Introduction to Re-considering Intermediality across Disciplines: New Directions

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Human beings live in mediated relations to the world and other people: it is *media* – here understood as communicative entities in art, business, politics, science – that gives us entry to the world and access to other human beings. This, we would argue, is the starting point for media studies and intermedial studies.

In the new millennium, the effects of digitalization have accelerated to the extent that it has transformed almost every aspect of our lives practically everywhere on the planet. Social, cultural, material and consequently even the medial infrastructures have been rapidly updated due to technological development, and one of the results of this is that hybrid and mixed medial communication practices – what we roughly cover with the term intermediality in this issue – have become more and more ubiquitous, transforming most experiences in our everyday lives.

The academic field of intermedial studies is a relatively new and growing area in the humanities, which can be understood broadly as the study of interrelations and interactions among all forms of communicative media types: there is an emphasis on artistic media types, even if intermedial studies can, in principle, analyse all imaginable communicative forms.

One way to approach intermedial studies is by way of three categories of intermedial relations, namely intermedial combination (heteromediality), trans-mediation/media transformation and intermedial representation. The categorization is from Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022) and builds upon magisterial work conducted by, among others, Irina Rajewsky, Werner Wolf, and Lars Elleström. Intermedial

combination is used to describe how different media are integrated within a certain media product: how images integrate with words on a poster, how music and words are a composite unity in an opera aria, or how several media forms are combined in a theatre performance. It is the media combination and media integration that produce the heteromedial deep mix that is so characteristic of contemporary communicative forms, but which has always been the condition for meaning-making.

Transmediation and media transformation, two closely related terms, refer to what happens when form and/or content aspects of one media product are transmitted into another media product: this is what happens when scientific results are transferred from a scientific article to a documentary film, or when a novel is turned into a film (or vice versa), or when the most popular rides in an amusement park are transformed into a computer game. As Linda Hutcheon demonstrated some years ago, such media transformations, what she calls adaptations, are everywhere around us. See Hutcheon (2006) for a general and very broad discussion of the phenomenon. Elleström (2014) offers a more systematic approach to the same question.

Intermedial representation designates features or characteristics of one medium that are represented or referred to in another medium, such as musicalized fiction (where musical form or content is mirrored in literature) or a painter's depiction of books in his/her paintings or musical representations of artworks. Needless to say, the three types of intermedial relationships are not separate, but rather complementary and supplementary to one another. They may be encountered together in one single work of literature, art, advertising or computer game. With such a basic systematic terminology of intermediality as a departure point, this special issue endeavours to explore a series of cutting-edge academic issues, as they are embedded in challenging and typical case studies.

The growing presence of digital and other media forms (and thus intermediality) in contemporary societies constitutes a major shift of our time. And even if intermediality as such is by no means a new historical phenomenon, digitalization seems to accelerate this. The hybrid forms that characterize most artistic and non-artistic communication on screens are accelerating in theatre, advertising, social media, literature and film. Such formal changes also bring about significant epistemological changes concerning how to understand human (and non-human) communication and interaction and will continue to do so in the future. It is therefore very likely that digitalization will become one of the most important watershed lines between the old and new studies of intermediality.

The effects of digitalization work in tandem with another broad trend in cultural studies in general and media and intermedial studies specifically, namely, the question of, and deepened understanding of, performativity. The notions of performance and performative forms have been undergoing numerous changes, with new modes being incessantly invented and practised in such fields as visual arts, art and performance installations, and multi-media concerts. In her introduction to *Performance: Live Art in the 1960s*, Laurie Carlos says, '[b]y its very nature the medium of performance is in constant evolution, and so it is inevitable that

performance artists should now appear to straddle new technologies and their avant-garde inclinations' (Goldberg 2004).

Currently, when social media as well as other kinds of digital forms have become either a dominant way of, or influence literally all, social communication, art and entertainment, performance constantly transcends the boundaries of media borders. However, performance understood in the broader sense of the word, as producing a partly non-human agency in medial interactions, is at least as important as conventional staged performances. As is discussed implicitly or explicitly in more than one article in this issue, contemporary understandings of media – including, among others, the work of John Durham Peters (e.g. Peters 2015) or Richard Grusin's (and Jay Bolter's) reflection on media, premediation and radical mediation over the years – stress that media are not only communicative forms transmitting (by way of transformation) form and content across media borders. Media also have inherent agency affordances: media communicate aspects of the world, but by doing so they also perform an act upon the world. For a brilliant opening discussion on performativity and performance as a traveling concept, see Bal (2002).

So, we are beginning to understand that media and mediation are perhaps a Janus-faced entity of communicating and acting at the same time, meaning that mediation may come to mean not only transmitting some kind of form of content but also producing the very possibility of being and acting in the world. Consequently, it is of great significance and even urgency to reconsider intermediality from the viewpoint of many different disciplines to ponder on new, productive directions. We need to consider digitalization and the double meaning of performativity as inescapable conditions for media and mediation and thus for human life. And we need to reflect upon and incorporate new and radical notions of mediation as a quasi-performative function. Richard Grusin, among others, has begun such reflections (2015); see also Larrue and Vitali-Rosati (2019) and Zylinska (2017).

