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The Politics of Intermediality

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Abstract. The whole discussion, whether historical or contemporary, on intermediality versus 'pure media' (a notion which seems to be implied by 'intermediality', otherwise one would not know between what entities the 'inter' takes place) is structurally – and not only in a historical-empirical sense – a political discussion. A prominent reference to this is to be found, for example, in the recent work of Rosalind Krauss. At the end of her small volume entitled *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, she refers to the "international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital," a complicity at which Krauss levels sharp criticism. She denounces intermediality as capitulation to the capitalist spectacle (Debord). On the other end of the Spectrum, in the mid-1960s, Dick Higgins condemned the pure media as signs of capitalist division of labour and praises intermediality as the dawn of communist society. In the essay these two opposites are described in detail and thus a new field of research is outlined: the politics of intermediality.

Intermediality and Capitalism

This subtitle may jar on the reader. What does the phenomenon of the combination of media – intermediality (in its most general sense[1]) – have to do with the politico-economic make-up of society? There are indications that questions concerning

a. 'monomedia' and their 'specifics' – and, that is to say, always concerning the processes of their 'purification' with a view to extracting them from a primordial intermediality (precisely that is the central problem of an important strand in the history of modern art)

[1] A number of proposals for differentiating the often somewhat diffuse concept of intermediality exist (see, for example, Schröter 1998, Rajewsky 2002 and the various proposals in Paech and Schröter 2008).

b. the forms and strategies of combining (previously purified?) monomedia into a (secondary?) 'intermediality', and consequently

c. the relationships between a. and b.

are by no means purely theoretical or aesthetic questions. Rather, they have already been laden with massive political connotations for some time. A prominent reference to this is to be found, for example, in the recent work of Rosalind Krauss. At the end of her small volume entitled *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, she refers to the "international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital" (Krauss 1999a, 56), a complicitness at which Krauss levels sharp criticism. I would like to pursue this reference below.

Point 1) presents the contexts in which Krauss made this statement. What exactly is Krauss criticizing and what alternatives does she propose? 2) Second, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that the question of the extent to which 'monomedia' or 'intermediality' have political implications is not entirely new. In some respects, the 19th century already gave rise to such discussion – which is continuing in the 20th century, but must be distinguished from the line discussed in 1). 3) What does this mean for theoretical and historical discussions of "intermediality"? Would it not be an apposite moment – now[2] that a deep crisis in capitalist reproduction is again shaking the world to its core – for us to probe the political implications of our own discourse about intermediality? Of course, this is not in keeping with the comfortable aestheticism in which some have ensconced themselves. However, if the question of intermediality is to remain a relevant question in media studies, it must also include the question of the politics of the medial. The question of intermediality is too established for it not to be possible to ask about its politics. *Today, there is a need for this question to be asked.* The present contribution can only be a first step in this process.

Intermediality as Capitulation to the Spectacle

The cited passage by Rosalind Krauss comes, as already mentioned, from a small book, whose subtitle is *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. What is the 'post-medium condition'? Lev Manovich, who has a quite different theoretical orientation, offers a means of ingress into this problem, which is not always easy to understand in Krauss' writings: "In the last third of the twentieth century, various cultural and technological developments have together rendered

[2] At the end of 2008/beginning of 2009.

meaningless one of the key concepts of modern art – that of a medium. However, no new typology of art practice came to replace media-based typology which divides art into painting, works on paper, sculpture, film, video, and so on. The assumption that artistic practice can be neatly organized into a small set of distinct mediums has continued to structure the organization of museums, art schools, funding agencies and other cultural institutions – even though this assumption no longer reflected the actual functioning of culture" (Manovich 2001).

The dilution of the concept of medium, which Manovich articulates here, may be initially surprising in view of the well-nigh inflationary expansion, at least in Germany, of media studies. At a later juncture, he remarks that, although the concept of medium has become obsolete to some extent, it continues to be used from "sheer inertia". This, he contends, is because it is difficult to replace it with new conceptual systems: "So rather than getting rid of media typology altogether, we keep adding more and more categories" (Manovich 2001). The very spread and extension of the concept of medium to ever more objects, phenomena, ensembles, and the accompanying uncertainty of how properly to define 'medium' can be interpreted as part of the problem, which, as Manovich makes very clear, is particularly acute for art. Manovich then cites various historical reasons for the dilution of the concept of medium. Alongside the spread of video, digital, programmable and hence relatively non-'specific' technologies, he particularly points to the spread of new art forms in the 1960s, including installation, which had broken with the notion of a media-specific justification of art.

