

# On the Volume's Topic — Media Border Phenomena and Their Investigation

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Approaching media border phenomena has diversified considerably in recent decades. The analysis of the cross-border interplay of material, communicative, semiotic, and perceptive components of artifacts is of great interest in current research, and not only in cultural studies. Investigation of media borders helps gain a deeper understanding of the functioning and conditionality of communication processes. Since the 1980s at the latest, an increase of media changes and convergences between different semiotic modes has been observed.

In this context, parallel developments can be observed, but also in different disciplines. Following early reflections on *intermedia* art (Dick Higgins, 1966) and the *theory of intertextuality* (Julia Kristeva), *intermediality* and its investigation have become established as a central paradigm in literary studies and media studies: »Intermediality is understood as the investigation of the relationships between media, in particular the possibilities of aesthetic couplings or ruptures.«<sup>1</sup> According to Irina Rajewsky, intermediality can be distinguished from *intramediality* (phenomena that involve only one medium) and from *transmediality*.<sup>2</sup> Even within literary studies, intermediality is an »umbrella-term«<sup>3</sup> that encompasses very diverse phenomena as well as theoretical and methodological approaches. For example, Rajewsky's differentiation of types of relations was expanded by Jens Schröter to include the distinction between synthetic, formal, transformational and ontological intermediality.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there are specifications with regard to new media constellations and practices or modifications through interdisciplinary appropriations of the original theories.

1 Hagen und Hoffmann 2007, p. 9. Translation by the author. In the original German: »Unter Intermedialität wird die Untersuchung der Beziehungen zwischen Medien, insbesondere von Möglichkeiten ästhetischer Kopplungen bzw. Brüche begriffen.«

2 Cf. Giessen et al. 2019, p. 12–13.

3 Rajewsky 2005, S. 44.

4 Cf. Rippl 2015, p. 13–14.

Something similar can also be observed in the second central line of research under the keyword *multimodality*. Prominently developed in social semiotics and linguistics by Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, the basic assumption is summarized by Hans W. Giessen and colleagues: »[C]ommunication is always realized with different semiotic resources, which in their entirety contribute to meaning. [...] The core questions of multimodal analysis are the relations between the different semiotic resources and their interplay in the construction of meaning [...] and their significance in shaping communicative and social situations.«<sup>5</sup> Here, too, numerous differentiations from the past 20 years can be identified. There are efforts, for example, to establish multimodal media linguistics.

The approaches through intermediality and multimodality share research interests: They expand the classical disciplinary subject area, take into account the complexity and interconnectedness of communication and the media landscape and attempt to make interactions and interrelationships analyzable and describable.

A relatively new proposal by Lars Elleström — not yet widely recognized in the Germanophone research landscape — is to build a bridge between the traditional lines or concepts. His basic theory is summarized in German in this collection. Relevant research with this theoretical model is carried out, for example, at the Linnaeus University Center for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS) and is also the basis of the recently published *Handbook of Intermediality*.<sup>6</sup> Elleström combines the fine-grained differentiation of semiotic resources or modes with considerations of complex (inter-)relational structures. At the same time, he demonstrates the added value of considering non-disciplinary approaches in one's own research.

### 1 Interdisciplinarity as a strength and weakness of the research field

The fact that similar media phenomena are examined with the respective competencies of different disciplines and theories undoubtedly leads to a

5 Giessen et al. 2019, p. 12. Translation by the author. In the original German: »dass Kommunikation stets mit unterschiedlichen semiotischen Ressourcen realisiert wird, die in ihrer Gesamtheit zur Bedeutung beitragen. [...] Kernfragen der multimodalen Analyse sind die Relationen zwischen den unterschiedlichen semiotischen Ressourcen und ihr Zusammenspiel bei der Bedeutungskonstruktion [...] und ihre Bedeutung bei der Gestaltung kommunikativer und sozialer Situationen.«

6 Bruhn et al. 2024.

more comprehensive understanding. The fundamental expansion of subject areas results in increasing overlaps and the associated multi-perspectival exploration. The common practice in the cultural and social sciences of applying approaches from neighboring disciplines to one's own questions and objects also points to the openness of research and has many positive consequences like the new insights that are gained by modifying linguistic approaches for use in the visual sciences.<sup>7</sup> The complexity of cultural, media, and social phenomena can only be countered by bringing together and exchanging ideas, concepts, and skills. To remain in the confinement of a disciplinary lighthouse would seem regressive. A genuine openness, nevertheless, also gives rise to difficulties, such as the confusion of research approaches or terminological vagueness resulting from translation. A transdisciplinary dialogue, therefore, must take place not only at the subject level, but also at the theoretical and methodological level.

The development of this collection began with a panel at the sixth annual conference of Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft e. V. (KWG) *B/ORDER-ING CULTURES: Alltag, Politik, Ästhetik* in Frankfurt (Oder) in 2020. The panel took place under the title »Mediale Grenzüberschreitungen — Modelle von Intermedialität und Multimodalität« (»Media Border Crossings — Models of Intermediality and Multimodality«). The annual meeting of this highly interdisciplinary academic society was a particularly fertile breeding ground for the issues addressed in this volume. Unlike many other academic societies, KWG brings together a wide range of disciplines so that members may discuss various topics relevant to cultural studies. A quick glance at the list of members reveals the broad spectrum: They are from cultural studies, ethnology, media studies, English studies, German studies, art history and visual studies, translation studies, linguistics, musicology, philosophy, sociology, computer science, pedagogy, urban planning, Romance studies, empirical cultural studies, or American studies.

