



Routledge Studies in Multimodality

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN INTERMEDIALITY AND MULTIMODALITY

**DIALOGUES INSPIRED BY THE WORK OF
LARS ELLESTRÖM**

Edited by
Signe Kjaer Jensen and Matilda Davidsson



Future Directions in Intermediality and Multimodality

This collection brings together leading scholars across disciplines to reflect on the relationship between intermediality and multimodality and future directions for the contemporary mediascape, building on a 2022 Linnaeus University lecture series honouring the legacy of Lars Elleström, following his untimely death in December 2021.

This volume contributes to ongoing dialogues about media and society, the challenges and opportunities for academia to engage with developments in the evolving mediascape, and interdisciplinary pathways towards engaging with these questions. Each chapter features an established figure in such fields as multimodality, intermediality, semiotics, narratology, art history, and adaptation studies. Each essay is prefaced with an introduction by the editors and bookended with a discussion transcribed from the original live presentations. A concluding chapter looks ahead to future directions, opening new lines of inquiry around the possibilities for intermediality and multimodality research towards continuing to build on Elleström's seminal work in the field.

This book will be of interest to scholars in multimodality, intermediality, and media and communication studies.

Signe Kjaer Jensen is an affiliated researcher with the Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS) at Linnaeus University, Sweden.

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Dedicated to the memory of Lars Elleström





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Foreword

The news of Lars Elleström's unexpected death in December 2021 left us IMS members in a state of shock and disbelief. To make matters worse, the COVID lockdown prevented us from coming together to share our grief. Sympathetic messages from friends and colleagues around the globe inspired us in the IMS steering group to create a series of online talks that would not only bring together brilliant media minds as interlocutors to Lars's ideas but also carve out a space for togetherness and mutual support: Meeting Media Minds.

A heartfelt thank you to our invited speakers who immediately got back to confirm their participation: W. J. T. Mitchell, Kay O'Halloran, Mieke Bal, Thomas Leitch, Kamilla Elliott, John A. Bateman, João Queiroz, Irina Rajewsky, and Marie-Laure Ryan.

Thank you, too, to Signe Kjaer Jensen and Matilda Davidsson, for their dedicated work transcribing and editing the recorded presentations and the discussions.

Lars Elleström was an academic role model, not only because of his brilliance but also because he was humble, funny, and, above all, intellectually generous. And it is in this spirit that we have come together to continue the work of IMS.

Dagmar Brunow

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to all those whose contributions have made this book possible. To the contributors, your expertise, insights, and commitment to this project have been truly invaluable. Your contributions have enriched this work and elevated its depth and quality. It has been an honour to collaborate with such a talented and thoughtful group of scholars.

We also wish to express our profound appreciation to the Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies, and especially its leader, Jørgen Bruhn, for their invaluable support throughout the development and editorial process of this book. Your support, encouragement, and guidance have been essential in shaping the research and bringing this project to life.

Thank you all for your dedication and trust in this endeavour.

Sincerely,
Signe Kjaer Jensen and Matilda Davidsson

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1 Introduction

Signe Kjaer Jensen and Matilda Davidsson

This volume is dedicated, as the title indicates, to the work and memory of Lars Elleström (1960–2021), a leading scholar in the field of intermediality who also worked to bring researchers and knowledge from intermedial and multimodal studies together. The volume is based on a lecture series given in 2022 at Linnaeus University called “Meeting Media Minds”, initiated by the Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS) in memory of the work of the late Lars Elleström. Prominent global scholars were invited to discuss and reflect upon their own work in intermediality and multimodality in relation to Elleström’s systematic and impactful theories and ideas about what media is and how communication works, but also to address new directions for their own fields.

Throughout the chapters, intermediality and multimodality are conceived of as related fields within the larger area of media studies, which specialises in the relations, specificities, and similarities of different types of media. As such, the anthology revolves around a common interest in understanding how communication is shaped and affects behaviour in a contemporary mediascape where different media, digital and analogue, mix and combine in various constellations. The volume touches on current debates surrounding topics such as the following:

- How to define ‘media’ and media borders
- The relation between intermediality and multimodality
- The role and place of the social in our understanding of media
- How media and narratives work as extensions of media users’ thought processes
- How to deal with the (not so) new digital, online media and the collection of user data
- The socio-political value of mixed artwork

Although this anthology is a testament to Elleström’s contribution to the study of media and an attempt to encourage dialogues about media, Elleström’s

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legacy still lives on at IMS, the research centre which he founded. The topics just listed are not just specific to this anthology, but are also central to research at IMS, where we work, inspired by Elleström, to find answers to these types of questions through a combination of intermedial and multimodal perspectives. As doing a complete survey of these fields is outside the scope of this introduction, the overview here will focus on highlighting a few key topics in intermediality and multimodality in relation to Elleström's work and the work done in IMS more broadly, as well as giving a more detailed introduction to Elleström's work, in particular his media model. This anthology succeeds our other publications and those of other IMS scholars which to various degrees present and discuss Elleström's work, including an advanced textbook on intermediality based on Elleström's media model, *Intermedial Studies: An Introduction to Meaning Across Media* (Bruhn & Schirmmacher, 2022b) (which was published shortly before his death). A very short overview of the most basic elements of Elleström's model can be found in Jensen's article, "The Sound of a Snow Queen: Perspectives on Synchronic Intermediality and 'Let It Go'" (2024). Finally, in a recent chapter in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, Elleström's former colleagues Jørgen Bruhn and Beate Schirmmacher (2023) summarise his transition into intermediality and provide a brief overview of his most important contributions to the field of intermediality as well as areas which are left open for future development. This last text even bears traces of inspiration from discussions following each chapter in this volume. This introduction will not attempt to replicate either of the previous publications, but to build on them. Some repetition will be unavoidable, but we feel that in order to properly contextualise the chapters in this volume, which to various degrees discuss and complement Elleström's theories, a basic overview of the main aspects of intermediality, multimodality, and Elleström's model is needed.

Elleström: His Work and Vision

Elleström began his career in comparative literature as a scholar of Swedish poetry in the late 1980s. Even though he didn't begin as an intermedial scholar, a concept which was only slowly beginning to develop from interart studies in the late 1990s (as pointed out by Bruhn & Schirmmacher, 2023, p. 187), his publication record shows an early and consistent interest in the borders, or lack of them, between different senses and art forms; he studied the influence of music, art, and theatre on Karl Vennberg's poetry (Elleström, 1992) and occasionally delved into music and art as well as literature (e.g. Elleström, 1996, 2002). It is telling that several of his early publications were published in anthologies and journals dedicated to interdisciplinary studies of art or interart studies, for example, his essay on Paul Celan's "Todesfuge" (Elleström, 1993), which was included in an anthology edited by Ulla-Britt Lagerqvist, Hans Lund, Peter Luthersson

and Anders Mortensen. Particularly Lagerqvist and Lund were back then leading scholars in the Swedish interart tradition which Elleström was influenced by (Bruhn & Schirmmacher, 2023, p. 187). According to Elleström himself, his interest in interart studies and comparative arts had already begun when he was an undergraduate (Elleström, 2021a, p. 137). Elleström's transition into a more systematic intermediality, however, seems to have begun in 2006, when he received a research grant from the Swedish Research Council to study visual iconicity in poetry. According to Elleström, it was his work in this area which led him along the path of developing grander models for intermedial comparison, which, initially, culminated in his media model, first published in 2010 (Pethó, 2018, p. 194). At this time, Elleström was also involved with the Forum for Intermedial Studies, which, under his leadership, developed into the Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS) in 2015. At the time of writing, it reflects Elleström's concern with bringing intermedial and multimodal studies closer together, which is an ongoing research project in IMS (see Bruhn & Schirmmacher, 2023; Jensen & Schirmmacher, 2024).

Elleström had a great interest in stimulating intellectual dialogues, which, like his research interests, broke with disciplinary and geographical borders. This can be seen through his work in IMS, an interdisciplinary research centre encompassing researchers from, for example, film, literature, languages, education, musicology, art history, and media and communication studies, and his work as chair of the International Society for Intermedial Studies (ISIS), founded in 2013 as an expansion of the previously constituted Nordic Society for Intermedial Studies. His great interest in and openness to constructive discussion can also be seen throughout this volume, where several contributors comment on their personal communications with Elleström, which often occurred in the context of an invitation to or conference at IMS and testify to the very significant impact he has made, which is acknowledged by these contributors even when they don't necessarily agree with his theoretical outlook. To Elleström, research was a fluid process, and he kept working on and developing his media model until his untimely death in 2021. We are confident that this volume, which focuses on *dialogues* about his theories as they have been set out in print by him, especially on dialogues about *future developments*, is in tune with Elleström's spirit: he was always hugely open to the exchange of ideas, the crossing of boundaries of any kind, and to seeing research as a work in progress, always open and in motion.

What Is Intermediality?

As implied earlier, intermediality tends to be defined in relation to the crossing of borders between different media. In *The Palgrave Handbook*

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of *Intermediality*, the editors define intermediality as “the study of interrelations and interactions among all forms of communicative media types, including transmedial phenomena, but with a certain emphasis on artistic media types” (Bruhn et al., 2023, p. 1). Intermedial studies has developed from interart studies, which were concerned with the dynamic relations between the arts, music, literature, and visual art, as a form of expanded intertextuality throughout history. These studies also included discussions about medium specificity, the hierarchy between the arts (often referred to by using the Italian term *paragone*, developed in the Renaissance), and whether and if so how different art forms should refer to each other or be combined (see, e.g., Bruhn & Schirmacher, 2022a; Toikkanen, 2023).

According to the history of intermedial studies presented by Bruhn and Schirmacher, early inspiration from interart studies includes Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s essay *Laocoön*, which is credited with instituting the idea of medium specificity (Bruhn & Schirmacher, 2022a, p. 12). Lessing argued that painting and poetry have essentially different possibilities for representing time and space and that artists should not attempt to imitate space in a temporal art form, or vice versa, nor should art forms be combined (Lessing, 1766/1984). In contrast with this view is the idea of *ut pictura poesis* (meaning ‘as in painting, so in poetry’), first associated with the Roman writer Horace (65–8 BC). Writings within the *ut pictura poesis* tradition acknowledge that all art forms are expressive or have mimetic qualities (although the emphasis on each of these is different in different time periods) as well as artistic value. Furthermore, the ‘mixing’ of art forms is seen as a positive thing. These different traditions clearly show the long history of interart studies and the anchoring of the field within aesthetic and comparative theories. With the rise of *intermedial* rather than *interart* studies in the 1990s, the focus was broadened to media in general rather than only being on the traditional art forms, and discourses concerning an aesthetic hierarchy were gradually replaced by less value-laden discussions about similarities and differences and the potential of different media forms. However, as late as 2018, Elleström, in an interview with Agnes Pethő, stated that “the divide between art forms and other forms of communication still makes many intermedial studies look like interart research in disguise”, arguing that what was needed in *intermedial* studies was “an integrated understanding of dissimilar forms of communication” which was much more attentive to the connections between old and new forms of communication (Pethő, 2018, p. 199).

Intermedial studies has often relied on different models and categorisations to grasp these “interrelations and interactions” (Bruhn et al., 2023, p. 1) mentioned earlier, often distinguishing between *synchronic media relations* in the forms of media combination or media integration and

diachronic media relations in the form of transformation, transposition, representation, or reference (for an overview, see Rippl, 2015). The aim of using these models and categorisations is to understand (1) what different media types have in common and how they differ, i.e. developing the idea of medium specificity, (2) how media types can be combined (e.g. in the study of opera or cinema), and (3) how and if so to what degree content can be transferred across different media types (e.g. in musicalised fiction, ekphrasis, or film adaptations), also referred to as transmediality.

Lars Elleström's Media Model

Lars Elleström's work appeared in the context of a discipline that is still today in a period of transition and, as Thomas Leitch argues in this volume, a field which is "in its opening moments" (p. 231). This is reflected in Elleström's theory, which was motivated by a wish to provide a clear and systematic foundation for intermedial questions in the form of a set of clearly defined concepts and relations between them. Kamilla Elliott refers to Elleström's model as a "bottom-up" approach (this volume), while John A. Bateman writes about (and critiques) Elleström's attempt to create a "minimal model" (this volume, p. 110). Although Elliott refers to Elleström's approach of categorising dimensions and modes of media and Bateman refers to Elleström's newer development of a communications model (see later for an explanation of these terms), both of the descriptions quoted in the preceding sentence refer to Elleström's wish to start by defining the most basic entities needed to have 'media' and 'communication' first and then building on and developing these entities in order to have a model that can, in principle, describe all possible constellations of different media. Using a bottom-up approach means developing concepts, models, and theories that are based on the (assumed) minimal entities needed in these concepts, models, and theories and explaining how these can be developed into more complex phenomena, like literature or music, rather than extrapolating from complex higher-order phenomena like literature and explaining from there how the more basic foundations work.

As previously mentioned, Elleström first published his influential media model in 2010, arguing then that

intermediality has tended to be discussed without clarification of what a medium actually is. Without a more precise understanding of what a medium is, one cannot expect to comprehend what intermediality is. (...) understanding of what a medium is and what intermedial relations actually consist of has vital implications for each and every inquiry in old and new fields of study concerning the arts and media. (...) Media,

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however, are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between medial differences that is founded on medial similarities.

(Elleström, 2010, pp. 11–12)

In this first iteration of Elleström's model, the focus was on the concepts of *medium*, *modes*, and *modalities* (note that the concepts of mode and modality here are inspired by but not compatible with the same terms used in multimodal studies). It should be evident from the quote just noted from Elleström's 2010 publication that he was arguing that intermedial analysis, and more broadly all media analysis, was hindered by a lack of precision concerning the use and definition of the word 'medium', which was often being used to refer to widely different "types or levels of mediality" (Elleström, 2010, p. 12). His first model was certainly mainly centred on clarifying and defining what he referred to as the three dimensions of media and how they were constituted by modalities and modes. In the revised version of the model, published in 2021, the basic framework from 2010 was kept but certain concepts were refined and clarified, and the model was extended with new and elaborated discussions of other concerns in media and communications analysis derived from the original model, not least the problems of media integration, media transformation, and the role of the media product in communication. Furthermore, while the 2021 version of the model retained the issue of defining 'medium' as the number one problem in the research field, Elleström also added four 'new' problems that this new model aimed to address. These were that analyses only tend to compare two media types at a time, that media research relies too heavily on concepts derived from linguistic models, particularly those created by Saussure (this critique was mostly directed at multimodal studies), that research more generally relies on misleading and unclear terminology, and that the pre-semiotic foundation of media is not distinguished from aspects relating to perception and signification (Elleström, 2021b, pp. 5–7). With this critique, Elleström very clearly situated himself in relation to how he perceived intermedial studies, showing how he envisioned he would contribute to and develop the field. He inherited the comparative discourse and the interest in aesthetic phenomena from interart studies and built on the distinction between synchronic and diachronic media relations, but he drew significant inspiration from Peircean semiotics as he did this. He also aimed not to become fixated with any specific type of media relation, because he intended to create a holistic and coherent media framework that would be able to adapt to new and different communicative forms and show how all types of media are based on similarities and differences.

Dimensions of Media, Modes, and Modalities¹

Elleström suggested defining the three different dimensions of media: *the technical medium* (in the 2021 model it was renamed *the technical medium of display*), *the basic medium*, and *the qualified medium*. A technical medium is a material entity that can be used to display, or mediate, a communicative and/or artistic message to someone. A book, a smartphone, and the human body are examples of technical media. The technical medium is the *realisation* medium, i.e. the material which is able to present semiotic content to a viewer or listener (2021b, pp. 33–34).

Basic media are entities like *written text*, *unorganised sound*, *a still image*, *a moving image*, and *a bodily performance* – things that can be used to communicate with but which are not yet organised in a way that makes them part of an artistic or communicative genre. A basic medium can be considered to be a communicative *resource* that is used for communicating semiotic content. These basic media are used in *qualified media*, which are art and communication forms that are organised in accordance with artistic and communicative conventions, such as *music*, *painting*, *literature*, *dance*, or even *scientific research papers*. Literature is a qualified medium that is based on the basic medium of written text and is (often) mediated by the technical medium of a book. Since the term qualified media does not just refer to art forms but to all communicative forms that are regulated by aesthetic or communicative conventions, both literature and scholarly writing can be considered media types. They are based on the same basic media but differ regarding their qualifying aspects (there are different stylistic and communicative conventions at work, they are part of different institutional contexts and they are used with different intentions), which again separate both forms from other types of writing. In the 2021 iteration of the model, Elleström even defined different communicative genres, like romance novels or crime novels, as qualified *submedia*, as they are not only regulated by the conventions of literature but also by a second set of conventions defining the genre (2021b, pp. 60–63).

Basic media are characterised by their modalities. In Elleström’s model, ‘modality’ is related to the lexical definition of ‘mode’ – a way of doing things. Modalities, in Elleström’s framework, are the formal structures of a medium, and these decide how basic media ‘behave’ in terms of what can be communicated/represented and how; that is, the modalities are the *form* that frames the *content*. Elleström distinguished four modalities:

- The material modality is the material interface or ‘surface’ of a medium, such as human bodies, sound waves, and flat surfaces, e.g. the flat surface of a page in a book (2021b, p. 47).
- The sensorial modality is related to the senses that are evoked by the medium (2021b, p. 49).

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- The spatiotemporal modality relates to the spatial and temporal aspects of a medium, as well as the medium's capabilities for *representing* time and space. A picture, or a film, offers a two-dimensional surface in its material modality, but it can still represent depth as a virtual space. A novel is a spatial object that unfolds in time (the actual time it takes to read the novel), but it also has the potential to represent space and time of the story world, i.e. time as a character in the story experiences it (2021b, pp. 48, 68).
- The semiotic modality relates to the kind of signs used to create meaning. Elleström was strongly inspired by the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, and he distinguished between *icons*, *indices*, and *symbols*. Icons can, for example, be images; they represent other things because of their *similarity*, that is, by looking like the thing they represent. Indexical signs (indices) represent by having a direct relation to that which they represent – common examples are footprints, which are indexical in relation to the person who made those footprints. In literature, handwriting is an indexical sign of whoever did that writing. Fingerprints are another common indexical sign, and they can be used to identify people. Lastly, symbols are signs that represent by convention, and most words belong in this category (2021b, pp. 49–51).

In each modality, there are a number of possible *modes*, and Elleström's comparative model is based on analysing how different basic and qualified media differ in terms of the modes employed and how this influences (1) *what* can be communicated, and (2) *how* something can be communicated. Regarding the material modality, different modes include sound waves, flat surfaces, and light rays as listed earlier. The sensorial modality includes the modes of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch, but also “interoception (sensing the internal state of the body) and proprioception (sensing body position and self-movement)” (Elleström, 2021b, p. 49). While interoception and proprioception were only discussed occasionally by Elleström, proprioception in particular is essential for analysing VR media, which illustrates the necessity of including all the senses in the framework in order to anticipate the evolution of different types of media. In the spatiotemporal modality, the modes include fixed sequentiality (e.g. literature or a film), unfixed sequentiality (e.g. an improvised performance), and spatiality (e.g. a dance or a picture), but it also includes the cognitively invoked experiences of time and space, such as the perception of depth or movement in paintings, or of the virtual time and space of the story in a novel. In the original publication of the model, Elleström explained that

virtual space and virtual time can be said to be manifest in the perception and interpretation of a medium when what is taken to be the

represented spatiotemporal state is not the same as the spatiotemporal state of the representing material modality considered through the spatiotemporal modality.

(Elleström, 2010, p. 21)

In the 2021 publication, this idea of virtuality was expanded to cover all modalities using the term *cross-modal representations* (Elleström, 2021b, p. 68), recognising that media products often represent objects (or spaces, or story worlds), which are characterised differently in terms of materiality and sensorial and spatiotemporal configuration from the media products themselves. Thus, the idea of virtuality was expanded from just being about time and space to also including the ability of, for example, pictures and novels to represent, for instance, singing, human bodies – a radically different materiality and sensory mode.

The dimensions of media and the modalities represent the core frame of Elleström’s model, and they showcase the systematicity and tendency for categorisation for which Elleström has become known, which several contributors to this volume also comment on.

Media Integration and Media Transformation

In addition to working on his media model, Elleström tried to refine how intermedial scholars classify media relations. He understood intermediality to be “all types of relations among dissimilar media types” (2021b, p. 71) and distinguished between *media integration* – suggesting moving beyond the strict division between *media combination* and *integration* with which many other intermedial models (to some degree even his own version from 2010) operate (2010, p. 29; 2021b, p. 75) – and *media transformation*.

Media integration, also referred to as *synchronic intermediality* (Elleström, 2021b, pp. 73–75) (for a discussion and development of this concept, see Jensen, 2024), or *heteromediality* (Bruhn, 2010, p. 229; Elleström, 2021b, p. 73), refers to all constellations of media which involve two or more basic or qualified media. An analysis of media integration conducted using the elaborated media model described earlier can account for the way media products are shaped by the combination and integration of various media modalities and qualifying aspects, thus creating a robust framework for talking about, for example, a film or song as integrated media (Arvidson et al., 2022, pp. 123–129; Jensen & Salmose, 2022). Whereas Elleström’s 2010 model distinguishes between “weak” integration/combination and “deep” integration as being different degrees of combination and integration (2010, p. 29), the 2021 model more strongly clarifies that “there is a floating scale between combination and integration” (2021b, p. 75) and thus subsumes all these relations in the category of integration.

Media transformation, also referred to as *diachronic intermediality*, is the category of media relations that Elleström devoted the most attention to, with two books (2014, 2019) being published on the topic. He defined media transformation as the overarching term encompassing *transmediation* and *media representation*. Transmediation has a long tradition of research, for example in the form of ekphrasis (when a picture, film, or a piece of music is re-represented in words) or adaptation, and involves the transfer and transformation of “media characteristics” (2021b, p. 81), i.e. what is more often thought of as content or represented meaning. However, transmediation is broader than the notions of ekphrasis and adaptation (at least as these terms are most typically defined) and includes all kinds of transfer of meaning, even toys based on characters from popular films or fan art based on popular story worlds. Media representation, however, refers to “the representation of another medium of a different type” (2021b, p. 81), also sometimes called *intermedial reference* (Rajewsky, 2005). A media representation is thus concerned with the representation of formal characteristics rather than content, although in practice it is rare to have media representation without a degree of transmediation, and vice versa. Typical examples of media representation are, for example, when literature imitates musical structures, like in musicalised fiction (see Wolf, 1999), or when a film portrays an artist painting. Here, both the technical medium (the canvas) of the painting and the qualified medium of visual art are represented. If the film is shot with a focus on the artist and without a clear view of the painting being painted, there might not be an *explicit* representation of the basic medium of the image (it will, however, still be implied), and therefore no explicit media transformation. If, however, the film shows us that the image being painted is, for example, Johannes Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665), then there is a transmediation from Vermeer’s painting. More subtle media representations could be, for example, the representations of the qualified media of figure skating and architecture seen in the film *Frozen* (2013) during the song “Let It Go”, when Elsa is seen moving in patterns that are commonly used in figure skating as she builds her ice castle (see Jensen, 2024, p. 50).

Elleström’s Communication Model and Media Products

In Bateman’s contribution to this volume, Elleström’s communication model is presented and discussed. Here, we will just briefly present the core elements of the model to provide a better foundation for understanding this and related discussions of Elleström’s work.

In Elleström’s 2021 version of his media model, the concept of media product gained a more prominent status than previously, as it is stressed as being absolutely essential to communication.

According to Elleström, communication consists of three entities which are “the smallest and fewest possible entities of communication” (2021b, p. 10). The three entities consist of “1. Something being transferred, 2. Two separate places between which the transfer occurs, 3. An intermediate stage that makes the transfer possible” (2021b, p. 10; see Figure 1.1, Elleström, 2021b, p. 16).

Elleström understood that which is being transferred as a *cognitive import* (2021b, p. 12), which we normally understand as the ‘message’ or ‘content’ of a media product; it is the part that contains the “‘meaning’, ‘significance’, and ‘ideas’” (2021b, p. 12) when an act of communication happens. It is important to note, however, that by using the definition ‘cognitive import’, Elleström was attempting to create a notion which he thought was broader, more neutral, and more precise than the idea of ‘meaning’ (2021b, p. 12). The concept of transfer, and the model in Figure 1.1 is, perhaps, easily misunderstood in this context, as Elleström never considered any transfer of meaning to be ‘complete’; indeed, it was essential to Elleström’s thinking that all transmediation, including that happening via the transfer of cognitive import, necessarily entails *transformation*. However, unlike, say, a film adaptation of a novel where changes between the source medium and the target medium are relatively easy to identify, communication, like a face-to-face conversation, only works if a sufficient amount of the cognitive import is transferred and the mental imagery appearing in a perceiver’s mind is sufficiently similar to the mental imagery appearing in the producer’s mind, because otherwise misunderstandings occur (which of course does happen regularly in communication). This leads us to the second entity of communication, which consists of the places between which the transfer occurs, which Elleström took to be the embodied cognition of a producer and perceiver, i.e. the producer’s and perceiver’s minds.

Finally, the third entity consists of the media product, a “materiality having the capacity to trigger certain mental responses” (2021b, p. 13). The media product is thus something which materially manifests a semiotic content intended by the producer, which can be interpreted by the

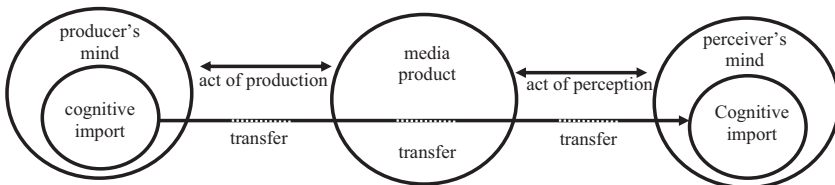


Figure 1.1 A medium-centred model of communication.

Note. Elleström (2021b, p. 16).

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perceiver. When two people, A and B, speak, for example about a new dog that A has, A will have a mental imagery of the dog (cognitive import), which A will express in a verbal message, for example “I just got the cutest dog” (media product with semiotic content), using her vocal cords to produce soundwaves (technical medium of display) in the form of oral speech (basic medium) as part of a conversation (qualified medium). Person B will pick up on these sounds, interpret the semiotic content, and get a mental imagery of a cute dog (cognitive import). The image of the dog that is in the mind of person A and person B is not necessarily identical, but because person A and B share enough common knowledge of the English language and of dogs, the message is understood. Importantly, Elleström saw the media modalities as “restraining factors” (Elleström, 2021b, p. 24) which shape and impose restrictions on the cognitive import. According to Elleström, the idea of ‘noise’ in the transfer of communication, associated with Claude E. Shannon’s communication model, is unsatisfying, as it seems to imply that ‘perfect’ communication is possible, which is not, of course, the case (imperfect communication is symbolised by the little dots that represent a breaking-up of the transfer in Figure 1.1). Just like a novel and a film have different possibilities for representing emotions, so all basic media provide different possibilities for transferring cognitive import – for communicating – and no media product can ever replicate all of the characteristics of a message perfectly. Thus, Elleström’s communication model differs from the classical transfer model associated with Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude E. Shannon in two ways: (1) by recognising the importance of the media modalities for shaping or transforming communication, and (2) by following Peircean semiotics regarding its trichotomy of the sign (representamen), object, and interpretant, and thus emphasising the importance of interpretation. According to Elleström:

A media product can be understood as an assemblage of representamens that, due to their material, spatiotemporal and sensorial traits, together with contextual factors, represent certain objects (that are available to the perceiver), thus creating interpretants (cognitive import) in the perceiver’s mind.

(Elleström, 2021b, p. 21)

This means that during communication, the media product will function as a sign that, based on the pre-semiotic modalities of the basic medium and contextual factors, is able to carry a selection of icons, indexes, and symbols, which are interpreted by a perceiver. Even though ‘interpretant’ and ‘interpretation’ are *not* synonymous, the interpretant can, in this case, be understood as an interpretation of the message of the media product, i.e. the cognitive import.

More concretely, a media product is any specific communicative entity which is realised using a technical medium of display, is based on at least one basic medium and one qualified medium, and is brought into communication. A specific sentence in a conversation, such as “I just got the cutest dog”, is an example of a media product that is based on the basic medium of oral speech and the qualified medium of social conversation and is realised by the technical medium of the human body. Other examples of media products are specific films, like *Frozen* (2013), specific books, like *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997), etc. Media products can be anything that is used intentionally to communicate with. If, for example, person A from the example given earlier picks up a stick from the ground and uses it to illustrate the height of the dog, the stick becomes a media product intended for communication, which is nested in the media product ‘social conversation’, even if the stick did not originate as a communicative entity (2021b, p. 15).

Several scholars in this volume critique Elleström for not paying sufficient attention to the social aspects of communication (see Bateman and Kay O’Halloran’s chapters, and the Questions and Answers section following Elliott’s chapter), and the social aspects are generally less developed in Elleström’s model than the more systematic aspects related to categorising media types and relations. There are, however, several areas of Elleström’s model where he did show an openness to and awareness of the social. The first is in his inclusion of the *symbol* as a modality mode, the second is in his discussion of qualified media, and the third is in his discussion of media products. Regarding the first two aspects, Elleström developed these further in a follow-up article on symbolicity, published posthumously in 2022. In this article, he highlighted his understanding of symbols as *motivated* signs rather than arbitrary, as they are based on cultural habits and conventions (Elleström, 2022, pp. 6–7) and stated that “qualified media types in general emerge, grow and decline within cultural frames” (Elleström, 2022, p. 26), essentially being qualified as a result of these cultural frames. In regard to media products, Elleström stressed that “a media product must be understood as a function” (2021b, p. 14) and that “media products are cultural entities that depend on social praxis” (2021b, p. 15), meaning that the production and interpretation of media products depend on cultural and social habits. Note also that Elleström, in the recent block quote from 2021, mentions “contextual factors” as a factor in representation.

Consequently, it is true that the social does not play a large role in Elleström’s two media models that have been published, but his 2022 article on symbolicity shows a move towards developing these aspects further. The social has also played a large role in multimodality, which we will turn to now.

What Is Multimodality?

Multimodal studies has grown during the last 30 years and has matured as an academic field. There are conferences on it, research centres devoted to it, and several journals that are dedicated to it. The book series in which this volume is published, *Routledge Studies in Multimodality*, testifies to this maturation. Despite this, the term ‘multimodal studies’ doesn’t so much refer to an independent and distinct discipline (although some have argued that it should be called a discipline; see Wildfeuer et al., 2019) as to a specific view of media and communication that can be applied to a range of different research methods and interests.

In a recent introduction to multimodality, Frank Serafini (2022) defined a multimodal turn as research which “move[s] beyond a focus on linguistic or visual phenomena as isolated forms of representation and communication and recognise[s] that most systems of meaning in modern times blend together a variety of modes or semiotic systems” (2022, p. 18). In parallel with this multimodal turn, Serafini even identifies a *social* turn, which tends to go hand in hand with much multimodal research, namely the recognition that communication is a social practice (2022, p. 18) and is thus embedded in shared social habits and conventions.

As such, multimodal studies is an umbrella term bringing together a range of different academic and analytic approaches to media that tend to share a number of assumptions:

- Media products and artwork can be understood as communicative and interactional artefacts
- Communication can’t be delimited to oral or written verbal language but is dependent on a range of different ways of making meaning, including gesture, iconography, and intonation, to name just a few
- Different expressive resources have different possibilities, or affordances, for meaning-making
- Communication is structured according to certain rules and conventions and embedded in a social context.

Individual researchers working in multimodality will tend to adhere to these assumptions, even though the focus devoted to each assumption might vary.

Because multimodality as a field is so broad, it becomes particularly challenging to deal with the associated terminology, which can be daunting for researchers who are new to the research area or for those who wish to promote dialogue and intellectual exchange across the two fields of intermediality and multimodality, as Elleström did. Furthermore, this intellectual exchange can be hindered by the fact that intermediality and

multimodality originate in different disciplines and research paradigms (see Jensen & Schirrmacher, 2024). Many foundational scholars in multimodality have a background in linguistics or communication studies (see Bateman this volume, p. 107 and Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 7), whereas many foundational scholars in intermediality have come from the aesthetic subject areas. Due to this difference, the focus and interests of intermedial and multimodal scholars tend to differ, even though they study similar phenomena.

Similarly to how we dealt with intermediality earlier, we will not attempt to give an overview of the entire field of multimodality (for this see Jewitt, 2014; Jewitt et al., 2016; Serafini, 2022; Wildfeuer et al., 2019), but we believe that a few select theories and concepts can fruitfully be discussed here to show how Elleström and IMS have engaged with multimodality and to anticipate the discussions following later in the volume.

First, following the outline of the field provided by Jewitt et al. (2016), two of the most dominant theories in contemporary multimodality, which have also been important to Elleström's thinking and to the work conducted at IMS, are the social semiotic approach and the systemic functional linguistic approach (the latter is also, sometimes, referred to as the social semiotic approach). Bateman, in this volume, presents a third approach, which might be termed multimodal semiotics but which draws on inspiration from social semiotics. Both social semiotics and systemic functional linguistics have been inspired by the linguist Michael Halliday's theorisation of language as a social semiotic system, but with slightly different focal points and different terminology (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 6). Social semiotics has often emphasised the concept of *mode*, which here tends to refer to a socially and culturally developed system for meaning-making, such as photography or language (Kress et al., 2014, pp. 52–53; Serafini, 2022, pp. 11–12), whereas researchers in systemic functional linguistics often use the term *semiotic resource* to refer to this kind of socially developed system of meaning-making (Jensen, 2021, p. 51; Serafini, 2022, pp. 11–12). In both social semiotics and systemic functional linguistics, a key concern has been exploring how non-linguistic modes and resources are used and combined, emphasising that communication is a matter of *choosing* from available modes/resources and employing these for specific purposes. Systemic functional linguistics has *traditionally* focused on how resources could fulfil different *metafunctions*: the *ideational* function (representing an experience of the world), the *interpersonal* metafunction (relating to social relations and creating contact with the perceiver), and the *textual* metafunction (creating coherence across a message). Social semiotics, however, has explored how producers and perceivers, both referred to as signmakers, use semiotic modes available to them and how the social context and power relations influence their

use and the possibilities afforded by them (Jewitt et al., 2016, pp. 23–24). Today, however, both social semiotics and systemic functional linguistics have branched out, and social semiotics is, for example, being used to analyse the construction and communication of personal identity (van Leeuwen, 2022). Kay O’Halloran, a leading scholar in multimodal systemic functional linguistics, builds on Halliday’s theories to discuss the relation between the social world, the semiotic world, and our (uncritical) use of digital media (in this volume).

The inspiration Elleström’s drew from multimodality is clear in his use of the terms ‘modes’ and ‘modalities’, which, however, take on a different meaning in Elleström’s model, as described earlier. Elleström adhered to Mikko Lehtonen’s idea that “multimodality always characterises one medium at a time. Intermediality, again, is about the relationships between multimodal media” (Lehtonen, 2001, p. 75) (see also Elleström, 2021b, p. 41). Even though there can be a point in reserving the term *multimodality* for the internal mixedness of communication in order to keep the terminology clear, it is not the case that multimodal scholars never pay attention to the relationships between media. Several concepts have, in fact, been coined for this purpose, namely *resemiotisation* (Iedema, 2001, 2003), *transmodal semiosis* (Newfield, 2017), and *transduction* (Kress, 2010). Media relations, however, have generally been pushed to the forefront in intermedial studies to a greater extent than in the area of multimodality, and in Elleström’s approach, the inspiration from multimodality can mainly be seen in the internal stratification of media and the attempt to break down media to their smallest entities and affordances for making meaning. He illustrates a stronger relation to intermedial studies in his theorisations of media transformation and media combination – that is, in the relations between basic and qualified media. Consequently, and as argued by Signe Kjaer Jensen and Beate Schirmacher (2024, pp. 7–10) and by Bateman in this volume, Elleström’s model can fruitfully be used in combination with multimodal analytical models in order to combine a perspective on intermedial relations with a multimodal perspective on the semiotic complexity of individual media types and products. At IMS, multimodality is being applied, for example, to studies of digital news media (in the IMS News cluster) and to the study of teaching materials and knowledge communication (in the IMS Literacy cluster). And intermediality is being applied, for example, in the study of the remediation of memories (in the IMS Memory cluster) and to the transmediation of the climate crisis through different media types (in the IMS Green cluster). All of the IMS clusters, however, to various degrees, conceptualise instances of media and communication as simultaneously a multimodal combination of different meaning-making resources and as part of intermedial relations with other media products and contexts.

Overview of This Book

The lectures presented in this anthology and the discussion section at the end of each chapter have been transcribed and only slightly edited to create a dynamic anthology that still has a conversational tone to it. Because the essays are based on live lectures, the language reads as fluid, in motion, and part of an ongoing thinking process. But the essays have been edited and adapted to fit with conventions of written language, for example by replacing temporal oral markers (such as ‘like I said before’) with written spatial markers (such as ‘as mentioned earlier’). Some parts have also been clarified or shortened to make for a smoother reading experience.

This anthology is unconventional in that it poses many questions, but rather than providing solid and fixed answers, it presents suggestive answers along with thoughts and ideas about where to go from here. As such, the anthology attempts to open up the areas of intermediality and multimodality, and by extension media studies, and show students as well as established scholars that all is not set in stone and that there is still much important work to be done within the fields.

The discussions at the end of each essay pick up on key elements of the talks to explicate, develop, and discuss them, opening up the individual talks and showing lines of enquiry that are still open for interpretation, critique, or development. We hope that this collection of lectures and discussions will provide experienced intermedialists and multimodalists with inspiration and perspectives on current debates. And the collection can show students how a research area develops in conversation with other scholars and how texts can be questioned, even by authoritative voices; it can also be an inspirational illustration of how critical enquiry and engagement with theoretical texts work. This anthology is a snapshot of an ongoing dialogue about what media is, how and why we should compare different media, how media plays into sociality (and the other way around), how academia might make the transition into the digital media sphere, and what the consequences are of the world around us already being in this media sphere.

Each individual contributor has their own expertise in art history, adaptation studies, multimodality, semiotics, intermediality, or narratology and uses this background as a point of departure for suggesting perspectives, problems, and directions forward both within their own field and in media studies as a whole. Each essay is complemented with a brief introduction by the editors, which provides a bridge across the collection and clarifies different uses of terminology.

In the first section of this book, titled *Modelling Intermediality and Multimodality*, Marie-Laure Ryan opens with her chapter “On the Problematics of Building a Formal Media System, or, Why Media Drive Me Crazy”.

Here, Ryan addresses a question that is fundamental to intermedial studies, namely how to define and characterise different properties of ‘media’. She takes the reader through various definitions of media, including Elleström’s, and problematises the attempts to construct taxonomic models of media, in which she counts Elleström’s. The basic categories of media are not things that are found in the world but concepts constructed through language, and different media types tend to overlap, complicating models like Elleström’s. In the final part of her chapter, Ryan argues that conceptual boundaries between different types of media should be maintained (which other scholars in this volume, like Mitchell, Elliott, and Bal can be considered to break down) and that blurring happens not between media as such, but between genres.

In the following chapter, “Lars Elleström and Bottom-up Categorization”, Kamilla Elliott deals with the notion of ‘mixed media’ using examples from pictorial initials in literature and discussing the reciprocity of images and words, showing how the meaning of a letter can shift between the symbolic, verbal signification of a letter to the visual, iconic meaning of a picture, depending on the context. Following an anecdotal outline of relations and differences between Elliott’s own approach and that of Elleström, Elliott further emphasises the necessity of breaking down media categories to basic levels and opposing binary opposition, as both she and Elleström have done.

In “Intermediality and Intersemiotic Translation on Self-Inspection”, João Queiroz provides a metatheoretical and philosophical discussion about the underpinnings of intermediality and argues that there is a lack of ontological foundation in Elleström’s model of media and intermediality. Queiroz then goes on to explain and exemplify an alternative model based on Peircean semiotics, distributed cognition, and philosophy of mind, arguing that media work as extensions of a user’s thought processes and that the act of translating artistic practices, concepts, or ideas from one domain to another (such as one-point perspective translated from art to theatre and dance) is essential to the creative development of the arts.

In the last chapter of the first section, John A. Bateman discusses “The Mutual Complementarity of Lars Elleström’s Model of Intermediality and Current Approaches to Multimodality”. As the title indicates, this essay by Bateman focuses on the complementarity between Elleström’s intermedial media model and the multimodal model developed by Bateman and colleagues. This chapter gives a brief overview of Elleström’s model and comments on aspects that, from a multimodal point of view, can be considered to be lacking, mainly the ways in which sociality is related to the use and interpretation of semiotic resources. The lecture then gives an overview of Bateman’s multimodal model of communication, comparing its concepts and ideas with Elleström’s throughout. Bateman concludes that

Elleström's model is appropriate for discussing intermedial relationships, which is something that is lacking in multimodal research, thus providing an area of complementarity.

The second section deals with art-historical perspectives on media relations. In "From Iconology to Media Aesthetics", W. J. T. Mitchell provides an outline of central ideas in the history of iconology, visual culture, and media aesthetics and shows us, among other things, how entangled imagery is with language, with touch, and with power. In this way, Mitchell introduces a fundamental insight into intermedial studies, namely that no medium is 'pure' but always relates to other sensory modes or forms of representation than the one that seems the most dominant. Mitchell further discusses the idea that media aesthetics can be 'triangulated' by showing how various thinkers throughout history have related art, media forms, semiotics, and notions of immediacy and reality in (different types of) tripartite constellations such as the constellation of *opsis* (spectacle), *melos* (melody), and *lexis* (diction) by Aristoteles, or the constellation of icon, index, and symbol by C. S. Peirce.

In the second, and final, chapter in this section, Mieke Bal discusses "Citational Aesthetics: Media Meeting in Intermediality", in which she uses Elleström's intermedial framework as a stepping stone towards discussing citational aesthetics in contemporary art. Bal treats the idea of intermediality as a meeting of materialities, discourses, and past and present. Through five mini case studies, Bal shows us how contemporary art can engage with socio-political topics and bring in different worldviews, ideologies, and experiences by references to previously existing media products, traditions, or even names.

In the third and final section, "New Media", Thomas Leitch discusses "How to Succeed in Intermediality Without Really Being Lars Elleström". Writing in a light and humorous style, Leitch gives a (positive) overview of things that characterised Elleström as a scholar. The overview reads as a recipe for young scholars not just about how to do intermedial research, but also about how to approach research and analysis from different critical angles, showing that research style is about personality and that there is more than one way to do things. Following this overview, Leitch discusses three case studies which challenge the idea of narrative and the borders of qualified media, namely printed restaurant menus, interactive map apps, and weather reports.

In the final chapter of this volume, titled "Everything Is Intermedial", Kay O'Halloran follows Bateman in addressing the lack of a social component in Elleström's model. She compares Elleström's media model to a multimodal model based on Halliday's theories of the relation between a world of matter (the physical world) and a world of meaning (the language we use to describe this world). O'Halloran proposes that matter and

meaning are related across four systems: the material world, the biological system, the social system, and the semiotic world. She then uses this model to address what she considers the most urgent topic for media studies going forward, namely the relation between digital media and society, where society is being shaped by invisible forces residing within and behind the digital media we all use.

Note

- 1 Parts of this section have previously been published in Jensen, S. K. (2024). The Sound of a Snow Queen: Perspectives on Synchronic Intermediality and ‘Let It Go’. *Journal of Comparative Literature & Aesthetics*, 47(2), 51–62.

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Section 1

Modelling Intermediality and Multimodality



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Introduction to Chapter 2

Media Taxonomy

Matilda Davidsson

In this first chapter, literary scholar and narrative theorist Marie-Laure Ryan addresses a central question to intermedial studies: the definition of ‘media’. In this chapter, Ryan critically examines various definitions, including Elleström’s and problematises the construction of taxonomic models of media based on a classification system resembling a tree. She argues that the basic categories of media are not intrinsic elements found in the world but are instead concepts constructed through language. This linguistic construction leads to an overlap between media types, complicating the rigid structures proposed by taxonomies like Elleström’s.

In this chapter, she presents three ways to conceptualise media that go beyond Lessing’s idea of art, and she starts by going back to McLuhan’s rather broad definition of media as an “extension of man”. This definition is then narrowed down by the MIT Media Lab’s definition, which states that media “must serve the purpose of communication”. The dictionary definition of media further highlights the artistic dimension of media. These different definitions combine the social-communicative and cultural areas of media in use, the technological aspects and media archaeology, and the expressive power of media. Ryan argues that all three aspects are important to take into account when working with media models, and though some have deemed it impossible, she argues that Elleström’s work was an attempt to do such a thing.

Ryan’s own proposed taxonomy of media does not take the shape of a tree but rather resembles a network or a forest of trees. Her model shows how the modalities of the second level define the basic media of the first and distinguishes between mandatory and optional relations between levels within a system. On the third level, she places categories that correspond to art forms. She also adds a fourth level where the technologies of mediation belong. She argues that literature must for example consist of written language, but it can be transmitted through a range of technologies such as a book, a digital text, or a voice reading out loud, thus consisting of an optional relation to a specific technology of mediation.

Ryan's analysis and her way of organising media take a nuanced stance on the nature of media boundaries, challenging the notion that media combination necessarily results in a blurring of distinctions. She contends that what occurs between media and in transmediation is not a blending of borders but rather a redefinition of genres within clear media boundaries that are necessary for identifying the medium. This perspective is particularly significant in the context of intermediality, as it contrasts with other scholars in this volume, like Mitchell, Elliott, and Bal, who are seen as proponents of breaking down media boundaries. Ryan argues that blurring does not happen between media as such, but between genres, and that defining what media is will be a crucial step in sketching out an accurate taxonomy of media.

In the Questions and Answers section, Ryan extends the discussion to narratology, considering it as a semantic structure that is related to but independent of specific media, given its capacity to manifest across various forms. The dialogue further explores the sensory and social aspects of media through a debate on phenomenology versus semiotics, ultimately differentiating between the experience and communication of media as possessing distinct affordances. This distinction underscores the need for these perspectives to complement each other in case-study analysis of specific media products.

Ryan returns to the critique of the organisation of media into rigid taxonomies, suggesting alternative approaches to the conceptualisation of media. For instance, the idea of tracing media as a grammar or structure for communicative events is discussed while considering that such definitions might become overly rigid and fail to account for the artistic value inherent in many media products. Elleström's model, which views the media product as an active event rather than a static entity, is highlighted as a dynamic approach to understanding media in use.

2 On the Problematics of Building a Formal Media System, or, Why Media Drive Me Crazy

Marie-Laure Ryan

I remember the very nice times I spent in Växjö for intermedial conferences and I remember the exciting discussions we had. But during these discussions, I always asked myself the question, what are media? And I think that everybody had a different idea of what media are, but we were still able to come together and discuss intermediality. So here I've decided to put down on paper, or maybe explain, why I have so many problems with the concept of media. I think it's no coincidence that Lars Elleström worked at Linnaeus University. I think of his work as an attempt to do for media studies what Linnaeus did for botany and zoology, or maybe what Mendeleev's periodic table of elements did for chemistry. It was to give a solid theoretical basis to media studies, a basis that functions as a taxonomy. Most taxonomies take the form of a tree and this is the case for Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*.

Figure 2.1 is a taxonomy of all the things in nature that show you the classification of the red fox, the dog, and the wolf. A tree, as you probably know, is a hierarchical system with distinct levels. Here you have nine different levels on the right side, and at the bottom, you have the types of things that are actually found in the world. Further up you have more and more abstract categories, and these abstract categories should show what the items listed below have in common. The categories are mutually exclusive. If an animal is a bird, it cannot be a carnivore. If it is a carnivore, it cannot be a primate, even though some primates do like meat. The difficulty of designing a taxonomy is finding elements that belong on the same level thanks to a significant shared feature. For instance, you cannot have a level that has birds, carnivores, plants, red foxes, and mammals. This would lead to the kind of Chinese taxonomy that Jorge Luis Borges has made fun of. I'm going to recount it here because it's so funny.

In its remote pages, it is written that animals are divided into (a), those that belong to the Emperor, (b), embalmed ones, (c), those that are trained, (d), suckling pigs, (e), mermaids, (f), fabulous ones, (g), stray

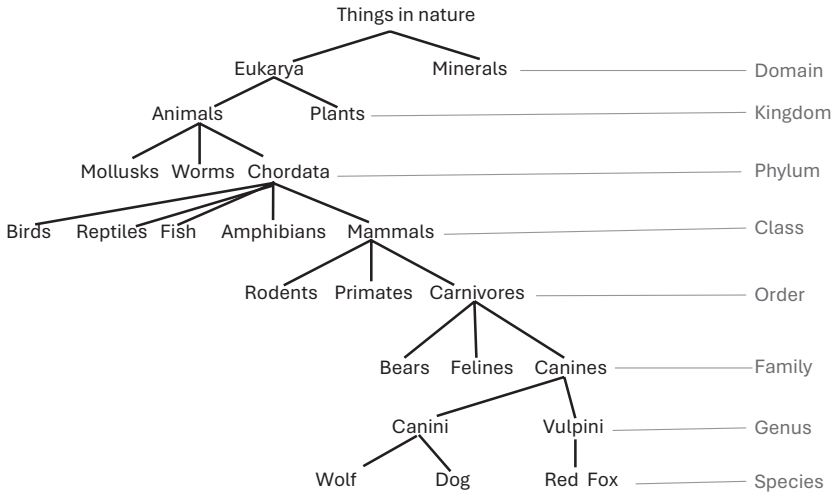


Figure 2.1 A classification system of things in nature, based on the tree-shaped taxonomy used by Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae*.

dogs, (h), those that are included in this classification, (i), those that tremble as if they were mad, (j), innumerable ones, (k), those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l), et cetera, (m), those that have just broken the flower vase and (n), those that from a distance resemble flies. (Borges, 1942)

This is exactly what you don't want to do. (Note that through the etcetera category, all the items that are not in the classification are in this classification.)

When you deal with the system of nature, your terminal categories are things that are actually found in the world. This does not mean that classification is a simple straightforward affair. For instance, when a plant is found that seems to be new, botanists may debate whether it really is a different species or maybe a variant of a known species that is a little bit different because of soil conditions or climate. On the next level up, some families may be merged or new families may be created. For instance, I've been interested in botany for many years and when I first started looking at flowers, there was a family called Liliaceae. But nowadays it has been split into two, so there are the Liliaceae and the Amarillydaceae. Taxonomies are constantly revised, but it doesn't change anything to their basic shape. Tree-shaped taxonomies like this one have survived since the 18th century and they have proved very useful.

The same cannot be said of media. To this day, there is no widely accepted taxonomic model of media. In fact, there is no consensus as to

what a medium is and what phenomena qualify as media. The main problem with designing a media system is that your basic categories are not things in the world, they are concepts designated by the words of language. The words of language are ambiguous, polysemic, and used in many different ways, especially the word medium, which etymologically designates what is in the middle between two things. There are lots of phenomena that can be described as being in the middle between two things. The concept of media has been popularised by Marshall McLuhan, but his definition was far too broad. He called media an “extension of man”. This may be true of media, but it is also true of every tool that was ever devised by man, for instance, hammers, wheels, scarves, hair dryers, and computers. There is a laboratory at MIT called the Media Lab, but according to Wershler, Emerson, and Parikka (Werschler et al., 2022), its founders had no clear idea of what media are. They just selected the name because it sounded cool and they admit that. The purpose of the Media Lab is to invent the future by designing technological innovations, but these innovations do not necessarily have anything to do with communication. I think a minimal requirement for defining media is that it *must serve the purpose of communication*. This eliminates hair dryers, scarves, hammers, and lots of other things, but it retains as media such technologies as television, radio, film, photo, the printing press, and computers.

But are media exclusively technologies? Not according to the definition in Webster’s dictionary (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This definition covers two items. First, a medium can be a channel or system of information, communication, or entertainment, and second, it can be a material or technical means of artistic expression. The first definition supports two approaches to media, one social and cultural and the other technological. The second definition, by foregrounding expression, inspires an artistic and semiotic approach to media as art forms. The social or cultural approach deals with the role of media in society, the behaviour of the consumers, and the institutions that guarantee their existence. The focus of this approach will be media of mass communication such as the press, television, radio, and the internet. We refer to this conception of media when we speak of “the media” either as guardians of freedom of expression or as hopeless propagators of fake news. The technological approach, which is also known as media archaeology, is a mostly German movement inspired by Friedrich Kittler, who himself was inspired by Michel Foucault, and it is represented by such scholars as Wolfgang Ernst, Siegfried Zielinski, and Finnish scholars such as Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka. Media archaeology embraces an evolutionary view of media, by which technologies are replaced by other technologies. But media archaeology refuses to regard this evolution as a narrative of progress. On the contrary, these scholars show a marked preference for “dead ends, losers, and inventions that

never made it as an important material product” (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011, p. 3). Among these losers are things like the camera obscura of the Renaissance, the View-Master, which was a device from the 1950s that showed three-dimensional images, or maybe the circular panoramas of the 19th century, which can be viewed as the precursor of virtual reality.

Media archaeology has inspired the creation of laboratories, where obsolete technologies are kept and studied. For instance, there is the Media Archaeological Fundus at Humboldt University in Berlin, where they keep tape recorders, typewriters, radio instruments, and computers. But they also keep scientific instruments of more dubious media status, such as oscilloscopes and Geiger counters. The Media Lab at the University of Colorado in Boulder focuses on a single technological medium, the computer, and all of its applications. They keep old computers and their programs, for instance, games or texts of digital literature, that no longer work on current computers. While media archaeologists are interested in the social impact of technologies, they tend to ignore the meaning of the messages that are sent through these technologies. In so doing, they continue the tradition of Claude Shannon, the pioneer of informatics, who defines information independently of any semantic consideration.

The approach that relates to the second definition restores the consideration of meaning by regarding media as means of expression. The phenomena considered to be media will be primarily art forms such as music, dance, visual arts, and literature. The inspiration for this approach is Lessing’s book *Laocoon* (1766/1887), in which Lessing contrasts the expressive potential of the spatial arts, such as painting or sculpture, with the temporal art of a poet. But if media are equated to art forms, is a concept of *medium* still necessary? Why not just ditch the concept and just speak of different kinds of art? Lessing, after all, never speaks of media.

A comprehensive media theory should not be limited to artistic forms of communication. It should instead incorporate all three conceptions of media, the social-communicative, the technological, and the expressive. But is such an integration possible? Wolfgang Ernst, the media archaeologist, thinks it is not. He writes, “media taken as physical channels of communication and as technical artifacts must be analyzed differently from cultural texts, art historical images, classical music, and works of art” (2011, p. 251). Even though Ernst comes from the humanities, he was only too glad to sacrifice artistic media and their meaning and to concentrate instead on technologies and their mode of operation.

The work of Elleström was an attempt to prove him wrong. He also came from the humanities. His concept of media was primarily an artistic and semiotic one. He wanted to give a theoretical basis to interart studies, the studies of the relation between artistic media. But he also wanted to take into consideration the material and technological support that allows

individual media objects to exist. In other words, he did not want to limit media theory to a theory of the kinds of art. The comprehensive nature of his view of media is expressed in this quote:

A medium should be understood in a broad way as the intermediate stage of communication; thus the term *medium* here refers not only to mass media, but also media used in more intimate communication; not only media based on external technological devices, but also media based on corporality; not only premeditated media, but also casual media; not only media used for practical purposes, but also artistic media.

(Elleström, 2018, p. 270)

Towards a Media Taxonomy

The first task in building a media taxonomy is to decide what will be the basic units of the system. With natural species, the basic units are the kinds of animals or plants in the world. But media taxonomy deals with abstractions, and these abstractions are not necessarily the lowest level of classification because below media there could be submedia, genres, and individual artefacts. The way to proceed is to start with a concept that is widely recognised as being a medium because the system must to some extent respect common usage. Once one or a few obvious candidates for medium status have been identified, the next step is to decide what the other categories that belong to the same level are.

To see what belongs to the same level and what does not, let's look at a list proposed by Roland Barthes of the various manifestations of narrative. He writes:

Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated *languages*, whether oral or **written**, *pictures*, **still** or **moving**, *gestures*, and an ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, **pantomime**, **painting**, stained glass windows, movies, local news, conversation.

(Barthes, 1975, p. 237 [emphasis added])

Here I have marked in the same way elements that seem to me to belong to the same level, even though you may disagree with my choices. Italics indicate the substance out of which media are made, like gesture for pantomime, picture for paintings, or language for legends and fables. Bold is the level below; it indicates basic media. Underlined are genres rather than media, so they occupy the lowest level. Clearly, we cannot base media taxonomy on all the elements of the list; this would result in something like Borges' Chinese taxonomy. Now let's look at what Elleström considered

to be media. In his article, “The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations” (2010b), and in his book, *Transmedial Narration* (2019), he proposes several loose, informal lists of media. Here are some of these lists, together with their descriptors.

- [A]: “loosely demarcated media conceptions: literature, text, image, music, visual art, comics, television news, film, speech and so forth” (Elleström, 2019, p. 47).
- [B]: “media types”: “comics, written texts, computer games, literature, music, images, speech and gestures” (2019, p. 53).
- [C] “basic media types”: “speech, written text, still images, movies, and sound recordings” (2019, p. 107).
- [D]: “media types: paintings, instrumental music, mathematical equations, and guided tours” (2010b, p. 15).

These lists try to capture our intuitive sense of what media are, but they do not illustrate a single homogeneous analytical level. List A has both literature and text, but literature is a sub-species of written text, mentioned in B. The items of C are very basic. The items of D are very specialised, and many other items are situated in between. These elements can be arranged higher hierarchically into a tree diagram:

In dark font (Figure 2.2) are the categories listed by Elleström as media, and in light font are my own additions. I added these concepts in order to hold the tree together, so as to have no dangling branches. On the first line, we have the substances of media – what they are made of: language, sound, image, and gestures. These substances are more diversified on line two. For instance, language is divided into written text and speech, image is divided into still images and moving images. Line three has mostly different kinds

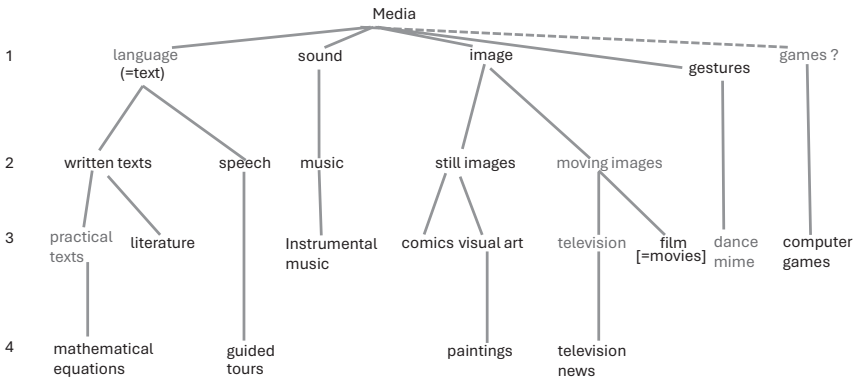


Figure 2.2 Elleström’s examples of particular media arranged as a tree.

of arts, as well as practical texts and a couple of technological categories. Line four has more specialised forms of communication, we could call them genres. However, the tree is not symmetrical like botanical or zoological trees. For instance, there is no level 2 item for gestures and games, and no level 3 item for guided tours. In the case of literature, instrumental music, film, or computer games, there are no items on level 4, but this is because I have chosen not to show them. In fact, there are many genres of these items.