In fact, this development is also central to Krauss, who herself comes from a tradition which regarded a clearly circumscribed 'medium' as being fundamental to artistic practice. She was a student of Clement Greenberg, who can probably be said without exaggeration to be the most important art critic in New York in the 1950s and 1960s. It was he that made the concept of medium prominent in art criticism. "From the '60s on, to utter the word 'medium' meant invoking 'Greenberg'" (Krauss 1999a, 6). The central role that the concept of medium plays in Greenberg's work consists in 'art' being defined as the process of reflection on, and hence purification of, the medium used in each case. Modernist *painting*, which is also the title of a well-known essay by the art critic, is thus painting which focuses *reflexively* on the specifics of the painting medium – color, surface, framing – and thus *renders* painting *pure* of all intermedial contaminations (be they sculptural or literary in nature): "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. [...] It

quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered 'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence" (Greenberg 1993, 85–86).[3]

We do not intend to discuss Greenberg's concept, its merits and demerits at any greater length here.[4] Suffice it to stress that from the 1960s onwards, as Manovich rightly emphasizes, the hegemony of his concept began to fade and art forms like 'abstract expressionism' that had previously dominated and been favoured and supported by him began to lose some of their importance.[5] Intermedia and installation art forms,[6] which rejected the idea of media reflection, at least in Greenberg's strict and narrow sense, began to establish themselves. It is hardly surprising that Greenberg should be unable to see any attraction in these intermedial strategies. In1981, he wrote:

"What's ominous is that the decline of taste now, for the first time, threatens to overtake art *itself*. I see 'intermedia' and the permissiveness that goes with it as symptom of this. [...] Good art can come from anywhere, but it hasn't yet come from intermedia or anything like it" (Greenberg 1981, 93).

Although Rosalind Krauss (and also Michael Fried) criticized Greenberg in many points (particularly regarding the question of the 'medium'[7]), they remained loyal to his basic intention "according to which esthetic autonomy can only exist if art defines its own area of competence, which can only succeed with reference to the representational modes on which the individual arts are based" (Rebentisch 2003, 87).[8]

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[3] Greenberg's reference to 'purification' presupposes that there is a primordial intermediality.

[4] A good introduction is provided by Lüdeking 1997.

[5] One of the reasons why Greenberg's approach faded was that he equated reflection on the medium with its purification in the sense of reduction to the essential. Soon, this purification was threatening to become a *reductio ad absurdum*, which compelled Greenberg himself to abandon his approach and cast doubt upon its plausibility (cf. Lüdeking 1997, 18-20 and de Duve 1998, 199-279).

[6] Installation art does not, of course, have to be intermedial (and vice versa) – the two concepts refer to clearly different aspects but, historically, the one has usually been accompanied by the other. For a basic introduction, see Bishop 2005.

[7] Whereas Greenberg based the concept of medium very closely on concrete materiality and methods for processing such materiality (this proximity to the 'production' of art can, according to Lüdeking [1997, 10–11], be interpreted as a trace of his earlier Marxist or, more precisely, Trotskyist convictions), Fried and Krauss also include the sedimented history of conventions established in a medium.

[8] It should also be mentioned at this point that Fried was extremely critical of intermediality in his equally famous and harsh, but also perceptive 1967 critique of proto-installation Minimal Art: "*The concepts of quality and value* – and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself – are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within *the individual arts*. *What lies* between *the arts is theater*" (Fried 1998, 164); emphasis as in the original). For a historical account of the devaluation of 'intermedial' theatre, see also Barish 1981. Theatre and spectacle stand in close proximity to one another.

