1 Intermedial studies

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Even if you have never heard the term intermediality before, you may still be familiar with the phenomenon. You have no doubt often compared a film adaptation with the novel it is based on, and you probably listen to audiobooks. On social media, you sometimes create and share memes or GIFs with your friends, and as a child your parents perhaps read picture books to you.

Intermedial studies is interested in the interaction of similarities and differences between media and the changes that may occur in communicative material when it is transported from one media type to another. It is also interested in how the differences between media types are bridged by similarities on other levels. The strange thing is that despite having no knowledge of or training in intermedial studies most people are very good at using and understanding intermedial relations, though of course not many of them would be able to use academic terminology to describe what they are doing, nor would they be interested in doing so.

One of the reasons why people navigate effortlessly in these communicative environments is that all communicative situations and all media types are multimodal: they draw on different forms of resources for meaning-making. When we speak to someone face-to-face, we not only understand the words they use but draw on intonation, body language, speech rhythm and the surrounding context to make sense of what we hear – and we do this without even thinking about it. This is not just true concerning face-to-face communication: even when we communicate across temporal and spatial distances when studying scientific articles, reading novels, or watching movies, there is never only one form of meaning-making involved. As you are reading this very text, in a print version or online, you are not only responding to the meaning of the written words, but the layout and typography also provide you with various kinds of visual information that facilitate reading and following the line of argument. If you are reading a printed copy, you are evaluating tactile and auditory information, and the weight distribution between your hands informs you that you are at the beginning of a longer text. If you are reading an e-book, the physical information found in a printed book has to be replaced by visual indicators. Thus, as media scholar W.J.T. Mitchell has pointed out, all communication involves all our senses. There are no purely visual, textual, or auditory media. All media products are, therefore, mixed and heterogeneous rather than 'monomedial'. Intermedial studies explores this

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heterogeneous relation between different forms of meaning-making, either within a particular media product or between different media types. A summary of the main terms used in intermedial studies is provided in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1 Terms to get you started

Media: the material-based tools that are needed to communicate across time and space.
Intermedial studies analyses the interaction within and between different media; traditionally, the research objects have been artistic phenomena.
Multimodal studies is, like intermedial studies, interested in the internal mix of modes inside each media product.
Media studies has traditionally been more focused on mass media, journalism and pedagogical contexts – and its approach is often closer to a social scientific approach.
Media product: a specific communicative object or event, for example, a Penguin copy of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, an article on global warming in *The Guardian* or a letter, an email or a spoken remark to a friend.
The technical medium of display refers to the material object or entity that allows access to basic and qualified **media types**.
Basic media types such as text, organized sound, or images are used as the communicative 'building blocks' in many different media
Qualified media types: when we speak of the news media, the arts, or genres such as the novel and the documentary, we are talking about media types in a way that is qualified and is defined by context, convention and history and by our experience of many individual media products.

Defining intermedial studies

The term intermediality has gained popularity and influence despite the confusion about whether the term 'intermediality' denotes an *object* of study, a *method* of study, or a *theory* about a category of objects. The concept of intermediality opens up for all three of them. In the following, however, we will be careful to distinguish between intermedial studies as the method and theory of study and intermediality of media products as the object of study.

Historically, intermedial research has been particularly interested in artistic media products and focusing on relations between media types such as texts and images, words and music, or on media transformations that in some way or other cross and challenge conventional media borders. Intermedial studies has been very good at demonstrating these relations – but perhaps not so good at demonstrating how to analyse them in practical ways. In order to compare and analyse intermedial relations within particular media products, this book presents different kinds of medial relations, and tools to analyse them, which will

allow you to describe, analyse and compare a huge variety of different media products in relation to each other. Our perspective is different from the classic intermedial approach, which deals mostly with artistic objects in that it is not only relevant for artistic media products but offers a method that can be applied to all forms of communication and analysis. Throughout this book, the choice of case studies and topics demonstrates that an intermedial perspective is not only relevant for artistic media products.

But what is the point of such an intermedial perspective? As previously mentioned, we can read and understand picture books, we can resend a funny GIF in an online thread, and we can apprehend the relation between words and photographs in newspapers without knowing anything about intermediality. But if you want to discuss, understand and compare these intermedial relations, terminology and useful analytical tools are needed. These should allow you to address similarities and differences and see how they relate to each other.

Intermedial studies is important, because academic disciplines such as literary studies, art history, musicology and even film studies do not provide the tools to analyse and interpret these intermedial relations. The analytical tools used within a discipline risk falling short when an attempt is made to analyse media products that go beyond the conventional borders of art forms and media types. And while film studies, theatre studies, comics studies, opera studies and media and communication studies have developed tools and terms to some extent to analyse their respective kinds of media, these disciplinary frameworks seldom address or discover similarities and differences between different forms of media types.

Intermediality emerged as a field of research in the late 1990s early 2000s. However, the interest in the relations between different forms of communication dates back far longer. It had previously been explored under the labels of, for instance, interart, adaptation studies, word and image studies. There has been a long debate in Western thinking, sometimes explicit, sometimes under the radar, about relations between different art forms and media, but from an institutional point of view the discussion has been scarce, and methodologies have not been developed. Innumerable artists, for example, have worked and continue to work with more than one medium, and it is probably the rule rather than the exception to do so, but traditional research in the different disciplines has not focused on this aspect. For instance, literary history abounds with writers who 'also' painted, who 'also' were skilled musicians or composers. There might have been an awareness of but not the analytical tools available to grasp how the knowledge and practice in one medium informs the work in another. Following the academic tradition of organizing study into different disciplines and therefore into different university divisions, we have left it to musicology to understand music and comparative literature departments to understand written literature, even though large portions of the history of music have to do with words and a lot of texts that are studied in literary studies are meant to be performed. For a long time, film studies as well as film directors were intensely interested in what they considered to be the 'cinematic'

aspects of film (meaning the visual aspects) and neglected the fact that they were dealing and working with an audiovisual media type. But questions such as what makes some stories easy to narrate in many different media and why it is so difficult to make certain scientific ideas appealing to children and easy for them to understand were too seldom understood as general, intermedial questions: that is, questions with a structural similarity that could be approached by applying just one broad theory.

