Part II

Media Borders of Qualified Media
Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality

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The debate about intermediality is characterized by a variety of heterogeneous approaches, spanning a wide range of subject matter and research perspectives. A large number of critical approaches make use of the concept, each with their own premises, methodology, terminology and delimitations. Likewise, the specific objectives pursued by different disciplines in conducting intermedial research (for example, media studies, literary, theatre and film studies, art history, musicology, philosophy or sociology) vary considerably. While some approaches focus on general media-historical developments or genealogical relations between media, on medial transformation processes, on the very formation of a given medium or on the process of medialization as such, others aim at questions of media recognition (Medienerkenntnis) or at understanding general functions of media. Further approaches, mostly coming from the realm of literary studies and related fields, such as my own, emphasize various forms and functions of concrete intermedial practices in specific individual texts, films, theatre performances, paintings and so on. Considering this background, it is not surprising that the question – still declared ‘fundamental’ in 2001 – of what ‘the concept of intermediality actually means’ now seems outmoded and has been reformulated with regard to various intermediality conceptions and their respective heuristic potential.2

While significant differences between the various research traditions become apparent as soon as one looks at them in some detail, there still seems to be a (more or less) general agreement on the definition of intermediality in its broadest sense. Generally speaking, and according to common understanding, ‘intermediality’ refers to relations between media, to medial interactions and interferences. Hence, ‘intermediality’ can be said to serve first and foremost as a flexible generic term ‘that can be applied, in a broad sense, to any phenomenon involving more than one medium’3 and thus to any phenomenon that – as indicated by the prefix inter – in some way takes
place between media. Accordingly, the crossing of media borders has been defined as a founding category of intermediality.⁴

Obviously, such a broad definition of intermediality, which seeks to do justice to this concept precisely in its quality as collective term, ultimately tends to be rather bland.⁵ Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to briefly ponder this broad definition of intermediality because it steers our attention to one of the central basic assumptions of intermediality research, which is also the focus of this essay. A broad conception of this kind – and, as a consequence, any more narrowly defined conception of intermediality – evidently proceeds from the assumption of tangible borders between individual media, of medial specificities and differences. In fact, any reference to intermediality implicitly presumes that it is indeed possible to delimit individual media, since we can hardly talk about intermediality unless we can discern and apprehend distinguishable entities between which there could be some kind of interference, interaction or interplay.⁶ Quite recently, however, it is precisely this fundamental premise of discernible media borders that has been called into question. As a consequence, the very concept of intermediality itself has come under scrutiny.

There are two principal arguments, frequently entangled, that are advanced against the aforementioned premises. Firstly, approaches to intermediality are criticized for widely ignoring the constructed character of any conception of ‘a medium’ and of any reference to ‘individual media’ (Einzelmédien) that, from the other point of view, are conceived of as purely discursive strategies.⁷ Accordingly, approaches to intermediality are quite frequently associated with dubious essentialist views.⁸ Secondly, the assumption of medial delimitations and the criterion of a medial border crossing are called into question by referring to various kinds of performances or artistic ‘events’ of the past decades that manifest ‘a still growing tendency towards an annulment, a dissolution of the boundaries between different art forms’.⁹ As the synopsis of the 2006 conference of the German Society for Theater Studies put it:

After decades in which film and video have been seen with such frequency on stage… and in which the traditional borders of the arts disciplines have often been completely blurred, we have to ask whether the criterion of medial border crossing can still be so readily applied.¹⁰

Similarly, according to Erika Fischer-Lichte, the concept of intermediality quite problematically ‘presupposes that it is possible to distinguish clearly between the different media in play’.¹¹ It is for this reason that Fischer-Lichte is reluctant to adopt approaches of this kind for the investigation of the artistic practices referred to above.
I do not intend to rebut the aforementioned basic considerations with which, taken as such and detached from any judgmental conclusions, I think everybody will agree. The assumption of media borders and of medial delimitations, and (along with it) any reference to ‘individual media’ should indeed be handled with care, and it is true that quite a few approaches to intermediality, especially approaches coming from literary studies, often lack a careful discussion of media theories. At the same time, however, I would like to point out that any kind of theoretical dismantling of the term ‘intermediality’ is confronted with concrete intermedial practices in the arts for which, as I will illustrate later on, media borders and medial specificities are indeed of crucial importance. As I will show in more detail, this is not contradicted by those medial configurations which tend to show the aforementioned tendency towards the blurring or dissolving of borders between different media or art forms. Likewise, with reference to theatre, the fact that films and videos have been seen on stage for decades and that digital techniques are increasingly used hardly gives cause to renounce the basic assumption of current concepts of intermediality regarding the crossing of media borders. On the contrary, the fact that theatre is able to integrate various medial forms of articulation and to present them on stage is made possible precisely by the medial conditions and the fundamentally plurimedial structure of this medium. Despite all medial expansion, theatre is still conventionally perceived – and has been perceived for centuries – as a distinct individual medium. It thus has medially based as well as conventionally drawn borders (which are obviously subject to historic transformation and must in part be seen as fluid).

This calls to our attention crucial aspects which should be considered with respect to the fundamental question of the delimitability of individual media and thus with respect to the status of medial specificities, differences and borders in the context of intermedial practices. The first aspect is the specific way in which medial differences, borders and the crossing of borders come into play in a given medial configuration. The second aspect concerns the historical processes of the development and differentiation of so-called individual media. Finally, there is the justifiably designated ‘construct’ character of media conceptions.

As I have elaborated in prior publications, in this context we should first of all bear in mind that in dealing with medial configurations, we never encounter ‘the medium’ as such, for instance, film as medium or writing as medium, but only specific individual films, individual texts and so on. Whether, following the work of Niklas Luhmann, we distinguish between ‘medium’ and ‘form’, as proposed, for example, by Joachim Paech, whether we distinguish between ‘medium’ and ‘medial configuration’, as I will be doing, or whether we use other terms and concepts, we must necessarily take into account that we always only encounter concrete medial forms of
articulation, which moreover are characterized by a multilayered and multimodal complex mediality. Already this very basic and simple observation leads to the conclusion that to speak of ‘a medium’ or of ‘individual media’ ultimately refers to a theoretical construct, to a ‘theoretical abstraction’ (Abstraktionsleistung), as Sybille Krämer calls it. Moreover, even a slightly more precise engagement with the variability of media conceptions brings to light the constructed character of each of them. As the debate stands today, it is hardly necessary to discuss the issue further. The question of how a medium should be defined and delimited from other media is of course always dependent on the historical and discursive contexts and the observing subject or system, taking into account technological change and relations between media within the overall media landscape at a given point in time.

Analogous conditions apply, for example, to genre conceptions, to introduce a comparative parameter, and yet, as opposed to recent questionings of the concept of intermediality, not only is a heuristic potential still attributed to conceptions of genres as well as of genre mixes or of an undermining of generic boundaries. Rather, literary studies, for example, have sufficiently clarified that – in spite of their constructedness and historical variability – genre conventions, just like discourse traditions, play a decisive role in conveying meaning to literary texts. This holds true both for their production and for their reception.

As these considerations already indicate, neither the fact that we are always dealing only with specific individual medial configurations, nor the constructedness and historicity of media conceptions, should lead us to the conclusion that we ought to cease altogether to speak of (historically transformable) medial specificities and differences, of media borders and eventually of intermedial strategies and practices. Rather, we should ask ourselves what exactly we mean when we talk about ‘individual media’, medial specificities or of crossing media borders in this context. Drawing borders of this kind clearly cannot be a matter of ‘fixed’ and ‘stable’ borders between ‘fixed’ and ‘stable’ entities, but if not this, what then? This is a question I shall investigate in more detail, starting from concrete artistic intermedial practices. For this purpose I first introduce some basic differentiations commonly used in current approaches to intermediality, albeit with different terminology and subcategories.

Even if we confine ourselves to an understanding of intermediality as a critical category for the concrete analysis of individual medial configurations, as I will be doing, one still has to cope with a vast and quite heterogeneous range of subject matter. In fact, in literary studies as well as in fields such as art history, music, theatre and film studies, there is a repeated focus on an entire range of phenomena qualifying as intermedial. Examples include those phenomena which for a long time have been designated
by terms such as filmic writing, ekphrasis, musicalization of literature, as well as such phenomena as film adaptations of literary works, novelizations, visual poetry, illuminated manuscripts, Sound Art, opera, comics, multimedia shows, multimedia computer ‘texts’ or installations and so forth. All of these phenomena have to do in some way with a crossing of borders between media and are in so far characterized by a quality of intermediality in the broad sense. However, it is also immediately apparent that the intermedial quality of a film adaptation, for example, is hardly comparable – or is comparable only in the broadest sense – with the intermediality of so-called filmic writing and that both of these are quite distinct from, say, book illustrations or Sound Art installations. If the use of intermediality as a category for the description and analysis of particular phenomena is to be productive, we should therefore distinguish groups of phenomena, each of which exhibits a distinct intermedial quality and – what is even more important in the present context – a particular way of crossing media borders. This allows for drawing distinctions between individual subcategories of intermediality and for developing a uniform theory for each of them. At the same time, it shows that any reference to ‘the criterion of a medial border crossing’ blurs fundamental differences between specific ways in which such a border crossing manifests itself in given intermedial practices. Such differences have implications both for theorizing the phenomena in question as well as for the concrete analysis of given medial configurations and their overall signification of course, in the concrete analysis also differing functions of intermedial strategies have to be taken into account. A closer look at the intermedial practices in question points to three groups of phenomena:¹⁵

1. Intermediality in the narrower sense of medial transposition (Medienwechsel), also referred to as medial transformation, as, for example, film adaptations of literary texts, novelizations and so forth.

2. Intermediality in the narrower sense of media combination (Medienkombination), which includes phenomena such as opera, film, theatre, illuminated manuscripts, computer or Sound Art installations, comics, or, to use another terminology, so-called multimedia, mixed-media and intermedia forms.¹⁶

3. Intermediality in the narrower sense of intermedial references (intermediale Bezüge), for example, references in a literary text to a specific film, film genre or film qua medium (that is, so-called filmic writing), likewise references in a film to painting, or in a painting to photography and so on.

A somewhat more detailed scrutiny of these three groups of phenomena reveals that we are dealing here with qualitatively different conceptions of intermediality. The first category, medial transposition, entails
a production-oriented, ‘genetic’ conception of intermediality. Here the intermedial quality – the criterion of a medial border crossing – has to do with the way in which a medial configuration comes into being, that is, with the transformation of a given medial configuration (a text, film and so on) or of its substratum into another medium. The ‘original’ text, film and so on, is the ‘source’ of the newly formed medial configuration, whose formation is based on a media-specific and obligatory intermedial transformation process. The category of medial transposition can therefore, to use Werner Wolf’s terminology, also be described as a form of ‘extracompositional intermediality’. Unlike medial transposition, both the second and the third category, media combination and intermedial references, aim at an intracompositional intermediality, that is, at a ‘direct or indirect participation of more than one medium’ not only in the formation process, but ‘in the signification and/or structure of a given semiotic entity’. Consequently, there is a fundamental difference between medial transposition on the one hand and media combination and intermedial references on the other. As Wolf goes on to say – and what is particularly relevant for analysis – ‘[e]xtracompositional intermediality as such does not necessarily affect the meaning or outer appearance of particular works or performances, while intracompositional intermediality does’.