For it is only through the authority achievable by restriction to its own subject matter that art can succeed in escaping arbitrariness and hence the cheap showmanship aimed at outward attractions. If art were merely to consist in the production of *arbitrary* sensory stimuli, its difference from the attention-grabbing production of the mass media culture industry, which imposes needs on subjects by surprise attacks on all their sensory channels, would be blurred. Intermedial *mises-en-scène* would then no longer be distinguishable from other staged products and events.[9] Thus the "phenomenon of intermediality" appears "[...] as an expression of a break with the Modern Project in favour of, to use the language of contemporary art criticism, an affirmation of the situation as it is under the conditions of spectacle culture" (Rebentisch 2003, 83–84). 'Spectacle culture' contains an allusion to Guy Debord's diagnosis that western societies, at least, are now 'societies of the spectacle'. According to this diagnosis, "mass media" as "its most glaring superficial manifestation" of this culture have monopolized everything: "The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point that it becomes images" (Debord 2006, 13–17). Although Debord generally refers to images, the above-mentioned 'mass media' are usually audio-visual, which means that his 'spectacle' can arguably be interpreted as intermedial.[10] Debord explicitly links his diagnosis to the concept of capital (reminiscent of the statement by Krauss that was cited at the beginning of this essay). While critically revisiting the tendency of (intermedia, installation) artistic avant-gardes to sacrifice 'craftsmanship', Rosalind Krauss writes: "By rejecting craftsmanship [...], you get caught in a dangerous rivalry with those very powers of thought control, manipulation and suppression against which you have taken a stand" (Krauss 1995, 66).[11]

[9] Cf. Lutticken (2004, 13): "Installation art certainly shares a practice of impure 'remediation' with today's media culture, which we have described as the apotheosis of the commercial Gesamtkunstwerk; various objects and media can be combined at will in installation art, and the result often resembles a showroom." In point of fact, there are artists like Guillaume Bijl, whose installation work can scarcely be distinguished from a normal business. Of course, such installations have a critical intention, for example, to question museum space and its functions. Such installations can, however, also be interpreted as a dissolution of the border between art and commercial culture. For an overview, see Hollein et al. 2002.

[10] Cf. Debord (2006, 32), where he refers to the "language of the spectacle." For a critical approach to Debord, see Rebentisch (2007, 120–122).

[11] Rosalind Krauss and others have, in this context, also levelled severe criticism at the replacement of classical disciplines by 'Cultural' and 'Visual Studies' (cf. Foster 1996). This also contains at least implicit criticism of intermediality. Thus, "medium-specificity in modernist art" was now invalid: "Due to artistic transgressions, theoretical critiques, political demands, and technological pressures, these old institutional arrangements are broken, and visual culture is thrown into the breach." And "may be governed by a digital logic that melts down other logics of word and image" (100, 114). Greenberg's criticism of "'intermedia', 'multimedia' and the rest" (Greenberg 1981, 92) can still be heard here.

To repeat, this position views intermediality as a capitulation of art to capitalist spectacle culture. Its 'autonomy,' if this refers to the area of special competencies circumscribed by medial reflexivity and purity, i.e. 'self-definition,' is lost. For what could otherwise be the point of combining media apart from achieving an effect that is different from their respective specifics – always assuming that one accepts this difficult concept –, i.e. a *general* effect? And this abstract effect in capitalist societies can only aim at increasing what is most abstract – money. From this vantage point, the "deadening embrace of the general" (Krauss 1999b, 305) would mean that media are now combined to produce an effect that is, in principle, different from each of them in isolation without allowing their heterogeneous, concrete sensual specifics, or laws, to appear. In this respect, intermedial *mises-en-scène* – just as the idea of the 'total work of art' (see below) – would seek to cancel out the differentiations of the various arts regressively and in heteronomous subordination to money.[12] De Duve insists on a very similar point: "All the styles, manners, forms, and media are exchangeable and interchangeable. They all compete without contradicting each other, much less as ideologies than as commodities. Painting, which sells best these days if it is figurative, has never been so abstract; it has the abstract quality of money" (de Duve 1998, 359).