These are exactly the kinds of questions that intermedial studies wants to ask, though. How can we analyse translations and transformations that exist not between languages but between different media types? How can we move from a superficial value judgement of liking or disliking a film adaptation to a level where we can describe and discuss how certain aspects of the narrative were changed? Can we perhaps even start discussing why such changes are made? We could consider questions such as how does a text succeed in getting us to 'see' mental images and 'hear' mental sounds when all we have in front of us are lines of black letters on a paper or a screen? And how can still images convey a sense of movement? How can we analyse and discuss the relation between texts and images in a children's book, comics, newspaper articles and internet memes? Can we compare multimodal communication on a theatre stage with the performance of YouTubers? Our argument is that understanding the heterogeneity of different media products increases our understanding of how medial choices shape, form and support what is communicated.

Traditions of media studies

There are various ways to define what media are and how we use them. Below is a very rough and brief outline of some of the most important ones.

The academic field of **media and communication studies** explores the history and effects of various media, primarily mass media, often with a focus on the content side of communication. Media and communication studies has a social scientific background – it is more interested in the role of media in relation to societal questions (news, ideologies, political impact, societal communication). The content and impact of particular media in a particular social context are explored in empirical studies or from different theoretical perspectives.

Other media-related fields focus on different forms of interrelation, mixedness and heterogeneity. Examples of such fields are media archaeology, intermedial studies and multimodal studies, which are based on some of the same assumptions – namely that communication takes place in the complex interaction between different media, mixed media and different resources. But scholars who use these different theoretical approaches seldom work together and common terms or ideas are seldom developed. This is partly because although the objects of study are quite closely related, they are approached from different perspectives and with different analytical foci.

The tradition of **media archaeology** originated in German cybernetical and philosophical approaches. The often controversial, even provocative, ideas of

German literary and media scholar Friedrich Kittler (1943–2011) played a decisive role. He mostly investigated the technical forms that support media content, demonstrating and developing Marshall McLuhan's (1911–80) famous idea that the 'medium is the message'. This means that all communication must be understood, at least partly, as being significantly influenced by the physical device that communicates it, the historical development of the device, and the ideologies underlying the historical conditions.

The broad field of **media studies**, also McLuhanesque in its approach, investigates mass media and art from the fundamental idea that all meaning has a relation to the medium's form, which includes thinking philosophically about mediation. Mitchell and Hansen's *Critical Terms for Media Studies* is an anthology of such contemporary media studies, and it discusses and exemplifies aesthetics, politics and communicative approaches (Mitchell and Hansen, 2010).

Multimodal studies tend to focus on the complexity of the integration of different modes (understood as different means of communicating such as speech, colour or typography) within media products and in relation to a social context. The oral communication that takes place during face-to-face communication involves numerous 'semiotic resources', such as intonation, facial expression and body language, and each can be examined and understood in greater detail. Multimodal studies often draws on insights from linguistics to understand the generation of meaning potential.

Intermedial studies touches upon similar questions. Intermedial studies draws attention to the technical media of display and media technology, which are explored in media archaeology. Like media studies, intermedial studies is interested in the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of media. Intermedial studies considers the interaction of different forms of meaning-making on interfaces, which is similar to what multimodal studies is interested in. The focus of intermedial studies thus overlaps with other approaches to the mixedness of media. Intermedial studies, however, does not tend to focus on only one of these levels but investigates how these levels interact and lead to the formation of what we call qualified media types. Intermedial studies explores how media technology and material qualities form our idea of media and vice versa.

The aim of this book

This book, built upon several ideas developed in different traditions within the study of media, is meant to demonstrate how to describe, analyse and discuss a large number of communicative forms across the conventional media borders. We will provide tools to understand media that are involved in the communication of fictive as well as of factual narratives and the role of media in artistic and self-reflexive communication as well as knowledge-based communication. In short, we hope to introduce tools that enhance intermedial literacy. This book provides a kind of analytical toolbox of intermedial studies that offers:

- An introduction to the central terms and methodologies of intermedial studies.
- Analytical methods that will facilitate analyses of media products in different media types.
- A large number of short case studies exemplifying theory and method.

Our aim is not so much to offer the reader a set of clear-cut typologies and labels, nor do we want to conduct long theoretical discussions or provide thorough historical contexts. There is a large body of intermedial research that already does that. Our main aim is not to give a detailed overview of different traditions and introduce all the complex terminological discussions taking place in intermedial studies as a research field.

In this book, we focus on an intermedial analytical method. We want to introduce a set of tools that will enable you to critically analyse and dissect the different layers of mediation in specific media products and that – if you wish – will enable you to compare different media products that are found in the contexts of different qualified media types.

This aim for our readers is mirrored in the composition of the book. We begin with theory, move on to analytical method and end with specific societal, historical and cultural questions, demonstrating that the intermedial approach is a useful tool that helps us to provide answers to these questions. The book, consequently, is divided into three main parts: a theoretical but very general introduction, where the necessary intermedial concepts will be introduced. The main theoretical ideas explained there will be exemplified in five substudies in which we demonstrate how our understanding of film, literature, computer games, music and news is formed and shaped by the material, sensorial, spatiotemporal and semiotic aspects of the media types involved.

The second part of the book deals with the different intermedial relations: media combination on the one hand, and media transformations in the form of transmediation and representation on the other hand. These are necessarily different phenomena but instead different perspectives that can often be brought to bear upon the same media product. We will present and discuss these intermedial relations with some main cases supported by a broader variety of minor examples.