So far, intermedial studies have been, to a large extent, centred on literature, from the blending of words and pictures in picture books and other literary genres to the transmission of literary form and content into media such as film, theatre and television, see for a very strong example Rippl (2015). In the related but not identical field of transmedia storytelling, the employment of 'literary theory, narratology, semiotics, film theory, media studies [. . .] all contribute important perspectives', 'but none is sufficient on its own' (Klaebe and Hancox 2017). With the rapid progress of technology, especially digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI), intermedial phenomena have expanded into and connected more domains of culture, resulting in various networks of intermedial practices. They are established in 'forms and ways of agency, performance and action that are discursive, material and systemic (networked) rather than simply individual, isolated acts' (Meyer and Pietrzak-Franger 2022).

As a prevailing global phenomenon, intermediality needs to be analysed not as a separate problem but in combination with other important issues, including the performativity mentioned above. In addition, the notion of intercultural studies should also be brought into the equation. In this age of globalization, although it has

been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, cultural productions that take place in one country or region cannot avoid being associated with other parts of the world one way or another. Nevertheless, cultural globalization does not just assimilate differences but rather takes advantage of them in a way that cultural particularities are highlighted and even diversified. In this process of intercultural production and transmission, the very materiality of artefacts has attracted greater attention. The supposed 'thingness' of intermedial practices, from the perspective of the new materialisms that have been colouring the theoretical and philosophical debates for some time now, is one important actant in producing meanings and reaching out to the recipients. It is, thus, of great significance that the conventional notions of intermediality and mediation should be dealt with from interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives.

In this issue of *European Review*, we ask, among other things: In what ways has our (intermedial) experience been affected by innovative artistic forms or practices? How does the rich landscape of our intermedial experience lead to important ontological and epistemological changes? We also ask whether it is time to combine a re(de)fined notion of performativity to better conceptualize and analyse intermedial phenomena. Thus, the underlying question of most of the articles is whether intermedial studies as we know them are up to the task of describing and critically engaging with contemporary or historical intermedial material.

The supplementary issue begins with an article by Svend Erik Larsen dealing with the early history of intermedial production before the age of digitalization. Then, in light of the existing scholarship in intermediality studies, the different kinds of intermediality together with some topical issues will be addressed, concerning some canonical works in fiction, theatre, film, photography, painting and so on, in both Chinese and Western cultures, although there may be inevitable and significant overlapping among the articles.

Concerning the intermedial representation in single artefacts, the media specificities of other artistic genres need to be considered in the process of innovative creation and reception. Wei Feng's article studies the Cantonese opera film *White Snake* (2021), which uses computer-generated technology and a transgressive combination of various media to popularize the *xiqu* heritage among younger audiences by transforming medium specificities and transmedial potentials of Song landscape paintings and martial-arts film, adapting them to a new scenic and choreographic setting. Taking as her starting point the sometimes fragile multimodal and intermedial relations between documentary film and indexicality, Signe Kjær Jensen studies the effects of the perceptual indexicality of sound in a Danish animated documentary, *Flugt* [*Flee*]. She demonstrates, somewhat counterintuitively but very convincingly, that even a soundtrack that is not indexically true to the source can have truthful effects. Chang Chen's article explores the ways in which intermedial performativity in Beckett's teleplays realizes several unique config-urations of the human mind, which not only enlightens us on the artistic vision and cosmic ontology of Beckett but also alerts us to the reverberations and implications of intermediality for humanity and its potential transformations.

The intermedial combination under the influence of new technology, digitalization in particular, is approached for the coming-into-being of a new kind of narrative with special attention to the deepening integration of the human and non-human. Espen Aarseth argues, boldly and inventively, for a rethinking of the generic setup of what is often called computer or video games. Based on both the player experiences and the narrative ambitions of the game-writers, Aarseth's article – in light of fiction theory – considers the most ambitious computer games as the 'supernovels' of our time. By focusing on *Blade Runner* as an intermedial narrative of the posthuman future, Kanjing He's article argues that the intersection of photography and film combines still moments and movements to represent a dystopian futuristic city and its inhabitants, who are at a loss of their identity, revealing a scepticism towards technological development and transformations.

The issue of transmediation should not only be concerned with the productive process of artistic work, but also with the impact it yields on its peculiarities in both the material and the spiritual sense. Weiyi Wu's article analyses the significance of abstract sculpture and its remediation to photography in the transitional time of post-war Modernism, focusing on David Smith's aesthetics of sculpture-photography. Entering the well-established research area of adaption studies, Nafiseh Mousavi offers a new take on classical ideas of investigating the transport between source and target products by focusing on the media production process. This comparative approach ought to be supplemented, Mousavi shows, with a better understanding of the rich intermedial process in between source and target – which is sometimes documented in intermediary media products such as making-ofs.

Finally, the agency of media is carefully addressed with a special emphasis on the intersection between intermediality and performativity. By associating the intermedial with questions of gender studies and interculturalism, Chengzhou He's article discusses how intermedial cross-dressing performance on-screen acts as a cultural intervention, as it has made a transformative impact on gender politics and cross-cultural communications. In his contribution, Jørgen Bruhn opens a much-needed conversation between environmental humanities and media and intermedial studies; discussing the notion of 'environing media' he tries to exemplify one of the many ways that contemporary media studies must conceptualize media as being at the same time communicative and performative.

With this string of strongly argued and theoretically resourceful texts, this issue of *European Review* wishes to gently push the research agendas of intermedial studies towards new perspectives while also bringing new and invigorating ideas to the extensive research areas exemplified by the individual case studies.

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