However, it would not be a solution for the critics of intermediality cited in this section simply to return – in a *retour à l'ordre* – to the conventional media of tradition. Rather, art would have to respond to the spectacle with a "spectacle of decomposition" (Clark 1985, 83), as Clark put it in a somewhat different context. Or as Krauss writes: "Rather, it concerns the idea of a medium as such, a medium as a set of conventions derived from (but not identical with) the material conditions of a given technical support, conventions out of which to develop a form of expressiveness that can be both projective and mnemonic" (Krauss 1999b, 296). Krauss makes a plea for artists, rather than combining arbitrary media indiscriminately or becoming regressively traditional, to create their own medium, i.e. a field of possibilities which they then systematically illuminate. It is particularly relevant here that the artists that she deems to be exemplary in this respect, e.g. James Coleman or William Kentridge, should avail themselves of technical resources that, first, already have a long phase of being used by the spectacle industry behind them and, second, are now technologically

[12] This would be the criticism that Adorno, for example, has aimed at the 'total work of art,' although he was not, in principle, hostile to the 'fraying of the boundaries' of the arts in the 1960s (cf. Rebentisch 2003, 101-145). She refers critically to Eichel 1993. On the problem of differentiation of the arts, see also Nancy 1996.

obsolete. Since the technical resources already have their career as commercial technologies behind them – and are thus not in danger of being used ever again by the capitalist culture industry to obtain spectacular effects –, they can now become the starting point for an alternative, projective and mnemonic,[13] *mise-en-scène* that situates itself outside and in opposition to the spectacle: "For if Coleman turns toward the by-now outmoded low-tech support of the promotional slide tape or the degraded mass cult vehicle of the photonovel, [he does so] to mine his support for its own conventions [...]. It tells of an imaginative capacity stored within this technical support and made suddenly retrievable at the moment when the armoring of technology breaks down under the force of its own obsolescence" (Krauss 1999b, 301–302, 304).

Krauss' proposal is sometimes abstruse and perhaps problematic.[14] All that needs to be noted here is that 'intermediality' or, to be more precise, forms of synthetic and transmedial intermediality (cf. Schröter 1998), are interpreted as the symptom of a capitulation of aesthetic strategies to the *mise-en-scène* strategies of the capitalist spectacle.

Intermediality as Salvation from the Capitalist Division of Labour

The intention of this section is to outline another area of discussion, which also relates intermediality to capitalist modernity, but places different emphases and arrives at different evaluations.

The texts (cf. Kultermann 1970, Yalkut 1973, Frank 1987, Higgins 1984) that belong here also associate intermediality with artistic trends in the 1960s, i.e. those developments (or parts thereof) which, for Greenberg and Krauss, threatened to become the very symbol of capitulation to the spectacle. The evaluation, however, is completely different. The notion, frequently formulated at that time, of being able to *abolish* the schism between 'art' and 'life' by means of intermedial art forms is valued positively. To some extent, this trend is in the tradition of Wagner and his Zürich Writings, and hence in the genealogical line of the *total work of art*. This line must not, however, be simply equated with the line of intermedial installation outlined above, as the emphases of the discourse are quite different (cf. Rebentisch 2003, 104). At least two factors are characteristic of this discourse:

[13] An instructive analysis of how to specify Krauss' definition of a projective and mnemonic self-distancing from, and critical examination of, the spectacle is provided, for example, by Buchloh 2000, using an artist that Krauss herself cites as an example: James Coleman.

[14] For a critique, see Rebentisch (2003, 89–99) and Lutticken 2004.

a) The condemnation of "monomedia" as a form of social and aesthetic alienation.

b) Linked to this, a revolutionary-utopian gesture, which sees overcoming 'monomedia' as (at least the preliminary stage of) social liberation from the capitalist division of labour.[15]

Higgins demands of avant-garde art that it should impart "holistic mental experiences" (Higgins 1984, 1). He understands this process as a form of cathartic peak experience, through which the conventionalized perception and behaviour patterns of so-called 'everyday life' are changed and enriched. He sees the potential of such 'fusions' particularly in the 'new arts', by which he means primarily fluxus: "[A]nother characteristic of many of them is that they are intermedial, that is, they fall conceptually between *established or traditional media*" (Higgins 1984, 15; emphasis J.S.). As this process of fusion is new, it is experienced as a zestful, refreshing and renewing shift in our own horizons – until 'automation' (in the sense of Sklovskij) takes hold again and the new intermedia, "with familiarity", lose their "defamiliarizing" effect: "[B]ut we should look to intermedial works for the new possibilities of fusion, which they afford" (Higgins 1984, 17). Or as McLuhan put it in 1964: "The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses" (McLuhan 1965, 55). For Higgins, intermediality means the very breaking of habitualized (and hence also commercially utilizable) forms of perception, and not their duplication, as Krauss sees it. This conviction links him to authors like Kultermann and Frank.