In the third part of the book, we will demonstrate how the intermedial approach can contribute to better understanding specific cultural and communicative phenomena in order to reflect upon or even respond to current phenomena and societal challenges. We will also discuss how intermedial theory can contribute to neighbouring disciplines such as performance studies, and we will describe the construction of transmedial storyworlds that span different qualified media. Finally, we will offer intermedial perspectives on contemporary media types such as social media and computer games. As will become clear through this book, the intermedial analytical aspects are not only interesting or useful for academic purposes or for creating communicative 'literacy'. Intermedial studies, in particular in the format that we want to advocate here, has a distinct relevance

when it comes to better understanding and possibly responding better to some of the societal challenges that are marring the world at the time of writing. The burning question of global warming, for instance, has several medial aspects to it: most people's knowledge of the climate crisis is gained through media transformations. We seldom read scientific articles on climate change but receive current research by way of newspaper articles, documentaries, Hollywood blockbusters, or even poems – with different effects, of course. The question of 'fake news' and spreading of disinformation in digital media highlights that we need more knowledge concerning exactly how and when we perceive a media product as truthful. By providing tools to analyse how the material qualities of media of display and basic media types convey certain truth claims and how we evaluate truthfulness differently in different qualified media types, intermedial studies can contribute to media literacy.

The intermedial toolbox

What is a medium?

When we talk about media in everyday conversations, we are mostly referring to mass communication channels for news, sports and entertainment. That is, we are referring to the technical devices which enable communication across time and space and the social institutions that provide it, like television and radio, or perhaps more personal devices, such as a computer or a smartphone. News media keep us updated on important events and social media enable us to be social in spite of being apart.

Medium is Latin for 'in between', and a medium can be seen as a mediator, something that enables communication across time and space. Media are the material aspects of human communication. News informs us about recent events. Literature can provide existential insights. Architecture not only provides shelter but also communicates social power relations. Fashion communicates ideas about the human body and about social norms. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan was already defining medium as 'any extension of man'. Thus, the list of material objects that can function as a medium is endless and it involves even other physical phenomena like light or sound waves, and our own bodies. In other words, once we become interested in the material aspect of human communication, media suddenly turn out to be everywhere. And anything and everything can be used as a medium. White pebbles on a beach are not usually a medium, but the white stones that Hansel, in the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, drops as he goes into the woods are definitely a media product, conveying a simple but important message: 'We came this way'.

There is not much point in asking what a medium is (and what it is not); it is more productive to investigate the ways in which objects and phenomena can function as media products. How do material objects facilitate human communication? And how do the material aspects of medium shape what is communicated?

With an intermedial toolbox we will have a useful perspective and terminology that we can use to understand text–image relations in comics or in newspaper articles, or the relations between the lyrics and a melody in both pop music and opera. We can discuss how diegetic media representation is used to represent narrative conflicts; we will also be able to pay attention to the material characteristics of literature, which are so often overlooked – the letters, typography, paper – and the impact of these elements on how we make sense of literary text. In short, we will be much better equipped to discuss a large number of phenomena that we seldom notice when we consume media products but which still deeply affect their reception. Marshall McLuhan famously said that 'the medium is the message'. We formulate more or less the same idea differently (and much less catchily): media are the invisible but crucial basis of human communication, and the material aspects of media shape what is communicated and what can be communicated.

Therefore, all communication is dependent on material objects, that is, different kinds of physical phenomena that we can perceive with our senses (including sound or light waves). The choice of media defines what and how we communicate. This is one of the main reasons why intermediality is a helpful toolbox. At a historical moment when digital media provide a technology through which we can easily switch between and combine media, it is easy to overlook the complex transformations and combinations inherent in such operations. We are not always aware that every choice, change or medium actually forms 'the message' that we want to bring across. This is yet another reason why we need to be 'media literate': because we live in contemporary media-saturated societies, we must be able to critically navigate and discuss and even partly produce media products.

History of intermedial studies and traditions

Although intermedial *studies* is a fairly new research discipline, intermediality as a phenomenon (defined as the interaction within and between different media types) has always existed, because all communication is multimodal and all communication employs different forms of media. This has not always been noticed.

The qualified media type of Greek drama from the fifth century BC, for instance, has been investigated in literary studies and classics departments primarily as *texts*, with remarkably little focus on the multimodal integration of speech, gestures, music and dance, as well as architectural space and ritual contexts. The orchestral suites of the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) are compilations of dance music but are today often perceived as an example of instrumental art music that you primarily listen (and maybe not dance) to. And if we enjoy and even memorize a poem by the American poet Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), the poem is not only made by the meaning of the words but by how they sound and look. For aesthetic effects, the literary avant-garde plays with the material aspects of language, and advertising can use similar means to reach economic ends.

All media are internally multimodal and externally interrelated with each other. However, whether intermedial and multimodal aspects are acknowledged and encouraged or are instead criticized or perhaps even suppressed depends on the time and context. Therefore, mediated communication is also formed by ideas, ideologies and conventions. In Ancient Greek, for example, the word *mousike* refers to both what we would call poetry and what we would call music (song) today. In the centuries that followed the Ancient Greek period, these have been increasingly conceptualized as different qualified media types. And when Bob Dylan (b. 1941) was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017, the decision was difficult to accept for those who insisted on a conventional border between literature and music. To others, the same decision highlighted the idea that poetry should be performed.

One way of looking at the history of discussions about intermedial aspects of Western art is to track the ideals of homogeneous art forms as opposed to heterogeneous art forms. Historical discussions about this can be traced far back in European cultural history and the issue was mainly seen as a question of aesthetics, albeit with important ideological undertones. From an intermedial perspective, we can see how these discussions and concepts about the relation between different art forms includes an awareness of mediality, of how art forms, like all forms of human communication, are shaped by their material that we perceive and make sense of. We will briefly introduce some of the fundamental concepts that have played a large role in these discussions. These terms are *paragone, ut pictura poesis, Gesamtkunstwerk* (the total work of art) and medium specificity.

The idea of *paragone* (Italian for 'comparison') originates in Renaissance art theory and relates to a ranking competition among the arts – each form vying to be deemed the best and the most valuable. Famously, painter and inventor Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) argued that painting was the highest example of artistic forms. This was refuted by, among others, sculptor, painter and architect Michelangelo (1475–1564), who counter-argued for the primacy of sculpture. The *paragone* debate has been an ongoing discussion in Western cultural history, and in 2010 a German collection of essays, inspired by intermedial studies, reinvigorated the idea of the 'comparative competition' between media types by analysing not only the classical art forms but also TV, advertising, graphic novels and computer games in a framework inspired by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (Degner and Wolf 2010). It is therefore possible to see current competition among modern qualified media as a kind of *paragone* debate, for example, seeing film as 'artistic' as opposed to 'popular' television.