I also have a problem with computer games. While they may be regarded as a kind of art, I am not happy at all with placing “games” on level 1; it is a type of human activity and does not belong with language, sound, image, and gestures, which are semiotic substances. Arranging media on a tree-shaped diagram requires some arbitrary moves because you need to have separate levels and you need to have something on every level. Let’s call this the tyranny of the diagram.

Comparison with Elleström’s Model

The tree in Figure 2.2 is my own attempt to organise the items that Elleström lists as examples of media. It is by no means his own model. Rather, his model looks like this (Figure 2.3).

As I have argued, establishing a list of *basic media* is a tricky process, but let us imagine that it can be done. Basic media occupy the top left of the diagram; the items are taken from Elleström’s lists of basic media, and they do not distinguish substances, like gestures or speech, from art forms

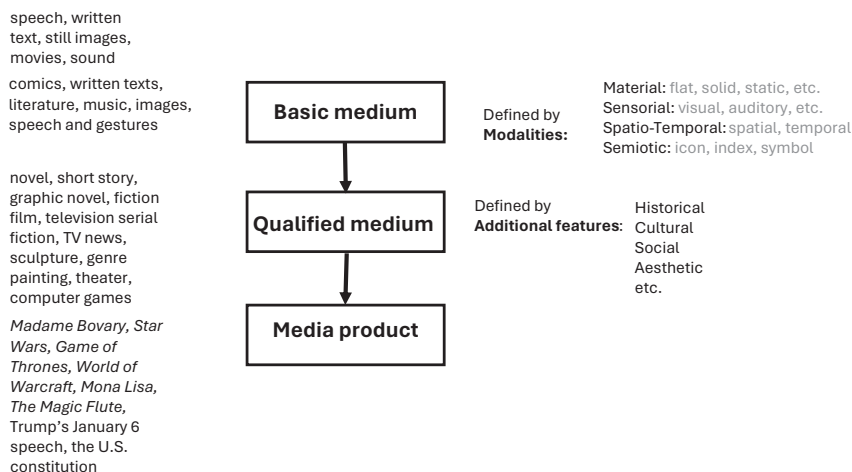


Figure 2.3 A diagram of Elleström’s system of media concepts.

like comics and literature. These basic media are defined by what Elleström calls *modalities*. Modalities are distinctive features that can be shared by media, but each basic medium is defined by a unique matrix of modalities. There are four types of modalities: material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic. The list of material modalities is open-ended, but the other three are limited: the sensorial has five senses, the spatiotemporal has two categories, space and time; and the semiotic corresponds to the three kinds of signs distinguished by Charles Sanders Peirce. Every basic medium must be defined in terms of the four kinds of modalities. For instance, still images are solid, flat, and static on the material component; visual on the sensorial component; spatial on the spatiotemporal component; and iconic on the semiotic component. Moving images are solid and flat; visual; temporal; and iconic. These are Elleström's suggestions; I have problems with some of them. He describes moving images as solid. Certainly, film reels consist of distinct frames made of solid matter, but projected images are fluid. Elleström describes written language as spatial, but Lessing considers poetry to be a temporal art. I think that written language is both spatial and temporal. It is spatial because it's printed on a page and you can see it all at the same time, but you have to process it one word at a time, and if you process it in the wrong order, you get different meanings. And finally, I have a problem with ascribing a semiotic modality to all media. There are media such as dance and music which are certainly forms of communication, but they cannot really be said to consist of signs (though they may occasionally contain signs), and I would have a hard time classifying them as iconic, symbolic, or indexical. Elleström thinks that music is iconic, but I believe it is only iconic in very rare cases (such as imitating a cuckoo). A case could be made for its indexicality (it causes emotions), but most of the time music signifies in ways that do not belong to the three categories of Peirce.

One level below basic media is what Elleström calls *qualified media*. They are further distinguished from each other not only through the basic media they represent but also through additional criteria: historical, cultural, social, aesthetic, etc. If we look at the list of examples proposed by Elleström of qualified media, namely novel, short story, graphic novel, fiction film, television series, TV news, sculpture, genre painting, theatre, and computer games, they look a lot like genres. Elleström says it explicitly: "Genre may appropriately be called submedia" (2019, p. 117). This assimilation of submedia to genres reveals the difficult problem of distinguishing media from genre. In many cases, we have indeed a hard time deciding if a specific type of communication is a genre or a medium. Take the case of email: some scholars will call it a genre of digital technology and other scholars will call it a submedium. But I still think that by erasing the distinction between media and genre, Elleström gets away too easily. Certainly, genres must be realised by media, so they constitute a subcategory

of media. But there is an important distinction between media and genres. Genres are defined by conventions and they are largely culture-specific. Media are sets of expressive devices determined by their material, semiotic, and spatiotemporal nature, and they transcend cultures. Genres are restrictions on communication, while media offer affordances and possibilities. Genres can easily hybridise, especially literary ones; think of tragi-comedy or auto-fiction. But media combine rather than hybridise. So if there is a sharp theoretical distinction between media and genres, genres cannot be reduced to the status of submedia.

On the lowest level are what Elleström calls *media products*. They are not types of communication but actual tokens – for instance, a specific novel, an actual speech, or a certain game. If we restrict ourselves to basic media, qualified media, and media products, then we have a classic tree-shaped taxonomy.

However, this tree (Figure 2.4) is missing an additional component that Elleström regards as necessary to the definition of any basic and qualified media. This component is *technical media*. Technical media are “any objects or bodies that realize, mediate or display basic and qualified media” (Elleström, 2010a, p. 5). So how do we put the technical media on this chart? And what is the role of technical media in the whole model? Is every basic or qualified medium associated with a technical medium, so that there are no simple media, but only pairs of media? For instance, we could say that the medium of literature is associated with the technical medium of the book, the medium of music with technical media corresponding to musical instruments, the medium of computer games with the technical medium of the computer, etc. This view solves the problem of reconciling media as channels of transmission with media as means of expression. Each means

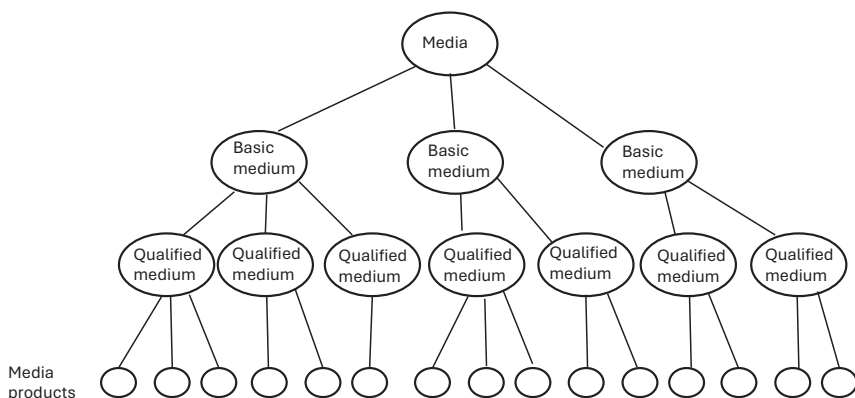


Figure 2.4 Elleström’s system of media concepts arranged as a tree.

of expression comes together with a technical channel of transmission. But there is no one-to-one connection between the two. A given mean of expression can have several channels of transmission. Take a written text. It can be disseminated through books, through the internet, through audiobooks, or through Kindle. Moreover, technology plays a role not only in the transmission of media products but also in their production.

Take the medium of text (Figure 2.5). In order to produce it, you have a choice between using computer authoring software, pen and paper, or a typewriter. These are the means of production. With the means of transmission, you have a choice between a printing press or digital technology, which results in a book, Kindle, or text on the web. But if these materials are recognised as media, this leads to an infinite regression. It takes trees to produce the paper that allows writing. So are trees a medium? Or should we recognise as media only complex technologies, such as the typewriter, the film, or the gramophone, but not the materials they are made of?

Another problem with adding technical media to basic and qualified ones as the means of production or transmission is that some of the basic media are inherently technological. This is true of film, photography, television, and computer games. Take the case of photography. It is produced by a technology that consists of an automatic capture of light patterns. The medium cannot be separated from the technology because the technology *is* the medium. By contrast, if we regard man-made images as a medium, this characterisation is independent of technology. You can use technologies as varied as oil painting, ink drawing, or computer software. With film, another inherently technological medium, we have a technology of production, the recording camera, and a technology of transmission, the screen and the system of projection. However, some media need technology for production, but not for transmission. One example is live music which you just listen to or paintings which you can look at directly. But

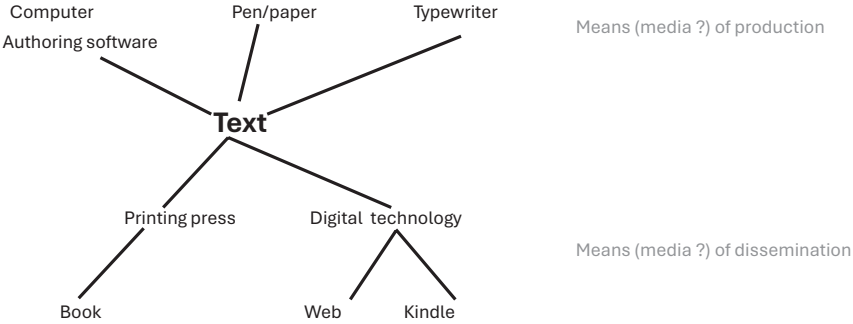


Figure 2.5 Means of production and dissemination for the medium “text”.

paintings can also be mediated by technology, for instance by photos in an art book. In this case, the content of a medium is another medium, to paraphrase McLuhan. Elleström handles the problem of inherently technological media, such as film and photography, by distinguishing them as art, which is regarded as a qualified medium, and as technology. So, film can be an art, or it can be a technology and, therefore, a technical medium. But the application that Elleström proposes for cinema does not work for media such as comics, dance, or literature, whose definition is not technological, but rather a matter of substance. Media must be treated individually rather than being fitted into the same mould, in contrast to natural species in a Linnean taxonomy. This means that they cannot be neatly arranged on a tree diagram, because trees presuppose symmetrical and uniform relations between their elements.

From Tree to Forest Network

Another reason why a tree diagram is an unsatisfactory representation of media relations is that trees present their elements as discrete categories, and they cannot show overlap between these categories. They are therefore not a very good basis for the study of intermedia or interart relations. But this was the principal interest of Elleström, and explaining the possibility of such relations is the main purpose of his media system. As he writes, “all media are related to each other” (2010a, p. 5), and “there are

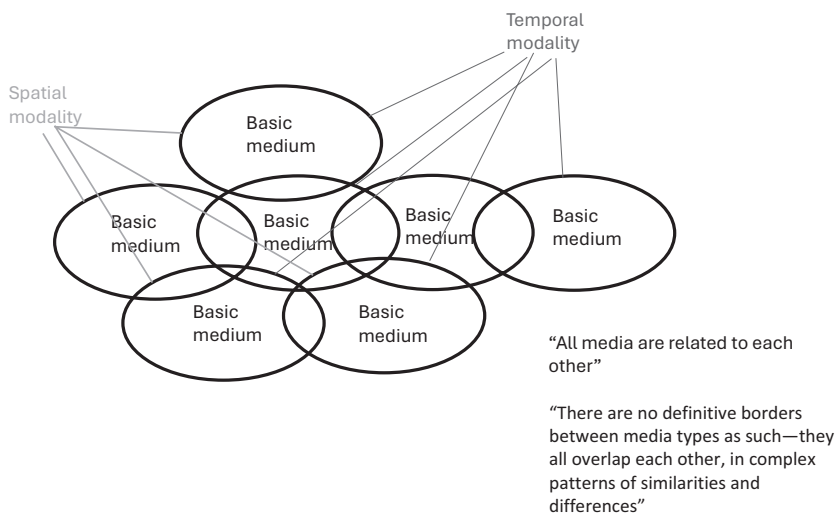


Figure 2.6 Elleström’s conception of media overlap.

no definitive borders between media types as such – they all overlap each other, in complex patterns of similarities and differences” (2019, p. 4).

This relation can be represented as shown in Figure 2.6. What makes media overlap each other is the fact that the modalities that describe them are not medium-specific, but rather general properties that can apply to many different media. For instance, all media that have spatial modalities overlap each other on spatiality, and all media with a temporal modality overlap each other on temporality. Some media are both spatial and temporal, so they overlap in both modalities. Media not only share individual modalities, but they can also share the whole matrix of modalities that define other media. This explains the phenomenon of multimedial media or multimodal media. For instance, comics consist of both still images and written texts. So they overlap with the more basic media of still image and written text. The most complex media are those that encompass the largest number of basic media, for instance, the theatre, film, or computer games.

Figure 2.7 demonstrates another way to represent the relationship between media. Because of the multiple arrows that connect levels, this diagram is no longer a tree.

In this model, the top row consists of some of the modalities, and the second row displays basic media. The tangle of lines between these two rows shows how modalities define basic media. For instance, to use Ellerström’s system of modalities, written language is spatial, temporal, visual, symbolic, flat, and solid. On the third level are categories that correspond to art forms. The solid arrows between levels two and three show mandatory relations, and the dotted arrows represent optional ones. For instance, literature *must* consist of written language, but it can have still

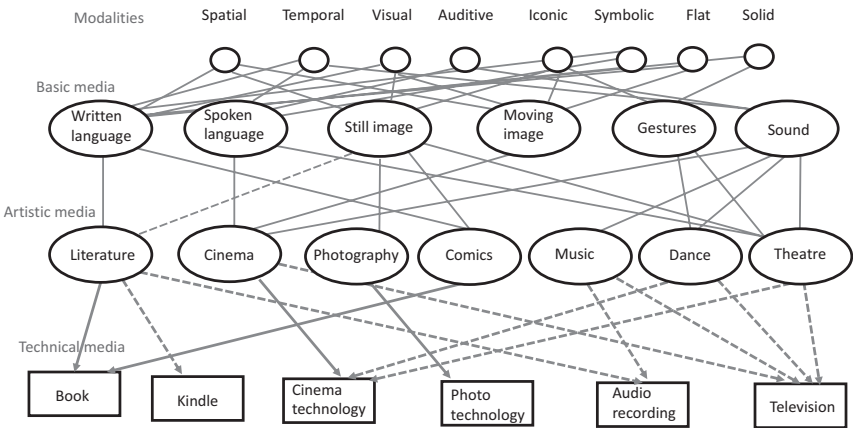


Figure 2.7 A non-tree diagram of Elleström’s system of media.

images as illustrations. On the bottom (level four) are the technologies of transmission. When the technology is the same as the name of the art form, this means that the art form is technologically defined. For instance, I have cinema and cinema technology or photography and photography technology, just as Elleström distinguishes these media as art and as technology.

An art form may have a primary technology, for instance, the book for literature. But it can also have secondary technologies. Literature can be transmitted through a Kindle, through an audio recording, or through the internet. Television is a secondary mode of transmission for most of the artistic media of the third line. The internet would play the same role. You may notice that in the diagram some art forms like music, dance, and theatre, do not have a solid line that links them to a technology because they are not technologically defined. This means that they can be experienced live rather than in a mediated form.

Beyond, or Within, Media Borders

One issue on which I do not agree with Elleström is when he claims that media do not have definitive borders. The phenomenon of intermedia relations is often described as a transgression of media boundaries. But in most cases, I think that this metaphor is inadequate. Consider the following list of intermedial phenomena that I have borrowed from Irina Rajewsky, who has written a great article on the issue of media borders. Here follow some examples of what she regards as intermedial phenomena: filmic writing, ekphrasis (the description of a medium in another medium), the musicalisation of literature, film adaptations, novelisation, visual poetry, illuminated manuscripts, sound art, opera, comics, multimedia shows, multimedia computer texts or installations, and so forth (Rajewski, 2010, p. 55). According to Rajewsky, intermediality illustrates three distinct processes:

- 1 Adaptations; the content of one medium represented in another one.
- 2 Media combinations (=multimodal media: opera, film, theatre, comics).
- 3 Intermedial reference: literary writing that imitates film or musical structures, painting that imitates photos, ekphrasis, embedding of a medium in another one.

I would like to add a fourth type of intermediality:

- 4 Complementarity: the phenomenon, described by Henry Jenkins (2006) as transmedia storytelling, telling a story through multiple media.

Do these categories involve the dissolution of media boundaries? I don't think so. Categories one and four involve a connection between very

well-defined media. In category one, you have a novel and use the plot to become a film, but you don't have a blurring of novel and film. Category two is a combination of resources and not a blurring of boundaries. There is a distinction between combination and blurring. Category three is the imitation of a medium by another medium. For intermedial reference to be recognised as such, the user must have a clear idea of what the imitating and the imitated media are. Blurring of boundaries requires a continuum, but media are defined by distinct features, such as modalities and technologies. I agree with Rajewsky when she writes that blurring of boundaries occurs on the level of genres, rather than on the level of media. This is because genres are made of conventions, and it is easy for a genre to adopt the conventions of another, as you have in tragi-comedy, auto-fiction, or visual poetry. But media are made of resources that derive from their material, semiotic, sensorial, and spatiotemporal substance. There cannot be a blurring of boundaries between time and space, between vision and hearing, between iconic and symbolic signs, or between all these categories together. As Rajewski writes, "Due to its material and medial conditions, dance theatre cannot truly become painting – just as painting itself can never become truly photographic" (2010, 62). The only situation where one can speak of the blurring of boundaries is when two media present the same components, but they differ from each other through the prominence of one component. For instance, you could say that both the theatre and musicals involve spoken language, gestures, and images. In addition, musicals have singing. While singing can also occur in the theatre, it is mandatory in musicals and optional in the theatre. So the two media are part of a continuum. When there is mostly singing, the medium is musical, for instance, *West Side Story*. When there is mostly spoken dialogue with only an occasional song, the medium is theatre, as in Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. But you could have a production with half singing and half-spoken language, and people would disagree whether the media product is a play or a musical. There you would have a blurring of boundaries, but I think that such cases are very rare.

It is now time to conclude. While I'm saying that Elleström is trying to devise a model that will be to media studies what Linnean taxonomies are to botany or zoology, I am not saying that he is proposing a tree-shaped taxonomy and that it does not work. On the contrary, Elleström's work is notorious for its avoidance of diagrams. Why is that? I think he realised that no diagram can capture the relations between media, submedia, modalities, and genres in their totality. But this does not mean that diagrams, whether tree-shaped or not, are useless. I am personally a great fan of diagrams, and many diagrams can capture certain meaningful relations. Media theory is not a tree. Rather, it is a forest that contains many trees, as well as diagrams of other shapes.

Questions and Answers

Liviu Lutas: You talked about narrativity. Where would you place that in relation to media in general?

Marie-Laure Ryan: Well, it's not a medium, because it can occur in a variety of media. I think it's a type of semantic structure. Narrative is defined by what the text is about. It needs to have characters, events, causal relations, and all these are semantic categories. But of course, as Roland Barthes and later Elleström also have shown, the semantic structure that makes a narrative a narrative is independent of media and it is also independent of the kind of signs that are used, even though some signs have better affordances to tell stories. You have symbolic narratives expressed through language, you have visual narratives, and I don't think you can have narrative expressed exclusively through indexical signs, but you certainly have lots of indexical signs in movies. So that's my point, that media is one problem and narrative is another problem. Of course, they interact, and it's very interesting to compare the narrative potential of different media. I think that in order to understand what media can do, narrative is a very useful point of comparison.

Jarkko Toikkanen: Something that I got to talking about with Lars before his passing is that if we consider the intermediality of experience instead of the intermediality of communication (or phenomenology instead of semiotics), the senses are fundamental media too. Not just communicative modalities. I've done research where I defined a fundamental difference between phenomenology and semiotics, which is then something that cuts right through the heart of how to make the distinction between media and modalities in the first place. And it's obviously too big a question to lay out there in the open today. But if there is anything that you'd be interested in talking more about, the disciplinary difference between phenomenology and semiotics, for instance, then I'm always open and ready for that kind of discussion.

Marie-Laure Ryan: So you are asking me how I envision the relation between semiotics and phenomenology?

Jarkko Toikkanen: In a way, yes.

Marie-Laure Ryan: Well, I don't think I'm really prepared to answer this question. I'm sure media have a semiotic dimension, I mean, what kind of signs they are made of. The phenomenological dimension would be a part of what I call the social, the cultural aspect of media, what role they play in our lives. But is that really phenomenology? Or what, in your view, is a phenomenological approach to media? What does it do?

Jarkko Toikkanen: Well, the phenomenological approach would be about how media are experienced or what kind of experience media give rise to, instead of what kind of communication they are about. What kind of information do media transmit? That is semiotics. Semiotics is about transmitting information and communication whereas phenomenology is about experience.

Marie-Laure Ryan: So in a purely semiotic approach, you would describe the cinema by saying that it's made of iconic signs and symbolic signs and movement. But in a phenomenological approach, you would say that it leads to a greater emotional involvement of the spectator than a novel or maybe that it's more difficult to follow the plot of a movie than that of a novel because there is so much that is not expressed. Is that what you regard as phenomenological?

Jarkko Toikkanen: Well, that's kind of like the traditional view of phenomenology, that it might be more about the affective or the emotional potential, this kind of intensity and embodiment as well, than about semiotics. But that is perhaps too crude a distinction between phenomenology and semiotics and something that would need to be revised by way of case studies. On that, I would very much agree with Lars and all the people in Växjö who are very practical about the approach and sort of always engage with case studies to see how exactly a case study takes place and what kind of communication takes place in there. So I'm very much for that as well, but we need to do a comparative analysis by way of these tools that we each might have, to see where the differences exactly might lie.

Beate Schirmmacher: Thank you, Marie-Laure Ryan, for this talk and for discussing the difficulties of trying to map the complexities of media which do not only consist of a tree but of a whole forest, I couldn't agree more. By pointing out the system or the different categories that Lars Elleström has presented, you see that they do not really fit into a taxonomy or create a tree, which is why I wouldn't describe it as a taxonomy. I usually explain it to the students as a kind of grammar that can be applied to explain how actual sentences that are spoken work or connect different kinds of information. These basic media types, the qualifying aspects, and the technical devices help us place the complexity or place the different levels of media in each individual media product to keep track of the different levels. One aspect that I didn't agree with in your presentation is that, from how I understand the framework of Lars, the individual media product is centred. What you showed is how difficult it becomes to trace what media are when we think from the concepts and try to map everything that is there, every kind of mediated communication. But I understand the model of Lars' as starting with the individual media products, which have the aspects of the technical device and one or several basic media types, which can be described with the modalities, and then these qualifying aspects of specific uses, conventions, contexts, which helps me to understand why I recognize this specific text and image combination that I see on my screen as, for instance, news or a graphic novel. I see these categories as much more flexible when we try to apply them to specific media products, instead of trying to create one tree.

Marie-Laure Ryan: Yeah, I can see your problem, we can describe a certain instance of a media product and then work our way up, saying that if it belongs to such medium, then it has such modalities, but the problem is to arrange everything into one encompassing model. And I have problems with the notion of grammar, it comes from linguistics, and there was a time in the 1950s when everything was considered a....

Beate Schirmmacher: ...was a grammar, yes.

Marie-Laure Ryan: Yeah, linguistics was the universal model for everything in the humanities and everything was signs, and you had to have these procedures to see what your distinct phonemes and words and sentences were, and you had to apply this to other media such as the cinema where you don't have discrete signs. The notion of grammar is fine with me, but it should not be strictly modelled on linguistic grammar because it's a different problem. There are media that are based on language, but there are also media that are based on images, and so it doesn't translate from one domain to another that well.

Beate Schirrmacher: Yes, thank you. I have certain colleagues who don't agree with the metaphor of grammar as well. It works for me, but as you pointed out, the history of this word might make it a bit more difficult. Let me just wind out another question because with this model of Lars Elleström, I think about the problem that you discussed with the boundaries and the borders of media that sometimes dissolve, but then again, sometimes are quite clear. With the different levels of technical devices, basic media, and qualified media types, we of course perceive specific conventional borders between what Lars would describe as qualified media types – we understand the prototype of literature as something else than music, that there is a clear difference – but in an individual media product and on the levels of how different basic media can be integrated in the specific media types, the boundaries are not always clear. I mean, where is the boundary between the prosody when I talk or between the intonation and the melody of a song? On this level, the boundaries are blurring. On another level, between conventions, the borders are clear. To me at least, these distinctions by Lars helped me solve this problem of whether media borders exist or not.

Marie-Laure Ryan: Well, I didn't say that blurring of boundaries does not exist, but I said that the vast majority of intermedial phenomena do not involve the blurring of boundaries because the categories are easily recognizable, and I think combination is an operation that does not blur boundaries. And for instance,

in a theatre, if we use film projection for the stage setting, it does not blur the boundaries between film and theatre, it just uses its subordinate film technology for the medium of theatre. The spectators will recognize that there is film technology that is being used, but the medium remains theatre. So that's what I mean when I criticize the metaphor of blurring. But it's a very common metaphor and I hear it all the time. That's why I decided to make it a target of my critique.

Beate Schirrmacher: I do not quite agree there, but we can discuss this another time because there are other questions. Thank you so much.

Jørgen Bruhn: Thank you very much, Marie-Laure, for the talk. I want to get back to the question from Jarkko concerning the relation between semiotics and phenomenology. I think the way I understand Lars's model is close to Beate's, of course. If we start with a media product, in the sense of the specific text, for example, this version of the *Star Wars* film or this specific version of a novel, then we start phenomenologically with the kind of experience of that media product. And then we can build the modalities and the technology, we can describe the experience of this text as best we can. But I think Lars, more and more through the years, being a kind of pragmatist, I guess it's called, in the Peircean tradition, was very much interested in the fact that things were actually *happening* around him all the time. And he wanted to try to follow it, systematize it as best he could, but all the time knowing that things *worked*, that communication *worked*, that was one of the things he said very often, at seminars and in discussions that, for instance, transmediation work much better than we should suspect because we cross media borders, we translate from a novel to a film, which is a complex project, but most of us would immediately recognize it. He would very often stress the fact that conversations, even thousands of kilometres apart now via technical media and sound systems, work (or not) – we do communicate. I also liked your last Figure 2.7 very much, it is totally chaotic in a sense, but also systematic and that gave an image of how

complex things are, while still working. And what I think Lars did was to start with the media product, the actual communicative entity, and then try to describe stuff from there. And I think that's actually a kind of combination of phenomenology and semiotics.

Marie-Laure Ryan: Yeah, I don't have a very clear idea of what the borders are of semiotics and phenomenology. So I think you are the specialists at Linnaeus University, you have been dealing with these concepts a lot while I haven't that much.

Jørgen Bruhn: I think I'm saying that this version of semiotics is actually a kind of phenomenology. I think the concepts are not so widely differentiated in this tradition that Lars studied more and more through the years. Thank you.

Liviu Lutas: I have a general question, since we talk about grammar in relation to a model like Lars's, I was thinking of the risk, as I see it, in my own work as well, of disregarding the artistic value when applying a model which is rather mathematical, I would say. What's your view on that?

Marie-Laure Ryan: Yeah, I think that many approaches to media disregard meaning and taxonomy also disregard the question of artistic values – that would need an extra component. The taxonomy cannot tell you if an individual media product is artistic or not, but on the middle line, you have all these art types and it is assumed that they are produced for the sake of aesthetic gratification because they are not really practically useful. The question is whether the middle line also involves technical concepts, for instance, do games belong there, and are games artistic products? I don't know. No, the study of aesthetics is a very important one, but I don't think it's the role of taxonomy to tell what makes media products artistic. It just takes it for granted that some media are artistic, and others are not. And there are also members of artistic media that are bad. I mean, in literature, there are some bad novels, so do you consider them aesthetic or not?

Heidi Hart: Thank you for the really interesting talk. I was wondering about the point you made early on about

the difficulty of parsing media and genre, which is always a challenge, of course. And thinking about an opera I attended a few years ago that was reframed as a graphic novel, although, of course, no one was holding a graphic novel in their hands, but the stage set was imitating a graphic novel of the imagination. I was trying to analyze this at the time and thinking, how does this work as a media product that's imagining another genre or medium? What might you say about these sorts of almost imaginary forms of remediation?

Marie-Laure Ryan: I think that this could be described by Rajewsky as an intermedial quotation. You have your medium of the opera, but in its stage setting, it quoted another medium, which was the graphic novel. To me, it would be the same phenomenon as writing that tries to imitate musical structure. It tries to be a fugue or it tries to be.... I don't know what else. So yeah, this is a clear case of intermedial quotation. But I don't think it blurs the boundaries because you know what the graphic novel is, what it looks like, and what its visual appearance is, and you know what the opera is.

Heidi Hart: Thank you. It's always interesting when it's something that doesn't exist yet. You just have to make this leap of your imagination. But yeah, that makes sense.

Liviu Lutas: I have another question, which is quite related to this. I was thinking of a case because I was wondering about this question of blurring boundaries. How about the so-called tableau vivant, where there's not only a quotation, but the new media product is in a way trying to replace the old one. It's not only a quotation, is it? Where's the relation there? And is that a case of blurring boundaries? I mean the tableau vivant being a staging, like a theatre of a painting.

Marie-Laure Ryan: So it's when you have actual people who pose as like *The Last Supper* of Da Vinci?

Liviu Lutas: Exactly, yeah.

Marie-Laure Ryan: So how would I characterize that?

Liviu Lutas: Especially if that is a case of blurring boundaries between media?

Marie-Laure Ryan: I would say it's a combination of.... I have to think about this.

Liviu Lutas: Yeah, of course, you don't have to answer because I can't answer it myself. I just reacted when you talked about blurring because that might be a case of blurring. After all, it might confuse the receiver in some way.

Marie-Laure Ryan: I'm not saying that there is no such blurring of boundaries. I'm saying that most intermedial relations are not a matter of blurring, but I left an opening.

Liviu Lutas: There are some, of course. Thank you.

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Introduction to Chapter 3

Discussing Medium Specificity and Basic Media Categories

Matilda Davidsson

Kamilla Elliott is a prominent name within contemporary adaptation studies. After earning a PhD in English and American Literature and Language from Harvard University, she has focused her work on Gothic and Victorian fiction as well as adaptation theory and practice, on which she has published several volumes. Her most notable work includes *Rethinking the Novel/Film debate* (Cambridge UP, 2003) and *Theorizing Adaptation* (Oxford UP, 2020). This chapter begins with an anecdotal outline of the relationships and differences between her approach to media studies and that of Lars Elleström. Elliott emphasises Elleström’s openness to different approaches and academic conversations, highlighting how this has led to experimental and innovative ways of engaging with and thinking about media.

Elliott compares their scholarly similarities, such as their views that semiotic and narratological approaches lack efficacy for intermedial comparison, and their shared interest in exploring similarities in words and images. Elliott found that a visual media approach and the work of W. J. T. Mitchell helped understand adaptation, and while Elliott takes a rhetorical, discourse-oriented approach focusing on persuasion, communication strategies, and audience impact, Elleström’s semiotic approach emphasises the structure of signs and the process of meaning-making. Peirce’s classification of mimetic, symbolic, and indexical signs was instrumental to Elleström’s media model. Mimetic signs imitate or replicate aspects of the real world, symbolic signs derive meaning from social conventions rather than resemblance, and indexical signs rely on recognisable forms that are not overly detailed in their representation.

On page 53, Elliott writes: “We both opposed the application of semiotic theories based in linguistics to nonverbal media and the oppositional categoricity of theories of medium specificity derived from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s categorizations”. Lessing’s work explored the differences between visual and literary arts and how these media forms convey meaning through their inherent characteristics, with visual arts as spatial representations

using form, colour, and composition, and literary arts as temporal forms that unfold over time and are experienced sequentially. Peirce's semiotic theory categorises signs based on their relationship with the objects they represent rather than focusing on media types as Lessing did.

While linguistically derived theories provide valuable tools for understanding certain aspects of media, they have limitations when applied to nonverbal forms, which can be non-linear and consist of an interplay of multiple modes. Elliott argues that recognising these affordances and integrating other analytical frameworks that appreciate the unique characteristics of nonverbal media can lead to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of these forms of communication.

In this chapter, Elliott also reflects upon how their different backgrounds – Elleström being a mathematician and humanist in Europe, and her being in theology and adaptation studies, moving primarily in Anglo-American circles – affected their often parallel research inquiries. She further emphasises the necessity of breaking down media categories into basic levels and opposing binary opposition, as both she and Elleström have done throughout their work.

Elliott then introduces her bottom-up approach, a systematic model of media traits, highlighting the difficulties of categorising media, akin to the challenges Ryan presents in this volume on bottom-up media categorisation. Both approaches start from the lowest level and the smallest components of media, building up to more complex constellations. Similarly, Elleström's medium-centred model also starts with the basic media but consists of three levels: basic media types, qualified media types, and the material object or entity used, the technical medium of display. Elliott's approach introduces a basic level of categorisation based on cognitive theorist Eleanor Rosch's work. Through this framework, she considers how media products can simultaneously have relational *and* differentiating qualities depending on their categorisation. Importantly, she notes that these levels of categorisation are not unitary but context-dependent, and she praises Elleström's model for avoiding fixed distinctions between media forms. With this, she also critiques linguistically derived theories of media for being too rigid to apply to nonverbal media.

Using a case study as an example, Elliott guides the reader through an analysis of the word/image relationships of pictorial initials in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, describing them as arbitrary mimetic and symbolic. She discusses the reciprocity of images and words, taking the notion of mixed media further compared to Mitchell's discussion in this volume and shows how the meaning of a letter can shift between the symbolic verbal signification, and visual, iconic meaning, depending on context. She describes this as a process of sublimation, leading to a theorisation of adaptation as fluid rather than oppositional.

In the Questions and Answers section, the complexities of a possible social dimension are explored as a future development of Elleström's modalities, including what role ideology plays in his media model since no descriptive model can be completely objective and apolitical. Social constructionism posits that reality is not objective but constructed through human interactions, language, and cultural practices. What is perceived as 'reality' is shaped by social processes and agreements. The meanings we ascribe to objects, events, and experiences are constructed through language, which is inherently subjective and culturally specific. It is therefore an important aspect to consider when creating a dynamic media model representing meaning-making in action.

Finally, it is acknowledged that intermediality is a flourishing field still in development, and the challenges of systematising cultural phenomena are also discussed, given their constant change, movement, and context.

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3 Lars Elleström and Bottom-Up Categorisation

Kamilla Elliott

I feel privileged to take part in this lecture series honouring the critical legacies of Lars Elleström. The series prompt asks us to discuss one of Lars's concepts in relation to our own work and to consider how the concept can be used and developed in future research. As a metacritic, I look at larger discourses, theories, and debates in intermedial studies. My thinking is greatly indebted to Lars's paradigm-shifting methodology in "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations" (Elleström, 2010). Lars could articulate in a sentence what takes others, myself included, chapters or monographs to delineate. That Lars situated this far-reaching, ground-breaking chapter within an edited collection that gives voice to other scholars, including some with whom he disagreed and scholars just beginning their careers, is another of his legacies. Just as he was more interested in media relations than in treating media as individual objects, so too he was more interested in relations between media theories than in touting his own theory as the only way. Indeed, the very title of this lecture series, "Meeting Media Minds", articulates Lars's scholarly ecumenism perfectly.

Mieke Bal's foreword to Lars's *Beyond Media Borders* (2021) highlights his unique ability to be utterly dedicated to his own approach while making space for other approaches:

Elleström's ongoing focus on – his intellectual loyalty to – the idea of the semiotic, a concept and field that on its own already indicates the need for the 'beyond' in the book's main title, demonstrates a resistance to ephemeral academic fashion and a consistency of thought without dogmatism which I consider characteristic of the semiotic perspective.
(p. vi)

Even as he worked to establish a universal theoretical system, he did so in a radically new way, giving priority to the bottom-up rather than the top-down concepts that usually govern claims to universality. In fact, his

system can only be applied to all media successfully *because* he worked from the ground up, starting with media traits rather than generic media classifications such as literature, film, dance, and television: “I rely on a bottom-up model of basic media traits. Instead of beginning with the selection of established media and their interrelations, I start with focusing on fundamental properties that are potentially shared by all media” (Elleström, 2017, p. 668). These traits are themselves interdisciplinary and trans-theoretical: “Media products can be analysed in terms of four types of traits: material, spatio temporal, sensorial, and semiotic traits. ... I call these categories of traits media modalities” (Elleström, 2021, p. 8).

Elliott and Elleström: Shared Traits

Before I turn to how that model affected my scholarship, I want to introduce some traits and experiences that I share with Lars Elleström. We both struggled with the inadequacies and prohibitions of prevailing semiotic and narratological theories for theorising intermedial relations in the 1990s and early 2000s. Semiotics and narratology tended to flatten out media differences under larger umbrellas of signs and narratives. We both opposed the application of semiotic theories based in linguistics to nonverbal media and the oppositional categoricity of theories of medium specificity derived from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s categorisations of poetry and painting. We both argued that words and images share traits and forms, opposing their binary opposition. We both found the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, with its distinctions between icons, indexes, and symbols, fertile and liberating for discussing nonverbal media in their own right and in relation to verbal media. We were both informed and inspired by W. J. T. Mitchell’s *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986), a powerful explication of the influence of theology and cultural ideologies on word-image theories in Western culture, even (or especially) those deemed to be objectively, scientifically based in phenomenology. Methodologically, we both found ways to address larger questions through close textual analysis.

Our similarities were joined by differences. Like Peirce, Lars had a background in mathematics: “When I was young, I was all into math, physics, chemistry and the natural sciences”. The interviewer remarks: “It is not by chance that a literary scholar with an interest in mathematics becomes a semiotician” (Elleström et al., 2020, p. 12). My own background, by contrast, lay in the humanities. Raised in a fundamentalist Christian household, I tumbled from close-reading the Christian Bible into literary studies at a time when literature was steeped in theories derived from Christian theologies and traditions: a Protestant value for the word over the image, a Catholic canonisation of texts, and propensities to categorise them as good or bad.

It is little wonder, given our educational backgrounds, that Lars found Peirce more fruitful for his research, while I found Mitchell more productive for mine. And yet both of us benefited from both theorists: indeed, we would not have had so many points in common had either one of us followed only one of them. While Lars pursued semiotics, I focused on rhetoric and discourse. We moved in different theoretical circles: Lars in European ones favouring material, scientific, and descriptive approaches to media; I in Anglo-American ones favouring cultural, aesthetic, and political approaches. Even so, we worked on similar questions via our different theories and methodologies and arrived at remarkably similar theoretical conclusions.

Writing *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Elliott, 2003) in the early 2000s, I was, like Lars, struggling with oppositional and binary categorisations of words and pictures, categorisations that opposed illustration and prose writing, film images and film title cards, and literature and film. The scholar who helped me most at that point was cognitive theorist Eleanor Rosch. Rosch has shown that categorical distinctions hold most firmly in cognition at what she calls “the basic level of categorization”, defined as the one at which category members are recognised most rapidly, the highest level at which category members share perceived shapes, the highest level at which an image can stand for a category, the level coded earliest in the language, and the level first learned by children (Rosch, 1978). So, in a vertical categorical chain that descends from everything to physical objects to organisms to vertebrates to mammals to cats to the body parts of cats, to the molecular structures of cats, “cats” would be the basic level of categorisation, most readily distinguished from other species such as dogs or mice, by contrast to the categorical levels of “mammals” or “molecular structures”, where they occupy the same category.

Rosch helped me to understand the perplexing paradox in novel-and-film discourse where the *same* scholars argue at the *same* time that novels and films are *both* sister arts *and* separate species. At the level of representational objects, novels and films are likely to be figured as sister arts, sharing the categorical surname “art” or “representation” (literary art/representation; filmic art/representation). At the basic level of categorisation or “novels” and “films”, however, they are more likely to be classified as different species based on different physical traits and technologies and different production and consumption contexts.

Levels of categorisation, moreover, are not unitary or agreed, as I argue in *Theorizing Adaptation* (Elliott, 2020). For semioticians, “novels” and “films” are subcategories of the larger category of “semiotics”; cultural theorists, however, subsume semioticians and semiotics alike under categories such as “professions” and “cultural ideologies” and all of those under its own uber category of “cultural studies”. Lars’s bottom-up model of media traits avoids these categorical wars, coming closer than any other

systematic theory I know to account for all media, precisely because it unfolds at the lowest levels of categorisation, shattering the basic levels of categorisation that divide media, yet without flattening them into undifferentiated higher levels of categorisation, such as “representations”, which does not attend to distinctions between media forms.

My methodology has been rhetorical, analytical, and discursive rather than semiotic. Yet, in a study of pictorial initials in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (2003, pp. 56–76), I do something similar to Lars, breaking down traditional distinctions between words and pictures by looking at lower levels of categorisation such as marks on the page. Pictorial initials are word-and-picture hybrids, as are illustrated novels and worded films, but their tiny size offers a lower categorical level at which to probe relations between words and pictures. Some pictorial initials put pressure on the categorisation that renders graphemes phonetic, symbolic, as well as simultaneously arbitrary and conventional signs, distinguished from pictorial graphics as visual, iconic, and mimetic referential signs. Categorical lines dividing writing and pictures fuse and confuse (quite literally) in pictorial initials such as the one opening Chapter 44 of *Vanity Fair* (Thackeray, 1940) (Figure 3.1).

Here, graphemes and graphics run along the same lines when the alphanumeric letter “O”, which is the first letter of the first paragraph, does double duty as a picture of a full moon. Yet, they are also at odds: the letter “O” leads reader-viewers away from the moon’s pictorial, mythological seascape into a (geo)graphical, verbal cityscape: “Our old friends, the Crawleys’ family house, in Great Gaunt Street” (Thackeray, 1940, p. 483). The fusion of mimetic moon and arbitrary letter in the “O” point to further such fusions in the unwritten word “moon”, whose two middle letters redouble its double resonance. Even the letters “m” and “n” can be configured as so many curved new, half, and waning moons. Such iconic congruences are arbitrary, demonstrating that letters can be arbitrarily mimetic as well as arbitrarily symbolic.

The pictorial initial that opens Chapter 41 of *Vanity Fair* sports an “S”-shaped pictorial whip, elected over the alphabetic “S” that is the final letter of the word “OMNIBUS” on the carriage to open the verbal paragraph: “SO the mourning being ready” (Thackeray, 1940, p. 454; Figure 3.2).

As with most pictorial initials, it pulls pictorial lines into prose and retains symbolic letters in the picture, crossing their categorical distinctions. In this instance, the whip is moving into the prose at the right, frozen at the instant it forms the letter “S” before occupying another shape. The “S” at the end of “OMNIBUS” offers a more fixed, secondary pictorial initial. Pulling away from its unidentical twin on the left in “OMNIBUS”, the “S” whip is pulled more forcefully to the right by its absence in the prose word. Yet here, as in other pictorial initials, it never quite enters

XLIV

A ROUND-ABOUT CHAPTER BETWEEN LONDON AND HAMPSHIRE



UR old friends the Crawleys' family house, in Great Gaunt Street, still bore over its front the hatchment which had been placed there as a token of mourning for Sir Pitt Crawley's demise, yet this heraldic emblem was in itself a very splendid and gaudy piece of furniture, and all the rest of the mansion became more brilliant than it had ever been during the late baronet's reign. The black outer-coating of the bricks was removed and they appeared with a cheerful blushing face streaked with white: the old bronze lions of the knocker were gilt handsomely, the railings painted, and the dimmest house in Great Gaunt Street, became the smartest in the whole quarter, before the green leaves in Hampshire had replaced those yellowing ones which were on the trees in Queen's Crawley avenue when old Sir Pitt Crawley passed under them for the last time.

A little woman, with a carriage to correspond, was perpetually seen about this mansion; an elderly spinster, accompanied by a little boy, also might be remarked coming thither daily. It was Miss Briggs and little Rawdon, whose business it was to see to the inward renovation of Sir Pitt's house, to superintend the female band engaged in stitching the blinds and hangings, to poke and rummage in the drawers and cupboards crammed with the dirty relics and congregated trumperies of a couple of generations of Lady Crawleys, and to take inventories of the china, the glass, and other properties in the closets and store-rooms.

Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was general-in-chief over these arrangements, with full orders from Sir Pitt to sell, barter, confiscate, or purchase furniture: and she enjoyed herself not a little in an occupation which gave full scope to her taste and ingenuity. The renovation of the house was determined upon when Sir Pitt came to town in November to see his

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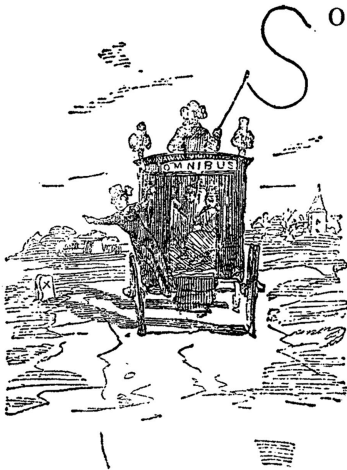
Figure 3.1 Pictorial initial for Chapter 44, *Vanity Fair*.

Note. Thackeray (1940). Public domain.

the prose and never quite becomes pure picture. The choice of the “S” whip over the picture’s more textual “S” disrupts reading conventions: one slides along the mobile whip “S” into the prose at the right. Had the “S” of omnibus been selected as the initial letter, the reading process would have been a leap from boxed word to boxed word, with spaces between them, which is how we usually read to build meaning along sentences. Here, far from words and images being separated by an unbridgeable divide, as so many theorists would have it, the journey from picture to word flows more fluidly than it does from word to word.

XLI

IN WHICH BECKY REVISITS THE HALLS OF HER ANCESTORS



SO the mourning being ready, and Sir Pitt Crawley warned of their arrival, Colonel Crawley and his wife took a couple of places in the same old High-flyer coach, by which Rebecca had travelled in the defunct Baronet's company, and on her first journey into the world some nine years before. How well she remembered the Inn Yard, and the ostler to whom she refused money, and the insinuating Cambridge lad who wrapped her in his coat on the journey. Rawdon took his place outside, and would have liked to drive, but his grief forbade him. He sate by the coachman, and talked about horses and the road the whole way; and who kept the inns, and who horsed the coach by which he had travelled so many a time, when he and Pitt were boys going to Eton. At Mudbury a carriage and a pair of horses received them, with a coachman in black. "It's the old drag, Rawdon," Rebecca said, as they got in. "The worms have eaten the cloth a good deal—there's the stain which Sir Pitt—ha! I see Dawson the Ironmonger has his shutters up—which Sir Pitt made such a noise about. It was a bottle of cherry brandy he broke which we went to fetch for your aunt from Southampton. How time flies, to be sure! that can't be Polly Talboys that bouncing girl standing by her mother at the cottage there. I remember her a mangy little urchin picking weeds in the garden."

"Fine gal," said Rawdon, returning the salute which the cottage gave him, by two fingers applied to his crape hat-band. Becky bowed and saluted, and recognised people here and there graciously. Their recognitions were inexpressibly pleasant to her. It seemed as if she was not

Figure 3.2 Pictorial initial for Chapter 41, *Vanity Fair*.

Note. Thackeray (1940). Public domain.

This pictorial initial plays with letters taking pictorial roles, pictures that have no relationship to the semantics of the picture or the prose. There are letter shapes scattered over the ground: I see an “O”, a “V”, a cursive “Y”, and various “S” and “W” shapes (to name only the more legible ones). The tombstone bears an “X”, connoting various meanings: a life crossed out, a name unspecified, an askance Christian cross. Like handwritten drafts preceding a printed text, the letters on the ground appear as rejects from the paragraph – prose litter embellishing pictorial ground. Although the “O” moon and the “S” whip can be read as double articulations in two sign systems, the selection of the mimetic whip over the symbolic letter of “OMNIBUS” demonstrates that the mimetic-symbolic divide itself is arbitrary, conventional, and variable. Thackeray demonstrates that “O” and “S” shapes occupy no exclusive or essential position in either verbal or pictorial systems; rather, the reader/viewer sees the picture in the letter and the letter in the picture: the moon in the “O”, and the “O” in the moon. To do this, we engage in a double process of sublimation, sublimating picture to letter to read the sentence and letter to picture to view the drawing, a sublimation from which we surface only to sublimate again.

Returning to Rosch’s theory of categorisation, categorisations of verbal and pictorial systems hold less strongly at categories above and below the basic level of categorisation, words and pictures. In a vertical chain of categorisation that runs from everything to signs to verbal signs to paragraphs to sentences to single words to graphemes to fragments of graphemes, “word” constitutes the basic level of categorisation. Similarly, in a vertical chain of categorisation that runs from everything to signs to pictorial signs to discrete pictures to pictorial lines within the picture to pieces of pictorial lines, “picture” constitutes the basic level of categorisation. As Rosch has shown, it is at these basic levels that contrast between vertical chains hold most strongly. Higher up at the level of signs, words and pictures share more features and functions and appear to be less categorically opposed. Lars’s bottom-up categorisation of media forms’ shared traits similarly broke down distinctions made between media at basic levels of categorisation. Media categorised differentially at this basic level may share material, temporospatial, sensorial, and semantic traits with others; conversely, media objects categorised with other media objects at the basic level may differ markedly from each other at the level of traits.

Elleström, Elliott, and Adaptation

By the time I made my first visit to the Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies [IMS] in 2010, I was researching intermedial adaptation. In his 2014 keynote at the Association of Adaptation Studies annual conference, Lars applied his intermedial theory to

adaptation, arguing that while media's shared traits *allow* for adaptation, "It is the material, sensorial, spatiotemporal and semiotic differences between source medium and target medium that allow for inventive alterations of media products into new creations" materially, semiotically, and in cognition (Elleström, 2017, p. 676).

Chapter 6 of *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* focuses on concepts of adaptation that tie cognitive processes to rhetorical figures. A metaphor, for example, may use words that generate a mental image in cognition. For example, "silver penny moon". Conversely, a visual image may generate words. For example, seeing a black hearse may create the mental statement: "Someone's died; it's their funeral". I used these inverse processes to explain and recommend models for intermedial adaptation processes, beginning with Lessing's categorical distinctions of poetry and painting and conclusions that they should not mix or mate. Although a painting lacks actual words it can evoke verbalising and narrative effects in cognition; conversely and reciprocally, although a poem lacks actual pictures, its words can arouse mental pictures.

I recommended this model for intermedial adaptation. If two media forms can contain and invert the otherness of each other reciprocally and inversely, as in the rhetorical figure of antimetabole, rather than being divided from each other by a binary opposition, then adaptation too can be more fluid and less oppositional. In this inverse relationship, difference is as much a part of identity as resemblance. Moreover, it's an *identical difference*, since each art differs from and inheres in the other *in exactly the same way*. As in negative and positive views of a photograph, if one expresses a lack in the other, it is a lack that the other has already filled, even as it exposes that lack. Poetry and painting, words and images, oral and graphic elements of words, and pictorial and symbolic elements of pictures are "both and" figures rather than the "either or" of categorical difference or the "neither nor" of deconstructive difference. The mutual and reciprocal process of verbal and pictorial figuration moved me towards a resolution of the novel/film debate's categorical and analogical tensions, of its word-and-image impasses, and of its form and content binds.

Chronologically, the relationship of my work to Lars's has been more parallel than cause-and-effect. In a literal sense, we appeared alongside each other in a 2013 collection of essays edited by Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*. Lars applied his media modalities to adaptation; I was beginning to probe relations between adaptation and theorisation. The next time we appeared in the same edited collection, *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (2017), I was looking at adaptation theory and scholarship and Lars was examining relations between adaptation and intermediality.

Future Directions

In a 2020 interview, Lars was asked: “Where do you go from here? What are your next projects?” He replied:

I will go on developing the research that I began 10 years ago with the *Modalities*. I’ve already mentioned that my new study on the modalities of media is about to be published. There is some research left to do on symbolicity, so I will write an article on symbolicity.

(2020, p. 16)

He did just that: received in 2020, the article was accepted in 2021 and published posthumously in 2022. I too returned to and continued my early work on rhetorical figures, cognition, theorisation, and adaptation in *Theorizing Adaptation* (2020).

At the end of the 2020 interview, Lars looked farther ahead:

After this, I will do everything all over again, one more time, trying to put everything together in a major publication. There are so many things that still need to be developed. I think this research will keep me busy for quite some time, maybe until my retirement. We will see.

(p. 16)

While I cannot imagine anybody who could continue that work with the same relentless focus, skill, finesse, and precision, we can learn from and carry forward his model of bottom-up theorisation and his intellectual ecumenism. As Lars pursued his work with a scientific precision I cannot rival, the sciences more generally have been helpful to my thinking about the scholarship: especially the ways in which experimentation can generate new ways of practising, thinking, theorising, and adapting that turn from dogmatic, top-down, “truth” imperatives based in philosophy, theology, and political ideology to discovery models, experimental models, creative models that don’t simply reiterate what we already know and believe, that aren’t afraid to fail and start again, that are willing to adapt and to see things differently. For me, that openness to what is new and different is Lars’s greatest legacy for the future.

Questions and Answers

Dagmar Brunow: Thank you, Kamilla. That was brilliant, and exactly how we had envisioned these talks to be. Such thorough engagement with Lars’s and your own theorizations.

Jørgen Bruhn: There are so many threads to pull in. It was a wonderful lecture. I was sent back to many of the discussions that were caused by your book *Kamilla, the Novel/Film Debate*, which was really central for many of the discussions that we had here, so I was almost thrown back in time and then forward again, it was really great. Mikael has a question.

Mikael Askander: Thank you so much, Kamilla, for a very intriguing presentation and such a good connection to Elleström as well. I had one question during your presentation about a dimension of social life, of sociological aspects, that is a little bit left out in Elleström's theorizing and also in your presentation, especially when it comes to consumption practices: for example, sitting in a cinema theatre is completely different from lying on your sofa reading a novel. Could you elaborate a little bit on that?

Kamilla Elliott: Yes. This was always something that struck me in semiotic and narratological approaches to intermediality and adaptation. With language and grammar, there's a finite set of possible combinations, so it's much more straightforward to come up with a systematic way to categorize it and contain it. This extends to narratology, where there are a finite number of types of narrative points of view and narrator positions. Narratologist Brian McFarlane (1996) concedes in his book on narratology and literary film adaptation that cultural and historical aspects of adaptation, vital as they are to understanding adaptation, do not lend themselves to systematic methodologies since they are infinitely variable, intertwined, multi-faceted, and therefore cannot be codified, categorized, or structured in the same way as language and narrative. So, while he made gestures to their importance through examples, his need to categorize meant that he didn't – or couldn't – fit them into his system. There are also issues with categorising itself. What is a category of what? While semiotic categorisation would figure literature and film as subcategories of semiotics, literature-and-film studies would make semiotics just one aspect of their relations with each other. As you say, the physical spaces in which one reads a novel or watches a film, the sociology of adaptation, and

the industrial practices of literary and film production, as well as the aesthetics that interest many scholars, would be other categories dividing the field.

It's interesting that when Elleström does turn to cultural, psychological, and sociological issues, his system doesn't allow him to address them with the same precision or in the same detail as his semiotic considerations. But that's what I liked about his work: it got a little bit murky precisely because he was becoming more open to other aspects of intermediality.

And yes, as ecumenical as Elleström was in his edited collections and as the leader of IMS, many media scholars have moved on to other theories and methodologies. When I met Elleström for the first time in 2011, I blurted out: "If only you published this theory 20 years earlier, you would have been world-famous". His work was so much more inclusive and finessed than the narratological reading I had to consume as a postgraduate student when narratology was the only approach regarded as "theory" in the field. However, by the time he had published his brilliant semiotic work, Anglo-American adaptation scholars had moved through deconstruction into postmodern cultural studies or were lingering with high-art humanism and aesthetic formalism, both of them equally pitted against "scientific" approaches. When Elleström supported other approaches; when he brought together people in his edited collections and at workshops, symposia, and conferences, he was fostering departures from as well as continuations of his work. I've come across a lot of approaches to academic study, and I'm not nearly as ecumenical as Elleström about them, but I have grown to be more so, in part because of his example.

Heidrun Führer:

Thank you for this talk, fantastic, and I just want to elaborate on the line that Mikael was proposing, because it is part of our ongoing discussion about the future development of modalities in Elleström's sense that you pinpointed greatly and clearly: the predisposition, the mathematical preciseness that is the prototypical model of his model. I totally agree with you, Kamilla, that it's not okay to start with the evaluated left- or right-wing ideologies. Nevertheless, we have to handle the evaluative approach, the political

responsiveness that we have not just in relation to the climate but also in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war, in particular, if you have in mind the results of the war that are caused also by the logical precise thinking of optimizing our action and our thinking in one direction. It is all about gaining power over the other without further ethical concern. We were discussing with Nafiseh and others about the idea of another form of modality that might be called the “social modality” or the “ethical mode”.

Kamilla Elliott:
Heidrun Führer:

Tell me more.

The basic idea is to reject that semiotics are objective due to its “pseudo-descriptive” approach; nevertheless, this is often bluntly accepted when making distinctions between signs that always imply values and most often emotions. I would say we need to be aware that a neutral positioning is not possible, and that is my critique against semiotics. You call it semiology. Elleström would say, “No, semiology is just Saussure” and he makes a dualistic differentiation and says, “I have the tripartite of Peirce”, but with a tripartite idea we are already in a form of evaluative interconnection with the world.

Kamilla Elliott:

Yes, I am totally in agreement with you. In fact, I had a paragraph in this talk that I cut out because I wanted this memorial lecture to honour Elleström rather than to critique his work. But in *Theorizing Adaptation* I look at critiques of so-called “systematic descriptive scientific models” by cultural and political scholars, who argue that there isn’t anything that’s innocent of ideology. It’s clearer to see in high-art humanism, where an elite group of upper-class scholars and artists decide what art has “high” value and seek to impose that on everybody else. But what you also have with scientific theories is equally ideological: the notion that politics doesn’t belong in scientific models when it is already here. When Mieke Bal praised Elleström for resisting “ephemeral academic fashions”, I don’t think she was simply referring to theories that many see as fads and fashions, but a rising tide of attention to political and ideological values and the sense that literature and all media need to play some kind of

role in the world: to make the world a better place and not just be a place for people to do scientific studies under a microscope or be media dilettantes, enjoying a film or a book like fine wine.

Jørgen Bruhn:

It's been a while since I reread the 2010 article, but I remember the discussions we had in the IMS group and in the Lund group on how to define media. It was so important 15 years ago, in particular the idea of turning around and beginning from the bottom up, that's what it's all about: it gives the possibility to, as you said also, describe all possible communicative situations. This you call a stroke of genius, and it was. And I think we felt that way when we were in the room together, that this is actually a new way of working, and Elleström was the one who wrote it most clearly: we were really having the feeling that "Oh! This might solve some questions", and then it has been taking lots of time and effort to get here, and now we have to move on, exactly as you said.