He attempts to provide a historical justification of his position: "The concept of the separation between media arose in the Renaissance" (Higgins 1984, 18). He describes the Renaissance as a social phase, in which the division of society into different classes favoured the purification of media. Frank defines this point more precisely by arguing that the founding of art academies in 17th century France marks "that development of the separation of the arts" (Frank 1987, 6). Accordingly, the intermedial trend that begins in the 20th century is more a "re-unification" than a completely new process. Both Frank and Higgins attribute this development to similar social shifts. Whereas, according to Frank, "the age of specialization" is losing its influence and "simultaneity" (Frank 1987, 4)[16] is

[15] I shall ignore here the issue, which I have discussed elsewhere, of how to delimit 'intermedia' from 'mixed media.'

[16] McLuhan's media history-based model, popular in the 1960s, contains a tendency that is in keeping with the political understanding of intermediality outlined in 2). His media history is also, above all, a history of decline – the written word splits and fragments the world, similarly to the schisms and fragmentations of the divisions of labour – until, finally, the new world of electricity results in a new holism (cf. Winkler 1997).

shaping our century, Higgins remarks: "We are approaching the dawn of a classless society, to which separation into rigid categories is absolutely irrelevant" (Higgins 1984, 18). Overcoming the division of labour, specialization in rigid categories, in a classless society is one of the ideas of traditional[17] Marxism, which was relatively strong in the 1960s and which saw the division of labour as an 'alienation' to be abolished.[18] In this light, intermedia anticipate the overcoming of the division of labour in the realms of the artistic, appearing as a utopia that has become concrete.[19] In the same way as in certain readings of Marxian historical teleology, according to which the communist society ("classless society") is the return of primeval society at a higher level, the lost original unity of the media re-emerges with that society.

In this respect, this discourse takes up that of the 'total work of art.' One of Wagner's programmatic aesthetic writings is entitled *Art and the Revolution*, in which he refers to the 'great revolution of humanity', whose intention is to bring about a new state of society that links up with Greek antiquity and its 'great work of total art that is tragedy' (cf. Wagner 1975, Borchmeyer 1982). Borchmeyer states the following in respect of Wagner: "The disunification and independence of the arts stand in the same relation to modern social 'egoism' as their unity does to that 'communism' which is seen as the social ideal embodied in the Greek *polis* and required for the artwork of the future" (Borchmeyer 1982, 69).[20] Wagner himself writes of the dissolution of the "Athenian state:" "Just as the spirit of the community was fragmented in a thousand egotistical directions, so that great work of total art that is tragedy disintegrated into the individual components that it contained. [...] The drama separated into its component parts: Rhetoric, sculpture, painting, music etc. forsook the ranks in which they had moved in unison before; each one to take its own way, and in lonely self-sufficiency pursue its own egotistical development" (Wagner 1975, 14/34).

The metaphor of *fusion* that is evoked again and again by Higgins takes on, in this view, yet another component: It also connotes the re-unification of the individual, alienated through specialization and wage labour from himself and his work, with his (hitherto) stunted possibilities. The "wonderfully natural [...]

[17] 'Traditional' as opposed to the currently much-discussed tendencies relating to 'post-operaism' and 'critique of value-split-off' (see below).

[18] From the extensive literature, see, for example, Tomberg 1969.

[19] For a critical approach to such claims, see de Duve 2006.

[20] Although Wagner undoubtedly knew Marx, the conceptual proximity should not tempt us to see Wagner as a Marxist. His communism was based more on the model of the Greek *polis* and his anti-capitalism (cf. Wagner 1975, 33: "[O]ur God, however, is money, our religion its acquisition") often contains anti-Semitic traits: Wagner does not focus on the systemic problems of capitalist socialization, but hallucinates the 'Jews' as the originators of this. On the politics of the total work of art, see Bermbach 1984.

