Intermediality and politics in theatre and performance
Dapp, G.S.

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

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

Perhaps this is the fundamental paradox built into the concept of media as such. A medium just is a “middle,” an in-between or go-between, a space or pathway or messenger that connects to things—a sender to a receiver, a writer to a reader, an artist to a beholder, or (in the case of the spiritualist medium) this world to the next. The problem arises when we try to determine the boundaries of the medium. […] The medium does not lie between sender and receiver; it includes and constitutes them.

――――

The most intriguing and, at the same time, frustrating experience for a scholar is when he or she encounters a 'chicken-and-egg' problem. By this I mean a situation which is essentially recursive in structure, which forms a feedback-loop that suspends the simple cause-and-effect logic into thresholds of mutual interaction. While the result seems clear (chickens do lay eggs, and eggs hatch chickens), the route to it is a challenge, as are the conclusions that are to be drawn from it. The attempt to make any statement turns into a constant negotiation and struggle, as it cannot avoid presupposing something that is also its consequence: the chicken “needs” the egg to the same degree as the egg “needs” the chicken.

In the same sense, writing about 'politics,' 'intermediality,' 'theatre,' and 'performance' presupposes many components, some of which refer to, build on, or distinguish themselves from another. Each concept has its own discourse, which in turn implies certain rules of approach and 'talk about' it. The disciplines of political and media philosophy meet theatre and performance studies and form a process of interaction which cannot entirely avoid interdependence. This mutual influence makes it very difficult to determine a 'germinal cell,' as it were, a shared point that can be used as a basis for discussion and from which everything else can be derived. This preface tries to fill this void by creating an artificial starting point, an outline of the theoretical reflections, which appears in a state that is both the basis for and the product of my analyses.

The title of this dissertation deliberately points to this problem. Besides trying to summarize the contents and provide the reader with an idea of the contents within the brevity of the tile, I also wanted to (intermedially, as it were) capture the process of argumentation, writing, and reading. The title unites four complex concepts into a syntax which is declarative in nature but might just as well be understood as interrogative. The concepts, in turn, maintain a degree of separation and point to a signification that lies somewhere in between *and* in the whole. They break out of the apparent
signification of the implied sentence and draw attention to the intricacy that lies in their interplay. Each word declares ownership of its own contents, meaning, history, etymology. Yet the same applies to every sentence that assembles, structures, unites, or occasionally clashes its contents. But if this is true, then the meaning, the signification of a sentence is more than its elements. It points to a process, an encounter between its constituents that contains and transcends each individual element, the writer, and the reader. In this sense, the following reflections seek to raise the question of what these terms mean individually and what meaning derives from their interplay and the structure in which they appear. In other words, how does the context of theatre or performance affect the meaning of each individual term? Kati Röttger calls such a process 'multistable' (see Röttger 2013, n.p.), and proposes conceiving of it in the form of a meta-picture of a “vortex” which captures the way an analysis that includes mediality as an epistemic object is conditional to the process of transmission between media and perception. In this process, it is impossible to refer to 'one original medium' (ibid.), just as it is impossible to determine any 'one original concept' in the interplay of the title of this dissertation. Röttger directly links this to intermediality and thereby provides an important methodological basis for the process I have outlined in the title of this dissertation. In delving into this process, I therefore suggest that the reader approach what seems initially a circular structure as a spiral which, with each revolution, arrives at what appears to be the same point, but which includes new aspects and has thereby moved to another plane. This is all the more true for the five performances I analyze in the course of this dissertation: the concepts thereby function as analytical tools that contribute to the signification of the performances, but are also refined and expanded by the performances.

The first concept, the term 'intermediality,' has gained popularity since the 1990s. The increasing usage, however, does not translate into a clarification of the concept. On the contrary, the expanding discourse on intermediality remains diverse and leaves the concept somewhat diffuse. The same is true for the objects of study which have been described as 'intermedial.' Instead of encountering one unifying trait or technique the scholar faces vast differences in approach which

1 I am using an unpublished manuscript for the basis of my citations. The paper in question will be published in French translation in December 2013 in Livre sur le Théâtre et l'Intermédialité en Français, Montreal. For this reason I will also omit page numbers in my reference and just refer to the year.

2 McLuhan was the first to link the effect of media on sense perception to the image of a “vortex” (see McLuhan/Parker 1969, 191). Röttger, in turn, refers to W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of “Vortex-Effect” (Picture Theory, 1995, 75) when comparing the vortex to a meta-picture which describes how a beholder's perspective shifts in the process of perception between medium and mediated (Röttger 2013, n.p.). She points out that a theatre performance “appears to be identical with the media that constitute it, but also opens up and stages perspectives on the media,” (ibid.) and thereby constitutes a multistable process she describes as a vortex. Mitchell describes another instance of such a multistable relationship in the interplay of figure and ground as described by Gestalt psychology, which plays an important role in Chapter 1, section “Deconstructing The Perception Process.”
include almost every form of 'Art,' independent of content or genre. Jürgen E. Müller even argues for treating and using intermediality as a search term (Suchbegriff, Müller 2010, 32) rather than as a concrete concept. This is further complicated by the fact that while these concepts suggest the involvement of a multiplicity of media, there is a great variance of what the various scholars conceive under the term 'media,' as well as what specific mediality is involved. What is more, while the prefix 'inter' indicates a specific relationship of the media involved, the distinctions from other concepts such as multimediiality, transmediality, or intermedia, even intertextuality, are often blurry at best. While Müller in the face of the variety of concepts and approaches to intermediality applies the term Suchbegriff, W.J.T. Mitchell describes a similar dilemma on a general level of media and proposes an approach of “addressing media” (see Mitchell 2005, 201ff) rather than attempting to “understand media” as Marshall McLuhan proposed (see McLuhan 2001): just as each word of the title operates on its own but conditions (syntactically, perceptually) the context in which it appears, Mitchell's statement in the epigraph affirms that the same applies to media.

The concept of 'politics' is similarly complex and contributes a range of meanings and implications not only on its own but also in the limiting context of “theatre and performance.” It is

3 'Intermedia – a key term of the 1960s – not only implies the integration of new media and materials into Art and a transition towards performativity and process, but also places mediality at its core,' “Intermedia – als zentrales Stichwort der 60er Jahre – bedeutet nicht nur die Integration neuer Medien und Materialien in Kunst und den Übergang ins Performative und Prozeßhafte, sondern rückt Medialität ins Zentrum” (Büscher 2001, 108).

4 Indicative of the variety of approaches and the conceptual differences is the way Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin refer to McLuhan when calling their 2000 book Understanding New Media. The title thereby illustrates the problematic of defining mediality: it implies that the 'new' (which in this case means 'digital') media follow different rules or produce a different meaning than 'old' media, and necessitate a redefinition of the concept.

5 The distinction between theatre and performance comprises a discourse in itself that is very specific (see for instance Metzler 2005, “Performance” 31ff, “Theaterbegriffe,” 337ff). My reflections, in turn, function on a very fundamental involvement of mediality in performativity that is at work both in theatre and performance and make any further distinction unnecessary. (In Intermediality in Theatre and Performance, Chapple and Kattenbelt do not even address the difference). The reason I refer to both concepts in the title is to indicate that my examples fall into both categories.

The terms 'performativity' and 'theatricality' require clarification. Both terms are a part of a well-established discourse and refer to a specific relationship between action and perception independent of context. Theatre can be performatative and 'reality' can be theatrical; it depends on what specific relationship becomes apparent and/or dominant. 'Theatricality' is generally considered to contain an 'as if'-quality which leaves a certain doubt about the actual status of the actions, and which can also contain semiotic functions. 'Performativity,' in turn, constitutes 'facts' and leaves little doubt about the actual status of the actions associated with it. For instance, it is due to its theatricality that theatre can stage a wedding without actually marrying the performers, whereas the performativity of an official wedding ceremony is very clear about its status and consequences. See for instance Balme 2001a; Boenisch 2006a; Dolenc 2012; Burns 1972; Davis/Postlewait 2003; Féral 2002; Fiebach 2002; Fischer-Lichte 2004; Freedman 1991; Krämer 2003, 2004; Leeker 2001b; Münz 1998; Röttger, 2003, 2008b, 2013; Schramm 1996. This situation is complicated in an intermedial context with the conscious involvement of mediality which, as Krämer asserts, possesses a performativity of its own (see Krämer 2003). As a consequence, when some mise-en-scènes are approached from an intermedial point of view, the conceptual distinction dissolves into a threshold, which means that what the performances stage is neither clearly theatrical nor clearly performative. My analysis of Christoph Schlingensief's 'Aktion Bitte liebt Österreich – erste europäische Koalitionswoche (see Chapter 2, section "Thresholds Between Theatricality and Performativity") makes this particularly apparent, but it is also plays a role in Rimini Protokoll's threshold between theatre and 'reality' (see Chapter 1) and is important in
common practice among theatre goers and critics to use the attribute 'political' in responding to performances that in one way or another deal with social problems or controversial topics, or are in themselves controversial. In fact, a category with the attribute 'political' seems to exist for almost all artistic genres. However, the types of works, genres, media, and approaches that are associated with this category are diverse, while the reasons why a performance or work of art is attributed to this category are often vague, and occasionally amount to nothing more than a tacit assumption. Sometimes a declaration by the playwrights, theatre makers, or directors, that may appear in the form of a critique of the socio-political environment or as a statement favouring a specific 'political' ideology, leads to a general association of their work as 'political' (e.g., Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator, Augusto Boal, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Christoph Schlingensief among many others). But this certainly cannot mean that everything they do is automatically 'political' or, conversely, that works whose creators do not make any such explicit declaration are by definition not 'political.'

Performances that are explicit in their intention to be 'political' require something beyond that intention to become 'political.' In fact, the very notion of performance implies a connection between content and meaning (in the sense of a performance of or about something) or between performer and meaning (a performance by someone). After all, theatre is, as Hannah Arendt puts it, “the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationship to others,” for “[...] the tangible identities of the agents in the story [...] can be conveyed only through an imitation of their acting” (Arendt 1998, 187–188). Yet when Arendt uses this connection to argue that theatre is “the political art par excellence” (ibid.) it is important to remember that Arendt's concept of theatre builds essentially on the model of Greek tragedy and of Greek democracy (see Chapter 1, section “Individual Corporeality and the Politics of Aesthetics”). This concept relies strongly on the idea of imitation and a clear distribution of roles, as well as a direct interaction between human beings without the involvement of media or mediations. It also focuses on text-based performances, an approach which becomes problematic in the context of performances that fall within the category that Hans-Thies Lehmann calls postdramatic (Lehmann 1999) or performances that are entirely non-text-based. The situation is altogether different when encountering other forms of 'political Art' which can be even more abstract / less content-oriented (e.g., an encounter with an abstract painting, a sculpture, or music). And Jacques Rancière as one of the prevalent current philosophers in the area of politics declares outrightly that we “no longer live in the days when playwrights wanted to explain to their audience the truth of social relations and ways of struggling against capitalist domination”
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

(Rancière 2009, 11).