If we focus on media combinations and intermedial references, that is, on the different forms of intracompositional intermediality, we note a further significant difference for which once again the moment of crossing media borders becomes most important. This can already be derived from Wolf’s assertion cited above: the issue is whether we are dealing with a direct or an indirect ‘participation of more than one medium in the signification and/or structure of a given semiotic entity’. In the following I will illustrate this central point with examples from dance theatre and photorealistic painting.

Film, theatre, opera or, more recently, Sound Art, are evidence that media combinations, from a historical perspective, quite frequently result in the development of new forms which somewhere in the course of this process are themselves conventionally perceived as distinct art or media genres. The plurimedial structure, then, is a characteristic and constitutive feature of these newly emerged genres. Correspondingly, dance theatre is defined by a plurimedial structure which manifests itself, not least, in the combination of theatrical and dance elements and structures. This fundamental plurimediality can, of course, be augmented, as has been shown especially in more recent productions, which increasingly tend to involve digital and other technical media. One example is Wim Vandekeybus’ production Blush (Wim Vandekeybus/Ultima Vez, Brussels 2002). This production involves pre-produced film sequences that are projected on a huge screen during the live performance. In these film sequences the ensemble’s dancers are seen swimming and acting under water. Drawing on the identity of the dancers
on stage and in the filmic underwater world, the interplay of film and live performance creates highly effective moments: repeatedly dancers seem to jump directly ‘into’ the screen and thus seemingly ‘into’ the film, where, now in their filmic embodiment, they seem to continue their movements without interruption. This effect is made possible by a projection screen that actually consists of several panels put next to one another, leaving some ‘slots’ that allow the dancers to jump behind the screen. Yet, since the live action on stage and the pre-produced action on film are exactly synchronized, the dancers effectively seem to jump into the filmic underwater world and thus into the water; an impression that is enhanced by visual and audible ‘splash’ effects occurring in the film sequences when the dancers seem to hit the water. In this way the identity of the dancers on stage and on film, as well as their seemingly continuous movements, create the illusion of a continuity of what happens on stage and on film. At the same time, two worlds, two medial ‘realities,’ two time levels and two medial forms of embodiment are set against one another.

Focusing on the distinction between different categories of intermediality outlined above, it is important that in this case – an instance of media combination – the various medial forms of articulation are all present in their own materiality and contribute to the constitution and signification of the entire performance in their own media-specific way. Here, applying Wolf’s terminology, several media come into play in a direct way. Such a way of employing and staging media in dance performances is in stark contrast to a sequence from the dance theatre production Bodies (Körper) by Sasha Waltz (premiered in Berlin, 2000). At the beginning of this sequence, a huge picture-frame-like construction is erected on the stage, equipped with a transparent front and an opaque panel in the back. Positioned between the transparent front pane and the back panel, and supporting themselves in the air by pressing their limbs against the two supports, the dancers move very slowly, heads up and heads down, in every possible direction; as if weightless and freed from the necessity to touch ground. With several other factors contributing to its overall effect, such as the lighting, the dancers’ costumes recalling loincloths and bodies seemingly cut off at the borders of the frame, this sequence as a whole reminds the viewer of a painting, maybe even more specifically of a mannerist one.

Here, different medial forms of articulation are not combined with one another, as in media combination; instead, the means and instruments of dance theatre itself – bodies, costumes, movements, lighting, stage props and so on – are employed and fashioned in a way that corresponds to and resembles elements, structures and representational practices of painting, thus creating an illusion of painterly qualities. (Put in terms of cognitive research, the spectator is cued to apply a painterly bound frame.) The evocation of painting is not achieved simply by means of subjective associations that may (or may not) be elicited in the spectator’s mind. Rather, the placement
onstage of the oversized frame – a device that is iconically related to a picture frame and that effectively frames the action taking place onstage – explicitly designates painting as the medial system being referred to and thus marks the overall *mise-en-scène* as an intermedial reference to painting. In this way, the sequence as a whole constitutes itself (and is received by the viewer) in relation to painting, simulating but at the same time also expanding the representational modes of the medium referred to. It is *as if* dance theatre turned into painting, yet explicitly pointing to a medial difference, to its own mediality and to the so-called ‘as if’ character of the whole procedure: it is *as if* we saw a painting that, supplementing pictorial stasis with the movements of the dancers, is not only populated by bodies in flesh and blood, but also put into motion: a *tableau vivant animé*.

The same kind of intermedial technique underlies photorealistic painting, to provide a further example with which the basic mechanisms of intermedial references can be visualized particularly well.\(^{21}\) Here again, it is not two or more different forms of medial articulation that are present in their own specific materiality. Instead, what we are dealing with is nothing other than painting – but a kind of painting which inevitably evokes in the viewer the impression of a photographic quality.\(^{22}\) Evidently, here too another medium is ‘brought into play’, but this only in an *indirect* way, as in the case of the sequence of *Sasha Waltz’ Bodies*. It is not photography which manifests itself materially; rather painting’s *own* instruments and means are applied and shaped in such a way that experiences, or ‘frames’, are evoked in the observer that are medially bound to photography, leading to an illusion, an ‘as if’, of a photographic quality. Consequently, in the case of intermedial references, only *one* conventionally distinct medium manifests itself in its specific materiality and mediality. Historically, this medium may of course have emerged through the conflation of different medial forms of articulation and thus, as in the case of dance theatre, can exhibit a (potentially expandable) plurimedial structure.

Thus, as already indicated above, the moment of crossing media borders in the case of intermedial references is brought to bear in quite another way than with media combination. A given photorealistic painting as such exhibits less a *crossing* than a ‘*playing around*’ its own medial borders in the direction of the system referred to: photorealistic painting constitutes itself *in relation* to photography and appears to us ‘as a photo’, but it still remains a painting. However, this effect comes about precisely due to the fact that it *refers to* another medial system: with the medium’s own specific means and instruments, elements and/or structures of another conventionally distinct medium are thematized, evoked or, as in the case of the sequence from *Bodies* and photorealistic painting, simulated\(^{23}\) – and this is certainly the most interesting variant of this kind of intermedial strategy. The media borders’ *cross-over* moment in the case of intermedial references therefore does not affect the material manifestation of various media within a given medial
configuration, but rather the specific quality of the reference itself. No matter how corresponding strategies in a given medial configuration may be functionalized in detail, in any case additional layers of meaning will be opened up in this way which must be taken into account in the analysis.

In the sequence of Bodies and in photorealistic painting, the medial difference between the referencing medium and the medium referred to (that is, between live performance and painting, and between painting and photography, respectively), becomes apparent in quite an obvious way, as is typical of intermedial references in general. Yet, especially in the domain of so-called media combinations, we can also find concrete intermedial configurations that do in fact, quite explicitly, show the constructedness of medial delimitations and thus of any notion of an ‘individual medium’. Here, we must consider the wide range of possible realizations of media combinations, reaching from a contiguity or coexistence up to a more or less ‘genuine’ integration or interplay of the medial forms of articulation which in its ‘purest’ form would privilege none of its constitutive elements. Depending on the specific form of intermedial relations, such interplay may be experienced as a synthesis or fusion of different modes of medial articulation, but also as an oscillating ‘in-between-ness’, something actually situated between two or more medial forms. The latter becomes especially apparent in certain kinds of Sound Art installations, for instance, installations of the Hamburg artist Andreas Oldöp. In Oldöp’s works sounds are created in a natural, mechanical way, using either air- or steam-driven organ pipes or gas flames in glass cylinders, so-called singing flames. Thus, in different constellations, acoustic architectures develop that are distinguished to a great extent through their hybrid quality. First and foremost, this is achieved in that the sculptural, material constructions in the given space are neither combined with independent sounds nor – as in many other sound installations – with sounds (re)produced electronically. Rather, the ‘sculpture’ itself simultaneously functions as a sound-producing instrument. The recipient’s apprehension of sound and his or her perception of the sculptural object are in fact no longer separable from each other. The material constructions are always at the same time ‘sculpture’ and sound instrument.

Hence, in such Sound Art works architectural space, material object and sound (and ultimately the peripatetic recipient him or herself), are related in such a way that the resulting effect exists and can only ever be experienced in the ongoing process of their interplay, as transitory and not repeatable. What develops, then, is less the impression of a synthesis, or ‘merging’, of the various medial aspects and qualities than the impression of an oscillating ‘between-the-media’. The movements of the visitors in the architectural space – their approaching some of the sound-producing objects while moving away from others – are continuously accompanied by changes of the sound and of the sound perception. Thus, the medial aspect of sound, its
materiality and mechanical generation, is again and again raised into the
visitors’ consciousness. By the same token, the sculpture-like material con-
structions are held present in their visual-aesthetic dimension and in their
relation to the architectural space, but they are at the same time also the
source of sound. In this way, it is precisely the smooth transitions and
consequently the impossibility of a clear demarcation between the media
involved that become evident here. In that the visitors’ seeing and hearing
habits are irritated and raised into their consciousness, in that space, sound
and material constructions are related to each other in an unusual way and
can be apprehended only through their interplay, any kind of ‘clear’ borders
between individual media – and equally of distinct qualities in our sensual
perception – is presented as being constructed (as opposed to being ‘naturally
given’).

To recall the arguments that have been advanced against the premise
of discernible media borders, what we see here is an artistic practice that
definitely manifests the above quoted ‘still growing tendency towards a
dissolution of the boundaries between different art forms’ or media. In
fact, media combinations expose – or at least can expose – the construc-
tedness of delimitations of individual media. At the same time, however,
it is also the oscillating interplay between two or more ‘entities’ as such
which media combinations of this kind bring to the recipient’s conscious-
ness. What I would like to emphasize here is that this oscillation per se,
and any apprehension of it, necessarily presumes commonly held distinc-
tions between the different media in play. If boundaries between different
art forms are said to be dissolved, and if delimitations of media are reflected
upon as constructs, what is necessarily presumed in the first place are a priori,
conventional delimitations of those media or art forms.

With this we arrive at the following point: concrete intermedial configura-
tions show, for one, the constructedness of medial delimitations and (along
with it) of any reference to ‘individual media’. For another, however, we
may also conclude that by means of intermedial strategies, the possibility
per se of delimiting different media re-enters the picture; that is, we may
conclude that the ‘idea’ of one or another individual medium can be, and
actually frequently is, called up in the recipient. We have seen this in an espe-
cially evident way in the case of the reference to painting in Bodies and to
photography in photorealistic painting, references which in their functional
potential necessarily depend on a perceptible medial difference.

I am deliberately emphasizing the notion of an ‘idea’ (Vorstellung) – not
least on the basis of conventional attributions – which the recipient asso-
ciates with a given medium. This is because the ‘idea’ of a particular medium
is relevant to the general question of how a medium can be defined and
discerned from other media, of how, for instance, the ‘filmic’, ‘painterly’
or ‘musical’ quality can be defined to which a given medial configuration
could refer. It is obvious that the answer to this question necessarily depends on the historical and discursive contexts and on the observing subject or system; furthermore, we must take into account the historical and contextual variability and conventionality of any defining characteristics attributed to a given medium. Hence, if I have been speaking all along of conventional delimitations and conventionally distinct media, I have been doing this very consciously. In my view, the functioning of intermedial configurations is always based on relations between media or ‘medialities’ that are conventionally perceived as distinct, or, to put this in other terms, it is based on the possibility of calling up specific medially bound frames in the recipient. Despite their conventionality and constructedness, these variable conventional ‘ideas’ and concepts associated with specific individual media are nevertheless at one’s disposal, both for the production and inner functioning and the reception of a given medial configuration. Conventional and constructed as they may be, they are still available for partaking in the constitution of a media product’s overall signification. Who (at least in the Western world), to give just one more example, does not think of theatre when watching Lars von Trier’s Dogville (Denmark 2003)? And who does not, at the same time, apprehend the filmic quality of this intermedial experiment that draws, among other things, precisely on the medial difference between film and theatre?