interlocking of human individual and environment" (Yalkut 1973, 94) can thus be defined as the *telos* of intermedia artists (artist groups). Consequently, this enables Higgins to accuse the 'pure' media, particularly painting, of being 'objects intended to ornament the walls of the rich' (Higgins 1984, 18). After deriding the commercialization and marketing of art in galleries, he concludes: "It is absolutely natural to (and inevitable in) the concept of the pure medium, the painting or precious object of any kind. That is the way such objects are marketed since that is the world to which they relate" (Higgins 1984, 19). This demonstrates that Higgins sees the concept of the 'pure medium' as being directly linked to the world that includes art in its circulation of commodities – the world of capitalism based on the division of labour. Scarcely any greater contrast to the position outlined in 1) is conceivable. Here in 2), the processes of 'purification' that are usually required to generate an example of a 'pure medium' (cf. Schröter 2008, 595) do not result precisely in a field that is demarcated from that of capital; on the very contrary, this process is mimicry of the capitalist division of labour.

The erasure of the difference between 'art' and 'life' that is set against this is virtually a cliché with regard to the artistic trends of happening and fluxus, to which Higgins' own artistic work belongs. In this context, Higgins undertakes an intensive critique of the proscenium theatre (Higgins 1984, 20/21), which for him is the symptomatic representation of a disappearing social order, just as Kultermann regards the separations between work and public as "a [...] ritual that is part of bourgeois society" (Kultermann 1970, 101). Wagner had already used the amphitheatre, which enabled a fusion of artists and recipients, to counter the polarization of public and stage: "In the classical orchestra, almost wholly encircled by the amphitheatre, the tragic chorus stood, as it were, at the very heart of the audience" (Wagner, cited in Borchmeyer 1982, 64). An intermedial *mise-en-scène* in this sense would therefore need to dissolve the boundaries between artist and public, art and life.

Accordingly, it is only consistent if Higgins considers even Duchamp's *ready-mades* intermedial:[21] "The ready-made or found object, in a sense an intermedium since it was not intended to conform to the pure medium, usually suggests this, and therefore suggests a location in the field between the *general area of art media and those of life media*" (Higgins 1984, 20; emphasis J.S.) The ready-made or Oldenburg's sculptures therefore appear to be intermedial, because an object from everyday life, a *life medium*, is carried across to the 'general area' of art, with art

[21] With regard to Duchamp, Frank (1987, 13) remarks: "Duchamp's aesthetic of 'infra-mince' emphasized the gap between art and life in order simultaneously to demonstrate and substantiate their proximity".

and life, high and low – which needed to be separated from one another at all cost in the works of Greenberg and Krauss (see below) – being, as it were, dovetailed with one another. The concept of *life media* requires explanation. Since Higgins, in this essay that was published in 1965, evidently views shoes as a medium in the context of work by Claes Oldenburg, this passage suggests conceptual proximity to the above-mentioned book by Marshall McLuhan, entitled *Understanding Media*, which was published in 1964 and quickly became famous. It is doubtless no coincidence that Jud Yalkut (also a fluxus artist of the 1960s) should call his manifesto *Understanding Intermedia* (cf. Yalkut 1973). McLuhan regards all media as extensions of man, which is why clothing – the 'extended skin' – can also be interpreted as a medium (see McLuhan 1965, 119–122). That is to say, through the defamiliarizing access of 'art media' to 'life media', the latter are idealized into aesthetic forms which generally call into question the boundary between 'art media' and 'life media'. This provides yet further clarification of the difference from the critique outlined in 1). Intermediality here refers to a very wide media concept, which can potentially include any object and is therefore in the tradition of Duchamp – a tradition that Clement Greenberg had to reject in order to narrow his media concept down (largely) to the art media that are traditionally called 'genres' (cf. Greenberg 1971, 18).[22] The fact is that intermediality in the position outlined in 2) is an anticipatory illumination of the overcoming of those divisions into which capitalist socialization forces individuals.

Politics of Intermediality

This essay attempts to demonstrate that the concept of 'intermediality' always has political dimensions (and hence normative implications). There are at least two variants of the concept:

1. Intermediality is 'bad': Intermedial *mises-en-scène* in art can no longer be 'specifically' demarcated by medial self-reflection if, *qua* intermediality, they are no longer able to designate a medium whose reflection should distinguish it from the *mises-en-scène* of the capitalist spectacle devoid of reflection, which merely aims at unspecific effects in the service of reproduction of abstract money. The only recourse here is Krauss' appeal to artists 'to invent a medium', a process in which commercially degraded procedures should, after their technological obsolescence, become new sources of projective and mnemonic form creations.