This means that the connection between 'politicity' and 'content' must be more complex than it may seem initially. A text without apparent 'political intention' can attain 'politicity' simply through temporal distance, for instance in statements which are now considered 'politically incorrect.' And also the reverse is conceivable: a text which seemed highly 'political' on its own can lose this status in the course of a performance. The politicity must have another origin; in fact, it seems to have a degree of independence, almost as if it were an additional element in between the others, which emerges or disappears during a performance. This also means that if it is perceived to be 'political' yet the 'material' provides no obvious support for this assumption, then perception plays a big part in the designation of any politicity. Politicity, then, is a multidirectional and 'multistable' process, in which the perceiver plays a role equal to the 'producer' in the broadest sense. It becomes clear that the complexity of these concepts means that their use in any form of statement is conditional and relational. One must inquire not only about the nature of 'politics,' but also about the relationship of these works to 'politics' that makes them 'political.' This very question already indicates that there is a difference in terminology and that the meaning of the terms 'politics,' 'politicity,' and 'political' needs to be carefully distinguished. This brings us to the next question: is there a specific goal involved? What happens when the goal is achieved, and what if it is not achieved?

On the basis of these very preliminary reflections I propose that there are several factors that affect the status of a performance as 'political': its status as 'Art,' or, more precisely, the involvement of aesthetics; the involvement of mediality in performativity and other modes of human interaction; and last but not least the interplay between perception and signification. Each of these concepts has its own discourse and poses its own problems and challenges, complicated even further by their interaction. As a consequence, rather than attempting to provide definite answers, this dissertation sets out to explore these questions in terms of these factors, 'addressing' them, as it were. I am particularly interested in the connection of the 'politicity' of a performance to strategies that I would call 'intermedial.' The first, introductory step in this exploration is a broad overview and critical evaluation (without any claim to completeness) of the existing approaches that are relevant in the context of theatre and intermediality.
The Concept of Media

'[...] As a medium, theatre in its mode of execution is inseparably connected with seeing and that which seeing makes accessible.'


We have to accept that there simply has never been a separate history of theatre and media in the first place. Theatre itself is a media technology that utilizes, at its very heart, other media to transmit and store, while it highlights, at the same time, the process of processing information. Essentially, theatre is a semiotic practice, which incorporates, spatializes and disseminates in sensorial terms (thus: performs) the contents and cognitive strategies of other media [...].

― Peter M. Boenisch “Aesthetic Art to Aesthetic Act,” 2006a, 113

While there is consensus that theatre uses media, or at least that certain medial relations are at work in theatre, the question about what constitutes a medium, and what the use of media means for the status of theatre itself, is highly contentious. In light of the way modern media technology has introduced vast changes in the overall social fabric7 and has affected theatrical conventions and expectations of audiences, this debate becomes inevitable and crucial. This is all the more true when approaching theatre following Arendt as a realm that closely resembles the Social in the sense that it is constituted and conditioned by the interrelationship of human beings (see Arendt 1998, 187–188). The experience of the increasing involvement of media in human interrelationships significantly complicates not only the Arendtian understanding of theatre but the human condition in general. Since its beginnings in the 1960s, the field of media studies has undertaken to make such relationships more accessible to critical discourse and has produced a wide variety of observations and approaches. One approach considers media as a storage container for content8 (storage), another takes a technological point of view (including for instance Philip Auslander9), while another focuses

6 “[...] das Theater als Medium [ist] im Vollzug untrennbar mit dem Sehen und dem sichtbar Gegebenen verbunden.”

In their paper Jackob and Röttger are mainly interested in the role of images in theatre and therefore emphasize visual perception. In the present context, however, I suggest expanding this statement and speak of perception in general. - Note: For the sake of readability I will cite non-English quotations in translation in the text and provide the original in a footnote. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

7 The most obvious example is the involvement of ‘social media’ in all realms of human life, from love (e.g., ‘online dating’) to death (e.g., mobbing, announcing massacres), from politics (e.g., ‘Arab Spring,’ opinion polls, election campaigns) to entertainment (e.g., ‘Wartainment,’ various ‘Idols’).

8 Such an approach, for instance, appears in Kittler, who “proposes a very handy functional understanding of media identifying the processing, transmission, and storing of information as the three ends to which media are the means” (Boenisch 2006a, 106). But this approach has much older roots, as Arendt's description of what amounts to a medial function at the core of the Classical Greek striving for excellence (aristewein) illustrates: “The task and potential greatness of mortals lies in their ability to produce things – works and deeds and words – which [...] are at home in everlastingness [...]” (Arendt 1998, 19).

9 Philip Auslander defines mediality in terms of the opposites 'live' and 'mediatized', as can be seen in his statement that, “As soon as electric amplification is used, one might say that an event is mediatized” (Auslander 1999, 24).
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

primarily on communication (including Claude Shannon\textsuperscript{10} or Joachim Fiebach\textsuperscript{11}). Opinions regarding the consequences of media are also divergent, ranging from a celebration of new means and possibilities, and more critical approaches (such as Brecht's encounter with technology),\textsuperscript{12} to outright media-phobia (Baudrillard's concept of \textit{simulation} comes to mind, see Baudrillard 1978).

Of special importance are the reflections of Marshall McLuhan, who is often credited as one of the 'founding fathers' of the discipline. McLuhan emphasized the importance of media in social relations (a community, after all, is built on communication) and combined the functional and consequential analysis into an anthropocentric approach to media by placing the human being at the centre of medial relationships. McLuhan proposed that media function as extensions of the human senses and body (see McLuhan 2001).\textsuperscript{13} This is most obvious in tele-technology (including tele-communication) that allows a human being to perceive things that are outside the reach of its natural senses. But it also allowed McLuhan to describe as media everything that changes human perception or social structures. In \textit{Understanding Media}, for instance, McLuhan includes money, railroads, roads, words, television, satellites, money, the printing press, clothing, weapons, numbers, housing, clocks, games, radio, telephone, and many more in his list of media. This list, however, should not be understood as listing media in an absolute sense but rather as indicating medial functions that emerge when applying a medial perspective. McLuhan thereby also moved away from content analysis towards a structural / functional analysis, epitomized in his famous aphorism: “The medium is the message” (McLuhan 2001, 8).

This broad approach has reaped wide criticism as critics such as Werner Wolf feel that a definition following McLuhan's notion of media as extensions “would produce too many media

\textsuperscript{10} See Shannon 1948.
\textsuperscript{11} 'I conceive a “medial event” to comprise all communicative processes in which a production and its maker do not meet immediately, “alive,” but become accessible (reveal themselves) to perception, experience, reception / receiver only in a separate / separable form,' “Unter einem 'medialen Ereignis' verstehe ich alle kommunikativen Vorgänge, in denen sich eine Produktion und deren Macher nicht unmittelbar, gleichsam 'lebendig' begegnen, sondern sich in einer von den Machern abgelösten / ablösbaren Gestalt der Wahrnehmung, der Erfahrung, der Rezeption / den Rezipienten vermitteln (darbieten)” (Fiebach 2001, 494).
\textsuperscript{12} 'Brecht countered the sheer euphoria of Futurism with an alternative that did not deny the socio-transformative force of technology. In his speech about the function of broadcasting he associated the new technology of the radio with a general political emancipation. Brecht demanded the transformation of broadcasting from a distribution apparatus to a communication apparatus in order to transform the role of the recipient into that of a producer,' “Bertolt Brecht gelang es, der bloßen Technikeuphorie der Futuristen ein alternatives Modell entgegenzusetzen, ohne dabei die Rolle der Technik als gesellschaftsverändernde Kraft zu leugnen. In seiner Rede über die Funktion des Rundfunks stellt er die damals neue Radiotechnologie in den Dienst einer allgemeinen politischen Emanzipation. Brecht forderte die Umwandlung des Rundfunks von einem Distributionsapparat in einen Kommunikationsapparat, der die Rolle des Rezipienten in eine des Produzenten verwandeln sollte” (Dinkla 2001, 128).
\textsuperscript{13} As Peter Weibel points out, this idea already appears in Henri Bergson's \textit{“La signification de la guerre”} (1915) where Bergson notes that each new machine is a new, artificial organ that extends the reach of the natural organs (see Weibel 1989, 98).
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

even within one literary genre such as drama” (Wolf 2011, 2). While some people have always found McLuhan's approach problematic, the broad definition of media makes it possible to include functions that other approaches miss. For instance it allowed McLuhan to recognize that media condition perception, and introduce what McLuhan referred to as shifts in “sense ratios” (McLuhan 2001, 19) as manifestations of adjustment to an ever-changing environment. This revealed medial functions at the core of the Social and made it possible to analyze changes to society that a new medium and its new relationships imposed. It also provides an important connection to theatre and performance, which deals with human relationships, and in its simplest form consists of the relationship between a performer and a spectator. As a performance concerns the creation of signification somewhere within this relationship and uses media to stage and communicate this relationship, Derrick de Kerckhove suggests that the foundation of the theatre as a cultural institution coincided with the incursion of media technology in the form of the alphabet. Theatre, according to de Kerckhove, thereby became a training ground for the senses, cultivating a new form of attention and the skills necessary to cope with the new conditions of life (see de Kerckhove 1995, 72). While de Kerckhove's hypothesis seems overly deterministic it illustrates two noteworthy points: (1) it indicates a medial function of the theatre that extends beyond its direct contents and takes on a social function; and (2) it refers to a transformation of the human sensorium that is triggered by media and affects human interaction. This second function is also very prominent in McLuhan's concept of medial extensions to the human body (this becomes an important feature in my analysis of Igneous' liquid skin in Chapter 3).

While McLuhan's anthropocentric approach is very useful in the context of theatre, it is also important to keep in mind that McLuhan is a polarizing figure in the scientific community. McLuhan often uses aphorisms and puns to make a point, which W.J.T. Mitchell considers a “messy, metaphorical and associative logic” (Mitchell 2005, 208). McLuhan's claims are often supported by lengthy quotations of others without including critical reflection on the context of passages. Another easy target for criticism is his stout Catholicism which may have been a reason for a quasi-religious overtone that seems to imply a promise that understanding media can provide salvation from all media-induced problems. Laws of Media (which was published posthumously in 1988 by his son Eric McLuhan) goes even further and seemingly offers the hope of predicting certain medial consequences. And McLuhan can also be considered to be himself an illustration for and a victim of a media machinery: the fact that he rose quickly to the status of a pop-culture

14 This is also the core of Erika Fischer-Lichte's notion which holds that mediality and perception are inextricably linked to each other (see Chapple/Kattenbelt 2006, 16).
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

'oracle' with TV appearances, cameos in movies (Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*), and serving as advisor for politicians and companies, did not really help his scholarly credibility. In this sense, becoming a media star resulted in an experience of the dark side of media exposure, earning him discredit, as well as the experience of the ease with which the exposure can also vanish.

At the same time, one could say that McLuhan's problematic style is also his greatest asset as it makes his books not only captivating to read, and evocative in insights, but most importantly thought-provoking. At times his style even seems to operate on a purely artistic-associative level (particularly the books published with Quentin Fiore, *The medium is the Massage*, 1967, and *war and peace in the global village*, 1968). This reverberates with McLuhan's notion of the artist as “the antennae of the race” (McLuhan/McLuhan 1988, 47), able to perceive the “actual new effects from any new environment” (McLuhan/Fiore 1968, 180). In this sense, the genre of Art offers the chance to take a step back, as it were, and look at and reflect on the Social by means of – paraphrasing Rancière – the very distance it takes in respect to this sphere (see also Rancière 2004b). McLuhan referred to his methodology as 'probes' which explore processes of medial functions in an environment that is constantly changing: “[...] [C]haracteristic of all media, [...] is that the 'content' of any medium is always another medium” (McLuhan 2001, 8). Instead of positing a definitive conclusion, any probe will reveal new media functions, just as new devices and tools appear every day and make possible things that used to be impossible or reveal aspects that were imperceptible. The recursive structure underlying his observation which supports this analysis also introduces another important aspect, namely that a medium can absorb (or, to use a term introduced by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, “remediate” another medium (or, at the least, its function / content). The same applies to McLuhan's broad and multifaceted approach to media, which evolves and transforms as it spreads through various books and papers, includes various phases, without, however, bringing it together into a definition or empirical / impersonal logic.