In fact, even Sound Art, by emphasizing the constructedness of medial delimitations, at the same time uncovers such delimitations as they are conventionally drawn (at least at a certain, and moreover context-related, point in time). Ultimately then, here too, there is assumed a delimitability, or better, an established, conventional delimitation of media. If the drawing of borders between media is reflected upon as a construct and finally transferred into an oscillating ‘between-the-media’, which applies at least to Oldöp’s works, this nonetheless refers back at the same time to conventionally drawn borders between the media. What is thus reflected upon, and what is in fact made useful for the potential effects of a Sound Art installation on the recipient, are prior, commonplace ideas about ‘individual media’ and medial differences, that is, specific medially-bound frames which are called up in the recipient, but which can also be modified and displaced, not least by the medial performance itself.

Moreover, the example of Sound Art shows the important role played by processes of habitualization and conventionalization in relation to drawing medial borders: if works of art that are now labelled ‘Sound Art’ were initially seen as an attempt to embark in a new direction and to disrupt established borders (also and particularly by the artists themselves) and could thus be understood as an artistic practice taking place at the margins of current artistic and media conceptions, most recently Sound Art is perceived as an increasingly established art and media genre in its own right. While for this genre the interplay of sound and material constructions
still remains constitutive, such interplay is meanwhile hardly perceived as a destabilization or disturbance of established borderlines, conventions and norms. Rather, the combination of sound and material constructions has since become a ‘normal’, established element of a genre, which like all other genres has certain prescriptive and restrictive rules. Hence, with the conventionalization and establishment of Sound Art as an art and media genre which in itself is conventionally perceived as distinct, the original destabilizing and disturbing moment of this form of medial border crossing has been lost or, through habitualization, has at least been muffled. Thus, diachronically viewed, practices of border crossings or of dissolutions of established borders – as far as they are accompanied by a sustainable conventionalization and habitualization – may result in other constructions, other borders that again are perceived as conventional, and in turn modified or even entirely new conceptions of individual media and art forms.

Up to this point, I have been mainly focusing on the constructed character of any conception of ‘a medium’ and on the fact that when we talk about ‘individual media’ we are actually talking about media that are conventionally perceived as distinct. These considerations can be taken one step further by highlighting an aspect that is usually overlooked, or at least not made explicit, in related arguments. Here again, intermedial references come to the fore, such as the reference to painting in Sasha Waltz’ Bodies or the reference to photography in photorealistc painting. The above remarks on these examples concentrated on differences between instances of media combination and intermedial references. Yet, those remarks actually not only delineate the features of intermedial references as opposed to practices of media combination, but also as opposed to intramedial references, as for instance intertextual relations, or, say, film–film and music–music relations. In this context the criterion of a medial border crossing is again of primary importance. In the case of intramedial references the referencing itself remains within one medium and consequently does not involve any kind of medial difference. Hence, intramedial references, quite significantly, do not come along with a medial border crossing. Instead, in the case of intermedial references a medial difference does come into play; and more precisely, a medial difference that – as a matter of fact – cannot be effaced. What can be achieved by intermedial references is an (more or less pronounced, yet necessarily asymptotical) approximation to the medium referred to; an overall actualization or realization of the other medial system is impossible. Due to its material and medial conditions, dance theatre cannot truly become painting – just as painting itself can never become genuinely photographic, even though this is suggested at times by photorealistc painting. Here medial specificities and borders emerge, which make clear that certain basic medial constraints must be considered. In spite of all the constructiveness and conventionality of the derived medial conceptions, these basic constraints cannot be neglected.
At the same time such medial constraints point to the fundamentally different status of *medial* restrictions and possibilities on the one hand and *generic* restrictions and possibilities on the other. Thus, media specificities can be differentiated from genre specificities. While genre specificities and the prescriptive and restrictive rules of a genre are based solely on conventions that can be played with, undermined and transcended without any problems, medial specificities entail material and operative restrictions that can be played with, but cannot be undermined with the use of the respective media-specific means and instruments. To stress this again, painting cannot become genuinely photographic, just as literary texts cannot really become filmic or musical. What can be achieved in this respect is only an illusion, an ‘as if’ of the other medium.

Consequently, if I have been emphasizing the constructed character of any conception of ‘a medium’, this constructedness itself is actually confronted with some limits; limits that are inherent to the materiality and mediality of any form of medial articulation. Accordingly, my above remarks on the potential capacity of intermedial practices to alter established prior ‘ideas’ of a given medium need to be specified: Intermedial strategies, if deployed in the appropriate manner, can indeed be the means through which commonplace ideas of a given medium as well as conventionally drawn borders between, and delimitations of, different media can be apprehended, critically reflected upon, and even displaced and undermined – yet always only in keeping with the basic material conditions of the medial configurations in question. In contrast to genres, conceptions of (individual) media are not based *solely* on conventions. Rather, they are additionally based on given material and operative conditions, which to a large extent are subject to historical, often technological, change, yet to some extent are also transhistorically valid. In fact, we note a dependency between genre conventions and their respective medial disposition: The emergence of certain genre conventions is at least *also* bound to technical requirements and thus to medially determined limits and possibilities underlying the respective genre.28

Putting medial boundaries, differences and differentiations at the centre of interest as I have been doing may be conceived as ‘strange’ or somehow *démodé*, as there seems to be a general tendency in recent research to discard thinking in differences as ontological or essentialist and thus outdated. Currently, efforts are being made to strengthen common and crossover features – not only in intermediality studies, but also, for instance, in the young field of so-called transgeneric and transmedial narratology.29 Contrary to this tendency, I have advanced the thesis that medial differences and the notion of media borders play a crucial and extremely productive role in the context of intermedial practices. In this context it should be emphasized again that the premise of discernible media borders and of the possibility of distinguishing
between individual media, ultimately inherent to any conception of intermediality, is not challenged even by such artistic or cultural practices that show the tendency to blur, or to entirely dissolve and overcome, established borders and delimitations of different art forms and media. Rather, the respective practices constitute themselves – either intentionally or, so to speak, necessarily – in relation to just these established borders and delimitations. In other words, they necessarily constitute themselves in relation to, and within the scope of, the overall medial and discursive landscape at a given point in time, including the respective delimitations of conventionally distinct art forms and media.

Thus, the ‘construct’ character and the historical variability of media conceptions are evoked, aspects which intermediality research must of course take into account. This is exactly why I have been speaking of individual media that (at a given point in time) are conventionally perceived as distinct, and of medially bound frames. These frames – if marked in an appropriate manner – can be called up in the recipient and as such are available for partaking in the constitution of a medial configuration’s overall signification. At the same time, however, we must also take into account that any artistic or, more generally speaking, any cultural practice depends on, and is determined by, its very mediality and materiality, rendering the constructedness of media conceptions and especially the constructed character of medial delimitations at least in part relative. Borders between different medial forms of articulation cannot ‘be drawn differently’ in every respect and it is especially for this reason that media conceptions, as constructed and conventional as they may be, still can be assigned a different status from genre conceptions.

Considering the initial question and main thesis of this essay, what is most important here is that, independently of which particular kind of intermedial practices we are dealing with, the effect potential of intermedial practices is always in some way based on medial borders and differences. Hence, in contrast to recent challenges concerning the criterion of a medial border crossing, on the basis of concrete intermedial practices, and thus starting from the objects of investigation as such, it is precisely the concept of the border which can be strengthened. In my view, the concept of a border is the precondition for techniques of crossing or challenging, dissolving or emphasizing medial boundaries, which can consequently be experienced and reflected on as constructs and conventions. It is only due to our constructing borders in the first place that we are able to become aware of ways of transcending or subverting those very boundaries or of ways of highlighting their presence, of probing them, or even of dissolving them entirely. At the same time, it is precisely these acts of transcending, subverting, probing or highlighting which draw attention to the conventionality and (relative) constructedness of these boundaries. My thesis thus encompasses the idea of fostering a process of rethinking the notion of boundaries: it should be
shifted from taxonomies to the dynamic and creative potential of the border itself. The borders or—perhaps better—‘border zones’ between media can thus be understood as enabling structures, as spaces in which we can test and experiment with a plethora of different strategies.

Notes


5. A broad intermediality concept of this kind allows for making fundamental distinctions, namely between intra, inter and (ultimately) transmedial phenomena, at the same time representing a transmedially useful category. Yet such a broad concept does not permit us to derive a single theory that would uniformly apply to the entire, heterogeneous subject matter covered by all the different conceptions of intermediality, nor does it help us to characterize more precisely any one individual phenomenon on its own distinct formal terms. Accordingly, in order to cover and to uniformly theorize specific intermedial manifestations, more narrowly conceived (and often mutually contradictory) conceptions of intermediality have been introduced, each of them with its own explicit or implicit premises, methods, interests and terminologies (cf. in more detail I. Rajewsky (2005) ‘Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality’, *Intermédialités/Intermedialities* 6, pp. 43–65).

6. The same is applicable for any reference to ‘interart relations’, as talking about interart relations likewise presupposes discernible borders between different art forms.

7. This was, for instance, one of the theses of the final panel discussion of the 8th Biennial International Conference of the German Society for Theater Studies with a special focus on ‘Theater & the Media’, held at Erlangen, 12–15 October, 2006; cf. H. Schoenmakers et al., (eds) (2008) *Theater und Medien/Theater and the Media: Grundlagen – Analysen – Perspektiven. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Bielefeld: transcript), p. 26 and pp. 545–60. A similar thesis has been advanced by Voßkamp and Weingart: ‘Not only within the traditional text-image genres (emblems, advertising, press photography, comics, etc.), but also when it is presumably “only” a matter of images or texts, monomedia assumptions about the picturality of the picture or about the textuality of the text can ultimately be seen as untenable essentialisms. In the sense of W. J. T. Mitchell’s assertion that “all media are mixed media” it is assumed here that medial purity precepts should themselves be understood as discursive effects and thus, not least, as the result of procedures of power, of inclusion and exclusion’ (2005) *Transkriptionen* 5, p. 31. See also W. Voßkamp and B. Weingart (2005) ‘Sichtbaren und Sagbares: Text-Bild-Verhältnisse’ in W. Voßkamp and B. Weingart
(eds) Sichtbares und Sagbares: Text-Bild-Verhältnisse (Cologne: DuMont), pp. 9–10. Also compare in this context Mitchell’s own remarks on this subject: ‘[T]he interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no “purely” visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism’: W. J. T. Mitchell (1994) Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), p. 5. As in the following I will continue to talk about ‘individual media’, what should be emphasized here is that, in my own understanding, the term ‘individual medium’ (Einzelmédiat) does not per se point to any kind of ‘monomedia’ or medial ‘purity’. Instead, in my view, what is at issue here are media that are conventionally perceived as distinct from other media (cf. in more detail below). Hence, so-called individual media can indeed be characterized by a plurimedial structure as, for instance, film or theatre. Moreover, individual media – and this is also true of media often termed ‘monomedia’, such as (literary) texts – are always to be conceived of as multimodal (cf. Lars Elleström’s contribution to the present volume). In fact, Mitchell’s famous dictum might be reformulated into a slightly smoother ‘all media are multimodal (media)’. Significantly, Mitchell himself has recently rephrased his dictum, specifying that ‘[a]ll media are, from the standpoint of sensory modality, mixed media’ (W. J. T. Mitchell (2007) ‘There Are No Visual Media’ in O. Grau (ed.) MediaArtHistories (Cambridge and London: MIT Press), p. 395; my emphasis).