[22] On Duchamp's deconstruction of the traditional art media using the example of a paint tube, see also de Duve (1998, 147-196). On 'medium' and 'genre' in the works of Krauss, following on from Greenberg, cf. Rebentisch (2003, 89).

2. Intermediality is 'good', providing the focus is on (re-)unifying (purified) 'monomedia', each defined, *qua* capitalist division of labour, as specific fields. Monomedia reproduce in their 'specifics' the very division of labour that needs to be overcome in post-capitalist societies. The intermedial – and performative – *mise-en-scène* provides an exemplary anticipation of a social order in which the division of labour has been abolished. The only recourse here is the appeal to artists to overcome the division between life and art, thereby enabling this exemplary abolition of the division of labour to be transferred to society (in whatever way).

Of course, these observations give rise to an initial question: How do these different evaluations come about? First, reference can be made to the fact that there have always been two trends in the history of modernity, which Lütticken has called 'Laocoonism' and 'total work of art' (cg. Lutticken 2004, 12).[23] The former makes a plea for using 'specifics' in art (based on Lessing's *Laocoön*), the latter for combining the arts. That is correct, but does not really answer the question, as the plea for specifics vs. total work of art necessarily involves issues of the structure of society and, on closer inspection, the question of its capitalist makeup. In fact, it appears to be the case that the question of whether specifics or intermedia are to be preferred depends on what it is about capitalist socialization that is primarily considered problematic.

The position outlined in 1) here distances itself particularly from what Rosalind Krauss calls 'thought control' or, occasionally, the 'spectacle.' Criticism is directed mainly at what would have been called 'ideological superstructure' (in a more traditional understanding). The roots of this again lie clearly with Clement Greenberg, who, in his influential essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" from 1939, had designated 'kitsch' as a negative contrasting foil. 'Kitsch' has already been labelled definitively as intermedial in this early text: it is linked to "chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc." (Greenberg 1986a, 11). According to Greenberg, the function of kitsch is to offer the "urban masses [...] a kind of culture fit for their own consumption", to give them the possibility of "diversion" (Greenberg 1986a, 12).[24] Intermedial 'kitsch' therefore has an ideological tranquilizing and controlling function – in fact, 'thought control', as Krauss will subsequently express it.[25] By contrast, the artist turns his attention

[23] It seems to me that these two tendencies are not the same as the 'specific' and 'generic', which de Duve (1998, Part II) distinguishes in modernity, even though Krauss appears to narrow the scope of these 2x2 tendencies. As far as I can see, the task of relating these two differentiations systematically and historically to one another is yet to be undertaken.

[24] The echoes of Benjamin here would need to be discussed separately.

[25] Greenberg thereby evidently focuses on a finding that Adorno and Horkheimer similarly highlighted almost simultaneously in their famous description of the culture industry (see Schwering 2006).

away "from subject matter of common experience", turning it in upon the "medium of his own craft" (Greenberg 1986a, 9). And at a time when the self-designation of revolutionary worker parties as 'avant-garde' was not yet as suspicious as it is today, Greenberg ends by invoking Marx: "Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture – as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now" (Greenberg 1986a, 22; cf. Clark 2004).

The fact that Greenberg in 1939 is hoping for the advent of socialism makes his Trotskyist orientation (at that point) clear, especially since the (in those days) highly Stalinist USSR was being interpreted by Trotskyists not as socialist, but rather as 'bureaucratically degenerate' – furthermore, Trotsky was more open to the artistic avant-gardes than the small-minded Stalinists (cf. Mandel 1992). The task of the artistic avant-garde is, analogously to the political avant-garde in this sense, to withstand the ideological – and intermedial – manipulations of 'kitsch' and its 'thought control' in order to save culture and to build a new one on top of it (cf. de Duve 2006). Both avant-gardes thus provide an anticipatory illumination of a socialist society, in which people can consciously structure their social relationships (even if this emphasis is at best only implicit in the current position of Rosalind Krauss).