I suggest that, analogously to what Mitchell calls for, McLuhan's approach should be understood as an attempt to describe media (rather than 'understand' them), as an organic process that tries to capture a process constituting mediality, which itself evolves and changes over time and

16 “Reacting against his style, scholars also dismissed McLuhan because he refused to be made accountable for his theory and because he became a popular culture figure in the mass media, which was considered to be an unorthodox way to promote scholarly activity. [...] He also rejected public documents and other evidence normally used in historical research because he claimed that evidence only expresses conscious thought patterns. For evidence, he turned to art and artists, as the 'antennae of the race’” (Grosswiler 1998, 183).
17 Bolter and Grusin turn this capacity into a definition: “A medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real” (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 65).
whose complexity inherently evades analysis. This has caused problems as some scholars (including Mitchell, see Chapter 1, section “Deconstructing The Perception Process”) only cite selected works (usually Understanding Media) and thereby miss some clarifications that appear later on in McLuhan's oeuvre. The same selective reading and pop-culture prejudice has lead some scholars to misunderstand McLuhan's reflections as proposing a purely optimistic outlook (see for instance Mitchell 2005, 206). It is also important to remember that while McLuhan may have been overtly religious he never claimed to be a prophet, and certainly accepted the possibility that his 'predictions' would contain fallacies. While some statements did not come true in the way he foresaw (including the alleged obsolescence of various media) many of his predictions have proven to be surprisingly accurate. I do not study the accuracy of McLuhan's observations, but use his concepts together with other approaches as tools to study the medial relationships at work in a theatrical / performative environment.

A point of connection between the wide range of medial properties can be found in Sybille Krämer's phenomenological approach to media that goes beyond a communicative or 'container' concept of media. By focusing on the process of interaction between media and human perception Krämer posits that, phenomenologically speaking, the productive sense (or, pace McLuhan, 'message') of media is 'not an increase in productivity but world creation' (Krämer 1998, 85). Villém Flusser had already described media in terms of a transmission process which involved the human body as a medium in the underlying 'information process' of digital media (which he compared to an 'electronic memory'). This lead him to argue against any attempt to reify this

---

18 See for instance Nina Sutton's 1975 interview with McLuhan, in which he discusses his notion of figure / ground. He states that he did not use this concept in his earlier writings, though he considers its implications are already implicit in “the medium is the message” (see Sutton/McLuhan 1975). McLuhan considered his 'new' concepts as clarifications to his 'older' concepts that capture aspects that he felt were not clear enough. Mitchell illustrates this when comparing McLuhan's approach to Luhmann's system theory entirely on the basis of Understanding Media. Mitchell seems unaware of McLuhan's 'figure/ground' distinction, which is striking when he calls for picturing the process of “addressing media” in terms of the vase illustration which McLuhan also used (see also Chapter 1, section “Deconstructing The Perception Process”).

19 McLuhan himself viewed his position as neutral and simply focusing on the processes, stating that he “never expressed any preferences or values since The Mechanical Bride. Value judgments create smog in our culture and distract attention from processes” (Letter to Jonathan Miller 1970, as cited in Molinaro et al. 1987, 405). I have also heard that McLuhan apparently reacted to criticism of his concept of the global village as an overly positive model by replying that these critics 'obviously never lived in a small village before.' Having grown up in a small town myself, this statement certainly carries a lot of truth for me, but I do not have a source to back up this reference.

20 The famous scene in Annie Hall comes to mind, in which McLuhan counters obnoxious claims regarding his theories by saying “You know nothing about my theories. You mean my whole fallacy is wrong” (see Mitchell 2005, 203).

21 Kati Röttger was the first to systematically apply Krämer's media theoretical reflections and define theatre as an intermedial event (Theater als intermediäres Ereignis; see Röttger 2003, 173ff) and has provided an important foundation of my own understanding of intermediality and theatre.

22 “Nicht Leistungssteigerung, sondern Welterzeugung ist der produktive Sinn von Medientechnologien”
process into a concept of a medium, including any notion of the 'Self' (Flusser 1989, 51–52). But if this process functions the way Flusser proposes then the media have to be largely neutral, an element of transmission that leaves the information intact. The context of theatricality, and particularly the involvement of a perception framework that via *semiosis* re-frames and conditions the signification of what is being perceived, reveals a problem with this approach: by making phenomena accessible to perception, theatre clearly functions as a medium, but it also conditions the signification of what it 'performs.' And it does not take a stretch of mind to recognize that this is not a special *caveat* applicable to theatre, but also applies to other media, and, as I want to stress, also to digital media.

Krämer seconds Flussers's argument against the possibility of any media ontology (see Krämer 2003, 82), but does so on the basis of an inherent element of performativity in mediality. She derives her approach of a 'metaphysics of mediality' (Krämer 2003, 83) from differentiating McLuhan's anthropocentric approach and Luhmann's system theoretical reflections:

'Media phenomenalize and thereby make the taking of relations possible. But in "making apparent" media transform, and occasionally even undermine, that which becomes apparent. By the power of its mediality a performance always contains also a surplus in regard of that which is being performed. The *notion* of "performativity" aims at capturing this surplus of use in

---

23 'The praxis of electronic memory forces us [...] to acknowledge the acquisition, processing, and transmission of information that relies on objects (as mental support structures) [...] but in a sense passes through these objects (which the term “medium” implies). This practice forces us to recognize these objects (including our own body) as media of the information process. Any attempt to reify this process, for instance by localizing it in a medium, is nonsense. In light of the practice of electronic memory one must therefore abandon all reifying concepts of this process (such as "soul," "spirit," "identity," “I,” or "self"); "Die Praxis mit elektronischen Gedächtnissen zwingt uns [...] das Erwerben, Speichern, Prozessieren und Weitergeben von Informationen als einen Prozeß zu erkennen, der sich zwar auf Gegenstände (Gedächtnissützen) stützt [...] aber diese Gegenstände gewissermaßen durchläuft (eine Tatsache, die mit dem Begriff 'medium' gemeint ist). Die Praxis zwingt uns, all diese Gegenstände (inklusive unserm eigenen Körper) als Medien des Informationsprozesses zu erkennen. Es ist ein Unsinn, diesen Prozeß verdinglichen zu wollen, ihn etwa in irgend einem Medium lokalisieren zu wollen. Daher sind alle verdinglichenden Begriffe dieses Prozesses (etwa 'Seele', 'Geist', 'Identität', 'Ich' oder 'Selbst') im Licht der Praxis mit elektronischen Gedächtnissen aufzugeben" (Flusser 1989, 51–52).

24 Roesler emphasizes this aspect when noting that, 'Following Flusser, media denote the mode in which information or a message is distributed. A basic tenet of all media, according to Flusser, is to maintain the information they distribute, which is not to be changed, transformed or wrongly interpreted,' "Medien überhaupt beschreiben nach Flusser die Weise, in welcher Information oder eine Botschaft verteilt wird. Ein Grundsatz aller Medien ist für Flusser, daß die zu verteilende Information erhalten bleiben soll, daß sie also beim Verteilen nicht verändert, verformt oder fehlinterpretiert wird" (Roesler 2001, 443). This approach resembles Claude Shannon's model, which considers the distortion of information as 'noise,' that is, as an external element that is not part of the mediality itself.

25 Chapple and Kattenbelt describe the modular concept of digital media Lev Manovich develops in *The Language of New Media* (see Chapple/Kattenbelt 2006, 17) which can account for a restructuring and transposition of 'blocks,' but remains vague about the nature, modality, and signification of media.

26 'The distinction of medium and form is relative [...] This means we cannot categorically sort the world into objects that are media and those that are not. A media ontology is impossible.' – "Die Unterscheidung von Medium und Form ist relativ [...] Wir können also die Welt nicht kategorial sortieren in Dinge, die Medien sind, und solche, die es nicht sind. Eine Medienontologie kann es nicht geben."
In subjecting the phenomena to a process of performativity rather than neutrally transmitting them, the media involved (including every individual human perceiver) condition the signification of the phenomena. This point of view finds support in Hans Belting's likening of media to a performance, *a mise-en-scène* in itself, which constitutes and conditions the act of perception (see Belting 2001, 20). Belting emphasizes that media function as agents in a process at the core of which the human body (and not any specific content) is situated as performing or perceiving entity (see Belting 2005, 302). While Belting is mostly interested in the role of mediality in the context of images in the broadest sense (as a part of his Bildwissenschaft), Krämer's approach concerns perception in general: 'Everything that is accessible to human beings in perception, communication, and cognition, is accessible via media,' 28 (Krämer 2003, 83). Perception and mediality, in other words, mark an interplay which “create[s] meaningful spatial realities and invoke[s] a sensorial, phenomenological experience [...]” (Boenisch 2006a, 110).

In short, there is no perception without media. At the same time, perception usually does not concern media but seems to direct the perceiver's attention 'directly' to phenomena. Krämer indicates this function when noting that 'Media function in latency. Wherever we interact with media, we usually focus on what media transmit and make accessible' 29 (Krämer 2003, 81). Krämer calls this the *aisthetic neutrality* of media, in which the mediality involved is neutral to perception, which she illustrates by likening this function to a window pane: the window pane only becomes perceivable if something disrupts the medial transmission (e.g., damage to the glass) and in revealing the transporting medium draws attention to the process of mediation (see Krämer 1998, 74). One could say that the disruption becomes a new medium that mediates the mediality of the window pane. This, in turn, brings us back to Krämer's argument against a media ontology, as it links the medial function directly to perception, or, as Belting suggests, attention:

The more we pay attention to a medium, the less it can hide its strategies. The less we take note of a visual medium, the more we concentrate on the image, as if images would come by themselves. When visual media become self-referential, they turn against their images and steal our attention from them. (Belting 2005, 305)

---

27 "Medien phänomenalisieren und machen also Bezugsnahme möglich. Doch indem Medien 'erscheinen lassen', wird das, was dabei erscheint, zugleich transformiert, manchmal auch unterminiert. Kraft seiner Medialität birgt ein Vollzug immer auch einen Überschuss gegenüber dem, was vollzogen wird. Auf dieses Surplus des Gebrauchs gegenüber seinem Programm zielt die Reflexionsfigur der 'Performativität'. Die Phänomene sind stets reicher als die Begriffe, die wir uns von ihnen machen."

28 "Alles, was Menschen beim Wahrnehmen, Kommunizieren und Erkennen 'gegeben ist', ist in Medien gegeben."