Kamilla Elliott:

If you've seen the musical *Hamilton* there's an amazing song "I want to be in the room where it happens, the room where it happens", and you got to be in the room where it happened. I can't imagine how exciting that was. Because of my background, I don't like dogma and rigidity in academia. What I loved about this system was that it made things so flexible and so free by comparison to every other narratological theory I had slogged through when I did my PhD. I found narratology dead; it was like taxidermy. Nothing felt alive. And then to discover somebody who's doing even more precise semiotics where it's alive and moving was a thrill.

Jørgen Bruhn:

I think this is the challenge that we are facing also because some people find that Elleström's media modalities model is mostly a kind of categorization, and I think there's a big task for us to develop this to be a kind of dynamic, processional, innovative way of thinking, more than just putting things into pigeonholes.

Eleni Timplalexii:

I quite liked the highlighting of analogy in your lecture. Do you think that the contemplation of analogy could hold more secrets for intermedial studies?

Kamilla Elliott:

Eleni, thank you for your question. I have a chapter on category versus analogy in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* and it's being reprinted in a multi-volume set of essays on adaptations. It looks at what category does and what analogy does to media studies, arguing that analogy is much more fruitful because it is flexible, adaptive, and interactive. In *Theorizing Adaptation*, I look at other rhetorical figures and how they reframe the relationship of theorization to categorization in more fluid ways. I also look at how rhetorical figures often have been credited with theorizing power: think of all the poststructuralists who invoke metonymy or the formalists who work with metaphor and metonymy. Rhetorical figures can open up new ways of thinking that takes us away from what we already know and believe and from the limitations of the categorical. In fact, my last IMS talk in 2018 was all about different kinds of difference, not just categorical difference, but also deconstructive difference, postmodern diversity, psychoanalytic difference, and more, by contrast to the reductive flattening out and neglect of similarity in academia. In my book, I ponder how much we've lost in adaptation studies by not looking at the different kinds of similarity propounded by rhetorical figures. After all, adaptation is defined not only by difference or variation but also by similarity or repetition.

Dagmar Brunow:

This ongoing conversation is almost a way of conceptualizing what IMS might become in the future, because it addresses so many questions that we have been dealing with for years and which we will carry with us into the future. This is what Heidrun is getting at with the concept of a "social modality", in connection to what Elleström has been doing and what the Centre is doing. Along with Jørgen leading this group on ecocriticism and the climate crisis, we have Beate's group on news, disinformation, and fake news, and then Nafiseh and I are kicking off a group on cultural memory, the negotiation of memory cultures and contested archives, and we have a group on media literacy. So we are really trying to find ways of connecting these theorizations

with what our university, LNU, is calling “societal challenges”.

Kamilla Elliott:

That sounds great! When I used to visit Europe, I would see far more people using scientific methodologies because that was required to pass exams, to publish, and to be employed and promoted at a time when “science” was considered to be the only way to produce good scholarship, but I have, over the years, seen a change in that and in my own cultural memory and scholarly interests as well. I applied for funding for an interdisciplinary project on adaptation and climate change, which didn’t happen due to Covid. When I spoke with a colleague in environmental science at my university and mentioned adaptation, he said that was a bad word for them – often pitted against mitigation. Mitigation means making changes to emissions and energy use; adaptation means not changing consumption but trying to avoid the consequences of it. In his field, adaptation is the word of despair: “We’re never going to get anyone to mitigate emissions, so we just got to adapt to them”. Then when I explained what adaptation means in the humanities, he said: “Well, I think we do need the humanities in this, because we haven’t been able to come up with any solutions that anyone listens to. We’ve got solutions, but nobody wants to do them, so we need the imagination and the creativity of the humanities to inspire change”. Returning to this discussion, adaptation crosses the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and engages many different methodologies. “Intermediality” is traditionally associated with a more formalist approach, but it is clearly now more diverse and the work you are doing with social modalities derives in part from Lars’s openness to diverse approaches, for which he laid a foundation. He has also laid a foundation for you to move away from his work. If I had known where IMS is now, I would have written a different lecture!

Giulia Bigongiari:

What moved me to work with Elleström’s model was that I thought it was really social in practice, not so much because of the modality system but because of what he defines as “qualified media”, and what he describes as “qualifications”. I think it

is a really smart move in his system to differentiate between modalities and qualification and say that qualification can be vaguer in its definition: more shifting, more mobile. That allows us to say that this kind of social/political qualification shifts according to time, place, and interpretative community, while talking about different media and also while talking about specific media products, whose qualifications can shift even when we're talking about the same media product. I am also curious about what people at IMS were saying about a social modality, because from a theoretical point of view that would mean moving, what I think is usually under qualification, to the modalities theoretical grid, and I think that would be a huge revision of Elleström's model.

Kamilla Elliott:

Yes, that's an important point. There is a difference in how Lars presents the physical media traits and the qualifications of media. When you're reading his work on semiotics, it's meticulous; it's precise; it's mathematical; it's thorough. But when he writes of qualifications, he is less categorically rigorous: his examples are illustrative rather than comprehensive and he doesn't probe them in the same depth or detail. Culture isn't conducive to precision: culture is chaotic; culture is changing; culture is baffling; culture is multi-faceted. Culture is one thing one minute, one thing the next. I like that, but I couldn't systematize it and Lars didn't either.

Beate Schirrmacher:

Thank you. About the way the social and the culture get in there, I recently read artistic researcher Vincent Caers's (2022) dissertation *Umbraphonics* which applies the Elleström model to explore the relation between the musical score, performance, and improvisation. Caers used the qualifying aspects to specify music in a specific socio-historical context and how it is used/what it is used for. The cultural is, as you say, shifting and historically and socially dependent. This is the work one needs to do: the specific analysis. This also ties back to the question that you had, Jørgen, that this model at first glance seems like a pigeonhole system, but if you try to describe specific intermedial relations or a specific media type, you realize the flexibility of it; when it

is put into use and connected to other disciplinary terms, it's so fundamental and general that it can be connected with other categorizations or can be put into any context and then you see the flexibility, and that it is not a pigeonhole system.

Jørgen Bruhn:

Yes, and I also think this is really important and difficult, what we're saying is that the modalities are kind of universal, for lack of better words, whereas the qualifying aspects are culturally specific. But it is more complex. Let's take the sensorial modality: we would think that that should be kind of the same everywhere, in every epoch. That's not how it is, of course. We know that the senses were different in the Middle Ages, where they had different senses than we have now: "the sense of the heart", for instance. In other cultures, they would have other senses as well.

Niklas Salmose:

Hierarchies of senses too.

Jørgen Bruhn:

Hierarchies that change over time, and the same would go for the temporal-spatial category, which sounds objective, but is, like other prototypes, highly variable across cultures. So in a sense, there are historical aspects laid into the universal modalities. It is a pity that Elleström is not here to say what he thinks about this, but at least we can agree that he knew there was an issue with the contextual aspects, but he preferred not to go into them deeply.

Kamilla Elliott:

Yes. And I think we're also dealing with different models of truth. The idea that theory is something that has to be true in all times and places in some ways opens things up, but in other ways shuts things down. It can preclude analysis of cultural variations. This discussion reminds me a lot of Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. His biographical name was Charles Dodgson; he was a mathematician at Oxford University. In the two *Alice* books, he mocks the imprecision of language because he believed that language is a ridiculous way to represent the world (English doesn't conform to rules and has too many irregularities and exceptions to its rules), but that mathematics is much more accurate and universal. Yet, some of his critiques of the nonsensical, illogical nature of

language and representation have become the basis of scientific theories, such as the Red Queen Theory in evolutionary science and the Cheshire Cat Principle in physics. There is tension between different models and paradigms of truth: within mathematics and within semiotics there is much more pressure to be universally true, but by seeking the universal we lose so much knowledge. Theory often lays claim to being “universal” by ignoring the local. If you think about theology, you’ve got many universal theologies but then you’ve got theologies of being only in the present moment. As scholars, we can be in the present moment rather than trying to account for all time and space so that we can speak to our own time and space.

Heidrun Führer:

I just wanted to come back to your talk again, Kamilla, where you outlined that Elleström is interested in media relations, and then you brought in the cognitive account about levels of categorization. We could apply this to Elleström’s different modalities and think of them not as a media product (as a book or a film or a closed entity) but more openly as a performance and in a relationship to the ancient understanding of *mimesis*. You cited critics who oppose mimetic to symbolic representation: I totally disagree on this point. If you go into the original meaning (whatever this means) and Halliwell’s (2002) explanation of the broad meaning of *mimesis*, that is, bringing, repeating, trying to imitate things and to differ; there you have a broad concept that opens up this kind of boxed knowledge and there I can also bring in the social modality. Because it’s not just a relationship between boxed signs, but it’s also a relationship within the sensorial modalities. In the spatio-temporality we have the kind of memory that we have in *inventio* in rhetoric, where we work with repetition schemes and variations, this is the way we make understanding possible, by juxtaposing different objects or signs. So for me, the potentialities are there and it is there even in the modalities, although I think that reducing the system to four modalities is also a form of ideology. I wanted to come back to that.

- Kamilla Elliott:* Yes. There is ideology in what we leave out. There is ideology in the values that we attach to any kind of abstract universal truth. Even the idea that there is such a thing as a universal truth – that’s a value; that’s a cultural position, and it tends to have been promoted by people who are not at all like Elleström: people who are trying to control everybody and silence anybody who disagrees.
- Heidrun Führer:* It’s Mieke Bal who says that theory and method are always ideological, not just cultural theories, and she is a scholar who really traces these things.
- Kamilla Elliott:* Yes, and she is a great guide: much better than I can be because she comes from a background similar to Elleström’s, so her work will be more fruitful in carrying his ideas forward into new contexts.
- Niklas Salmose:* My point is just a comment on the discussion of culture and contexts. What you do in your talk, brilliantly I think, is to position one of the key points that I always discussed with Elleström too, which was this idea of “difference and resemblance”. I think one of the reasons why his modalities are lacking social and contextual content, and in considering the role of reception and the role of the receptor (although he talks a little bit more about this in his new communication model), is because his is a theory of similarity, and bringing in these kinds of social contexts in a theory of similarity would wander much more towards a difference, I think.
- Kamilla Elliott:* That’s a great reflection. Again, with the levels of categorization, at some point similarity and difference start to intertwine and overlap.
- Beate Schirrmacher:* Just adding to this, when you say Niklas, that Elleström’s model is built on similarities, I agree, because it is about the basic, fundamental similarities that all media products share and that is why it gets so basic. But the point which we have to keep in mind is *why* he gets down to these similarities: it is because there he is able to explain how the similarities and the dissimilarities relate to each other, which then gets into focus when we put this model of basic similarities into use, because it enables us to, in his words, consider how there are similarities

between dissimilar media types. The point is to balance between and be specific about what is similar on one level and what is dissimilar on another level, and this is something we have to remember as well: that the model is the most functional when one is aware of keeping this balance and what these basic fundamental similarities enable.

Kamilla Elliott: Very well said. I was thinking that if you applied that to cultural differences, regional differences, racial differences (etc.), a model of looking for similarities *amid* dissimilarity and finding places of meeting and of adaptation might be a fruitful way of applying his ideas culturally.

Jørgen Bruhn: You mentioned earlier your mutual inspiration from Mitchell and early on, we at IMS repeated his maxim many times that “all media are mixed media, but they’re mixed in very different ways”. That’s what this is, in a sense, about. I think this was such a fantastic lecture. I think we’ve got so much to think about. I want to reread your texts, Kamilla. We shall rethink Elleström’s texts also, and all other texts. But first and foremost thanks to you, Kamilla: it was great seeing you. Thanks a lot for contributing.

Kamilla Elliott: My pleasure. This has been an inspiring discussion for me. Thank you so much.

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Introduction to Chapter 4

Basics of Peircean Semiotics and Philosophy of Mind

Signe Kjaer Jensen

In this chapter, João Queiroz discusses how to establish a firm foundation for intermedial and multimodal studies, arguing that to further develop these fields, it is essential to identify and analyse the fundamental problems of the fields, including the theoretical premises, main goals and research questions, the ontological backgrounds, foundational concepts and models, and the academic institutionalisation. Out of these ‘basic’ problems, Queiroz focuses on the ontological level, that is, how to understand the basic nature of intermedial phenomena, exploring and exemplifying the concept of *intersemiotic translation*.

Queiroz explains intersemiotic translation as the “translation between systems that are recognised as systems of different natures” (this volume, p. 79), and it can be understood as a basic mechanism through which signs from one system, e.g. the verbal, are translated into another system, e.g. painting, or more broadly as the way artistic and communicative habits are adapted from one communicative or artistic practise to another. This process is exemplified through the adaptation of one-point perspective from mathematics to visual art and theatrical dance. The concept of intersemiotic translation is further discussed and elaborated in the Questions and Answers section, where several participants attempt to tease out similarities and connections with Elleström’s concept of transmediation. As transmediation and intersemiotic translation relate to different analytical focal points, the first to the transfer of semiotic *content* between media types, and the second to more general semiotic processes, this comparison proves challenging. More concretely, a case study of intersemiotic translation will pay more attention to the translation of *form* than to the translation of *content* (see, e.g. Queiroz & Atã, 2020, pp. 195–208). Important to note is also that this definition of intersemiotic translation differs markedly from the way the similarly sounding term *intersemiosis* is sometimes used in the field of multimodality, where it tends to refer to meaning potential generated from *synchronously* interacting semiotic resources or modes (see the Introduction to this volume).

The theoretical background of Queiroz's chapter comes from Peircean semiotics and distributed cognition. While Elleström also advocated Peircean semiotics as a way forward for intermedial studies, the kind of in-depth engagement with Peirce that is practiced by Queiroz, and his focus on Peircean semiotics as a form of cognitive externalism, is not often seen in intermedial studies, and it therefore deserves a brief introduction here.

To Peirce, a sign is anything that is interpreted as a sign (Elleström, 2021, p. 21). His theory of signs is general and applicable to all types of basic media, not just the verbal, which is one of the reasons why Elleström favoured this theory (Elleström, 2021, p. 22). Peirce's semiotic system is furthermore a triadic system, which doesn't only distinguish between the *sign* (also called the *representamen*) and the *object* that the sign refers to, but also includes the *interpretant*. The interpretant refers to the effect produced by the sign, like the perception or mental image of the sign, or an emotional or behavioural reaction to the sign. The interpretant can even be a new artistic practice that arises as an effect of a sign, as discussed by Queiroz in his example of how one-point perspective (object) inspired the proscenium arch in theatre (the arch becomes a representation, thus a sign, of one-point perspective), leading to the effect (interpretant) of new practices in ballet, here the ballerina in point.

Essential to Queiroz's discussion is also the processual aspects of Peirce's theory. Process philosophy understands meaning as a process rather than as something static (Atã, 2020, p. 9), and in Peirce's philosophy, the emphasis is on "sign action as processes of reasoning and processes of communication" (Atã, 2020, p. 17). One aspect of this processual view is the process by which the interpretant of a sign itself becomes the basis of a new sign, as exemplified by Queiroz when he shows how a ballerina in point can be the interpretant of the proscenium arch, but also the sign which mediates, or stands for, the proscenium arch (now the object) and creates an effect on an audience. In this way, semiosis is dynamic, and the relation between sign and object is never fixed. Interpretants are actually to be considered signs in themselves that point back to the sign that first produced them (Queiroz & Atã, 2020, p. 190).

Queiroz also refers to the idea of distributed cognition, which sees cognition as semiosis and something which is not restricted to neural processes. Cognition is semiosis because our thoughts are shaped by semiotic structures (see Atã, 2020, p. 17). Often when we think to ourselves, we think in words, or some might think in images or music, but we always think in semiotic constructs. The argument of distributed cognition that Queiroz presents here is that semiosis is not restricted to neural processes, neither is cognition, and we use media as *thinking tools* that "complement" our "cognitive abilities" (Atã, 2020, p. 74) and develop and communicate our thoughts and ideas (see also Queiroz & Atã, 2020, pp. 186–188). Once

again, this is exemplified by the way a mathematical idea (the one-point perspective) is transferred to the theatre as the proscenium arch, thus giving new possibilities for thinking about theatrical performances. Both the mathematical idea of one-point perspective, the proscenium arch, and intersemiotic translation itself work as thinking tools that aid the process of thinking, here functioning to inspire creativity and the development of new art forms and genres.

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4 Intermediality and Intersemiotic Translation on Self-Inspection

João Queiroz

This chapter has two interrelated purposes. First, any discussion on intermediality as a programme of research should include a metatheoretical discussion on models and their fundamental components, and Lars was strategically aware of this. Second, I will argue the thesis that *intersemiotic translation* is the default on many scales of observation. Related to this, I will present some ideas about a model that I have developed with several collaborators in recent years, especially with Daniella Aguiar, Letícia Vitral, Lilian Moreira, and more recently with Pedro Atã.¹ This model is strongly influenced by Peirce's cognitive semiotics and by Peirce's mature theory of sign. To be more precise, the model is inspired by what we call Peirce's cognitive externalism.²

Problems

I formulate various problems related to intermediality and multimodality. Some were systematically addressed by Lars, while others were overlooked and remain neglected within the Peircean semiotics community. At this first phase in the development of the research fields, fundamental problems and sub-problems are or should be identified and their co-dependency analysed. First, what are the main general and specific questions addressed by the fields of intermediality and multimodality? My suggestion is that the approaches should be more decisively engaged in the necessary task of enumerating and discussing this issue openly. Second, which are the fundamental open research questions? What are the shared goals pursued by the fields? How do these goals guide research activity?

On philosophical and theoretical premises, questions should include – what theories or theoretical assumptions and concepts provide the premises for intermedial and multimodal research? Where do the necessary assumptions that ground investigation in the field come from?

Moving on to ontological problems and the conceptual building blocks, models, and theories in the fields – what are the primitive ontological

units referred to in intermediality and multimodality domains? What is the metaphysical worldview implied by concepts, theories, and models? This is one of the topics we have given too little attention to. Especially the relationships created between a metaphysical view of the observed phenomenon and the models that result more directly from this. The relevance of this topic should not be underestimated. For Grant Bartley, the editor of the magazine *Philosophy Now*,

a new model always differs from the old in one very significant way: metaphysically. It isn't just about better mathematical descriptions; each new scientific paradigm we adopt make [*sic*] us think of reality itself very differently – sometimes absolutely differently – from the old.
(Bartley, 2019, p. 4)

Any discussion of what might be a good theory about intermediality should dedicate more attention to the metaphysical and ontological domains in which models and theories are elaborated.

The central proposition of my approach is – *intersemiotic translation* is semiosis. Intersemiotic translation is a dynamic process of sign in action. It's a time-dependent process. In several articles, I, along with colleagues mentioned above, have suggested that intersemiotic translation is a cognitive artefact that is metasemiotic, generative, and anticipatory, and we have explored these ideas using several examples of intersemiotic translation. This approach comes from a philosophical standpoint developed across Peircean process semiotics on one side and distributed cognitive science on the other side. According to our view, intersemiotic translation is defined as a semiotic process (semiosis), a communication of sign behaviours, trajectories, dispositions, and constraints. The question, what is intersemiotic translation, is related to (or depends upon) the question – what is semiosis?

A very basic question related to the first part of my chapter is, why should we separate the problems? Our answer – because it enables us to see how problems are interconnected and how they are co-dependent. So that improvements in some levels of discussion may be constrained by improvements or lack of advancement in other levels. We have separated the problems into five levels of discussion: (1) premises, (2) goals of research, (3) building and adjusting concepts and models, (4) defining, observing, and analysing objects, and (5) academic institutional organisation and communication. This is an arbitrary division of levels. They could be arranged differently and there is no reason to assume that this list is complete or exhaustive.

On the first level, we ask, what are the fundamental theoretical entities? An important observation is that the first level of problems should not be confused with terminological problems. On the second level, we ask,

what is the importance of adopting intermedial perspectives or studying intermediality? What are the goals and research questions of intermediality? What are the strategies for pursuing these goals? Level 3 is related to building and adjusting theoretical terms, concepts, models, and theories. What vocabulary should one use for referring to and describing theoretical and empirical entities? How can we conceptualise and systematise concepts and build models? How can we evaluate models and theoretical assertions? How can we compare competing models? At level 4, which can be described as a level primarily interested in methodology, we ask, what are intermediality's objects of research? How can we frame and isolate empirical objects of research? How should we collect and analyse data? Level 5 is about academic institutional organisation and communication. What are the historical origins and seminal works of intermedial traditions? What are some competing narratives of this history? How are intermedial perspectives institutionally organised in communities, departments, journals, and events?

To conclude the first part of this chapter, it is clear that one of Lars's most important contributions is related to the identification of a general problem. The problem that he so attentively pointed out is that there is a lot of confusion about fundamental topics in the field. Among other things, general approaches often mix levels of analysis and levels of description. Lars was very alert to methodological rigour, which he often didn't observe in the field, to a mixture of categories of distinction in classes of analysis. These problems are related to different phases of theoretical activity, to the conception of fundamental theoretical terms, elaboration of theories, identification of problems related to the construction of explanations, and tactics applied to the selection of historical examples. There are many problems in the area and Lars was interested in stimulating a specific kind of research attitude that puts emphasis on methodological and conceptual precision. He had a kind of mission. It is necessary to develop a model, but the elaboration of such a model should not neglect achievements obtained historically. The model should have internal consistency and empirical applicability. It is also necessary to uniformise the theoretical terms. More ambitious than that, the model should incorporate, as an explanandum, the notions of mind, communication, and media in their categorical divisions and subdivisions. The result is a clear interdisciplinary programme of research.

Lars did this work, and he did it very well. But there are of course still many problems left, and I'm just going to point out some of them. A technical problem is that the general protocol, or the general procedures, for choosing analytical categories neglect a technical discussion on ontology. There is no well-structured development that justifies, in logical terms, the irreducibility of classes or analytical categories. There also isn't

a well-structured development that proves or demonstrates the property of completeness of the list of classes or analytical categories. Therefore, the model has no explicit logical and ontological commitments. Underlying assumptions related to the logical organisational classes are accepted too quickly.

Modelling Intersemiotic Translation (IT)

The group I'm coordinating in Brazil, the ICONICITY RESEARCH GROUP,³ have been defending a broad usage of the term *intersemiotic translation* to characterise translation between systems that are recognised as systems of different natures. What I have been trying to do over the last few years is very much in line with Lars's ideas of creating an explanatory scenario regulated by an internally consistent theory, a theory of meaning processes. This theory should also be in line with recent trends observed in philosophy of cognitive science. I agree with Lars on the need to incorporate the notions of mind and communication into the explanations. My colleagues and I have explored, in many papers, chapters, and books (see endnote 1), the idea that intersemiotic translation is semiosis and a cognitive artefact. This first statement is unsurprising from the Peircean cognitive semiotic perspective. However, the proposition that intersemiotic translation is semiosis should also be considered as an ontological and methodological statement, and Peirce's model of semiosis provides an explanatory model of these aspects of intersemiotic translation.

Intersemiotic translation is a cognitive artefact, a cognitive tool, or a cognitive technology that supersedes humans' capacity to break away from previously established styles of thought or conceptual spaces. Among the most important premises of these arguments is this: we are cyborgs, a kind of symbionts. We are coupled to penetrative, and non-penetrative, devices to work better, from motor system prosthetic devices to perceptual devices. But I'm not just referring to these kinds of symbionts, a mix of biological and mechanical, electronic, or digital, devices. We are also cyborgs in the sense that we are connected to prosthetic artificial tools to amplify biological abilities – glasses to make vision more efficient or better, walking sticks to navigate in human urban spaces, old-fashioned maps to localise metro stations, the best networks of interconnected metro stations, or a combination of digital technologies and real-time interactive tools, such as responsive maps. We cannot imagine our ordinary life without some of these tools. These are good examples of non-penetrative cyborg technologies. For David Chalmers (2008), one of the main authors of the Extended Mind Hypothesis, “perhaps the camera of my iPhone can serve as an extended perceptual mechanism” (p. xiv), as probably everybody here knows. But even our bodies, or parts of our bodies, we use as tools,

as thinking tools, or artefacts to distribute complex cognitive processes. We use our own bodies for representing, conceptualising, and reasoning with these representations. As a climber or a dancer, using her moving body to anticipate the movements, marking⁴ is an increasingly investigated phenomenon in distributed cognitive science. Or when we use our fingers to supersize our focus and attention while reading. Indeed, according to this approach, we are embedded in a huge variety of thinking tools and artefacts for several purposes. We use maps to navigate, and notation to freeze our reasoning to visual perception and manipulation and to control complex inferential processes. We use written language systems, which is a very new prosthetic device in terms of human evolutionary history, to extend our memory. We use alphabets, numbers, graphs, and diagrams to represent relations and meta-relations. More trivially, we design and use checklists, tables, pharmacological drugs, and plants, cultivated plants to change our conscious states and increase our attention or to relax. Even space we use to organise and categorise our thoughts and actions. As Andy Clark (2005, 2008) has shown, we are cognitive niche builders, extending the mind into the space to think better. “Mind is out there”, and this is not a metaphor, “the mind is just less and less in the head” (Clark, 2004, p. 4). Although the evolutionary history of this ability or this morphological trait is quite old, we don’t find this kind of niche builders – niches that are constructed by improved cognitive skills and performance – in many taxa. As Kim Sterelny (2003) has suggested, this is a new evolutionary trait, an autapomorphy in terms of evolutionary biology.⁵ While other animals participate in niche construction, it is uniquely within the human species that we observe the powerful, cumulative runaway process of semiotic-epistemic engineering.

At this point, I return to my main working hypothesis – intersemiotic translation is a cognitive artefact. Intersemiotic translation can be described as a pump designed to distribute creativity in arts. We are very inspired by, among others, Daniel Dennett’s ideas about thinking tools and intuition pumps and the general notion of mind as a set of tools (2013) and Andy Clark’s ideas about cognitive artefacts (2004, 2008), but our major philosophical influence has been early Peircean process semiotics and his externalist theory of cognition. Let’s take a quick detour into Peirce’s philosophy of sign processes and go through some of the premises of the so-called semiosis, an active semiotic externalist notion of mind.

According to Peirce’s active externalism, mind is semiosis. Mind is semiosis in a dialogical, materially embodied form, and cognition is a development of available semiotic material artefacts and technologies in which it is embodied. Peirce is an avant-garde distributed cognitive scientist. As David Kirsh argues (2008), “Peirce first mentioned this idea – that people use external objects to think with – in the late nineteenth century, when he

said that chemist [*sic*] think as much with their test tubes as with pen and paper” (p. 297). Semiosis is a concept that describes the most fundamental relations involved in processes of meaning and cognition as opposed to reactive processes. According to many authors, semiosis is the most general description of the internal structure of mind processes.⁶ An important implication of the fundamental premise that intersemiotic translation is semiosis, is that this premise shifts the focus of our explanatory framework from signs to semiosis, to the action of signs. Few scholars have been stressing this aspect of Peirce’s theory of signs. There are many implications related to the idea that Peirce is a process philosopher (Queiroz & El-Hani, 2006; Rescher, 1996), an idea still poorly explored by scholars. Peirce develops his phenomenology, semiotics, and metaphysics around the notion that the foundations of meaning (semiosis) and reality are dynamic and open-ended processes. As Max Fisch (1986) highlighted, the fundamental conception of semiotic is not that of sign, but that of sign in action – “the fundamental conception of semeiotic is not that of sign but that of semeiosis; and semeiotic should be defined in terms of semeiosis rather than of sign, unless sign has antecedently been defined in terms of semeiosis” (p. 330). Semiosis is a dynamic process with signs continuously translating into other signs in time. It means the mode of existence, the mode of being of a sign, is to produce effects, interpretants, which in turn are new signs for new effects or new interpretants. Semiosis is a triadically irreducible process through which a constrained factor acts on cognitive systems or cognitive behaviour because of the mediation of a certain entity or process. The S–O–I triad graphically represented here (Figure 4.1), which are the minimum constitutive elements of semiosis, is but a snapshot of an ongoing process of production of interpretants, which becomes signs for new interpretants.

Sign in a triadic relation is the entity or the process being employed by a cognitive system to stand for something else. The object is something

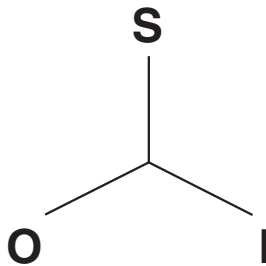


Figure 4.1 The three irreducibly connected terms: sign–object–interpretant (S–O–I). A logical property is derived from its irreducibility: semiosis must be regarded as associated to the interpretant.

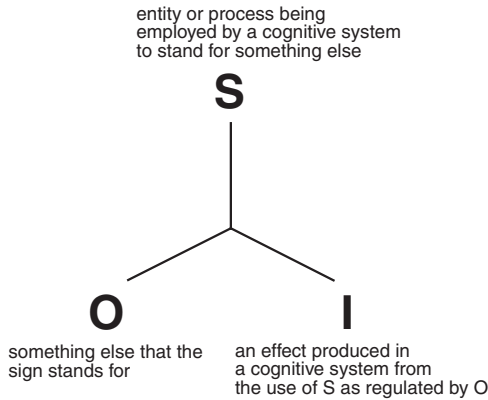


Figure 4.2 A sign is an entity or process used by a cognitive system to represent something else, where the object, not a tangible thing but a dynamic process or another sign/semiotic process, leads to the production of the interpretant within the cognitive system.

else which the sign stands for. And in the case we are interested in here, the object should not be understood as a thing, but as a process or as another sign or another semiotic process. The interpretant is, in effect, produced in a cognitive system from the use of a sign as related by the object (Figure 4.2) It is relevant that semiosis is characterised as triadically irreducible. In an irreducible triad, what brings together all the terms of the relational complex cannot be ensued from dyadic relations. This is important for my arguments, because the relation between the source and target of a translation, in general, is traditionally treated as a dyadic (bi-lateral) relation.⁷

Another consequence of the formal definition of semiosis is that sign, object, and interpretant are viewed as functional roles. There is no intrinsic property that defines their functions. These roles can be taken by virtually any entity or process. The same entity or process can take different roles in different meaning relations, in different triads. The interpretant in a given S–O–I relation can take the role of the sign in another S–O–I relation, for example. If intersemiotic translation is semiosis, and this is the core of my argument, the model of semiosis is the basic explanatory unit for intersemiotic translation. In intersemiotic translation, the semiotic relation, S–O–I, describes how a translation source is translated into a different semiotic system or process, resulting in a translation of targets. There are at least two possible ways of mapping a translation source and a translation target to the S–O–I triad. Either the source is the sign and the target is the interpretant (model 1) (Figure 4.3), or the source is the object and the target is the sign (model 2) (Figure 4.3).

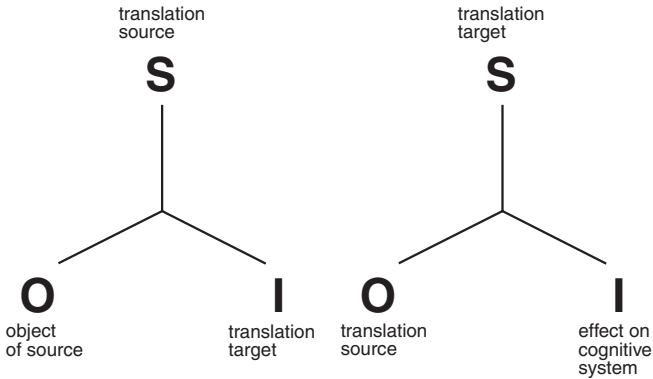


Figure 4.3 Model 1 shows how the source sign mediates its object to determine the target effect—without depicting the target’s impact on interpreters—while Model 2 shows how the target sign mediates the source to determine the effect on the interpreter.

The two models, and I mean to be very emphatic about this aspect, show different aspects of the same phenomenon. I’m not talking about two different kinds of phenomena, but two different views of the same phenomenon. When we use the first model, we focus on the translation source as the sign, that is, the translation source stands for something else, the object. So, the first model describes how, through a translation source, a certain pattern of constraints acts on a cognitive system to produce a translation target. In model two, the sign is a translation target which mediates a translation source, so as to determine an effect on a cognitive system. The second model includes the effect of the target on a cognitive system, as determined by the translation source, through the mediation of the translation targets. I’m going to situate these models in two examples. Both are related to the idea that performance space in dance is the exosomatic embodiment of a problem space resulting from a process of intersemiotic translation. The examples operate on very different scales of observation – trans-individual and historical, involving an entire generation of agents, and within the creative protocols of the musician-composer John Cage and the choreographer Merce Cunningham. A very important premise is that performance space is part of a complex distributed cognitive system which we call theatrical dance (see Atã & Queiroz, 2019a).

The first example is the translation of a well-structured problem space: the mathematics of one-point visual perspective to painting and architecture. This cognitive artefact, invented or discovered in 15th-century

Italy, was applied to the design of scenic spaces for the first time in Teatro Olímpico di Vicenza, designed by Andrea Palladio at the end of the 16th century.

This translation of one-point perspective to scenic spaces radically transformed the relative position of the audience and the performance, leading to the creation of the fourth wall in theatre and the proscenium arc stage, and it produced a cascade of events that created a new distributed cognitive system that we now know as classical ballet. The audience directly faces the stage and views only one side of the scene. This one side is commonly known as the invisible fourth wall of the scene. So, this cognitive artefact of one-point perspective forms the fourth wall into a canvas. As a consequence of the introduction of this artefact, a radically new cognitive niche and a new set of problems were inaugurated. This new system then favours the emergence of new vocabularies of dance movements – a new vertical morphology of movements transforms the dancer into an ethereal figure, which in turn creates a demand for the introduction of new cognitive artefacts and tools. For example, the point shoes to support new vocabularies and changes in the elevation of dance technique. This is typically a causal looping of body movements and an ecosystem of tools and artefacts. In Figure 4.4, this process is visualised in a simple graphic model, which describes the process as a cascade of events where intersemiotic translation of a cognitive artefact, one-point visual perspective in art, especially in architecture, inaugurates a new set of problems or a new problem space in theatrical dance, or a new cognitive niche, the classical ballet.

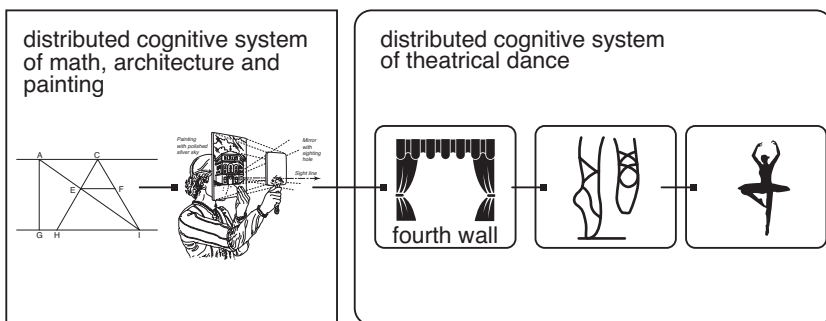


Figure 4.4 What we are observing here can be described as a cascade of events where intersemiotic translation of a cognitive artefact (one-point visual perspective in visual arts and architecture) inaugurates a new set of problems in theatrical dance and a new cognitive niche: classical ballet. Model inspired by Davies and Michaelian (2016).

The next example, working on a very different scale of observation, is Merce Cunningham. Cunningham is one of the most important choreographers of the 20th century. He produced historical innovations in many different domains – syntax composition, motor vocabulary, relation with sound processes and entities, and the performance of space. He used the I Ching, the Chinese *Book of Changes* and other tools as artefacts to introduce chance operation and random effects in dance composition. The I Ching is used by Cunningham as an external methodology for the choreographic creation, a kind of proto-computing tool to explore new problems in dance. To externalise chance procedures, Cunningham distributed the authorship of the process. In fact, many external artefacts were applied to a set number of components, such as the sequence of choreography parts, the sequence of movements, duration and direction of movements, dancers, locations, speed of choreography sequences, and the number of dancers in each sequence. We know that also John Cage was systematically exploring the use of several tools to produce random effects in music a few years before and that Marcel Duchamp had systematically been exploring chance operations as an external methodology in visual arts even before Cage. We are talking about a translation of protocols and procedures, or a translation of problem space, from visual arts to dance through Cage’s music. In our simplified model (Figure 4.5), chance procedures and protocols translated from Cage’s music modify the distributed cognitive system of Cunningham’s dance.

Again, what we observe is a cascade of events based on the intersemiotic translation of a cognitive artefact or a thinking tool. In this case, the chance operation, translated from music through Cage’s protocol and impacting dance in several ways, inaugurates a new set of problems in which the sequences of performers’ actions are radically changed. The hierarchical

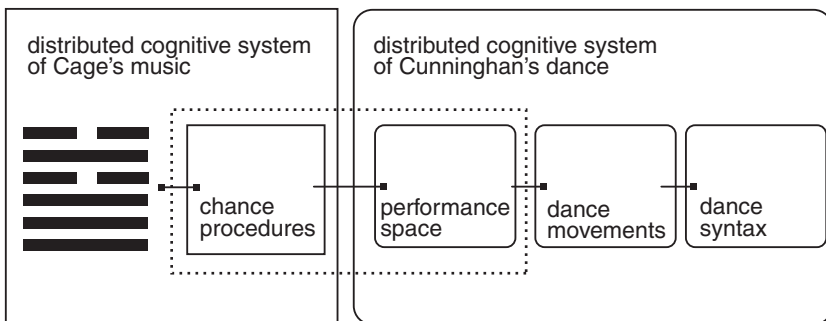


Figure 4.5 Chance procedures, translated from Cage’s music, modify the distributed cognitive system of Cunningham’s dance. Model inspired by Davies and Michaelian (2016).

structure of performance spaces is radically reframed, and the relations between music and dance are reconceived.

At this point, my question is – if our thesis is correct and intersemiotic translation serves as a tool or an artefact to scaffold and distribute artistic creativity, then how does it work? Intersemiotic translations are metasemiotic artefacts in at least two aspects. First, it is semiosis about semiosis, poetry about music, film about literature, and so on. Second, the process of translation can reveal properties of the translation source and target and thus works as a way to investigate and experiment upon semiosis. Intersemiotic translation is a cognitive artefact with an epistemic function of improving understanding of the translation source, its material properties, and about the translation process itself. Intersemiotic translation allows metasemiotic operations of critique and analysis of semiosis itself. As a kind of projective augmented intelligence technique, intersemiotic translation works as an anticipatory and predictive tool, anticipating new and expected events and patterns of semiotic behaviour and keeping under control the emergence of new patterns. We know from so many examples that artists use many strategies to reduce the amount of information and the amount of data at their disposal. From this perspective, intersemiotic translation decreases the complexity of the environment, of the cognitive niche. At the same time, it works as a generative model, providing new and unexpected surprising information or data in a target system, providing competing ideas. Therefore, translation allows the system to generate candidate instances for new experiments. From this perspective, intersemiotic translation increases the complexity of the cognitive niche, of the environment. We have made an attempt more recently, in a very preliminary analysis, of triadic modelling of these processes to enable us to distinguish the properties just discussed, metasemiosis, generation, and anticipation. As stated above, intersemiotic translation is a meta-level semiotic process. This triadic modelling can be seen in Figure 4.6, showing a relation between

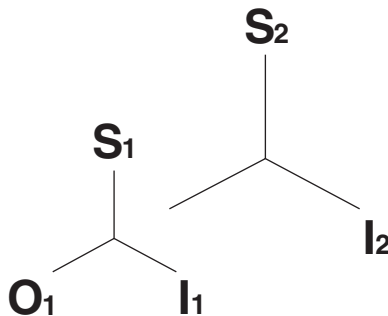


Figure 4.6 Semiosis, (S–O–I)₂, about semiosis, (S–O–I)₁.

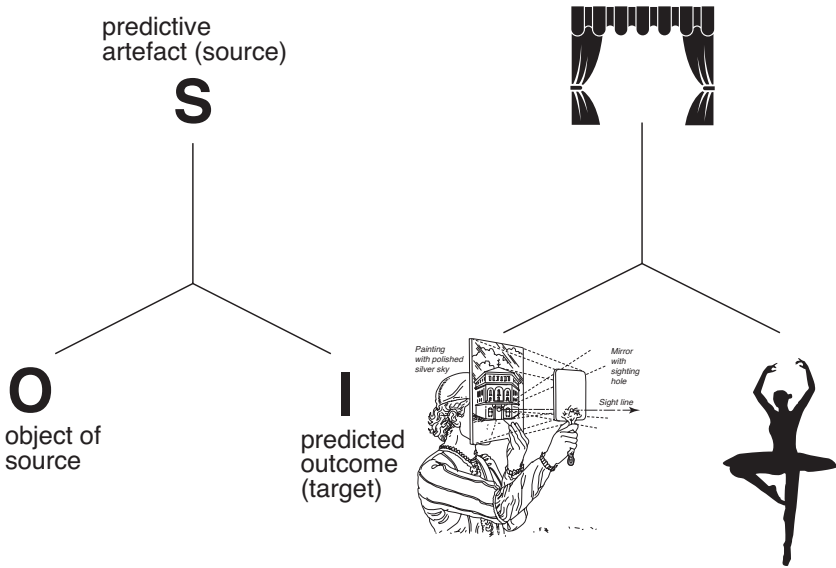


Figure 4.7 The model (1) exhibits the triadic relational irreducibility between the mathematical artefact (visual point perspective), the source of translation, the arc of the proscenium it determines, and the ballerina in point, which the arc determines.

two triads in which meta-interpretation, I_2 , is determined by $(S-O-I)^1$, the source sign in action, in relation to $(S-O-I)^2$, the target sign in action.

This graph model (Figure 4.6) shows in a very simplified way how two semiotic processes are related in an intersemiotic translation. It is a snapshot of an ongoing dynamic process, a twofold coupled dynamic process, $(S-O-I)^1$ and $(S-O-I)^2$. Figure 4.7 shows the proscenium stage as a predictive artefact that embodies one-point visual perspective.

The ballerina in point here is an interpretant of the proscenium arc stage that stands for one-point visual perspective. In this model, the object of the source, a pattern of constraints that regulate sign behaviour, constrains the proscenium arc stage in such a way as to determine the ballerina in point. According to model two (Figure 4.8), the proscenium stage, the object, works as a generative artefact. The outcome, the sign, is the verticality in the morphology of dance movements, the classical figure of the ballerina in point shoes.

Verticality in dance, in turn, determines surprising aesthetic effects, such as the visual effects of likeness and elevation that amazed the audience of the first romantic ballet. It is important to emphasise, as stated earlier, that the two triadic models, which are different views of the same phenomenon,

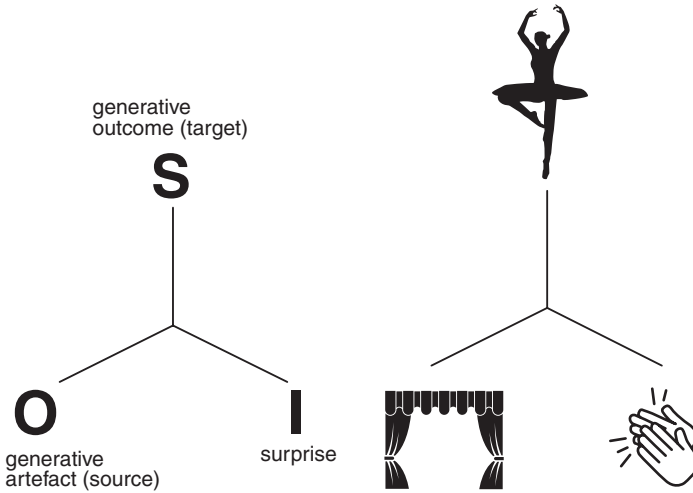


Figure 4.8 Model 2 exhibits the triadic relational irreducibility between the arc of the proscenium, the source of translation, the ballerina in point it determines, and the audience.

suggest a complete relational irreducibility between the components of the triad. They are irreducibly related in a complex that cannot be decomposed into dyadic parts. When talking about translation, or intersemiotic translation, this is always the case.

Some Implications

Let's extract some implications from the ideas presented here. They branch out to a broad array of fields of research, which are of course strongly interrelated, and I will only point out some of them. Our approach suggests a new relationship between the two fields, Intermediality Studies and Distributed Cognitive Science. This relation, hopefully, leads to a new research agenda and a new set of research questions, considering translation as a cognitive artefact to scaffold creative processes in arts, in several time scales. In cognitive science, artistic creative processes are described according to our approach as an inferential, non-psychological process externally distributed and strongly based on the action of different types of cognitive artefacts. In philosophy of arts and history of arts, the attention is not centred on a history of ideas, neither centred on relevant properties, nor in a history of representational attributes, semiotic attributes, and structures of art movements. The attention is centred on transformations

of ecosystems of artefacts that scaffold and supersize the activity of distributed cognitive systems through intersemiotic translation. The attention is centred on transformations of cognitive niches that shape the activity of artists through translations.

We have framed a meta-philosophical discussion according to a bipolar opposition between process and substance ontologies. In our approach, process and substance ontologies regulate models. These regulations impact the premises and goals of research, objects of research, methods of observation and analysis, and even academic institutional communication. We have insisted that the radically, processually, ontological and epistemological position is the only one really adequate to frame several problems related to intermediality and intersemiotic translation. I completely agree with Johannes Jaeger (2018, p. xi) from Complexity Science Hub in Vienna: “Things are abstractions from an ever-changing reality. Reality consists of a hierarchy of intertwined processes”. As a consequence of that, a process framing of intermediality should produce several necessary conceptual positions. Content is not a thing inside media, mostly because it is not a thing. Media are not things either inside or outside the head. Meaning is not a thing inside the head. The relation between agents and media is not an input-output interaction. Interpreters and producers are not equated to individual agents, but agents are distributed semiotic cognitive systems. Translation or transmediation is not a transfer. There are no things to be transferred. Although Roman Jakobson talks about a transmutation of signs, a more precise way to phrase it would be a transmutation of semiosis, the action of a sign, or the process of sign in action.

Something that still needs to be done, is modelling these kinds of processes through a Peircean extended theory of sign, a theory developed after 1903–1904. Another thing that has to be done is the selection of a greater number of historical examples to be analysed through the tools that I have presented here, related to distributed cognitive science and process philosophy. Another possible direction is to describe intermedial processes inside the context of cognitive distributed signs, more precisely regarding phenomena related to cognitive niche construction. One more possible direction among many others that could be listed here, is a more careful investigation of metasemiotic processes as metacognitive processes in several spatial–temporal scales of observation, such as aesthetic and artistic movements. Last, but not least, we should try to understand how generative, predictive, and metasemiotic properties are related to fundamental classes of logical inferences, abduction, deduction and induction, and how these fundamental classes of inference are co-dependent on extended classes of signs.

Questions and Answers

Jørgen Bruhn:

Thank you, João for, in a sense, an extremely clear but also quite complicated and rich presentation. You started out saying, in a kind of gentle critique perhaps of Lars's efforts, that he lacked an ontological or metaphysical underlying idea, and you took us through some winding roads onto a final sketch of how this foundation perhaps could be found. I found this extremely rich and inspiring. I like many things in your presentation, but one of the first things I want to mention is that you had this five-level model of problems. I suppose this is perhaps how you conceive of your research in your group in Brazil, and also how we could think about it in Växjö right? It's a way to move from abstract problems all the way to finding your institutional place and some kinds of power battles, pointing out research issues and objects. I found that quite illuminating as a tool for working.

João Queiroz:

Yeah, in discussions with the group [the ICONICITY RESEARCH GROUP, IRG], we decided to structure and organize the problems. After going over several papers — including ones by Lars, Claus Clüver, Irina Rajewsky, John A. Bateman, and others — we thought that maybe it would be a good idea to break the problems down into different categories and levels: methodological, ontological, epistemic, and semiotic. How are they related? How are they co-dependent? We have assumed that it is a good idea to separate the problems into different levels to understand how one level is acting at another level. Mature empirical and formal sciences do this quite naturally as a crucial part of their research agendas. I'd like to see this as a collective, strongly collaborative effort to develop a set of metatheoretical tools for thinking about intersemiotic translation, intermediality, and multimodality. So, it's kind of a cognitive tool operating within a collective mind — in this case, our research community, I think.

Beate Schirrmacher:

Jørgen said that he recognized this way of thinking and organizing, and I agree with it, but coming from intermediality and from thinking in intermedial

terms, I still grapple a bit with understanding how intersemiosis relates to what I would, in my terms or in Lars's terms, describe as a form of media transformation, where transmediation is one aspect and the representation of how it has been constructed previously in other media types is another aspect. From what you described as intersemiosis, I recognize the transmediation aspect. I also hear from how you described it to Jørgen now that you not only think about signs but you also consider how material, perceptual and spatial-temporal relations, to talk in Lars's modalities, affect this intersemiotic translation process. Still, what is a bit difficult for me is that when you present intersemiosis, it is all about signs. Where do the material and perceptual processes that you clearly consider come into the model? Or is it more like you are looking at different aspects? Could you explain why you use this term of semiosis which mainly focuses on signs, if you are interested in this relation between material aspects and communication?

João Queiroz:

It's a very good question. One big problem is how to relate paradigms, and the relationship between fundamental conceptual terms developed in different paradigms or in different conceptual spaces. Like, for example, relating theoretical terms in semiology, cognitive semiotics or Peircean process semiotics to more common terms in media studies and cognitive science. Incommensurability is a big challenge. How to accommodate conceptual basic building blocks developed in different theories, and how to establish a mapping of different theoretical terms developed in different paradigms. For example, when we are talking about signs and their translation, especially within the Peircean framework, we're essentially dealing with temporal distribution and trajectories. We're discussing something much more connected to time and changes over time, rather than focusing on material things in the sense of physical products or objects in spacetime. But, it's crucial to highlight that this viewpoint operates only at a specific level of abstraction. It's a viewpoint feasible strictly within a particular theoretical framework. Thus, from this

view and at this specific level of description, discussing materiality, products, and tangible things becomes a secondary challenge. In order to incorporate these aspects, we need to make the transition to a different level of analysis and move the discussion to another theoretical framework.

Beate Schirrmacher: Yes. Just to clarify, I didn't ask you to solve this problem of connecting different theoretical frameworks, but my question was to understand what you do, which is a bit different from what I would do with the concept of media transformation. And this you answered, because then it's more about the process and relating and forming the chains of signification between different objects and instances.

Shatha Khuzae: Thank you very much for such an interesting presentation, which really provoked one big question in my mind about how we understand resemiotization and intersemiotic translation. What key issues can arise from understanding the idea of intersemiotic translation as a resemiotization process, or how do we conceptualize intersemiotic translation as resemiotization? Do we have any key issues if we consider intersemiotic translation as a principal idea of resemiotization?

João Queiroz: I'd say that intersemiotic translation is the most general theoretical term, and that resemiotization is a subclass of it. It seems to me that intersemiotic translation is kind of the default across many different scales of organization or description. Of course, this is just a kind of slogan. "Intersemiotic translation is everywhere" or something like this, but I still have to prove that different forms of translation and referential relations in other types of semiotic processes can be described in terms of intersemiotic translation. But I'd argue that intersemiotic translation is the most general phenomenon — it cuts across different scales and semiotic systems and processes.

Shatha Khuzae: Do you think that it is the umbrella term for even resemiotization? Do you feel that the intersemiotic translation is the umbrella term that covers all the ideas of how the transference of meaning from one mode into another, or from one culture into another works?

João Queiroz: Yeah – intersemiotic translation is the most general phenomenon we can observe when we are talking about different kinds of relations between sign processes of different natures. I would say that, for example, intermediality would be conceived as a subclass of intersemiotic translation. But, of course, I should be able to demonstrate this assertion, and I don't have enough time to do that quickly here.

Shuangyi Li: This question is really about the relationship between translation and meaning. Am I right in thinking that intersemiotic translation, in your configuration, is really interested in the dynamic meaning-making process rather than the content of the meaning *per se*? I'm also thinking of its application to say artwork or literature, which we usually tend to talk about in terms of adaptation. I just wonder how the intersemiotic translation in this case may be able to describe and explain the process and changes taking place. It's just very frustrating that we don't get to that level of actually being able to explain artwork and literature. I don't know whether you can just clarify that part? Because so much of what we do in literature and art is about interpreting artworks. I just wonder how this intersemiotic framework can help us understand and engage with specific literary works or artworks?

João Queiroz: What we are currently attempting is to analyze various forms or artistic paradigms from different periods in terms of creative intersemiotic translation. In this explanatory scenario, the emergence of new artistic paradigms, according to our approach, is rooted in the intersemiotic translation of different processes. Some examples with which we have worked include how Gertrude Stein translated Cézanne's proto-cubist approaches into literature; Kandinsky translated Schoenberg's methods into painting; Morton Feldman translated abstract expressionism's formal procedures into music; Paul Klee translated polyphony's music structures into painting; Augusto de Campos translated Webern and Klangfarbenmelodie models into pre-concrete poetry. In my view, a strong research project would involve developing an explanatory framework for understanding how new

creative art paradigms emerge through intersemiotic translation.

Shuangyi Li:

Thank you. I totally see the connection between Dadaism and the question of meaning and problematizing the meaning-making process.

Jørgen Bruhn:

I'd like to just jump in here, because this is, of course, a central question, how to use this. Already Beate, you began trying to navigate between the Lars Elleström model that we are very in love with in Växjö and the model that you, João, suggest here. And I noted that you've used the term of the snapshot, right? The snapshot of the S-O-I (sign-object-interpretant) model. That we should not be led to see this as something substantial, so to speak. We should see it as a current process in a single moment. When you say that you want to investigate, let's say, a new development in the arts, then I clearly see how your model of semiosis will explain some of the material and political stuff, which is crucial. And that would be some of the processes, but wouldn't it be the case that Lars's model of the modalities could also be used to do a snapshot of some important moments where we could pinpoint these kinds of processes? Moving from one level, so to speak, to another, we could try to catch it for a moment. I suppose that would be my way of trying to reconcile your, in a sense, more general model, with the more categorical terms of Lars.

João Queiroz:

Actually, I have discussed this topic with Lars many times. This is typically a topic of inter-theoretical relations and how difficult it is to create a dialogue between basic theoretical terms coming from different theories based on different paradigms and based on different conceptual frameworks. It may be possible to establish a consistent inter-theoretical relationship between the concept of modality and the basic classes of signs. Lars was very interested — as I've been in recent years — in the extended Peircean theory of signs developed after 1903. This might be a new topic — a new research program — aimed at bringing together different basic terms to build better descriptions of specific phenomena. And I'm not sure whether it's possible to connect the notion of

- the sign as a trajectory shaped by time — or deeply dependent on time — with the notion of modality.
- Jørgen Bruhn:* I see what you mean. But this is a challenge we'll have to face. I'm looking forward to working on this.
- Gibran de Souza:* Thank you, João. I really enjoyed your discussion. I'm intrigued by a few things that you mentioned. Because you approach this translation as a distributed semiosis, there are many things involved, but only three main things involved in their interconnection. They expend the process in a way so that is difficult to track everything, but we can get the source of this triangulation. You mentioned something like a media product not being a thing, and content not being a thing. I wonder how your approach would accommodate the idea of transfer of content. For example, you get a musical composition that has a musical structure and express it. What is musical content? The musical structure and the expressive content, right? And then we transfer that into a poem. The whole thing or parts of it, the way it was perceived by the poet. In Elleström's approach, there is a transfer of media characteristics. Let's say the change of the contrast of mood was transferred to the combination and contrast of poetic images, for example, day and night, and then we have kind of a sombre mood in the music, and we have a kind of bright atmosphere. This is just an example of a transfer of media characteristics. And there's a transfer of content too because the content, the musical content, was interpreted. It has changed, but it's still there, there is a transformation. I wonder, how do account for this process that I just described? How does it work in your approach?
- João Queiroz:* We, in the IRG, are describing different processes of intersemiotic translation, for example, from painting to literature. In the case, for example, of the emergence of cubist literature at the beginning of the 20th century, Gertrude Stein is translating some fundamental procedures and protocols that have emerged in a very different system, for example, in painting, as a kind of transformation of diagrammatic structures. These structures are the content itself. But I

understand that we are putting into dialogue very different entities of conceptual basic terms. We are not talking about the transfers or the communication of certain kinds of substances, but a transmutation of certain types of semioses, for example, a visual diagrammatic structure into diagrammatic syntactic and acoustic signs, more related to linguistic and paralinguistic processes. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question. Maybe I should show how we're trying to approach the analysis, but the challenge is that all the translation processes are described using a very different set of theoretical terms. What we're describing is something much more grounded in the notion of transformation over time — of sign classes and semiotic processes.

Gibran de Souza: The idea is not what type of content is associated with signs, but the signs themselves. So, it's the transmutation of musical signs into perhaps poetic signs. And this is another kind of form, but how can you talk about expression by only talking about signs? It is very tricky to deal with expression when you're dealing with signs. And then whatever the sign carries, you're assuming that this is being translated. How can you keep track of what is translated and what is not from a sign?

João Queiroz: Maybe I'm not fully understanding the problem. Let me frame it differently. When we talk about expression and about transfer, we're operating within a specific theoretical scenario. What we are trying to do is to reconceive the process or the phenomenon in terms of a very different battery of theoretical terms and using a very different general methodology to discuss what's happening in an intersemiotic translation. When we analyze, for example, how concrete poetry emerged in the 1950s in São Paulo, we aim to describe how certain classes of signs — or certain types of semiosis — change over time across different kinds of sign processes.

Gibran de Souza: The problem is the interpretant of a sign. If you have a musical sign, the interpretant will be very difficult to track. If I'm not mistaken, you're not interested in that. You're interested in one sign system into another. Is that correct?

João Queiroz: Yeah. I'm interested in how a process of signs — or a class of signs — changes over time into a different kind of sign process. That's the core of our approach, I'd say. I should point out that the theme of the temporal distribution of semiosis has interested me at least since the works I did with Floyd Merrell some years ago (2006, 2008, 2009).

Signe Kjaer Jensen: Do you mean that you're interested in semiotic processes but not in the content?

João Queiroz: Yes.

Signe Kjaer Jensen: How can you study semiosis without discussing content? Semiosis is content.

João Queiroz: That was the problem I was trying to frame in my discussions with Jørgen, and also with Shuangyi Li — it's about inter-theoretical relationships. Part of the discussion — or what I suggested in my presentation as a 'working agenda' — needs to address the metatheoretical challenge of examining the implications of adopting fundamental theoretical terms to explain a phenomenon. The assertion that 'semiosis is content' comes at a cost — both in terms of demonstration and within the context of inter-theoretical relationships — and that cost is not trivial. The notion of 'content' belongs to an explanatory framework that is rooted in a very specific theoretical perspective. If a mapping is possible, I think it resides in the notion of the effects produced by sign processes — that is, in the interpretants. But the more immediate problem is that this notion of interpretant is immersed in a philosophical system that privileges the idea of action, habit, and process and rejects fundamental dichotomies (for example: mind versus matter; thought versus expression; content versus form).

