
Yvonne Spielmann (Germany)

SPIEL@KHM.DE

History and Theory of Intermedia in Visual Culture

Taking as a starting point the history and the discourse of intermedia, my paper relates to the current debates of intermedia describing the phenomena of crossing the borders between traditional media (such as painting and photography) and contemporary media (such as cinema, television, video, and digital technologies). What I am interested in is to show the ways that the processes of interrelation are transforming the notion of the image. From that point of view I will focus on the visual devices of intermedia in recent media art.

Intermedia, multimedia, hypertext and other related terms are common in the contemporary debates on recent developments in new media. Evidently, a variety of terms are used to name processes in which there is an interrelationship, a dialogue between two elements of differing media. The variety of names is a reflection of the current media debate which tries to comprehend, to determine and to communicate the combinations of diverse and heterogeneous elements which are recognizable within the recent developments of audio-visual media. Approaches in Cultural and Media Studies, semiotic and formal theories, when viewed together show the difficulties to come to terms with those new forms effected by the ways that elements of different media relate to each other.

In general, intermedia means an interrelationship of distinct media that merge with each other, such as a photographic still image reworked in another media such as film or video. The painter and filmmaker Peter Greenaway gives a striking example of this in his electronic film *Prospero-Books* (1991) where he reworks elements of photography and film in digital media. Greenaway reworks the interval that relates to photography and film on the level of the digitally represented image thereby creating a new form of computed image that relates the static and the moving image to each other. Thus, the structural elements that are specific to different media, like the interval, are correlated on the representational level. The result of this correlation is a structural comparison of different media that is effected by the collision of different types of movement and velocity within the unit of one single image. I will call this collision a hyperdynamic image position.

The hyperdynamic image position shows such processes of correlation, collision, and transformation that result in a mixed form of image. The hyperdynamic image position represents a form of intermedia insofar as this represents a point of collision in which the structural differences between the static, the moving and the computed images are made visible on the level of representation. The paradox

structure of this point of collision represents the processes of transformation. The hyperdynamic image position expresses an intermediate step between different visual media. Finally, it shows that the distinction between the media is an essential issue in intermedia.

The appearance of an intermediate state in the development of media has as its prerequisite the existence beforehand of different, distinct media. Only that which is distinct can merge. This definition is a result of the assumption that the development of intermedia historically coincides with the emergence of technological media, namely photography and film. Furthermore, with the emergence of the digital media intermedia becomes self-referential, since with digital media the former distinction between the media are no longer relevant.

Zhigniew Rybczynski shows the limits of intermedia when the differences between the media are blurred. With his concept of a coherent image, Rybczynski shows the shift from analogue to digital media, performing processes of multiple layerings, thereby revealing on a representational level the distinction between media is not relevant. In the HDTV videofilm *Kafka* (1992) Rybczynski uses the device of motion simulation to create the effect of a coherent image that encompasses up to seventy layerings. Such devices - on the edge of digital media but performed on the analogue level - show intermedia become self-referential since the difference between the different elements are no longer visible.

Thus, the coherent image of Rybczynski and the hyperdynamic image position of Greenaway, are examples of two different concepts to relate elements of different media to each other. The coherent image is a result of a motion simulation that makes the devices of merging and layering invisible. On the contrary, with the incoherent image of Greenaway, the merging of media to be identified as intermedia is essentially based on the difference that can be recognized. Concerning media arts the visibility of the difference is expressed in the form and the shape of the artwork. From this point of view the modes of merging can be described in terms of collision, exchange and transformation. Collision results from elements of moving images and of static images that are related to each other in the form of another medium, in a computed image. On the representational level the collision is performed within a structure of exchange that is to say the coherent and the incoherent aspects of both elements combined are made clear. The form of an intermedia artwork is thus defined by the exchange and transformation of elements that come from different media, such as painting, photography, film, video and other electronic media. The transformation is the visible form that shows the results of collision and exchange in the form of a new image, for example in a hyperdynamic image position transformation is a structural category to express the ways that those different elements are connected and merge into each other thereby creating a new form.

Intermedia therefore is a formal category of exchange. It signifies an aesthetic device encompassing both form and content. In an intermedia work of art content becomes a formal category to reveal the structure of combination and collision. The related meaning of content is to express such modes of transformation that are effected by the collision of painting and film, of film and electronic media, and so on. The context meaning of intermedia is to reveal the form of media itself. The making visible of elements that are considered media specific can be performed by ways of comparing and transforming elements like the interval. Since the concept of the interval can be identified in different media such as painting, photography, and film, it may serve as the level of structural comparison between distinct media. What can be compared is the use of the concept of interval on the level of representation.

The notion of intermedia provokes a shift in the form of the medium by bringing together distinct elements of different media. As an aesthetic device intermedia brings together diverse elements that were originally taken from different media. To consider an intermedia artwork is to deal with the processes of transformation that are reflected in the structure and form of the artwork. In relation to the static, moving and computed image the transformation between such different images is a reworking of elements such as interval to be performed at the representational level. Thus, the reworking of media specific elements on another level of representation results in making structural differences and similarities between two or more different media visible. What happens is the process changes fundamentally and the aesthetics of images are affected by the process. Thus, the process involved in working with a given medium can effect a conceptual change in the notion of the image.