29 "Medien wirken in Latenz. Wo immer wir gewöhnlich mit Medien umgehen, richten wir uns auf das, was Medien vermitteln und vorstellig machen [...]."
Conversely, if perception always involves a medium, and if the medial function directly depends on attention and has the potential to recursively refer to further layers of medially, then '[…] intermediality is a fundamental principle for the medial sphere' (see Krämer 2003, 85). This also plays an important role in Werner Wolf's definition of medium, which posits that:

Medium, as used in literary and intermediality studies, is a conventionally and culturally distinct means of communication, specified not only by particular technical or institutional channels (or one channel) but primarily by the use of one or more semiotic systems in the public transmission of contents that include, but are not restricted to, referential 'messages.' Generally, media make a difference as to what kind of content can be evoked, how these contents are presented, and how they are experienced. (Wolf 2011, 2)

I find this definition noteworthy in two aspects: (1) the modifier “as used in […] intermediality studies” indicates that the concept of intermediality has implications for the definition of a medium, while (2) despite the attempt to remain abstract and comprehensive, the aspect of perception is missing and the keywords 'message' and 'transmission' favour a directionality going from a sender to a receiver.

While I prefer the phenomenological diagnosis of intermediality, it is too general to set it apart from other concepts such as multimediality or transmediality that have been employed to describe various forms of using and staging media in a theatrical context. As a next step I will therefore situate Krämer's observation in the context of a short overview of some of the relevant positions pertaining to intermediality in theatre.

**Intermediality and Theatre**

'Intermediality is an epistemic condition of media cognition.'

——— Sybille Krämer “Erfüllen Medien eine Konstitutionsleistung,” 2003, 82

'Theatre is a medium which is constituted by the processing and transformation of countless medial distinctions and markers under the condition of a perspectivization. In the theatrical realm a process of performing (inter)mediality takes place by means of the differentiation, mutual transposition and configuration of media which make perceivable the visible and the audible. As an intermedial event theatre opens up and performs perspectives on the media which it stages.'

---

30 “[…] Intermedialität [ist] ein für die Sphäre des Medialen grundlegendes Phänomen.”
31 Since the discourse on intermediality does not distinguish between specific types of intermediality pertaining to theatre and performance, and since this section concerns the specific medial mechanisms of intermediality in performativity and does not refer to any concrete examples, the subheading only refers to theatre.
32 “Intermedialität ist eine epistemische Bedingung der Medienerkenntnis.”
33 “Theater ist ein Medium das gekennzeichnet ist durch das Prozessieren und Transformieren unzähliger medialer Unterscheidungen und Markierungen unter der Bedingung von Perspektivierung. Im Raum des Theaters findet ein Prozess des Vollzugs von (Inter)Medialität statt in der jeweiligen Differenzierung, wechselseitigen Übertragung und Konfigurierung von Medien, die Sichtbares und Hörbares zur Erscheinung bringen. Theater als intermediales Ereignis eröffnet und inszeniert Perspektiven auf die Medien, die es zur Erscheinung bringt” [Quotation italicized in the original].
Despite (or maybe because of) its definitory problems, intermediality is a concept that has proliferated in many disciplines. It begins as a critical concept in the study of literature, and the first usage can be traced to Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812 (see Schröter 1998, 1), with Dick Higgins applying the term in the 1960s Fluxus concept of *intermedia*. Barbara Büscher states that the concept of *intermedia* marks the integration of new media in the Arts, as well as the transition into recognizing medial relationships as a process (see Büscher 2001, 108), but Henk Oosterling points out that underlying Higgins's concept is a notion of intermediality as occurring in between separate media. This becomes apparent in the way it is translated into intermedial terms by Jürgen E. Müller: “Intermediality does not mean an adding of different medial concepts nor a situating-in-between-media of separate works, but an integration of aesthetic concepts of separate media in a new medial context” (Müller as cited in Oosterling 2003, 36). Müller's definition, in turn, goes beyond the realm of the Arts and includes “social, technological, and media-related factors” (Müller 2010, 19), which, however, comes at the cost of constituting a Suchbegriff (search term) that “will not deliver the system of systems that so many media theorists have been hoping for” (Müller 2010, 32). While Müller’s broad definition makes it possible to include medial relationships across all disciplines, the notion of a search term makes his approach impractical: simply avoiding any critical encounter by prefacing the postulate of an impossibility to achieve consensus may be deescalatory but does not further the discourse.

Underlying my analyses is the proposition that intermediality is a process in which the interaction between media dissolves medial specificity into a threshold. What characterizes this threshold as intermedial is the way in which it creates a need to determine a medial specificity (i.e. determine medial boundaries) while also making apparent that any such specificity is ultimately contingent. As we will see, this has vast consequences for the involvement of the spectator and the resulting signification. The foundation of this approach is Krämer's observation that a phenomenon is embedded in a medium, and pervaded by its mediality; 'what a medium presents may appear in another medium but never entirely without a medium' 34 (Krämer 1998, 83–84). And because mediality includes a mechanism of aesthetic neutrality, media become perceivable, 'epistemic objects,' only when a medium 'performs' another medium and thereby transforms it into a 'form-in-

---

34 “Wenn wir hingegen eine Botschaft empfangen, so ist diese 'in' einem Medium gegeben. In einem Medium ist etwas eingetaucht und von ihm so durchdrungen, daß es außerhalb des Mediums überhaupt nicht zu existieren vermag [...]; und was in einem Medium vorliegt, kann vielleicht in einem anderen Medium, nicht aber gänzlich ohne Medium gegeben sein.”
a-medium' (Krämer 2003, 85). This means not only that any notion of separate or individual media is the result of an abstraction (ibid.), but also that in interacting media condition each other. In other words, while the notion of separate media is necessary to perceive media, this separation is marked by a process of interaction and exists only in distinction from another medium. Within this distinction both media mutually condition each other, as well as the separation. In short: medial separation constitutes a threshold, a process, rather than an absolute. W.J.T. Mitchell echoes this approach from the perspective of Visual Culture Studies, when making the following proposition regarding the modes of media in affecting perception and signification, their mediality:

Let us try out, as a counteraxiom, the notion that all media are mixed media, and see where that leads us. One place it will not lead us is into misguided characterizations of audiovisual media like cinema and television as if they were exclusively or “predominantly” (echoes of the hegemonic fallacy) visual. The postulate of mixed, hybrid media leads us to the specificity of codes, material, technologies, perceptual practices, sign-functions, and institutional conditions of production and consumption that go to make up a medium. It allows us to break up the reification of media around a single sensory organ (or a single sign-type or material vehicle) and to pay attention to what is in front of us. (Mitchell 2005, 350)

Mitchell thus favours a model of intermediality that focuses on the perception process as taking place in a multimodal intermedial realm of mutual influence, rather than on a stable object that consists of specific medial relations or modes of perception. An object does not contain the intermedial process, rather the intermedial process conditions the object qua its perception. Accordingly, the object (or, at the least its signification) changes as one shifts attention to other elements or medial functions.

Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt capture this complex status when speaking of a rhizomatic structure of intermediality (see Chapple/Kattenbelt 2006, 19), an in-between of softening boundaries, and a mixing of spaces, media, and realities (Chapple/Kattenbelt 2006, 12), which relies heavily on Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation, but does not include any mention of McLuhan's groundwork. What is problematic in their approach is the underlying notion of space that frames their statement (“[T]he intermedial is a space where [...]” ibid.). As Röttger points out, this spatial notion implies a irreconcilable duality, as is assumes that theatre “provides a space, or stage, for intermediality,” while intermediality itself “seems to inhabit or operate in a space in-between” (Röttger 2013, n.p.). Given the inextricable connection between mediality and perception, space is furthermore not an absolute but also emerges in condition to mediality.35 I suggest instead that intermediality should be considered a mode of perception, a process, which involves the recognition of the involvement of several interacting media, and the uncertainty regarding their

35 This is implicit in Jacques Rancière's description of Art as framing “a specific space-time sensorium” (Rancière 2004b, n.p.).
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

boundaries or separation. This focus on perception also marks a difference from other approaches to intermediality which focus on specific relations of media as constituting intermediality.

Instead of referring to individual theories, I will turn to Jens Schröter's critical overview of approaches. This overview identifies four discursive fields, which he considers to be characterized at best by a gradual distinction (see Schröter 1998, 135, and 2011, 2). This overview quickly reveals that approaching intermediality from the direction of medial interrelations falls prey to definitory unclarities and cannot sufficiently distinguish itself from other modes of medial relations.36 The first approach, which Schröter labels synthetic intermediality proposes a fusion of media to form a “super-medium” (see Schröter 2011, 2) or intermedium37 (Schröter 1998, 1). He suggests that in condemning ‘‘monomedia' as forms of social and aesthetic alienation,” this approach contains a socio-political dimension and a utopian idea of “holistic types of existence” (see Schröter 2011, 2). At the same time, Schröter points out that this concept requires a certain degree of media specificity, which means that the synthesis ultimately takes place in perception (see Schröter 2011, 3). Despite its “sharp distinction between intermedia and mixed media” (Schröter 2011, 2), this approach remains vague in its relation to the notion of multimediality (see Schröter 1998, 135).

The second approach, formal or transmedial intermediality focuses on shared structures or modes among various media as a tertium comparationis (Schröter cites 'narration' as an example for such a transmedial mode, see Schröter 2011, 3) that makes it possible to aesthetically “re-realize” concepts and principles from one medium in another (Schröter 1998, 136, and 2011, 2). The problem with this approach is that it implies and struggles with “abstractable medial apriori” (Schröter 1998, 141) that need to be media-un-specific so that a transfer can take place between media, but also need to be media-specific so that the transfer is recognizable (see Schröter 1998, 141–142). Schröter points out that the underlying trans-medial mode essentially appeals to conventions of other media (see Schröter 1998, 140) and, by positing and blurring the distinction between media, reduces their specificity to “styles” (Schröter 1998, 141). This also means that, contrary to the opinion of some scholars,38 trans-mediality is an element (or specific type) of

36 Furthermore, Schröter postulates that each different discursive field (model) of intermediality also implies and applies a distinct concept of media (Schröter 2011, 6). He concludes that the point of departure should not be definitions of media but deriving definitions of media on the basis of the “intermedial field” (ibid.), reverberating Krämer's reflections on intermediality. Schröter, however, goes further and suggests that the notion of single media within an intermedial field amounts to a “politics” (ibid.). He considers this politics a preliminary fifth category, virtual intermediality or politics of intermediality (Schröter 2011, 2) although he remains rather vague regarding the meaning and implications of this concept of politics.

37 Schröter cites Dick Higgins and Jud Yalkut as proponents of this idea, see Schröter 1998, 1.

38 Kattenbelt, for instance, writes, “The concept of transmediality is mainly used in art and communication theoretical discourses for referring to the change (transposition, translation etc) from one medium to another. This transfer may apply to the content (to what is represented, the story) or to the form (in formalistic terms we might say to the
intermediality rather than a separate category.

The third approach, *transformational intermediality*, and fourth approach, *ontological intermediality*, are closely related (Schröter compares them to 'two sides of the same coin,' Schröter 1998, 129, 'flip sides,' 2011, 2). *Transformational intermediality*, according to Schröter, builds on processes of representation (Schröter 2011, 2) or reference (Schröter 1998, 144), in the sense that one medium represents or refers to another. The inter-medial component thereby consists not in the direct representation but in the critical distance that such a relationship allows:

One medium refers to another and thereby it can comment on the represented medium, which would allow making interesting inferences to the “self-conception” of the representing medium. And it can also represent the represented medium in such a way that its everyday, “normal” states of being are defamiliarized or, as it were, transformed. (Schröter 2011, 5)

The intermedial relationship, in other words, is the reflection on mediality that the defamiliarization inherent to the process appeals to.⁴⁹ At the same time, this approach implies a strict specificity of media and cannot account for the mutual conditioning of media, which, however, is a logical consequence: if the representation of one medium in another allows critical insights in one direction, the same must also apply to the opposite direction. *Ontological intermediality*, in turn, assumes that media always exist in relation to other media (Schröter 2011, 2), which includes, for instance, Krämer's position that the notion of what Schröter refers to as *monomedia* is the result of an abstraction. Schröter speaks of a differential definition of media that stems from a preceding intermediality (Schröter 1998, 147, and 2011, 5) and essentially forms neologisms on the basis of existing terminology (see Schröter 2011, 5–6).