The position outlined here in 2) takes up another finding – it is ultimately derived from Wagner, who, in the 19th century, problematizes the "industry" (Wagner 1975, 21) and the accompanying division of labour. This position also connects up with the critique of 'alienation' that is to be found, in particular, in the early Marx.[26] Even with regard to Marx, this concept has a long and complicated history, on which this essay cannot and does not intend to report (cf. Mészáros 1973). The 'intermedia' discussion of the 1960s evidently interprets the concept in such a way that the 'specialization' into individual arts is a process comparable to the critique of the fact that people deem their work processes and the resulting products to be alien. The reception of this concept varied from very simple forms – 'factory workers only ever focus on individual steps in the production process' – through to elaborate constructs, which are similar to Marx's critique of fetishism and which focus on the more general phenomenon that people in capitalist societies perceive social cohesion as something alien and external. Even Adorno described the Wagnerian 'total work of art' as an attempt to overcome the "principle of the division of labour, which not only separates men from each other but also divides each man with

[26] Examples would be the 'Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844' by Marx and Engels (1990, 510ff.).

himself" – but criticized it for this very reason, since it was a romantic-illusionary attempt to revert to pre-modern structures and thus persisted in a "form of spurious identity." This can only give rise to an "external principle of simple aggregation of disparate procedures" (Adorno 1971, 99).

Both positions problematize different aspects of capitalist modernity, deriving different stances on intermediality from them. The final question ought therefore to focus on what it is about capitalist socialization today – at the beginning of 2009, we are beset by a deep financial and economic crisis such that the problem of capitalist socialization remains virulent, if not acute – that is regarded as particularly 'problematic',[27] and the stance on intermediality that follows from it.

Do we have an advanced perspective today that enables us to understand what 'capitalism' is – a concept which, while it is still in continual use, has appeared oddly vacuous since 1989/1990? Yes, there are a whole host of different approaches attempting to take up the Marxian analyses and enlist them in the cause of providing an understanding of capitalism in the 21st century. These include, in particular, post-operaism, which has attained a good deal of fame through the book entitled *Empire* (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000; Birkner and Foltin 2006), and a field with many internal differentiations, which can best be defined by means of the overarching term 'value critique' (or, in some forms also, 'critique of value split-off').[28] This is not the place to provide a systematic and historical development of the two approaches or even their internal differentiations. However, it would be a rewarding task to analyze these two fields in respect of the understanding or critique of intermediality that could be derived from them.

But apart from the general perspective there are some more concrete questions concerning the 'politics of intermediality'. Three should be mentioned here.

1. In continuation of the readings in this paper, one could undertake a broad reconstruction of the *history* of theoretical approaches to intermediality (and 'paragone,' etc.) to analyze and sketch out their political implications in the context of their specific historical backgrounds. To mention an interesting example: Why did Greenberg (1986b), Eisenstein (1946) and Arnheim (1957) write independently from each other, essays which discuss, with reference to Lessing's *Laocoön*, problems of the separation between 'the arts' almost at the same time (1940, 1937, 1939)?

[27] Of course, it is always possible to side with adaptation and affirmation and say that nothing is problematic. However, apart from the fact that such a position can evidently no longer be squared with realities, it would suppress the simple observation that the discourse of intermediality has historically involved such problematizations all too often.

[28] For a lucid introduction to a particular variant of value critique, see Jappe 2005. For a somewhat differently oriented perspective, see Heinrich 2005.

2. The general question of a 'politics of intermediality' can be differentiated *socially*. The question is how do different social groups, classes, strata or institutions, even when located in the same culture, practically operate with intermedial processes in different ways? Is it possible to observe power struggles connected to those intermedial processes? How is power practically inscribed, let's say, in the design of intermedial surfaces like those of the *IPhone*? This last question could be tackled through ethnographical studies of interface design practices at Apple, asking how the designers conceive of 'intermediality' and its implications. Additionally one could observe, also ethnographically, how users interact with the intermedial structures, how they follow the implied routes or how they resist.

3. Last but not least, there is the possibility of an *intercultural* approach to compare how different cultures understand the differences between media and their interaction in a given historical phase. It seems obvious for example, that Japanese culture understands the difference of image and text quite differently from 'European' culture – if one considers how poems and other writings were inscribed on the surfaces of traditional paintings.

The initial intention of the present contribution was merely to demonstrate that the question on the politics of intermediality has historicity – and is still possible and *necessary* today.

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