9. Quoted from the grant for the International Research Training Group InterArt/ Interart Studies, an international graduate school that has been established at the Freie Universität Berlin in October 2006 (spokesperson: Erika Fischer-Lichte).


11. As note 9.


15. Cf. in more detail Rajewsky (2002), (2004) and (2005). With respect to this tripartite division, it is important to note that a single medial configuration may certainly fulfil the criteria of two or even all three of the intermedial categories outlined below.


19. Ibid., p. 254.


22. The depictions of streets and buildings by the American painter Richard Estes serve as a paradigmatic example of this (see, for instance, *Café Express*, 1975, oil on canvas).

23. My use of the term ‘simulation’ is not intended in the sense the word is used in media studies (that is, to designate mathematical simulation processes); rather, it connotes a simulation in the literal sense of the word.

24. Cf. also Wolf (1999) *The Musicalization of Fiction*, pp. 40-1. At the extreme outer pole of this subcategory of intermediality are phenomena which, taking recourse to another terminology, can also be designated as *intermedia* configurations. The term ‘intermedia’ was first brought into play by Dick Higgins’ 1966 pioneering essay ‘Intermedia’ (Something Else Newsletter 1, 1 (1966), reprinted in D. Higgins (1984) *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U?)", in which Higgins expresses his conviction that ‘much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media’ (p. 18). This understanding of the term has become relevant for attempts to delimit so-called *intermedia* configurations from *mixed-media* and *multimedia* configurations. Higgins uses ‘intermedia’ to refer to works ‘in which the materials of various more established art forms are “conceptually fused” rather than merely juxtaposed’ (E. Vos (1997) ‘The Eternal Network: Mail Art, Intermedia Semiotics, Interarts Studies’ in U.-B. Lagerroth, H. Lund and E. Hedling (eds) *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, p. 325); the quality of medial juxtaposition is ascribed (with certain fine distinctions) to *mixed-media* and *multimedia* configurations (see C. Clüver (2001) ‘Inter textus/ inter artes/inter media’, Komparatistik: Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft (2000/2001), pp. 14–50). Hence, as can be seen in certain forms of visual poetry or corporate logos, in *intermedia* configurations the materials of various individual media become inextricably bound to, or even ‘merged with’, one another (cf. ibid., p. 36).


27. Here a performative potential of intermedial strategies becomes apparent (cf. also below).

28. In narrative film, for example, the formation of certain narrative conventions, such as specific ways of introducing flashbacks, can at least also be traced back to the fact that film, as far as the image track is concerned, is medially restricted to present-tense narration. Hence, to visually convey analepses, film narration must necessarily rely on certain filmic codes and conventions.

30. Compare in this connection general considerations on the constructed character of border drawings, discussed particularly in the 1990s with special attention to the observing subject or system. Referring to the concept of hybridity, Irmela Schneider has pointed out that to the extent that differences are conceived as observer-dependent differentiations, these are at the same time recognized as modifiable (cf. I. Schneider (1997) ‘Von der Vielsprachigkeit zur “Kunst der Hybridation”: Diskurse des Hybriden’ in I. Schneider and C. W. Thomsen (eds) Hybridkultur: Medien, Netze, Künste (Cologne: Wienand)). Accordingly, differences and borders are not seen and discussed as ‘natural’ but as set or drawn borders, which could also be set and drawn differently.
3

Intermedial Topography and Metaphorical Interaction

Axel Englund

As the title of this volume illustrates, we often tend to think of arts and media in terms of geographic areas delineated by borders, and consequently of interartial and intermedial studies as a kind of topographical description, a charting of territories and their positions in relation to each other. This conception is often a helpful way of imagining the arts and media, and one which is deeply connected to the way they have been functioning for the last couple of hundred years or so. My point in this essay is not to argue that the topographical model ought to be discarded, but to contrast it with a different model, namely the conceptualization of intermedial relations in terms of metaphoricity.¹ My examples will concern the interplay between music and literature, specifically works of Western art music (Ravel and Mozart) and poetry (Bertrand and Celan) that bring the ‘other’ medium into play.

Most modern theories conceive of metaphoricity not in terms of substitution, but as a tension between separate elements that cannot be paraphrased without losing its essential meaning.² In other words, metaphor has a cognitive import in its own right, and what it communicates cannot be exhaustively recast in any literal wording. In this context I will be making use of the conception of metaphor advocated by Max Black, which he calls the ‘interaction view’ of metaphor.³ In short, a metaphor consists of two separate subjects – Black labels them principal subject and subsidiary subject – interacting with each other. Each subject has a system of associated implications (which might be roughly described as a list of ideas commonly associated with the subject) and when placed together in a metaphor, the implications of the primary subject are affected so that analogies with subsidiary subject are foregrounded. As a result, our perception of the primary subject is altered by the metaphorical interaction. As the word ‘interaction’ implies, however, this is not the whole truth: our perception of the secondary subject is altered as well, since those implications that are analogous to implications of the primary subject are foregrounded by the metaphor. In short, the metaphor organizes our conception of its two constituent subjects. My discussion of particular examples departs from the idea that the
‘music’ part and the ‘literature’ part of many musico-literary artefacts can be interpreted as the constituent subjects of a metaphor. The emphasis on the interpretative activity is important: what we are dealing with is less an inherent quality exhibited by intermedial works than a fertile strategy for approaching these works. At the same time, as has been suggested by theoretical concepts as different as Gadamer’s *Wirkungsgeschichte* and Derrida’s *dissemination*, a definitive distinction between text and interpretation, between internal and external, is neither possible nor desirable.

What implications does Black’s theory have when applied to intermedial relations? For one thing, his conception of metaphor suggests that the subjects involved in the interaction are best regarded not as ‘things’ but as ‘systems of things’, or, even better, each subject could be conceived of as a ‘system of ideas’. Such a system, he stresses, is ‘not sharply delineated, and yet sufficiently definite to admit of detailed enumeration’. Hence, if the interacting subjects are music and literature, these are to be thought of as systems of ideas rather than one sharply delineated ‘thing’ with a definable essence. On a general level, these ideas could be the physical form of presentation (literature is stereotypically presented as a book, music as performed on musical instruments), the semiotic mode (literature stereotypically employs a symbolic mode of reference, music stereotypically consists of abstract sound or, in some cases, sound with iconic reference) or the sensory channels through which they reach the perciept (a text is stereotypically read, a musical piece heard). These notions, and many others, are all part of the system of ideas connected to the words ‘music’ and ‘literature’. This way of considering music and literature is fully analogous to definitions of media not according to a single, palpable essence, but rather as the configuration of a number of distinguishable modalities. It is not, however, entirely compatible with the topographical model, since it tells us that there are indeed no distinct borders. Any alteration of the configuration of modalities would entail a slight movement on the map, and it would be impossible to pinpoint the place in which one medial territory ends and another starts. Most epochs, particularly modernity and post-modernity, have seen a number of works that do not allow themselves readily to be placed on the map in its contemporary state – liminal cases that, in terms of the topographical model, would have to be regarded as a no man’s land or disputed zones. Much like nations, then, the systems of ideas that constitute arts and media are historically contingent and if one wishes to speak about their borders, it needs to be kept in mind that they are subject to gradual but constant change.

In Black’s view, we understand a metaphor by searching for analogies between the ideas associated with the two subjects. The ideas, according to Black, may be either commonplaces about the subject or ideas ‘established *ad hoc* by the writer’. This double-edgedness is an important part of applying the metaphorical perspective to musico-literary artefacts. Any musico-literary metaphor would activate the system of ideas that make up
our conception of ‘music’ and ‘literature’, provoking us to find analogies between them. These are the kind of general ideas mentioned in the preceding section. However, such general ideas are not the only ones put into play by the interaction, unless the metaphor in question is simply the sentence ‘literature is music’. In addition, each work incorporating music and literature also contains its own unique configuration of material ideas, by which I mean its particular words, sentences, notes, chords, rhythms, large-scale structures – in short, all that constitutes the physiognomic identity of the given work. The ‘system of ideas’ associated with principal and subsidiary subject respectively thus has a very wide spectrum, incorporating everything from concrete material shapes to semantic connotations. Since all such aspects are potentially essential parts of the artwork – a phenomenon akin to what has been termed ‘repleteness’ by Goodman⁹ – they may consequently be activated and reorganized by the metaphorical interplay.

Furthermore, much as there are no watertight seals between langue and parole, there are none between these medial-general and work-specific ideas. When a work is understood in terms of a metaphorical interaction between music and literature, both categories, as they are configured in the particular artefact, partake of the reorganization of the systems of ideas, altering our conception of categories as such. As Irina Rajewsky stresses, we never encounter the abstract notion ‘the medium’ as such, but always as articulated in an individual work.¹⁰ If metaphorical interaction is based on a tension between the principal and subsidiary subject, it also implies a tension between our preconceptions of the subjects involved and the way in which they actually appear in the present context, the former demanding continual revision when faced with the latter. The far-reaching consequence of this perspective is that each musico-literary work can be read as a metamedial utterance with the inherent potential of altering the system of ideas known as ‘music’ and ‘literature’, thus redrawing the borders of medial territories. The way in which the ‘music-part’ and the ‘literature-part’ relate in a given work has the power to change our conception of the way ‘music’ and ‘literature’ relate in general. Just as a metaphor changes our conception of the world, the metaphorical dynamic of musico-literary artefacts changes our conception of media. From this perspective, the topographical model becomes untenable: a work of verbal or musical art is not an object located in one territory or another, but is a shaping force in our conception of these ‘territories’.

Two further comments should be made here regarding the concept ‘metaphor’, namely regarding the criteria of two ‘systems of ideas’ such as ‘music’ and ‘literature’ being read as interacting according to the rules of metaphor. First, metaphor is commonly thought of as a trope based on similarity. It is also, however, fundamentally dependent on difference. If love is said to be ‘a red, red rose’, we are dealing with metaphor. Where there is no difference and no term is alien to the other, there is no metaphor,
but the pointless statement that ‘a rose is a flower’, or even a figural short-circuit such as Gertrude Stein’s ‘a rose is a rose is a rose’. Now, if metaphoricity presupposes difference, the relation between music and literature can never be described as metaphorical as long as the arts are not conceived as different and distinguishable from each other. For instance, the use of the Greek term *mousike techne*, subsuming dance and drama as well as music and poetry, renders impossible any notion of metaphorical interaction between the arts – they were not thought of as separate at all and cannot constitute the ‘distinct subjects’ described by Black. One step in this historical development was taken when poetry began to be written to be read silently rather than performed in song. A definite separation did not come about until the mid eighteenth century, when aesthetics became a philosophical field and instrumental music gradually began to be conceived of as a genre of its own, distinct from language. The difference needed to create a metaphorical tension between the concept of ‘music’ and the concept of ‘literature’ was thus guaranteed: the arts became each other’s Other, which opened up the possibility of cross-illumination. As is well known, this possibility was not left unexploited: especially in Germany, the advent of Romanticism saw a proliferation of the use of the other art as a model for that which music or literature should aspire to. If the notion of literature and music as independent and fundamentally different arts was necessary for a metaphorical interaction to take place between them, it stands to reason that it also promoted the topographical model, which to a certain degree counteracts the metaphorical perspective: differences easily came to be thought of as borders delineating territories.