Signe Kjaer Jensen: Okay. The original question that I had, which was also very much related to what Gibran was talking about, is that I'm still trying to situate intersemiotic translation in relation to transmediation and adaptation. And I'm wondering about the term 'translation', because, if we talk about intersemiotic translation as an umbrella term that would encompass what we often refer to as transmediation at IMS [Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial

and Multimodal Studies] and what other scholars might refer to as adaptation, then translation would seem to me to not cover all the aspects of transmediation. After all, translation implies that you want a high degree of fidelity. Translation implies that you want to recreate the same expression again. But here we're back to the whole content discussion. If you're not discussing content, then my question might not even be relevant. But what I was wondering was, does intersemiotic translation also describe, in your model, the process from a target source to an adapted source, from a source text to a target text, what we would normally discuss in adaptation, or does it only relate to the process happening between the 'inner' sign that you have? You have a text, say a Jane Austen novel, and then you interpret that and create an inner sign, there's an intersemiotic translation going on in that process, if I understand the term correctly, and then you create a new film, but a film that does not aim to actually translate, but to do something new. So, there would be an intersemiotic translation going on between the inner sign of what you want to create and then the product that you create, I guess, but there wouldn't be a *translation* process between the actual source text and the adapted text, because the intention is not to translate there.

João Queiroz:

Okay, maybe what I'm really suggesting is that it might be a good idea — or at least more productive — to talk about semiosis, rather than content or the binary opposition between form and content, when we're trying to understand what's going on in processes like translation, remediation, or adaptation. What really matters, perhaps, is the explanatory scenario — the space of theories and models — and the radical implications that come with this way of thinking. What I was saying is that the philosophical scenario we're heading for is much more based on the notion of process than on the notion of things and the molecular substantialist view of meaning as content being transferred from an agent to another agent, for example, from my head to your head now. We're talking about a

previous discussion about where we're going in terms of the metaphysical scenario, the ontological scenario, or the epistemological scenario. The question isn't whether it's possible to transfer — or not transfer — a substance or a structure from a sign to an interpreter. That's not really the issue I'm interested in. The point is that, within the philosophical framework we're working in, we seem to be accepting the idea that we're dealing with agents, things, and a particular kind of transfer mechanism between agents involving certain entities. The purpose was to demonstrate that a discussion of different theoretical scenarios for describing the same process or phenomenon should take place.

Eleni Timplallexi:

Do you adhere to the distinction between the sensorial and the semiotic and how exactly do you respond? Because a process means a different thing than a thing, as you said. So in this process, how do you situate this distinction? Thank you very much.

João Queiroz:

Yes, that's a good point. When we talk about signs, we are referring to sensorial entities and processes. Sign processes are materially embodied. But we're dealing with a different kind of materiality — one that involves not products or static things, but ongoing processes. To discuss the mode of being of a sign is to understand how it becomes materially embodied within a process of transformation. We could establish this bridge. Though the semiotic process is mainly linked to the logical mechanisms governing the relationship between signs, objects, and interpretants, it's crucial to recognize that the mode of being of a sign involves materialization.

Jørgen Bruhn:

I'm coming back to the idea of the snapshot that is sometimes needed in order for us to get some kind of visualization or something to think with, as you would perhaps say. But of course, these are the processes that we, at IMS, would talk about in terms of the materiality, the sensorial, and the spatial-temporal, which could feel like steps in a procedure leading into some kind of semiotic construction of things. This is a simultaneous procedure that is only mapped out in order to clarify it. I think that's the way I see this at least. I think Lars would see it like

this as well, that it's an artificial way of dividing something which is actually organic and simultaneous. I think that's also the problem that we're having here. We're speaking in a language that proceeds in time in order to talk about processes that are, in a sense, as close to timeless as they can be.

João Queiroz:

We're talking about a simplified model of a dynamic, multi-level phenomenon that unfolds over time and involves multiple dimensions. What we are discussing are models — simplified ways of observing and describing complex phenomena. The issue I've tried to shed some light on here concerns models — and competing models. What I've been suggesting is that an important part of our discussion should take place within a controllable meta-theoretical domain.

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Notes

- 1 Some publications include these studies (Aguiar et al., 2015, 2018; Aguiar & Queiroz, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Atã & Queiroz, 2019a, 2019b; Moreira & Queiroz, 2022; Queiroz & Aguiar, 2015; Queiroz & Atã, 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020, 2023; Queiroz et al., 2021; Vitral et al., 2016).
- 2 The definition of cognitive externalism asserts that mental contents, such as intentional mental states or mental states with an “aboutness”, are, in part, located in the environment. This stands in contrast to internalism, where mental contents reside within the intrinsic properties of an internal mind. According to Peirce's cognitive externalism, the mind is embodied in signs-in-action that are spread across time, representing future-oriented tendencies. Cognition is materially driven by the exosomatic action of signs.
- 3 <https://www.instagram.com/iconicitygroup/>.
- 4 In Perissinotto and Queiroz (2023), we explore marking-for-self – a thoroughly examined phenomenon in dance – as a metacognitive and diagrammatic process, incorporating Peirce's cognitive semiotics and metacognitive studies.
- 5 An autapomorphy is a distinctive trait unique to a particular group or species, serving as a defining feature that sets them apart from others. It plays a crucial role in phylogenetic analysis by helping identify and characterise taxa within the broader evolutionary context.
- 6 In a series of articles from Peirce's youth (see Peirce, 1984, pp. 193–272), within the context of a set of anti-Cartesian theses, he already asserts that thought is inseparable from signs. Taking a more radical approach, Peirce suggests that

signs are not merely conveyors of meaning but are essentially constitutive of our mind.

- 7 The application of Peirce's triadic model of semiosis to the relationships between translated-translator-interpreter was initially proposed by Stecconi (1999), and more recently by Queiroz and Aguiar (2015) and Queiroz and Atã (2018a, 2018b, 2019). Among the authors who consider Peirce's model of semiosis appropriate for translation studies are Marais (2018), Gorrée (1994, 2005, 2007), and Jeha (1997).

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Introduction to Chapter 5

Comparing Intermedial and Multimodal Vocabulary

Signe Kjaer Jensen

In Chapter 5, John A. Bateman starts from Lars Elleström’s goal of bringing intermediality and multimodality closer together and his observation that “it is a matter of priority to straighten things out as far as core concepts and basic terminology are concerned” (Elleström, 2010, p. 13). Bateman addresses this ‘straightening’ out by doing a close reading of Elleström’s media model and comparing it to the model developed by himself along with Janina Wildfeuer and Tuomo Hiippala in *Multimodality: Foundations, Research and Analysis – A Problem-Oriented Introduction* (Bateman et al., 2017). As terminology varies between intermedial and multimodal scholars, this introduction will attempt to provide a background for reading Bateman’s chapter by clarifying the most important concepts.

Bateman et al.’s model centres on the concept of the *semiotic mode*. This concept is widely used in social semiotics and similar approaches to multimodality (see the Introduction to this volume), but with varying definitions. According to Harmut Stöckl, mode “is the most central concept in multimodality, at the same time, however it is perhaps hardest to pin down” (2019, p. 45). Similarly, Theo van Leeuwen considers the use of the term ‘mode’ in multimodality as ‘elusive’, lacking clear definitions or specifications of the properties included in the definitions (2022, p. 52). Bateman et al.’s model aims to tackle this elusiveness by putting forth a definition of semiotic mode which is unique in the field of multimodality (Bateman et al., 2017, pp. 16–19, 112–113). In this definition, a semiotic mode is a material resource for creating signs, such as written language, moving images, or music, which is used and understood in accordance with social habits and conventions. More specifically, a semiotic mode in this definition consists of three strata: (1) a material level, (2) the *form*, which is comparable with grammar and regulates how signs are constructed and combined, and (3) discourse semantics, which guides interpretation by specifying the communicative context and associated conventions (Bateman et al., 2017, pp. 113–117). Important to note is also the concept of *mode families*, which applies to modes that are very similar in the two

strata of form and discourse semantics, but which differ in their materialities, such as written and spoken language (Bateman et al., 2017, p. 122).

Bateman et al. further use the term *canvas* to refer to materials that can ‘carry’ semiotic traces, such as a laptop which can carry both written text and moving images because it supports the materiality of these semiotic modes (2017, pp. 101–110). As Bateman argues in this volume, the canvas is comparable to Elleström’s concept of *technical medium*, while the material stratum of a semiotic mode is comparable to Elleström’s three pre-semiotic modalities: the material, sensorial, and spatiotemporal (for an explanation of Elleström’s concepts, see the Introduction to this volume). Bateman further compares his notion of semiotic mode with Elleström’s *basic medium* (which is characterised by the three pre-semiotic modalities and the semiotic modality). The concept of *medium* is defined by Bateman et al. as a socially and historically conventionalised combination of semiotic modes (Bateman et al., 2017, pp. 123–125), which Bateman compares to Elleström’s concept of *qualified media*.

Closely related to the concept of the semiotic mode is the idea of semiotic choice. Semiotic choice is also a recurring idea in multimodality, which emphasises the design behind a communicative entity. It is essential to Bateman’s argument in this volume to distinguish between noise and ‘material regularities’, that is, signs which are intentionally constructed by a sign producer. This distinction lies behind Bateman’s critique of Elleström’s concept of *media product*, which he finds to be too broad and to encompass entities that, according to Bateman, are not *designed* as communication and therefore do not showcase any active semiotic choices being applied to a materiality. As implied, this distinction between noise and signs is also related to the concept of intentionality, which, like the concept of media product, is further problematised and elaborated on in the Questions and Answers section.

Finally, Bateman et al. (2017) consider *textuality* to be a property of *texts*, which are defined as:

A unit that is produced as a result of deploying any semiotic modes that a medium might provide in order to produce a particular and intended structuring of the material of the medium’s canvas so as to support interpretation by appeal to those semiotic modes. That is, expressed more simply, a text is what you get whenever you actually use the semiotic modes of a medium to mean something.

(2017, p. 132)

That is, a text is a material and communicative artefact that is the result of semiotic choices in semiotic modes. Consequently, ‘text’ here is comparable to Elleström’s notion of ‘media product’.

While this introduction and Bateman's chapter itself make many comparisons between Elleström's concepts and the concepts suggested by Bateman et al., it is important to note that while these comparisons aim at enhancing interdisciplinary dialogue, they do not mean that two terms can be used interchangeably. Both the concepts suggested by Bateman et al. and the terms suggested by Elleström are based on broader theories and contain nuances that are not immediately translatable to the other field or theory (for a short discussion of this, see Jensen & Schirmacher, 2024, pp. 7–9).

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5 The Mutual Complementarity of Lars Elleström's Model of Intermediality and Current Approaches to Multimodality

John A. Bateman

This chapter will focus on several complementarities that I perceive between Lars's model of intermediality and some of the work that we've been doing with multimodality over the past 10 years. I first came into contact with Lars's model when I was invited to the Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS) in 2016. It struck me then rather forcefully that the broad sweep of work on multimodality that I was familiar with had said rather little about *media* and, what it had said, was arguably not the most rewarding. Conversely, the work on media that I saw at IMS had said rather little about the details of what we would consider *modes* in the multimodality tradition. Going through both bodies of work more systematically I found that there were many questions which appeared similar or parallel across the two orientations. On the one side, one would ask questions about media while, on the other, we would ask exactly the same questions but directed towards mode instead (see Bateman, 2017).

Many of the distinctions that Lars was taking considerable pains to pull apart and define clearly were consequently distinctions that we had been finding important from the perspective of multimodality as well. Similar kinds of problems were arising in both areas and so it was natural to attempt to go further into these complimentary positions. It was, however, also very important to remember the different origins of the approaches. Work beginning with intermediality often started in literary studies, overlapping with media studies; work beginning with multimodality often started in sociosemiotics, and (functional) linguistics and so overlaps with semiotics and discourse analysis. The theoretical challenge – and this is one which I think Lars was also focusing on – is then how to characterise modalities in media and media in modalities, in ways that could do justice to both theoretical orientations. Crucially, it was not that the two approaches were simply saying the same things in different words, but rather that the focus was different in each case, and so offered something which would be very positive to leverage off. What I wanted to push further was to find

sufficiently fine-grained descriptions so that we could engage with complex media artefacts and performances in detail – while establishing just how to do that methodologically along the way.

It's useful to take some starting words from Lars here, who sets the scene very well. His first publication of the model from 2010 appeared quite a while before I was familiar with his work, so his observation there that the orientations of intermediality and multimodality have “surprisingly seldom been related to each other” (Elleström, 2010, p. 13) was quite accurate. He already saw then that there *should* be such references because some of the questions were so overlapping. He says it quite clearly: “since it is a waste of intellectual energy to develop two closely related research fields separately, it is a matter of priority to straighten things out as far as core concepts and basic terminology are concerned” (Elleström, 2010, p. 13). This is what I will try to continue in this chapter.

I will also be critical, however – although I think this should be in a sense that Lars hopefully would have appreciated. I'll start with his assessment that it is a “matter of priority to straighten things out as far as the core concepts” (Elleström, 2010, p. 13) because this has still not happened with respect to combining intermediality and multimodality. I will suggest that in the framework of Lars's model, there are still some areas where basic dimensions need to be pulled apart more in order to consider what is going on. This is going to be my main concern here, to say why and where those areas are and how we can refine them.

Although I have been finding all of the distinctions that Lars was making extremely important and meshing well with some of the thoughts that we were having in multimodality, I have also often been left rather frustrated with the actual analyses Lars offered as examples of his framework in action. And this was the origin of many discussions that I had with Lars over the years. I hope that they were received in the way they were intended since it was only the huge complementarity that I was seeing that made it worthwhile engaging at that kind of depth with the two approaches. For a long time, it wasn't clear to me just why I was frustrated with his analyses. But now I think it was due to just those areas where I find that things need to be articulated in more detail for the two approaches to get the most out of each other.

So, what are those areas?

- First, I'm going to suggest that what's critically missing is a thorough conceptualisation of *textuality* and its relation to the rest of the model. This might sound strange because, in our disciplines, we are always working with texts. However, as far as I can see, *text* is not conceptualised as a first-class theoretical citizen in Lars's framework. So, although we talk about texts, it's left a little open with respect to how it fits as a concept.

- Second, also missing is a robust notion of *discourse*. In the multimodality perspective I have been working within, this is really the basic mechanism by which textuality is performed to enact texts and so, without it, there will be places where something will appear to be missing.
- Third, there are several gaps in how *materiality* needs to be related to textuality and how it can be made effective methodologically for analysis. Here, again, we'll see that there are many overlaps to draw on. So it's a question of fitting the available pieces together to obtain a more complete view.
- And finally, further discussion is needed of the relation of the model to the *social* – I will be describing *semiotic modes* as social habits and *media* as social institutions. Both fields need, I think, to make this relation to the social explicit.

Many of these issues are mentioned by Lars, but the question is where precisely they enter into the theorisation and with what level of detail? The method I'll adopt will be to carry out a fairly close reading of the position set out in Lars's model; I'll base this primarily on his 2021 *The Modalities of Media II*, but I'll also use some of the observations on the model set out in Jørgen Bruhn and Beate Schirrmacher's (2022b) excellent textbook. Furthermore, I'll be reading the intermedial constructs through the principles, categories, and relationships which I have been developing with colleagues, particularly as given in our textbook *Multimodality* from 2017 (Bateman et al., 2017).

Defining the Communicative Situation and Incorporating the Social

Let's consider the notion of communication in the two models. I think it is necessary when dealing with a model of the depth and degree of detail as Lars's model to go into the essential foundations, and the nature of communication offers an important place to start. Lars took the view that the notion of 'medium' should always be placed centrestage (Elleström, 2018, 2021, pp. 9–14).

I think it was in Copenhagen in 2018 when I first saw Lars present his communication diagram (Figure 5.1; Elleström, 2018, p. 282). It already disturbed me then, and we had a certain exchange of words about it. I'm not sure if he got quite why I found it problematic. One reason was that it seemed to be going back to Saussure and an essentially *transmission*-based view of what communication is. This metaphor has a long history, but even though it has been updated a little by people like Jakobsen, it has also been extensively criticised over the years. So my immediate concern was: why would we still want to work with this kind of transmission model?

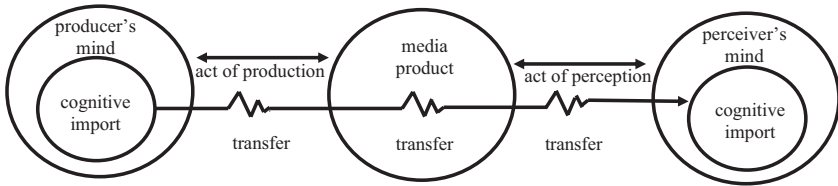


Figure 5.1 A medium-centred model of communication.

Note. Elleström (2018, pp. 269–293).

This was something that Lars was of course well aware of. He appeared to take this model as a foundation nevertheless because he took it as constituting what he considered to be “the smallest and fewest possible entities of communication and their essential relations” (Elleström, 2021, p. 10). So the model was meant to be suggesting a minimal bedrock. However, I’m going to argue that this medium-centred model does *not* yield a minimal model. Instead, one has a fragment of the whole picture that is not yet functional for communication. The model here needs to be fundamentally re-configured in order to do the work that Lars wanted it to do. So, let’s focus in on this to make it clear what I mean.

First, I’ll go through the central concept in the model, Lars’s notion of media products. There are several important points of contact with the view from multimodality here, and I will try to maintain these throughout. We see it already when Lars states that “perceiving something as a media product is a question of being attentive to certain kinds of phenomena in the world” (Elleström, 2021, p. 15), something which multimodality would agree with. Similarly, “media products are all material in the sense that they may be, for instance, solid or non-solid, or organic or inorganic, comparable traits like these belong to the material modality” (Elleström, 2021, p. 20). This is, again, something which multimodality would also commit to. But, at the same time, the transmission idea is also present, “my suggestion is to use the term ‘media product’ to refer to the intermediate stage that enables the transfer of cognitive import from a producer’s to a perceiver’s mind” (Elleström, 2021, p. 13).

I believe these two distinct strands, media products as material phenomena in the world and the communicative process, need to be separated to achieve a more robust model.

How, then, might we characterise communicative situations from the ground up with genuinely minimal assumptions? I’ll adapt the discussion and examples given in our *Multimodality* textbook (Bateman et al., 2017), to provide a further basis for discussing Lars’s model. In the textbook, we start with the interlinked notions of *material* and *traces*. Without traces in a material, there is nothing for semiosis to do. Although this matches well

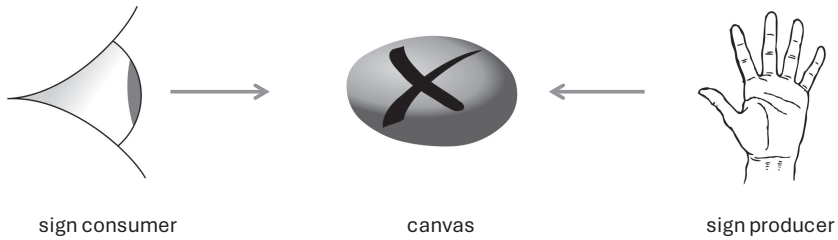


Figure 5.2 The essential roles constitutive of a communicative situation; the cross on the ‘pebble’ in the middle represents the traces to be interpreted, while the pebble itself is the ‘canvas’ carrying those traces.

Note. Bateman et al. (2017, p. 86). Copyright by the author. Reprinted with permission.

with Lars’s focus on materiality, we have to go further and specify this aspect even more because it is clear (from the multimodality perspective at least) that it is not just *any* trace in *any* material that is relevant. This means that the constructs of material and trace are not yet minimal. To characterise this further, we need to define certain roles with respect to the material and traces (Figure 5.2) (Bateman et al., 2017, p. 86).

First, we need the role of a trace itself and a carrier, or *canvas*, of the trace. This semiotic constellation gives us something which can be engaged with semiotically. However, we also need a role for a *sign user* that does the actual engaging with materials and traces through any kind of perceptual access, and a role of a *sign producer*, someone who made the traces. All three roles are essential as otherwise there’s nothing communicative for semioticians to get started with: it is this role-constellation of sign producers and sign users with respect to some traces in a material that constitutes the minimal requirements for talking about communication.

This constellation necessarily entails some further details of its own: the fact that they are all roles is itself crucial. They are roles that can be taken on and put together in very different configurations and, thereby, distribute their respective ‘tasks’ over entire groups of potential *role bearers* (Figure 5.3). In other words, within such groups, some role bearers may be more concerned with making traces, some with perceiving traces, some entities are being treated as traces, and so on. The roles are only defined with respect to such communities: that is, it’s a social situation. And I think, as many positions in various philosophical or other orientations to communication emphasise (e.g. Habermas, 1981), that without the social aspect, without the community, there isn’t much hope of language and communication getting started. So this needs to be ‘hardwired in’ in order to get things going. In short: *We have to already be working within the social – a community of potential role bearers.*

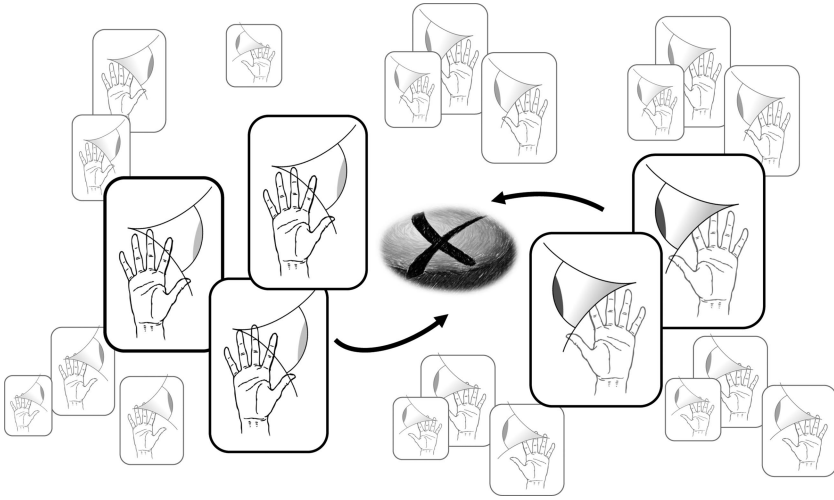


Figure 5.3 Communities of role bearers constitutive of any communicative situation; actual role bearers in any communicative situation are always drawn from the background of the relevant community.

It also follows from the nature of these basic ‘components’ of communication as roles that they can be put together in many ways, each giving rise to different kinds of communicative situations. Let’s take the medium of film as an example. There are a whole bunch of agents involved in the production and reception of film who are engaged with producing traces. Moreover, there are also a whole bunch of other agents consuming and engaging with the traces produced; and (normally) not making traces themselves. We can rejuggle this for all sorts of communicative situations that are all variations of the basic redistribution of roles and those roles’ presupposition of corresponding communities. Take, for example, the situation for improvised dance (Figure 5.4), where *the traces are made by the bodies themselves*. As a consequence, we can see that the roles are freely movable and combinable.

This generic view of communicative situations also gels well with some of the ideas that Lars developed. We see this with the concept of media product, “every single display through a technical medium constitutes a specific media product” (Elleström, 2021, p. 37). That is: the actual media products are mediated, e.g. by screens, each time they are instantiated and so are unique. However, considerably less resonant with the communication model set out above is the continuing role given to transmission. Lars continues: “Not even a written text is a media product in itself; it is only when its function of transferring cognitive import among minds is realised that it can be conceptualised as a media product” (Elleström, 2021, p. 16). This echoes the idea that it is only in the head of an interpreter that a text exists and, unless some material is engaged with, there is no text.

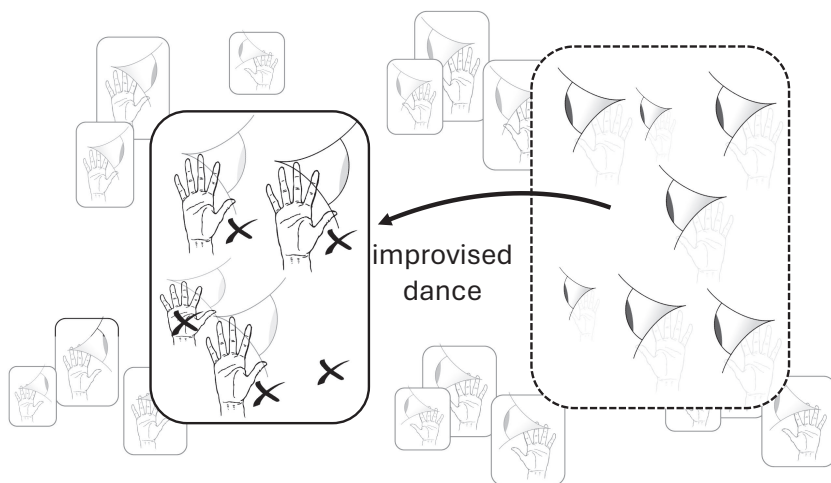


Figure 5.4 Communities of role bearers in the communicative situation of improvised dance in which there are typically many viewers and the sign-makers' own bodies offer the canvases in which traces are made.

I think this position is in many respects too extreme. I would suggest that a necessary conceptual modification is for us to move away from the transfer model inherent in the reliance on “transferring cognitive import”. This cognitive view is no doubt relevant when considering many aspects of actual reception processes, but I’m going to complement it with a *social* view, where communication is considered from the perspective of shared alignment to specific material traces among a community of sign makers or sign users. This is how the function of communication is constructed within our multimodality view and it ‘predates’ in an important sense any individual role bearer’s engagement with some material. Particularly important to note here is the fact that communities can be heterogeneous, i.e. exhibit rich internal structure. Such variation has to be part of the model, inherently and indissolubly. ‘Readers’ may then only be idealised to the extent supported by reading positions within communities of potential role bearers. Roles can consequently be distributed freely within a community, but always within the constraints of social structure, knowledges, skills, and all of the things which we would expect from knowledge, power, and their applications.

Media Products

I think that one of the things which stopped Lars from developing this aspect of communication further in his model was that his account had already both undershot and overshot his target. On the one hand, leaving

out the social constitutes a substantial problem; on the other hand, the model also overshoots its target by trying to include too much within the notion of a media product. Lars says that media products are not only of the kind that we would normally think of, like written texts and road signs, but also a collection of entities such as: “nudges, blinks, coughs, meals, ceremonies, decorations, clothes, hairstyles and makeup. In addition, dogs, wine bottles and cars” (Elleström, 2021, p. 14). In one sense it’s good to be general, but the things you can say about such general entities can themselves become restricted simply because the objects picked out actually have little in common; this means that the generalisation becomes counter-productive. Lars says that really anything can be thought of as a media product, as long as it’s brought into the communication. And so, as he writes:

producing a media product does not necessarily mean fabricating it materially. Fingerprints presented in a criminal trial are evidently produced by the prosecutor not in the sense that she materially fabricates them, but in the sense that she gives them a communicative function by placing them in the context of the trial.

(Elleström, 2021, p. 15)

All that is required in order to have a media product is, “a material entity that has the capacity of triggering mental response” (Elleström, 2021, p. 19). From the perspective of multimodality, this is far too broad because we end up lumping together a rather heterogeneous collection of things which are semiotically very different from one another. Generalisation concerning this collection of diverse entities is then inherently limited: in fact, what is left is little more than to say that the entities concerned can be interpreted – which is not to say much more than they can be signs. Following Peirce, anything can be a sign if you treat it as a sign. This means that one *can* consider generalised sign functions such as iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity, just as Lars does, but there is nothing specifically communicative about this yet. This means that Lars’s view of media products can only be maintained at the expense of moving us out of the realm of communication and communicative situations.

Not everything that is used in communication is *inherently* communicative. Of course, you can treat a fingerprint as a sign (for example, being indexical of the culprit), but it is not *itself* a communicative entity; it wasn’t constructed by a sign maker in order to communicate. In multimodality, we’re not so much interested in what *can* be brought into communication, but in *how* communication does any such bringing in. Think again of the cross on the pebble used in the communicative situation in Figure 5.2; in the case of fingerprints, what we’re doing is throwing away the trace and

only interpreting the pebble, say, concluding that the pebble has been in the ocean for a long period of time, based on its polished surface. This is a perfectly respectable activity; it is simply not concerned with a *communicative* event.

Semiotic Modes: Materiality and Discourse

This means that if we were to focus on the fingerprints as our main point of interest, what we end up asking is: what can the *carriers* of traces be? What kind of things can be the pebbles on which we inscribe marks? But this can be anything, which leaves us with a far too heterogeneous basis for theorising. This appears to resonate with something from Bruhn and Schirmmacher (2022a), where they say: “There is not much point in asking what a medium is” (2022a, p. 9). This is true because it can be anything, any old pebble. Far more interesting is their question: “How do material objects facilitate human communication? And how do the material aspects of medium shape what is communicated?” (Bruhn & Schirmmacher, 2022a, p. 9). For this, we need to talk about the properties of the traces, which requires that we go back to our overall communication model and ask about the role and organisation of traces within that model.

We do this by developing the communication model further and incorporating the notions of *semiotic mode* and *shared alignment*. Whenever we have material being used communicatively by a community, we are concerned with efforts towards achieving a shared alignment to traces made in that material. This is what communication is. And so it becomes a sensible and necessary question to ask further: How does this work? What is involved and presupposed by some process of achieving a shared alignment with respect to traces? The answer to this, from the perspective of multimodality, is that such a process comes about by the *instantiation of semiotic modes* as forms of embodied practice. So we need to go more deeply into what allows this to occur: what makes traces (of any kind) operate as something to which a shared alignment can occur? To do this, I'll use the model and diagram (Figure 5.5) of semiotic modes set out in Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala (2017, p. 117).

We start off at the bottom of the diagram with material, shown in the lowest, innermost circle, together with some traces in that material, shown as our cross on a pebble from above. In order to be able to draw on such traces for communication, a community must use them in certain regular ways, i.e. certain regular patterns must be made that support qualitative classifications as exhibiting differences. That is: the almost infinite range of potential material variation is reduced in terms of equivalence classes. Typically, we can classify such classes using standard semiotic tools, such as the construction of paradigmatic and syntagmatic descriptions. This

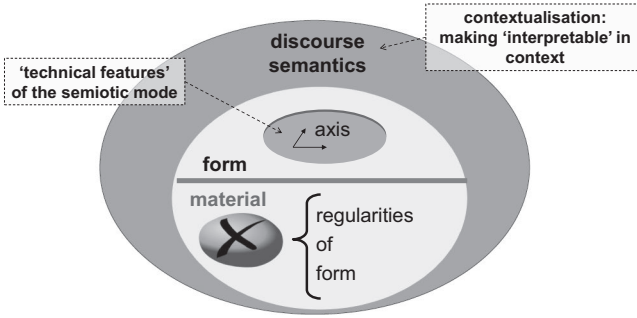


Figure 5.5 A graphical overview of the nature of semiotic modes.

Note. Bateman et al. (2017, p. 117). Copyright by the author. Reprinted with permission.

gives us a starting point for a semiotic mode: there is something that may be interpreted and which is intended to be interpreted. The next and, for current purposes, the final step is then given by the outermost circle in the diagram, that of discourse semantics. This is where we place the conventionalised interpretation principles necessary to relate qualitatively organised material traces to the contextualised interpretations of those traces. This is our definition of what a semiotic mode is. Any semiotic mode has to exhibit these properties; this is how physical traces can be made to function as communicative entities.

One of the main motivations for such a model of semiotic modes is the kind of practical guidance the model gives for concrete analysis. For a brief illustration, I'll use a particular fragment from a piece of concrete poetry from Guillaume Apollinaire (1914) shown on the left of Figure 5.6. Consider the situation that this is our 'data' and we want to consider how to analyse this from the perspective of multimodality. That is: multimodally and methodologically we ask how this is to be addressed in terms of semiotic modes. The methodological question for our analysis is then always the same, which is why we can talk of methodological principles. That question is simply: *which material regularities are claimed by which semiotic modalities?* To answer this, we can use the semiotic modes to methodologically *slice* our object of analysis. In the present case, we have a shape that is meant to suggest a tie (but which may of course also fail to do so: there is no requirement in our model that interpretations are always successful), and we also have the physical trace of a poem, which is saying something in words. These two slices of material are controlled by two different semiotic modes as suggested in the figure: that is, they make use of material in very different ways. Now, we've characterised rather precisely how we can pull information from the material traces using the semiotic modes.

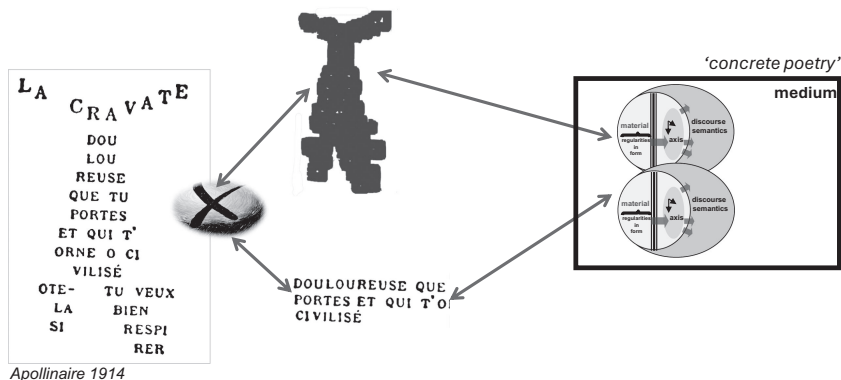


Figure 5.6 Using semiotic modes to 'slice' materiality.

We use the term *canvas* to refer to those particular aspects of materiality that are necessary to support the qualitative distinctions that some specific semiotic mode requires (i.e. controls or takes responsibility for). So material in general might be able to do all sorts of things, but each semiotic mode engages with the material available in only the specific ways it requires. That's why one can have written language in many different materials – because several types of material supply enough of the distinctions that the canvas of the semiotic mode of written language requires. This view also has certain connections with aspects of Lars's model, particularly concerning his notion of the technical media of display. As he writes:

The distinction is needed in order to demonstrate the difference – and mutual interdependence – between, for example, what one construes as a piece of music (a media product) and the sound waves emanating from a music audio system (a technical medium of display).

(Elleström, 2021, p. 36)

Here we have the difference between the canvas in a semiotic mode of music, and the sound waves that make up the broader material, and precisely because the semiotic mode has a canvas, it tells us what parts of the material we can ignore. In Lars's terms, "perceiving something as a media product is a question of being attentive to certain kinds of phenomena in the world" (Elleström, 2021, p. 15) – he then gives the example of ignoring accidental noises in a musical performance. This is precisely the job that is done by having the semiotic mode engaging with materiality only in very specific ways. When applying the semiotic mode of music to some material (sound waves), the semiotic mode simply doesn't pick up on the

noise – that is, any noises present are *not taken responsibility for* by that particular semiotic mode.

In multimodality theory, there’s a broad range of discussions of materiality and how it’s shaped (see Bateman, 2021). These discussions, again, have many points of contact with Lars’s model. Parts of Lars’s definition of media products, for example, “media products are cultural entities that depend on social praxis” (Elleström, 2021, p. 15), appear very compatible with what has been said so far from the multimodality perspective. Semiotic modes are also always conventionalised from practice. They are also, following Lars, ways of taking material and deciding what is believed to be relevant for achieving communication.

We represent this multimodal model in a diagram (Figure 5.7), bringing in as well the rather simple view of *medium* that we have offered in multimodality theory. Medium is here seen as a collection (socially institutionalised) of semiotic modes, which are used to shape material for particular generic purposes, i.e. the genre(s) performed in communication. Communication in a medium deploying a collection of semiotic modes then operates by using the discourse semantics of the distinct semiotic modes for the modes to ‘talk’ to each other.

This overview of the model gives us all that we need to now return to the main task, picking out detailed complementarities and potential gaps between the multimodal model and Lars’s model. The next step here is

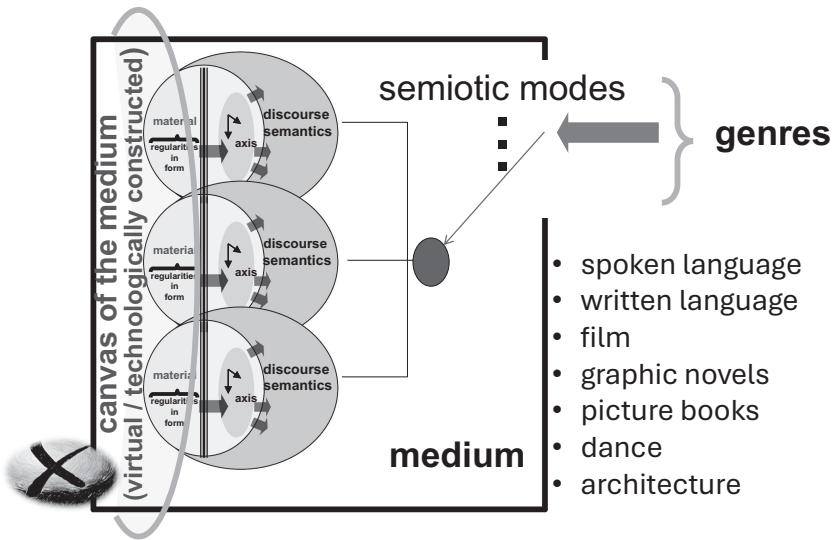


Figure 5.7 The multimodality view of the relation between semiotic modes, media, and genres developed in Bateman et al. (2017).

then to go into some of Lars's important conceptions of media modalities, his "four kinds of basic traits" (Elleström, 2021, p. 20) of media products (see Table 5.1, Elleström, 2010, p. 36).

I will focus specifically on the semiotic modality, as it is here that we see some of the main consequences of Lars's model overshooting its target. Lars follows Peircean practice for this area and picks out iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity as the main media traits. These are certainly indispensable for semiosis, but, as discussed above, I think the breadth of entities that Lars accepts as potential media products, for example, fingerprints, dogs, or wine, is problematic. If we back away from this very general perspective and look at just the *communicative* entities, i.e. those which are guided by and used in semiotic modes, then we can say much more. And, in fact, we *have* to say much more because the 'simple' classification in terms of iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity provides very little *methodological* guidance for detailed analysis.

Table 5.1 The Modalities and Modes of Media

Modality	What the modality is	The most important modes of the modality
Material modality	The latent corporeal interface of the medium; where the senses meet the material impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human bodies • Other demarcated materiality • Not demarcated materiality
Sensorial modality	The physical and mental acts of perceiving the interface of the medium through the sense faculties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing • Hearing • Feeling • Tasting • Smelling
Spatiotemporal modality	The structuring of the sensorial perception of the material interface into experiences and conceptions of space and time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space manifested in the material interface • Cognitive space (always present) • Virtual space • Time manifested in the material interface • Perceptual time (always present) • Virtual time
Semiotic modality	The creation of meaning in the spatiotemporally conceived medium by way of different sorts of thinking and sign interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convention (symbolic signs) • Resemblance (iconic signs) • Contiguity (indexical signs)

Note. Elleström (2010, p. 36).

This has profound consequences for how Lars's model then develops. Concerning the semiotic modality, Lars writes, "semiotic traits of a media product are less palpable than the material, spatiotemporal and sensorial traits, and in fact are entirely derived from them" (Elleström, 2021, p. 20). Everything hangs here on the meaning given to 'derived from'. If we take this literally, it is simply false because semiotic traits are interpretive acts and are then, in Peirce's terms, *Thirds*, and so cannot be 'entirely derived' – else they would be *Firsts* or *Seconds*. Because this doesn't work semiotically, I presume that Lars meant something else, like, the material, spatiotemporal, and sensorial traits being all that an interpreter has to go on when seeking interpretations. But while these traits cover all of the 'material' sources of evidence, this certainly does not exhaust what is drawn upon during interpretation. There must then be something more that has to be brought into semiosis to be able to attribute signification. And so, if the semiotic traits are not inherent components of the material, we need to explain *how* they can be assigned. And this is where multimodality begins to offer more returns on investment.

Lars suggests that we start with "a material entity that has the capacity of triggering mental response" (Elleström, 2021, p. 19). This distinguishes a material entity for consideration. But above we also had material products being considered cultural entities that depended on social practice. So on the one hand, we have the material, spatiotemporal, and sensorial, and on the other hand, we have the semiotic. Bridging this particular gap in a principled manner that is open to empirical investigation and which offers methodological guidance for how such investigation can proceed is exactly the work that a semiotic mode does. The task of a semiotic mode is to build these necessary connections between materiality and semiotics, and it does this using the level of discourse semantics. The degree to which this work is necessary is often underestimated. To see this, let's take a particular example involving a media product, a court sketch drawn for journalistic purposes, and ask is this indexical? Some people would say, "No, it can't be indexical because it looks like a drawing". Other people would say, "Yes because *its job is to be indexical* in a situation where you're not allowed to take photographs". So we need to know the discourse semantic embedding of this material entity in order to decide what its semiotic status is. That status cannot be 'derived' from the material properties alone.

This kind of analysis depends on a lot of knowledge, and that knowledge is what the process of discourse semantic interpretation principally relies on and 'regulates' during its application to material. So the bottom line is that the Peircean sign types, iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity, *can only be assigned as part of a process of building discourse semantic coherence*. And if we don't have access to that process and the information required to drive it, then we cannot work out, in each particular case,

what kind of semiotic status is relevant because that is precisely the task of discourse semantics, to mediate between pertinent forms and contextual knowledge and genre. Without it, one still needs to fill in the gaps as best one can and sometimes one will have enough information to come to a reasonable hypothesis – this is generally the approach adopted in more hermeneutic styles of analysis. But one can also miss interpretations or produce less well-motivated interpretations when applying this procedure as well. The aim of multimodal analysis is then one of attempting to guide and constrain such interpretations so that they can be made maximally transparent, reliable, discussable, and reproducible. Again, this does not mean that one will always find unique and guaranteed correct interpretations; it does mean, however, that one will be in a stronger position to motivate interpretations and to rule out misinterpretations, i.e. interpretations that are *not* supported by the materials at hand.

Combining Intermediality and Multimodality: Applying Textuality

Finally, I'm going to use everything discussed so far, and try to put the pieces back together into a coherent whole where both the multimodality perspective and central components of Lars's model will co-exist in a mutually supportive and complementary fashion.

Bruhn and Schirrmacher observe:

'Media products' can be a particular news article in *The Guardian*, graffiti art by Banksy on the West Bank Barrier, the computer game *Final Fantasy XV* (Square Enix, 2016) or the latest Facebook status. We access an individual media product with the help of some kind of material object which we call the technical media of display.

(2022a, p. 16)

This is fully compatible with the multimodality model: the technical medium of display would then be our example pebble with some traces on it. But a significant further leap is then made in the following: "These phenomena and objects display constellations of texts, still or moving images, speech or organized sound" (Bruhn & Schirrmacher, 2022a, p. 17). Here, we have clearly moved from the material objects that might be acting as technical media of display to address particular *classes of traces* that might be made in that material. Usually, our analytic concern will be specifically with these constellations of texts, images, and so on and how they combine, interact, and cohere in the service of effective communication. But the media-based model actually tells us rather little about what these entities might be, how they are organised, and how they might be studied.

Bruhn and Schirmmacher suggest: “These constellations, which we call ‘basic media types’, work like building blocks” (2022a, p. 17), and so can be put together differently. But how do these building blocks operate? Lars’s model looks to more literarily informed approaches concerning how a text analysis addressing such concerns might be performed, but from the multimodality perspective, we instead rely centrally on the notion of semiotic mode to tell us how to combine any of the diverse forms of expression participating in the production of meaning.

If I attempt to put these various components of Lars’s model together in a single, simplified graphic, then it could look as shown in Figure 5.8. On the left, we have the technical medium of display, which supports a media product, which can be characterised materially in various ways. These material properties are accessed by perception. We also have something which has been labelled as basic media types in Lars’s model, any of which draw on the spatiotemporal material properties available and which can be deployed (singly and in constellations) to build qualified media types, which are communications qualified by context, genre, and institutions. Now, if we know the qualified media types, then we clearly have a considerable amount of semiotic information that will allow us to do some interpretation. But the more precise and motivated we want to make that process of interpretation, the more use we can make of the complementary multimodal semiotic description and the notion of semiotic modes.

Going further, the relationship between basic media types and qualified media types in Lars’s model is still unclear to me because there are a couple

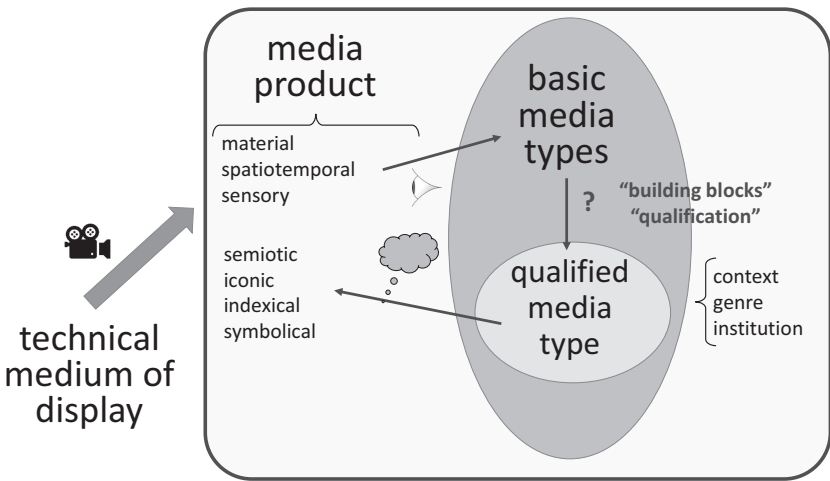


Figure 5.8 Elleström’s model of single media, augmented with the multimodality framework set out here.

of different metaphors circulating. We have the building blocks metaphor from Bruhn and Schirrmacher and the notion of qualification, which seems to be rather different. It suggests that there's some kind of broader possibility which is then restricted, or 'qualified', in some way. This, I think, is somewhere where we need to look closer to see what the relationship involved might be.

First, we can see media products as instancial engagements with socially shaped and delimited materiality. I think this is a nice blend of how multimodality would describe the situation and how Lars would describe it. Then we need to know the technical media of display which involves an interpreter and something to perceive in the first place; examples of technical media are book pages, sound waves, dancers' bodies, screens, and so on. We also have to know what gets attended to among the myriad possibilities each of these materials offers. The aspects to be attended to are characterised on the multimodality side by the canvas of a semiotic mode. That is, in the case of dance, a dancer's body moving in 3D space is just material (the technical display media), but a particular kind of dance may only want us to pay attention to particular kinds of orientation or particular body parts within the theoretically possible. What we get by going through the semiotic mode is the *dance* being watched; prior to the application of the semiotic mode, there was just movement. Access to any media product is then necessarily only something that we get from an application of a semiotic mode or semiotic modes. So the semiotic mode and the canvas part of the model seem to correlate with Lars's basic media. But what we now have in addition are explicitly specified semiotic modes and their provisions for a discourse interpretation. In short, the semiotic mode tells us how to interpret – how to pull information out of the material for discourse interpretation in a manner that, to date, characterisations of the basic media types do not.

With the notion of semiotic mode to draw on, it is also possible to address a variety of problematic or still open areas in the account that Lars offers. I think this will be one of the most productive sources of ongoing development for the future. For example, there are issues of individuation among the uses of media products. Lars suggests that: "On a theoretical level, it's important to be able to acknowledge that every display of a media product is unique, even though several media products may be extremely similar" (Elleström, 2021, p. 38). What is the precise theoretical nature of this uniqueness and similarity? The quote appears to be saying that it's often efficient to call things the same even though ontologically they are never the same. This is exactly right: instantiations are unique, but it is also important to be clear about how different instantiations can be thought of as being the same. As Lars continues: "One could perhaps say that very similar media products are variations of an abstract but

recognisable communicational composition that may be reproduced more or less efficiently” (Elleström, 2021, p. 38). One of the missing components noted above was the notion of ‘textuality’ and so, to clarify Lars’s point here, I suggest we consider the media product a *materialised text*. What does this mean? Well, a semiotic mode is by definition a potential. It’s a resource for making certain kinds of meanings, and any potential has to be instantiated. So we might have an actual dancer running around, this is an instance of the respective potential of the semiotic modes involved, which means that such an instance is necessarily linked to *choices* in the potential. This is what materialising the text means; a text is a text because it’s related to some semiotic mode. This is then also what defines sameness. A unique text can be similar to another text because it exhibits the same choices in the semiotic mode(s) deployed, regardless of whether that is verbal language, dance, or any other form of expression for which semiotic modes have developed.

What about media proper then? As stated above, in our approach to multimodality, we have looked at the concept of medium as a collection of semiotic modes that are conventionally used together. This seems to correspond quite well with the qualified media type in Lars’s model. So when we have a collection of semiotic modes being used for an institutionalised social purpose, this seems to correlate with the qualified media type. What follows from this correlation? This is not just a renaming exercise because now we’ve established different properties and some extended interrelationships for these terms. In the multimodality framework, the two constructs of semiotic modes and media have very different properties and they do different work.

How does this then relate to the distinction between basic and qualified media types? First, we have the building block versus the qualification view. So a basic media type might be part of a qualified medium. This is very similar to what we would say in the multimodality perspective regarding semiotic modes that make up media. We wouldn’t talk about specialisation or qualification here because semiotic modes and media are very different entities. Semiotic modes never ‘become’ a medium but they can vary depending upon the use that some medium makes of them. This seems to be exactly what’s going on when we see Jensen and Salmose describing film in *Intermedial Studies*: “The closer we look at the use of basic media types of image and sound, the less ‘basic’ they appear” (2022, p. 30). I think this is getting at exactly this kind of phenomenon – depending upon the uses made of semiotic modes in media, they will exhibit quite interesting variations.

We can also examine other quite different implications as well. The possible relationships between modes and media are enumerated in Table 5.2. Applying the terms of the multimodality model, there is one combination

Table 5.2 Space of Possible Relationships Between Semiotic Modes and Media When Augmented from the Multimodality Perspective

media inside other media	media depiction	media 'flatten' to fit materiality of embedding medium: combination by discourse
<i>media inside modes</i> modes 'inside' other modes	<i>makes no sense within the model</i> can only happen with second-order modes serving a compositional role	– modes fully present plus additional compositional meanings
modes inside media	normal integrative function	integration by discourse × experiential meanings

that makes no sense: that is to talk of media 'inside modes'. The normal case is modes inside media, where we have a completely usual, integrative function, where the application of discourse semantics brings together their various contributions. The final column in Table 5.2 then sets out some of the consequences both for interpretation and form that the different combinations lead to. These distinctions are not readily apparent without the clear difference drawn between modes and media.

Conclusion

I think accounts of semiotic modes and modality from multimodality don't really cover media in an interesting way. Note here that I've said nothing about intermedial relationships because there, I think, we enter the places where Lars's model gives considerable theoretical and practical purchase that is not inherently present in the multimodality view. This is, therefore, an aspect that needs to be brought into multimodality. But conversely, as I've tried to argue, the accounts of medium and mediality from the intermedial view do not cover the detailed contributions of semiotic modes. I've tried to suggest how we can bring these things together to get a semiotically founded account that brings out what both of the frameworks or models have to offer. I think this will help sharpen analysis in the future considerably. I also think that this would help, at least me, get over some of my frustrations with some of the early analyses using Lars's model, because what I was missing was really a way of getting hold of the concrete details of individual texts in a principled fashion and seeing how the semiotic modes were being employed to do media work. By bringing some

of these concepts into a closer interaction, I think this could offer some interesting ways for taking the use of both models further, engaging with challenges at an even closer level of detail, and hopefully getting more out of the work as a consequence.

Questions and Answers

Beate Schirrmacher: Thank you very much, John, for this very rich presentation. I recognize this frustrating feeling that you mentioned when intermedial approaches do not really attend to the areas that the multimodal analysers would look into, because, coming from the intermedial perspective, it feels the same the other way around. I found it really interesting how you tease out and kind of try to glue together the gaps between multimodality and intermediality. I also found your discussion of discourse semantics helpful, and how a discussion of expected discourses can be used to make a better argument for differentiating between indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity. However, one of the reasons there are these ‘gaps’ in Lars’s media model is that in a lot of intermedial analyses, it is not the most expected discourses that are relevant. In intermedial relations, it may be the uses that are *not* the prominent ones that become important. So these ‘gaps’ are based on the different directions of analysis.

John A. Bateman: I think this is an area where it doesn’t really make a difference whether you’re looking at it from intermediality or multimodality – it’s more fundamental and covers both the expected and non-expected. I think that as soon as one’s dealing with interpretations which are not the expected ones, one *has* to go into a more detailed analysis to see what is going on inside some media product. Regardless of whether the starting point is intermediality or multimodality, you do not get to iconicity, symbolicity, and indexicality without going through a discourse analysis. Of course, one can assert, ‘Hey, this photograph is indexical’, but this is a shorthand. We’ve just put all of the reasoning we should have done into a little bag labelled ‘indexicality’ but haven’t opened that bag. And that can work fine if things are really clear.

The interesting cases are where this doesn't work; when you need to go beyond the expected. So I think that that particular distinction came into the trans-medial model from an over-extended notion of what a media product is because if you don't focus on the specifically *communicative* things, which are done with semiotic modes, there's not much to say apart from what Peirce already said.

Beate Schirrmacher: I want to get back to your argument about the fingerprint because I don't agree with you there.

John A. Bateman: I think for those kinds of things, there's not really much debate possible. I'm putting it in such strong terms because I don't believe that anyone would want to argue that one (typically) *designs* a fingerprint to communicate. That's not how fingerprints work. And so it must necessarily fall outside the definition of a semiotic mode as I have set it out here, but perhaps the disagreement is somewhere else?

Beate Schirrmacher: The problem is that the media product doesn't consist of the fingerprint alone, but also of the communicative function applied to them.

John A. Bateman: There I think that it is important to know the difference between using something to communicate with and having something which *itself is structured* to guide interpretations.

Eleni Timplalexi: I have been working on the ideas of 'transfer' and 'media' in Elleström's model, considering media products as performances and documents of performances (Timplalexi, 2023). My central question has been whether the media product ends up resembling a sort of 'content battery' enabling communication if the producer and perceiver are not alive or co-present. As you said, the Saussurean communication model applies to an alive, co-present producer and perceiver. My conclusion is that the producer and perceiver are roles and that 'noise' is situated within the perceiver/producer contexts. The concept of transfer as a literality may be challenged by extreme examples (see Timplalexi & Führer, 2023) and 'media product' prevails as a role for any entity projected by the perceiver onto practically everything. I have also discarded the difference between media product and technical media of display, as the

final display lies in the hands of the perceiver – and because this way of distinguishing the two echoes the Cartesian mind/body split – form and content split. My question to you is, do you consider *semiosis* as only intentional and/or unintentional from the side of the alleged producer source?

John A. Bateman: For the kinds of semiosis discussed with semiotic modes, it's intentional. I do not regard semiosis as *only* intentional, but the kind of things we're looking at in terms of multimodality are. There we are looking at things which are constructed to guide interpretations. This is the basic premise of textuality.

Eleni Timplalexi: But how can we know?

John A. Bateman: That's an epistemic question. Sometimes you *don't* know.

Eleni Timplalexi: It's not the same. Take the example of slut shaming practices: – one sees a woman who, in their opinion, is dressed provocatively and categorizes her as a “slut”. But perhaps the woman's intention was not to be provocative.

John A. Bateman: The multimodality perspective I put out is trying to be ontological – this is what a communicative entity *is*. If we find some archaeological relic, and there are a few scratches, then maybe we will guess that somebody intended to make a sign there, but we don't know. For things that are interesting to us from a textual perspective, it's not just a scratch here or there. It's such a rich surplus of cues that to assume that this could have happened by accident is probably not very productive. Take any mode, the instances of that are not going to happen by chance. A performance in a theatre is not going to happen by chance. So these kinds of semiotic objects are wearing their intended construction on their sleeves. That doesn't mean that somebody will always be able to understand the intention or get the ‘right’ intention. It's more a question of, “How did that set of material traces come into being?”

Sigene Kjaer Jensen: I think that you are dealing with a narrower communication model than I do, by focusing on the intentional aspects of communication. When you talk about discourse semantics, and when Lars writes about the realization of an abstract communicative

idea, then you're working with an idealized communicative situation, not an *actual* communicative situation. If the recipient knows all of the discourse semantics, then you might have something that comes close to an idealized situation. But you have to be aware of the 'interpretive community' (see Fish, 1980), and that people don't all come in with the same kind of presuppositions for understanding a communicative event.

John A. Bateman:

But that was the reason I started with the communication model to show that the social community is there and is *always* there and has to be thought of along with everything else. This includes the fact that there are always going to be differences between individuals. It is not the case that the model is only talking about an abstract idealized speaker. It's talking about a community member's *potential* response to an engagement with material, which then becomes *instantiated* in any actual real concrete engagement. This is going to play out differently depending on which resources the individual has access to, but that doesn't change the mechanisms which I have described: you will still need to engage with the material traces to the best of your individual or, if you're doing this in a group, collective ability. So that means you could track each individual concrete response as well; none of the *mechanisms* would change.

We're not then talking here about the division between abstract and real. We're talking about a description of interpretive engagements with material from a community member and how potential is instantiated. This is the sense of intentionality used. It's very important to get away from a (solely) individualistic cognitive view. Our concern in multimodality is more intentionality with respect to a community, not in terms of an individual.

Signe Kjaer Jensen:

Let's stay with the intentionality and the idea of noise. Imagine you have a choir performance at a school and a lot of children who are out of tune. This is not intentional, but it's still part of the media product. It still becomes a very important part of the communicative experience.

John A. Bateman: Of course, this is absolutely what one would expect because the material traces are always much richer than any individual semiotic mode, not just in terms of an interpretation using a semiotic mode, but also in terms of their embodied perception. So I think one of the problems with having a less differentiated view is that, if you talk about media products, it sounds like a single chunk of stuff. Of course, it's not all intentional. It's a materiality, which is incredibly rich and dense. Remember the semiotic mode: the job of the semiotic mode is to *take responsibility* for certain ranges of material traces, *not* all of them. Any media product is going to be built on top of a materiality that will be exhibiting regularities, but also many more differences that are not regularities, sometimes just noise. And this is also 'available' for experiencing, for interpreting, but it's not a part of the music piece.

Signe Kjaer Jensen: So 'communication' is broader than the semiotic mode?

John A. Bateman: Only if one chooses to take communication in a broad sense. If I don't believe that something is being intentionally communicated, then I'd take it more as a 'symptom' of something which is coming from the overall experience. Now you could always (or often) *intendedly* produce it: say, "Let's now play this piece of music as if it's a bunch of five-year-olds with untuned instruments". That is perfectly possible to do. Then, of course, you'll be able to interpret it; but that doesn't mean that it's not conforming to or modifying a semiotic mode. So this kind of performance is just as informative.