Throughout history, discussions of the interrelations between media types have shifted between the tradition of pointing out the benefits of the merging of art forms and the tradition, which warns about such merging. Different terms have been used in different periods, beginning with the Roman writer Horace's (65–8 BC) idea of *ut pictura poesis* (the literal meaning is 'as in painting, so in poetry'), which means that what can be accomplished and admired in painting can be accomplished and admired in literature, too. This was refuted, centuries later, in

German Enlightenment writer G.E. Lessing's (1729–81) essay called 'Laocoon: On the limits of painting and poetry'. Lessing's interrogation inspired some problematic but often repeated dogmas of aesthetic theory concerning the relations between the arts. Lessing's essay offers an interesting discussion of fundamental intermedial insights, namely that the same event has to be represented differently in different media. However, one does not necessarily have to come to the same normative conclusion, namely that literature should deal with and represent time and narrative subjects, whereas painting should stick to spatial, or non-temporal, presentation, for instance, of the landscape. Lessing's treatise has inspired numerous positions that have circled around the idea of medium specificity (see Box 1.2), either as being descriptive formats or as being normative dogma, to the time of writing, across the fields of literature, painting and film.

The struggle of *ut pictura poesis* versus the Laocoon tradition of medium specificity can be traced back and forth through cultural history, and it can be found in academic disciplines and in artistic media types. Richard Wagner's (1813–83) late Romantic concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art, is one version of the *ut pictura* tradition, and in many ways the immersive practices of the cinema experience are clear signs of this idea: the darkened movie theatre, with high-quality visual representations and impressive sound systems, very much imitates the dreams of Wagner, who wanted to overwhelm his spectators with the combined powers of orchestral music, performances, poetry and stage props. Even several of the so-called historical avant-garde artists from the beginning of the twentieth century believed that the mixing of art forms was not only possible but necessary to achieve the highest artistic and political/spiritual goals and affect the reader, listener, or spectator in the most efficient way (Bürger 1984). Opposed to this stand the numerous attempts at specifying the different art forms (or media), as well as limiting them to their own formal investigation. A clear example of the medium specificity position is the influential American art critic Clement Greenberg's lifelong engagements with modernist art in the second half of the twentieth century.

Box 1.2 Medium specificity and transmediality

Medium specificity is an influential aesthetic theory that describes the possibilities and limitations of media, which are often called affordances. The concept of medium specificity dates back to German Enlightenment writer G.E. Lessing, who stated that each art form has specific possibilities and limitations that the art forms should not try to transgress. The debate resurfaces from time to time in debates among both artists and critics, often when new media types battle to find stable ground. Elliott (2003) provides a general and historic overview of medium specificity in film versus literature, and Chatman (1980) offers a discussion of film versus literature from a medium specificity perspective. For a discussion of the ideas of medium specificity and visual arts, see W.J.T. Mitchell (2005).

If medium specificity has to do with creating or upholding borders between media, **transmediality** is a concept that denotes the possibilities of transgressing media borders. Transmediality has to do with the fact that you can, for example, express the notion of 'sorrow' with different basic media types, with an actor's body language, the organized sound of music, or the words of a literary text. Even some structural forms are transmedial – rhythm, for instance. At first glance, rhythm looks like a media-specific phenomenon that is related to the repetition of sounds in music. But rhythm is transmedial in that painting has a rhythm, verse and prose have a rhythm, and so does dance. Narrativity, another transmedial phenomenon, is not specific to literature or to film: narrativity exists in many verbal and non-verbal media types; it is an important aspect of older traditions of painting, for example, but is less significant in sculpture. Newspaper articles as well as popular scientific articles often have a narrative structure.

The relation between medium specificity and transmediality is a very important theme in intermedial studies and it lies at the centre of all analysis of media transformation (see in particular Chapter 9).

As mentioned above, media are connected to values, and these values change over time. In the 1990s, for example, the internet and digital media were often discussed in almost utopian terms as the new hyper-medium that provides unlimited and free democratic access to information. Some thirty years later, we are in fact communicating, learning and working differently, and we are digitally interconnected. What seemed utopian in the 1990s has in a way become true, but so have new power relations that stem from the exploitation of digital data. It is not just communication that is changed by every major media revolution. Just as new forms of communication channels make it possible to question traditional hierarchies and gatekeepers, media revolutions have an impact on social and political stability as well. The use of social media to raise consciousness and gather revolutionary momentum in the Arab Spring during 2010 and 2011 is just one example of this.

Another example of a change in the value judgements related to media is the rise of music within Western aesthetic hierarchies. For centuries, music was ranked lower than visual art and literature because it lacked referential precision and was perceived as suspicious because of its double impact on the listener – it affects both the body (via sounds and rhythms) and the mind (via the order and beauty). Worried thinkers, from Plato (428–348 BCE) to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), advocated controlling the affective impacts of music.

However, artists in the nineteenth century became increasingly interested in expressing subjective experiences and emotions, and therefore what was considered the lack of referential precision became an asset, and instrumental music rose in the hierarchy of the arts. When modernist writers in the early twentieth century looked for new forms, the structures of art music, the fugue and the sonata form provided alternative models. The idealization of art music as a role

model for all arts was, however, seriously disturbed by how the Nazi propaganda drew the very idea of the supremacy of music and the fame of German composers into their racist worldview. So whenever we describe media types, we have to do so in a specific historical context; we cannot simply say what 'the internet' or 'music' 'is'.

A founding idea of intermedial studies is that meaning-making is dependent on technical devices and is formed by earlier cultural forms. This is an important point in Jay Bolter and David Grusin's (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. This influential book, which clearly works from McLuhan's original ideas, demonstrates that new, digital media work by always nesting earlier forms within them to take one step forward: the computer interface, for example, uses the metaphor 'desktop', and even though literature has been a written form for millennia, we still talk about 'narrators' as if a novel is an oral form.

So, when thinking about media and intermedial relations, it is important to remember the relation between relative structural stability versus historical change, both when it comes to each and every media type and when it comes to the interrelations between media and media aspects. This is what we call contextualized medium specificity: the idea that most media types can be described with a limited number of more or less stable media-specific characteristics but that these characteristics by their very definition change under the pressure of historical contexts.