Even though Schröter sets out to define ways of talking about 'intermediality' rather than intermediality itself (Schröter 2011, 2), his analysis implies a definition of intermediality based on specific modes of interaction among media. If we then compare this to Werner Wolf's approach, which holds that intermediality is “the participation of more than one medium of expression in the signification of a human artefact [...]” (Wolf 1999, 1), it becomes clear that the mere involvement of media makes it impossible to distinguish intermediality from other forms of medial interaction. Wolf revised his definition in 2005, stating that intermediality “[...] applies to any transgression of boundaries between conventionally distinct media [...] and thus comprises both 'intra-' and 'extra-compositional' relations between different media” (Wolf 2005, 252). I find this revised approach problematic as, (1) it remains unclear what characterizes or triggers such a transgression and, (2) the very notion of a transgression of boundaries implies a clear distinction of media and does not

---

⁴⁹ For the connection of this medial defamiliarization or *Verfremdung* in the context of Brecht's epic theatre see Dapp 2006.
specify its effects. Instead, I would argue that intermediality is not the transgression but rather the negotiation of boundaries in a relationship of inherent ambiguity that emerges from an awareness of mediality.

Conversely, if we approach intermediality as denoting a relationship between media and perception, it follows that intermediality is not a technique, a tool to produce a concrete 'object,' but a negotiation of the constituents of the fundamental process of its emergence. We can thus set intermediality apart from multi-mediality by noting that while multimediality recognizes the involvement of multiple media, their borders are much more clearly defined, which, in interplay with their aesthetic neutrality, results in an immersive environment that does not elevate mediality to the status of an epistemic condition. In this sense, a Gesamtkunstwerk, which Schröter places in the category of synthetic intermediality (Schröter 2011, 2), is multimedial rather than intermedial.

In the context of visual perception, Hans Belting defines intermediality as a practice that places a conscious reflection about the mediality ("Medienstil") at the core of the process of beholding a work of art (Belting 2001, 48). He emphasizes a critical dimension of the interaction between image and medium that manifests itself in the inherent conundrum of 'being and appearance' (Belting 2001, 49), which can easily be expanded to encompass the interaction between media and perception in general: media are not only "intermediary by definition" (Belting 2005, 314), but also "act as intermediaries among themselves in that they mirror, quote, overlap, and correct or censor one another. They often coexist in layers whose characters vary according to their position in history" (ibid.). This means that as soon as mediality becomes a conscious part of perception, the involvement of media affects the status of the phenomena, and thus the signification.

This is due not only to the unclear boundaries and status of media involved, but also to a historical dimension: Belting explicitly includes the element of medial re-cognition (i.e. being able to recognize and identify the essential difference of media, see Schröter 1997, 145) as evoking the re-cognition (and memory) of other media, which requires, and at the same time enhances, an 'awareness of the coexistence or rivalry of various media' (Belting 2001, 49).

40 “Intermedialität ist eine verbreitete Praxis in der zeitgenössischen Kunst, wo immer die Reflexion über den Medienstil ins Bewußtsein der Werkbetrachtung gerückt wird.”

41 ‘Intermediality itself is only a specific form of the interaction of image and medium. This interaction contains the conundrum of being and appearance governing the world of images,’ “Intermedialität ist ihrerseits nur eine besondere Spielform in der Interaktion von Bild und Medium. Diese Interaktion birgt in sich auch das Rätsel von Sein und Schein, das in der Welt der Bilder herrscht.”

42 ‘Intermediality […] evokes images we know and remember from other transporting media, and requires the awareness of a coexistence or rivalry of various media,’ “Intermedialität […] ruft Bilder auf, die wir aus anderen Trägermedien kennen und erinnern, und setzt das Bewußtsein von der Koexistenz oder Rivalität verschiedener Medien voraus.”
Of course, the realm of theatre and performance is a special case as it involves various modes of perception. One of the reasons why some scholars find the notion of theatre as a medium problematic is that it builds on corporeal presence and 'liveness' (see also Chapter 1, section "Mediality and its Thresholds: Liveness in an Intermedial Environment") in the broadest possible sense. Furthermore, theatre possesses the unique capability to include other media without changing the medium itself, although it may affect its status or signification within the theatrical framework. At the same time some medial function is clearly involved, which is why Kattenbelt proposes to view theatre as a hypermedium (see Kattenbelt 2006, 37), and Boenisch a “fully transparent medium” (see Boenisch 2006a, 112). Kattenbelt's notion of theatre as a hypermedium is problematic as this concept, following the definition by Bolter and Grusin, is strongly linked to digital technology, most notably the computer; digital technology, however, cannot contain corporeality, it can only allude to it in its absence. Röttger also advises against this concept on the grounds that, “If theatre is able to stage media in the process of intermedial transpositions in terms of theatricality in order to open up different perspectives on mediality, then theatre cannot be identical with a hypermedium” (Röttger 2013, n.p.). In fact, defining theatre as a medium epitomizes what Schröter criticizes as the approach of defining a medium and then using this definition to derive a notion of intermediality (see Schröter 2011, 6). While it seems feasible to speak of a mediality of theatre in the context of an immersive medial environment (i.e. multimediality) that 'contains' its elements and does refer to mediality, the context of intermediality defies any such concept.

Christopher B. Balme was one of the first to reflect the implications of the realm of theatre back to the concept of intermediality. Balme proposes an approach to theatre that does not "[…] define its object of research in contradistinction to other media, defensively as it were. Rather, it should approach theatre as a medium, which is fundamentally intermedial, that is, geared towards exchange" (Balme 2001c, 681). Balme sees the underlying concept of intermediality as opposed to...
“medial specificity” (Balme 2001c, 670) and distinguishes three types of intermediality: (1) *transpositional intermediality* in which a theme or text (content) is transposed from one medium to another. Balme criticizes this approach for being a simple change of medium (*Medienwechsel*), a trans-position, and as such strictly speaking not an inter-medial interaction (Balme 2001c, 670–671). It should be added that this approach implies knowledge of the specificity of both media and assumes a directionality of the transfer that ignores the possibility of omnidirectional influences.  

The second category is (2) *intermediality as a special case of intertextuality*, which according to Balme originates in Karl Prümm's concept of 'intermediality as the transposition of one (or more) sign systems in another' (Balme 2001c, 671). Balme questions the usefulness of this approach since literature theory considers such a relationship *between* texts as a normal condition of any text production and text reception (*ibid.*). The third approach, which Balme considers to denote intermediality in a 'stricter sense' (*ibid.*), is (3) "*recreative* intermediality. This type consists of the attempt to recreate the aesthetic or mode (rather than content) of a medium in another (*ibid.*)". According to Balme, this type of intermediality appeals to an existing 'plural media competency' (Balme 2001c, 681) in a process that consists of individual, distinguishable medial layers. Theatre thereby serves as the 'framing medium' (*Rahmenmedium*), in which another medium, the 'internal medium' (*Binnenmedium*) appeals to the aesthetic conventions of the 'thematic medium' (*thematisches Medium*) (see Balme 2001c, 673). The interplay of these medial levels constitutes intermediality because it maintains the 'framing medium' while the mode of perception takes place largely in the mode of the 'internal medium' (see Balme 2001c, 676).

In her habilitation thesis *Fremdheit und Spektakel* (2003) Röttger is more specific in applying the concept of intermediality to the realm of theatre. In approaching theatre on the fundamental phenomenological level in the tradition of Krämer, Röttger defines it in terms of its medial competencies:

---

46 It thereby falls in the same category as Schröter's *transmedial intermediality*.  
47 “Intermedialität [als] die Transposition eines Zeichensystems (oder mehrerer) in ein anderes”  
48 Kati Röttger also points to Joachim Paech's critique (“Mediales Differenzial und transformative Konfiguration,” in: Jörg Helbig (ed.), *Intermedialität. Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*, Berlin, 1998, 23) of the intermedial discourse as merely formulating the transposition of content from one container to another, see Röttger 2003, 173.  
49 “Die Realisierung medialer Konventionen eines oder mehrerer Medien in einem anderen bezeichnet Intermedialität im engeren Sinne.”  
50 This definition is supported also by Patrice Pavis who notes that intermediality “(…) does not mean the addition of different media concepts, nor the act of placing discrete works in relation to particular forms of media, but rather the integration of aesthetic concepts from different media into a new concept” (Pavis as cited in Röttger 2013, n.p.).  
51 “Jeder Theaterzuschauer heute, oder beinahe jeder, verfügt über plurale mediale Kompetenzen, sowohl im Hinblick auf die medienspezifische Konventionen als auch im Sinne des dort transportierten Wissens.”  
52 Balme supports these categories by an analysis of Robert Lepage's "Seven Streams of the River Ota."
First, the messages of theatre (as a medium) do not contain the traces of a specific medium 'theatre' but rather that of an interaction of multiple (and individually exchangeable) media (such as voice, sound, movement, language, image, etc.). Second, theatre is quite capable to integrate various technical apparatuses creating artificial realities (film, TV, video, digital media, etc.) without losing its status as theatre. (Röttger 2003, 176)

She combines this definition with Krämer's concept of an inherent performativity of media, which allows her to define theatre as an event (see Röttger 2003, 180) that is constituted by 'the processing and transformation of countless medial distinctions and markers under the condition of a perspectivization' (Röttger 2003, 185, full quote in epigraph). Intermediality, in turn, takes place 'by means of the differentiation, mutual transposition and configuration of media' (*ibid.*), which means that theatre becomes an intermedial event when it 'opens up and performs perspectives on the media which it stages' (*ibid.*). While these insights are highly acute, the opening statement 'theatre is a medium' somewhat contradicts Röttger's definition of theatre as a 'realm' and as an 'event'.

The event character, however, is very important as it recognizes the interplay between perception and mediation in an environment which is perceived to be theatrical, but in its mode does not mark a difference from reality. In other words, while a medium interacts with perception it does not in itself constitute an event. Theatre, in turn, contains various media (one might speak of theatre as an inherently pluri-medial realm) yet is not an object, but rather an event that is inseparably connected to performance. In a more recent paper Röttger clarifies her definition by referring to theatre as an “open dynamic configuration” that is “identical with those media in which the elements characteristic of its structure are organized” (Röttger 2013, n.p.).

In describing an intermediality of theatre in these terms, Röttger's approach makes it possible to break out of the constraints imposed by any medial specificity. At the same time, it is admittedly difficult to explain a concept 'intermediality' without also having a concept of 'medium,' which is where Krämer's quasi-recursive position of intermediality as a fundamental principle for the medial sphere (see Krämer 2003, 85, and Röttger 2003, 180) comes into play. The degree to which this recursive structure is characteristic for a medial environment can also be seen in Philip

53 “Erstens nämlich bewahren sich an den Botschaften des Theaters (als Medium) eben nicht die Spuren des spezifischen Mediums Theater, sondern vieler (jeweils auswechselbarer) Medien (wie Stimme, Klang, Bewegung, Sprache, Bild usw.) im Zusammenspiel. Zweitens ist das Theater durchaus in der Lage, verschiedene technische Apparaturen zur künstlichen Welterzeugung zu integrieren (Film, Fernsehen, Video, digitale Medien usw.) ohne seinen Status als Theater zu verlieren.”