Jørgen Bruhn: You critiqued Lars for implying that the semiotic modality derives from the three others. Perhaps this points to a larger problem relating to the issue of whether we should see a given photograph as indexical, symbolic, or iconic. Lars often said that he was very much aware that he was going into an immensely complex question of how meaning-making is done – or how we orientate ourselves as human beings in the world – and his problem was that he had to begin somewhere. He was a logical-thinking man, and he started from the bottom,

with the building blocks, to develop a systematic description with the three dimensions of media. In order to make a descriptive system that we can use to analyze *texts*, it has to define different steps, something that resembles a hierarchy. But, at least verbally, Lars stressed that all of the modalities are something which we perceive simultaneously. We would not normally be conscious about going through the steps of materiality, spatiotemporality, and sensoriality in order to get to the semiotic mode. So I think Lars's model is a way of describing something that is going on simultaneously and transforming it into a discursive line of argument.

John A. Bateman:

I agree. It is all simultaneous and it's all in a cycle of interrelationships and the trick is to jump into that cycle, in a way so that one can pull out how those interrelationships work. I think this will often depend upon the material that one's analyzing as well. Sometimes one has such little idea about what the discourse interpretations are, of what's going on, that one must start with the material and try to build from that. But more usually, one does have an idea about what one is analyzing. Then we use that idea to have a first hypothesis about where it's worthwhile focusing, deciding which material regularities are probably going to be at work, and looking at them in detail, so that you can jump back to the other side and refine the discourse. So certainly, it is necessary to juggle all of those things but also to have the methodological components that allow you to do that effectively and flexibly.

Of course, one doesn't *always* need to pull everything apart because sometimes things are relatively clear, or one can plausibly assume that they're not relevant to a particular research question. And there, I think, it's perfectly fine to take a shortcut if the detail is not central to your research question. But I think it's also nice to know that if things get difficult and one wants to pull an analysis apart, then the theoretical resources for doing that are available.

Ines Tebourski:

My question is an inquiry to elaborate on the notion of shared alignment and how it works in heterogeneous communities. Were you suggesting that every

single media user understands the message in the same way or that the media can trigger the same response? I don't think that this was the idea?

John A. Bateman:

No you're right. And that's why it's so important to have the notion of the social community in the model. Aligning to material is the process of trying to find coherence in that material. And that alignment will be shared to the extent that the semiotic modes are shared in a community, in a habit. There are going to be all sorts of differences among communities and community members, but alignment will still work in the same way. You'll try to engage with regularities to the extent that your (internalized, embodied) understanding of the semiotic modes that you think are applied allows.

But there's zero guarantee of understanding being the same across individuals. The problem with trying to understand human communication from an individualized ontological perspective all through the 20th century was that if you base your theory on *individuals*, it can't work because nobody will get the same message. So communication only works by partial congruences established by practice within a community which shares sufficiently similar communicative habits. Even if two community members are not aligned in the fine detail, it doesn't really matter as long as they are sufficiently close for them to be saying the 'same' thing. This normally happens in performance and interaction; if you're interacting and somebody appears to be understanding what you said, you don't go back and say, "Well, did you really understand what I wanted to say". This is communication as interactional achievement. So alignment is an interactional achievement and not something pre-given by cognitive processes that are identical across individuals and so giving the same message. You need to have the flexibility to expect variation.

Dagmar Brunow:

I think that what Lars did in his model was to try to find a way of creating a model that is more into 'basic' theory, and his notion of cognitive import allows us to *add* all these social aspects. So, would you agree with that? Or would it help to not call it cognitive import?

John A. Bateman: When we're doing concrete analysis, we need to have much more available to us than saying, "Well, it's cognitive import", which is saying little more than we have brains which process material. Now, the neuro-cognitive components are what support the whole process of semiosis, so it's a kind of foundation for what's going on, but it is then relevant to consider what kinds of questions we want to ask. There are certain kinds of questions that, looking at the neuro-cognitive processes, will be the right kind of level to look at to get answers. But there are going to be other kinds of questions, often questions about textuality itself, where, maybe, it doesn't make much difference what the actual neuro-cognitive mechanisms are or how, for example, memory is structured.

There has to be cognitive import otherwise nothing happens, and the question for us in multimodality is, what structures or drives those cognitive imports? Where do the sources of constraint for cognitive imports come from? There are certain constraints which come from the actual neuro-cognitive mechanisms, but there are also constraints from the social side of communication. I would never play these two directions against each other and say, "Oh, no, I don't do cognitive because that's reductionist", or, "Oh, no, I don't do social stuff because it's all too vague". This replicates a mind/body distinction, which, I hope, is out of date in many kinds of semiotics. So embodied alignment and interaction are working socially at the same time as it's working neuro-cognitively.

Jørgen Bruhn: I think that the "cognitive import" phrase that Lars chose, after many hesitations, was meant to be as neutral as possible. He wanted it not to be "message", not to be "content", he wanted a neutral term. You said that Lars's model is extremely useful and very elaborate when it comes to intermedial questions – inter-relations between media. Do you imply that that is where the real force of Lars's model is? As compared to multimodality, which is perhaps stronger in establishing, according to you, the basics of multimodal meaning-making?

John A. Bateman: Yes, because in multimodality, we haven't really discussed intermediality very much as a phenomenon. I think there's a very big difference in experience and the objects of analysis that one can draw upon. I think that where multimodality does come in, is where there are cases of intermediality where the analysis gets a bit difficult and maybe one wants to zoom in a little more and bring in discourse analysis for a particular text. What I'd like to see, as a next phase of possible developments, is looking at some intermedial relationships combined with the attention to the material that one has from multimodality to see how those perspectives fit together. Will those intermedial relationships still stand and work in the same way? Going across media, we're going to have considerable use of, say, iconicity – but now we should know how or where we would be able to look for iconicity more effectively. The overall frame from Lars's model might then still be giving us the framework we need for doing that intermedially, but I would also see that as a place where there is a strong complementarity to be looked at for further development.

Signe Kjaer Jensen: I agree with you regarding the complementarity between intermediality and multimodality, Beate Schirrmacher and I have been working on similar things (see Jensen & Schirrmacher, 2024). What I wanted you to elaborate on was your comparison of Lars's qualified medium with your definition of medium. I would not agree that these terms are all that similar, so could you clarify on that relation?

John A. Bateman: I would also have that on the list of open questions and things to consider for the complementarity. I am happier with the idea of seeing basic media types as semiotic modes. I still have question marks concerning the relationship between qualified media and basic media types. I was trying to use the perspective from multimodality to think of ways of answering that, asking what would be possible relations. And if the qualified media types were like how we've considered media in multimodality, then that gives a certain set of relationships [as shown in Table 5.2]. The next step is for you, or others, to say, "Those are

not the relationships between basic media types and qualified media types: there's something else going on". That would then force a natural progression where one would say, "Okay, so the qualified media types don't quite fit with how *we* were looking at media. Where *do* they fit then?" I think that's what opens up positive and productive rounds of discussion that go far beyond exchanging terms – really pulling the terms apart to see what their functionality and internal properties are.

Heidrun Führer:

I am interested in your focus on the social, and I have been hoping to introduce a kind of social modality. When I read Elleström, then the social part for him, I think, is within Peirce's notion of habit and conventionality in relation to symbolicity. Peirce is actually at the same level as Husserl here, having a kind of transcendental ego in mind, which I don't agree with. I think, following Merleau-Ponty, that we have to bring in the sensory aspect and link to the sensorial modality, and we have to integrate the centralization of the human being and, as Signe brought up, the decentralization. These aspects have to be included in the concept of qualification because, for me, the genre theory present in Elleström's model here is quite outdated. My question to you is, wouldn't it be better to also link this to performance theory? You said that signs are related to what you see and recognize as a sign, and similarly, in performance theory, it is often the case that *to perform* is *to come into action for those who see it*. Then you can bring in a more *specified* community discussion, like what happens in the audience community of an event. So I would like to integrate a social modality and performativity as more dynamic aspects, instead of following the idea that you can break things down into bricks – basic media – that you then compose differently. So, to me, it goes back to Aristotle's communication model (see Timplalexí & Führer, 2023).

John A. Bateman:

I agree, and I think we need to draw more on Peirce, as Lars was trying to do – specifically, the notion of habits as something social. I think that starting from that position makes it easier to bring together

some of the multimodal perspectives and Lars's model. Sometimes these dynamic aspects fall a bit into the background, and I think they need to be foregrounded.

I think the model I was trying to suggest is compatible with this. Sometimes, when one uses the word 'text', people start thinking of things as static. But this is absolutely alien to how we think about these things in multimodality.

Heidrun Führer: But in your model, there's something that is like a specter and this is the term 'grammar'.

John A. Bateman: Grammar is something which is organizing performance. We do not reject system thinking.

Heidrun Führer: But this is normative thinking – it's either right or wrong.

John A. Bateman: No, we certainly don't think of grammar in that way. It's only a way of organizing behaviours. What happens is that you have a system that gives certain ways of behaving. How you *actually* behave then feeds back and changes the system. So we're always in this cyclical development of things changing over time. I think this is a very important lesson which came from sociolinguistics in the early 1960s when they suddenly realized that this is ongoing as a dynamic varying system.

Heidrun Führer: So it's more than Niklas Luhmann's system theory?

John A. Bateman: Philosophically, we're in that kind of ballpark, but to take the next step and analyze a concrete text or performance in detail, much more is needed. The essential question is: Do I have the methodological tools for doing that? This is what we want to try and get to within a framework where performativity, dynamicity, changes in the system, and so on, are taken as foundational. Anything which is not dynamic is not semiotic. This so often gets lost, because as soon as one starts talking about 'text' these things can sound a lot more static than they are intended to be.

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Section 2

Art Historical Perspectives



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Introduction to Chapter 6

Iconology and Media Aesthetics

Matilda Davidsson

W. J. T. Mitchell is a theorist of visual arts, media, and literature. In this chapter, Mitchell takes the reader on a historical journey through the development of media aesthetics as a field of study, pausing at important inventions, moments, and people defining the growing field. Centring his lecture around Frieda High Tesfagiorgis's painting *Hypericons: Homage to W. J. T. Mitchell*, also called 'Iconologist at work', Mitchell starts with the idea of image as icon and places iconology at the intersection of philosophy and art history. Through a range of images and important thinkers within the tradition (Descartes Peirce, and Saussure to name a few), Mitchell explores iconicity from how the Duck-rabbit represents the multi-stability of the image, to how the adoration of the golden calf, idolatry, was punished by God, leading to a discussion about iconoclasm and the destruction and reproduction of images. The human fascination for image making is also traced in popular culture and in relation to immortality, from Gertie the Dinosaur who was brought back to life on the screen to the more recent mediation of dinosaurs through DNA cloning in Jurassic Park. Mitchell then focuses our attention on the idea of seeing, watching, and looking and explores what these actions entail.

He stands in dialogue with Panofsky and Althusser when he writes "The work of art is seen as a kind of person or a kind of being that needs to be acknowledged. I think this is foundational to the whole notion of what an image is" (this volume, p. 148), this statement begs the question, are all media "a kind of being that needs to be acknowledged"? Here Mitchell touches upon the important contribution of the viewer, the audience, or the media user and how the status of a media product does not arise solely from the objective characteristics of a media product but from the acknowledgement or recognition (which, to Mitchell, is different from interpretation), i.e. from the meeting, and interaction, between the media object and the observing subject. A media product, which like the man with his hat, greeting another, in Mitchell's example, greets or addresses and thus acknowledges the subject, contains an implicit expectation of a

reaction or response from the subject. While Mitchell doesn't comment on Elleström's communication model, this idea of a response in the form of an acknowledgement could be seen as a critique of Elleström's cognitive media model seen in several places in the volume, but instead of highlighting the need for a social dimension, as discussed by Elliott and Ryan (this volume), the acknowledgement points to something different, namely to a form of simplified communication circuit not only between the sender and receiver but also between the media product and the receiver, implying the perceiver projects something back onto the media product, that is also dependent on the positionality of the receiver. Mitchell also stresses, as in several of his earlier publications, the close connection between imagery and language, highlighting that while images might be closely associated with the icon, and language with the symbol, they are often thought of as different semiotic sign systems, different basic media, or different semiotic resources or modes, but they are still interlinked in our perception.

Mitchell's work on mixed media highlights the complex and dynamic relationship between visual and verbal forms of communication. By emphasising the interdependence and mutual influence of words and images, Mitchell challenges traditional hierarchies and advocates for a more integrated approach to understanding media. His insights are particularly relevant in the context of contemporary digital and multimedia landscapes, where mixed media play a central role in shaping cultural and social narratives.

The presentation evoked several interesting trails of thought, some of which are further elaborated upon in the Questions and Answers section. The hierarchies of modes, the image, and the written word, and how they are mixed and equally important in for example comics are explored. This is then followed by a discussion on the importance of sound, and the limitations of media to represent reality, the relevance of visual studies for dealing with current issues like the climate crisis and warfare, and the importance of aesthetic sensorial responses to media and art.

6 From Iconology to Media Aesthetics

W. J. T. Mitchell

I'm going to try to improvise some remarks about the historical transformation of the humanities and the study of culture in my lifetime, a transformation to which Lars Elleström made a key contribution. This movement started, I suppose, when I was quite young in the 1960s and 1970s, during the theory revolution, which shook the foundations of scholarship and of humanistic learning. A new concept of the conditions of knowledge and of media itself began to occur, and Elleström was a key contributor to this movement. He made it possible to think about media in more than just an enumerative way. We always knew there were lots of them. But to think about them systematically was a new departure. It was particularly important to reflect on the hybridity of media – their multimodal, multisensory, and multi-semiotic characteristics – with numerous ways of making meaning and doing things with images, words, and sounds, engaging all the fundamental building blocks of media. My lecture is going to present my own perspective on these developments, ranging from a new iteration of the ancient discipline called iconology in the wake of the theory revolution of the 1960s, through the rise of something called visual studies or visual cultural studies, which in the late 1980s and the 1990s burst upon the academic world and created new formations of knowledge, including a very specific formation at the University of Chicago called media aesthetics, which not only became a field of research for many of us but also became a curriculum and a pedagogical structure. So my presentation is going to be inspired by a freshman course that I'm teaching right now, spring semester 2022. At Chicago, we introduce our students to the humanities through the concept of media aesthetics, and there are now approximately 350 bright young freshmen at the University of Chicago who are immersed in this subject. I have my own class of (mercifully) only 20 students, and we are having our last class of the winter quarter today, a session devoted to language, texts, speech, and the role of language in media.

So how can I put all this together? It's a long story, a complicated story, needless to say, and I'm going to have to show you some pictures. As Mieke

Bal would say, “We need to think through pictures, think with pictures”, and I’ve always followed her advice. Many of us in media studies find that it is never just words, it’s the images that capture the world in which words and worlds take place.

One of our participants here today is an artist and scholar from the University of Wisconsin named Freida Tesfagiorgis. She made this painting (Figure 6.1; High, 2007) about 15 years ago, which I call “Iconologist at work”. It’s a picture of me, sorry for the vanity, but this is my best way into the work. It shows me as a scholar surrounded by what we might call a storm of images. And basically what I’m going to do is to read this painting for you. I’m going to take you through all of the images that Freida depicted, swirling around my rather unlovely visage from when I had a lot more hair than I do today. So what is an iconologist? I begin with Deleuze’s remark on the gravitational pull between philosophy and the image, which is also one of repulsion. “Philosophy does not free itself from the element of representation when it embarks upon the conquest of the infinite. Its intoxication is a false appearance. It always pursues the same

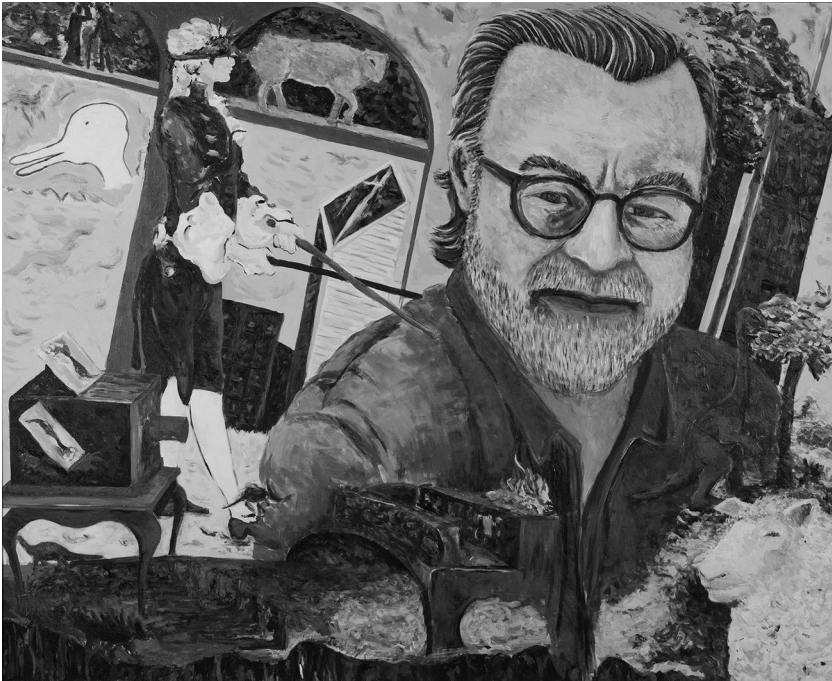


Figure 6.1 *Hypericons: Homage to W. J. T. Mitchell* [painting] by Freida High (Wasikhongo Tesfagiorgis) (2007).

Note. Copyright by the artist. Reprinted with permission.

task, Iconology” (1990, p. 260). As you know, philosophers have always been uncomfortable with metaphors and uneasy with images. And Deleuze says they can’t resist them, their quest for the infinite is a false appearance. Philosophy always pursues the same task, iconology. So part of my project has been to follow Deleuze in tracing the way philosophy has engaged (reluctantly) the image and the media in which images appear. The other side of this, of course, is art history itself, which has usually repressed its impulse to gravitate towards philosophy. I think art historians are better at keeping philosophy away than philosophers are at keeping the arts and the images away from their work. In any case, they converge somewhere. And that’s the field I think of as iconology, located between art history on the one hand and philosophy on the other. So in keeping with the philosophical impulse, I’m going to give you a definition, or rather a picture, a tree diagram of the concept of image as it appears in the English language, primarily (Figure 6.2; Mitchell, 1986).

There would be different diagrams, I think, in different languages. But I think they would all have the shape of an inverted tree of this sort: with a root concept located in the notion of likeness, or what Charles Sanders Peirce would have called iconicity, analogy, resemblance, and similitude, and then elaborated in a whole series of subcategories. Peirce sees this all as part of the tree of the sign (Figure 6.3), which proliferates into three modes, the icon, that is, the image, and the sign by resemblance. Indices, existential signs, signs by pointing in language, and in everyday experience.

And finally, the symbolic, the realm of language and arbitrary conventional meaning. So the image is a kind of migratory concept in the senses

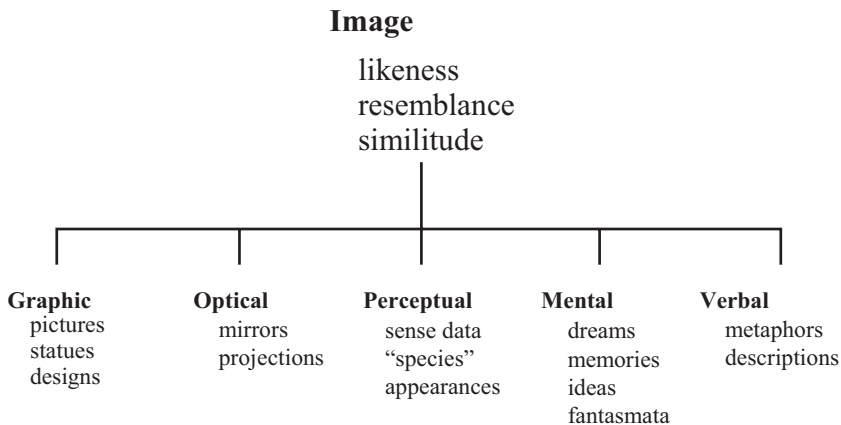


Figure 6.2 The family tree of images.

Note. Mitchell (1986). Copyright by the author. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 6.3 Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Structure of the Sign*.

and media. It can't be confined to the visual arts but pops up in the verbal arts as well. As much as we would like to say, "When I say image, I strictly mean pictures", it tends to resist confinement. And so, graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, and verbal images are an inevitable trace of this migration across the boundaries of media. The image proliferates as a kind of garden of forking paths that takes us everywhere that human experience finds itself, in works of art and texts and situations and worlds. And perhaps most importantly, it tends to liberate the image from pictures into language, as Saussure saw very clearly, into language and into thought.

This is my cartoon rendering of Saussure's picture of the linguistic sign as itself a hybrid formation linking the verbal signifier with the mental image (Figure 6.4). The image is clearly central to literature, embedded everywhere in language and in sound, as well as sight.

A Peircean analysis of this sign (Figure 6.5; Saussure, 1959, p. 67) would point out that it is not just composed of two elements, the verbal/symbolic signifier and the iconic/pictorial signified, but the bar and arrows that are the indices that make the whole thing function. The egg shape, finally, is an eloquent icon of the fertility of signification, the way signs take on lives of their own.

Finally, we have Roland Barthes' obtuse image (Figure 6.6; Barthes, 1977), which produces a redundancy of the icon in thought and language. So the image is what escapes the word, or replaces it with the picture. And Barbara Kruger's artwork depicting a red square with the text "HELP! I'm locked inside this picture" (1985) helps me here.

Everybody has asked the question, well, "Who is it that's calling to us from inside the picture? Who is locked in the picture? Or what is locked in the picture?" And my answer is that it's the image, which is not the picture, it's what is *inside* the picture. It wants to escape that picture and get into us, the viewers, or out into the world. Let me come back to Freida's painting and to a little detail that you probably wouldn't notice in the upper left-hand corner. You may see a man tipping his hat to another man who's walking with a cane. This is the most ordinary scene in everyday life, the scene of greeting. When Panofsky introduces his concept of iconology, he doesn't have to start right away with his fourfold ladder of interpretation. He starts instead with a social encounter. "When an acquaintance greets me on the street by removing his hat, what I see

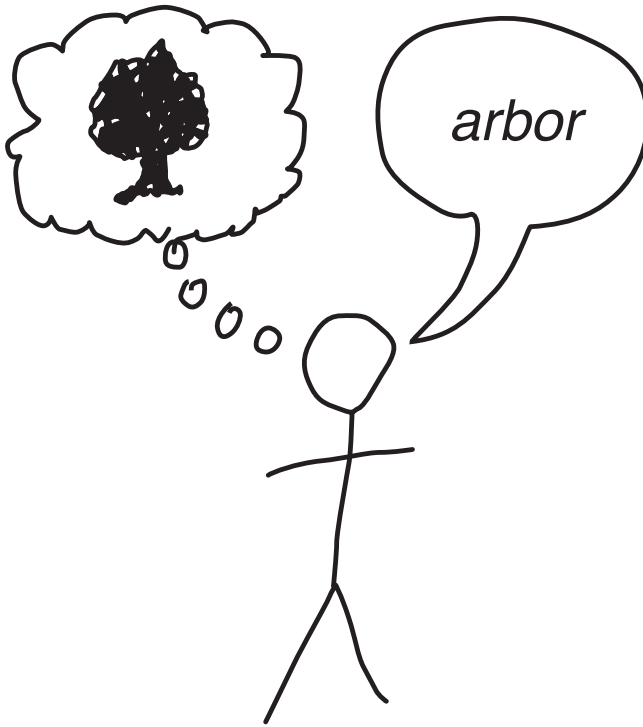


Figure 6.4 Mitchell. A cartoon version of the relation of speech and thought, signifier and signified, in Saussure's *Linguistics*.

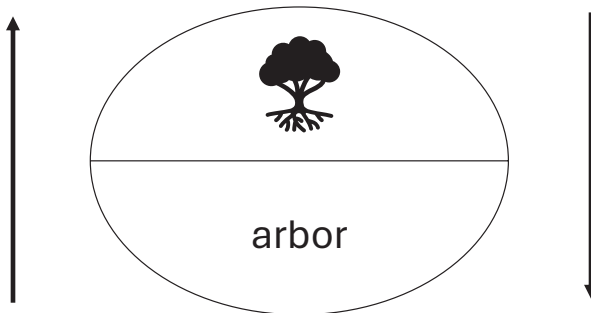


Figure 6.5 Saussure, *The Structure of the Linguistic Sign*.

Note. Saussure (1916/1959, p. 67). Public domain.

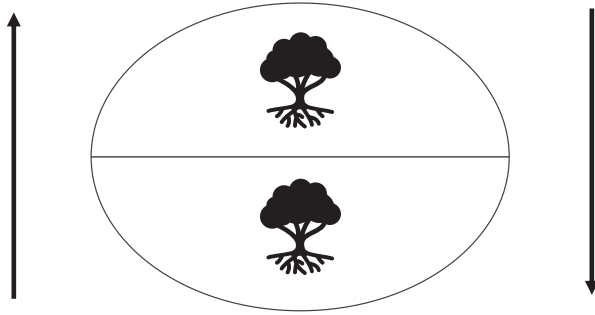


Figure 6.6 Roland Barthes' obtuse image.

Note. Barthes (1977). Creative Commons.

from a *formal* point of view is nothing but the change of certain colours, lines, and volumes which constitutes my world of vision" (1939). Panofsky turns the world of the iconologist upside down by pointing out that the encounter with a work of art may "from a formal point of view" begin with simply perception, formal perception. But in essence, it's also like the encounter with an *other person*. More than a scene of knowledge or interpretation of the work of art, it's a scene of acknowledgement or recognition. Louis Althusser has something similar to say when he explains ideological *interpellation* in terms of a scene of greeting: "When we recognize somebody of our previous acquaintance in the street, we show him that we have recognized him" (1970). The work of art is seen as a kind of person or a kind of being that needs to be acknowledged. I think this is foundational to the whole notion of what an image is. And it leads inevitably to the question, what do pictures want? What do works of art claim from us? What do they do to us? J.L. Austin has taught us how to do things with words. Artists I think are constantly teaching us how we do things with pictures and images.

Now of course, at the most foundational level of iconology, we encounter another detail of Freida's painting, namely the famous Duck-rabbit, which reveals to us, perhaps, a primary essential data about the image, namely its doubleness, its duplicity, its shape-shifting ambiguity.

It is there and not there. It is in the picture and out of the picture (Figure 6.7). Multistability is captured in this image, which migrated all over the world in the 20th century. A couple of years ago, I staged an exhibition called *Metapictures* at the Overseas Contemporary Art Terminal in Beijing.¹ My colleague Wu Hung in Chicago canvassed the world of 20th-century Chinese art to find the Duck-rabbit as well. It turned out it was everywhere. There's an uncanny tendency in that strange little creature. I want to call attention to the text I associate with this, it is what you

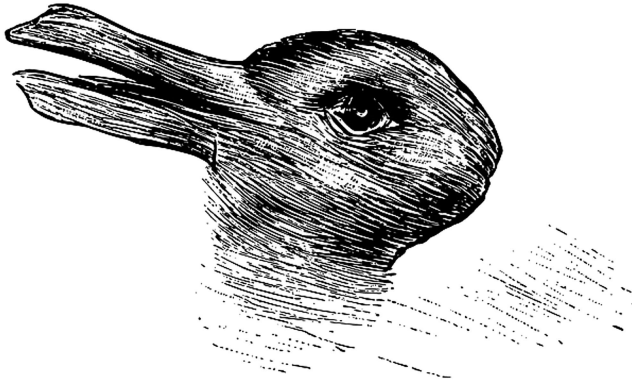


Figure 6.7 The earliest known version of the Duck-rabbit from *Fliegende Blätter*, 1892.

Note. Public domain.

might think of as the canonical text about the Duck-rabbit, Gombrich's remark: "We cannot experience alternate readings of the Duck-Rabbit at the same time" (1960). This has become a kind of fixed dogma in cognitive psychology since it was first introduced by Joseph Jastrow. I prefer Wittgenstein's analysis. He spent many pages in his *Philosophical Investigations* on this kind of image. He points out that "I *may* say 'it's a duck-rabbit'.... The answer that it is a duck-rabbit is the report of a perception" (1953). In other words, there is a third thing to be said – and seen. The ambiguity, the duplicity of the image, doesn't just produce a fluttering or alternation of perception between two incompatible readings, but the occurrence of a new perception of a third thing. We found this when my research assistant and I were trying to find the origin of the Duck-rabbit in the *Fliegende Blätter* in the 1890s. We realised we were not looking for a duck and we were not looking for a rabbit. We were looking for that third thing. So our search template was shifted from the identity of either one of these. I think Gombrich has been decisively refuted on this question and with him the whole dogma of the psychological partitioning of perception as either this or that. How about both/and?

It also led me to ponder the fact that the Duck-rabbit is an animal image. One of my inspirations for many years has been an incredible essay by John Berger called "Why Look at Animals?" (1980). It turns out that images and animals have a kind of affinity in human cultures. Berger claims that the first images were animal images, starting with prehistoric examples such as the caves of Lascaux. But Freida picked out a very different animal

from the Duck-rabbit for her painting, and that was the Golden Calf of Biblical fame. Like every image, the Golden Calf leads us to a text, specifically the Second of the Ten Commandments, which addresses the duplicity of the image as a deep moral and religious transgression of God's law. All the other commandments are straightforward moral rules forbidding things like lying, stealing, adultery, and murder. The second commandment forbids image-making. I quote: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water". It's as if God in dictating the second commandment wants to leave nothing to chance. There cannot be *any* kind of image. And, of course, some philosophers (Maimonides, for instance) took this even further and ruled out metaphor and verbal images as well. The second commandment is that it is merely advisory but absolute. The punishment for making images seems disproportionate, over the top. If you do make an image, "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 32). In other words, God's justice for violating this prohibition is to wipe out you and your offspring. God's punishment is a massacre, a genocide of his chosen people. And if you don't believe it, you get a vivid demonstration of it in Exodus 32, where the jealous, angry God is ready to kill *all* the Israelites. Moses argues with him and says, "What are people going to say about you? What kind of God are you if you brought these people out of Egypt only to wipe them out?" So God says, "OK, you handle it". And then Moses divides the Israelites and only kills half of them. Several thousand are killed that day and are forced to drink the molten gold of the golden calf. Of course, artists have made hundreds of representations of the story of the golden calf. My favourite is Poussin's masterpiece, now in the National Gallery in London (Figure 6.8; Poussin, 1633–1634).

Here, we see the key scene with Moses smashing the commandments of the law, while the Israelites dance around the calf in celebration. I know that as an art historian, I am supposed to say that this painting illustrates and even justifies the story of Exodus. But the painting says something different to me. The painting tells us the calf is magnificent, monumental – much grander than anything a wandering desert tribe could have forged out of their melted-down jewellery. The painting doesn't just say that idols are important; it shows this one as magnificent, the centrepiece of the painting. Could it be that idolatry, image worship, and the effect of images on us is something irrepressible, something built into the human psyche? What Poussin is saying *as an artist* is perhaps not exactly what he might say as a pious Christian.

The moment of the idol, then, is also the moment of iconoclasm. The destruction of images is just as an important part of their story as the making



Figure 6.8 Nicholas Poussin, *The Adoration of the Golden Calf*.

Note. Poussin (1633–1634). Copyright by The National Gallery, London. Reprinted with permission.

of them. Iconoclasm has been a kind of fixed feature since the beginning of the making of impressive images. In Freida's painting, the iconoclastic moment is the image of the World Trade Center's twin towers being destroyed as the idol of globalisation and capital in the 20th century. The idolatry/iconoclasm struggle is a very long story that runs from ancient times to the present. And as Berger argues, it's not only a story that repeats itself in cycles, but it also has moments of innovation. No doubt the caves of Lascaux and the animal images were part of rituals, music, perhaps dance, certainly meditation and storytelling. But the conditions of image-making change with the conditions of media. New technologies make possible new kinds of images, and so Freida settled on Dolly the sheep, the figure of the new animal that came into being in the late 1990s, becoming the iconic animal for the new technology known as cloning. In *What Do Pictures Want*, I wrote these words,

The clone signifies the potential for the creation of new images in our time-, new images that fulfill the ancient dream of creating a "living image", a replica or a copy that's not merely a mechanical duplicate, but an organic, biologically viable simulacrum of a living organism.

Another of Berger's insights about animals is their prophetic character: anything that is done to or with animals will be done to human beings. So Dolly was inevitably a prophetic animal that predicted the arrival of human cloning. And in mass culture and popular culture, we saw entire clone armies emerging. An image, from *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002), was the central symbol of a new moment in the history of media and in warfare. Walter Benjamin's mechanical reproduction was exemplified by photography and the assembly line, to mention the mechanisation of warfare, most notably in the machine gun, one of the most efficient means of mass murder ever invented. Those images dominated ideas about media for much of the 20th century. But towards the end of that century, the twin inventions of the computer and the discovery of the secret of life in DNA converged in a new synthesis I call *biocybernetic reproduction*. We have recently seen this new synthetic technology in the engineering of vaccines, which are not based on any organic material but are informational creations. We can simulate the shape of a virus and create an antibody for it on a computer. It's not done by taking a test tube and putting a sample of the virus into it. You put the virus under a microscope, study its structure, and produce a simulacrum of it. Biocybernetics is the foundational technology of our moment in terms of media, metaphor, and material production.

We can see premonitions of this when we go back to the early 20th century. Freida puts into her painting a dinosaur eating a tree. It is drawn from Winsor McCay's 1914 animated classic, *Gertie the Dinosaur*, which inaugurated the dream of bringing back to life not just the dead, but the extinct. It's so interesting that the beginnings of animation didn't just represent living animals like Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck (the Duck-rabbit animated?). Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* brought an extinct animal back to life, which had been a cultural icon already for over half a century, brought back to life in painting and sculpture and spectacular reconstructions in the Crystal Palace Exhibitions of the 1850s.² *Gertie* is one of the first animated films ever made and it's worth stopping to contemplate it. *Gertie the dinosaur* is a premonition of what will come. It launches the project that is fulfilled in Stephen Spielberg's (1993) *Jurassic Park*. The icon that emerges from *Jurassic Park* is what I would call the *digital (or biocybernetics) dinosaur*. In the making of *Jurassic Park*, Spielberg abandoned animatronics, the method of moving robots and puppets and taking frame shots of each of their movements, and replaced it with digital animation. (Winsor McCay, by the way, had to make Gertie come alive by *drawing* all the thousands of frames by hand; his film shows the transition from manual to mechanical reproduction, just as *Jurassic Park* shows the transition from mechanical to biocybernetic reproduction). There is a moment in *Jurassic Park* when the ferocious velociraptors, who by the way are all *cloned* as female, break into the control room of the park.

One of them turns on the park's orientation film, which is old-fashioned animation. The projection is screened for a moment on the velociraptor's skin, and it displays the DNA code that made it possible to clone these animals. It's an uncanny moment revealing the hidden micro-biological structure of the animal, the biological code that makes it possible for it to come back to life and make big trouble for us.

In the 1990s, the emergence of a formation known as visual culture asked us to go back and rethink not only what pictures are, but what it is to look at pictures, or what it is (as John Berger taught us) to look at *anything*, to look at each other. What is vision itself? The impulse to think philosophically, historically, and anthropologically about vision and the visual process produced books like Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes* (1993), a history of theories of vision from the ancients to the moderns. Freida picked out Descartes, a central figure in this history. Descartes' argument in the *Optics* (1637) is that the best way to understand vision is to contemplate the situation of the blind (Figure 6.9).

Descartes' blind man is not just someone who cannot see, but someone who shows us what seeing really is. Seeing, Descartes argues, is an



Figure 6.9 Descartes, *Optics*.

Note. Descartes (1637, p. 56). Public domain.

extension of touch. His image of the blind man with his walking sticks imagines vision as simply the extension of the sticks to great distances. They are like the orthogonals in a perspectival representation, an analogy reinforced by him doubling and crossing the sticks as if the two eyes of binocular vision are analogous to the two hands that make it possible for us to “grasp” what we see. Descartes does not mention sound, which also plays a crucial role in the way the blind navigate their invisible world, but he is clear about the role of the sticks as analogous to perspectival lines converging at a vanishing point. This then becomes the paradigm for the truthful image, perceived by the eye, but confirmed by the experience of touch.

In a cartoon made by Gregory and published in *New Yorker*, two men are looking at a wall with what appears to be a realistic painting of a city on it, but it could also be interpreted as a window. We could puzzle over this cartoon for a long time. It shows the way that in every medium there is a contrary value that pushes back against mediation itself to present something with a sense of immediacy, as if it is just there. The text reads, “It’s not high definition anything. It’s a window”. But what if it was the other way around? Of course, in this cartoon, it’s neither a window nor a screen. It’s a drawing of a window in a scene with two men, one of whom has made a mistake about what he sees. When we started teaching media studies at the University of Chicago around the late 90s, early 2000s, at one point, we thought about calling them “immedia studies” and asking the question, what constitutes the sensation of the immediate, of that which is non-mediated? Every concept has to have its border, its “definition”, and media certainly must engage with that. The visual medium took us back to Lacan’s reflections on the eye and the gaze (Figure 6.10; Lacan, 1978), as well as the notion of the screen, the image that appears on the screen, and the orthogonals.

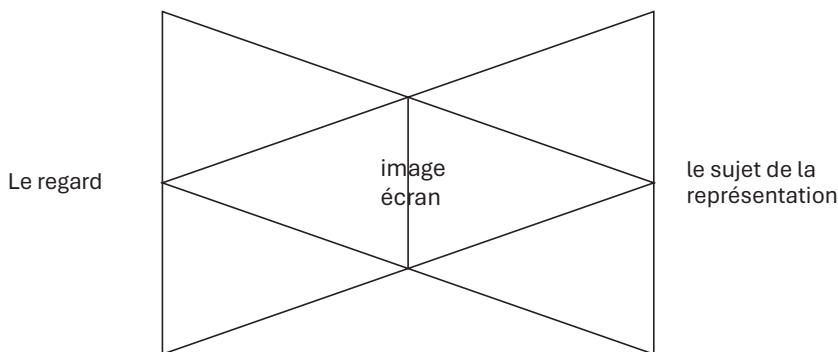


Figure 6.10 Lacan’s “The Eye and the Gaze”.

Note. Lacan (1978). CC.

You might think of these orthogonals as the canes held by the blind man, and Lacan's diagram of the encounter of the eye and the gaze, of the subject and object in the visual field, and what lies between the subject and object in the image or the screen. Saussure had given us a picture of what he called the 'phonation circuit' of the mouth and the ear (Figure 6.11; Saussure, 1959, p. 11).

The phonation circuit builds on Freud's notion of the drives (anal, genital) adding to it the *vocative drive*, the need to hear and to be heard. In Figure 6.11 is also my cartoon rendering of Lacan's circuit of sight and touch, what he called the *scopic drive*, the desire to see and be seen. Visual culture, of course, quickly turned and went beyond meditations on

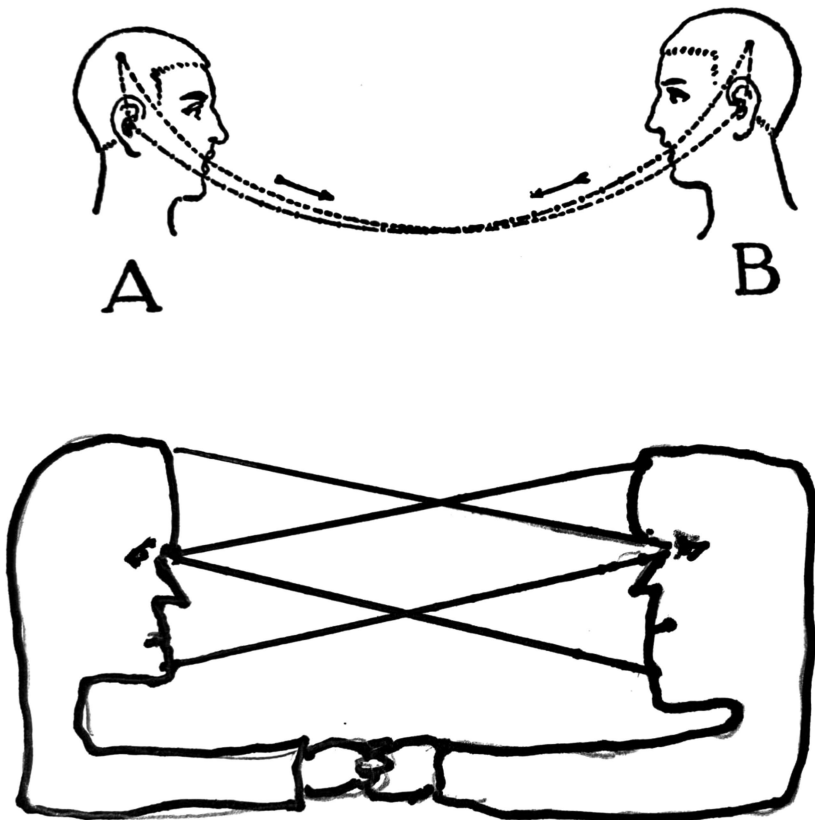


Figure 6.11 Saussure's *Phonation Circuit of Mouth/Ear* and Mitchell's cartoon rendering of Lacan's *Scopic Circuit of Sight and Touch*.


Note. Saussure (1916/1959, p. 11). Public domain.

the ontology of vision, the question of what is the visual process, to the irreducible connection of the visual with the question of power, the idea of the subject as a seeing subject or a seen subject, and the idea of the sovereign subject, as in this case, Big Brother, who not only sees everything but shows everything as well. In the movie *1984* (Radford, 1984), the main character Winston Smith hides in the corner away from the telescreen and writes in his journal. In that scene, the book becomes a refuge from visual surveillance, from the optical regime of tyranny. And Big Brother's face becomes laminated with the faces of the masses, an updating of this old fantasy of the sovereign subject, Hobbes' Leviathan, with all of the multitudes inside the body of the sovereign looking towards him.

So let me conclude now with media aesthetics. Freida captured this too in the bottom section of her painting, a rendering of the Platonic Cave, which I think of as after all these years still a kind of master metaphor for multimedia and the multisensory, multi-semiotic features of media. You probably all know Plato's allegory of the Cave by heart, an image, as he says, of human life. "A strange image you speak of, Socrates". It is an image of a total media situation, an entire world presented as a cave in which the prisoners are forced to see nothing but shadows on the wall in front of them. "Like to us", says Socrates. So what happens then, when we try to turn this into a curriculum, to introduce 350 students to something called media aesthetics? We decided immediately to triangulate the question of media aesthetics around the three foundational elements of theatre laid out by Aristotle's account of the means of mimesis in drama and in tragic drama. Aristotle identifies the "means" or medium of drama as *opsis*, *melos*, and *lexis*, the spectacle, the music, and the words. Wagner echoes Aristotle when he theorises the *gesamtkunstwerk* or *total work of art* of opera, placing music as the most immediate medium, the thing that goes directly to the emotions.

And this triangulation is remarkably consistent, articulated at many different levels in the descriptions of media as you can see in Figure 6.12.

We find echoes of Aristotle and Wagner in Roland Barthes' classic *Image, Music, Text* (1977) and in Lacan's division of the psychological into the *Imaginary*, the *Real*, and the *Symbolic*. The Real is the realm of immediacy, of trauma, of the thing that feels like it broke through whatever media barrier you had between yourself and the content. I'm sure everyone in this audience has read Friedrich Kittler's classic *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999), which builds upon Lacan's structure of the imaginary, real, and symbolic to link them with the technologies of mechanical reproduction that in his view constituted the modern media system. For Kittler, this is the period from 1870 to 1930, the time in which cinema, sound recording, and the keyboard interface were developed. The typewriter section of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* is the one that's most

Aristotle	Opsis	Melos	Lexis
Wagner	Spectacle	Music (immediate)	Poetry
Barthes	Image	Music	Text
Lacan	Imaginary	Real	Symbolic
Kittler	Film	Gramophone	Typewriter
Goodman	Sketch	Score	Script
Peirce	Icon	Index	Symbol
Foucault	Seeable	[X] Frontier	Sayable
Hume	Similarity	Cause and Effect	Convention
Saussure		Bar	Arbor

Triangulating Media Aesthetics

Figure 6.12 Triangulating media aesthetics.

problematic and most unexpected. Everyone expects sound and sight, cinema and sound recording, but the typewriter and the whole notion of this device, not just as a machine for inscribing the Symbolic, but the keyboard interface as the medium of the digital in both senses: digital codes and physical fingers.

Then there were philosophical approaches coming from a very austere field. Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* (1976), approached the question of media from the standpoint of the theory of notation. He produced a very rigorous triad that fundamentally echoes these same three registers: *sketch*, *score*, and *script*. The score employs the most rigorous notation, aspiring to a kind of exactitude that alphabetic writing never attains, since it "writes down" instructions for volume, pitch, duration, and other acoustical qualities. Composers and musicians have a relation to writing that's quite different from people like us who live in the world of written language. They write and read with a precision that is unimaginable in language. Goodman treated the score as the place where writing encounters the real most directly. Script, the loose, improvised notational structure of alphabetic writing systems doesn't have the same kind of notational rigour and compliance. The sketch is the loosest of all, an infinite number

of possible sketches constantly corrected and correctable. Then of course there is Peirce, the *icon*, the *index* and the *symbol*, his foundational semiotic types, signs by resemblance, by cause and effect, and by convention. On the side of philosophy, good old David Hume reminding us that the laws of signs are also the laws of thought, *similarity*, *cause and effect*, and *convention*, the three laws of the association of ideas. Or Foucault's wonderful dialectic between the *seeable* and the *sayable* and with a kind of border or blank place which he illustrates in his wonderful little book on Magritte as what he calls the *crevasse* between the picture of the pipe and the legend, "This is not a pipe". And finally within language itself, Saussure's picture of language as an icon separated from a symbol, the word "arbor", by an index, the bar that cuts the sign in two, or if you follow Peirce, cuts it in three. So it is all there in Freida's painting. I haven't shown everything in it, there are a few details left out but you can see the scene of greeting, the golden calf, the Duck-rabbit, Descartes's blind man, the moment of iconoclasm with the twin towers, Dolly the sheep, the dinosaur eating the tree, next to her is a camera capturing the image of the dinosaur eating the tree. And finally at the ground level, the base of the whole thing, the platonic cave.

Questions and Answers

Ines Tebourski: You spoke about the history of the icon and the image, and you also spoke about icons like Dolly and how images are read. What about reading these icons in a multimodal work of literature? I'm working on William Blake's *Illuminated Works*, which is a multimodal work in which not only the image lends itself to a meaning-making process, but also the poetry and the work of art. It's iconic and poetic, and my question is to what extent is the image dominant? When we look at a multimodal piece of literature in which there is painting and poetry for example, to what extent is the image the one which first attracts our attention and controls our reading of the text? And to what extent is it possible, in multimodal words, to give favour to both modes?

Tom Mitchell: Thank you. It's a very important question and my own formation as a scholar begins with exactly the question you're raising, because when I was a graduate student, I fell in love with William Blake and his illuminated books which were descendants of the old illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, but in a

new technical foundation of engraving and printing. Blake's composite art was exactly an attempt to think about the relations of image and text and how you can move from the visual to the verbal, from pictures to writing and back again. For a long time, they were separated. In Blake's editions, you didn't even know he was an official artist or that they were art books. You knew he was an artist, but the illuminated books had never been treated as what they were, which were synthetic, hybrid, multimodal objects. Your question is exactly what launched my whole career and there was only one book already in print about Blake as a maker of illuminated books and that was by Jean Hagstrom (1964). But Jean treated the images mainly as illustrations, he said, "The text is what's important". I opted for a different model based on Blake's own idea of contraries, in other words, a dialectical model of interplay or interaction, in which images could contradict the text. It was most famous in his illustration of the tiger where *The Tiger* poem presents a ferocious fearsome sublime creature burning bright in the forests of the night there is no such image. In our humanities freshman class, I will be teaching Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) and the assignment for each student in the class is to prepare a discussion of one page, and these pages are of course all mixed of icons, symbols and indices. Bechdel is a real maestro of the comics medium, she makes it into a mixture of all kinds of signs, including photography, including sound ... so learning to read that is central to what we're trying to teach.

Niklas Salmose:

Thank you, Tom, for your lovely presentation so beautifully structured around this painting. My question is very specific because I just want to take the opportunity to ask somebody who's been doing so much work on visual arts something that's been bugging me for a long, long time. Very concretely: if we think about film, when you go from a moving image to a still image but the sound still continues, for example at the end of Truffaut's first new wave film – *The 400 Blows* (1959) – and in Kubrick, there are many examples, more often I think in 60s and 70s film productions. You're still in the same media product, but

there is a kind of reshuffling of focus of modalities, if we're using Elleström's terminology. Suddenly that has such a sublime or uncanny effect on an audience, but I have never really managed to put my finger on what is actually happening there, and why it is so profoundly special in terms of aesthetics?

Tom Mitchell:

That's a wonderful question and I think that what you are perceiving is the deconstruction of the distinction between the moving and the still image. Which, if I were going to give you a polemic on this, I would just say "Could we get away from the idea of the still image?" I mean, I think there are silent images, they don't all talk or make sound but they all move, and to me the Duck-rabbit shows you that at the foundation of the image, there is a fluttering, an instability or a multi-stability. Think about Panofsky's encounter. He asks "What is it to look at a work of art?" *before* we talk about interpreting it, or reading it, deciphering, allegorizing. He begins by comparing it, tipping one's hat to an acquaintance on the street as if looking at a work of art is like acknowledging the encounter with another person. He doesn't say it *is* another person, only that the work is *like* an other. Now of course our lives are overburdened with multitudes of others (and images!); we can't pay equal attention to all of them. But this is an insight that I think Panofsky skipped over too quickly. I don't know if he was aware of Stanley Cavell's arguments about *acknowledgement* as opposed to knowledge, but to me, the critical moment in the perception of a work of art is the moment of acknowledgement, of encountering it as not a still image, not as frozen in time but here and now and also there and then, present and absent. In a phenomenological sense (i.e. self-reflective experience), I think there are no still images, in that sense that they are all potentially reawakenable, revivable. This is what I think Winsor McCay was suggesting when he promised to bring extinct creatures back to life with animation. Spielberg then turns it into a sci-fi fantasy of cloning the DNA of extinct creatures, realized via digital animation. The reversal of extinction is definitely on our technical horizon. We have never seen a living mastodon in a zoo, but mastodon

DNA is available and cloneable. It's just a question of when, so I think your irritation is well found, but it's grounded in an intuition which I share, that there's no such thing as a still image.

Niklas Salmose:

Thank you, can I just add one thing because this idea of the non-existent still image in a cinematic sphere seems more explicit if you go to the cinema, and you have the projector sound and you have the movement of the machines simultaneously with the projection of the non-still image, thank you Tom.

Tom Mitchell:

In cinema of course there's no still image, there might be a frame, but does anybody look at the frames? They pass constantly by us. Also in comics, some people say "Well comics are filled with still images" but then there are the gutters, the jumps and the spatialization of time so that with comics, we also move through them, and I think we impose a mental cinema on them. We see them as if we are replaying them in our minds as we go from panel to panel.

Doron Galili:

I want to bring Gertie into this conversation. Recently, thanks to the work of the wonderful Don Crafton who staged, or restaged, in the form of a play the way the film was originally shown. He reminded us of how McCay himself appeared on a screen against the background of the projected Gertie as a kind of trainer or interlocutor with her. Your comment about extinction was fascinating. Not only does technology revive the extinct, but it also makes it present with humans and highlights the screen's presence. This is very McCayanian, with its thresholds and transitions that enrich the film. Since you mentioned extinction in the context of media, I'm curious about your thoughts on media aesthetics and how a growing awareness of extinction affects our understanding of our changing environment. How does this work inform or challenge our perception of our environment's end?

Tom Mitchell:

Yeah well, it's a sad story. I think that is one of the central myths since the mid-19th century or since Cuvier really, when the fact dawned on scientists that something like 90 per cent of the living things that have been on this planet are no longer around. There's no guarantee of indefinite longevity for

species, and the human species has now established itself as a principal cause of extinction. While my talk is going on, at least two or three animal species, the last survivors, have disappeared from the planet. When you try to get your mind around this fact it is deeply alarming, especially since in this historical moment we are just emerging from a plague, and stumbling into wars, with the ominous threat of a world war which would be a genocidal and extinction event. It certainly looks like Putin wants to extinguish a nation, the Ukrainians are going to become an endangered people already. And now Israel and Palestine are immersed in a cycle of mutual vengeance, violence, and accusations of genocide [revised]. And all of this is taking place while we put climate change on the back burner. We can't pay attention to that; there is always something more urgent to deal with, namely war. All this brings out the gloomiest side of my generally cheery personality. To meditate on dinosaurs and show good old Winsor McCay trying to bring them back to life: why do we want to do this, to bring them back to life? I think it's an answer to this anxiety, that we are a murderous species. We are killing lots of living things and we're also killing the conditions for our own survival. So again, to go back to John Berger: "Whatever is done to animals, will be done, is already being done to human beings". It's a dark question, I'd rather dwell on the moment in *Gertie the Dinosaur* when you see Winsor McCay and all his assistants with enormous stacks of paper because they've got to make all of the individual frames of the animation, and one of the assistants spills them all over the floor and they're rushing around trying to pick them up and put them back in the right order. Maybe iconology is just an escape from the reality of what we're doing. Or a way to imagine an escape.

Beate Schirrmacher: Thank you for a wonderful lecture. I'd like to revisit the Duck-rabbit and the different ways to approach it. We can see it as either/ or, but by discussing it as a Duck-rabbit, we can perceive and acknowledge the multistability. My first reaction was that by looking at it and speaking about it, I can acknowledge the multistability with language, despite some oscillation

in my perception. But since I'm not a visual scholar and not trained in analyzing images like you do, maybe it's due to my lack of familiarity with visual complexity. This raises the question of what awareness of the complexity of verbal-, image-, and sound communication is? It is crucial not only for media aesthetics but also for digital literacy so how can we understand this?

Tom Mitchell:

I won't be able to give you a very convincing answer because I regard myself as a digital illiterate. For me, the digital/analogue difference has always been a stumbling block. I live in an analogue world even when I'm reading and when I'm deciphering script or text. To me, the digital is always being converted into the analogue. I follow Brian Massumi's classic essay on the superiority of the analogue. I really don't want to know what's going on inside my computer. I don't want to write code. I have freshmen in my humanities class who are in computer science and I think they will be at the frontier of answering this question, but most of them also say, you know, "Coding is not just the keyboard", it's also what is going to guide your fingers as you code. What are you looking for? What are you trying to bring into being? So as for the Duck-rabbit, I think you're right. Those of us who've cultivated visual skills of recognizing motifs in images, you know, looking at a painting and saying, "Aha that's Descartes's blind man" or "That is the Necker cube" a cube in which all of the sides are drawn exactly the same length so the cube won't stabilize, it won't fit in perspective but it invites you to think in perspective and then it disturbs it. There were two moments when I realized the Duck-rabbit was a third thing. One was just when we were looking for it, and I realized we were not looking for a duck or a rabbit, but looking for the third thing. It's the search template, the precognitive schematism that you're looking for. Another was a remark from one of my students, an African-American woman in my class said, "I don't get it, I can see both". When I asked her to explain, she said, "Why do I have to explain, I'm just telling you I can see both". She elaborated by comparing the Duck-rabbit image to racial

identity, seeing it as a hybrid, like a mulatto, neither entirely one thing nor the other. She shifted the question to the perception of racial identity as opposed to species identity. There are lots of interesting exercises you can do with students around this puzzle of multi-stability. I always ask them, what do you see first? The duck or the rabbit? The duck always wins. Why? I don't know. Maybe because it's the noisy animal that quacks and the rabbit is silent. It's still a mystery even after I've learned to conjure with it quite a bit. But thank you, that's a great question Beate, I appreciate it.

Heidrun Führer: Thank you for your lecture, I loved it. I got really inspired by your triangular list about media aesthetics. As a classicist teaching Intermediality in Lund, I often start my course on the total work of art with Aristotle and move to Wagner. Are you familiar with Shaw-Miller's article on Opsis, Melos, and Lexis (2015)? He clearly differentiates that while image, music, and text are the basis of our intermedial studies, Aristotle saw these elements, like Melos and Lexis as more hybrid, indicating all media are mixed media from the start. Your point about mixed categories aligns with this, showing how historical perspectives on media change over time. Given your perspective, I'd like to ask: shouldn't we say "all is mixed with media"? Where do you see the limits of the medium discourse? Lars discussed reception as historical and personal mediation, and then he spoke about the media product. Your talk mentioned Lacan's subject-object relation as a kind of blended space. If we embrace this hybrid effect, can there be a limit to the medium? Where are the limits of media studies?

Tom Mitchell: I think it's a very difficult question and I don't think I'm going to be able to give a very convincing answer. My slogan, and it's more of a slogan than an answer, is that there is always something outside the medium. To talk about the medium is always, I think, to imply that there is something beyond it, outside of it that is unmediated or immediate. In a way, it's just a question of grammar, of the word medium itself. We qualify it with the idea of things that come to us without mediation, directly. But where that boundary is going to be

is very difficult to specify. I think Lacan was trying to get at immediacy with the idea of the Real, the Symbolic and Imaginary. The Real is the thing that feels unmediated or immediate – the usual example being the wound or trauma that is felt directly. I am glad that my table is useful to you. The strong elements in it are the horizontal ones with the terms that these theorists adopted and thought out. The weak ones are the verticals, and I think you were pointing out that they reflect different historical moments, they're talking about different things. Nelson Goodman's theory of notation is in a quite different universe from Wagner's *The total work of art*.

Jørgen Bruhn:

I'd like to ask a question that relates to this and goes back in history. It relates to Lars also because we said so many times both in Lund and in Växjö, that "all media are mixed media". I remember the long discussions we had also with you, on defining medium and you're getting at that now also. One of the major insights of Lars was to make this media model with modalities that some of us find very useful, strong, and convincing. I don't remember where I read it but I remember that you had a model that defined media like a food recipe, right? The idea was that some basic ingredients must be in every imaginable plate, in every course, and in the same way that was your kind of working definition of media. But on the other hand, it seems to me that you have suggested this playfully and didn't return to it. Could you bring us back a little bit historically to this point in media studies, inter-medial studies, and iconology going towards media aesthetics, when the question of defining medium was very important?