If difference is one prerequisite of the fecundity of the metaphorical perspective, the pretension to identity is the other, in the textbook example of metaphor usually brought about by the use of the copula ‘be’. Max Black exemplifies his interaction view with the sentence ‘man is wolf’, which in essence consists of nothing but a principal and a subsidiary subject and the verb suggesting an identity between them. This ‘is’ need not be explicit; it can equally well be implied by a genitive (‘the chess game of the cold war’) or predicate (‘the chairman ploughed through the discussion’). Intermedial works that somehow suggest an identity between music and literature seem to encourage a metaphorical interpretation. The pretension to identity, one might argue, is the necessary catalyst for a metaphorical understanding of the intermedial relations. In a work bringing music and literature together, then, this understanding does seem to require a meta-level: an identity between the arts has to be suggested by the artefacts themselves.

How, then, does this suggestion come about? The most obvious place to look for such a pretension to identity is the title of a work, whose most important function, as Genette has pointed out in his meticulous discussion on paratexts, is to designate the work, to give it an identity. If the identity suggested by the title clearly belongs to the other art, its metaphorical
quality is indisputable; it is, in fact, a clear illustration of the Aristotelian definition of metaphor as ‘giving the thing a name that belongs to something else’. It is tantamount to saying that ‘this piece of music is a poem’ or ‘this poem is a piece of music’. A quick look at the works commonly studied by musico-literary research today confirms a dominance of works signalling their intermedial status in this fashion. A similar intermedial signal can be found in the titles of instrumental pieces commonly studied in musico-literary contexts, where many titles are borrowed from a specific literary work rather than a genre, which nevertheless has the effect of ascribing the music to a medium other than its own. Such is the case with my first example: Ravel’s piano piece Gaspard de la nuit, whose title is borrowed from Aloysius Bertrand’s collection of poems.

Siglind Bruhn has carried out a beautiful analysis of the second piece from Gaspard de la nuit, ‘Le gibet’, which, like the whole suite, has borrowed its name from Bertrand. Rather brutally oversimplified, this poem has the form of an inquiry as to the origin of a sound. This inquiry is repeated through five strophes, all containing the interrogative ‘serait-ce’ and the suggestion of a possible answer. These are the chirping of a cicada, the buzzing of a fly and other insect activities. In the sixth strophe, the answer is given: it is a bell on the city walls sounding the death-knell for the hanged man. Now, as can be seen in Figure 2, Ravel’s piece begins with a B flat in two octaves,
which persists throughout the piece, although in different metric positions. It is subsequently surrounded by different kinds of music, a technique that is suggested already in the first measures of the piece.

The bell tolling throughout the poem (which we recognize only in retrospect) and the insistent repeated pitch of the piano piece is an obvious analogy, and one that Bruhn’s analysis elaborates on. She interprets the gradually developing relation between this note and its surroundings as analogous to the relation between the hanged man and the insects that become ever more encroaching as the poem progresses.¹⁶

The metaphorical perspective would not oppose this interpretation – it would acknowledge the specific analogies discussed by Bruhn, although in slightly different terms. It would, for instance, speak of the interaction between music and poem as endowing the repeated note (an idea in the system of the principal subject, Ravel’s music) with the sinister timbre of a death knell (which is an idea in the system of the subsidiary subject, Bertrand’s poem). These are, in the terms suggested above, the specific or material ideas, but the metaphorical perspective would also add a further notion to support the interpretation. The general concepts of ‘music’ and ‘literature’ form the background against which the material analogies are understood, and the individual work of art is constantly measured against these pre-established notions of the media it involves. For instance, the notion of referentiality, undeniably an important component in the system of ideas thought of as ‘literature’, is projected upon the system of ideas known as ‘music’. This analogous implication organizes our conception of Ravel’s music, so that the idea of referentiality – which is sometimes thought to be a part of music, but which is not central to it – is foregrounded. By dint of the metaphorical interaction between ‘literature’ and ‘music’, the latter is endowed with the former’s tendency to signify – although in a semiotic modality focused on the iconic rather than the symbolic mode – which makes the interpretation of the B flat as a death-knell, as well as its further implications for the interpretation of the piece, all the more pertinent. Heard in this way, this composition becomes a meta-utterance on the character of music and its relation to verbal art, taking part in the historical process of medial evolution by emphasizing their common ground in the semiotic modality.

Furthermore, due to its paratexts, Ravel’s piece is particularly susceptible to a metaphorical reading: ‘Le gibet’ is an excellent illustration of the pretension to identify between music and poetry encouraging metaphorical interaction. First, the title uses the name of a piece of literature to designate a piece of music. Second, Ravel has furnished his score with the subtitle, ‘Trois Poèmes pour Piano d’après Aloysius Bertrand’. These paratexts make the metaphorical suggestion ‘this piano piece is a poem’, indeed a specific poem, which necessitates an interpretation of Ravel’s piece in the light of the poem ‘Le gibet’. The paratext, then, constitutes a link to the important intertext of Bertrand’s poem, which points to a crucial issue: the paratexts
play an essential part as the catalysts of metaphorical interaction. In fact, music without verbal elements has very limited means – if any – to make a meta-reflective suggestion of its own being literature. Therefore, if there is no title or other authorial paratext (such as epigrams, program notes and so on) suggesting the relation to a literary artefact, a piece of instrumental music cannot be recognized as being based on such an artefact.

This notion is related to the question of how to categorize a piece like Ravel’s. As Bruhn points out, several labels exist already: she discusses transposition, transformation, transcription, translation and transmutation, before settling with transmedialization. In other words, what is continually altered is the ending of the word, whereas the prefix is retained throughout. Now, ‘trans’ etymologically implies something being moved from one place to another, as is exemplified by Rajewsky’s definition of the term ‘transmediality’ as the appearance of the same matter in different media, where the assumption of a contact-giving medium of origin is not important or possible, and would not be relevant for the constitution of meaning in the current medial product. If this were the case, then, we would not need the source medium to access this something once it had been carried across into the target medium, just as the point of a translation is to make a text accessible to those who do not have access to the original language.

Quite obviously, this is not the case in our example. Without the title designating at once Ravel’s music and Bertrand’s text, and thus bringing the latter into the interpretation, we would have no particular reason to hear this piano piece in the light of this poem rather than any other. The repeated B flat would hardly be endowed with the ominous character of a death-knell, or at least it might equally well be heard as a number of other things. This fact might be illustrated, for instance, by the similarly repeated A flat of Chopin’s op. 28:15, which, due to the paratext of the piece, is often interpreted as a drop of rain. Any term using the prefix ‘trans’, then, denies the necessity of keeping ‘target’ and ‘source’ simultaneously in mind, by implying that the notes themselves are able to express the content of a poem without being illuminated by a verbal paratext. Even if one adopts a postmodernist perspective from which the notion of ‘music itself’ as absolutely distinguishable from ‘language’ appears highly suspect, the paramount importance of paratextual elements in generating meaning has to be acknowledged.

The notion of a musicopoetic artefact as transmedialized is potentially hypostasized by the topographical model, since it suppresses the notion of simultaneity and interaction by emphasizing the notion of moving from one place, art or medium into another, leaving the original behind. Rajewsky notes this aspect implicitly in referring to transmedial works as Wanderphänomene – phenomena of wandering. In this intermedial vagabondage, the border is crossed and the property of another area brought into foreign territory. The notion of media as adjacent, geographical areas, then, suggests that an artefact of the verbal field can be transported into a musical field, the
core of its identity remaining unaltered even when the original place is out of sight. By contrast, the notion of musico-literary relations as metaphorical interaction between two subjects or system of ideas, stresses the fact that the original, verbal artefact and the musical piece need to be held in mind simultaneously. For instance, Paul Ricoeur, quoting Douglas Berggren, holds that the ‘possibility of comprehension of metaphorical construing requires … the ability to entertain two different points of view at the same time’.20 Black, too, underscores the simultaneous appearance of principal and subsidiary subject, speaking of the latter as a filter through which the former is perceived.21 Ravel’s ‘Le gibet’, from this perspective, is not a content transported from literature into music, but a piece of music demanding to be perceived through the filter of a piece of poetry.

Unlike music, literature does not need to rely on its paratexts in order to create the pretension to identity needed to set off a metaphorical interaction between itself and another art. A piece of verbal writing, in other words, has the ability to meta-reflectively thematize its own medial status and make the metaphorical claim of belonging to another medium. For my next example, I turn to Paul Celan, whose poem ‘Anabasis’ from the 1963 collection Die Niemandsrose contains the following lines:

sekundenschön hüpfenden
Atemreflexen - Leucht-
glockentöne (dum-,
dun-, un-,
undes suspirat
cor),
aus-
gelöst, ein-
gelöst, unser.22

secondlovely skipping
breathreflexes - light-
chimenotes (dum-,
dun-, un-,
undes suspirat
cor),
re-
leased, re-
deemed, ours.

One could spend a great deal of time with these lines, not to mention with the poem from which they have been severed here, but let us focus on what they say about the relation between language and music.23 First, the Latin phrase – meaning approximately ‘whence our hearts sigh’ – comes from Mozart’s motet for soprano and orchestra, Exsultate, jubilate.24 Immediately preceding this quotation, three syllables that seem to be emptied of referential content present themselves. Importantly, these two modalities – abstract, organized sound and referential language – are joined by a gradual, almost seamless modulation: ‘dum-, / dun-, un-, / unde’. The Mozart quotation as well as the sounds empty of referential meaning – tönend bewegte Formen, to quote Hanslick’s famous definition of music – are contained within a parenthesis, which seems to suggest that they exemplify the preceding word, ‘light- / chimenotes’. Thus, the poem makes a claim to verbal imitation of musical sounds. Moreover, the gradual transition from an abstract-auditive
to a semantic modality in combination with the evocation of Mozart contributes to the suggestion of an identity between music and language: the border, as it were, is being blurred. Alternatively, these verses mimic the blurring of the border – there is never any doubt as to the fact that ‘Anabasis’ is a verbal text rather than a piece of music. Thus the interplay between identity and difference needed for a metaphorical interaction to be set off is present in these lines.

There are, in fact, further reasons for interpreting this gesture as a pretension to identity between music and literature. One of them lies in a general tendency in Celan’s poetry to be meta-reflective: one of the main issues of his oeuvre, only partly stemming from his engagement with Adorno’s famous caveat, is the possibility of German poetry in the wake of Auschwitz. In view of this, every single element of his poems can potentially be understood as turned towards poetic language itself, questioning, problematizing and analysing it, and musical references such as the ones displayed in ‘Anabasis’ are no exception. Although a particularly salient feature of Celan’s work, the inclination of poetry towards poetics is of course a very widespread practice in modernist as well as postmodernist literature. A further historical note could be added: in the chaotic age of modernity, one of the most conspicuous techniques in music as well as literature has been the juxtaposition of seemingly disparate and unrelated elements, disregarding those laws of causality to which art had hitherto adhered. In poetry, paratactic collocations as well as a number of other ways of deconstructing syntactic structures could be mentioned, and in music the dissolving of tonality and highly fragmented formal language exemplifies a similar tendency. In short, the relations between the elements of a work of art became less and less obvious, and had to be inferred by the percipient. Although he preferred the term *imago*, the following brief and well-known poem by Ezra Pound is doubtless an example of metaphorical interaction in Black’s sense: ‘the apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough’. Even though no explicit statement of identity is made, the juxtaposition clearly prompts us to look for analogous implications and to regard the depiction of the subway scenery through the filter of the second image. The proliferation of this kind of writing and composing, one might argue, has made the percipients of modernist art attuned to the search for relations other than causal ones. There is no reason why this change of attitude should not affect our understanding of the juxtaposition of music and literature within the same work. The question of the relation between the medial components of a piece of text or music has become increasingly important in modernism, which is patently illustrated by verses such as those of Celan’s quoted above.