Issues in the area of media boundaries have become increasingly relevant in almost all of these disciplines in recent decades. However, the disciplinary, conceptual, theoretical, and methodological diversity results in individual analyses that sometimes fail to develop the interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary impact that they actually contain. This anthology aims to bridge this gap in research.

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7 Cf. e.g. Diekmannshenke et al. 2011.

Numerous publications and research initiatives in recent years show that there are extensive efforts by the international research community to achieve exchange and mutual understanding. These efforts are often based on either a research paradigm or research tradition (multimodality, intermediality, transcriptivity, or inter art studies, for example)<sup>8</sup> or a subject area or an analytical example (TV commercials, literature, language, or text-image relations, for example).<sup>9</sup> This volume deliberately avoids a specific overall focus in order to bring together a wider range of subjects and approaches. It so enables a synoptic view of heterogeneous approaches and objects and offers the advantage of uniting different perspectives.

When we talk about media border phenomena, it is of crucial relevance which concept of the medium we draw on, and so this is where terminological confusion begins. As an umbrella term, *media* is defined quite differently in each specialist area, as, for example, Marie-Laure Ryan pointed out many years ago:

Ask a sociologist or cultural critic to enumerate media, and he will answer: TV, radio, cinema, the Internet. An art critic may list music, painting, sculpture, literature, drama, the opera, photography, architecture. A philosopher of the phenomenological school would divide media into visual, auditory, verbal, and perhaps gustatory and olfactory (are cuisine and perfume media?). An artist's list would begin with clay, bronze, oil, watercolor, fabrics, and it may end with exotic items used in so-called mixed-media works, such as grasses, feathers, and beer can tabs. An information theorist or historian of writing will think of sound waves, papyrus scrolls, codex books, and silicon chips.<sup>10</sup>

In selecting the contributions, an attempt was made to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives on media border phenomena. This breadth is reflected in the affiliations and associated research traditions of the contributors, ranging from literary and cultural studies, intermedia studies, media studies and media theory, translation studies, linguistics, art history and visual studies to theater practice.

The theoretical contributions by Thomas Metten, Patrick Rupert-Kruse and Lars Elleström take the *border* as a very literal task: Metten (Cultural Studies of Language and Media Theory, Eichstätt-Ingolstadt) emphasizes

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8 Cf. e.g. Deppermann and Linke 2009.

9 Cf. e.g. Stöckl and Schneider 2011.

10 Ryan 2004, p. 15.

liminality as a central characteristic of his understanding of media, while Rupert-Kruse (Media Theory, Immersion Research, Kiel) focuses on the material border of apparatusive media — the interface. Elleström (Intermediality and Multimodality Studies, Comparative Literature, Växjö) attempts to create a general, model-like definition of media borders that is geared towards analytical application. For him, media borders are abstract categories that do not exist clearly in reality, but are of decisive importance for the detailed analysis of intermedial relations.

The methodological proposals of Stefan Meier (Cultural Media Studies, Koblenz) and Marco Agnetta (Translation Studies, Innsbruck) also aim in a similar direction. Both use multimodal formats of communication — such as film posters, comics and operas — to show how the interplay of different semiotic resources can be analyzed for the joint constitution of meaning. Kathrin Engelskircher ((formerly) Romance Translation and Cultural Studies, Mainz) and Lisa Bauer (History and Literature, Mathematical Physics, Data Scientist, Hamburg) build on these methodological proposals by examining the construction of identity through intersemiotic acts of translation and the potential of individual sign types within a multimodal communicative act. The situation is similar with regard to the design of mediatecture when Rostasy and Sievers (designers and creators) focus on the interplay of different media — albeit with a much more technical concept of media.

In the individual studies, the fruitfulness of comparing the border areas that crystallize in the execution of an analysis also becomes evident. Sebastian Richter (Dramaturgy and Directing, Bochum) relates the mediality of the object of investigation to that of the method of investigation while Manuel van der Veen (Art Sciences, Bochum) compares two media processes, and Laura Rosengarten (Art History, Leipzig) compares two concrete works of different media types. Jasmin Pfeiffer (Comparative Literature, Media Studies, Game Developer, Saarbrücken) compares two genres from a synchronic perspective while Ana Peraica (Visual Studies, Media Art History and Culture, Krems) compares two media histories from a diachronic perspective. The mostly fluid border areas that emerge in the research do not only contribute to an expanded understanding of the respective media composites, but also reveal the impediments of uncritically assuming distinct points of observation, as is often the case. Van der Veen shows, for example, that ultra-modern digital media processes can certainly be related to historical analog ones. By examining media categorized as games with regard to their literary aspects, Pfeiffer not only exposes the

blurring of the categorical boundary between games and literature, but also how disciplinary genre boundaries may act as impediments to research. Like Elleström, she uses the limitations of genres as analytical categories to better understand the mechanisms of specific media products as well as the genre itself.

The contributions in this volume illustrate the diversity and complexity of media border phenomena. They show how interdisciplinary approaches can contribute to a deeper understanding of media interactions and their cultural meanings. By bringing together these different perspectives, the volume creates the basis for further discussion and research and emphasizes the potential of interdisciplinary research.

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