Media aspects and media modalities

In the first parts of this chapter we have sketched out some of the other academic approaches that are interested in the heterogeneity of media but explore them with a different focus. We have also briefly described some of the historical discussions that, in different ways, have led to our understanding of intermedial studies.

To better understand different intermedial relations, combinations and transformations of media, we now need to describe in more detail the concept of media that we are working with. If we want to address all kinds of intermedial relations, we need a broad and very general framework that explains how all sorts of media work on several levels at the same time. In what follows we present a flexible set of tools that addresses the different levels of mediation and the different ways we interact with media.

In our everyday use of media, we concentrate on what we perceive to be content and tend to ignore the complex interaction of material, sensorial and semiotic processes that not only facilitates but also shapes this content. Actually, we only become aware of mediation in specific cases: when a technical device does not work properly, when it is unfamiliar to us, when we cannot use all our senses or the media product explicitly draws attention to its own mediation. When we want to analyse intermedial relations, we have to consider these processes that are going on underneath the surface, so to speak.

The broad variety of intermedial relations has in the past often been approached by identifying and defining a variety of specific and different forms. Such typologies provide an overview and may be a good first step in approaching a new field. However, if everything can be used as media, how can the typology provide an encompassing overview? And how can we find terminology for the endless variety of intermedial relations? Although typologies and categorizations are built on an order by means of identifying differences, intermedial phenomena are an interplay between differences *made possible* by similarities. Thus, a focus on sorting and categorizing by means of perceptible differences proves to be a difficult method of analysis. The problem is that for each difference on one level, one finds a similarity with another kind. There is no lack of broad concepts of media that stress the ubiquity of mediation in our everyday life and how media concern societal questions (a good case in point is Rust, Monani and Cubitt 2016), but fewer theories offer terminologies that can be used for analysis. While we agree with W.J.T. Mitchell that all media are mixed media, we want to go one step further and ask: how can we deal with this heterogeneity in a specific intermedial analysis? How can we acknowledge that different media have much more in common than we see at first glance but at the same time analyse how basic similarities play out differently in different media types?

When it comes to a theorization that is both precise and relatively flexible, we find that Lars Elleström's terminology is the most helpful (Elleström 2010, 2014, 2021). Elleström tackles the variety and complexity of intermedial relations by focusing on the fundamental characteristics that all media share. In order to analyse intermedial relations, you first need to know what all media have in common. This kind of bottom-up approach provides a flexible framework that addresses how mediation always takes place on different levels and how 'intermediality must be understood as a bridge between media differences that is founded on media similarities' (Elleström 2021, p. 5).

Elleström cross-links the overlapping frameworks of intermedial and multimodal studies, and draws on different traditions that study the mixedness of media and communication (see Box 1.1) by stressing that mediation always involves different aspects and takes place on different levels simultaneously. Thus, with this approach, it becomes possible to not only agree with Mitchell that all media are modally mixed but also to analyse the mixedness of media and how material characteristics, different semiotic processes and their conventions interact in shaping the very communication they facilitate. Therefore, we intend to set out Elleström's model in more detail as it forms the theoretical basis for all the different forms of analyses this book provides.

Media products and the aspects of mediation

We can encounter difficulties when trying to answer the question of what a medium is because we tend to answer the question differently depending on which aspect of mediation we focus on. Regarding 'radio', for instance, we might refer to a technical device (a radio) that receives a particular kind of

airwaves of a specific frequency that are used to transmit sounds, but 'radio' can also refer to a broadcasting company, e.g. the BBC. 'Radio' can even designate a specific kind of sound-based content that a broadcasting company produces and transmits to its audience's radios, including particular genres like radio news (as distinct from newspaper or television news) or radio plays. We might also refer to a smartphone application that distributes the content of broadcasting companies (that was previously distributed by radio waves) in the form of digital files. In fact, when we talk about media such as radio, literature and film/cinema, we often do so by *referring to* certain materials but actually *thinking of* them as specific forms of communication that are shaped by cultural conventions.

This tendency to mix up material form with the communicative form they facilitate is not a problem in everyday life and not a problem at all as long as it stays inside disciplinary contexts. However, it becomes a problem when we start to compare different media types, and therefore we need to be more specific concerning which aspect we are thinking of. Are we speaking about *objects* such as books or records; or are we speaking of what they give access to, *configurations* such as text, images or organized sound; or are we referring to the kind of *information* that we make sense of according to the convention of a specific context? We therefore need to clarify different aspects of media and be more precise than in everyday speech.

If we want to talk about media not just on a general level but in terms of the analysis of the various relations that can arise between and within different kinds of media, we have to find a new solution: what we normally call a medium needs to be broken down into three interrelated aspects that are very often confused and conflated. Following Elleström's model, we differentiate between technical media of display and different basic and qualified media types. This allows us to address the physical, perceptual and cognitive aspects of individual media products and how they enable social interaction. These categories are not to be thought of as different groups of media; they are aspects that are part of and are relevant in all forms of mediation.

Media products

Our understanding of different media is based on our experience of how they are used. Our idea about news, social and artistic media consist of our experience of innumerable individual media products – of a multitude of different news articles, messages in group chats, pieces of music, novels or paintings. All of these media products involve different aspects; they use entities that we can physically interact with and display configurations that we can perceive and that we understand as meaningful.

Examples of '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. These phenomena and objects display constellations of texts, still or moving images, speech or organized sound. These constellations, which we call 'basic media types', work like building blocks and can be used differently in different kinds of media products and in different historical and social contexts. The basic media types of text and images are combined differently in the context of news media to how this is done in children's books or comics.

Taken together, the 'technical media of display' and the way the 'basic media types' are used in a particular context shape our understanding of the third major dimension, 'qualified media types'. Examples of qualified media types could be news, literature, music or visual art. We explain these three aspects of media next: the technical media of display, the basic media types and the qualified media types.

