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Citation for published version (APA):
Dapp, G. S. (2013). Intermediality and politics in theatre and performance

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Summary

INTERMEDIALITY AND POLITICS IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE  
by Götz Dapp

This dissertation applies the concepts of intermediality and politics to five performances (Rimini Protokoll's *Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Band 1*; *Mnemopark*; and *Cargo Sofia X*; Christoph Schlingensief's *Bitte liebt Österreich: erste europäische Koalitionswoche*; and Igneous' *liquid skin*) and analyzes the implications on a significational as well as on a theoretical level. Both concepts are highly complex and bring together various disciplines and discourses; they also interact on a theoretical level and produce a signification that lies somewhere in between and in the whole. This signification, in turn, points to a process, an encounter between its constituents that contains and transcends each individual element, along with the writer, and the reader. My dissertation poses the question of what the terms mean individually, what meaning derives from their interplay, and how the context of theatre or performance affects the meaning of each individual term. I also propose to use the term 'politicity' in order to maintain a clear terminological distinction between politics and the political (in the post-foundational tradition) and avoid conceptual ambiguities. Any analysis presupposes certain concepts in approaching its object of analysis, but also faces the problem that its findings affect the underlying concepts, which is why the introduction serves as an artificial starting point providing an outline of the theoretical reflections.

As a first step, the introduction describes the constituting elements of the concept of intermediality. The implied involvement of a multiplicity of media leads to a reflection on what various scholars conceive under the term 'media,' as well as on the specific mediality involved. The prefix 'inter,' in turn, indicates a specific relationship between the media involved which the introduction seeks to define in such a way as to make it possible to distinguish it from other medial relationships. Another important aspect arises from the context of theatre and performance, which, as most scholars agree, use media but also raise questions about what the use of media in general and their intermedial relation in particular mean for the status of theatre itself. To this end, I use the reflections of Marshall McLuhan together with other approaches as tools to study the medial relationships at work in a theatrical / performative environment. McLuhan emphasizes the importance of media in social relations and, by placing the human being at the centre of medial
relationships, combines functional and consequential analysis into an anthropocentric approach. This medial relation is of utmost importance in the context of theatre and politics, particularly when speaking of a multidirectional and 'multistable' process of 'politicity' which emerges in between the other constituents and depends to a great degree on perception. This focus on perception, which is supported by phenomenological reflections based on Sybille Krämer's definition of media and Kati Röttger's concept of theatre as an intermedial realm, also marks a difference from other approaches which emphasize specific medial relations as constituting intermediality. Intermediality is not a technique, a tool to produce a concrete 'object,' but a negotiation between the constituents of the process of its very emergence, and the uncertainty of signification and medial boundaries. I propose that at the core of this uncertainty is the recognition of an inherent contingency which links intermediality to the concept of 'politics' in the post-foundational tradition which posits a contingency at the core of politics.

I suggest that the perceiver plays a role equal to the 'performer' in the politicity of an intermedial realm whose function and meaning is conditional and relational. As a consequence, this dissertation inquires not only about the nature of 'politics,' but also about the relationship of these works to 'politics' that makes them 'political.' Of particular importance are Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière, whose approaches are shown to complement rather than contradict each other. While neither Arendt, nor Rancière, nor Marchart explicitly consider the involvement and implications of medial relations, I am expanding the post-foundational approach by linking the contingency at its core to intermedial mechanisms. In dissolving boundaries into a threshold thus located in between a plurality of independent-yet-connected orders, perception becomes a conscious activity addressing its own conditions in much the same way as Krämer considers intermediality to be the epistemic condition of mediality.

These reflections are applied to five performances in three chapters (structured by company), each of which introduces its own insights and yet forms part of an organic whole which grows and evolves throughout. At the same time, the unique approach of each company makes it possible to read each chapter independently, which is why I have included a section on the general methodology of the directors / companies involved (omitted in the third chapter as the project was an international co-operation). The first chapter, “Rimini Protokoll – A Communitarian Approach to the Politics of Intermediality,” analyzes three performances which appear to follow a tradition of 'political theatre' that includes aspects of collective creation, German documentary theatre of the 1960s, and Brecht's epic theatre, but comprise an assemblage of individual perspectives that could
be called 'postdramatic.' The performances appeal to and engage the individual spectator's unique perspective to produce signification in interaction with the mediality underlying the theatrical performance. If one approaches the performances as an intermedial 'realm,' principles of separation emerge which structurally pervade the production on various levels, separating performers, audience, and media. These separations interact with the intermedial process and produce thresholds of signification that become the locus and origin of a politicity of the performances. Despite the complexity of the underlying medial processes, Rimini Protokoll remains on a clearly theatrical level, using a metaphorical mode of signification to reflect on socio-political functions of 'reality' by staging and undermining theatrical illusionism.

The second chapter, “Christoph Schlingensief's 'Bitte liebt Österreich – erste europäische Koalitionswoche' - Antagonism, Provocation and the Contingency of an Intermedial Performance” takes these reflections to a more general level of performativity. In employing 'conventional' medial mechanisms, the 'Aktion' interacts with the mediality of performativity and forms an intermedial realm that deconstructs the signification process so effectively that all conventional forms of interacting with media fail. Its intermediality is both apparent and opaque, doubling the mise-en-scène which consists of a 'Big Brother'-scenario around a deportation camp for asylum seekers who, however, remain mostly invisible to the audience. The performance realm deconstructs the theatrical gaze and creates an ambiguity concerning the distribution of roles, pointing to an inherent mediality which operates at the core of the signification process and makes intermedial relations possible. Schlingensief postulates a performativity which extends beyond the immediate realm of the containers, emanates into the broader medial environment, and reveals an inherently performative dimension that dissolves the separation between 'Art' and 'reality' into a threshold.

The third chapter “liquid skin – Intermedial Thresholds of the Human Being, Technology, and Media” analyzes the lyrical, multi-structural process of abstract, intermedial signification of the performance's combination of dance, puppets, video projections, and an elaborate soundscape. The visual level of signification engages with the complex spatio-temporal soundscape, renegotiating images and actions on stage and, in confronting them with alterity, brings to attention 'discontinuities' within a non-hierarchical, non-absolute, synaesthetic, unpredictable and individual intermedial perception. The intermedial realm of dissolving boundaries extends to the human being and produces a threshold between human being, mediality, and technology. This threshold dissolves identity into ambiguity and highlights a medial biopolitics that attempts to normalize the human body in its medial function and thus create a new type of functional equality that abolishes human
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individuality. The contingency at the core of this politics is not a variation of an *inter-homines-esse* but the boundaries of identity, which determine whether any notion of an 'inter' can even be maintained.

These analyses support my argument for using the term 'politicity' to capture the 'political relation' at the core of the performances, namely the relationship between a unique human being and its medial environment. This terminology describes the potential for 'politics,' rather than implying any concrete 'political' action or ideology that is often associated with 'political theatre'. This thesis extends Röttger's definition and proposes that theatre is a pluri-medial realm in which the conscious interaction between perception and mediation can produce an intermedial process of signification whose inherent contingency is the basis of its politicity.