Having thus argued that these lines from ‘Anabasis’ are another example of metaphorical interaction between literature and music, as well as an illustration of a verbal text setting off such interaction without the aid of paratexts, I would briefly describe the resulting interaction. Celan’s verses
themselves would have to be the principal subject of this metaphor, whereas the secondary subject would be the andante movement of Mozart’s motet. One very general notion included in the system of ideas known as ‘music’ is that of a strong connection to emotions, a commonplace that remains widespread to this day. This idea finds its analogy in the ‘cor’ mentioned in the text, as well as in the sounds ‘dum-, /dun-’, which might be interpreted as an onomatopoetic reference to the beats of the sighing heart (or, for that matter, to the sound of chimes). Also, the religious character of the Mozart motet activates the traditional notion of music functioning as a link between humanity and divinity, fundamentally important to Friedrich Hölderlin among others. In Celan’s text, this notion is mirrored by the elated mood and almost epiphanic connotations of the lines ‘re- / leased, re- / deemed, ours’.

A more specific, material idea lies in the adverb ‘secondlovely’, which could be taken as referring not only to the time unit of a second, thus stressing the fundamentally temporal quality of musical appreciation, but also the musical interval of a major or minor second. If one examines Mozart’s *Exsultate, jubilate* at the entrance of the quoted phrase – that is, the music evoked by the textual quotation – 21 intervals out of 25 turn out to be seconds (the remaining being a fifth and three thirds). The predominance of seconds is of course a very common phenomenon in the melodic idiom of Mozart. Thus it seems reasonable to understand this musical interval as one of the connotations of ‘secondlovely’. Furthermore, the term ‘breathreflexes’ actualizes the notion of breath, which is not only a central notion in Celan’s poetics, but also inextricably linked to the human voice, be it speaking or, as in Mozart’s piece, singing.

In this example, it is rather obvious that we are not dealing with a ‘trans’ anything: music is not carried into the poem. Without the aid of a paratextual marker, Mozart’s music is evoked as an intertext through which we may perceive the non-referential syllables as well as the Latin phrase – Mozart’s motet serves as a metaphorical filter through which certain aspects of Celan’s verses might be read.

By using examples from the categories labelled ‘literature in music’ and ‘music in literature’ in Steven Paul Scher’s classic essay, I have aimed to suggest a further important advantage of the metaphorical perspective: it is able to serve as an umbrella concept for both of these types, since they can both be regarded as metaphorical constellations. This approach, I believe, might serve as a possible starting point for the collocation and comparative study of works from all three of Scher’s categories, a kind of intermedial examination that is arguably hard to access and of which we have not yet seen many convincing examples.

I have also tried to shed light on some implications of the topographical model which describes media as adjacent areas separated by borders and gaps, and contrast this model with an understanding of musico-literary
phenomena in terms of metaphorical interaction. For an artefact to open itself up to such an interpretation, it needs a meta-reflective element, giving rise to a pretension to identity between music and literature. In verbal artefacts, this pretension can be expressed either by the text proper or a paratext. In musical artefacts, by contrast, a paratextual marker such as a title, a program note or an epigraph, is perhaps the only way. Hence, a literary content or form cannot be transported into music and recognized as such without the simultaneous presence of the original work, a fact blurred by the topographical model as well as by the use of the ‘trans’ prefix. Although efficient in many ways, I have argued that it suppresses the notion of simultaneity. The metaphorical perspective, then, requires a suspension of the topographical model in order for the arts to exist simultaneously in the mind of the peripient. Moreover, I have argued that, like Black’s subjects, these arts are better understood as systems of ideas than as neatly mapped out medial areas delineated by clear borders. Through the metaphorical interaction, in accordance with Black’s perspective, the ideas that constitute analogies between the subjects come to the fore in our understanding of the musico-literary artefact. These are general, notional ideas as well as specific, material ones and the reorganization of the systems of ideas to which the analogies between them give rise can be read as meta-medial utterances, potentially altering our view of ‘music’ and ‘literature’ as such. Each instance of a musico-literary metaphor actively partakes in the historically developing notions of arts and media, reflecting on and reshaping their imaginary territories, and thus continuously rendering obsolete each new map of the intermedial topography before it is finished.

Notes


4. Ibid., p. 44.

5. Ibid., p. 40.

6. Ibid., p. 41.

7. Cf. Elleström, this volume.


17. Ibid., pp. 296–7.


25. For equivalent examples involving the visual arts, cf. Rajewsky’s discussion of intermedial reference in this volume.


4

Intermedial Strategies in Multimedia Art

Christina Ljungberg

Laurie Anderson’s multimedia performance *White Lily* opens with a computer-animated projection of a figure running in slow motion. Anderson then enters into view backwards against the animated runner who disappears to the left, while Anderson moves across to centre stage to electronic music punctuated by clock chimes. Dressed in a white suit and accompanied by her silhouette shadow generated by a strong circular projection, Anderson has her movements doubled by the shadow, as she presents a short text about her memory of a brief conversation in Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s film *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

This short sequence is reshaped into a poem recited by Anderson, at the same time as she makes punctuating gestures with her right arm, ending by making a backwards sign. The performance concludes with the projection of the central symbol, the white lily, held by the hand of a white silhouette in a still that is left standing against the dark, as Anderson moves out of the centre and disappears to the right. The animated figure then reappears and fades out, with only the music playing in the dark.

With its intricate intermingling of image, sound and gesture, the performance of *White Lily* is a complex multimodal restaging of the short scene in Fassbinder’s film, in which Anderson directly addresses a number of questions concerning mediality, modality and art form. Anderson’s reconfiguration of the scene in Fassbinder’s movie alludes to Alfred Döblin’s famous 1929 novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* which was the source of the film Fassbinder made for television in 1980. Its impetus as an intermedial work is partly drawn from Döblin’s text, which is in itself both intermedial and intertextual. With its strikingly cinematic and journalistic character, Döblin’s work is a modern epic, which, not unlike James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, rewrites antique myth into a modernist urban setting and which, influenced by both Futurism and Dadaism, tries to capture not only the visual mosaic of the city’s frenetic and oscillating surfaces but also its polyvocal discourses. This is the cultural memory that Fassbinder recreates in his epic 15-hour film, which transforms the (mainly verbal) montage technique Döblin employs in his large 400-page polyphonic novel into an audiovisual masterpiece, and which
Anderson reconfigures in her 1 minute and 16 seconds performance of a key event in Fassbinder’s film and Döblin’s novel.

These intersemiotic transformations, from a dialogic and intermedial novel to, initially, a brilliant filmic visualization of Döblin’s imagination and, eventually, to Anderson’s masterpiece, that is, from one medium to another to yet another, raise the question of the notion of ‘medium’ in an especially pointed and forceful manner. What is a medium? A key concept in semiotics, one way of defining ‘medium’ is to say that it is the necessary channel or conduit of communication which allows the transmission of a message to a receiver. As Winfried Nöth suggests, even the air functions as a medium, since it carries the sound waves from speaker to listener. This basic meaning resonates with the definitions given by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which describes it as a means by which something is expressed, communicated or achieved; a substance through which a force or other influence is transmitted; a form of storage for computer software, such as magnetic tape or disks; a liquid with which pigments are mixed to make paint; with the plural ‘mediums’, a person claiming to be able to communicate between the dead and the living, that is, between our lived world and an imaginary one; or the middle state between two extremes. Although the first sense given by the OED may be the most commonly used in contemporary life, all these aspects of ‘medium’ suggest a dynamic and fluid meaning, characterizing a transient function more than a fixed or stable property.

In Peircean semiotics, a sign is itself a medium since it dialogically interacts in its various modes, the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic, in an ongoing flow of signs mediating between the life-world we live in and our interpretation of it. Although all sign aspects are necessary for a sign to function, they are differently foregrounded in the various sign systems. If music is predominantly iconic, photography and film are, due to their mode of production, mainly indexical media, whereas painting and verbal communication, insofar as they depend on cultural conventions, are symbolic.

In communication and media studies, the concept of ‘media’ is used to refer to the classical mass media newspaper, book, radio, popular music, film and television. More recently, the concept has been extended to cover writing or even speech in general, music, painting, photography, video, the Internet or computer games, which no longer qualify as media interacting with the ‘masses’. Intermediality, then, concerns the transgression of the borders between such media, for instance, between different sign systems and/or the iconic enactment of one medium within another. It also involves the sensorial modality of a specific medium, mainly the visual, oral or tactile (the use of olfactory signs, as in Divine’s Odorama, was a short, even if rather successful, attempt) and the semiotic register of sign functions.

What happens to these modalities and to these functions when various media interact? What precisely constitutes the result, that is, the
phenomenon we call intermediality, which concerns the negotiations of the borders between various media. What do these ‘border talks’, as Irina Rajewsky (in this volume) calls them, effect in such intermedial transgressions? What are the possibilities and limitations that such intersemiotic translations from one art to the other bring into being and how is one medium reflected in another? I will argue that these instances of intermediality are

- radically performative, as we are confronted with hybrid forms that generate something new and unique
- strongly self-reflexive, since they focus attention both on their own mode of production and on their own semiotic specificity, which is heightened by the increasing digitalization of interacting media
- a highly effective communication strategy, as they give readers, viewers and listeners access to different levels of meaning.

These are the issues at stake in my contribution, which will discuss two very different examples of intermedial art mapping time and space by the performer, artist and writer Laurie Anderson and digital artist Lucia Leão. What I want to explore are the strategies they use to achieve their unique and innovative intermedial effects.

The medium as sign

As mentioned at the outset, in a technical or material sense, ‘medium’ can be described as the channel enabling communication between a sender and a receiver. In its broader semiotic sense, however, the sign itself, as defined by C. S. Peirce, functions as a medium. In the triadic semiotics of Peirce, a sign is anything that stands for (represents) something, called its object, to generate another sign as its interpretant. According to this definition, the sign is itself a mediator or medium, acting, so to speak, as a translator between its object and its so-called interpretant, which is the result of its interpretation. The sign is therefore defined in terms of a triadic process called semiosis, or sign generation. According to one of the most quoted definitions, a sign is ‘something that stands for something to somebody in some respect or capacity’. The sign initiates a process which makes it interact relationally or functionally with its object. Signs are not necessarily material objects, nor even a class of objects: they exist in the mind of their interpreters, in other words, they have a cognitive effect on their interpreters. In signification, a sign dialogically interacts with its various sign aspects, the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic, in an ongoing flow of signs mediating between the life-world we live in and our interpretation of it.

Although all sign aspects are necessary for a sign to function, these aspects – iconic, indexical or symbolic – are, as mentioned above, differently foregrounded in various sign systems. That is why painting which, as a
visual sign, would seem to be primarily indexical as it is always embodied in some singular materiality displays mostly symbolic aspects: paintings adhere to the styles and cultural (and ideological) conventions dominant in the period in which they were executed. Not even so-called ‘pure painting’, which was advanced at the end of the nineteenth century as a form separate from so-called ‘narrative painting’ and supposedly demonstrating ‘pure opticality’, is ‘pure’ but is, as W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, the ‘discourses of theory, of idealist and critical philosophy’. Recognizing these underlying discourses is as vital for understanding modernist painting as the knowledge of the Western narrative canon and familiarity with its myths required for comprehending classical narrative painting. Music, another example, and the most iconic of all medial forms as it comes to us in the form of mere quality, can also be indexical and, though marginally, symbolic. It is indexical not only because it always indicates a certain style or genre (insofar as the recognition of its characteristics depends on similarity, it is again iconic), but also because its tonal flow calls us to ‘things in this [particular] world’. Symbolic aspects appear, for instance, in the case of a national anthem. That is why, just as there are no ‘pure’ sign forms, there are no ‘purely’ visual, verbal or aural media: in Mitchell’s words, ‘all media are mixed media’. This does not take away a medium’s particular characteristics, its ‘specificity’ as it were, but instead, enables media mixtures and innovations and the transformations of old media by new techniques.