Intermedia is a concept of merging based on historically separate developments. In the case of digital media all different media are integrated that is to say they merge with each other within the same technical structure. As the German computer scientist Wolfgang Coy says: "All written, optical, and electric media with the use of microelectronics and computer techniques finally will merge into one universal digital media." The universal medium is often named hypermedia, thus signifying a multidimensional structure. This means that the computer is a building block for creating new hypermedia. Hypermedia, the term was introduced by Ted Nelson to describe media which perform "multidimensional w-p of branching. That is to say hypermedia is an ability to move in non-linear way through information. The point is how to access different media; the distinction between media is not the issue in hypermedia. Multidimensional connectivity and interactivity which are associated with hypermedia do not rely on the same transformation category essentially concerned with intermedia. The non-sequential structure in the first place indicates an option to connect each single digital media

to another one. The networking in hypermedia differs from intermedia in which the connection of different media involves a transformation.

Intermedia not only differs from hypermedia but also from multimedia, and mixed media. Both are comparable to hypermedia insofar as they describe the expansion of a single medium in terms of accumulation rather than transformation. In his essay on intermedia Dick Higgins describes the different concept: "Intermedia differ from mixed media; an opera is a mixed medium, inasmuch as we know what is the music, what is the text, and what is the mise-en-scene. In an intermedium, on the other hand, there is a conceptual fusion." Referring to art forms, in particular avant-garde art, multimedia and mixed media can be identified within happenings, fluxus-performances, and related forms combining live art and film. All those connect and combine different art forms on a level that does not necessarily involve a changing of the structure of each single medium. To conclude: multimedia and mixed media are considered on the edge of intermedia, that is to say dealing with similar phenomena. In a historical view the cross-relations become even more evident. Regarding the medium film intermedia aspects can be traced in the early phase of the medium film itself insofar as film brings together elements from literature, music, dance, and theater, but the medium film is not per se intermedia.

In consequence intermedia in visual culture is best expressed by modes of self-reflection. Self-reflection refers to a media specific device which is used to link formal aspects of different visual media, like painting, film, and electronic media. In particular, those forms of an image that have occurred in one single medium undergo a process of remodelling and reshaping when they are transferred into the context of another visual medium. Transferring means transformation when the structural elements of both media are made evident and visible in a form that tells the difference. Because self-reflection reveals simultaneously those elements of incoherence and those of coherence, it seems to be an appropriate device to tell the specific interrelation of two different media. Transformation here has a twofold meaning: one concerns the dialogue between distinct elements which merge into each other; the other one is the collision of separate elements. Thus, self-reflection is the most striking device to make clear the twofold structure of transformation by revealing the ways that different media can be connected in one form. In visual culture an intermedia state of art occurs when the forms of different media collide in another form effected by transformation.

In the 3-D video-installation *Kur* (1997) Clea T. Waite dismantles the twofold structure of intermedia. The work simultaneously shows the merging of different moments in time into one single image and the presence of parallel time on four screens, that is to say as multiple reality and multiple self. *Kur* represents parallel time in a simulation of space. The three-dimensional simulation of space reveals the concept of time in space. The concept of space simulates how different times may exist parallel that is to say at the same time. This concept of duality is expressed by specific image devices. These are: the electronic flicker that simulates the flicker in the medium film. The electronic flicker is used to represent simultaneously two different times. The digital feedback causes an aesthetic effect that makes the time trail visible. This effect creates a spatial sculpture that makes different moments in time visible. The partial effect results from the reworking of density. The effect shows the distortion and the recreation of images. This process compresses and decompresses space in time thereby giving an example of transformation between different forms of images. The three-dimensional video-installation shows time images that merge into space and spatial images that merge into time. What is important is that the difference is made visible within the image itself.

To conclude: The current debates of intermedia bring together approaches deriving from literary theory, art history, film theory and media theory, including debates on computer and virtual reality. The discourse on intermedia encompasses an aesthetic practice in media art, the structure of cultural and artistic processes, and a technological metaphor, whereas the distinction from multimedia or hypertext is not so clear. Conceptually the meanings of "inter"; "multi"; and "hyper" are not coherent. The understanding of the phenomena described as intermedia shift in different discourses. Similar phenomena are described within different terms, and vice versa different aesthetic practices are subsumed under intermedia. The incoherence of naming points to a problem that lies within the phenomenon itself. In the context of Media Studies intermedia is a conceptual term that stands for processes indicating integration of structural elements that are specific to different media. The meaning of the concept is twofold: on the one hand it signifies a technical device and on the other hand referring to the technological dimension of both, cultural and media processes. Basically the processes of intermedia involve the activity of transformation and not of accumulation.

In summary, intermedia is a conceptual term. It should be applied in the first place to a specific type of transformation between different media. Secondly, intermedia indicates the structure of the transformation that is effected by a collision of elements taken from different media. Furthermore it is an aesthetic device to be identified in the media arts. To conclude: I suggest to use the term intermedia on three levels, that it is a transformation category, a structural term, and an aesthetic device.