Tom Mitchell:

I started as a McLuhanite, I still think he is the great prophet of media studies even though he was discredited, ridiculed, and his star sank out of sight, especially during the age of theory when Walter Benjamin sort of took over our understanding of media. But there's one thing I think McLuhan bequeathed to media studies which we must never forget, and that's a sense of play. Questions like "What is outside the medium?" and "What goes into a medium?" are going to be phenomenological and empirical investigations

that consider experience, surprise and the arrival of new things that we didn't anticipate, or the revival of old things we thought we'd left behind. I think of the table of theorists as a way of capturing a fundamental triad of thinking about media together with the numerous ingredients, historical and philosophical, that go into any specific example. The emphasis of a theory may move from sensation and perception to the nature of signs and notations, to metaphysical categories like time and space, to institutional arrangements like Foucault's *Seeable and sayable*, exemplified by prisons and the discourse of the law. Here, the many different kinds of ingredients can go into any medium. They are the multimodal elements, like solids, liquids, and gases. But when people say, "Well this is very abstract and ahistorical", I'm glad that Heidrun didn't think it was ahistorical, she read my chart as historical and I'm grateful for that, but it's been objected to this, "Why are you getting so abstract, why are you trying to lift us out of the innumerable kinds of media into these kinds of structural triads". And my answer is, "It's what Marshall McLuhan would call a probe", which he was basing in electronics. Where you have a big circuit board filled with impossible complexity and you take a testing instrument, you put it in and something lights up, a relationship emerges. Abstraction and concreteness are the fundamental dialectic of critical reasoning and experimental thinking. I met McLuhan, by the way. When I was a graduate student at John's Hopkins in 1968, he gave a lecture to the English department in a state of total drunkenness which was unbelievably memorable. I was imprinted by him at quite an early age about the importance of playfulness and humour in theory. A recognition that we're not going to be able to answer in a metaphysical way what is outside of media, or what is beyond it. We're always going to find ourselves inserting a probe into a circuit board and seeing what lights up.

Freida Tesfagiorgis: First of all thank you, Professor Mitchell, Tom, for bringing my painting into the conversation. Someone mentioned something about the conversation being structured around the painting, but the painting

is actually structured around Professor Mitchell's teaching. I've worked with Professor Mitchell at the University of Chicago. I was teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, African and African American Art History. I had earned my MFA in painting a long time ago, and as I was reading art history, all of a sudden visual culture emerged on the scene and I was telling my husband, "I really don't understand this". These debates were going on between our historians and visual culturalists and I said, "I need to get into the classroom", and fortunately I saw that Professor Mitchell was teaching visual culture and Professor Heller was teaching modern art and primitivism, so I went back into the classroom, and I began to bring visual culture, the things that I was learning at the University of Chicago, into the University of Wisconsin. I found that this painting was stimulated by my studies, so all of these materials, or symbols or icons, came out of all the readings that we were assigned to do under Professor Mitchell. In studying for the exams, I was most afraid of the visual culture, because there are just so many different areas. You're moving between art history, philosophy, media studies, and so on. You do what you can to prepare for the exam, but then, the night before the exam I had this dream of all of these terms, all of the philosophers, the images, the names, the titles of books, et cetera, just moving around like a Jackson Pollock painting. I woke up and I did a quick sketch, it was more like an abstract painting, and then I went and took the exam. I did well on the exam despite the fear, and I think we all do that, and later on I decided that I needed to do this painting. I started out with the abstract but thought it wasn't working. It was chaos, and I think that's like the chaos or the panic that we may have as we go into an exam. That's how that painting came about, and I realized that an abstract painting didn't make any sense, because I kept seeing the icons or the images, and so I began to take those various icons related to all of the materials that we were reading and put them into some kind of context. The painting is structured around the visual culture program and studies that I had under Professor

Mitchell. Thank you so much Professor Mitchell for all of that, and thank you for inviting me today.

Tom Mitchell: Thank you for making that painting, dear Freida. It gave me a way to think across this multiplicity of examples.

Erik Erlanson: I would like to thank you for your lecture, which I appreciated very much. I also found the table very thought-provoking, and I have a short question: you mentioned the concept of biocybernetic reproduction as a kind of new age, and you placed it in relation to Walter Benjamin. I was just wondering if you could elaborate on that notion because he made the argument that this has consequences for our understanding of the artwork, and so on?

Tom Mitchell: Yes, biocybernetics is a relatively straightforward concept. Walter Benjamin made photography and the mechanical reproduction of images into a basic model for modernity, alongside the assembly line and the mechanical production of commodities. Benjamin's essay goes back to Roman coinage and to woodcut and other forms of mechanical reproduction. But photography speeds up the production of images. A further speedup has happened in our time with the invention of digital photography, which creates and circulates images much more rapidly than it could in Benjamin's time. But one thing that was always at stake in image-making was the desire to create a "life-like" representation, an "imitation of life", and even to bring the dead back to life. The idea that the image keeps something alive, or that the image is itself alive, was literalized in the 1990s when DNA was revealed as a digital code underlying the analogue appearance of an organism. So, two inventions converged: the computer on the one hand, along with information science and digital coding, and on the other hand, the discovery of the code of life, the four proteins of DNA. That's why my icon for this is the double helix on the one hand, and the Turing machine on the other – the four proteins of DNA, wrapped in a spiral and the binary computer of information science, with its ones and zeros. When those two technologies found a way to talk to each other, to coordinate, that was biocybernetics. The animal icon

of that convergence is Dolly the sheep, who became world-famous as the first cloned animal. Nobody asks, of course, how many failed tries there were before the scientists got a viable sheep who could survive more than a few minutes. The story of cloning is a whole epic in itself. I recommend my essay in *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005) entitled “The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetics”, which examines cinematic narratives about cloning: Stephen Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* is premised on the cloning of extinct DNA to bring the dinosaurs back to life, George Lucas’s *Star Wars* introduces an army of cloned warriors created from the DNA of a single stormtrooper, and Arnold Schwarzenegger fights with his cloned double in *The Sixth Day*. Novels and films about cloning proliferated around the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, making it the cultural icon of biocybernetics, the convergence of biology and information science.

Toby Logan:

Thank you, Professor. That was a very enlightening talk. It took me back to my fondest times of my history of art degree. It’s somewhat unrelated, but also continuing from what Erik asked about. In your opinion, where do you think the digitally altered images and video footage, otherwise known as deep fakes, might fit into the channels of digital culture or visual culture? That is, media which are digitally manipulated to purposely deceive its viewer.

Tom Mitchell:

That’s a very important question. I think the deep fake depends upon a parallel concept, which I would call the deep copy. In the early 1990s, a scholar at MIT named William J. Mitchell, (no relation) wrote a book on the rise of the digital image entitled *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (1992). Mitchell argued that the image condensed into a JPEG file and reproduced endlessly is clearly different from the old idea of printing from a master copy a negative that is a direct impression of what the eye could see. He expressed alarm over this, arguing that we can no longer trust photographs to have a direct connection to reality. The traditional photographic image was a trace of the real. I felt it was necessary to debate this claim. My argument is that the deep fake was always possible before the

invention of digital photography. The “depth” of the fake is in our assumptions that photographs are true, transparent transcriptions of the real, rather than complex products of mechanical inventions involving lenses, shutters, apertures, techniques, and chemical laboratories. Spirit photography had always found a way of representing things that weren’t there, and darkroom tricks could make different people appear in the same photo even though they had never met. The digital image also presumes the deep copy, but what is copied automatically is not just an optical impression, but a whole archive of metadata – the time and date of the exposure, the specific camera that took it, even the location (given GPS) where the picture was taken. The digital photo actually contains *more information* than the old chemical-based print. I would recommend here a chapter in my book *Image Science* (2015) entitled “Realism and the Digital Image”. The fundamental issue with the question of photographic “truth” and “fakery” is this: you cannot have deep fakes unless you have a prior notion of deep truth, a kind of built-in trust of the medium. And that is what photography came with: it was supposed to be automatically true, realistic, and accurate. But the deeper the truth (and trust), the deeper the capacity for fakery. The truth of images, our trust in their veracity, is not automatic, not guaranteed by the simple fact that they are photographic, but by a larger discourse engaged with credibility, accuracy, and reality.

Martin Rossouw:

I’m thrilled that you shared the painting with us today. I’m very interested in the meta pictures in that picture, and I’m curious about the fact that the cave at the bottom seems to have a privileged place in that pantheon of meta pictures, and you seem to suggest that it’s this massive metaphor. As a film scholar, I’m interested in the fact that the cave is also a metaphor for cinema. Considering the importance of the cave to you, I’m curious about the importance of cinema to you. And I’m asking that with a few things in mind. You speak often of the growing importance of your son’s work as a filmmaker in your thinking. You just told us there’s no such thing as a still image, that

all images move. I'm just curious, how do you see the role of films, cinema and the moving image, as potentially a privileged meta picture in your own thinking and development?

Tom Mitchell:

I've had the good luck to be able to go through a long professional career without ever becoming professional or disciplined. Starting with Blake, I said, "One discipline is not enough". And that's what I think is key to the humanities, a certain "indisciplinarity". When visual culture first burst onto the scene, I felt like it invited us to look at everything visual as interesting, as potentially important. Of course, a lot of what we see, we don't even bother to look at. One of my first art history books was actually by a colleague at Chicago named Joshua Taylor, entitled *Learning to Look* (1957). So everyday life, -architecture, and -landscape, encounter the strange idea that sometimes human beings have the ability to look at *nothing*, to look at empty space, and to find something deeply moving and interesting in it. Just the view from a window or, with the great landscape of painters of the 19th century, the view from a mountain top, or the view of a mountain. I once wrote an essay about landscape asking the question, what does it mean when somebody says, look at the *view*.³ What are you looking at? And to me, the answer was that you're not looking at anything particularly, you're looking at everything in particular as a certain assemblage in a certain moment, in time, in your life. So to me, landscape aesthetics has been a kind of metaphor for the power of visual culture to keep one's eyes open and alert to all possibilities. Cinema is clearly crucial to that. Right now, my students are writing their final papers. I told them to write about a film that they love and think is important to them. And they don't have to check with me to make sure it is "appropriate". I'm going to spend the entire weekend watching the films that they are writing about, which is a kind of gift. I don't think I would have ever watched *Interstellar* without one of my students recommending it. Nor *There Will Be Blood* or contemporary cartoons. One key, I think, to being undisciplined is to let your students lead you, because they're the ones who are

going to produce the next phase or the next wave of real knowledge.

Eleni Timplalexi:

Thank you very much for the wonderful seminar. My question is when I first saw the Duck-rabbit in that version, I didn't like it very much, but then I thought, "This is completely irrelevant to the discussion", and I blame modernism for this. What do you think? Do you think all pictures really want to be kissed? And modernism asks us to kiss beyond beauty?

Tom Mitchell:

Is this a trick question? I don't blame the modern artists. I blame the modernist critics. I hold Clement Greenberg (1992) responsible for an essay which I have taught so many times. And I love the essay, but you know, you can often love a text that you disagree with violently. Greenberg basically said, "The purpose of modern painting is to get rid of representation". We don't want any Duck-rabbits in there. We don't want anything recognizable. It has to be pure painting, just colour, shape, and flatness. It's as if he was saying, in relation to Panofsky's idea of the beginning of looking at a painting, don't go beyond shape and colour. Don't go beyond the purely visual impression. Don't try to read or interpret. And this is why he called his essay "Towards a Newer Laocoön". He was echoing the great essay by Lessing from the 18th century, which said, "Painting is one thing and poetry is another. Don't try to mix them. Don't try to produce hybrid versions. Don't try to tell stories with painting. It's not equipped for that. The painting shows you a moment". And so, Lessing and Greenberg have always been, I think, crucial to the teaching of intermedia, multimedia, and multimodality, precisely because they resisted it. You need to see and deal with the argument of the other side, which is that media have specific identities. They are singular. They have things they can do and nothing else can do, and things that they cannot do. I'm sympathetic to that. But when it became a dogma for Greenberg, I think, it made abstract painting into a dead end. Abstract painting is still around. I still love it. I have no problem with looking at shapes and colours, just as I have no problem with looking at landscapes with no subject in them. I'm not looking at anything in particular.

I'm looking at the whole thing, a space. I don't know if that answers your question, but the moment when Robert Rauschenberg inserted the Duck-rabbit into one of his paintings, we knew that abstract modernism was on its way out as the avant-garde of the visual arts.

Mieke Bal:

This is very short. Tom, what do you say to a freshman, not to me, but to a freshman who asks about what the meaning is of the second word of your course, media aesthetics? I'm not asking for a philosophical answer, but what would you say?

Tom Mitchell:

I give the same answer to the freshman that I would give you, that aesthetics has to do with the senses. I go back, of course, to questions of beauty, but also ugliness, sublimity, all of the categories of (dis)pleasure that you might apply to an experience. Do you like to look at this? Does it make you feel good? Do you feel seduced? Mystified? Curious? What does the image *do* in terms of sensation and experience? So yes, media aesthetics was crucial. Instead of just treating media as means of communication, we wanted media to be connected to the senses, what McLuhan called "the massage" as opposed to the *message*. The sensuous aspect of media, and their relation to the human body, the eye, the ear, and the hand, is crucial, and it forms another triad (optics, acoustics, tactility) to be considered here. In our term devoted to sound, audition, orality, etc., we developed a group performance around the notion of the *sound* image. (Sound Studies, by the way, has emerged as a research field modelled on and designed to correct the emphasis on the visual). The artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan designed the performance for us as a symposium held in total darkness. The only sensations permitted in the performance (which involved about 90 people), were speech and the rustling of moving bodies. In addition, we had a system of flashing lights so that participants could signal the speakers to slow down, speed up, or repeat themselves. Abu Hamdan based this on the structure of visual cues used at the Nuremberg trials of the Nazis after World War II. There is nothing like complete darkness in a crowded room to produce strange, uncanny sensations. I found that my

eyes were so hungry for light that I tried closing them in the hopes that I would be able to see my mental images.

Mieke Bal: Well, thanks. And thanks for a wonderful session. It was great, as always.

Notes

- 1 Metapictures, the catalogue, and a separate publication in English and Chinese are available. See <https://www.cafa.com.cn/en/News/details/8325648>
- 2 See Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and times of a Cultural Icon* (1998) for a comprehensive study of this cultural icon.
- 3 See Mitchell's introduction to *Landscape and Power* (1994; 2nd edition, 2001).

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Introduction to Chapter 7

Intertextuality and Quotation

Matilda Davidsson

In a world characterised by rapid change and an abundance of information, the role of art in helping us remember and remain attentive has become increasingly important. Art possesses a unique ability to capture and reflect the complexities of human experience, serving as both a mirror and a catalyst for change. In this chapter, cultural theorist and video artist Mieke Bal explores the concept of art as a means of remembering and staying attentive, highlighting its transformative power and the ways in which it can inspire us to pause, reflect, and alter our habits. By examining the intersection of word and image, as well as the temporal nature of artistic expression, Bal delves into how art functions as a dynamic force for personal and societal transformation.

In this chapter, Bal argues that the role of art extends beyond passive observation; it needs to become an active force that encourages us to think critically and act consciously. This transformative potential of art can be understood through its ability to “activate” rather than merely serve as a form of activism. By activating our senses and emotions, art prompts us to confront our assumptions and consider alternative perspectives.

Through the concept of quotation in relation to intermediality, Bal explores how the mutuality of source and target media products transforms and integrates temporal aspects represented in media products.

A key aspect of art’s power to activate lies in the interplay between word and image. These elements do not exist in isolation but are deeply interconnected, each informing and enhancing the other. Bal ties this relationship to roots in the philosophical ideas of thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure, who explored the nature of language and meaning. According to Derrida, language is inherently temporal, constantly evolving and shaped by context. Similarly, Saussure’s theories emphasise the arbitrary nature of signs, highlighting the fluidity and interdependence of word and image.

In art, the fusion of word and image creates a rich tapestry of meaning, allowing for multiple layers of interpretation. This complexity invites

people to engage more deeply with the artwork, prompting them to consider not only what is presented but also the underlying context and implications. By challenging conventional boundaries between word and image, art encourages us to remain attentive and open to new possibilities.

Bal takes the reader through a series of case studies, each highlighting different ways quotation can be used as a transmediating and activating process. From Doris Salcedo's work *Palimpsesto*, through Monika Huber's reimagination of News images, to Edward Munch's painting *Metabolism*, Bal's own enactment of Caravaggio's *John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, and Indian artist Nalini Malani's drawings.

This chapter's Questions and Answers section delves into the crucial role of interpretation and intertextuality within the information sphere. While art invites diverse interpretations, it is essential that these interpretations remain grounded in the artwork itself. Scholars and critics bear a responsibility to ensure that their analyses are rooted in the actual content of the art, avoiding the pitfalls of misinformation and misrepresentation.

Interpretation is inherently context-dependent, influenced by cultural analysis and intermediality. Cultural analysis considers the social and historical context in which an artwork is created and received, while intermediality examines the interactions between different media forms. By taking these factors into account, scholars can provide more nuanced and informed interpretations that honour the complexity of the artwork.

The challenge lies in striking a balance between openness to diverse interpretations and the responsibility to prevent disinformation. This requires a careful consideration of the semiosphere, the semiotic environment in which art and communication exist. While close reading focuses on the text itself, cultural analysis expands the scope to include the broader social and cultural context.

By recognising the interconnectedness of word, image, and context, Bal argues that scholars and audiences alike can engage with art in a way that is both open-minded and critically informed. This approach not only enriches our understanding of art but also empowers us to use it as a tool for remembering, reflecting, and effecting change.

7 Citational Aesthetics

Media Meeting in Intermediality

Mieke Bal

Disclaimer: Parts of this chapter have been published before in the chapter “Citational Aesthetics: For Intermediality as Interrelation” by Bal (2023) in *The Palgrave Handbook for Intermediality*.

Introduction: “Inter-” for Integration

Intermediality is seen as a transgression of media borders and a combination and/or an integration of elements from different media types. In order to make this less focused on transgression and foregrounding more strongly the integration, I consider *quotation*: the productive adoption into one media product of elements from another. Quotations consist of integrating recognisable fragments taken elsewhere. In tune with his modesty, in this lecture in honour of Lars Elleström, I simply use the main principles and terminology that his important theoretical vision has generated. I’m just using his inspiring terms. It is organised around cases of quotation as a recasting or reframing of past words and images, sounds, or even styles into new media products. Each case shows how this interrelation between media products is vital to the new one as well as to the source from which it is derived, and that mutuality is important to me. Such quoting media products thus present theoretical issues as they are implied in representational practices of the past, yet can only be perceived through the detour of the present, which transforms both. This mutuality of time is one of my principles. As an academic and filmmaker, I am of course very much aware of intermediality. The inevitable integration of words and images, colour, sound, narrativity, technological effects, and more, clearly demonstrates that no single disciplinary framework will do to understand, analyse, and teach the participation of intermediality in culture. In the title of the two edited volumes Elleström published in 2021, *Beyond Media Borders: Intermedial Relations among Multimodal Media*, every word counts, and is programmatic (Elleström, 2021b).

“Inter-” stands for relation, rather than accumulation, as in “multi” or “trans”, which denotes a passage through without impact from another

domain. “Inter-”’s frequent use in different contexts makes the relationality appear in different framings, which can each learn from the other. Inter-ship encourages a closer reflection on relationality. And the resemblance of my neologism to the concept of internship, which denotes learning through practice, produces a welcome association. It’s very nice to realise that. The phrase “beyond media borders” in the title of Lars’s volumes suggests a commitment to transgressing those borders that academic traditions have so insistently drawn up around their fields, mostly through specific methodologies and definitions. Seeing media as intermedial per se, Lars is a primary authority in that domain that doesn’t fit any of the traditional disciplines, yet concerns the largest, most frequently practiced mode of communication. His untimely passing compels us all to work in the wake of his intellectual dynamism, where meticulous accuracy comes with creative thinking. That combination speaks to me, I find it very important. Both the producer and the perceiver process media products for meaning. This connection is necessary because an always dynamic “meaning-making”, semiosis, participates in intermedial processes. A key concept from semiotic theory is *semiosphere*, which is indispensable to understanding communication in context, and as contemporary. A semiosphere is a sort of domain in which it works. I will argue through five mini-samples of analysis that intermediality does not stop at the comparison of two media. Instead, these short pieces suggest how the intermediality within each work moves outwards: into, and on behalf of the world.

Quoting Names (to Restore Names to the Dead)

Movement, of the smallest, subtlest kind, trembles through an immense plaza consisting of large slabs, in sand colour, with a grainy surface of tiny pebbles, designed to resist the absorption of water. Nearly effaced names are written on them with black sand. Overwriting these are other names, in the same size and font, in shallow relief engraved in the slabs. Suddenly, a shiny drop of water appears, rolling towards the relief; then more, until the letters of the name are filled, and the water becomes a slightly convex shiny surface filling the reliefs, surmounting the flatness of the slabs. After a few minutes, the water letters start to tremble; then they disappear. Appearance and disappearance: the quoted names keep moving. Movement, as physical instability, and as affective effect, produces turmoil. Sand to write with, relief carved in stone, and moving water drops: the media collaborate. The flat ground on which the visitor walks; the humble material; and the constant unsteadiness: these are the media of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo’s work *Palimpsesto* (2017). The material, spatiotemporally disposed and sensorially perceptible elements of the media product, invoke intermediality. The water names nearly overwrite the sand names, which, while being

put in the shadow of the water names, remain as a palimpsest, a trace of forgotten people. This is the semiotic modality: these quoted names make heart-breaking meaning, and this is the point of the work.

Salcedo inscribes names of refugees left to drown in the Mediterranean Sea. This quoting honours the anonymous drowned and indicts European indifference. The use of the given names might also suggest intimacy; as if these dead people are friends, since you call them by their first name. The materiality: sand and water, the world of the drowned. And where the Europeans who condone the political indifference don't stop to mourn the unnecessarily lost lives, the glistening water drops suggest that, instead of its inhabitants, the earth is crying. This too-brief description demonstrates how the act of quoting (here: names) in an integration of different media, makes art relevant for the social domain. It helps us to grasp how quotational intermediality between simple, socio-political names (most often used orally) and their written form artistically inflected is essential for the functioning of art in and for the world. It is there that such intermedial-quoting artworks must be understood. The short documentary that I made does much more justice to the work than still images can.

Now, *quotation* stands at the meeting point of the art-historical method of iconography and the literary concept of intertextuality; of the disciplines of art history and literary studies. The concept refers to the signs that a writer or image-maker finds available in preceding media products. Iconography, the central methodological tool of art history, examines this re-use of earlier forms, patterns, and figures within a new media product. This dual concept of iconography and/as intertextuality helps integrating visual and linguistic traditions where they meet, thanks to the fundamental intermediality of all media products. In quotations, recognition is part of their processing and interpreting. Three features characterise both iconography and intertextuality. Firstly, both see the historical precedent as more or less dictating to the later artist what forms could be used. Adopting forms from the work of an earlier artist, the later artists seem under the spell of their predecessors' influence; they declare their allegiance and debt to them. British art historian Michael Baxandall (1985) convincingly proposed reversing the passivity implied in that perspective, which pushed me to a revision of chronology into "inter-temporality". He considered the work of the later artists as active interventions in the material handed down to them. This reversal complicates the idea of precedent as origin and thereby undermines the claim of historical reconstruction. Hence my use of the term *pre-text*, to merge the temporal sequence with the intellectual posture that so easily becomes dogmatic, as well as implying an ironic wink, with *pre-text* as the deceptive pretention lurking around the corner. Partial to ambiguity, I tend to come up with terms that are ambiguous, implying, with a wink, an opposition to meanings others may have attached to them. These neologisms contribute to the importance of staying "on speaking terms" with that to which one objects.

A second feature is the functioning of meaning. The sign borrowed inevitably comes with meaning. Not that the later artists necessarily endorse that meaning, but they will have to deal with it: to reject or reverse it, ironise it, or simply insert it into the new media product; they cannot ignore it. Instead of classifying and closing meaning as if to solve an enigma, an intertextual-quotational study of after-effects traces the process of meaning production over time (in both directions: present/past and past/present) as an open, dynamic process. Instead of establishing a fixed one-to-one relationship between sign or motif and meaning, I emphasise the active participation of visual images in cultural dialogue, the “discussion” of ideas in media products of all kinds. This inflects the *cognitive import*, as Lars would call it, or interpretation-making thinking a crucial part of intermediality. In the dynamic between the works as objects, their perceivers, and the time in which these join, a compelling collective thought process emerges; you’re never alone in these processes.

A third difference-in-similarity resides in the textual character of quotation. I take the textual nature of precedents as a visual textuality, using the general term *mediality*. Recycling elements, motifs, or forms taken from earlier works, an artist takes along the media product from which the borrowed element has been broken away, constructing a new work with the debris. The new image-as-text is “contaminated” by the discourse of the precedent, and thereby fractured, ready to fall apart again. Intertextuality is also a particular instance of interdiscursivity: the mixture of various different visual and discursive modes. Thus, this “textualizing” iconography will consider visual principles of form – such as chiaroscuro, colour, folds, surface texture, and perspective – as “discursive positions” interdiscursively relating to media products. This form-making occurs not only in figurative but also in abstract art. But its forms move beyond those “media borders” that have locked up the disciplines. First, in narrative, the quotation of character speech is embedded within the primary discourse of the narrator. Secondly, in their new (quoting) framework, these fragments of things are the product of manipulation by the later producers and their semiosphere. Rather than serving reality, they serve a reality effect (Barthes, 1986), the opposite of realism – a fiction of it. Thirdly, according to Bakhtinian dialogism, quotations point in the directions from which the words have come. Finally, stipulating the impossibility of reaching the earlier speech, the “pre-text”, deconstructionism emphasises what the quoting subject does to its object. Whereas for Bakhtin (1981) the word never forgets where it has been, intertextually, for Derrida it never returns there without the burden of the excursion through the quotation.

Halting the News (to Give Time to Those Who Struggle)

German artist Monika Huber devotes her work to the issue of time in visual images. Her target is the news on television, where every day we see revolts, violence, and oppression, edited to take exactly one minute and a half. Huber

captured news footage as still images, reworked these in a variety of different ways and aggrandised the result into prints of 150 × 106 cm. What happens when journalistic images are transformed into artworks? Both media products are still, but since they are film stills, how still can they be? In the project *Archive One Thirty* (Figure 7.1) Huber's artistic polemic with "the news" is an attempt to revise the realistic illusion and to compel durational looking.

Her current project focuses on images of protests. The ubiquity of protests indicts the state of the world. But can we see it, in 90 seconds, in similarity and repetition leading to routine? The images in their artistic



Figure 7.1 #518_221020 by Monika Huber for project *Archive One Thirty*, portraying violence against protesters calling for free elections, 22 October 2020, Belarus.

Note. Huber (2020). Copyright by the artist. Reprinted with permission.

transformation contrast with the speed of the news broadcasts. Many of the images that just pass by on an everyday basis are cruel, disturbing, violent. We see people die on screen – but do we really see them, and if? Directing seeing is a project of making art that is politically relevant without being particularly activist. It does not address a specific political issue. Instead, it is activating. This gives us, as viewers, the task to participate in the effort to see. So, I go from activist to activating in this reasoning. How does Huber manage to slow down the speed of seeing? She prints the images on a slightly porous drawing paper and reworks them in various ways but always with material that allows more reworking. She may put the already-reworked print into a bathtub, dissolving the image, and thus rendering visibility limited. The effect of this treatment is to evoke the desire to see more than you can see. The artist manipulates and thereby draws attention to the manipulations perpetrated by the mass media. The dissolution compels protest – ours, this time, as visitors-participants – against the destruction of human beings that comes with violent repression. She cites the images, but cannot bear to leave them be, in their 90-seconds existence. Let's call Huber's worked-over images, then, *prottexts*. And that term can go for many different examples.

Quotation Subverts Agency and Time (to Keep Us Focused, Here and Now)

The meanings of the concept of quotation as exemplified by intertextuality and iconography engage the relation between media product and semio-reality. Their orientation leads from the image to the outside world. Other meanings focus on meaning coming from the outside in. Hence, their simultaneous mobilisation also entails a questioning of what separates outside from inside; a limit, or border, beyond which we must move, per Lars Elleström's title, if we are to grasp what intermediality not only is but what it *does*. We must pay attention to the media products' persistent appeal, their address – their “second-personhood”. What do these older media products contribute to today's culture, including its political domain? Such an interpretation that shifts from intention to the media product's agency neither contradicts historical evidence nor does it project present concerns upon it. Quotation supposes that the media products are rigorously contemporary in their effect; there lies their agency. Therefore, it makes the historical art more important because it keeps it alive and materially present. Judith Butler, I'm sure you know her, proposes a materialism suited to materially engaged art. She writes:

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a *process of*

materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.

(1993, p. 9, emphasis in text)

This materialism resonates with a crucial element in contemporary intermediality as bound up with quotation; hence, with the past, in relationality (inter-ship). Translating the meanings of quotation into a visual context clarifies how contemporary quotation changes older media products. This transformation is possible because, as Elleström insisted, media products are imbrications of four indispensable modalities: material, spatiotemporal, sensorial and semiotic modalities (2021a, p. 44).

Recycling Myths (to Bring Science and Religion into Discussion)

The reality of the people who drowned due to social–political indifference has shown how art can encroach on that indifference through the deployment of the media – sand, water, stone, the Western alphabet, the latter being deployed to write Arabic names – so that the Western perceiver who belongs to the indicted Arabic can read the names. Huber’s messing up the once-clear footage demonstrates how badly we see, how little we know, and how quickly we move on. Next, I demonstrate the binding of art and society through the intermedial connection between two conceptions of life: the one based on science, the other on religious myth. I allege a painting by Edvard Munch titled *Metabolism* (Figure 7.2), which refers to the organic process of ongoing life, death, and regeneration; a scientific term used for non-religious political and cultural persuasions.

It is hard to avoid seeing an “Adam and Eve” scene in this painting. Even the famous tree is present between the naked woman and man. Quoting the biblical story is, however, far from recycling it wholesale. Instead, it “discusses” it. This shows in the details. Neither of the two figures has open eyes; both avoid looking at each other. Such failure to engage can be explained as alluding to the shame about their nakedness, the first biblical punishment for the transgression. But a funny discolouration around the man’s genitals shows he is wearing a cover over it in transparent brown. The penis is still clearly visible, so the point of the garment is not shame remedied by the proverbial fig leaf. The scientific idea of metabolism as digestion, death, and regeneration, can substitute for the myth. The painting becomes a “thought image” due to the combination of these two interpretations. This compels us to think.

But how does this media product become intermedial? The visual mode of colour actively participates in the production of meaning. The woman has long hair, reddish brown (“chestnut”). The outline of this colour around her head hints at a halo. The man’s hair is green, with a dark blue



Figure 7.2 Edvard Munch: *Stoffveksling. Liv og død / Metabolism* (1898–1899).

Note. Munch (1898–1899). Copyright by Munchmuseet. Reprinted with permission.

outline, but no hint of a halo. The background is made up of vertical lines; so thin because of the Munchian presentation of depth; a forest of trees set off against a bright turquoise-blue sky. Some dark blue, swaying (cinematic), horizontal-oblique strips could be tree branches. From the figures' hips down, the background is dark green.

The man's knees are red, with outlines veering towards orange. This could be a visual quotation of the part of the curse in the textual media product of Genesis that says that he will have to toil for a living. In a typical integration of iconicity and indexicality, red knees would then signify labour, working the earth. The most exuberant colours are on the tree

trunk in the middle. While its top is pink, the middle part has cobalt blue, bright green, and orange-red lines. They also seem like a bouquet of flowers in veneration of the scarcely visible foetus inside the trunk. This signifies the regeneration of metabolism. The feet of both figures are outlined in red, but differently. Her foot looks as if she is wearing a shoe, as light and transparent as the man's loincloth. She seems to want to walk towards the man. But his left foot points outwards, as if about to walk away. Her arm is held towards the man, but he does not reciprocate. His one arm protects his stomach, while his right hand is behind his head; showing his body and withholding it. All this gestural mediality tells its own story.

But what will come of the metabolism if he persists in that refusal? Now we can interweave the two cognitive imports. We can do this by revising the interpretation of the myth as it has lived on for so long, always misconstrued. The story of the tree, the prohibition, and the transgression in the Bible concerns nothing like greed or seduction, as the misogynistic cliché interpretation has it. It figures the endorsement of the mortal condition for which procreation compensates: the individual dies, but the species does not. According to this remediation of the famous story, the woman did the wise thing; refusing intercourse is not a good idea. In this sense, the myth and the scientific theory shake hands, thanks to the intermediality of the media product, where colour and line meet the linguistic pre-text.

Semiosphere: Wavering and Hovering Media

From a semiotic point of view, to take the presence in the present of what historically precedes into account, through focusing on quotation as an active element of intermediality, makes the analysis more, rather than less, historically responsible. This is where quotation intermediates on behalf of contemporary social relevance. One can push this reflection further in the direction of self-reflection because perceivers bring to the media products their own legacy of discursive precedents. This self-reflection matters for the emancipation of the perceivers from the passivity wrongly attributed to them. The "recipient" is not a passive mailbox but participates in the construction of meaning, Elleström's *cognitive import*. Hence, viewers are participants. Reading images – or processing visual media products – entails the inevitable mixing of these previous signs with those perceived in the media product now. This input from the present demonstrates the ongoing live presence of the past.

In a volume occasioned by the 100th birthday of Russian-born semiotician Juri Lotman (1922–1993), Peeter Torop published a chapter on the concept of *semiosphere* (2022). He opens with the statement that this concept "marks his [Lotman's] move towards dynamic cultural analysis". He

continues that “the concept has travelled from one terminological field to another”. And he ends this introductory paragraph saying: “‘semiosphere’ marks the complementarity of disciplines studying culture, the movement towards the creation of general theory of culture and flexible methodology” (Torop, 2022, p. 296). In these opening sentences, I was excited to read them, three phrases speak to me: “cultural analysis”, “the concept has travelled”, and “flexible methodology”.

Recently, I encountered that integration once more. I was invited by the famous film school in Łódź, Poland, to make an experimental “essay film”. I had one week to make the film, in a semi-foreign semiosphere, with people whose language I did not understand. Fortunately, English was, though imperialist, a helpful tool. The word “essay” in its meaning of “trying”, in turn in its Anglo-Saxon two meanings of “attempting” and “challenging”, was appropriate. I put ambiguity at the heart of the semiosphere, which denotes the greater socio-cultural environment within which intermediality functions. This is what makes it, as well as semiotic practice, both stable in the sense of delimited, and unstable, since no meaning functions alone. But then, intermediality emerged. For developing the script, I took on the mythical figure of Cassandra. She could foresee the future but, in an antique #MeToo case – a pre-posterous quotation of a still-current socio-political issue – when she declined to sleep with him, she was cursed by her employer, the god Apollo, to never be believed.

I invoke Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of *the figural* in his attempt to overcome the tenacious word-image opposition and the divide between disciplines that it has produced (Lyotard 1971/2020). This concept of the figural is crucial for a quotation-oriented view of intermediality. It also accords with Elleström, who argues that: “Because being visual is a sensorial trait and being verbal is a semiotic trait, it is pointless to oppose the two” (2021a, p. 7). Lyotard argued for language as dynamic, turning it into a force, a movement. He made it more “sensorial”. As such, he argued, language is closer to the Freudian unconscious in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) than to any Saussure-derived structuralist conception of it; dynamism as opposed to structural stability. Lyotard describes meaning as sense – including sensuality – in terms that include affect, sensation and intuition, movement, and spatiality. Although he speaks only about language, his view of that medium, through the invocation of Freud’s (1900) dream theory, is already intermedial in itself. For him, language, and the meanings it produces, is primarily dynamic. Force, for Lyotard, is inherent in language, and it is, in David Rodowick’s paraphrasis,

nothing other than the energy that folds and wrinkles the text and makes of it an aesthetic work, a difference, that is, a form.... And if

it expresses, it is because movement resides within it as a force that overturns the table of significations with a seism that makes sense.

(Rodowick, 2001, pp. 9–10)

The attempt at intermediality shows even in the choice of words. The word “seism”, which invokes movement, is powerful in this revision of what language is and does. “Folds” and “wrinkles” applied to “text” import visual and tactile aspects to the linguistic media product. These words affiliate language with, specifically, cinematic language. Both language and the cinematic as an informational tool, a mode of communicating and an art form, are prominent in the European semiosphere. In my search (attempt) for semiotics in my film on Cassandra, the characters had to figure meanings as signs. The primary issue is the interaction between the figures, which is where narrativity comes in. To make my case for intertemporality, I figured the “about” idea through an intermedial contact between one medium and another, mobilising an old-master media product cinematically animated. Contact, rather than translation. For the older media product remains present.

Characters as (Inter-) Media Products (to Bring Theory in for Sense-Making)

To turn intermediality into contact I staged the enactment of a tableau vivant of Cassandra’s lover Aeneas as Caravaggio’s *John the Baptist in the Wilderness* (1604). The living body of the actor playing Aeneas, and the photocopy of the 17th century painting – a still of a still – intermedially produced a media product: the tableau vivant. Then, in a history lesson, Cassandra (now acting as a teacher) explains pre-posterous history to her lover-student, dressed up as a Walter Benjamin look-alike. In a discussion with his teacher, Aeneas quotes a passage from Benjamin’s fifth thesis on the philosophy of history, which has been deeply influential for my thinking on history: “Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Benjamin, 1968, p. 167). Then, the staged copy of the Caravaggio painting, with the tableau vivant still in the perceiver’s mind, is concretely turned into an intermedial product of a different kind, when an abstract, highly sensuous contemporary painting by American artist David Reed shifts over it, for a moment almost – but not quite – hiding it. In a different scene, I staged interactions of Cassandra with two contemporary paintings by South-African artist Ina van Zyl. These paintings are made in a hyper-realistic mode and thereby balance the sharp and impossible distinction between reality and fiction. The figures, actors, and characters, in interaction with the media products of the other medium, become figural,

and as such, figurations of ideas. These two figures are thus themselves figural instances of pre-posterous history, as what rhetorical analysis would call its personifications. The same can be said about their figuration of intermediality through quotation – literal quoting of the texts they read and figural quoting of the postures.

Semiosis does not easily signify time. Yet, for an effective intermediality, I wanted to bring together, not in harmony but as a “discussion”, my concerns about time. Apart from chronologic, an important figural aspect of time is rhythm. In film, rhythm is always important, but especially in one concerning time thematically and politically. In view of the second meaning of the title, the rhythm had to become hectic. This hecticcy becomes stronger as the film progresses and closes on a frantic dance by Cassandra. When she stops dancing, shaking her body in protest, she ends up saying: “The future is now”, with urgency. A media product that is both multi-modal and intermedial can bring the issues so close that they get under the perceiver-participant’s skin. That affective effect needs art that is not so much, or not only, activist, but as I said before, activating. It makes perceivers think, but what they think is up to them. The art cannot dictate what we should think.

Art for the World

On Christmas Eve 2020, Indian artist Nalini Malani drew a media product as number 41 of 89 works on paper she made during the COVID-19 lockdown. It ended up on the back cover of a beautiful book of the 89 drawings reproduced in actual size. A perceiver can process the figure as a child, a fantasy figure, half-animal, half-human, clearly fictional, but the lettering points us inevitably to a political view. The presence of words makes the drawing immediately intermedial. The figure looks like a monster. The text says: “All tyrannies rule through fraud and force” which is a clear political statement. But I want to probe intermediality in other details than this loud and clear indictment of the currently widespread dictatorships. Four details.

One. Behind the statement in large print are some small figures, one of which is a girl, Malani’s version of herself as Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*. This is her way of subtly inserting first-second person discourse, with her own presence being a participant. The thought bubble the girl lets fly upwards like a gas-filled balloon cries out for the liberty that the monster is destroying through fraud and force. The force and weakness of the lines participate in the meaning-making.

Two. The monster is callously walking on a small, headless human figure. Underneath it, two hands, one drawn in red, one in black, point to it; the red one to the neck-without-head, the black one to the monster who is stepping on it.

Three. On the left-hand corner at the bottom is a head with spread arms, an open shouting mouth, and over it, the word “freedom”, written in blue. That figure evokes a drowning child. Four. Between the monster and the letters that indict him and his peers, some other words are written, barely readable: magic, lies, terror, cheat. The figuration of a pair of black dots above the monster’s head, perhaps eyes, held together by two fingers pointing in opposite directions, suggests a member of society asking the monster to account for his unjust rule. The intermediality here works between the words mechanically printed in black and large, which state the situation of the world as in newspaper headings, and the other words, hand-drawn in colour and small. This differentiates the power and the powerlessness – politics and the political. The intermediality that makes this sheet a strong intervention in the social–political world, is primarily located in the different lettering.

For this, Malani’s image is compelling. The irregularities, the hand-written letters draw attention, through their technical imperfection, to the fact that the quoted “official” letters are not perfectly printed, which overrules their pretention. The top line has letters that are not opaque black. The words are obliquely disposed on the sheet. The tyrant, the ruler, neither has a full body nor is he central. The technique of layering staining instead of a perfect opacity of colours, and the red dots evoking blood spatter spilling over the lines of the drawing: all these features produce the effort the media product demands. The intermediality resides primarily in the imperfection. You could even say that the most important intermediality is among the letters.

A short ending on the “how” question: with intermediality both pervasive and complex, how can we grasp its working, through analysis? I don’t care much for generalising, to say all media products are intermedial, okay, you say it once and it’s done. Generalisations do not yield information about how the works work. Instead, I have discussed, in these five cases, how attention to the way the intermediality in the media product works illuminates the special effects it emanates. Hence my focus on quotation. Whereas referencing and interpreting can move in many directions, citational aesthetics draws on specific pre-texts, which become part of the new media product. Salcedo’s names, with all their tentacles of meaning-making; Huber’s ruining the hasty journalistic images in order to make us see beyond the speedy act of (not-)seeing; Munch’s “discussion” about the sustainability of life; the overtly pre-posterous discussion of pre-posterous history by the actors, props and fragments in the film on time, and the subtle intermediality among types of lettering, words, and drawn figures, their dimensions, and bodily orientation: it all contributes to an understanding of the way the aesthetic – binding through the senses in the semiosphere – impacts on the social, and thereby makes recipients

as co-makers skilled in responding to the cognitive import of the media products that surround them. We do need meaning; we communicate, hence, live through it. So, we had better pay attention to them.

Questions and Answers

Ines Tebourski: Thank you so much, Professor Mieke for this wonderful and illuminating talk on which I have many questions. I would like to go back to the beginning of your presentation when you spoke about the *Palimpsesto* which can be linked to Gérard Genette's seminal book from 1982, *Palimpsests*, in which he argues that palimpsest is an image that is put in the foreground with the background being deleted. I want to ask you: to what extent can we link intermediality and multimodality to palimpsest, since in multimodality for me, we can't speak about deleted backgrounds?

Mieke Bal: Thank you for your question. It's an important one. I think that Genette exaggerates a little bit the erasure of what is behind and doesn't seem so interested in the remainder. And I think what Salcedo is doing here is to put forward the remainder and say, "We forget that these people died unnecessarily, and let's get them back to the present". So, the palimpsest is the attempt to get those people back to our attention. And that's why she has these two layers. The black sand names and then the water names that look almost like precious stones. It's so beautiful when the sun is on it in Madrid in that glass building. You could see that. It was like precious stones. And then Andreas Huyssen who was there said, "Well, the earth is crying because we don't". So, what is erased is not only the fact that these people died and that we forget them but also that we are not attentive to that tragedy. We also erase our own affective engagements. And so, I think that Genette's book, important as it is, makes it a little simpler than it really is.

Jørgen Bruhn: Thank you again for the talk. How does the mutuality of time, or temporality code, influence the feedback loop in media transformation, where meaning is continuously interpreted and sometimes temporarily

- fixed in texts? In your coronavirus lockdown example, I think the artist was called Malani?
Mieke Bal: Yeah, Nalini Malani.
Jørgen Bruhn: The intention of her work was an opposition and aesthetic response to tyranny and dictatorship, whereas my immediate impression of this was that it could also be interpreted as the tyranny of the coronavirus pandemic, perhaps even specifically of the lockdowns that some people were against, because some of the terms were actually terms that some of the deniers or sceptics also used. So, my question is, what do we do with such a reading?
- Mieke Bal:* Yeah, I see what you're saying, I see why you're bringing it up, it's because I mentioned her being confined to the kitchen table during the coronavirus, but she was not protesting against that. She was completely happy to be there and to try out a different medium. She's so inventive that she constantly invents new media and so she came up with this and it was immediately exhibited in a museum afterwards and she was quite happy. The force and tyranny that she's mentioning are of the dictators in the world and not of corona or the measure.
- Jørgen Bruhn:* You mentioned the corona lockdown.
Mieke Bal: And if I had not mentioned that, and now I regret that I did, I don't think you would have thought of it, because this is more a parody of Modi or of Trump or all these tyrants than it is a corona motif. She's not an anti-vaxxian artist at all. And there is no sign that she would be, in the image.
- Ernst van Alphen:* She's Indian and I think it's first of all about Modi and Hindu fascism.
- Jørgen Bruhn:* Okay, I didn't know that either.
Beate Schirrmacher: I've been working on questions regarding what is news, what is fake news, what is information, and what is disinformation? In the context that Jørgen describes, something is put into a context where it doesn't belong and people jump on these signal words that would prove to, e.g. anti-vaxers, that "this is what I've always suspected". They take this work of art, but they use it to confirm what they already know or want to believe. What I took from your question, Jørgen, is how this is also a form

of intertextuality, taking something and doing something new and transforming it into a new context. In the information sphere, this is currently a huge problem, but you could say that it is an intertextual practice. So, how does one deal with this kind of unfriendly, or confirming, practice of intertextuality? Is there a situation where I could say, “No, you’re not allowed to do that”, or “No, this is not the appropriate way”? These discussions are currently going on in the information sphere, but it would be interesting to see them from this aesthetic perspective of intertextuality.

Mieke Bal:

Yes absolutely, and I think that one of the intertextual, or interdiscursive I would call it, moments is the imperfect printing of recognizable newspaper print, that is a case of that. But I deeply regret now that I mentioned the corona lockdown because I only mentioned it to say that this artist came up with a new medium because she had to. There was not a single sign, because this is something that I find very important when we interpret a media product, there was not a single sign in this drawing that refers to corona. Not a single one. It refers to tyrants, it refers to dictators and it refers to Modi and his different kind of lockdown. Locking down intellect, and artistic schools, for example. But not corona.

Ernst van Alphen:

But you referred to Bakhtin as well as to Derrida. I think they illustrate very well these very different intertextual practices which are in a way in tension with each other, quoting you, Bakhtin said, “The word never forgets where it comes from”, and Derrida said, “It never returns there without a new burden”. I think your example, Beate, can be theorized by referring to Derrida’s work instead of Bakhtin.

Mieke Bal:

I want to add something to this discussion. If we do our work of meaning-making and processing media products, I think that we have to have the almost ethical duty to the media products, to the cultural products, to say, “Okay, this is what I see here” and it has to be checkable, and I really appreciate Malani’s way of dealing with a difficult situation by implementing a new medium. But she did something about dictatorships and that you can see,

- and you can see it by analyzing in detail, in the way Lars would have done it, these particular distortions of traditions of newspaper print and handwriting together in interaction. But you have to see it.
- Jørgen Bruhn:* We could of course imagine that we suddenly found out what she really wanted, but we choose to read it otherwise as an attempt to read it as, let's say anti-vaxx.
- Mieke Bal:* That would be falsifying, she is completely not on that line.
- Jørgen Bruhn:* Yes, I know, but that is the work we do, right? This is a classical hermeneutical problem?
- Ernst van Alphen:* That happens all the time, that images or text are being appropriated for something completely else.
- Mieke Bal:* I think we should still account for what we do.
- Signe Kjaer Jensen:* I just wanted to add to this discussion. You are both discussing whether it is the receiver who determines the meaning of the text or whether it is the sender, and I think the social context of the interpretation is lacking here. I generally agree with your interpretation of the image Mieke, it was very interesting. But what Jørgen points to is that if you had not introduced the image at all and if you had put the text on the table in a group of anti-vaxxers, then they *could* have read it the way that Jørgen did because of a pre-established bias or interest.
- Mieke Bal:* I don't think that this drawing will do anything for the anti-vaxxers. If you don't mention the situation and the date and when she did it, I don't think it will do anything, what in this drawing points to that? Nothing.
- Signe Kjaer Jensen:* My point is that the social context is a factor in itself and that the social context frames what kind of interpretation will and can take place.
- Mieke Bal:* If you take the interpretation from anything, you are doing a fake news kind of interpretation, and I also believe in the relationship between the object, the media product, and both sender and receiver. So I'm not appealing to Malani's Indian background. I'm appealing to what I see, and that is the lettering issue and that was where I wanted to bring in some of this intermediality. I think, of course, that there is not just one interpretation.

- Kobus Marais:* I do not agree that texts, especially aesthetic texts, can have only one interpretation. Is it not a known procedure that texts can be read against the grain? Peircean semiotics and other hermeneutic scholars also factor in the context of interpretation.
- Mieke Bal:* Kobus, you're right, but something has to make that interpretation stand up, otherwise we are just doing anything.
- Ernst van Alphen:* There is always an endless number of interpretations possible, but even more interpretations are impossible.
- Mieke Bal:* Right. And I would say that this interpretation is impossible if you take the object seriously.
- Claire Swyzen:* Thank you Mieke Bal. I'm just coming back to this question since the drawing would be perfect if I were a corona sceptic, it would be perfect to cite it if I were on social media, I would cite it just by copying it on my Facebook page, if I had one, and so it could be appropriated. If I were an anti-vaxxer, by citing, that is, copy-pasting Malani's image, I could make it blend perfectly into the intermedial assemblage of my social media page and into a discourse about the "tyranny" and "oppression" of corona sanitary measures imposed by governments on citizens whose individuality – according to anti-vaxx logic – is violated. The possibility of an interpretation that is (radically) different from the author intention is of course one of the risks of citational culture and of appropriation, especially on social media; the possibility of a different interpretation is also a reality to reckon with as scholars. Pointing out a possibly different interpretation does not imply that we should authorize it; it is precisely an instance where we can show the difference a scholar can make when closely observing a work and taking into account context in the process of interpretation.
- Mieke Bal:* Of course, anybody can appropriate anything, but I think as scholars who do professional work on media products and interpretations, analysis is part of what we do. We don't do just anything, not anything goes, you have to have some sort of thing to stand on. I like to stand on what is in the text, in the work. It's not the intention of the author. The

fact that she's Indian makes the tyrant associate with Modi, but if you don't know that, then you don't. I just want to protest against the idea that there's either only one interpretation, or anything goes. I think that is a wrong opposition. It's not that anything goes, the media product is in the end the test ground of our interpretations. If not, there is no communication. You communicate through media products, including conversations.

Claire Swyzen:

I don't think those exclude each other. I think your point is very important, you have an authority as a scholar, the ethical question is really important but it doesn't exclude pointing out other possible interpretations, which you can argue as being far-fetched or not being the product of an accurate reading or scene. But not talking about other possible interpretations is denying them, and especially in this context of citation, maybe we can think about how reading the other possible interpretations is also anticipating possible future citations.

Mieke Bal:

Well yeah, but it's not that anything goes. I'm not going to censor you, but as scholars, I think that we want to convey the point of an interpretation that is based on a relationship with the media products and what we can see there. And if there is not a single sign that goes in that direction, then I think we are not in the right profession if you bring that forward, and I think that is the responsibility of the scholar.

Philip Steiner:

My remark on this topic is just a very short one because it hasn't really been mentioned, I feel like we can totally point out that there could be associations, that there could be recipients seeing a work of art such as this in such a manner, but I also feel like that in such heated cultural discussions, which corona obviously is, we sort of have the obligation as scholars to be extra careful not to take associations too far, because in such a case we could almost devalue an artist in the public opinion by just playing with these associations without enough evidence for them.

Amanda Ekberg:

I have a question concerning semiotics. Is it possible to exclude context in a semiotic analysis, of for example an artwork?

Mieke Bal:

That is a question that speaks to me because I have always been blamed for not doing enough with the historical context: “Oh, but you don’t understand how this works with the commissions”. And then I came up with an answer that was very useful when I published *Reading Rembrandt* (1991). I got this criticism, that there was nothing about the historical context, which wasn’t quite true, but I was indeed reading Rembrandt as a text *now*. And so then I wrote another book, *Quoting Caravaggio* (2001), to explain why and how I do take history seriously, not as some reconstructable context in the past, but as part of, or participant in the present. I don’t think that semiotically it makes sense to exclude context; that’s why I brought up the semiosphere as a concept that sort of delimits. Within the semiosphere, you could say the European semiosphere that’s now in my new project, certain things are understandable, they go without saying, and other things we don’t understand. If you see letters in an alphabet that we don’t have, then you cannot read it, and I think it is important in that sense to delimit the context a little bit; but I would not take the context as the context of emergence, which is why it was a mistake to mention the kitchen table in Malanis’s drawing, because that would be irrelevant. I did mention it for a reason, the fact that she came up with a new medium, but it is not about her intention, it is not about her historical position. It is what she made, and that media product is our first and last object of communication. Communicating is what we do with it and I think it is important for scholars to be responsible to that aspect. So, context, yes. Reconstructed historical context alone? No. That’s my answer to Amanda, thanks for the question.

Beate Schirmacher:

What I found interesting is the kind of performative force of what was going on, it goes into intention and that is so difficult to talk about. But I think something in your lecture clarified what is currently going on in the digital and public discussions, that is the Derrida approach to intertextuality: “The word can go anywhere”. But what you stress is that both directions have to be addressed, the word has to

remember where it comes from too. The word can go anywhere and people can share news and confirm things that they want to believe. But if we want to address it, we have to stress it and make clear that no, not anything goes. It can go very far but it must still remember where it comes from.

Mieke Bal:

It's fine; I don't mean to censor anyone's views or anyone's interpretations, but what we do as scholars has to somehow substantiate that there is something like a media product that we validate. That's why we are in the humanities. I like the idea that Derrida and Bakhtin go in opposite directions together, it does somehow hold us back from anything goes. And I think that is important, not anything goes. A lot goes.

Jørgen Bruhn:

I'd like to ask a bit beyond that, about something in your lecture. You talk about "from activism to activating", and I think it's something that is on many of our minds, your ideas about how media does not so much represent or stand for something but it *does* something. I think many of us would probably agree in theoretical terms and abstract terms. How do you think more specifically? How does it activate us, and what happens then?

Mieke Bal:

That's the key question of what we do. I think it is important to account for the performativity of the artwork in the sense that the artwork, the media product, does something on both sides. And what it does exactly is shake up what we think we know and that complacency, that certainty. You know, you vote for the same party every year, every four years or whatever. But now your certainty wavers. The fact that we have a work there that shakes up our certainties, that is the performativity, that is the activating force. But what it is that it does then, to you, we cannot dictate, and I think that this is the possible problem of activist art. I am not against activist art, it is really important, but it is addressing a certain issue with a certain answer. Very fine and very necessary, but it is a limited view. And the activating force is necessary in order for this to work. Activist art cannot work if it doesn't activate people. If you only preach to the converted, you only preach

to people already on your side. And I think that is what we want to do with ecocriticism, for example, make people change their habits and that is the activating part. And then what they do is up to them. I am not going to tell you that you cannot eat meat at all, that is up to you. But I want you to realize that there is a problem there, and that is the activating force. How that works depends exactly on the media product and its force. I was trying to show some cases where the media product in different ways was doing just that. Even the Munch painting, which is from a century ago, is saying something like, “the interpretation of the story of the paradise and the fall is biased, it is not about that” and that is very necessary given that the Me-too situation is still ongoing, so the misogynistic interpretations of those stories have to be shaken up. But I am not telling you “this is the truth”, I would never use that word. Thank you for your wonderful lecture. Could you elaborate on the consequences of combining Bakhtin and Derrida and combining two traditions with rather different conceptions of language? Because there are different ideas of the word’s relation to the source, so is it something that we as scholars need to account for, these two separate processes? Or can we combine them, are they speaking about the same thing?

Erik Erlanson:

Mieke Bal:

That is a really good point, and I am glad that you bring it up because this is the theoretical crux of this quotation of the static. If you want to use intertextuality and iconography as common understanding, or as Bakhtin would say “the word does not forget where it has been” and iconography would say “the figure does not forget where it has been”, it is broken off from a whole and then integrated into a new whole, and that is very important but that is only one direction of the cultural process through history. The other direction is what Derrida says: “Opposition is valid, every opposition can be deconstructed”, this is why I find deconstruction important. Opposition’s binary thinking does not work. You cannot say, “This is word, this is image, and they stay apart”. No, they do not stay apart, and in

- that sense, it is the deconstructive move that opens up everything we do, everything we say, everything we read, and every text we interact with. That opening up, that it can go in all directions, is really important but it is also important to realize that the Bakhtinian view goes along. So, you can go with the text somewhere else, but you cannot forget where it has been, and that combination I think is important.
- Erik Erlanson:* But is it me as a scholar who shouldn't forget, or is it the object, the figure?
- Mieke Bal:* I think it is the figure, but it is a scholar's duty to point that out and that is why I object to interpretations that have no connection at all to the work.
- Ernst van Alphen:* What Derrida said was a kind of response to the notion of language from Saussure, that the signifier and the signified are like the two sides of a sheet of paper, so they stick to each other. Whereas for Derrida there is this endless deferral of this chain of signifiers, but that does not mean that the signifier goes everywhere, because ultimately, in the social use of language, this endless deferral is stopped all the time and the signifier gets meaning. So it is not that anything goes or that it can go everywhere, but when we use language it is framed by a very specific use of it and that is the moment of signification.
- Mieke Bal:* And that is why Lars used Peirce rather than Saussure as a semiotic background, because there is a constant chain in Peirce, there is a temporal aspect, you have an object and you give it meaning, but that meaning is itself then again up for reinterpretation, the interpretant, as he calls it. Not only because the three categories (object, sign, and interpretant) are helpful and not fixed, but because of this temporal aspect that goes on in the process and that is where it comes closer to Derrida than to Saussure, and for me that is very important. If you ask what I think all scholars should do, that is not my authority, but if you come up with interpretations that have no grounding whatsoever in the media product, I would protest. I think the answer to your question is, yes combine the two.
- Ines Tebourski:* I am very interested in the way you analyse the painting, and the pictures within in the painting

of supposedly Adam and Eve next to the tree of knowledge, the body postures, whether they are centred or on the margin, on the right or the left, their facial expressions and so on. For instance, I wonder how you chose the meaning of the colour red on the knees and feet of Adam. Semiotically, red sometimes means love, passion, or anger but you chose labour as the meaning for red in this painting. I ask this question because Lars once cautioned me about the choice of colours' meaning. He said, "You seem Ines, to pick the meanings that best suit your analysis, and be careful of that". I just wanted to ask you how you picked this meaning for this specific colour?

Mieke Bal:

That is a really important one. Colours have traditionally been assigned meanings, like passion or blood or violence when we speak about red. But in this case, it is not just the colour on the knees. It is a sort of more or less, I wouldn't say realistic painting, but it is a figurative painting and so if the colour is on the knees, I don't think it would have the same meaning as it would have if it had been on the heart. In that sense, I did choose this meaning, because also "the word doesn't forget where it has been", it has been in the Genesis story where God says "You will have to work for a living and that is hard work", and so you see that on the knees. But that is not the only meaning that this painting proposes, it also says "he is avoiding contact" and that is the wrong choice if you want humanity to continue after your death. I think that is an important insight and that is very different from the misogynistic interpretation that it was all Eve's fault because she couldn't resist the apple, because the snake seduced her, and all that. This story has been so misconstrued that it is ridiculous if you think of it, and in that sense, I didn't choose the colour alone, colour was part of a larger interpretation of the figurative image.