Technical media of display

Technical media of display are the very material bases of mediation: they provide access to the media products. Technical media of display could be clay, paper or stone, or the screens and loudspeakers of electronic communication. Technical media of display are a function of physical objects that sometimes also serve as storage (like books – as opposed to loudspeakers that only display the sound); these objects can also interact with different production tools (like pens, typewriters, keyboards, cameras and microphones), storage devices (like records) or dissemination devices (gramophones and projectors). Their material qualities and the way they function shape what can be communicated.

Sheets of paper provide access to several basic media types, such as text and images. Text and image can be arranged in different ways so that we recognize them as different qualified media types, for instance, poems, scientific articles or graphic novels. The smartphone and computer provide access to innumerable media products and qualified media types. In face-to-face communication, performing arts and music, the presence of the human body functions as a technical medium of display.

It is important to keep in mind that everything in a particular context can be perceived as a technical medium of display: stones in a forest, glasses and a table in a kitchen, or a urinal are not always perceived as technical media of display, but they can acquire that function on a forest path (in a fairy tale), in interaction with other actors' bodies on stage (in a theatrical play) or in the context of the art gallery (as part of an artwork).

While technical media of display are needed to realize media products, they are not in focus in our interaction with media products as long as they are familiar and function well. We perceive and manipulate them, but usually our attention is not focused on these actions but on what they display. We tend to 'look through' the technical media of display as long as communication is functioning.

As a rule of thumb, we notice the technical medium of display when it is broken or when we are unfamiliar with how to manipulate it, such as when we try to make a phone call with a smartphone for the first time or try to read a manga book in the Western reading direction. Some media products self-reflexively draw attention to the presence of its technical device of display, like the Belgian painter René Magritte's (1898–1967) famous painting of a pipe that includes the caption '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*' ('This is not a pipe'). The painting thus insists on the idea that what we see is not the pipe itself but the depiction of a pipe – and suddenly we are looking at a painting of a pipe. That is probably the reason why the *title* of the painting is *La Trahison des images* (*The Treachery of Images*).

Basic media types

When we are manipulating technical media of display, our attention is focused on certain configurations of sign systems: text or speech, images, organized sound, moving images and gestures. All these basic media types are configurations that in a multimodal analysis can be differentiated into numerous different semiotic modes. These basic media types are not the smallest entities that can provide meaningful information, but they are basic, meaning that they are used and combined in many different kinds of media products, and that is why we refer to them as the building blocks of qualified media types. Obviously, the same basic media types can be combined very differently, such as the text and image in children's books, illustrated novels, comics, advertisements, internet memes and news articles.

Certain technical media of display are particularly well suited to providing access to certain basic media types. Paper or screens are well suited for text or images but less suited to display a basic media type such as organized sound or speech. And while sound waves work perfectly well for basic media types like the organized sound of music and speech, sound waves cannot easily display gestures and facial expressions; these are basic media types of body language that use human bodies as technical media of display.

Qualified media types

We do not automatically understand all kinds of texts, images, organized sounds, gestures etc. Depending on the historical and social context, these basic media types are used and integrated differently and are involved in different forms of meaning-making. This is the aspect that we call the qualified media type.

Text is used differently in a novel, a poem, a news article or an SMS text message, and we look differently at images as art paintings, children's paintings or caricatures. Consequently, we recognize particular qualified media types by the way basic media types are arranged, and we have different expectations of them. Media products can be qualified in more or less detail, depending on which other kinds of media products they are compared with. A general category such as literature, visual art, music and film and can be qualified even

more specifically if needed according to the conventions and the context into different genres, or submedia. Novels, short stories, poems, essays are examples of qualified submedia of literature. When we qualify a particular media product as 'art-house cinema' or as 'news reportage' we draw on our previous experience of similar media products. The differences we perceive between different qualified media products are confirmed, challenged or extended with every new media product we interact with, like Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986–87) challenges the idea that comics cannot tell as complex narratives as text-based novels

These three aspects of media are all present in each media product. The technical media of display gives us access to the basic media types that we understand according to the contexts and conventions of qualified media. There can be no qualified media type that does not consist of basic media; all basic media types need to be displayed for us.

When we use the three aspects of media to explain and understand relations that transgress and challenge media boundaries, these concepts become useful for orientation and differentiation. We might expect a Renaissance poem to be in the form of written text displayed on the pages of a book. However, we might (perhaps often nowadays) also access a particular sonnet by William Shakespeare (1564–1616) as digital text on a screen of a smartphone or watch a YouTube clip of an actor reciting the sonnet. This has an impact on our experience of the sonnet.

In the contemporary digitized media society, the configurations of technical, basic and qualifying media types are no longer as stable as they used to be but involve new combinations and faster changes of media of display that change our understanding of certain qualified media types. Thus, knowledge of the three media aspects makes you aware of the countless processes of combination and transformation, which usually remain unnoticed.

The four modalities of media

The three aspects of media (the technical media of display, the basic media type and the qualified media type) are useful for describing the complex set-up of each and every media product. However, we need to go one step further to find other levels that can help us better understand the workings of media products. This next level is called the modalities of media.

Without ever thinking about it, we interact with each and every media product in very different ways and at the same time. We engage with the following:

- a material object,
- which we perceive with our senses,
- and whose different spatial and temporal characteristics interact with each other,
- and gather that what we perceive with our senses is representing something else, as a sign.

The descriptions in the above list are, respectively, the material, sensorial, spatiotemporal and semiotic modalities of media, according to Elleström.

Being aware of the media modalities helps us to understand what we are actually doing when we communicate and interact with media products: we are interacting with different material objects, we are giving these objects perceptual attention, and we are perceiving signs, but usually we focus only on the sense that we make of these different actions – we jump directly to the 'content'. By looking at the four modalities of media, we can grasp this complexity that we usually tend to overlook, and, exactly as with the three aspects of media types, which cannot be thought of independently from each other, this is also the case with the media modalities: their very definition means that we interact simultaneously with a media product in all four media modalities.

It is a bit like driving a car: you perform movements with your hands and feet, you evaluate what you see, hear and feel, you relate your speed of motion to the movement and positions of other drivers and you interpret all sorts of signs. Once you've learned how to drive, and drive in a familiar area, you do not think about this anymore – you just think about how to get from a to b and perform the necessary actions to get there. In a similar way, we just perform the necessary actions to access a storyworld, to be updated on the latest news and to interact socially with friends and followers. Once we've learned how to manipulate a new technical device, we usually do not think about the complexity of it anymore. However, when we want to compare different kinds of medial engagement, we have to be more aware of what it is we do in different modalities.