54 A few pages earlier Röttger begins a preliminary version of this definition with the statement that, 'Theatre as a medium is a realm which is characterized...'; “Theater als Medium ist ein Raum, der gekennzeichnet ist...” (Röttger 2003, 178) which is more inclusive but still contains the notion of theatre as a medium. This problematic can be avoided altogether if one considers theatre to be a realm constituted by pluri-medial relationships rather than a medium itself.

55 See also the above remarks about Röttger's *vortex.*
Auslander's important distinction between 'liveness' and 'meditization': any concept of 'liveness' only makes sense in terms of its opposite, i.e. a mediatized environment (see Auslander 1999). For this very reason I disagree with Kattenbelt's approach to “theatre as the stage of intermediality” (Kattenbelt 2006, 37) as it seems to suggest that theatre performs intermediality. Rather, theatre is constituted by a process that can be both 'theatrical' and 'intermedial' (or, for that matter, multimedial). In this sense I prefer Boenisch's formulation that intermediality “[...] is an effect created in the perception of observers that is triggered by performance [...]” (Boenisch 2006a, 113), and, as I would add, includes the performance. But it still remains unclear what triggers such an intermediality and what sets it apart from a multimediality of theatre.

Boenisch attributes the intermedial 'effect' to “the pluri-focal networks of signs, worlds, messages, and meanings offered by the performances” (Boenisch 2006a, 115). I propose that the key to intermediality is not a 'plurality' of perspectives but the uncertainty of distribution of boundaries and signification, “effects of alienation and dys-referential un-realities” (Boenisch 2006a, 115) within this perspective. If we approach theatre as a pluri-medial realm rather than a medium, the theatricality (and, in some cases, performativity) at work refers to a mode of appearance within an environment that is characterized by a conscious co-presence of three elements: action – observation – mediality (see Chapter 2, section “Thresholds Between Theatricality and Performativity”). The dimensions of 'observation' and 'action' encounter and interact with the inherent mediality that conditions, affects, and potentially distorts the signification. This results in a 'magical triangle' of mutual influence, co-conditioning, and co-creation. As long as the influence of mediality remains largely aisthetically neutral, the signification is conditioned primarily (or, at least, apparently) by the interplay between action and observation and produces a multimedial, immersive, and illustrative environment. Instead of 'presenting' various distinct positions, the intermedial process, in turn, deconstructs the apparent cohesion of human perception into a plurality of elements, addresses (in Mitchell's sense) the mediality involved, whose performativity (in Krämer's sense) turns into in unstable thresholds of signification that create the need to establish (contingent) boundaries, and produces new signification that is located inter-media and thus starts the process anew.

---

56 This approach is also supported by Röttger's observation that, “Because theatre is reliant on both its productive and receptive sides – i.e. on the presence of human bodies and their specific sensory capacities – it is at the same time principally open to all kinds of media (including technical media). Hence it can function as an open dynamic configuration of medial transpositions” (Röttger 2008c, 338). In other words, mediality plays such a prominent role in theatre because of the inherent elements of action (i.e. production) and observation (i.e. reception).

57 The conceptualization of these processes as a 'magical triangle' originates in Helmar Schramm's *Karneval des Denkens* (1996, 251) in the form of the interplay of aisthesis, kinesis, and semiosis, which Röttger (2003, 94ff, 2008b) and Dolenc (2011) extend by including mediality instead of semiosis.
Röttger links this to theatricality which, [...] inserts a gap between beholder and beheld that pervades their relationship with alterity, thus regulating and deregulating relations of perception: [...] Theatricality is always functional at the borderline of the view or the perspective of the beholder to decide on truth or non-truth, reality and non-reality, fiction or non-fiction. (Röttger 2013, n.p.)

But in order to maintain a differentiation from other modes of medial interaction that still register as 'theatrical' (e.g., multimediality) I suggest that such gaps are not primarily linked to theatricality but to the conscious contingency in signification that becomes the epistemic condition of intermediality. In this sense one could say that as soon as the question of mediality is problematized in the context of theatre, theatre constitutes an intermedial realm, in which the awareness of the performativity of media turns all separations (including live, corporeal, and mediatized) into a threshold and thereby conditions its own 'conditions.' Once this process occurs, theatre itself is intermedial (rather than performing intermediality) and triggers an active process of perception, in which perception produces signification in interaction with an intermedial realm (beginning with a distribution of roles, including that of the perceiving human being). Here I concur with Boenisch, who diagnoses that in intermediality it is “the essentially active role of the observer, that constitutes true inter-activity and this two-way process of observing [...]” (Boenisch 2006a, 109). And Röttger speaks of an “intermedial practice based on theatre’s assumed capacity for intermediality” (Röttger 2008c, 338), which makes it possible to consider a medial function of theatre (in non-intermedial situations), without, however, limiting its function to that of a medium.

In Luhmann's terms one can describe theatre as marking a threshold between form and medium, as an intermedial realm, whose own status is as contingent as that of its constituents. In its most extreme form, intermediality undermines the status of theatre so that it is no longer clear whether theatre is theatre or something else, potentially and radically 'real.'

This uncertainty in status and signification has far reaching implications and constitutes, as I am proposing, a 'politicity' of intermediality. This position goes beyond Schröter who argues that,

The intermedial field (including the intermedial processes on writing about intermediality) produces definitions of media. The remaining task is therefore to start a differentiated analysis of the politics of intermediality and the politics of the corresponding notions of various media.
(Schröter 2011, 6)

Schröter's statement is rather vague regarding the meaning and mechanisms of the underlying concept of politics but it still allows some inferences: 'politics' has to do with a separation of the intermedial 'field' into its constituting media, whose definitions and boundaries, however, are

---

58 Röttger's definition of intermedial theatre does not explicitly address a distinction from other modes of medial interaction.
59 I am using performativity here in Krämer's sense, who speaks of a 'constitutive aspect' of media. See Krämer 2003.
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

contingent in depending on the field. If we then consider that intermediality implies an awareness of mediality, we can note that underlying this 'politics' is an awareness of an aesthetic mechanism that assigns signification and status to perception. Contrary to Schröter, who speaks of a 'politics of intermediality,' I propose that we have arrived at a nexus of 'politics' and 'intermediality.' For the same reason I find the title *The Politics of Aesthetics*, which Gabriel Rockhill chose for his translation of Rancière's book *Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* (2000), problematic as it does not maintain Rancière's distinction between “politics” and “the police.” Following this distinction, 'politics' strictly speaking marks a disagreement with the *distribution of the sensible*, whereas aesthetics is a manifestation of the forces of *the police* that maintain the *distribution of the sensible*. In this sense, 'aesthetics' marks 'the political;' conversely one could say that aesthetics contains a certain 'politicity.' Thus, from my vantage point, a more appropriate title would be “The *Politicity of Aesthetics.*”

**Intermediality and Politics**

Though obviously one who sees, an observer is more importantly one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations.


Intermediality reconfigures three former separated cultural domains—established in the 19th century — of the arts, politics and science, especially philosophy—enhancing an experience of the in-between and a sensibility for tensional differences.

―――― Henk Oosterling, “Sens(a)ble Intermediality and *Interesse*,” 2003, 30

My reflections on the discourses on 'media' and 'intermediality' have come full circle: on the basis of Krämer's phenomenological reflections I first suggested that media cognition requires intermediality. And when looking at intermediality I arrived at the proposal that at its core is an aesthetic mechanism that assigns status and signification to perception and produces definitions of media, which, in turn, can further affect signification and thereby the media involved. Instead of indicating a fallacy in my argument, this recursive structure reveals a contingency that becomes apparent when approaching intermediality from a phenomenological perspective. This contingency, in turn, links intermediality to the concept of 'politics' which from its beginnings in Classical Greece has had an intricate connection to perception. I am basing my approach towards 'politics' on a philosophy that Oliver Marchart has called 'post-foundational' (see Marchart 2007) and that, within the range of its individual approaches, recognizes a contingency at the core or foundation of
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

politics. Following Marchart, what characterizes these approaches as 'post-foundational' is the recognition that all social human interaction needs a foundation, even though this foundation or ground will always be contingent (i.e. contain a flaw or miscalculation) and as such can never be 'final'.

Of particular importance for me are Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière\(^6\) although their approaches initially seem to contradict each other: what Arendt describes as 'politics,' namely a negotiation of issues and perceptions within an existing order (\textit{polis}) and among equals, constitutes the opposite of 'politics' for Rancière, who describes as 'politics' the moment of disagreement with and deconstruction of an existing 'distribution of the sensible' (see also Chapter 1, section “Individual Corporeality and the Politics of Aesthetics”). The focus of Arendt and Rancière differs and, as I will show, to a certain degree complement rather than contradict each other. While Arendt's approach considers the political implications of forms of human interaction, Rancière focuses on the aesthetic principles regulating this interaction. But if one takes a closer look at the underlying mechanisms and \textit{raison d'être} of politics, which, following Marchart, lie in an inherent contingency of any political order, the two approaches become comparable. I combine my own reflections on mediality and intermediality with these approaches, each of which implies but does not explicitly consider medial relations.\(^6\) I am thereby expanding the post-foundational approach by linking the contingency at the core of both approaches to mechanisms of intermediality.

'Politics' is a concept that applies only to human (inter-)relations\(^6\); its application to a single human being makes no sense, just as its application to contexts without any human presence or involvement is futile. Arendt explains this by noting that the core of politics is the 'plurality' of human beings (see Arendt 2003, 9): human beings share certain qualities but are also unique. As a

\(^6\) “[Post-foundationalism] assumes [...] the absence of an ultimate ground, since it is only on the basis of such absence that grounds, in the plural, are possible. [...] It does not turn into anti-foundationalist nihilism, existentialism or pluralism, all of which would assume the absence of any ground and would result in complete meaninglessness, absolute freedom or total autonomy. Nor does it turn into a sort of postmodern pluralism for which all meta-narratives have equally melted into air, for what is still accepted by post-foundationalism is the necessity for some grounds” (Marchart 2007, 14).

\(^6\) I am also referring to the works of other theorists, including Alain Badiou, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, Martin Heidegger, and Chantal Mouffe, but will do so largely in the context of the approaches of Arendt and Rancière.

\(^6\) While Rancière speaks of media, for instance in \textit{Future of the Image} (2007), the concept of media he applies is relatively conventional with a strong material dimension. Rancière recognizes the involvement of perception in mediality, which in the context of his research interest, however, appears largely with a visual emphasis (see for instance Rancière 2007, 71–72) and recognizes further elements but does not include any anthropomorphic qualities: "A medium is not a 'proper' means or material. It is a surface of conversion: a surface of equivalence between the different arts' ways of making: a conceptual space of articulation between these ways of making and forms of visibility and intelligibility determining the way in which they can be viewed and conceived” (Rancière 2007, 75–76).