What happens when various sign systems interact, which is the phenomenon that we call intermediality? What does it do to the specific character of each particular system? It would have to be assumed that, as in all border transgression, transformations and substitutions take place. One of the oldest intermedial relationships is the evolution from image over pictorial writing to ideographical writing systems, which, as has recently been shown, developed according to underlying principles governing the shapes of human signs. And is not also narrative language in itself intermedial, as we structure our sentences in verbal diagrams and as spatial diagrams on the page? It would thus seem that intermediality is intrinsic to narrative texts, whether in the form of rhetorical structure or in the interplay with other sign systems such as photographs or maps. This explains, I would argue, why forms of self-referentiality and iconicity are intrinsic to literary texts – and vice versa.

This intermediality demonstrates how such a seemingly simple transgression is inherently performative, since it creates something new and unprecedented, at the same time as one medium is reflected in the other. In intermedial art forms, this relationship becomes radicalized, as the difference in interaction in multimedia art and performance determines the different degrees of performativity and self-referentiality of the work of art and its communicative effect.
Intermediality and performativity

What precisely is meant by performatory here, and what is its relationship to intermediality? If ‘performance’ is an execution of an action, the fulfilment of a claim, promise and so on or a presentation to an audience, ‘performative’ is the very expression that effectuates it. Both concepts entail memory. As Mieke Bal points out, in a performance, playing a part or role requires memorizing that part or that score and practicing the gestures, expressions and diction suiting the role, just as a performative act needs a cultural – and appropriate – context to function. This subordinates individual intention to social convention and makes performative acts instances of an ‘endless process of repetition involving similarity and difference, and therefore relativizing and enabling social change and subjects’ interventions, in other words, agency’. 16

The concept of performativity and its link with performance has also been theorized by the theatre historian Erika Fischer-Lichte17 who argues that it is the transformative potential arising from the shared ritual practices surrounding a theatre performance that makes them both self-referential and capable of constituting reality. She Differentiates three different kinds of performativity: in the weak sense, that something is done by someone saying it; in the strong sense, whereby language creates a new reality against a backdrop of stable conventions; and in the radical sense, by which all these processes create a new social reality.18 Intermediality always entails performativity in the radical sense owing to its hybridity.

Within our cultural life, performative utterances and acts bring something into being. In the simplest cases, in uttering words (for instance, ‘I promise you to be there at seven’) an act is performed, one entailing various consequences and expectations. The performance of a traditional ritual (for instance, a marriage ceremony or christening) is one thing, that of a yet to be instituted form of ritual and performance quite another. Of course, the latter are enacted against the vast, vague background of our complex, myriad inheritances. Even so, they bring something into being, not in accord with traditional forms of ritual, but as an attempt to establish what is not now recognized or authorized.

What is attempted in the quiet dramas of quotidian life is also undertaken in more manifest ways in numerous contemporary artworks, which therefore also involve analysis and interpretation. But is not the very act of analysis in itself a performative act in which a new, further developed object of study is created? As C. S. Peirce points out, an object exercises influence over the sign in so far that it can ‘guide or constrain’ the process of semiosis or sign generation.19 This is what Bal refers to when she points to the fact that the analysis mutates from just applying theory to ‘a performative interaction between object (including those of its aspects that remained invisible before the encounter), theory and analyst’ making the very process
of interpretation part of the object for the analyst to investigate. In this way, 'objects enable reflection and speculation, and can contradict projection and wrong-headed interpretation ... and thus constitute a theoretical object with philosophical relevance'.

Such awareness is particularly called for in the analysis of complex multimedia performances such as *White Lily*, in which the relationship between performativity and performance indeed becomes radicalized since the switching between different media automatically generates new objects and new realities for their 'analysts', that is, the audience trying to grasp the intricate layers of meaning. Anderson's performance – and also the work of Lucia Leão – therefore poses interesting questions as to what happens when various media interact and what such intermedial relationships effect. Anderson’s profound and multilayered transformation of Fassbinder's film based on Döblin’s novel into her own performance demonstrates exemplarily the extent to which intermediality involves the transformations of myths, poetry or prose, modes of narration and styles of writing into other forms such as paintings, films, video arts, performances or other works of art which in some way quote, adapt, rework or just allude to literary texts. At the same time intermediality also refers to the very act or process of transformation that literature undergoes under the influence or in contact with other art forms as it absorbs and adapts motives, plots and even modes of writing of the visual arts. It also takes up intermedial dialogues with the other art forms by reflecting, in writing, on what these interactions bring, as well as producing new hybrid and multimedial forms of art, of which Döblin's intermedial novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is a particularly pertinent example.

In Anderson’s performance, the interplay among the visual, the vocal and the gestural is highlighted by the complex interaction between the technical media, the qualified media and their various modes, performatively calling something entirely new and different into being. Anderson's brilliant syncopation of a key event in Fassbinder’s film and Döblin’s novel abstracts the core issues of time and temporality in her 'pretexts', transforming them into a multi-layered mediation about time, memory and mortality. The split focus on Anderson and her shadow is iconically matched by the sound tension simultaneously created between the electronic background music with its effects of a bell that chimes and Anderson’s voice dramatically reciting her memory:

*What Fassbinder film is it?*
*The one-armed man comes into a flower shop and says:*
*What flower expresses days go by*
*and they just keep going by endlessly*
*pulling you into the future?*
Days go by
endlessly
endlessly pulling you
into the future.
And the florist says:
White lily.

Anderson’s condensation of the question of time and memory into her one minute and 16 seconds refiguration of this key event in Fassbinder's film and Döblin’s novel brings up the question of the relationship between performance, performativity and cultural memory in a very intriguing manner. The event itself, the quotidian act in which a man comes into a flower shop to buy flowers, may seem banal enough. It constitutes, however, a crucial trait in the portrayal of the hulking, child-like ex-convict Franz Biberkopf. When this scene takes place, Franz has recently come out of prison, fully convinced that from now on he will become an ‘honest soul’ and lead ‘a decent life’. But every time his life seems to be taking a turn for the better, he is betrayed by men he trusts and considers his friends. Such a betrayal is implied in Anderson’s performance of the flower shop scene, when Franz wants to make a decent gesture towards a woman who has been nice to him. In Döblin’s story and Fassbinder’s film, Franz meets a girl, Polish Lina, whose uncle, Otto Lüders, lets him into his business as a door-to-door shoelace salesman. On one of his peddling rounds, Franz meets a lonely widow, whose husband he physically resembles, and has sex with her. She is grateful and generous to him, but Franz’s childish delight at his good luck has him tell Lüders about it. Lüders immediately pays a visit to the widow, first to insult her, saying that word about her ‘generosity’ is afoot, and then to rob her. Franz, unsuspectingly looking forward to his next dalliance with her, goes to buy her flowers. This is where Fassbinder’s poetic imagination stages the short scene that Anderson is alluding to, a scene that does not occur in the novel which only tells us that Biberkopf ‘slowly walks up the stairs with a bouquet wrapped in oiled paper,’ only to have the door slammed shut in his face, and, disappointed and angry, throws the flowers into the gutter. Only later, receiving a letter from the widow, does he learn of Lüder’s betrayal, which demolishes him: when Lina comes home, she finds him sitting in his room, apathetically picking his alarm clock to pieces, as if time could be stopped and turned back to be repackaged, reordered and replayed.

In his film, Fassbinder superimposes Biberkopf’s visit to the flower shop onto the underlying issue of time and temporality. Franz enters the shop and asks the florist what flowers express the meaning ‘that the past always runs after you and drives you further and further to where there is no future’. To his surprise, the florist suggests white carnations, which to Franz symbolize ‘flowers of death’. Fassbinder then has Biberkopf buy the widow a bouquet of red roses instead – which then end up in the gutter when he is refused entry
to the widow’s apartment. At this time, Franz is not yet the ‘one-armed man’ in Anderson’s memory – he still has both his arms. Moreover, not only does Anderson change the white carnation into a white lily but she also weaves the flower shop scene in Fassbinder’s film together with a later betrayal, which costs Franz his arm and nearly his life when he is thrown out of a car by another envious ‘friend’ – who later proceeds to kill his girlfriend, making Franz temporarily insane. By mapping the two betrayals, temporally distinct but causally related incidents (as both concern betrayal by ‘friends’ whom Franz naively trusted) onto one another, Anderson skilfully and poetically syncopates Franz’s existence as an agent caught up in fields of intersecting forces beyond his control, a victim of his time and circumstances. By only ‘learning things that he had rather not wanted to learn’ too late, and not being able to adapt to the ruthless life of the modern metropolis, he shows himself as too naïve, too innocent and above all, too trusting.

The network thus spun over Alexanderplatz could therefore be looked at as an ‘agential space’, a space in which agents are at once caught up transcending their immediate control and implicated in the effective exercise of their somatic, social agency. In other words, these agents are such situated and embodied forces that the exercise of agency is best understood in terms of introducing disturbances into this field or as tracing these intersecting force patterns. This notion would seem to be appropriate to describe both Fassbinder’s film and Döblin’s multiperspectival story about the interaction of people caught in the corrupt urban landscape of Weimar-era Germany and which is brought to such a fulcrum in Anderson’s performance.

**Intermediality and self-referentiality**

Intermediality also displays degrees of self-referentiality. Iconic self-reference is typical of the aesthetic sign. One of the characteristics of the aesthetic sign is that it calls attention to various aspects of itself, above all to its sensuous qualities and formal structures, its actual materiality and its rhetorical strategies. At least, this becomes evident and explicable when we approach self-reference in general and the self-referentiality of aesthetic signs according to C. S. Peirce’s doctrine of signs. In particular, his second trichotomy of signs (icon, index and symbol), which is based upon the character of the relationship between a sign and its dynamical object, is especially illuminating here, since it provides

1) a way of understanding reference in terms of indexicality (the indexical sign being defined as that in which there is a spatiotemporal or causal relationship between sign and object) and

2) a way of understanding self-referentiality (at least in part) in terms of iconicity. All iconic signs are self-referential, which could appear paradoxical since signs should really stand in for something else. The reason
why signs can represent other signs is because, in Peircean semiotics, the object ‘does not need to be a piece of the so-called real world at all, since signs or ideas can be the object of a sign. The object of the sign is something which precedes and thus determines the sign in the process of semiosis as a previous experience or cognition of the world.’26 The sign’s referent (Peirce’s object of the sign) can be another sign, and self-reference can be a chain of signs referring to other signs.