Gizem Kızmaz:

I want to ask how intermedial analysis, as you perform it, is different from what literary or art criticism has performed for a long time; that is close reading. I understand that reading is about pursuing meanings behind what we see and that there are sensorial,

affective, material qualities to cultural objects that close reading alone might potentially end up downplaying. I am just sceptical about what intermediality adds to our analysis as a method other than theoretically stating that there are no strict media borders.

Mieke Bal:

Right, good question. I do favour what we used to call close reading, but not in the same sense, because close reading, historically, was out of context without any social embedding. For me, the close reading that I do is cultural analysis; this is why I use cultural analysis rather than cultural studies. As cultural analysis, I want to put the close detailed reading of the object, of the media product, in its social environment. That is why I brought up the semiosphere and its theoretical framing, and in that sense, I think that intermediality as a concept helps to make specific how that close reading can be grounded in something that you can actually see, or read, or hear. You also have hearing in the object, in the media product, so in a sense, yes; it is close reading but not as isolated from these other aspects, from its context, its semiosphere, its theoretical grounding, and the methodological tools that we have inherited from people who developed them. I mean in this case intermediality, and of course Lars Elleström, adds something because it helps us to show how exactly this meaning that we read there comes about. It is grounded in theoretical thoughts.

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Section 3

New Media



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Introduction to Chapter 8

How to Address the Borders of a Qualified Medium and to Situate ‘Narrative’ Within Elleström’s Framework

Signe Kjaer Jensen

Thomas Leitch is well-known for his work on film adaptation (see, e.g. Leitch, 2007). Although adaptation studies has developed as an independent field, adaptation is also one of the core interests of intermedial studies, as medium specificity and the possibility of transferring stories between different media types have been both a major focal point and a source of inspiration and critique in intermedial studies. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that Leitch (this volume, Chapter 8), after paying tribute to Elleström’s achievements in developing grand systematic models and interdisciplinary models, chooses to build on Elleström’s work on transmedial narration (Elleström, 2019).

Elleström defined a narrative as “a virtual sphere, emerging in communication, containing events that are temporally related to each other in a meaningful way. Thus, the core of a narrative is exactly this: represented events that are temporally interrelated in a meaningful way” (Elleström, 2019, p. 37). While the last part of this quote is straightforward, the first part calls for some clarification. Elleström’s goal in his 2019 book on *Transmedial Narration* was to develop a broad narrative theory that could be used to understand and analyse the transmediation of narratives across different media types, the influence that various media types have on the representation of narratives, and all the psychological, cognitive, semiotic, and communicative aspects of narration (Elleström, 2019, pp. 10–11). The term *virtual sphere* in his definition of narrative is a consequence of these aspirations to include cognitive and communicative aspects, and it refers to the ideas, meanings, and imaginings that are mentally evoked from a media product (Elleström, 2021, pp. 31–32). As such, ‘virtual sphere’ can be compared to the more common concept of *story world* (Elleström, 2019, p. 30). ‘Virtual sphere’ is, however, broader than ‘story world’, as virtual spheres can both be made up of story worlds and other kinds of communicational content.

Leitch jokingly brings up how Elleström himself used his definition of narrative to examine qualified media (for an explanation of this term, see

the Introduction to this volume) that are not traditionally thought of as narrative media in his exploration of, for instance, guided tours and mathematical equations. He then moves on to suggest three “less obviously narrative media” (this volume, p. 214) of his own: restaurant menus, interactive maps, and weather reports, thus showing a similarly broad understanding of qualified medium and narration. To understand Elleström’s and Leitch’s argument that mathematical equations and restaurant menus can be considered narrative media, it is essential to differentiate between qualified media which are more or less inherently narrative by definition, such as literature or Hollywood films, and qualified media which only have a narrative capacity. Since the core of a narrative is made up of “represented events that are temporally interrelated in a meaningful way” (Elleström, 2019, p. 37), a potential narrative requires both the capability to represent events and the capability to represent temporality. This is why non-temporal media, like paintings and mathematical equations, are not obviously narrative. However, in Elleström’s theory, it suffices if temporality can be inferred from a media product for it to have a narrative potential. Thus, paintings can depict a scene or an event from the Bible, with the observer inferring the events leading up to that represented, or they can depict several events, with the observer inferring temporal relations between these (Elleström, 2019, p. 118). Likewise, some mathematical equations can infer temporality by being read as a sequence of events and “numerical changes” (Elleström, 2019, p. 126). Put simply, an equation such as $2 + 6 = X$ can be read as ‘to 2 (event 1) is added 6 (event 2) resulting in an unknown number (event three)’. When a child first learns addition, the equation might even be embellished to look even more like a narrative, like this: “If you have two apples and I give you six more, how many do you then have?”. This idea that narrative can be something that is implied by a media product or something that is inferred from a media product also underlies Leitch’s discussion in his chapter and is something that is further debated in the Questions and Answers section.

In Leitch’s own words, his ‘innovation’ in this volume is to consider “the complexities that arise when narratives that are ostensibly set in the past tense intersect with narratives that are projected in the future tense”, by studying media that are “intended to direct users’ future behaviour” (this volume, p. 214). In choosing these types of media, Leitch is indeed innovative as the inferred narrative goes beyond those events represented by the media products to also include the behaviour anticipated by the media products. As such, Leitch’s examples of qualified, potentially narrative media also build on Elleström’s framework by expanding the role of the user as a co-constructor of the narrative by selecting media products which entail a great deal of interaction from the user.

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8 How to Succeed in Intermediality Without Really Being Lars Elleström

Thomas Leitch

The last time I saw Lars, or at least his digital image, was at the Transmedial Turn conference that was originally planned to be held at the University of Tartu in Tallinn, Estonia in December 2020 before COVID changed the rules. When the conference was taken online, I was given what seemed to me an early morning time slot, but Lars's presentation began hours earlier at a time that was for me 4.30 in the morning. So I opened my own presentation this way:

I have to begin by apologizing to Lars Elleström, whose presentation on truthfulness I missed because it was so early in the morning. If I end up repeating everything he said, I apologize to all of you. If I end up disagreeing with everything he said, that's just business as usual.

This was no mere rhetorical flourish because Lars and I consistently disagreed about almost everything from the first principles of intermedial studies to the relation between intermedial studies and adaptation studies, and I was deeply elated when Lars told me after this presentation that he didn't entirely disagree with what I had said. That was the very last time we spoke, and I can't tell you how much I treasured his non-judgement.

Lars's reaction reminded me of the first time I met Patrick Cattrysse at the 2017 conference on networks, nodes, and new approaches to adaptation studies in Provo, Utah. Patrick and I had already commented on each other's work in ways that emphasised our mutual disapproval of each other. I think we were both very surprised by how we took to each other and enjoyed our time together during the conference. So before we left to go back home, we agreed to collaborate on a dialogue on adaptation that we'd submit to *Literature/Film Quarterly* – a dialogue that would allow us to outline and mutually critique some of our foundational disagreements as straightforwardly as possible, not in order to resolve them, still less to score points off each other, but in order to clarify them for interested readers and incidentally to encourage other disputants in the field to consider writing

similar dialogues (Cattrysse & Leitch, 2018). As far as I know, nobody has accepted the implied invitation the article “A Dialogue on Adaptation” has offered to write and publish similar dialogues, but the dialogue itself was a pleasure to write since it brought together in a friendly way a pair of obvious antagonists: Patrick, a rigorously systematic thinker, and myself, an opportunistic blue jay attracted to bright, shiny objects. It contrasted his spatially oriented theories that seek to map the discursive universe with my temporally rooted observations seeking to tell persuasive stories.

When I heard that Lars had died, one of my first reactions was regret that I’d never taken the opportunity to pursue and publish such a dialogue with him, another systematic world-builder whose models were frequently illustrated with spatial diagrams. On further reflection, though, I realised I’d already had so many dialogues like this with Lars in real time that one more really wouldn’t have mattered. Even so, I’d like to offer this presentation as my attempt at one more dialogue with Lars. Since he isn’t here to speak for himself, I’ll quote him from time to time, but he’s not going to get nearly as much screen time as I will, and I’m less interested in engaging with him than in promoting his legacy. Hence my title, “How to Succeed in Intermedial Studies without Really Being Lars Elleström”.

Let me begin with some obvious advice about how you can succeed in intermedial studies. Be organised. Be very organised. Be hyper-organised. Generate maps and charts of your field, your approach, and your methodology that demonstrate your high degree of spatial organisation and your ability to map every area or process onto a single plane. Be open to the dazzling profusion of semiotic media from cave paintings to digital media. But don’t be daunted by this profusion. Instead, work tirelessly to generate intelligible connections between different media, different qualified media, and different ways of thinking about media. And theorise everything. That is, do your best to establish the place of every discovery you make and every hypothesis you advance within a larger, more abstract universe of possibilities. To put this another way, constantly work towards integrating all your theories into a master theory. But don’t treat your theories as finished objects. Instead, periodically revisit and refine them, as Lars did most notably in *The Modalities of Media 2* (Elleström, 2021), his expanded reworking of his signature 2010 essay in volume one of his 2021 collection, *Beyond Media Borders* – a revision I greeted with the reaction, “Wait, there was stuff he left out before?” Yes, lots of stuff had been left out, though I’d never noticed its absence.

To return to my list: meta-theorise your theories by stepping back from them and testing the assumptions they make against new evidence and competing theories. Don’t be afraid to generalise your findings, thinking as big as necessary in pursuit of a general theory of media, or of signifying, or of everything. And finally, make sure the worlds you’ve built can

accommodate the work and the world of colleagues in related fields, so you have a firm basis for ongoing discussion with these colleagues. This last point may sound like a postscript, but in many ways, it's the most important piece of advice I have to offer. I'll be returning to it and, à la Lars, enlarging on it in due course.

Of course, it's no coincidence that all these bases have already been exceptionally well covered by Lars himself. And we'd probably agree that there's a limit on how closely you can imitate him, especially given what you may feel is your own limited focus and intellect. So what can you do if you're not Lars? Since there's no way you're going to be able to duplicate his formidable strengths, you might consider taking the opposite, or let's say the complementary, route. Instead of thinking deductively and presenting top-down theories, you can think inductively and work bottom-up, from granular particulars to more general conclusions. More specifically, you can immerse yourself in close readings of diverse texts that resist obvious theories: analyses of unadaptable novels, for instance, or transmedial activities that don't seem to follow the rules. You can allow yourself to be drawn into exploring byways and tangents, looking for roads not taken in medial and intermedial studies. In fact, if you don't mind coming across as annoying and perverse, you can actively seek out anti-systematic medial activities: one-offs like performance art, or John Cage's *4'33"* for silent piano.

In other words, if you can't make yourself into a successful follower of Lars, you can do your best to make yourself into his dialectical counterpart, not to demonstrate that his systematic approach to media transformations is wrong, but to indicate some of the ways it might be strengthened even further, either by posing challenges that criticise its founding principles and operational protocols or by exploring alternatives whose dead ends confirm its power, externalising, in either case, the self-critical impulse that was so characteristic of Lars. Of course, Lars's impulse to self-criticism makes this dialectical approach equally daunting because he already covered so many of these contrarian bases too, as he indicated most economically in the title of his interview with Ágnes Pethő, "A good concept should be both very concrete and very abstract" (Pethő, 2018) – a title that made me think, "Wow, not much room for me here".

If you can't reasonably expect to succeed by becoming Lars Elleström Jr., and Lars has already pre-empted much of the territory that you might think properly belongs to the anti-Lars, what can you do? Don't worry: I have more suggestions. You can network. Not everyone can build networks as effectively as the Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies, but everyone can take an active role in networking, even if it's not a leadership role. In this connection, it's important to note that Lars never thought of himself as a central figure in Intermedial Studies. When he reflected on his position, he always decentred himself, and he was clearly more proud of his membership in the Intermedial Network (perhaps I should say the

Intermedial Rhizome) than of any preeminence or centrality he might have enjoyed in that network.

Your first step in networking should be to make contact with other researchers in your field, in adjacent fields, and in fields you think might have something to offer you and your colleagues. This involves travelling to conferences, maybe even hosting conferences, using your contacts to pursue more contacts, and taking the trouble to write to researchers whose work strikes you as admirable or provocative. The next step is not to make announcements to these people but to listen to people in your networks, to your students, and to the media, by which I mean both what Lars called qualified media and what everyone calls news media, the media that enlighten and bombard your every waking moment. Once you've gathered people together in groups as small as two or as large as 200 and listened to what they're saying, the next step is to ask them questions, encourage them to ask questions, listen to their questions, and internalise their questions. Since one of the most important people you'll be questioning is yourself, don't be afraid to build on your own earlier work, as Lars constantly did. But truly build on it, extending and qualifying and complicating your theories instead of simply rehashing them every time it's your turn to speak.

A few years ago, Lars and I talked about why some conferences were so much more successful than others, and we agreed on three working rules for successful conferences in the form of questions. Did participants ask the presenters questions that suggested that the participants had actually taken in what the presenters had said and were seriously grappling with its implications? Did anyone give signs during the conference that they'd changed their minds about anything important? And were the conference attendees still in touch with each other a year later? I still believe in these rules, and I'm especially proud that they don't include any reference to how distinguished the speakers were or how appealing the conference venue was. I'm still convinced that the most important business of a conference is to spark productive dialogues that continue long after the conference ends. Thinking of conferences not as showcases or isolated events but as productive nodes in ongoing networks suggested to me that conferences were themselves a qualified medium, in the sense in which Lars defined that term.

Though I'm tempted to go on to talk about conferences as qualified media, I'm going to resist that temptation and leave the possibility of developing that argument up to you. Instead, the beginning of the summer vacation, at least for those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, has inspired me to identify three other kinds of qualified media I propose as subjects for further study. Before I get down to these three case studies, though, I have to issue several advance warnings. Since I'm not the researcher that Lars was, my presentation, which you will have noticed already is a good deal less formal than any presentation by Lars, will continue to be considerably more informal. My examples will be illustrated mostly by anecdotes rather

than scholarly citations of Lars or anyone else. Instead of sharing Lars's intention to highlight the broad transmedial applicability of essential narrative concepts, as he does in *Transmedial Narration* (Elleström, 2019), I plan to take for granted Lars's success in this project. I'll attempt not to demonstrate it, but to build on it, as Lars might well have done himself if he were here, by teasing out narratives from less obviously narrative media. My principal innovation, if I have one to offer, will be to consider some of the complexities that arise when narratives that are ostensibly set in the past tense intersect with narratives that are projected in the future tense, since all three of the examples that I'd ask you to consider today concern qualified media that are explicitly intended to direct users' future behaviour. My analyses will be much briefer and more superficial than Lars's because I have a limited amount of both time and expertise. Nor will I cover in any comprehensive or systematic way every one of the four modalities Lars memorably identified as essential to all qualified media – the material, the sensorial, the spatiotemporal, and the semiotic (Elleström, 2010, 2021) – although I may accidentally allude to one or the other from time to time. I can only hope that you'll find my much less systematic analyses penetrating enough to spark your recognition and provocative enough to encourage pursuit on your own. Finally, even though they're highly appropriate to the season, I can't use guided tours as one of my examples because they're one of the qualified media Lars already examined in *Transmedial Narration* along with painting, instrumental music, and mathematical equations (Elleström, 2019). Instead, I'd invite you to consider three other qualified media.

Restaurant Menus

The first of these media is restaurant menus. I'm encouraged to use these because Lars mentioned them very briefly, and because a good concept should be both very concrete and very abstract. Menus, of course, are qualified media that list which food and beverage selections are available at a given restaurant. Some menus, like those posted over the counters at fast food franchise restaurants, may never seem to change. But I'm more interested in the changing menus that list what's available at a specific time of a specific day at a specific restaurant.

I want to focus primarily on printed menus rather than blackboard menus. But I should begin by noting that even though you're much more likely to encounter printed menus that imply stability than blackboard menus that are likely to change from minute to minute, blackboard menus are actually the conceptual norm, not the outlier, because printed menus are just as likely to change for a number of reasons – because the restaurant indicates that it has daily specials that aren't listed on the menu, for instance, or because the restaurant indicates that it's run out of something

that's listed on the menu, or because the food you actually receive turns out to be different in some way from what's listed on the menu. The side dishes might be different, the salad might be missing ingredients, or the beef might be just a little tougher than advertised. In other words, printed menus are designed to project an era of stability while incorporating changes to which they already respond and leaving room for still other changes.

As Lars might well have observed, menus are multimedia that incorporate photos or icons into their design. Even menus that might seem to be text only typically incorporate at least two signifying systems: verbal descriptions of the menu options, sometimes describing them, sometimes listing at least some of their ingredients, and numerical prices, unless the prices are omitted from some or all of the menus, an omission that makes a very definite statement of its own. The unwary might assume that the function of menus is purely descriptive, to serve as neutral lists of selections available for eating and drinking, but I doubt that any of you thought of them that way even before I put you on high alert by introducing the word *neutral*.

There are at least four ways that menus aren't neutral.

- 1 They're presented as one of many selling points for the restaurant at hand, designed to convey perhaps a sense of luxury, or of reassuring familiarity, or of a plenitude of options, or of whatever feature the restaurant most wants to use as a selling point.
- 2 They're generally designed to encourage you to spend more money. In the United States, for instance, menus often omit dollar signs from their prices and avoid the suffix .99. For some reason, these two things discourage people from spending money, so upscale American restaurants and menus tend to omit them.
- 3 Many of them are designed specifically to steer you towards some options – typically, of course, more expensive options rather than others. Their ideal goal is to get you to order not the most expensive item on the menu, which many patrons avoid in principle, but the second most expensive, which typically is the one the restaurant really hopes you'll order. They put the most expensive item on the menu specifically to tell you, "Don't order this; it's not for you. Instead, you should order the second most expensive one".
- 4 Finally and most obviously, menus are only incidentally describing *present* states of affairs. They're primarily indicated to drive *future* states of affairs so that whatever impact they have is determined by what you order. Just as important, menus, unlike, let's say, playbills for theatrical productions, aren't so much lists of information as foundations for or sites of negotiation. I've never seen my wife simply order from the menu any restaurant provided. Instead, she asks, "Does the sushi have any shellfish in it?" Or "Can I get some side dish other than asparagus?" – questions I'm sure any of you with dietary restrictions will sympathise with.

Although restaurants may think of menus as maximising information, they may ultimately cut back on it by announcing that they have to substitute regular French fries for the sweet potato fries, or that they've run out of fresh strawberries for the strawberry shortcake. Patrons like my wife think of menus as providing minimal information that it's always possible to expand. Instead of thinking in terms of menus-minus, as the restaurants in question undoubtedly do, she assumes that her ordering experience will be based on menus-plus, exploiting whatever accommodations she can find that aren't written into the menu, which provides no more than the opening move in an ongoing game between the restaurant's desire to regularise its varied patrons' culinary experiences and my wife's desire to obtain the best conceivable meal that a particular restaurant has to offer.

Interactive Maps and Map Apps

The second qualified medium I'd ask you to consider is interactive maps and map apps. You're probably all familiar with Google Maps to begin with, but I'd remind you that there are many alternatives to Google. Writing for the website *Rigorous Themes*, Tom Clayton has compiled a list of the 10 best Google Maps alternatives (Clayton, 2023). I'll review Clayton's list very quickly. Maps.Me creates maps that you can download and use offline, conserving more of your device's memory and power. Bing Maps features more conservative estimates of travel time, something I especially value, and allows you to save places you plan to return to in a personal library for future use. Navmii provides up-to-date reports on traffic accidents and delays and allows integration with other sites like TripAdvisor. MapQuest, the predecessor of all the others for those of you who, like me, remember that far back, most closely resembles Google Maps but has fewer features. Sygic maps, like Google Maps, features audio turn-by-turn directions, though with fewer languages, and includes an app that supports offline maps. Waze provides real-time updates about traffic delays and suggests alternate routes through its integration with the online social community called Wazers. In greater Los Angeles, for example, everyone is on Waze, and all the Wazers head for exactly the same alternate routes in a perfect example of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. HERE WeGo specialises in multiple route options, like buses, taxis, and rideshares, and allows users to download maps for entire countries, not just their immediate surroundings. Once you've parachuted into Russia, you can now look at a map of the entire country of Russia and feel more rooted. CityMapper specialises, as its name implies, in mapping urban routes, providing multiple options about how to get from A to B. OsmAnd specialises in providing more information about rural areas likely to be attractive to hikers, cyclists, and skiers. Rand McNally, the most traditional of these alternatives, offers more detailed maps whose target users are professional truck drivers.

I don't bring up all these alternatives to brag about my profound knowledge of interactive maps. I'd never heard of half of them before I started working on this presentation, and I don't bring them up to recommend any of them over the others. Stick with what works for you. Instead, I'd note that online maps are clearly a qualified, multimodal medium which, like restaurant menus, make no attempt to convey comprehensive information neutrally. Each of them puts its own distinctive spin on the information about the routes it provides, beginning with the fact that it highlights the routes that have been constructed specifically for use by drivers, hikers, or skiers rather than natural, topographical features of the landscape.

The fact that Tom Clayton recommends these as the 10 best alternatives to Google Maps has made me wonder how many alternatives didn't make his 10 best list. The list could probably be extended indefinitely by adding maps that are more specialised or less successful. Instead, I'd add only two other kinds of interactive maps: the maps found on standalone GPS devices that have been largely superseded by cell phones, and the maps on Wikimapia. The maps on Wikimapia, like the pages on Wikipedia, are interactive in a different sense than all the other online maps I've mentioned. Anyone can edit them, so they're constantly being subject to updates in real time – sometimes no doubt for the better, sometimes maybe not.

If you're uneasy at the prospect of dealing with maps that anyone can edit from any location at any moment for any reason, your uneasiness reveals a fundamental assumption you probably make about maps: that they're sources of information whose authority and reliability can be safely assumed. If you spend enough time using your GPS, you know how dangerous this assumption can be. We've all heard or experienced horror stories like the times that cars following the directions from a GPS too closely encouraged their drivers to crash them into ditches, buildings, or other cars, or the time that following directions from a GPS took an unquestioning driver 50 miles out of his way. A car I was in myself was still on an exit ramp off Interstate 5 in California headed towards the 110 when the GPS suddenly said, "Turn left! Turn right! Turn left! Turn right!" – an incident that went a long way towards making me rethink my formerly uncritical relation to the GPS as a font of information.

Although we routinely consult online maps as if they were simply purveyors of useful information about when we should next turn and why, a brief consideration will reveal that our relation to them is considerably more complicated. Even an analysis that's restricted to the GPS devices we used to depend on and the Wikimapia maps we're invited to improve is likely to make us more aware of the different uses to which we put maps in different situations and of the fact that we rarely consult maps of any sort unless we want to use them in some specific way.

From these observations follow three points I'd particularly like to emphasise. First point: even pre-digital maps from the earliest days of mapmaking to the 20th century have mostly been intended to be interactive. The

Mercator projection, which Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator introduced in 1569, has made maps notorious for distorting the landmasses of areas like Greenland. Mercator knew about these distortions but was willing to introduce them as the price of making it easier for sailors and navigators to plot ocean voyages on straight lines, increasing the power of the nations they represented. Henry C. Beck's iconic 1933 map of the London Underground distorted the distances between many tube stations and their relative positions on north-to-south and east-to-west axes in the interests of regularity, legibility, memorability, and, to my mind, beauty. As in the case of interactive maps, there's no one correct way to produce printed maps. The map I used to navigate the New York subway system when I was in college was replaced around the time I graduated with a map that outraged many New Yorkers. For one thing, the bodies of water were brown, so a call was issued for a corrective map that would be stylised, but not too stylised, a map that observers hoped would better meet the needs of visitors and locals (see Platt, 2018).

I give these examples to illustrate the fairly obvious point that with the rare exception of maps that are posted on study walls as assertions or inspirations – as I myself displayed a street map of London in my office for years before I ever visited the city, just to stake my claim – or maps that are used on places like mousepads as reminders or affirmations of beloved places, most printed maps are documents designed to be used. They're just as interactive in their own way as Google Maps. What's new, as Kyle Meikle has written about *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, is not the invitation to interactivity, but the emergence of different modes of interactivity that the new technology encourages, discourages and deactivates, or positively forbids, like using your pencil to draw your route on an old paper map (Meikle, 2017). You can't do that on a GPS.

This leads to my second, slightly less obvious point: the likelihood that discrepancies will arise between the different motives for maps' production and their use. These two activities aren't adequately described by customary terms like consumption or audienceship, as we can see by comparing multiple maps of any particular space or route or affordance – for instance, those different maps of the New York City subway system, at least one of which New Yorkers literally could not bring themselves to read and trust.

The fact that these activities of reading and trusting cut two ways leads to my third point: digital maps, unlike earlier printed maps, are interactive in ways their users don't control and may not even be aware of. Every time we consult online maps for information, the maps are also extracting information from us. Depending on how often we consult a given site like Google Maps and how long we stay on each page, they can discover where we are, where we want to go, what route we're following, and how long it's taking us: a habit so deeply ingrained that it's generated a widely used meme. I found many examples of this meme, but my personal favourite is a meme showing a Google search for the question, "If the Illuminati is

secret, why does literally everyone know about it?” and including a superimposed panel that announces: “The CIA wants to know your location”, and two buttons that purport to let you choose “Block” or “Allow”.

The most obvious way that online maps exploit the information we yield when we consult them is by targeted advertisements designed specifically to appeal to consumers at our location – ads for restaurants, stores, and other services the mapmakers’ algorithms think we’re most likely to respond to. More generally, online maps gather information about their users so that they can agglomerate and sell it, even if their findings aren’t linked to specific identifiable users. As the wisdom of online browsing has it, if you can’t tell what product is being marketed, it’s probably you. A broad implication of this algorithm is that media, like online maps, that you may consider interactive in the sense that they expand your control over the route you’ve chosen and can change it at will are also anti-interactive whenever they capture and sell your personal data, reducing you from an agent to a commodity – a finding that suggests that what Henry Jenkins (2006) has called convergence culture may well have a darker side.

Weather Reports

Instead of lingering over this disquieting possibility, though, I’d propose a third variety of qualified media: weather reports, which are multimodal in two distinct senses. You can access them through a variety of different media – television, radio, newspapers, websites – and most of these individual media are themselves multimodal, save perhaps radio. Even online weather sites like *Weather Underground*, which use charts and icons along with words, are multimodal.

It might seem obvious what kinds of information weather reports give. They tell us what weather conditions are most likely to prevail over the next day, or the next seven days, or the next 10 days. So you might assume that they have a purely utilitarian function. We tune in so that we can see what the weather is likely to be – especially for the very next day, since the further out the forecast extends, the less reliable it’s likely to be – and we plan our apparel and our activities accordingly. Interestingly, though, weather reports on the evening and nightly news, at least in America, always begin with an overnight forecast, presumably to create a sense of comprehensiveness, even though that information is much less likely to be useful to the audience. Weather forecasts typically present their information through spoken words and numbers alone, with rare and notable exceptions; newspaper forecasts through a combination of words, numbers, icons, and maps; online forecasts through words, numbers, icons, maps, and charts; television forecasts through words, numbers, icons, maps that are often animated, and, of course, through variously overt invitations to the audience to bond with variously charming forecasters.

If I were Lars, I'd linger here over the different ways weather watchers absorb the information that's conveyed by words, icons, maps, and recognisable human beings. But I'm less interested in the ways we process information within these different semiotic systems than in our motives for watching, reading, or listening to weather reports and the uses to which we put the information they provide.

Even though I've been talking so far as if there's a single normative way to watch weather reports, a moment's reflection will convince you that that's not true. There are the weather reports we watch ritualistically just before we go to sleep at night, sometimes while we're going to sleep. There are weather reports we watch anxiously, as my wife and I did in the recent run-up to our annual Memorial Day party, which was coming back after a two-year hiatus, and which we were determined this year to hold outdoors in deference to the pandemic. So every few hours, we'd check the weather again and fret about whether it would rain. And of course, there's crisis weather watching when our televisions remain tuned to the weather channel as a hurricane approaches, even though these real-time updates deliver precious new information from moment to moment, and usually, the information they deliver is not what we want to hear.

When I lived briefly in London 20 years ago, it always seemed to me that every night, the forecaster would scatter every weather emoji imaginable at random over the map of England, then look straight into the camera and say, "Tomorrow's weather looks a bit unsettled". By contrast, there's the zen-like approach audiences have to weather reports in San Diego, which are basically reducible to more of the same indefinitely, whatever. Forecasting the weather for a San Diego television station means never having to say you're sorry. But I've often been charmed by the frequent apologies meteorologists outside San Diego make for bad weather. Occasionally, they apologise for having gotten the forecast wrong, but more often, they apologise for delivering bad news about the upcoming weather. These apologies have no parallel in other news reports. Newscasters never say they feel bad to tell you that COVID is spreading, that Ukraine has been invaded or that global warming seems to be accelerating.

You might be tempted to argue from this don't-shoot-the-messenger posture that television programmes and online news sites seek to personalise weather reports in ways they don't personalise hard news. I'd agree with this assessment, but only in a very limited sense. TV and online weather reports do indeed personalise news reports. But instead of seeking to broadcast this personalisation by issuing apologies, they complement news with commentary, telling us what the news means and how we should react to it while pretending that they're doing nothing of this sort. We'd probably watch news reports a good deal more critically if we watched them as alertly as we watch weather reports.

One final observation about weather forecasters' apologies: they're limited to their forecasts' past or future, not to their summaries of the weather you've already been having that day. This last observation may seem obvious, but it leads to a larger and odder one. Virtually all the weather reports on television, unlike those in radio and newspapers, begin even before the overnight forecast by summarising today's weather. Although they rarely go on to make this summary the basis of their prediction, they frequently introduce online forecasts with phrases like 'big changes are coming'. In this, they depart sharply from online sites like Weather Underground, whose charts drop any information about the weather at a given moment once that moment has passed. It's down the memory hole.

Why do television forecasts begin by summarising the weather outside? Is their target audience unaware of what the weather is like? I doubt it. More likely, I think, they summarise the day's weather as a narrative point of departure for a story they want to tell. In addition, they do so not to give information, but to establish generic consistency with the rest of the news. Larger analyses of multimedia predict both the narrative and the generic elements of this anomaly, though they don't explain why newspaper and radio weather reports are less narrative. Most of us who watch weather reports, of course, are less interested in what the weather has already been like, which we know perfectly well, than what it's going to be like. I suspect that we use their summaries to the extent that we use them at all as grounding, nodding to ourselves as we acknowledge the authority of report – "Yes, it is partly cloudy, so true" – and our community with it in preparation for the leap of faith we're about to take when we buy into the prediction of future weather. It seems clear, though, that most of us watch the weather specifically in order to help us make future plans, or at least to heighten our awareness of how the weather might affect plans we've already made.

It might seem, therefore, that we watch weather reports differently from the rest of the news reports in which they're embedded, since our interest in weather reports is frankly future-oriented, interested in what's going to happen, whereas our interest in the rest of the news is archival, or past-oriented, interested in what's already happened. I suspect, though, that this difference is more apparent than real because we watch news reports that are set in the past with a keen interest, perhaps a primary interest, in the predictions they allow us to venture about what's going to happen next. This is, obviously, much more true of some kinds of news, like stock market reports, than other kinds of news, like obituary columns. But the future-oriented ways we watch weather reports turn out to be a surprisingly good model for the ways we watch other kinds of news, from global politics to sports.

Conclusion

I hope you've found this brief survey of restaurant menus, interactive maps, and weather reports, informative, provocative, and less painful than a survey of some of the more stressful alternatives I considered but rejected: airline websites, vacation planners and agglomerators, Airbnb, and VRBO. All of these, it seemed to me, cut a little too close to the bone, and I'd hate to spoil your summer by probing beneath their skin. But my survey, which is surely unworthy of Lars, would be even more unworthy if I didn't provide you with some more general takeaways. So here are three tentative conclusions.

First, as I've been saying, all three of these media – restaurant menus, interactive maps, and weather reports – whether or not they're explicitly cast as narratives, are likely to be framed by narrative tropes and consumed as if they're chapters in an ongoing story. Second, at least the first two of them are marked by a lack of congruence between the goals of the creators and the goals of their most likely consumers, sometimes amounting to a barely submerged conflict or collision course, something that may even be true of the third. When I was a teenager, for instance, my sisters were convinced that summer forecasts of weather at the Jersey Shore were routinely altered by a commercial desire to encourage more weekend visitors. Week after week, they said, "They never predict rain at the shore. Even when it's going to rain, they don't predict it. They just want you to go no matter what". And I doubt that they were the only people, then or now, to share that belief.

So it might make sense to think of even qualified media that we consider semiotic as additionally, or even primarily, pragmatic (cf. Altman, 1999). Even if weather reports, interactive maps, and restaurant menus aren't biased, they're certainly meant to influence the behaviour of audiences who consult them. In fact, that's precisely why audiences consult them in the first place. These results make me wonder whether all self-identified reference sources, from Wikipedia to the *Farmer's Almanac*, are also designed specifically to encourage some future reactions or uses and discourage others and whether that might indeed be true of qualified media that don't pose as reference sources, and perhaps even of many qualified media that do.

These reflections persuade me to offer a big idea for the future of intermedial studies. I'd like to see more work in the field that focuses specifically on literacy studies. Of course, there's been a great deal of research already on what we might call media-based literacy, studies of print literacy, visual literacy, cinematic literacy, computer literacy, and so on. But I'd urge those of you who are interested in literacy studies to sharpen your focus in two ways.

First, I'd urge you to consider literacy not simply with respect to generalised, presentational media, like words and images, but with respect to specific, qualified media like restaurant menus, interactive maps, and weather reports. Here's an example that I hope will illustrate why I think

this might be a good idea. I've seen more and more attention by the news media to news literacy, the ability to watch, read, or listen to the news critically, and I welcome this development. It seems to me, though, that most of us are much more weather-forecast literate than news literate, as I said before. We're much more intelligent about how we watch the weather than about how we watch the news. If a weather report predicted a 29% chance of rain, for instance, I suspect that many of you would think seriously about taking an umbrella when you went out. But when the polling aggregator 538 gave Donald Trump a 29% chance of winning the 2016 presidential election, everyone I knew assumed that that meant he wouldn't win. Speaking more broadly, I suspect that most of us ask much more active, critical, and intelligent questions when we read fictional texts than when we read non-fictional texts like histories, biographies, and news reports, which we tend to divide simply into the reliable and the unreliable, the ones we believe and the ones we don't believe. A more discriminating news literacy would be a lot more critical and precise.

This brings me to the second way I'd like literacy studies to sharpen its focus, by extending our notion of literacy from semiotics or hermeneutics – that is, how we understand a given text – to consider questions about how we use a given text once we've taken it on board. Extending our discussions of literacy from what Rick Altman, writing about genre, has called the semantic and syntactic realms to the pragmatic realm (1999, pp. 207–215) would amount to such a foundational shift that I'm not sure the subject of our discussion would still be called literacy. But I'm okay with that. So that's my pitch: Media Literacy R Us.

Whether or not you're interested in reconfiguring literacy studies until it's as sharply defined as intermedial studies, let me invite you more generally to entertain a post-Elleström vision of intermedial studies I hope Lars would have endorsed. Based on our deep agreements and our most productive disagreements, the field should depend on interdisciplinary and interpersonal networks. It should be dialogue-driven rather than remaining the property of a single powerful proprietary spokesperson. It should be argument-driven and argument-incorporating. No matter how definitive it seems at any given moment, it should always acknowledge contingencies and be constantly evolving. It should be unselfish and generous in its search for new voices and receptive to these voices when they emerge. And of course, it should be both very concrete and very abstract.

All of this may sound like a recipe for endless oxymorons. But Lars's own example should reassure us that it isn't. As he argued, and as he repeatedly demonstrated, we should adopt terminology that's applicable to general intermedial notions and phenomena in order to communicate across borders of specialisation. In other words, we should constantly be thinking and acting outside disciplinary boxes, both by maintaining

active dialogues with our counterparts in other disciplines and by internalising and adapting their habits, terms, and approaches so that in addition to being cogs in a larger series of interdisciplinary initiatives, we can do our best to make our own individual contributions more interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, constantly attending to media as both products and activities. In this context, I should note that the text that inspired the title of this paper is already an intermedial intertext, a reference to *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, reaching back from recent productions to the 1995 Broadway revival to the 1967 film to Frank Loesser's original 1961 musical, which wasn't actually original because it was based on Shepherd Mead's 1952 mock instruction manual (Mead, 1952), whose 1995 reprint I'm told has been catalogued by the Library of Congress under business books, with subject headings that include success in business, management, and career development.

Even if you follow all my well-meaning advice, I can't guarantee that you'll really succeed in intermedial studies. But I'd like to provide a few final warnings that might help. I don't mean to propose myself or my own work or this presentation as a model for success. Even more than Lars, I consider myself a visitor, not a native, to intermedial studies, and an indifferently successful one. As my title indicates, however, I'm not here to model or display my own success but rather to offer advice about how to be more successful than me. And even the most successful of you aren't going to be Lars Elleström. I never promised that, but only that you might become worthy heirs and successors to Lars as you worked the field. That's what Lars would call it; I'd call it the anti-field he did so much to survey and fertilise. In this connection, you should keep in mind that *succeed* doesn't mean dominate or control. Its etymology depends instead on succession, not perhaps in the sense of the TV series, but in the broader sense of accepting a legacy and assuming responsibility for administering it – a lesson Lars's unassuming but inspiring example will go on reminding us over and over.

Questions and Answers

Niklas Salmose: Thank you very much, Tom. Knowing Lars, he was very much aware that his world had to be systematic, schematized and organized in a specific way. But he was always very generous in the sense that he didn't expect everyone else to live in that same systematic and schematizing world, I think.

Thomas Leitch: I have known many people who are great networkers and I've known a smaller number of people who were great system builders. But Lars is the only person I've ever known who was both.

Niklas Salmose: That is true. I really enjoyed that you talked about media in terms of their function, activity, and interactivity. Putting a focus on consumers of media, which is maybe something that you felt was lacking in Lars's conceptualization of media?

Thomas Leitch: It's funny that you should ask that, Niklas, because for years I did feel that way. And it was not until the publication of his 2021 article that I thought, "Lars is now doing what I've been doing for years, but he does it better than me". I really loved the case studies that he provided, although one of the reasons I loved them is that I thought "This is so Lars, I can hardly wait to see what's coming next". Sadly, I didn't realize what was coming next.

Beate Schirrmacher: I appreciated that you drove your talk towards media literacy, and I would say that it's exactly this kind of intermedial perspective that needs to be brought to media literacy. I really appreciated that you defined what this would mean – that it is not about spelling out that we have to know how to look at film, which is different from social media, or digital media, but to understand the conventions and the habits that are in place in a qualified media type and how these conventions make us understand, evaluate and focus on different aspects, while simultaneously leading us to make choices.

I also really appreciated the move towards the pragmatist perspective: What do we do with it? How do we respond to it? It is this kind of intermedial literacy – the awareness that *different* kinds of qualified media may be relevant and that people may respond to the same media product differently because they apply different forms of literacy. I think this is what happens currently. Very often when people evaluate things or integrate them into different narratives, they draw different conclusions about what this means because they apply different forms of literacies.

Thomas Leitch: I've become obsessed lately with the problem of news literacy, and a good deal of my work has been moving away from adaptation studies toward media literacy, news literacy in particular. For many years, one of the hardest lessons that I have taught to first-year

students in college is that texts don't interpret themselves. No text tells you how to read it. You can only read texts by mastering other texts and using the information that you've gained from them to read this new text. This, of course, can be generalized to media. Media don't teach you how to read them. You can only read them through your experience of other media. And that other experience can't just be applied wholesale to the new text or medium; you have to pick and choose. So the more texts and media you've mastered, the more likely you are to be able to master a new text or a new type of media, not by saying, "I know just the way to read that", but by saying, "I have many resources and many affordances to draw on in reading that". Also, they may not be the same resources or affordances that I would have used last week, or that I'd use next week. I should own the fact that my readings may change, and my reactions may change. And I shouldn't end up like all the Americans who read or listen to the news and ask one and only one question, "Do I believe this?" That's a great question to ask, but if that's the only question you're asking, you are truly a news illiterate. Tomorrow evening [9 June 2022], most of the American news networks will be broadcasting either live coverage or programmes about the congressional inquiry of the January 6 committee into what happened on 6 January 2021. But Fox News won't be broadcasting anything on the topic. So far, every commentator I've followed has said, "This is bad". This seems to me a dumb reaction. But it's also a dumb reaction for Fox to say, "There's nothing to see here. This is not news". Clearly, they're not going to know whether it's news until they get a look at it. Americans are so eager to prejudge news that they drastically limit their literacy. Therefore, I regard working on news literacy as steady work.

Mikael Askander:

I really like it when we get to move a little bit outside the aesthetic box. We are talking about novels, films, and different kinds of aesthetically designed communication all the time, but not so much about news reports or menus. I think this is the road to travel for intermedial studies in the future, to take on these

kinds of communicative systems. But I also have one question, and it popped up while you were talking, Thomas, about these different qualified media being narrative. I am not sure I would agree that menus are narratives. I think they might be departures for a narrative, or when we start to reflect upon them, discuss them, and make use of them, the menus become a part of a narrative or storytelling. But I wouldn't say that all kinds of menus are narratives. Do you have something to comment on that thought?

Thomas Leitch:

I do. I would like to strengthen what you've said a little bit and edge it closer to what I was saying in the first place. Menus are not in themselves narratives, but they are meaningless outside of narratives. At least in the connection for which they're ordinarily designed, menus, even if they're not narrative per se, have an irreducibly narrative function. If you're my wife, they're designed specifically to provoke narratives. If you're me, they are specifically intended to foster narratives. "I'm hungry. We've come to a fork in the road. What can we do now?" The menu will tell me, "Here are your options".

For me, the bottom line is the question, how many media we think of as non-narrative are in fact either narrative in ways that we haven't observed or are embedded in narratives? I'll give you an example: the way that paintings are arranged in art museums. There's a museum close to me, the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, in which the paintings are arranged in patterns that have to do with Dr Barnes's notion of how the pictures' patterns and colours inform each other. Very occasionally, I get these patterns, but most of the time I don't. I just experience them as a bunch of paintings that are together. What I always find wonderful about a visit to the Barnes Foundation is that it reminds me of the ways that paintings at other museums are displayed. They're not displayed in this crazy, arbitrary way. They're displayed in the normal way. What's the normal way? Chronologically, and within the chronological organisation is a spatial and a cultural organisation. We don't think of this as a narrative, even though it seems to me we really ought to think of it as a narrative. There's a great deal to be gained by thinking of it as either a

narrative, or the trigger to a narrative, or based on a narrative, or taking its part from a narrative.

Péter Makai:

I just wanted to say that regarding the narrative function of menus, I have a bit of a reservation, because I don't think that menus are narratives or generative of narratives. Rather, I think that they are less intelligible without mental scripts and schemata that we use to make sense of the process of a meal, "I'm first having an appetizer and then I'm having the second plate. I'm having a dessert afterwards. Maybe I'll have a coffee later on". But I don't think that it is in and of itself, even in rudimentary form, necessarily a narrative. Rather it projects certain kinds of temporalities of consuming different kinds of meals. However, even if you take it to be narrative in some sense, the temporality of the menu itself often betrays the way they're actually used to construct the visit to a particular restaurant, because most of the time, the first things that people would order is not an appetizer, but rather a drink. But drinks are often relegated to the very back of the menus. So, if you think of a menu as a temporal progression from one course to another, then we do have a tmesis in there, to use Roland Barthes's sense of the term (Barthes, 1973/1975, p. 10). There is a jumping and a disorganization of order. I wonder, to what extent do we need to broaden our idea of narrative in order to see restaurant menus as narrative?

Thomas Leitch:

When I said that menus were narrative, I didn't mean in the sense that we order and then consume a first course, and then a second course, and then dessert. It seems to me that if I go to McDonald's and order a happy meal, the menu is equally narrative. One might say that the narrative is in my mind. "Oh, well, the last time I had a happy meal, I got sick, should I get the filet of fish instead? No, I really want the toy". And so on. I would not say that there is a master narrative but that there are multiple narratives that are engaged. However, this brings us back to what I take as the crux, whether narratives are provoked, engaged, or perhaps embedded. And the question I would ask is, where should we look for narrativity? Is narrative a property of texts? Is it a property of genres? Is it a property of the people who consume texts and genres?

Is it a property of the relation between people and particular texts? And if it's the last one, is it a property that inheres in the relation between the consumers of texts and the texts, or between the producers of texts and the texts, or let's say the editors of the texts and the texts? Restaurant menus, I think, are designed specifically to appear non-narrative, timeless, and eternal. "This is what we have, eat it and like it". However, it's clear that any restaurant menu has a narrative behind it, as well as a narrative in front of it. Innumerable decisions led up to, "We will list this, but not that. We will list this first. We will charge this much for this. We have to charge this much more because it's just harder to get fresh fish than it used to be. We will take this off the menu for the following reasons".

I'm highly sympathetic to anyone who says that those aren't features of the menu. Those are features of the thinking process behind the menu. My argument is that you can't detach the menu from the thinking process. But if you wish to detach it, I will just ask, "In that case, where should we look for narrative? What is it a property of?"

Péter Makai:

I just want to say that I'm wholly satisfied and completely disagree with the statement as it is. But yes, I think it is rather stimulating to narrow our understanding of how we understand narrative.

*Asum López-Varela
Azcárate:*

From the perspective of Peircean semiotics, pragmatism will be part of semiotics. Menus might be lists upon which a narrative framework is imposed by us as readers (just as we impose a story on Concrete Poetry, even if a storyline is not intended, or when we explain an abstract painting). In Peirce's parlance, explanation (narrative) would be an event occurring only in the cognitive category of thirdness (following laws, rules, or habits, as those present in discourse related to the cause-effect relations we establish in memory) (see López-Varela Azcárate, 2023). One of the problems of intermedial studies is the wide range of disciplines involved, and we need to learn the different terminologies. This is a challenge but also an opportunity.

Thomas Leitch:

As I was preparing this, and especially as I was coming toward the end of it with my peroration about pragmatics, I thought, "Peirce does this already. And

I'm acting as if this is new". So that's my confession. Here's my challenge. Peirce did advocate this 100 years ago. Are you folks all doing this? Are you all working on pragmatics? It seems to me that intermedial studies, to the extent that I'm acquainted with it, doesn't place a primary emphasis on pragmatics, but rather on semiotics, or on what Peirce would more accurately call the first and second movements, firstness and secondness, of the semiotic transaction. So I would not say that I'm adding something new to Peirce, but I'm reminding you of what Peirce said long ago and saying, "Let's do this, folks".

Heidrun Führer:

My comment was exactly to the same point, that I thought you brought up a kind of opposition between semiotics and pragmatics. Nevertheless, I think you have a great point because pragmatics, as offered by semiotics in the form of Peirce, is a mathematical and theoretical generalization that has a deep relation to Kant and Plato in philosophy. It does not imply the same kind of approach that you might have when you are discussing literacy. Literacy I would bring into Sophistic pragmatics, where the discussion is not about Aristotelian mimesis and representation theory in relation to a closed object or work, but in relation to the flow of the text and to understanding. As you said, you understand texts or other works by having read and heard about other things and then you put all these things together. Semiotics, as it came up under Umberto Eco, for example, tried to formulate this and to press it into codes, to generalize and theorize it. The pragmatics of Peirce broke away from this idea. What I see as a challenge is how to position yourself between the openness that Umberto Eco formulated with the open text and the fact that he also wanted to force a certain interpretation. Mikael's question was also to the point. We have a menu as an object and me as a subject, and I'm imposing my experience onto the text, and then I make a narrative where there is no narrative. I think we must work on this kind of meeting point.

Thomas Leitch:

I think that one reason that theorists tend to focus on what Altman calls semantic and syntactic features of texts rather than pragmatic dimensions of them is because it's much easier to theorize semantics and

syntactics than it is to theorize pragmatics. I don't think I'll ever reach a point at which I am satisfied, because I think this is the work of many lifetimes. But I also think that if intermedial scholars are invested in this, they should count their lucky stars that they're in a field in its opening moments. These are the opening moments of intermedial studies, and, naturally, we're all asking holistic questions: "How is it different from everything else? How is it organized? How is it coherent? Where does it end?" Those are questions that you're going to ask at the birth of any new scholarly discipline, or as I would say, anti-discipline. It's great that we're in a position right now to ask those questions. It's incredibly liberating to ask them, and it also encourages us to ask those questions about other disciplines, like English literature. However, the price that we pay is incredible frustration. Day after day, year after year, we fail to come up with good answers to these questions.

Beate Schirmacher: Adding to this feeling of frustration and the idea of opening up a new field, I think that the tools that intermedial studies have developed in mapping the relations between different kinds of artistic media objects can now be used to grasp the importance of getting pragmatics theorized, to understand the interaction with and the use of media objects. I think that what digital media and the internet have added to the communication situation is the increased importance of a new variety of interactions that are scripted and designed into different media, as you explained in the case of interactive maps. And we need to know more about the pragmatics of how we interact with media products and with the internet. I also wanted to thank you for this question about where we place the narrative. I can see Peter's point that we impose frames and scripts on media products, and from what I have learned working with narratives and news, or the way news forms or creates narratives, there is something similar going on there. People focus on the narratives that are *in* the news item, but they don't see how people respond to a news article and impose different narratives *on* it, or see how different news creates various macro narratives that may or may not be correspondent with the

events reported. So I think, like you, Heidrun, that we need to work more at this intersection between the media product and how we interact with it.

Thomas Leitch:

Let me go off in a slightly different direction. Digital media are providing a constant challenge, constant inspiration, new venues, and new affordances. More and more, however, I'm convinced they're making my students less literate. My students have kinds of literacies that I don't have. They know, for instance, how to do many more things with my cell phone than I do. They grasp the technology better than I do. However, I think at least two prices are to be paid for this new digital literacy. One of them is that it's a distraction. So much more attention is devoted to expending my powers and so little to the implications. What does it say about me that I'm so invested in certain very particular aspects of the connections I'm establishing with other people, and what are the costs of those connections? "Look at how many times I was retweeted!". Well, what exactly does it mean that you were retweeted? What's the context of your being retweeted? Who are the people who are retweeting you and what are they going to do with your tweet? I don't mean to say that it's bad and you should be suspicious, but I do think it's complicated in ways we should attend to.

The other thing that I think is dangerous about the digital universe is that it encourages a single literacy. It encourages its adherence to announce that a new superior literacy has outmoded old literacies. When my son was in high school, my wife and I tried to give him a bunch of books that we had loved when we were his age. And he said to us – and this was 25 years ago – "Guys, print culture is so dead". That was it. No more books for him. That was a former culture. So digital culture establishes a hegemony that not only displaces all earlier cultures but also makes meta-literacy unnecessary. I have Alexa, and as Henry Ford said, "I don't need to know the answer to that question because I can have a man in here in 30 seconds who can answer it". That's how my students feel about Alexa. They don't need to know anything. All they need to do is to have access

to answers. I realise that grappling with the past is always going to be something that you're going to have to fight to get students to do. I just wish that today's students weren't so armoured by today's culture to believe that what we know is complete and that we need nothing new. That's one of the reasons that I'm such a vigorous admirer and supporter of medial and intermedial studies. If anything is going to wake people up, it's going to be stuff like this.

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Introduction to Chapter 9

Halliday and Discursive Knowledge Construction in Multimodality

Signe Kjaer Jensen

In Chapter 9, Kay O'Halloran discusses the existence of a *shadow text* when we use digital media, and argues for more intermedial and multimodal scholars to engage with this important area of research. O'Halloran builds her discussion on a comparison of Elleström's media model to Michael Halliday's social semiotic theory of meaning, arguing that the key difference between the models is that in place of Elleström's spatiotemporal modality, Halliday operates with a *social system*, which is essential to understanding how the more complex *semiotic system* works. Halliday's social semiotic theory of meaning and his systemic functional linguistic (SFL) grammar thus form the basis of O'Halloran's theoretical foundation in this chapter (a very good introduction to SFL for multimodal discourse analysis can be found in O'Halloran & Fei, 2014).

Briefly put, SFL sees language as evolved to fulfil three different metafunctions: The first is the *ideational* function, which is sometimes divided into the *experiential* metafunction and the *logical* metafunction. The first of these can be considered the 'representational' function, which works to express experience, that is, events and observations, while the logical metafunction works to establish logical relations between these experiences. The second metafunction is the interpersonal function, which refers to the way social relationships, interactions, attitudes, and emotions are expressed or enacted in language. The third metafunction is the textual function, which refers to the way a text is structured to create a coherent whole (for an example of these metafunctions, see O'Halloran, 2023, pp. 181–184). A key term in SFL is the *semiotic resource*, which is any system of signs that can fulfil these metafunctions, such as language or images, although Theo van Leeuwen has suggested that the metafunctions are not universal and need to be revised for non-linguistic resources (van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 190). The SFL approach to multimodality examines how the metafunctions are fulfilled by different semiotic resources in media products, and what happens when various semiotic resources combine. The way to do this is to look at semiotic *choices* on a paradigmatic level. Thus, the idea

of a semiotic choice is explicitly related to choosing one appropriate sign among several possible.

Importantly, O'Halloran considers systems such as mathematical expressions and computer programming languages to be semiotic resources, which means that they, like language and images, can be studied and problematised using Halliday's social semiotic theory. Part of this theory relates to the discursive construction of knowledge, which is a theoretical assumption that underlies much of O'Halloran's discussion in her chapter. O'Halloran explains this very concisely when she states that humans

develop different semiotic resources, language being one, and use them to act on each other and construct knowledge. From that knowledge, we design and construct technologies for acting on the environment. This, of course, includes technical media and digital media technology. For all the knowledge that we construct, we construct technologies, and they in themselves impact on the material world and what meanings we can make.

(this volume, pp. 242–243)

Further, in an explanation of the relationship between language and reality, O'Halloran has previously argued that “SFL views language as a social-semiotic, a system of meanings that construe the reality of a culture” (O'Halloran, 2008, p. 88). Taken together, these two quotes from O'Halloran show how semiotic resources don't just fulfil metafunctions, they construct a certain view of reality through these metafunctions. As such, the way we perceive both the social world *and* the biological world is shaped by the semiotic resources we use to construct our experience. To exemplify this, think about words such as ‘man’ and ‘woman’. These are not simply neutral terms referring to biological circumstances, but verbal constructions of our experience of what it means to be a man or a woman. ‘Hidden’ beneath these terms are numerous conventions and expectations of femininity and masculinity. In this sense, language both reflects and constructs reality and develops in interaction with the social context.

In O'Halloran's article on *Matter and Meaning*, she explains the importance of this discursive knowledge construction, when she states that:

society and culture consist of interacting systems of meaning and their material realizations (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). As others have pointed out, semiotic constructions of reality become naturalized with the result that humans learn to view the world in particular ways that often function to maintain existing power relations and inequalities in society.

(O'Halloran, 2023, p. 178)

In this quote, we also see a clear affinity between Halliday and O'Halloran's view of the discursive construction of reality and basic tenets of critical discourse analysis. This view of the construction of reality is important to understanding the relationship between "the world of matter" (encompassing the physical and biological systems) and "the world of meaning" (encompassing the social and semiotic systems) (O'Halloran, this volume), which refers to Halliday's distinction between the natural world and the social and semiotic world. This distinction also underlies much of O'Halloran's chapter, and it is further elaborated on and exemplified in the Questions and Answers section.

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9 Everything Is Intermedial

Kay O'Halloran

The title of my paper comes from a conversation I had with Lars, that everything is intermedial, and I agree. In what follows, I will discuss some concepts that Lars developed for intermediality and especially his model for describing how media are related to each other. Then I'll raise some questions about this in relation to digital media and how the model can be expanded to investigate the very complex digital ecosystem that we're looking at today. In order to do that, I will talk about human experience in general before focusing on digital media technology specifically.

Yes, everything *is* intermedial, especially in today's digital world, and we have to come to terms with what's actually happening as a result of the advances in digital media technology. In tandem, I also say that everything's multimodal. My starting point is Lars's view that virtually all forms of communication can and should be understood in terms of intermediality *and* multimodality.

Elleström's Model of Intermediality

Bruhn and Schirmmacher give useful definitions in their wonderful book *Intermedial Studies: Introduction to Meaning Across Media* (2022b): media are “the material-based tools that are needed to communicate across time and space” (2022a, p. 4), and “intermedial studies analyses the interaction within and between different media; traditionally, the research objects have been artistic phenomena” (2022a, p. 4). Of course, today you can't do intermedial studies without looking at all sorts of different discourses and different sorts of texts, including dynamic texts (e.g. videos and so forth). So it's a very complex field in the world of digital media. Multimodal studies, which I've worked in for quite some time now, is “like intermedial studies, interested in the internal mix of modes inside each media product” (Bruhn & Schirmmacher, 2022a), but not only, I think, *inside* each media product but, like intermedial studies, *across* different texts as well, because I think that's how we understand basically everything about being human.

As Lars said, intermediality can be plainly described as “an approach that highlights media differences – and hence media similarities – and their constitutive role for meaning-making within communication” (Elleström, 2014, pp. 3–4, as cited in Elleström, 2017, p. 2). Lars distinguished between three types of media: *basic media*, *qualified media*, and *technical media*. This fits perfectly, I think, with a multimodal approach. “Basic and qualified media are abstract categories that help us understand how media types are formed by very different sorts of qualities, whereas technical media are the very tangible devices needed to materialize instances of media types” (Elleström, 2010, p. 12). Throughout this paper, I’m going to focus on this technical aspect in relation to digital technology and computers, because what we’re going to see is that what’s happening today is something very, very different in human history. So I’m going to highlight the notion of the technical media and its significance historically, as well as the implications of different technology types.

Regarding basic media, Bruhn and Schirmacher, once again, come up with useful definitions, which are very straightforward, stating that the basic media types such as text, organised sound, and images are the “building blocks” (2022a, p. 4) of many media. Working within multimodal studies, I’d probably refer to these basic media as *semiotic resources*. Language is an example of a semiotic resource, it can be spoken, it can be written, and a text consists of selections from those different semiotic systems. Second, we have the qualified media types, and, as Bruhn and Schirmacher say, here we’re speaking of news media, the arts, genres in the novel, and so forth (2022a, p. 4). Qualified media are specific types of *genres* in my terms, where different selections are made in recognised patterns, and they are definitely shaped by “context, convention, and history and by our experience of many individual media products” (Bruhn & Schirmacher, 2022a, p. 4). So they’re genre types if you like. Finally, we have the technical medium of display, which is the “material object or entity that allows access” (Bruhn & Schirmacher, 2022a, p. 4) to the different media types. Again, what I will be focusing on here is digital technology, because it has radically changed the way we communicate with each other and as a result, it is having a massive impact on society, as I will discuss in this paper.