\(^6\) Although the relationship between a human being and an object can also mark a certain 'politicity,' this is only the case insofar as this relationship also affects the interrelationship with other human beings.
consequence, wherever they encounter each other they interact as separate and distinct entities and thereby form relations. 'Politics,' in turn, concerns the interaction and relations among this plurality, or, as Arendt puts it, 'deals with the “being-together” and “being-among-each-other” of the distinct' (Arendt 2003, 9–10). This interaction constitutes a 'realm,' a human world or 'reality' that unites and simultaneously separates the human plurality. While 'reality' is commonly associated with stability, Arendt stresses that this realm changes over time (see Arendt 2003, 25) and analyzes transformations of this realm in terms of various aspects of human life and experiences (including transformations of the social-, labor- / work-, and technological environment, see Arendt 1998). All of these experiences, however, depend on perception which takes place in this realm but also conditions it. In this sense, human plurality does not interact in a space, but their interaction creates and conditions the realm, which, in turn, structures and conditions its elements (including perception). This is the first indication of fundamental medial relations underlying the human plurality, which emanates from and includes each unique human being.

This mediality is also implicit in Arendt's concept of a common inter-est (Latin: being in between) that holds together this community of equal-yet-distinct individuals (see Arendt 1998, 182). The communal inter-est is more than an assemblage of individual interests but in constituting human interrelations connects and simultaneously separates the distinct into the same. This also means that Arendt's concept of politics should not be understood in purely spatial terms, even

---

64 “Politik beruht auf der Tatsache der Pluralität der Menschen. [...] Politik handelt von dem Zusammen- und Miteinander-Sein der Verschiedenen.”

65 The concept of 'real' and 'reality' is a very complex discourse in itself (Arendt even distinguishes between 'actuality' or Wirklichkeit, and 'reality' or Realität) and would require a study in and of itself. I will limit myself to a very provisional definition of 'reality' as the opposite of 'theatricality,' that is, a realm of human perception and interaction that is not marked by a conscious perceptual element of performativity and mediality, and in which all actions and re-actions have 'real,' non-semiotic or imaginary, consequences. This realm centers on human life, which is also at stake as its essential and ultimate consequence: though a number of human beings may agree on certain traits of 'a reality,' human uniqueness links the concept of 'reality' to individual perception so that with the end of a unique life (which is a consequence of the linearity of human life, see Arendt 1998, 17ff) the unique reality associated with that life comes to an end. My understanding of reality thereby includes notions of the 'public' (see also Arendt 2002, 62f, 113) and the German concept of Öffentlichkeit (see also Balme 2010). Conversely, in resolving the separation of 'reality' and 'theatricality' into a threshold, intermediality, following my hypothesis, is inherently 'political.'

66 'Wherever human beings assemble/encounter/meet a realm [...] emerges, that both assembles and separates them from one another. Each of these realms has its own structure that changes over time [...]’ – “[...] Überall wo Menschen zusammenkommen [...] entsteht ein Raum [...]” (Arendt 2003, 25).

67 This aspect is also implicit in Röttger's discussion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in which she notes that 'In this sense, the Other and the Self are no radical difference, what is more essential is the question of the shared affiliation of the I and the Other with the world. Merleau-Ponty calls this world, which is common to both, 'shared world' [Zwischenwelt].’ “Das Andere und das Selbst sind so gesehen nicht als radikale Differenz gedacht, viel entscheidender ist hier die Frage nach der gemeinsamen Zugehörigkeit von Ich und Anderem zur Welt. Diese Welt, die beiden gemeinsam ist, nennt Merleau-Ponty die 'Zwischenwelt.”' (Röttger 2003, 194).
though the Greek model of the *polis* seems to suggest so.\textsuperscript{68} If one accepts that space (the same also applies to time) is not an absolute but an abstraction derived from the framework of perception, the inevitable connection of media and perception Krämer posits means that the same contingency that applies to perception also applies to its framework, i.e. includes the notion of space. When Jonathan Crary (see epigraph) stresses the mutual influence by etymologically linking the notion of an observer to the rules of an aesthetic system regulating and conditioning perception, we arrive at a system that reverberates remarkably with the reflections on intermediality I have developed above. In this sense it seems more correct to speak of a realm of human inter-relation, which becomes intermedial as a consequence of the inherent medial dimension of human interaction. Henk Oosterling confirms this connection from the opposite direction when describing the “unstable and non-discursive quality of the being (*esse*) of this in-between (inter) as inter-*esse*” which characterizes intermediality for him (see Oosterling 2003, 31).

Mediality plays a role in terms of the mode of politics. Arendt posits that the political realm “rises directly out of acting together, the 'sharing of words and deeds'” (Arendt 1998, 198). While Arendt, following the Greek tradition, assumes a direct, immediate communication, from a medial perspective it becomes clear that only the capacity to act and speak allows a human being to manifest his or her uniqueness, which means that a medial function is the precondition of politics. With that in mind, perception is part of the political mode: without it the 'sharing' would be impossible; perception is intrinsically associated with human uniqueness. Arendt alludes to this when describing how perception can create freedom of movement on a metaphorical level:

> 'Essential is […] that one attained the capability to truly perceive objects from various sides, which means in political terms that one could assume the many […] points of view from which the same thing can be seen, and whence it reveals different aspects that are independent from its essence [“Selbigkeit”]. […] This is significantly more than bypassing one's personal interest […], but produces a true freedom of movement on an intellectual level that parallels that of a physical level.’\textsuperscript{69} (Arendt 2003, 96–97)

This statement contains several key elements of Arendt's concept of politics: it indicates the plurality of perspectives as constituting the realm, the difference that separates an individual *interest* from the *inter-esse* (namely the recognition that there is a potential surplus of perception), as well as what Marchart calls the communitarian foundation of Arendt's concept of politics. For

\textsuperscript{68} This becomes clear when considering Arendt's statement “[The] true space [of the *polis*] lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be” (Arendt 1998, 198).

\textsuperscript{69} “Entscheidend ist […], daß man die Fähigkeit gewann die Sachen wirklich von verschiedenen Seiten zu sehen, und das heißt politisch, daß man sich darauf verstand, die vielen möglichen, in der wirklichen Welt vorgegebenen Standorte einzunehmen, von denen aus die gleiche Sache betrachtet werden kann und in der sie, ihrer Selbigkeit ungeachtet, die verschiedensten Aspekte zeigt. […] Dieses ist erheblich mehr als die Ausschaltung des eigenen Interesses […], [man] erzielt so eine wahre Bewegungsfreiheit in der Welt des Geistigen, die der Bewegungsfreiheit im Physischen genau parallel läuft.”
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

Arendt, politics begins with the foundation of a *polis*\(^{70}\) as a realm of equality\(^{71}\) and is characterized by communication which seeks to include as much of the unique differences as possible (and thus resembles the attempt to derive definitions of media from an intermedial epistemology). This equality, however, comes at the cost of excluding elements that are considered to be non-equal (in a Classical Greek context this meant any non-citizens, including women, children, and slaves).

While for Arendt this exclusion\(^{72}\) indicates the non-political, it is at the core of Rancière's concept of 'politics,' where it is also intrinsically connected with perception. 'Politics' in Rancière's sense, constitutes not the activity within a 'realm' (what he calls *distribution of the sensible*) but an appearance which is impossible according to the realm's rules of the appearance. This impossible appearance deconstructs this 'realm' by revealing a fallacy in its foundation, exposes the underlying contingency of the separation, turns it into a threshold, and thereby necessitates a renegotiation of the founding principles. The appearance posits radical equality with, rather than difference from, the realm's logic of appearance.\(^{73}\) In light of the mediality of the human body, one could say the appearance creates an incursion of signification which dissolves medial separation and distribution and thereby creates an intermedial realm. This intermedial realm deconstructs medial specificity, that is, it dissolves the distribution of media and their separation into a threshold which creates a radical equality. As this equality needs to be perceivable and recognizable, the appearance stresses perception as being located in between a plurality of independent-yet-connected orders. This appeals to a conscious perception which addresses its own conditions, in much the same way as Krämer's concept of *intermediality* is the epistemic condition of *mediality*. The political 'activity' involved is not communitarian in the sense of maintaining a community but antagonistic in deconstructing a 'realm' by revealing the contingency and mediality of its underlying structural principles that condition status and the signification of its elements (including perception).

\(^{70}\) As Marchart notes, “[I]n the Arendtian trajectory, Claude Lefort […] will call the political the moment by which the symbolic form of society is instituted, while for Ernesto Laclau […], to some extent from within the Schmittian trajectory, the political is both the disruptive moment of the dislocation of the Social and the founding moment of the Social's institution *vis-à-vis* a radical outside” (Marchart 2007, 48). By “the Schmittian trajectory” Marchart refers to the political thought of Carl Schmitt, who was the first to introduce the distinction between 'politics' and 'the political' in the German discourse (see Marchart 2007, 4), and whose reflections are important also for Giorgio Agamben's concept of biopolitics (see Agamben 1998).

\(^{71}\) I would like to stress that this equality does not concern superficial differences such as profession, look, language, etc., but fundamental qualities of being a unique perceiving, speaking, and acting human being. It concerns the question of what makes each human being unique at that level, which implies that there needs to be some characteristic that sets him or her apart.

\(^{72}\) Both Arendt and Rancière emphasize the Greek concept of the *logos* as the core of the distinction in the Aristotelean tradition (see for instance Arendt 1998, 25ff, Rancière 2002, 14, 30, 34, 37).

\(^{73}\) “Politics is first of all the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, the setting of objects posed as ‘common’ and of subjects to whom the capacity is recognized to designate these objects and discuss about them. Politics first is the conflict about the very existence of that sphere of experience, the reality of those common objects and the capacity of those subjects” (Rancière 2004b, n.p.).
In other words, the political is a realm in which an assembling, uniting process meets a dissembling, separating process. This is another key feature of the post-foundational approach to politics which distinguishes what Marchart refers to as the 'ontic element' of 'politics' and the 'ontological element' of 'the political' which evolves on a symbolic level at the core of the founding moment of society (see Marchart 2007, 7–8). 74 I suggest that because of the human involvement this symbolic level needs to be conceived of in terms of an inherent performativity, both in the sense of establishing an order and assigning signification via performance (a performative act), and also as acting in accordance with an order which conditions the signification of the performative acts. Every foundation needs a certain degree of stability, a uniting structuring principle or order which not only creates but also maintains some homogeneity in the assemblage of elements that are heterogeneous ('unique') in character. This fulfills essentially a management function which functions as (or replaces) a sensus communis or inter-esse, a shared 'sensibility' or logic. 75 Rancière describes this integrative mechanism at the core of 'the political' 76 in neutral terms (see Rancière 1999, 29, 31) as “the police” which maintains a distribution of the sensible by assigning each element its place and status. This element is a necessary part of 'the political' because of its contingency which, following Rancière, implies a fundamental wrong (blaberon), an inherent logical flaw which will disrupt the order if it becomes apparent (Rancière 1999, 13). In this sense, the function of the police, as Gabriel Rockhill puts it, is to establish “the borders between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable” (see Rancière 2004a, 89). Phenomenologically speaking the police is essentially an aesthetic mechanism, and Rancière distinguishes several historic 'aesthetic regimes' 77 as specific distributions of the sensible. Even though he does not establish a medial perspective, the involvement of aesthetics and its qualitative norms implies a mediality that regulates the way something is perceived as something. In this sense, the awkward use of the term “sensible” (which seems to be the product of Rancière's own

74 Some theorists use the terms in reverse meaning or in different interrelationships. Chantal Mouffe, for instance, defines politics as “the practices and institutions through which a certain order is organized” (Marchart 2007, 43), which Rancière would refer to as the police. Despite the individual differences, however, all theorists that Marchart calls post-foundational maintain a distinction between 'politics' and 'the political' (see also Marchart 2007, 144).