Oral interpretation, as in the case of Anderson’s performance, utilizes the self-referencing qualities of language and literature which involve the interpreter as both actor and reader. In the case of digital media, self-reference is coupled to the mathematical generation of numerical images. These images are in perpetual metamorphosis, ‘oscillating’ between the actual image on the screen and the virtual image or potential set of images.27 Because there is no analogy between the algorithms that generate it and the image on the computer screen, this image is highly iconic. It generates experiences that are not ‘real’ but formalized and repeatable calculations, which makes the synthetic image synonymous with virtuality and simulation. That is why the digitalization of pictures and films has contributed strongly to the increase of self-reference in the media – at the same time as it has liberated the media from ‘the bonds of factual reference to a world which they used to depict’,28

Quotations, allusions, adaptations, influences and borrowing from texts, films or any other medium also generate *intertextual* self-reference.29 When various media are involved, for instance a film referring to a painting (*Girl with a Pearl Earring*) or a novel in a film (for example, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, which has the novella lying on the protagonist’s bedside table), there is *intermedial* self-reference: reference from one medium to the other. Such borrowings from other texts or media are allreferential, which means that ‘the object of the quoting sign is a quoted sign from which it differs’,30 since one medium refers to another. The difference here is that when one film makes an intertextual reference to its own cinematic medium by quoting another film, and not to the world which they ultimately represent, they are examples of intertextual self-reference, in particular since quotations always entail repetition and sameness, which is ‘the source of iconic self-reference’.31

As discussed above, *White Lily* is a highly complex intertextual act since its ‘pretexts’ resonate throughout the performance, albeit mainly for an audience familiar with Fassbinder’s film and even more so for those who have read Döblin’s novel. Quotations and allusions are generally considered referential, since they refer to something else, an object, in a different context. That would make Anderson’s literary quotations referential and in this sense indexical since they have a particular context in mind. However, whenever her music refers to other pieces of music and her visuals to other visuals (and not to any world beyond the world of music or visual representation), her
‘quotations’ of other musical and visual works are self-referential since they are references from the media to the media. Furthermore, Anderson’s work is pervaded with repetitions and recursions of words, phrases or ideas, which are typical and striking forms of self-reference – whether in music, texts, images or films – since they always refer back to the preceding instances. So are the reuses and quotes of her own work, which make up much of Anderson’s œuvre.

Self-referentiality is something that digital art shares with other postmodern art forms. Hybrid forms of art and media heighten the degree of self-referentiality: switching between or among various media not only forces its viewing or, rather, participating, audience32 to make comparisons among them but also exposes the particularities of the various semiotic systems that each medium embodies. Virtual reality requires both specific aids and a technological environment, which calls attention to the necessary procedures involved. Focusing attention on the artist and her bodily self, as both generating and participating in the work of art, also increases self-reference. However, these works have a marked indexical ingredient, too, in the sense of referring to other ‘real’ works, contexts or bodies. Even in virtual reality, an awareness of the physical body is necessary for orienting ourselves in and understanding the particular digital work of art. Hence, there are varying degrees and forms of self-reference characteristic of various types of digital art and media. Virtual reality is not separate or even separable from embodied reality, but is rather an attenuated and reconfigured form – or array of forms – of our embodied being in interaction, intermedia, with anything and everything.

Another factor contributing to the self-referentiality of digital art is the emphasis artists put on the very process involved in producing art by more or less smoothly integrating the various media into an intermedial whole. As Mitchell points out (referring to McLuhan), what is important is the ‘ratio’ in which the various ‘ingredients’ are mixed and timed, questions of dominance/subordination, the phenomenon of synesthesia, or what Mitchell calls ‘nesting’, in which one medium appears within another as its content, or ‘braiding’, the seamless weaving together of disjunctive elements into a ‘seemingly continuous narrative’.33 His own emphasis on process is in effect an interrogation of time, of the textures and forms of temporality, but since the flux of time leaves sedimented layers of meaning and identity, these sedimentations deserve our critical attention – not only the result of the temporal flux but also the power of this flux to unsettle, to disturb. This does not emanate from the artist only but is created in the space between bodily co-presence between actor and spectator, and in the filmed recording of a performance. Anderson’s multimodal performance can be seen as ‘braiding’ since one medium appears within the other as its content though in a highly complex form: the scene from Döblin’s novel transformed into Fassbinder’s film, then the filmed recording of Anderson’s performance of...
her memory of Fassbinder’s film. There is however also a ‘braiding’ taking place in the viewer’s mind in the act of interpretation as this utterly condensed performance must be mapped onto our own personal and cultural maps of knowledge and experience. Viewed thus, there is an expansive network of performative relationships, which contributes to the artwork’s particular power.

Interactive works of art such as Lucia Leão’s *Hermenetka* would seem to offer a different kind of self-referentiality and intermediality, as it offers the user the possibility to produce his or her own map dynamically in an ever-changing cartographic configuration. The meshwork Leão spans across her Mediterranean map is a project of Net Art that generates fortuitous cartographies from search engines in various databases. *Hermenetka* is a telescope word coined from associations to Hermes, god of communication and commerce, protean shape-changer and inventive creator as well as the interpreter and intermediary between the divinities and the mortals; Net, to internet, and Ka to the divine concept in ancient Egyptian mythology representing the life-force and consciousness. Leão chose the geographical area and the cultural concept of the ‘Mediterranean’ because of its etymological meaning as the ‘sea between territories’ or its cultural meaning of being a ‘sea in the middle of the Earth’ – both literally and metaphorically – and therefore being a ‘space in-between’ – which is thus embodied in unbounded cybernetic flows and data exchanges. The project’s basic intent is to generate plural cartographies of the seas of data populating cyber culture.

*Hermenetka* is constructed as two types of mappings. The first enables the generation of a map in real-time centring on the concept of the Mediterranean: countries, cultures, histories and so on. The map is entered by clicking on one of the various topics circulating in hypertext on the map surface; frontiers, myths, limits, plurality, territories, flows, memory, flavours, aroma or rhythm. You can then explore each site’s layered images by double-clicking them – ‘rhythm/pulse’, for instance, begins with Luciano Berio, Italian composer, with a link to the Wikipedia entry on Berio, the Albanian singer Edi Zara and the Spanish rap artist La Mala Rodriguez. ‘[L]imits’ introduces us to the singer Fortuina, then links us up with Wilson Sukorski’s poetic Noosphere, focusing on boundary-crossing artists presented in continuously shifting images such as Okay Temiz, the Turkish jazz percussionist whose unique ethno-jazz is the result of his crossing both physical and cultural borders and confronting different music styles, or the Franco-Algerian musician Rachid Taha. All these entries are accompanied by artists’ websites or biographies, geographical maps, blogs, bibliographies and photologs. At the time of downloading, the music databank provided 33 different kinds of music from all parts of the Mediterranean zone which, apart from the front map with its meshwork opening itself to the manifold images, is the only ‘constant’ element in this dynamically altering interactive mapping enterprise.
The second kind of mapping consists in answering the question ‘What is the Mediterranean for you?’ in an html-window (see Figure 3). This encourages map users to contribute their own images, texts and links, triggering further cyberspace research to be entered on the site, thus constantly composing a unique and instantaneous map. In both mappings, images are generated at random and composed of different sizes and levels of transparent overlaying of images and texts. It is hard to escape the impression that the context here is that of advertising propelling us into the illusion that the world and everything in it is simply what we – with enough resources and ingenuity – are able to make it into. At the same time, it is indicative of the extent to which the ethos of consumerism permeates our sensibility as the interactive character of the site flatters the informed and enlightened consumer as setting the terms of interaction. But these are in fact constantly negotiated and renegotiated, and here we, too, are agents in a field of crisscrossing forces in which we can never achieve full control.

Populating the various territories with a seemingly unending supply of sources of historical entanglements, myths and sensorial inputs as streams in which we are caught up and carried along in the form of visual and aural media both deconstructs known space and reconstructs it all over again. The interaction between the various media – images, film, television,
music, books, the internet – uses the visual, the aural and its evocation of smell, taste and tactility, thus playing on our sensory apparatus. The sensorial inputs in their attempts to evoke flavours and aromas play no small part here, making the site both performative and self-referential. Moreover, it is continuous, as the various levels flow into one another; it is also dynamic, constantly developing new, augmented alternative cartographies of images and sounds from visitors’ suggestions and new combinations with constantly changing perspectives and positions.

To conclude, what becomes obvious here is that an intermedial analysis demands a multi-level specification of the particular elements of matter, energy, skill and technology that are involved in medium-specific practices. However, considering the extent to which we are caught up in media and the ways that our actions and reactions are functions of the energies and trajectories of the media themselves, an investigation into what spaces of interaction, what degrees of performativity and of self-referentiality are generated in such reconfigurations is even more called for. This becomes yet more urgent since our involvement is such that both our identity and agency can be defined in and through immersion in media, which makes necessary a penetrating understanding of the relation not only of practitioner to practice but also of the interaction among media effects.

This interplay results in both artworks in something new and unique and is therefore radically performative. Anderson’s condensation of Fassbinder’s transformation of Döblin’s novel produces a performance which is both precise and poetic and will also differ whenever it is experienced. This makes each viewing instantaneous since it projects new space emanating from the cultural, political and social memory provided by the ‘pretexts’ it evokes. This space is liminal and unique; apparently, it is also immediate, though upon analysis it turns out to be a complex mediated affair. Such uniqueness also applies to interactive digital art works like Leão’s dynamic mapping: its fortuitous cartographies consist of an immense amount of incalculable combinations and variations as well as being potentially unlimited in the sense that, whenever a new element is added to it, the constellations change. The ‘actual’ map is in continuous metamorphosis, responding to the input of the user or interactor. They may seem to involve different degrees of performativity – one theatrical, related to the space generated in the performative interaction between performer and audience, the other in the dynamic space produced in the interactive response between the mapper and the computer. Nevertheless, they are not only both radically performative but also produced by not entirely dissimilar processes, as they both address time and cultural (as well as personal) memory. Both take place within a certain ritual: Laurie Anderson’s polyphonic amalgamation of various cultures, media and time is played out to an audience as a live performance with all its inherent rituals – even as a video recording. In a sense, this also pertains to Lucia Leão’s Hemnenetka, which involves a ‘cyberart ritual’ (turning on
the computer, opening the website, clicking on the various links). Its performative relationship is rather similar to the one created by Anderson’s performance during which the audience as much as the artist becomes responsible for what is brought into being by such dynamic works of art. After all, the cybercartographer equally perceives and experiences the mappings from the point of his or her subjectivity and maps them into his or her mental geography. Moreover, both in Anderson’s White Lily and Leão’s Hermenêutika self-reference is used as an aesthetic sign whose formal structures and rhetorical strategies evoke the materiality of the performance, but in different ways. That is also why they involve different degrees of intermediality: as we have seen in White Lily, Anderson’s multimodal Gesamtkunstwerk which consists of invisibly sutured ingredients, there is a self-referential use not only of syntax and sound in her lyrics (prosody, assonance, alliteration and the sound editor) but also in the ways she deploys music, gesture and visual animation. Whereas Leão’s cybermapping is closer to the concept of ‘nesting’, in which one medium appears within another as its content, Anderson’s intermediality could be defined as ‘braiding’, the multimodal but seamless weaving together of disjunctive elements into a seemingly continuous narrative.

Intermedial works of art therefore not only involve intermedial border negotiations and media transgressions, they also concern performativity and high degrees of self-reflexivity. Furthermore, it is precisely the efficacy of these dialogic negotiations that makes them meta-negotiations, or are they re-negotiations? Are not the terms on which we undertake such negotiations always already set by existing structures of power, thereby forcing us to renegotiate the very framework of negotiation itself at the same time as we are renegotiating some specific point of negotiation or contestation? All this may explain why intermediality is such an efficient, complex, elusive and exhilarating communicative strategy.

Notes

1. Anderson’s first performance appeared one year after Fassbinder’s death, which hardly seems coincidental.


24. Ibid., p. 83.

25. Ibid., p. 2.


29. Ibid., p. 19.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Not only can digital art forms be accessed anywhere and at all times but they also demand interactivity on the part of the addressee.