Of course, as Lars said, “qualified, basic and technical media are not three separate types of media” (Elleström, 2010, p. 12), they’re theoretical concepts, they’re complementary, and they help us understand what media are. In his 2010 essay (Elleström, 2010), Lars developed a theoretical framework to help explain how different media are related to each other, what they have in common, and what their differences are. This is fascinating because when you look at it, you can see, as I hope to demonstrate, how closely aligned the conceptual framework is with a social semiotic multimodal approach. So it’s very clear that his work is orientated

towards semiotics rather than cultural studies, and it aligns with the work that's been done in multimodality. So, the two fields are, as far as I can see, very closely, if not perfectly, aligned. In this model, Lars came up with four different media modalities, the material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic modality, and these form the basis of the framework that he developed, and his model for understanding the intermedial relations. So I want to look at this model quite carefully and compare it to what we would do within a social semiotic perspective.

Table 9.1 shows Lars's framework for the modalities and modes of media (Elleström, 2010, p. 36). When I examine this model, it's clear that the material realm and the sensorial realm are both 'there' via the first two modalities. I mean, as human beings, we inhabit the material world and we sense it through our sensory/perceptual systems. The spatiotemporal modality is interesting though. This is the structuring of the

Table 9.1 The Modalities and Modes of Media

<i>Modality</i>	<i>What the modality is</i>	<i>The most important modes of the modality</i>
Material modality	The latent corporeal interface of the medium; where the senses meet the material impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human bodies • Other demarcated materiality • Not demarcated materiality
Sensorial modality	The physical and mental acts of perceiving the interface of the medium through the sense faculties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing • Hearing • Feeling • Tasting • Smelling
Spatiotemporal modality	The structuring of the sensorial perception of the material interface into experiences and conceptions of space and time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space manifested in the material interface • Cognitive space (always present) • Virtual space • Time manifested in the material interface • Perceptual time (always present) • Virtual time
Semiotic modality	The creation of meaning in the spatiotemporally conceived medium by way of different sorts of thinking and sign interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convention (symbolic signs) • Resemblance (iconic signs) • Contiguity (indexical signs)

Note. Elleström (2010, p. 36).

sensorial perception of the material interface into experiences in space and time. Last, we've got the semiotic modality, which is the different semiotic resources, as I would see it, as the tools we use to structure thought and reality.

What's interesting in this model, and what I want to question and bring on board is the *social* aspect. In the model, we have the material, the sensory and the spatiotemporal modality, which in a sense, is more cognitive-based; it is about the way we *perceive* spatiotemporal relations. And then we have the semiotic modality where we have the convention, the semblance and the contiguity, the symbols, icons, and indices, or signs which we use to construct the world. So, what I want to bring to the table is, "Well, what about the social?" And I think this becomes *particularly* important when we start to examine digital media (and other media as well). So, these are the questions that I want to raise and talk about: How can Lars' framework be used to study and understand digital media? Is it sufficient or does it need to be expanded and built upon? And what are the implications of the current digital ecosphere for intermedial studies and multimodality? I think we're facing something very different in today's digital world compared to what we have historically. I'll explain why I'm saying that and what I mean by this, but I'll explore this from a multimodal social semiotic perspective, with the aim of building upon this very rich legacy that Lars has left us.

Social Semiotics and Human Experience

Let's step back now. Let's not just focus on media per se, let's focus on human experience in general. M. A. K. Halliday made the comment, and I think it's extremely insightful, that we inhabit two worlds as human beings (2005). We inhabit a world of matter, in other words, the physical world that we can see and touch and perceive, and so forth, and we inhabit the world of meaning. In a broad sense, this is what makes us human, the interrelations between these two realms, the material world, the world of matter, and the world of meaning. In Halliday's own words:

We inhabit a world of matter, and we inhabit a world of meaning.... it is the interplay between these two which defines the human situation – whether for the individual, the social unit, the state, or for the human race as a whole.

(Halliday, 2005, pp. 65–66)

Of course, you see the social coming in here.

Now, let's go back to Lars's model. This is basically like putting the material modality, the world of matter, at one end of the scale, and the

semiotic modality, the world of meaning, at the other end. I think Lars, within his writings, talks about the different concepts ranging across his four different modalities. My question will be, “How do they relate to each other?”. The answer is, “They’re intertwined”. As humans, we perceive the world, we feel it, we sense it, but we also make meaning about it. So, they’re intertwined, but there are benefits in looking at them separately, as indeed Lars has done in his study of media. If we separate them, matter and meaning, we can look at the ways they’re related to each other. From there, we can develop models which take into account these two different dimensions, which indeed is what Lars did within his model. And then we can look at the interplay between the two, the dynamics of the relationship, and how the material world impacts on the semiotic and the semiotic impacts on the material world. The focus of intermedial studies is in relation to media, but the actual principles apply to everything, not just media per se. We are human, we perceive the world, and we use different senses to do that, which is Lars’s sensorial modality. We construct this world using semiotic resources. Perhaps, when we perceive the world, we perceive it as a cognitive process. I completely agree with that, but somehow we also filter it. When we sense the world, what we see and hear, and what we take in and pay attention to, I’d say is conditioned. It’s conditioned by social factors and influences, which include whichever context we’re in, the culture and beliefs, where we come from, our belonging to a family unit or group, values, and life experiences. In other words, we don’t just experience the world, and we don’t just make sense of it spatiotemporally. What we take in and what we construct *within* that sensorial, spatiotemporal world is filtered. And that’s where the social comes into play. So Halliday’s (2005) model that I’m going to use is closely related to Lars’s model, but beyond that, as Halliday claims, the semiotic modality is the most complex. That is, if you talk about the semiotic modality, you can say that it involves four systems, which Lars refers to as the material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic modalities. But I will use Halliday’s (2005) terms: (1) Physical systems, that is, the material world; (2) Biological systems, that is, human beings and their senses; (3) Social systems, that is, society and culture. Lastly, we have (4) Semiotic systems which we use to create meaning (Halliday, 2005; O’Halloran, 2023).

If we’re looking at matter and meaning, they’re related across these four different systems, with the material being the most simple and the semiotic being the most complex.

Semiotic systems are the most complex because they incorporate the other three systems. Let’s start with the simplest. We’ve got physical systems, they’re made up of matter. Biological systems, in this case humans and our senses, are made up of matter. They’re physical, but they’ve also got the added dimension of life. Social systems are simultaneously physical

and biological, plus they are socio-culturally organised. This is one of the hallmarks of being human; we are social beings. And then semiotic systems are the most complex because they are simultaneously physical (the material sign), biological (the body and the senses), social (the social context in which the sign is being used) and semiotic (the sign system itself). Therefore, when we're dealing with semiosis and meaning, we're dealing with the sign as a physical entity, how it perceived within a situational and cultural context, and the meaning which is subsequently made. Consequently, what I'm suggesting diverges slightly from what Lars has said given that his third modality is a spatiotemporal modality, which could (arguably) be viewed as part of the human cognitive system, i.e. the structuring of sensorial perception of the material interface into experiences and conceptions of space and time. Therefore, a social modality could be integrated into Lars's model to account for the structuring, filtering, and understanding of particular types of sensory input. You could have a spatiotemporal system as well, I'm not saying it shouldn't be there. But if we could bring in the social, it would have implications for understanding digital media today. What we've got then, if we go back to Lars's model, is the material modality, sensorial modality, social modality, and semiotic modality. It's so similar. It's just that thing about, "Well, is the spatiotemporal social"? It could be argued that it is because we structure spatiotemporal perception through the lens of socio-cultural constructs which have become naturalised (and therefore largely invisible) as members of a society.

I think the four orders are really valuable because they provide a basis for developing intermedial and multimodal models that take into account these various dimensions of human experience in the same way that Lars did. I'm not going to go through this in any detail but just focus on what a social semiotic multimodal model would look like. And once again, it's so similar to Lars's model. You've got the material aspect. You've got the sensory aspect. You've got the social context. And then what we would do in multimodal studies is to work with multimodal systems (i.e. a 'multimodal grammar') to try and look at very carefully – and this is where much work has been undertaken in multimodality – how language and other semiotic resources (images, sound, music, etc.) are organised and used as semiotic resources. What meanings can be made? And then how do choices from these different resources combine to make meaning in different media processes and artefacts, and across media platforms?

Technological Ages and Digital Media Technology

Human history has always been an interplay and tension between the material world and our semiotic world (Halliday, 2005), and both interact with each other. And so what we do as humans is we develop different

semiotic resources, language being one, and use them to act on each other and construct knowledge. From that knowledge, we design and construct technologies for acting on the environment. This, of course, includes technical media and digital media technology. For all the knowledge that we construct, we construct technologies, and they in themselves impact on the material world and what meanings we can make.

Martin Hilbert (2020) conceptualises the technological ages throughout history as follows. In the beginning, throughout the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age, the focus was on ‘transforming material’; that is, creating tools to transform our physical environment. Once modern mathematics and science developed, there were new ways of constructing reality, leading to the key technological age of ‘transforming energy’; that is, developing water power, steam power, electric power, and combustion power. What’s fascinating today for the purposes of the work that we do is that the current era is about ‘transforming information’. This is the new technological age today. Communicating and storing information was the first part of the digital revolution, with computers and so forth. And we’re now into the computing information era, where it’s about knowledge, algorithms, and AI. The current era is what I’d like to focus on in terms of thinking about the impact of digital technology. The work that we do is absolutely fundamental and key to understanding what’s happening socially, economically, politically, and culturally in the digital age. Once again, I won’t go into this in great detail, but if you look at every technological age, what you’ll find is that there are semiotic resources associated with these eras. Very early on, of course, it was just gesture and speech and marks and early writing systems. As soon as we moved into the first and second industrial revolution, it was writing systems, maths, and science. And what we have at the moment, in the current age where we’ve already have computing and the internet, is *computing information* (knowledge and algorithms) and *data science* (O’Halloran, 2023).

What I want to look at is those latest technologies and their impact on digital media today. Lars always understood the significance of technical media and he explained how different technologies impact on what “modal variants of the four modalities” can be mediated (Elleström, 2010, p. 30). We can look at different technologies, radio, television, and so forth and see that very clearly. Today we need to examine, perhaps more critically, digital media technology and what it affords which hasn’t been possible before. To Lars, “the more or less hidden technical properties of the technical medium (the means of production and storage in a wide sense) are of subordinate interest” compared to this ability of technical media to realise different modal variations (Elleström, 2010, p. 30). So here Lars is saying that the technical properties are of subordinate interest to a certain extent, but he’s talking about the means of production and storage. What

I want to talk about is how digital technology works and what happens behind the scenes and the implications of that, which is very different to what we have previously experienced.

Lars writes about mass media, and he explains that TV allows different types of resources to be used, “‘moving images’, ‘auditory texts’ and ‘organised non-verbal sound’, but also ‘still images’ and various sorts of ‘visual texts’” (Elleström, 2010, p. 31). I don’t think anyone would disagree with the impact of technical media on the meanings that can be made. Now, the computer, and this is what Lars said, “can mediate the same basic media as a television set. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity to interact with the material interfaces and to communicate with other computer users” (Elleström, 2010, p. 31). Now, this is the key point, we interact with computers and we communicate with other computer users. And what are the implications of that in today’s digital ecosphere? Lars also recognises that:

Sometimes it is a more or less radical change on the material and technical level, such as the invention of a new printing technique or a new technological device, that triggers the genesis of what is taken to be new media.

(Elleström 2010, p. 25)

The impact of the technical cannot be overstated.

The printing press and computers are described as “agents of change” (Dewar, 1998). What happened with the printing press? It enabled standard semiotic forms in mathematics and science, which enabled knowledge to be built upon and circulated in standard semiotic formats, and hence, the printing press *led* to modern mathematics and science. But as those changes happened, they were accompanied by major *social* changes arising from the various industrial revolutions. People moved to the cities, they moved to the factories, and the changes that happened included urbanisation, new class structures, and the industrial capitalist division of labour (e.g. Landes, 2003). So, these impacts – the different sorts of semiotic choices arising from different sorts of technical ways of technologies – all have an impact on society and its organisation and the resulting power structures within it.

Computers are fundamentally different technologies, as I’ve said several times already. How are they different and what’s the impact? Computers are input–output machines. In other words, they take input from external sources, such as the keyboard, touch screen, mouse, sensors, and the internet. No matter what happens with a computer, whatever you do, it takes that input and it returns the required output of that process to the user. Computers work via strings of zeros and ones which are translated into

usable outputs that we can understand on the screen and other interfaces. And so all of this processing on-off, zero-one, binary code, gets translated into usable outputs, text, images, music, vibrations, videos, and so forth: that is, the media products that we were talking about earlier. But what's interesting about computers is that they're programmed as logical machines. So as soon as you do something, there's a computer program running in the background which will give some specific output, depending on how the software application has been programmed. Therefore, the semiotic choices that we're making on the screen using digital interfaces are in fact complex arrangements of zeros and ones that are controlled by software programs. And that has implications in terms of what we can do, as has been pointed out by Theo van Leeuwen, Emilia Djonov, Sumin Zhao, and others (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2018; Zhao et al., 2014). For example, we have to create semiotic constructions according to the way that the computers have been programmed. That is, what we're doing and how we connect are determined by the technology that we're using. And as has been pointed out, this has transformed the nature of social practices. We've seen that dramatically over the last few years during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many social practices have changed as a result (e.g. hybrid working, online meetings).

I'm going to define digital media as the products and services from all types of media, entertainment, information, websites, applications, services, everything that we use computers for, including the internet online, and that we can access from different digital devices, following the definition provided by the World Economic Forum (2016, p. 6). So, when we use these devices, which are now fundamental to our lives, we input a lot of information about ourselves. We create different texts, but at the same time, we also share different information across media platforms. And we are at the stage now where users (which includes nearly everyone) have become so increasingly dependent on digital media for the exchange and provision of content, information, and services that digital technology is integrated into nearly every aspect of our lives, including healthcare, civic and political participation, consumption of culture, and entertainment, even to the extent that dating services, personal relations, and just about everything is done through and mediated by digital technologies. While we're doing all of this, the current digital ecosystem has major ramifications beyond the fact that we're constrained about what meanings we can make. Because the power to decide what we access, what is circulated, and what's filtered, is in the hands of the major institutions and organisations, and of course these are the big tech companies like Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft. And what's interesting from the point of view of intermedial studies is that these companies offer sets of integrated experiences and integrated services. In other words, we're moving across

different media doing different types of things but often these platforms are owned and controlled by one big tech company. They buy up different sorts of services, not by chance, but to have an overview of how these different media are used. So users have an integrated experience across all these different platforms, but the tech companies control the content services that are available, and most importantly, they monitor their use. And this is where I think we've got to step forward and think about the way we're approaching intermedial and multimodal studies and the implications of what's actually happening today.

The point is, users provide personal information and express opinions, ideas, and views (e.g. in terms of attitude, likes and dislikes), about the content and services they encounter. And the large tech companies collect and analyse this user-generated data, using AI and data-driven technologies for modelling, predicting, and modifying human behaviour. And basically, of course, this is for profit. There's a good reason why these companies are mega-rich beyond belief, it is because what they're doing is they're actually collecting human experience, codifying it, and selling it. Shoshana Zuboff calls this "surveillance capitalism" (2019). It involves taking the various dimensions of human experience; the physical actions, the biological information (from wearables such as Fitbit), the social interactions (who you interact with, who your friends are, and who is your partner, distant friends and so forth), and the semiotic constructions, and convert it into behavioural data, which is then analysed and sold for profit. And this is the ecosystem that we're in at the moment. And so the data science and AI algorithms, which attempt to model human cognitive processes for predictive purposes, have become major research areas. Billions of dollars are poured into data science research and most of the best researchers in the area are being employed by these big tech companies who have resources well beyond what's available within universities. The numerous research institutes that have been set up, which involve universities, are primarily hubs for university, industry, and government collaborations, aimed at advancing AI to accelerate the translation of research to market and practice. So, in other words, we've got a whole range of resources going into this field of analysing human behaviour and working out algorithms across the different dimensions, actions, feelings, and so forth, translated and codified as behavioural data using AI algorithms that are (supposedly) modelled on human cognitive processes.

In simulations of neural networks (for example, see O'Halloran, 2023, p. 193), we can see that these models are based on the material features of the signal. Therefore, these models do not have a sophisticated framework for analysing the relation between matter and meaning. Rather, the models are based on the material sign, where brute force (via the algorithms and computing power) is used to categorise the sign without reference to the

biological, social, and semiotic systems which are involved. As a result, the models do not incorporate the meaning of the sign.

Nonetheless, the impact of these AI algorithms is profound. They provide the foundations for search engines, online shopping, virtual assistance, image analysis, speech, and face recognition, you name it, including cybersecurity and the Internet of Things. The latest developments include Generative AI where large language models (LLMs) and large multimodal models (LMMs) are capable of recognising, summarising, translating, and generating content. The latest digital technologies collect data, analyse it, and feed it back to users to influence human behaviour, with recommendations about what's trending, who to follow, what to watch, what to eat, what to buy, how to spend time, who to go on a date with, what fitness routines we should have and now they even provide responses to our queries. In other words, these AI algorithms are feeding back through media, influencing how we think, what we do, and what decisions we make. And, as I said, they rely on brute force to discover the underlying patterns, and they, therefore, reinforce prevailing biases and naturalised views of reality. As Crawford claims, the global networks underpinning AI are entrenching inequality and are fuelling a shift towards undemocratic governance (Crawford, 2021). We've seen this in the US elections, and we've of course seen it in the UK too: for example, the Brexit referendum and the elections as well.

So we're in a new era. If we go back and look at the impact of the printing press, the printed texts resulted in modern mathematics and science, leading to the industrial revolutions and a division of labour. As Zuboff claims, we now have a "division of learning" (2019, p. 181), where private companies collect and analyse data and then sell it to other companies for profit. It's led to a reorganisation of knowledge, authority, and power beyond the workforce because it's now engrained in everything we do. It's every action, opinion, feeling, and emotion from the beginning of the day to the end of the day, even through the night when monitors are turned on and smartphones are checked. And it's all mediated by digital media platforms, which collect, store, and codify behaviour, turning it into data. In addition, every aspect of human culture and civilisation has also been digitised, stored, and analysed as well. In fact, everything is being reinvented as information. And as Zuboff claims, "the division of learning becomes the ascendant principle of social ordering in our time" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 182). We can see that today, these companies are the most powerful influences today, well beyond any government, because of the amount of information they have, the value of it, and how it is used and sold.

What Zuboff (2019) explains, and this is what I want to raise today in terms of the impact on intermedial studies and also multimodal studies, is that this command of the division of learning, where some

organisations are influencing every aspect of human behaviour, is the issue of two 'texts'. We are so used to just looking at the text we see on the screen which we analyse and interpret. That's what Zuboff calls the first text, the text on the screen; the Google search engine, Facebook, the news feeds, and streaming media. This is what we focus on generally, what we see on the screen. But what Zuboff raises is the fact that there's a second text, which she calls the 'shadow text' – in other words, the text behind the first text which captures every aspect of users' engagement with the first text, no matter how fleeting. If you look at something for a second, it's recorded. If you tap on something, it's recorded, if you're in a location and you move, it's recorded. If you've got some wearable device, your heartbeat, or your steps, whatever it is: it's all recorded. Now, this second text is hidden from view. We don't see it. But it's used by the big tech companies to analyse human behaviour and subsequently shape the public text, the first text, to fulfil commercial objectives. What we're seeing is impacted by the second text, the shadow text, which is operating in the background.

When I think about this, it reminds me of a one-way mirror. The user is located in the space with the first text, which is the digital screen or the interface. This is what we see. This is what we do. We look at it and we get a reflection back of whatever it is that we're doing: we do something, the computer program does something, then sends it back. And that's what we see. But what's really happening is that the one-way mirror operates with the shadow text behind it, so that everything that we do, all the user engagement, feeds back into that first text, into the well-lit room. And so, the one-way mirror works through that one room being really well lit, while the other room is dark. And those in the darker room can see through the glass and see what's happening in the brightly lit room. We're in the brightly lit room and the companies are on the dark side, so to speak. And they're the ones that are taking all this information and analysing it and then feeding it back to fulfil commercial objectives.

The question that arises is, what's the role of intermedial studies and multimodality today? Perhaps, as part of what we do, it is to remove this one-way mirror or at least assist with its removal or replacement with clear glass, so the shadow text is in view – in other words, assist with placing all the data that is collected and analysed, upon which decisions are based, out in the open rather than it being behind closed doors. That is, ownership and control over personal data should reside with the user who generated it, rather than the technology company. And, as part of this way forward, we can assist with the development of responsible, ethical, and explainable AI algorithms, with clarity about how the algorithms work and how the results are derived. Because at the moment,

the AI algorithms are based on the material signal and there's no indication of how those algorithms work or the inherent biases they perpetuate. Responsible, ethical, and explainable AI is concerned with the development and training of the models and the outcomes, with a view to increasing the potential for social change. In other words, what I'm suggesting is a semiotic science for undertaking research and stimulating social action, to mitigate the risks and leverage the benefits (and there are many benefits) of digital media technology. As Zuboff claims, "surveillance capitalism depends on the social, and it's only in and through collective social action that the larger promise of information capitalism aligned with a flourishing third modernity [that we all want] can be reclaimed" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 195).

So maybe we can integrate computer science, intermedial studies methodologies, social theory, and multimodal semiotic analysis to develop responsible, ethical, and explainable AI techniques, which can be interrogated and understood according to contextual parameters. That would really enable a step change, not only in understanding digital media today and digital media technologies but also to develop tools that we ourselves can use for understanding the relations between digital media and society. And why would we do this? To inform the design of digital technologies policymaking and activism around future digital technologies based on different principles; that is, principles of inclusion, equality, transparency, privacy, social solidarity, health and well-being, sustainability, and preservation of the natural world. It sounds like a big order, but it would be a society which would be sustainable for the future generations, unlike the world that we've got at the moment.

Let's have some final thoughts from Lars. He says, "I really think that the world must be understood as systematically as possible, while at the same time acknowledging the incredible complexity of the mind, of culture, of knowledge, of communication" (Elleström et al., 2020, p. 31). I think that that's the way forward too and it aligns with what I have been suggesting in this paper, a systematic approach to understanding the nature and impact of digital media today. And he says, "We'll never know if it [a model of intermedial relations] is right or wrong, but we will certainly know if it has been useful or not" (Elleström et al., 2020, p. 39). I would say that there's a large number of uses for a model of intermedial relations, particularly if we want to look at the relations within and across different digital media platforms today. As Lars also said, "Cross-fertilization between disciplines is one of the aims of my research, so I am truly glad when my publications reach readers outside the field of intermedial studies" (Elleström et al., 2020, p. 40). This is a challenge for us, to work across disciplines, to understand what's happening in the world today.

Questions and Answers

Beate Schirrmacher: I found it really interesting how you tweak the social and the political aspects into a semiotic model of communication, and especially how this connects to our understanding of digital media. Therefore, I have a question regarding the concept of the shadow text and the first text. Isn't there a third level that concerns the coding of the program, which decides what *kind* of first texts we see? Is our problem that we neither pay attention to the shadow text nor the material and computational premises of this 'first code'? It connects to what you said before about binary systems, that everything has to be made yes and no, or on and off, and that there is a resistance to ambiguity and multi-perspectivity in the very coding of how we communicate.

Kay O'Halloran: Yes, you are right, there are different levels here. When we are interacting with our computer, the input is processed by computer programs. So for a particular input, the software programs run and give us an output back. That's why we're limited in what we're doing when using digital devices because we only get a certain set of options. We developed software in Singapore for doing multimodal analysis (see, e.g. O'Halloran et al., 2017) and it became very clear that the design of the software impacted greatly on what you could do with it, and the way you thought about what you were doing. So what we've got is the 'first text', and behind that we've got these software applications, apps, as we call them, that are programmed to do certain things in a certain way and deliver a certain output back to us. We're constrained in that way, no doubt at all. And that's one implication of the code, the constraint of what meanings we can make using computers, So digital technology has resulted in new semiotic resources and these include computer programming languages, which are hidden and used in the background. And if you own the software and you program it, you can determine what comes back in that first text. So this is very different from the printing press. The printing press also led to new semiotic resources – mathematical symbolism, scientific

images, and so forth – but they were on the first text. That's what everyone could see, and everyone could work with and build knowledge on. With the printing press, you had semiotic representations that were constrained as well, as Lars said, nonetheless, the new semiotic resources that changed the world then were visible. What we've got today is that the new semiotic resources are invisible, running in the background on a computer, but they also lead to new forms of representations such as virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, computer graphics, and electronic music, for example.

So there are the computer programs that are running in the background and what we see on the screen. But the point of the shadow text is that it's much more than that. The shadow text is derived from our interactions with the computer and software programs, and this data is collected and analysed and then influences what information we see on the screen, for example, in internet searches, social media, advertisements, etc. So you could perhaps say that there are three levels, there's the first text and the software programs, but then on top of that, there's the shadow text with a record of what the user does, where they are, how long they spend on different activities, etc. The data from the shadow text is used to create profiles which are used to choose content for the viewer. It is possible to differentially do that for every user (i.e. 'personalise' the content) and, as a result, influence what people see and think. It can be used for good and bad purposes, of course.

Beate Schirmacher: I was thinking about a small study by Thomas Bauer called *Die Vereindeutigung der Welt* (Bauer, 2018), translated it means *making the world univocal or unambiguous*, where he connects the ongoing social and political polarization with our constant interaction with a binary code that basically limits our communication and makes it readily available for analysis. The code enforces univocal yes/no responses rather than multifaceted reflexive expressions. It is like the restrictions that we all feel when we are confronted with evaluations based on a scale

of 1 to 10 where you have to delimit your response to a number. Your interaction needs to be visible, countable, and evaluable. I mean we perceive this constraint everywhere, but we also comply with it to be able to interact with digital technology.

I was thinking about how everything that is communicated has to be evaluable and countable. The design of social and digital media, in a way, supports the dissemination of dis- and misinformation, because they are designed to spread what people talk about, and you talk more about the things that you do not agree with and less about the things that everybody trusts or agrees upon. I think that these three levels, and how the code forms both the shadow and the first text, have many implications for the social and political world and for forms of meaning-making.

Kay O'Halloran:

Yes, nearly every aspect of human life is being turned into data. Also, we have to remember that everything is filtered as a result, and only certain things get circulated. And this is beyond our knowledge and control at this stage. We don't know what exactly is happening or how things are filtered. We only get access to what we can see on the screen. But it's also about the extent of information that's collected. It permeates everything because nearly every aspect of our life is mediated through digital technology and as a result, there are comprehensive, datafied records of our lives. And that's what is analysed and informs what is fed back to us. Furthermore, there's a whole range of misinformation and disinformation that gets circulated, and responses to it depend on people's level of digital literacy: that is, their ability to understand what is seen on the screen and make a decision about it in relation to the trustworthiness of the information. So there's a whole range of implications beyond what I have discussed in this paper. I was examining the issues in relation to us as academic researchers in intermedial and multimodal studies. But it is also important to consider the digital divides and digital inequalities which exist. So it's a very complex situation.

Dagmar Brunow:

I loved how you connected with Lars's ideas and really engaged with them in this stimulating way, and I'm so happy you brought in the social because we have been on Lars about this, and now you do it. Personally, I'm very happy about it because it ties in very well with what I'm doing in my research on memory and archives, like the notions of tagging, the commercialization of audio-visual heritage online, and all these things. I have a question about the model that you use, these four layers of, among others, the social and the biological. Would you understand this chart as heuristic? I would say that you can't access the biological without the layer of the social, is that how you would understand it as well? Or what relation would you place them in?

Kay O'Halloran:

I want to clarify that the conceptualisation of four orders of systems of increasing complexity (physical, biological, social, and semiotic systems) came from Michael Halliday (2005). What Halliday said, and I think he's right, is that the semiotic level is the most complex because semiotic systems are simultaneously physical, biological, social, *and* semiotic – you need a material sign that you perceive with your senses, and then you make sense of it given the social context. I would say that everything that's material within a culture makes meaning. This follows Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan's (1985, p. 4) view that culture can be seen as a set of interacting semiotic systems. If you look around, everything make meaning, the book, the lampshade, the table, the carpet, the paint, the architecture. What we've got then is semiotic systems, in other words, those systems of meaning that we try and theorize. They are semiotic, but simultaneously they're social because meaning can only be made in some sort of social context.

It's interesting if you think about maths and science and their success in modelling complex physical systems. Think about the weather, for example, the underlying physical systems are not simple at all, rather they are complex. So if we think about the mathematical and scientific knowledge required to model the physical world, it's no wonder that it doesn't work to model the human world, because

the human world of meaning is even more complex. The next level of complexity is still physical but also has life – the biological system. Following that, the next level of complexity is the social, because it's simultaneously biological and physical, but it's also got social organisation, power relations, and organisations – all the sorts of things that go into organising society and how we interact. Finally, you've got the most complex, the semiotic, because there's meaning added on top of that. So in intermedial studies and multimodality we are dealing with the most complex phenomena. And it's no wonder that the computer scientists can't analyse human behaviour. Nonetheless, with their on/off systems, their programming languages, and the pure computational power they've got, the impact is profound because they pick up patterns based on vast amounts of data. And what's interesting if you look at the AI algorithms is that they're (supposedly) modelled on biological processes. They're modelled on the *second* layer. But they're only imitations. They are models of human processes (i.e. neural networks) but they are not human processes. What's happening today is that computer scientists and engineers have very effectively collected a lot of data and developed algorithms to detect patterns and repeat them. But they still can't model what we can model. And that is the *meanings*: the *social* and the *semiotic*. They can't do that because they don't have the frameworks. It doesn't mean that they won't eventually. But if we came on board we could develop, I think, better ways of analysing multimodal semiosis based on responsible, ethical, and explainable techniques where you can understand the results and the reasons for it.

Dagmar Brunow:

So they can't model the social, but still everything they do is informed by discourses. It's like the algorithm has a racial bias, a gender bias, and so on, as critical archival studies have shown. So that's a paradox.

Kay O'Halloran:

It's because these algorithms are picking up the inherent biases that exist in discourses today. They're not being used to show or change the bias, which is where we would come on board. Before mathematics and science developed a system of semiotic resources – the mathematical symbolism – people used to measure

everything. If you wanted to work out how to build a building, you physically measured it. It was only through the development of mathematical symbolism and the ability to abstract the relations symbolically that you had a semiotic resource that could be used to model and predict the world, so you didn't have to measure every time. But those models will never work for humans, because they're only devised to deal with physical systems. What we've got now is that we're back to the same situation, and computer science is measuring everything to look at what people are doing and influence them – vote for this or buy this – to do certain things for certain commercial purposes. So computer scientists are measuring things: that is, they're getting all this data and they're trying to develop algorithms that detect the patterns, but they don't have the models to understand the semiotic world. So the social dimension is (apparently) present because the algorithms are repeating existing patterns which inherently have a social dimension to them but in this case, it is synthetic. But nonetheless it is powerful, as we have seen.

Nafiseh Mousavi:

I have two questions about the spatiotemporal modality. I think the interaction between mind and matter is most visible in this modality, as it has different layers: on one hand, it refers to the spatial and temporal qualities of the material, and on the other hand, it is about the perception of time and space. I think I got from your first points that you think that there is potential for the social to emerge there. Could you expand a bit on this? And further, this modality gets even more complicated in digital media, how do you think it can be developed to better adapt to digital media?

Kay O'Halloran:

When I looked at Lars's model, I thought, well, he is right because we live in a spatiotemporal modality as human beings. We move in space, we experience space, and we experience time. I know that time is measured into certain sorts of times, like institutional times, but nonetheless, there is that notion of the passage of time. We can see that through our physical appearance, when we're young and old. So, the spatiotemporal, I think, is a facet of the biological makeup of human beings. It's part of our sensory perception and our cognitive processes. We see the world, we

hear the world, and it is spatially and temporally organized. Why I say the social comes in there it is because when we're sensing the world, we don't sense it as a blank canvas. We know this because whenever we go to another culture, certain things stand out to us because they're 'marked' (i.e. different) compared to what we're used to. We are socialized into a particular culture, we learn to pay attention to and read things in particular ways. Therefore, we have a 'naturalized view' of reality according to whatever society and culture we're in, which often serves to reinforce existing power relations and so forth.

The spatiotemporal dimension, and I'll quote Lars, is "the structuring of the sensorial perception of the material interface into experiences and conceptions of time and space" (Elleström, 2010, p. 36). I would say that our understanding of the structuring of how we sense things is social. We learn to look at certain things in certain ways. You can make something a certain colour and use different sorts of material to make people focus on certain aspects of the physical world, so our spatiotemporal understanding of the world is a *social* cognitive space. The impact is huge if we're thinking about how, in regards to any media, we perceive things in certain ways due to society and culture. I think we perceive things in certain ways, spatially and temporally, and we move through spaces in certain ways. We do have some control over it, I'm not saying it's all predetermined, but the socio-cultural domain influences the ways we perceive and understand the world. Then we use semiotic resources to construct that world.

Regarding the digital media and the spatiotemporal, I guess it's still spatial and temporal to me. We're on a screen that defines a space, we interact with digital devices that are material and occupy space, and there are temporal dimensions as well. An online meeting is a spatiotemporal event. We're dealing with that reality that is constructed on the screen, which leads me back again to the affordances of those digital devices – the way they operate and what they give back to us, which is controlled through the technology and the programs behind it. The spatiotemporal to me is still important in digital media.

Signe Kjaer Jensen: I would say that the social comes in, in all of the modalities, because the social is always filtering both how we *use* the material and sensorial affordances and how we *perceive* them. I never really thought about the modes and modalities in Lars's model as affordances before, but now listening to you, I think they can be considered as sets of affordances, which goes well with the notion of the social because this would entail that the modes and modalities are something that is being *used* by *social* beings in different contexts.

Kay O'Halloran: I completely agree that the social is part of everything, because we are human. Everything we learn, like speaking and behaving, is influenced by it. When Halliday talked about those "orders of complexity" (2005), it was in the context of a specific kind of question. As humans, we do have these two realms. We have the material, and we have the meanings that we make of that. The social is there, but everything we do is organized through semiotic resources which make meaning in a particular context. So the social's part of every meaning-making activity. If you look at a tree, though, is the social part of that? Not necessarily, if you look at it as a living organism that has a material substance. But we don't just look at a tree like that, in isolation. Rather, the tree is part of our larger socio-cultural construct and, moreover, we would be looking at the tree in a particular situational context. But I guess where humans really change things is that we do *think* socially and semiotically. So the social is in everything because the social is in the semiotic.

Signe Kjaer Jensen: I think it's valuable to have this distinction between the pre-existing natural world and the social and semiotic, but I would say that even though the tree stands as an objective natural entity, pre-semiotic, then the way that we perceive it is filtered through the social.

Kay O'Halloran: Absolutely, because it's filtered through the way we use semiotic resources and construct it. This is a key point and why I think the social needs to be in there. The social is incorporated in the semiotic, we perceive and construct reality in particular ways and that is socially and culturally conditioned (and

in this case, the tree is part of that construct). What's also interesting is that when you look at the functionalities of the different resources, say you're looking at the functionalities of how we could construct the tree linguistically, it's actually related to how we see it visually. If you look at the evolution of semiotic resources, the various technological ages were very long periods, and the evolution of language, of course, has taken a very long time. When you look at the evolution of language and what language does, it only does what it does because of its connection with our visual and perceptual systems. Because when we see things visually for example, we see things in relation to each other, but when we construct things linguistically, we construct them sequentially as a series of happenings, which are logically connected. In other words, we use language to create order in what we perceive, and so when you're looking at things multimodally and also historically – as Lars said, you can look at things synchronically or diachronically – then you'll see that language evolved to construct and order the world as logically connected sequential happenings in order to make sense of what we could see. The way we construct meaning is definitely socially determined, but we do it through semiotic resources. Therefore, in order to understand something, we need to understand the semiotic resources themselves. We need to understand how we make meaning linguistically, what this system can and cannot do, and the way it's organized, because then we can understand how the social aspect is actually constructed. By having this semiotic level at the top, it creates a focus on the resources that are fundamental to how we do everything. We need to have a really close look at language, images, and music, and how things combine. It's that combination of different resources that make the human experience, so to speak.

Niklas Salmose:

Lars didn't pay much attention to the social aspect, the medical aspect, the mental aspects, or the consumer in his communication model. Obviously, there are limitations in his construction of these modalities. However, I think the richness of them is that they are

so open and it's easy to fill them with your own interests, as we've done here with the social, which permeates all the modalities in different ways.

I want to venture beyond the more 'traditional' screen cultures and into the idea of virtual reality. How do you think about the ways that virtual reality culture can affect the shadow text and the relationships and the feedback loops from the primary text back to the consumer, and how would you approach this from a multimodal perspective?

Kay O'Halloran:

It depends on the technology and software applications that are running the virtual reality. You put on certain glasses, so you see things in a 3D world, and that involves different cameras that are tracking you and different ways of presenting information visually so that you perceive it as being 3D. In a sense, nothing's changed. It's still software applications running in the background to construct certain sorts of representations that we as humans can understand and read, and I would say it depends on how you are linked up, and how that program operates. If it sends all the data right back to the owners of the software, then they'll not only have information about what you're doing on a computer screen with a keyboard or a mouse, or what content you spend your time looking at or listening to, they will also be able to have information about how you move physically in space and what you look at and so forth, because virtual reality works through these tracking cameras and sensors. But to be clear, I'm not against digital technology at all. On the contrary, there are so many benefits, such as access to information, social networks, new forms of presentation and knowledge, etc. However, a key factor to consider is the digital ecosystem in which digital media technologies operate. That's what I was trying to say towards the end of the paper, about opening it up, so that there is no shadow text so everyone can see what data is collected, and what information is made of that data in order to understand it. But to come back to your question, VR is interesting because it's a new type of semiotic representation,

and I see the uses for it. For example, it would be interesting to explore the use of immersive analytics for multimodal research. I think that what we're dealing with is so multi-dimensional and complex that we don't have the right semiotic representations yet. We can't represent the phenomena that we're trying to understand, and so maybe we need new semiotic constructions in order to do that. At the moment, we don't have semiotic resources that can construct the complexity of the human world, of the world of experience, and that's why I'm interested in virtual reality because perhaps we could develop new semiotic ways of thinking and seeing things, which can help us make sense of this huge amount of data that we've got, and making it explicit so that people understand what it is we're dealing with, and how we're dealing with it.

Niklas Salmose: The metaverse is, of course, linked to this too in creating a new way of collecting a new set of data, but I'm curious about that collection. What would that lead to? I think that's not only more of the same, I think it's something different.

Kay O'Halloran: In essence, it's more of the same in terms of collecting data that can be analysed. But it's also different because it's collecting different sorts of data. In virtual reality, if you've got tracking cameras on you, there's a lot more information that can be collected about your body, your movement, and so forth. So it's more wide-ranging and so is its potential for new forms of semiotic representation.

Beate Schirmacher: I want to go back to the spatiotemporal modality. I came to intermediality from an inter-art background, concerned with relating and transforming different forms of communication and media. The spatiotemporal modality was extremely helpful for me, to help me realize how material, sensorial, and temporal data are understood as representations of space, and vice versa. And we create these *relations* between the spatial and temporal not only when we talk about different media but also, for example, when we see a huge tree and we immediately say: "It's an *old* tree". We relate the space the tree occupies with the time it took to grow, which we cannot otherwise

access. To me, the spatiotemporal modality crosses the material, the sensorial, and the semiotic – like Signe said that the social permeates all the modalities. So for me, the relational aspect between space and time has been very much in focus, and I find it very interesting to think about it in an expanded sense – to see the way we relate space and time as an aspect of how we relate different data and things as social beings. We perceive the colour or the shapes of clothing, and immediately, if we have the right filter, we understand these resources as representations of social hierarchies. Maybe we should switch the focus onto seeing how the different modalities are related to each other, how material, sensorial, and spatiotemporal data are perceived and then immediately interpreted to represent something else.

Kay O'Halloran:

Right, the spatiotemporal is fundamental, but it needs to be viewed in terms of the social, because when we move through space and time, it is always mediated, we move through buildings, or according to our watches and mobile phones, or whatever. The world is material, we make sense of it, we perceive it, we take in information about it, and socially we construct meanings. When we see a picture of an oak tree, we know what the oak tree is, it's social because we know what it represents, given our experience in history. I guess the reason there's a fourth level is that the question would arise, how is the social organized and played out every day? The world of meaning is what makes us human, that's why Halliday said that the fourth order of complexity is the semiotic level because it simultaneously incorporates everything else, so if we say things are social, then there must be some way of enacting social relations and social organizations and the operation of power and everything – the answer is that it's all orchestrated semiotically. That by default means that the social incorporates everything else as well. A particular focus of multimodal social semiotic analysis is to look at the semiotic resources and at what you can do linguistically, or by visual representation, or symbolically, and so forth, and understand the functionalities of the different resources.

To round off, what's very important is that the meaning that's made arises from the combination of semiotic choices from different resources. Therefore, you can't divorce something and say, "Oh it makes that meaning". Rather, it has to be seen within its socio-cultural context and the co-deployment of that with everything else that's going on at the same time. That's one of the things that makes the multi-dimensional notion of semiotic choices combining so extremely complex and challenging.

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Afterword

Signe Kjaer Jensen and Matilda Davidsson

The legacy of Lars Elleström's contributions to the broader field of media studies and to the more specific fields of intermedial and multimodal studies has been teased out by the authors in this anthology. Arguably, his main contribution is his meticulous understanding of how to organise what we usually call media (a problematic term!) in order to understand different processes of communication that take place on a daily basis and at all levels of society, but his aim to create interaction and knowledge exchange is also important – his legacy also inspires collaborations across the fields of intermediality and multimodality.

As shown in this anthology, there are many ways to model communication, and even though different approaches may have definitions and assumptions that are contradictory, some often complement each other, creating the possibility of interilluminating aspects that are lacking in one approach but that are present in another. However, as João Queiroz states: “One big problem is how to relate paradigms, and the relationship between fundamental conceptual terms developed in different paradigms or in different conceptual spaces” (this volume, p. 91). Although different perspectives are not easily combined, they can be stimulated. Kamilla Elliott notes: “When Elleström supported other approaches; when he brought together people in his edited collections and at workshops, symposia, and conferences, he was fostering departures from as well as continuations of his work” (this volume, p. 62). Being open to other approaches can be complicated sometimes but it fosters new ideas and functions as a tool for creating more nuanced and thorough investigations of how communication and media work.

In this volume, Kamilla Elliott, Kay O'Halloran, and Thomas Leitch highlight this aspect of Elleström's work and advocate the development of approaches that are open and experimental. More generally, all the papers point to possible areas for future development of intermedial and multimodal media theory and to their cross-fertilisation with other theories and areas, and the Questions and Answers sections following each chapter also

do this, perhaps to an even greater extent. This collection presents suggestions from scholars who are already highly established in their respective fields regarding how to move research forward. But, via the discussions, a variety of both senior and junior scholars also contribute to painting a picture of a (partly) new generation, who come from and in various ways combine intermedial and multimodal approaches with ideas from, for example, iconology, art history, comparative literature, narratology, audience studies, musicology, performance studies, and studies of new media and digital culture. In this way, the articles and discussions enhance the models bit by bit in relation to individual media types and the broader communicative structures of society.

The social, in the sense of social interaction and communities as well as the cultural aspects of communication, is a particularly important theme that runs through several discussions, and there are different suggestions regarding how to incorporate and balance this with the systematicity and semiotic perspective prioritised in Elleström's model. Perhaps we might take our cue from Elliott again, who in her Questions and Answers section argues that the social, cultural, and historical aspects are hard to align with systematic theories based on models akin to those developed in semiology and narratology. The challenge is to create approaches that operationalise openness and experimentation so as to make these qualities functional, while also bridging interdisciplinary borders. This would allow us to create holistic media models that are systematic but also attend to social and cultural aspects of experience. One important question in this regard is how to connect the material aspects, Elleström's pre-semiotic modalities, with the semiotic modality in a clear, thought-out manner. John A. Bateman and O'Halloran both address this (albeit from different multimodal backgrounds) and suggest overcoming it by allowing the social to be the mediating factor which connects the materiality of communication with the semiotic structures through shared understandings and habits shaped during our everyday experience of living, interacting, and communicating in the world. It could be argued that the combination of semiotic systematicity and social and cultural anchoring is already provided in the field of multimodality. However, Bateman argues that Elleström's focus on the medium rather than on the semiotic mode and on the comparative aspect of his theory, based as it is in intermediality, also provides nuances that will be of value to the multimodal field.

Coming back to the argument about openness and experimentation, perhaps the answer to the problem of combining systematic categorisation with a social perspective is to take seriously, as Bateman suggests, Elleström's argument that "it is a waste of intellectual energy to develop two closely related research fields separately" (2010b, p. 13) and that creating shared languages and basic assumptions that suit both intermediality and

multimodality is a key concern, but also to extend this argument beyond these fields. Elleström's media and communication model *is already* an attempt to provide a common, interdisciplinary language and basic assumptions, and while other work has been done to make the crossing of boundaries and the integration of perspectives from different disciplines more accessible, not least in Elleström's edited volumes (2010a, 2021a, 2021b) but also in the work of, for example, Alarauhio et al. (2022), Bateman (2017) and Jensen and Schirrmacher (2024), this is challenging work which is still in its nascent stage.

The call for a social component, or a *social modality*, a term independently suggested by O'Halloran and by participants during the Questions and Answers section of her chapter, first appears in the discussion following Elliott's chapter but is focused on most in Bateman's and O'Halloran's contributions. This call arises from the perceived need that the discussants see to move beyond systematic categorisation and into the realm of lived experience. As pointed out by Dagmar Brunow, projects at Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS) already engage with 'societal challenges' through clusters focusing on ecocriticism, news, memory studies, and literacy. In response to this, Elliott notes that the work in the IMS clusters, particularly the green cluster, relates to discussions she has had with a colleague in environmental science about how 'adaptation' crosses disciplines and as a concept can be enriched by inspiration derived from the humanities (see Chapter 3, Questions and Answers). This relates to the discussion in the Questions and Answers following O'Halloran's paper which highlights how the words and metaphors we use to understand the world don't just reflect the world but shape our understanding of it (see also the discussion following Mitchell's chapter on extinction and revival through media). Thus, intermedial studies, with its comparative and interdisciplinary outlook, can help us see, deconstruct, and reconstruct our language, knowledge, and outlook on the world. However, integrating intermedial theory with theories about the social in order to confront these societal challenges and show how an intermedial understanding shapes discourses and how media intertwine and intersect to complicate our discursively constructed social environment is nonetheless still a developing and promising area for future studies. As suggested by Leitch in relation to news and by O'Halloran in relation to digital media, much more work is needed in these areas both in terms of understanding the developing media landscape and in terms of developing new media literacies.

As also discussed in the Introduction to this volume, and by Giulia Bigonjari (see the Questions and Answers following Elliott's chapter), the social and the cultural already figure in Elleström's theories through the concept of *qualification*, *media product* and *symbolicity*, but as O'Halloran and Signe Kjaer Jensen argue (see the Questions and Answers following

O'Halloran's chapter), if one follows a constructivist or critical realist position and argues that our social world is discursively constructed, this entails that the social also permeates Elleström's pre-semiotic modalities. Even if there is such a thing as a pre-social, pre-semiotic material modality, our perception of this modality will be shaped by our cultural experience and established ways of talking about it. Similarly, Jørgen Bruhn and Niklas Salmose discuss the changing perceptions of the senses, pointing to the way in which even the seemingly objective or universal conception of the sensorial modality changes over time and with social use (see the Questions and Answers following Elliott's chapter). As Elliott states in a later response to this problem, "the idea that there is such a thing as a universal truth ... that's a cultural position" (this volume, p. 70). However, Elleström's models were never intended to promote "a universal truth", and through an anthology such as this, his ideas and concepts are bent and reshaped to suggest new ideas and ways of conceptualising intermedial relationships.

So where do these reflections lead in terms of the future of intermedial and multimodal studies? As indicated earlier, one clear direction is the exploration of the complementarity of the two fields, developing models and vocabularies that can cross disciplinary boundaries and making use of the strengths that both sides have to offer. In the case of intermediality, perhaps especially intermediality inspired by Lars Elleström's models, this involves consideration of the social, as just discussed. It might also involve opening up the study of media to 'new' types of narrative: looking for narrativity and qualification in areas not normally regarded as having these features and considering the consequences such an outlook will have for our understanding of literacy, as discussed by Beate Schirmacher and Leitch (see Chapter 8, Questions and Answers). As Leitch argues, some media, like restaurant menus, "whether or not they're explicitly cast as narratives, are likely to be framed by narrative tropes and consumed as if they're chapters in an ongoing story" (this volume, p. 222). Just like being open to different theories and perspectives can prove fruitful for developing our understanding of media and communication, a broadening of the idea of narrativity, as a transmedial phenomenon, can enhance our understanding of narrative media, how they are processed, and what it takes to be media literate in today's society. This is highly relevant since the contemporary media landscape is constantly changing and the tools that intermediality and multimodality provide for understanding communication must be up to date to function as the foundation of a critical media literacy that students as well as established researchers need to have. As disinformation, propaganda, and manipulation of media content become increasingly hard to detect, intermediality and multimodality have powerful potential to cultivate an understanding of the foundational aspects of

communication as well as to provide tools for a nuanced and thorough investigation of how communication and media work. The synergy effect of the combined fields is a way forward that also affects and strengthens debates outside academia that can be productive in the face of social challenges.

As for multimodality, this area could, perhaps, take inspiration from the intermedial perspective on tracing media relations. Mitchell's notion that "all media are mixed media" (2005, p. 260) has long been a cornerstone of intermedial studies at IMS, an idea which is echoed in Elleström's contention that "media are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between media differences that is founded on media similarities" (2021c, p. 5). Media relations are not foreign to multimodality, as stated by O'Halloran (this volume, p. 237), but Bateman nonetheless argues that regarding intermedial relationships, "Lars's model gives considerable theoretical and practical purchase that is not inherently present in the multimodality view. This is, therefore, an aspect that needs to be brought into multimodality" (this volume, p. 125). In this volume, media relations are discussed by Mitchell and Elliott, who point to the close connection between imagery and language, two sign systems that are often thought of as different basic media, or, in multimodality, as different semiotic resources, or modes. However, Elliott and Mitchell both show how one can take on the properties of the other. Mieke Bal, in a similar vein, shows how a media product that belongs to one basic media type, e.g. painting, can evoke another, e.g. literature, essentially blurring the sharp distinctions between these two seemingly different sign systems, at least on the level of perception. Ryan, however, argues that it is important to distinguish between a perceptual recognition of one medium referring to another and an actual blurring of modalities and technologies of distinct media, countering the popular idea in intermediality that media boundaries tend to blur or dissolve. Although Mitchell, Bal, and Elliott do not use the term 'media boundaries' and it also seems that there are two perspectives here that diverge on the conceptual level, the shared concern with some form of media boundaries and how different media relate to each other speaks to the strong influence that this kind of comparative thinking has had in intermedial studies. It has led to the development of models for tracing media relations diachronically both for specific products, such as the artworks discussed by Bal, and for qualified media more generally, showing what individual media have in common, how new forms have developed, and how they diverge in representational possibilities.

Following the discussion about Elleström's cognitive perspective in his media model, mainly presented in the chapters by O'Halloran and Bateman, but also touched upon by Bal and Elliott and in the Questions and Answers following Leitch's chapter, there could be future developments

in this area. It is important to develop the connection between the idea of cognitive import, a rather individualistic view, and the social, as discussed earlier. Such a balance can perhaps be found by developing the Peircean foundation of Elleström's model, as discussed by Heidrun Führer and John A. Bateman (see the Questions and Answers following Bateman's chapter), as the notion of symbolicity already contains the idea of convention or habit shaped through collective use. This idea is also used in multimodality to incorporate the social perspective – a perspective Elleström himself was working on in an article published posthumously (Elleström, 2022), as discussed in the Introduction to this volume. However, another way forward is suggested by Queiroz's focus on distributed cognition and Peirce's processual and cognitive externalism. Queiroz himself doesn't use the word 'social', but a social aspect is built into the notion of *intersemiotic translation*, as cognition here is not relegated to an individual's internal mind, and "intentional mental states or mental states with an 'aboutness', are, in part, located in the environment" (this volume, Note 2, p. 100) as humans are "extending the mind into the space to think better" (this volume, p. 80). Intersemiotic translation is described as a fundamental process which lies behind creative developments in art, and presumably in non-artistic developments as well, which, it might be argued, contains a social component in the shared processual and accumulative achievements that take place within a social environment. As Queiroz states, "Meaning is not a thing inside the head. The relation between agents and media is not an input–output interaction. Interpreters and producers are not equated to individual agents, but agents are distributed semiotic cognitive systems" (this volume, p. 89). This statement implicitly problematises Elleström's communication model. As the Questions and Answers following Queiroz's chapter shows, there is, however, a challenge if Queiroz's terminology and semiosis-focused theories are to be fully integrated with Elleström's concepts and more materially focused model. Where Queiroz puts semiosis, that is, abstract sign processes, centre-stage, Elleström has the media product, leaving us with two models that zoom in on two different levels of analysis, similarly to how multimodality and intermediality can be considered to zoom in on semiotic modes and media respectively, leaving room for future research to more clearly tease out complementarities and possible integrations.

Concerning the cognitive aspects of Elleström's media and communication model, there might also be room for development in terms of theorising the synaesthetic qualities of basic media. If we expand, as Leitch suggests, the intermedial study of objects to include such media products as restaurant menus, the importance of synaesthetic perception, already present in qualified media such as film and television commercials, becomes particularly clear: restaurant menus and food commercials using words and

images are not only supposed to communicate a list of dishes and ingredients but also to evoke the perception of taste, smell, and sometimes even touch and sound, evoking many more senses cognitively than simply sight, which is normally taken to be the relevant sensorial mode for the basic media of language and image. Some scholars might argue that this problem is covered by the notion of transmediation in that the restaurant menu or commercial simply transmediates a dish, but wherein lies the implicit representation of the sensorial modalities of taste and smell? As noted in the Introduction to this volume, the media model that Elleström published in 2010 included the notion of ‘virtual’ time and space (Elleström, 2010b, p. 20), which in his 2021 model was developed into a notion of ‘cross-modal representation’ (Elleström, 2021c, p. 68–71) to account also for virtually represented sensorial and material configurations. This shows that Elleström himself was aware of the importance of virtual synaesthesia and was perhaps moving towards a more developed account of this aspect. In the preface to the 2021 publication, he argued that

the discussions now include not only virtual (represented) time and space but also virtual (represented) materialities and sensory perceptions. Providing a fuller picture of representing and represented media traits, as well as adding discussions of cross-modal cognitive capacities of the human mind, makes it possible to offer a much-developed understanding of the concepts of media types and media borders and what it means to cross media borders.

(Elleström, 2021d, p. xii)

This discussion of cross-modal representation is still rather short, and given the importance also ascribed to this aspect by Elleström himself, it would be a relevant area to develop further in order to fully account for the traits of various basic media – to be able to fully understand and describe the affordances that basic media have for designing media products and for addressing the receiving subject. In the same way that Mitchell argues that the image demands acknowledgement, the restaurant menu demands a response. This anticipation of a receiving subject generates an extra loop in the communication model, which is yet another aspect that could be more fully explored in relation to Elleström’s theories, the implications of which are touched on by Mitchell, Bal, Bateman, and Leitch in this volume in their various discussions of the relation between the media object and the receiving subject.

Some chapters in this volume consider the terminology used in Elleström’s model, which, from some perspectives, could be considered problematic or unclear. As mentioned previously, Leitch opens up the boundaries of the qualified medium, which might leave one wondering where exactly the

boundaries are if restaurant menus and maps can be qualified media. In relation to Elleström's notion of qualified submedia, which refers to different genres within a qualified medium (Elleström, 2021c, pp. 63–64), one could argue that the definition has become even broader, as any communicative form guided by convention is now a qualified medium of one degree or another. As Ryan states in her chapter (pp. 34–35):

This assimilation of submedia to genres reveals the difficult problem of distinguishing media from genre.... But there is an important distinction between media and genres. Genres are defined by conventions and they are largely culture-specific. Media are sets of expressive devices determined by their material, semiotic, and spatiotemporal nature, and they transcend cultures.

There is always a risk that if theoretical concepts become too broad and encompassing, they are watered down and lose some of their explanatory and critical value – Ryan formulates a similar critique of Elleström's concept of technical media when she suggests the term is open to “an infinite regression” (Ryan, this volume). Whether or not that is the case here is up for discussion, as it could be argued that Elleström is simply staying with the original definition of qualified media and including genre as a subcategory as a consequence of this essentially cultural definition. Or one could argue, as Ryan does, that the concept conflates two different entities, i.e. expressive but conventionalised *forms* such as literature and more specific ways of using this form, i.e. genres such as the romance novel.

This gives rise to a second question: are basic media to be thought of as *material resources*, or building blocks (a term discussed by Bruhn and Bateman in the Questions and Answers following Bateman's chapter), or are they to be thought of as more *abstract possibilities or affordances* of some material or technical medium? Basic media are only basic as long as they are not being used in the design of a media product; as soon as someone actually uses writing, imagery, or sound, these entities stop being ‘basic’ and instead become qualified, e.g. in the form of a child's drawing, a scholarly article, a painting, or a poem. This distinction might not be a problem in a specific analysis, but it points to areas regarding the relation between technical media of display, basic media, and qualified media which could be clarified. This relation between the technical medium and the basic medium is also problematised, albeit somewhat differently, by Ryan in this volume, while the relation between basic and qualified media is problematised by Bateman. Furthermore, Elleström's original notion of a *technical medium* (Elleström, 2010b, p. 30) was, in his revised model, changed into a *technical medium of display* (Elleström, 2021c, p. 34), with

a heightened emphasis on the display or realisation function, showing a movement towards clarifying these definitions and relations.

The final last avenue that we can see for further studies is a more nuanced notion of media combination and of the way meaning is generated through the interaction of different expressive forms. This is not a question that is discussed much in this volume, but it is touched on by Ines Tebourski and Mitchell in the Questions and Answers following Mitchell's chapter, and it is a question which has been at the core of many studies in the field of multimodality (see Jensen, 2021, pp. 59–67) and in some disciplines often taken as inspiration for intermedial studies, such as film music studies (see Jensen, 2021, pp. 107–130), or studies of comics and picture books (see Bateman, 2014, pp. 72–116), but which still to some degree eludes proper characterisation (for a suggestion on how to develop the idea of synchronic intermediality within the Elleström framework, see Jensen (2024)).

Trying to tie all this together and come to some form of conclusion, we see the road forward for intermediality and multimodality as an ever-moving and shifting media landscape which is lively and continues to move in many different directions, as explored above. With regard to each of the avenues suggested here for further exploration, it is of course true, as Bal and Queiroz argue, that many more and many different case studies are needed to test the various concepts and theories empirically and to see specifically “how attention to the way the intermediality in the media product works illuminates the special effects it emanates” (Bal, this volume).

To conclude, we would, once again, like to thank the contributors for their interesting and thought-provoking lectures and for their openness to engaging with the audiences' inquiries, which highlights the importance of intellectual conversation, collaboration, and questioning as crucial parts of the theorisation process and as key to cultivating a democratic and open research landscape, which are things that Elleström also valued greatly.

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