The material modality

When we focus on the material modality, we ask how and why do these material objects function as an interface of communication? A page in a book and a screen of an electronic device are different technical media of display. But they are both flat surfaces and thus offer a suitable interface for basic media types such as texts or images. Records and the speech organs of the human body are different technical media of display, but they both produce sound waves and thus offer a suitable interface for basic media types such as speech or the organized sound of music. When we engage with media, we treat material objects and living organisms depending on what kind of interface we consider to be important. Very different material objects such as stones, plasma screens and paper are perceived as interchangeable when we read text or look at images because we primarily focus only on two dimensions of three-dimensional objects and neglect the material quality of the object that provides the surface. When we look at sculptures or engage with architecture all three dimensions as well as the material quality of the objects are perceived as potentially meaningful. In the material modality, we can thus perceive similarities between materially very different devices as long as they provide the same interface. We can also perceive differences in the communicative situations that use the same interface.

The sensorial modality

In the sensorial modality, we are interested in our sensual perception of the material interface that the media product demands of us. Media exist not only materially, as physical objects, but also communicate with us through our five sense organs. In order to 'meet' them, we must be able to perceive them with our senses: to see, hear, feel, smell or taste something. Ultrasonic sounds, for example, although materially present and perceptible to bats and to scientific measuring tools, are unsuitable as a basic media type in human communication, simply because human beings cannot perceive them with their sensorial apparatus.

We sense a particular aspect through one or more sense organs, and then we perceive and process the sensation or sensations in both our brain and body. Experiencing perception through our brain is called cognitive perception, and meaning-making through our body is called embodiment. These processes are deeply interrelated. The embodied reactions to our surroundings that are processed unconsciously or preconsciously are called affects and once we become cognitively aware of these reactions and name them to categorize them, we call them emotions.

Research has shown that sense organs do not operate in isolation from each other: vibrations can be heard and felt, our taste is connected to smell, and multimodal studies show how different kinds of perceptions combine, support and fortify each other. Although we use all our senses when engaging with media products, we usually only focus on some of them regarding what we perceive when we interact with them. We hear the rustle of the pages and feel the weight of a book in our hands and perceive the smell of a new (or old and dusty) book, yet we focus on vision while perceiving the text on the pages. Media products exploit our capacity for cross-modal translations. In the sensorial modality, we construct synaesthetic connections, where the image of ringing bells makes us 'hear' the bells.

If a book is the technical medium of display of a novel, then we need the body to realize this and respond with embodied reactions to the meaning of the words we decode. The importance of the sensorial modality can be experienced when sense organs are temporarily or permanently limited. Many inter-sensorial translations are possible, but they all radically affect communication and consequently the semiotic modality.

The spatiotemporal modality

We perceive all objects in space and time. These two categories are always related, even if we only focus on one of them. If we look at a huge tree, we perceive it as a spatial object, but we might call it an old tree as well, because we realize that its enormous size is the result of a long temporal process. In the same way, we perceive all media products in space and in time. However, media products as such have several different spatiotemporal qualities.

We classify some media types, like images, as primarily spatial objects. We can usually describe the spatial dimensions of these objects in terms of depth, height and length. Although time is involved in producing and perceiving the objects, we would not describe them temporally, as a 'three months' work' or a painting of 'three minutes of watching time'.

We primarily engage with other media types as temporal events, for instance, a piece of music. Here, we can define the event as having a beginning and an end: once it has started, it takes a certain amount of time to finish, be it a four-hour-long opera or a pop song that only last three minutes. But the sound waves of music take up space as well; a rock concert can be heard miles away.

The spatiotemporal qualities of media are important for several reasons. They offer a needed focus on less considered aspects, for instance, the temporal dimensions of spatial objects and the spatial qualities of temporal events. This means that although images are spatial objects in the material modality, we always need time to look at them in the sensorial modality. And although text as a basic media type is as stable as images on the page in the material modality, we engage with text differently as we read one word after another in terms of an ordered sequentially. We perceive the text of a novel as a temporal event. The sensorial time of reading and the virtual time of the represented storyworld interact in different ways. The temporal succession of words on a page communicates the virtual space of a storyworld as well. The perspective of a realistic painting conveys a virtual space that differs from the actual spatial dimensions of the canvas. The spatial qualities of images can be used to represent temporal events to communicate virtual time.

Not all of these spatiotemporal characteristics are essential in every intermedial analysis. However, it is important to keep in mind that intermedial relations tend to exploit the spatial and temporal characteristics of a media product and that they draw on different ways of how space represents time and vice versa.

The semiotic modality

Finally, the reason why we engage with media is not their material, sensorial and spatiotemporal qualities. We engage with media products because they mean something. The material, sensorial and spatiotemporal qualities of media products provide information that we understand to represent something else. Thus, media products employ our ability to make meaning of signs. Media can rely on conventional sign systems such as languages, but also, for instance, body movements in dance that convey meaning which may be difficult to translate into words.

There are different ways to understand how signs work. While Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857–1913) linguistic theory and his concept of the two-sided linguistic sign had a major impact on the development of linguistics and semiotics during the first half of the twentieth century, his language-based

model creates difficulties when we want to compare the relations between different kinds of media and compare language to the way images, sounds and other forms of basic media types communicate.

In this book, we draw on the work of the semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Peirce differentiates three ways that a sign can relate to what it is supposed to signify: signs can be based on similarity (icons), contiguity (indices) or convention and habits (symbols). We connect the *iconic* signs to an object in the same way that pictures relate to their objects, namely due to their similarity. *Indexical* signs – symptoms, or traces – relate to their objects based on contiguity: they signify that a certain object is or has been present. The *symbolic* signs, for instance, words, form a relation that is based on habit and convention. See Box 1.3 for further explanation.

Box 1.3 The three Peircean sign relations briefly exemplified

In order to refer to a certain species of aquatic birds, you can refer to the bird as a 'duck'. You can also show, or draw, a picture of the bird, and the traces of a duck's footprint in the mud or a feather left on the ground also inform you that ducks were in that place at some point. The *symbolic* signs of the word 'duck' form a relation that is based on habit and the conventions of the English language. We connect the *iconic* signs of a picture of a duck to the actual birds because of their similarity with the object. Footprints or feathers form *indexical* signs of ducks; they are not similar, but they are a sign that ducks have been present. Different signs can thus refer to the same object. And all of the signs involve all three kinds of relations. For instance, a photograph of a duck is an iconic sign and also an indexical sign that ducks were present at the moment the photograph was taken.

Peirce's theory makes us understand that signs are not simply out there, waiting to be discovered and used. Objects can only function as signs if an interpreter attributes significance to them. To reuse an example from above, we may or may not notice a white stone on the ground on a hiking tour, but to Hansel and Gretel trying to find their way home, the stone is an indexical sign, because they relate it to the act of having dropped it there. But that does not mean that all white stones have the conventional meaning 'we came this way'.

Please note that the three kinds of relations – iconic, indexical and symbolic – are present in *all kinds* of signs, even if one of them might be more prominent. Words are not only conventional symbols; they also form iconic and indexical relations to the objects they signify. Many words relate iconically to the objects they refer to. We can hear that in words that refer to sounds, for instance, 'crackle', 'hush' and 'whisper'. The iconic relation is even more prominent in onomatopoeia, that is, sound-imitating words, such as the 'tick tock' of a clock, which at the same time is based on conventions that differ in every language. In Japanese, the sound of the

clock is expressed as 'katchin katchin'. When we look at a photograph, we consider the iconic relation it forms with the objects shown in it, but we also consider photographs to be indexical signs that something was present at a certain time and place. Even faked and manipulated photographs draw on the indexical relation between photography and the object, for example, photographs that are deemed to be proof of the existence of UFOs or the sea monster of Loch Ness.

Although many signs are dominated by one kind of relation – the iconic, indexical or symbolic relation – all three kinds of relations are present in all kinds of signs. Intermedial relations often exploit the ambiguity of signs, that is, the possibility of relating in multiple ways to different objects.

By using the four modalities, we can systematically compare and differentiate between what happens in different forms of mediation and intermedial relations. They draw our attention to the fact that we carry out different acts when engaging with media products. We interact with objects; we perceive information with all our senses; we pay attention to certain temporal and spatial relations on material, sensorial and semiotic levels; finally, we understand the sense data as a certain form of signs.

Final comments

As we started to explain when we presented the four modalities, they make it possible to better grasp the different dimensions of mediation and the representation of material presence, sensorial perception, relations in space and time and how we make sense of them. They form the basis of a more grounded analysis of what happens in intermedial interaction when different media types are combined, transformed or represented. The intermedial analysis of the media product can support contextual analyses of meaning-making as well – as exemplified in the following chapters and case studies.

By presenting the three aspects of media products as well as the four modalities in which we interact with them, we have drawn attention to the complex interaction of different activities we carry out to get at what we conceive to be 'content'. The characteristics of technical media of display, of basic and qualified media types and the material, sensorial and spatiotemporal information, as well as different forms of sign relations, provide a kind of 'grammar'. In other words, the three media aspects and the four modalities are part of a toolbox that helps you to more precisely explore the heterogeneity of media products and different forms of interaction between media. You will probably not use all of the tools in every analysis, but you can use the best tools to describe the particular intermedial relations that you are interested in, and they will enable you to analyse how certain media are similar in one media aspect or in one modality but different in another

The introduction chapter has laid out the history, principles and basic terminology used in intermedial studies. The following five chapters will define the modalities of five different qualified media types in more depth.

These chapters can be read in sequence (which would provide a handy overview of central contemporary qualified media types) or in any other order if you have a special interest in one particular media type.

The following chapters will therefore provide you with an insight into several specific qualified media types that you might not be familiar with from 'your own' discipline. When we study intermedial relationships, we typically begin by analysing the media in the same way that we have learned to do in our own field: we are familiar with the material, the processes of production, the historical changes in one, or perhaps two, disciplines, but we are usually much less informed about others.

While all five chapters address the central aspects of media and how we interact with them in the four modalities, each chapter has a slightly different focus on aspects that are important when considering intermedial relationships and invites you to consider aspects other than those which are usually in focus in each discipline's discussions. Also, we conclude each chapter with a schematic overview covering the media and modalities of each specific media type. These diagrams are not meant as a definition but rather as a sort of very brief summary, hinting at the complexity inherent in all media types, when studied closely.

Of course, none of the chapters can provide an encompassing overview: the chapters are meant to give you an introductory overview, and we encourage you to consult the reading references if you want to explore the media type further.

Further reading

Marshall McLuhan's idiosyncratic but highly influential ideas on media from the 1960s can be studied in McLuhan's classic *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 1987).

There are several primers for media and communication studies; among them are the classic introductions in Dennis McQuail's *Mass Communication Theory* (McQuail and Deuze 2020) and John Fiske's *Introduction to Communication Studies* (Fiske and Jenkins 2011).

Several introductions to multimodal studies exist, including Ledin and Machin (2020) and O'Halloran and Smith (2011).

Media studies in its contemporary, philosophically inclined form is nicely covered in the work of W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Mitchell and Hansen 2010).

The tradition of media archaeology is probably still best introduced with Parikka (2012).

The long history of interart and thus intermedial studies does not exist yet, but Claus Clüver provided a good overview (Clüver 2007).

Irina Rajewsky (2002) and Werner Wolf (1999) offered influential systematizations of the field, whereas Bruhn has suggested an approach to

intermedial aspects of narrative literature (Bruhn 2016) and, with Anne Gjelsvik, to cinema (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 2018)

As an entry point into current intermedial research, see Rippl's (2015) *Handbook of Intermediality* and Elleström's (2021) *Beyond Media Borders*.

For the theoretical framework of this book, Lars Elleström's work is important: his revised description of his theoretical model in Elleström (2021) is clarifying, as well as the recent anthology that he co-edited with Salmose (Salmose and Elleström 2020).

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