75 Marchart notes that this consists “mainly of institutionalized social management and of what Foucault would call governmental technologies or police. It appertains to the realm of calculation, where all arising problems and difficulties are to be 'resolved' by administrative means, while everything questionable in the radical sense, that is questionability as such, disappears” (Marchart 2007, 68).

76 Gabriel Rockhill observes that Rancière does not maintain a strict terminological distinction between politics and the political, but that the political is “the meeting ground between politics and the police,” i.e. the realm of encounter (see “Glossary of Technical Terms” in Rancière 2004a, 89). This should not be confused with the distribution of the sensible (which is part of the police) but rather as a realm that makes the encounter possible.

77 The 'ethical regime of images,' the 'representative regime of Art', and the 'aesthetic regime of Art' (see Rancière 2004a).
translation of the French term *partage du sensible*, in which *sensible* signifies the perceivable) should be understood as including the connotation in English of an element of reason that the process of negotiating an aesthetic order conditioning an interplay between medially and signification into a political system implies.\(^78\) This perspective is important not only in the context of a nexus of politics and intermediality, but also in an environment that is marked by an increasing awareness of an omnipresence of media,\(^79\) by “micro and geopolitical aspects of intermedial interactions and transactions within a globalized, media dominated information society” (Oosterling 2003, 30–31). It also indicates why a purely administrative activity, epitomized in the work of today's professional politicians, does not constitute 'politics.'

We have arrived again at an essentially intermedial situation: the medially at the core of politics resembles strikingly the theoretical implications of a concept of intermediality; and, vice versa, the reflections on intermedially point to a political dimension. In other words, the very concept of intermediality is 'political' or contains a certain 'politicity' in the sense that, although it does not itself present a *distribution of the sensible*, it marks a realm that suspends the police's mechanisms of distribution and allows for a renegotiation of a *distribution of the sensible*. Hints of this can be found in Schröter's notion of a 'politics of intermediality,' and Oosterling explicitly argues for such a connection by pointing to a political dimension of the 'inter' as “an integrating force working in media technology, implicitly imposing politics on collective consciousness,” which concerns “the unstable and non-discursive quality of the being (*esse*) of this in-between (inter) as inter-*esse*” (Oosterling 2003, 31). Both the communitarian and antagonist approaches locate politics in a threshold between sameness and difference; the approaches differ in the direction each takes in regard to this threshold and how it draws the lines of distinction. My concept of the *mediaclash*\(^80\) describes the uncertainty regarding the interaction with media in an intermedial realm, particularly in terms of the implications regarding one's own role and status in interacting with these media. The *mediaclash* suspends all prior mechanisms of signification, points to the underlying contingency and dissolves all boundaries within the intermedial realm into a threshold. This establishes the political dimension, the deconstruction of medial and signification specificity in a self-reflective surplus of meaning.

What Belting notes for the specific case of images *qua* media also applies to intermediality in general:

---

\(^{78}\) See also Chapter 1, section “Individual Corporeality and the Politics of Aesthetics.”

\(^{79}\) Although this awareness generally refers to digital media, my analyses demonstrate that it applies also to medial relations in general.

\(^{80}\) See Dapp 2006.
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

The politics of images relies on their mediality, as mediality usually is controlled by institutions and serves the interests of political power (even when it, as we experience it today, hides behind a seemingly anonymous transmission). The politics of images needs a medium to turn an image into a picture. (Belting 2005, 305)

My reflections suggest that what Belting describes as 'images' applies to phenomena in general; 'picture' thereby describes the interaction between phenomenon and transporting medium; Belting's 'politics' strictly speaking refers to the politicity of signification, which, once the inherent mediality becomes perceivable can produce an intermedial threshold which has the potential to disrupt the distribution of the sensible. The same intermedial interplay can also be demonstrated from the opposite, political direction, for example, in Ernesto Laclau's concept of 'sedimented social practices':

[W]e live in a world of sedimented social practices. The moment of reactivation consists not in going to an original founding moment, as in Husserl, but to an original contingent decision through which the social was instituted. This moment of the institution of the social through contingent decisions is what I call 'the political'. (Laclau as cited in Marchart 2007, 138)

In light of Arendt's notion of human 'plurality,' what lies at the core of the 'social practices' is the threshold of a distribution of distinct-yet-equals, of individual interest within the social inter-esse, and of a contingent alterity. The incursion of the contingency which emerges from the appearance of the other not only questions the social inter-esse but also extends to each individual interest whose status it calls into question.

If we then return to the initial question regarding the concepts of 'intermediality' and 'politics' in the context of theatre and performance, the medial function of performativity (see Chapter 2, section “Thresholds Between Theatricality and Performativity”) problematizes the inherent contingency on yet another level: the very assumption of the status as 'Art' posits a difference from all other modes of human interaction qua performativity. One could say that in performing sameness theatre (and, even more radically, performance) claims difference, or rather, it claims difference because of performing sameness. In this sense it is not the specific content of a theatre performance that makes it 'political' but the distance it assumes with respect to other 'realms.' As Rancière puts it,

Art is not political owing to the messages and feelings that it conveys on the state of social and political issues. Nor is it political owing to the way it represents social structures, conflicts or identities. It is political by virtue of the very distance that it takes with respect to those functions. It is political insofar as it frames [...] a specific space-time sensorium [...] which defines ways of being together or being apart, of being inside or outside, in front of or in the middle of, etc. It is political as its own practices shape forms of visibility that reframe the way in which practices, manners of being and modes of feeling and saying are interwoven in a commonsense, which means a “sense of the common” embodied in a common sensorium. (Rancière 2004b, n.p.)
Rancière bases this approach on his historical analysis of various aesthetic regimes or distributions of the sensible (see Rancière 1999, 2004a, 2004b), which reflect attempts at regulating and evaluating (and thus controlling) the difference in status that 'Art' claims, and which is as old as the concept of politics. It is important to keep in mind that when Rancière notes such a politicity for 'Art' he thinks primarily along the lines of visual arts and painting. If we apply Rancière's reflection to the realm of theatre, its inherent corporeality and theatricality provides theatre with an even more heightened politicity as its 'practices, manners of being and modes of feeling and saying' are even nearer to the 'social structures, conflicts, or identities' of a distribution of the sensible from which it postulates its distance. In this sense I will continue to use Rancière's term 'Art' also in a theatrical context to indicate its broad applicability, but urge the reader to keep in mind the special mode, conditions and capability of theatre.

At the same time, most people will agree that not all Art is 'political'; Art, in fact, can be purely entertaining because of its distance from the other realms. I propose that the answer to the question of what makes Art 'political' lies in its inherent mediality. More precisely, Art becomes 'political' when intermediality becomes an epistemic condition to perceiving the interplay between mediality and performativity. It becomes political with respect to its own sameness, as the logic of the police cannot absorb this paradoxical sameness-of-the-distinct. As soon as the event of politics has taken place, its occurrence triggers a renegotiation of the distribution of the sensible, which includes the new order but is no less contingent, just differently so. In this sense it is the uncertainty, the stance of literal 'in-difference' and indifference that makes intermedial Art 'political.' Any explicit claim to politics, for instance by addressing social issues, essentially remains within the logic of a distribution of the sensible and can be labeled, categorized, and controlled, and thus is just another manifestation of the police. Intermedial art is 'political' in the sense that it makes possible or even encourages 'politics' in order to attain politicity but also remain 'Art.'

My definition of intermediality expands Rancière's concept of aesthetics to account for the intermedial relationship underlying the interplay of aisthesis, media, and signification. Other forms of mediality, such as multimediality or transmediality can be said to maintain a set of predefined medial relationships which can absorb any inkling of a conscious mediality into 'rules of aisthesis' that maintain a distribution of the sensible. This definition implies a politicity that is independent from any political 'ideology' and even departs from any clear 'meaning.' It also means that any notion of an appeal to a specific political action becomes impossible. The resulting ambiguity can be quite frustrating for an audience (see for instance Chapter 2); the frustration, however, is an
indicator of an active engagement by spectators who recognize the presence of meaning but are uncertain about its status. One could say it encourages a (re-)negotiation of the distribution of the sensible yet leaves it open as to how this negotiation should take place, or what its outcome should be.

The detailed analysis of five performances which follows has greatly contributed to the theoretical reflections outlined above, yet is also inconceivable without them. These chapters set out to explore the way in which these concepts can contribute to the signification of these performances, and, conversely, how the performances can contribute to the concepts of intermediality and politics. None of these performances claim to be intermedial, nor yet to be 'political theatre'; in fact, some of their creators might question or even reject such labels altogether. Each performance creates a unique medial realm with a wide range of medial functions, and a particular function and place for the individual spectator, a circumstance which at the same time calls into question the distribution of roles, media, and signification. Each unique intermedial realm which emerges within these performances also differs in politicity and comprises unique ratios between the two opposite 'political' forces of integration and disruption, of communitarian and antagonist approaches as posited by post-foundationalism. Furthermore, all of them address the medial 'realm' as a globalized phenomenon, as an experience transcending national boundaries and interests. Each performance thereby creates its own threshold between performance and reality with the potential to re-activate the contingency of 'sedimented social practices' and make negotiable concepts which seemed to possess a relative stability. At the same time, they constitute a 'precarious Art,' as it were, insofar as their unique politicity is always in danger of being subsumed by the aesthetic rules of the police, which would reduce them to mere meta-politics.

I have organized my analysis by theatre companies as a broad indicator of a shared 'sense ratio' inherent in their methodology. Except for the second chapter, my analyses are based on my experience of the live performances augmented by video material obtained from the companies themselves. While this transforms the overall signification at least slightly by allowing a comparison and level of analysis beyond the exact experience of an audience member, an intermedial point of view alleviates this problem by focusing on the encounter with media, making

---

81 It should be noted that this situation does not equal chaos which abolishes all signification. Analogously to the distinction between post-foundationalism and anti-foundationalism (see Marchart 2007, 14), there needs to be some meaning, even though this meaning has to accept its own contingency. Intermedial performances maintain cohesion, which, however, consists of constant attempts of independent, heterogeneous elements to break out of the homogeneous whole.

82 The second chapter is an exception insofar as it is based on Paul Poet's documentary Ausländer Raus – Bitte liebt Österreich and other secondary sources, in line with my argument that the performance took place in a larger medial realm beyond the immediate, corporeal event (see Chapter 2).
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

it possible to include this difference as an analytical tool. After all, the point is not to recreate a performance, nor its experience, but to reflect on the implications of this experience for my theory. The question directed towards the productions does not address any concrete political message or 'political actions' they might call for. Rather, it looks at the intermedial 'realm' they create, what this 'realm,' its distributions, and signification process means, and what its implications are, for the intermedial 'realm' that constitutes 'reality.'

Writing on Intermediality and Politics: Findings of the Individual Chapters

The intermedial field (including the intermedial processes on writing about intermediality) produces definitions of media.

—— Jens Schröter, “Discourses and Models of Intermediality,” 2011, 6

In writing my analyses I found that the distinct intermedial 'realm' of each performance extended into the process of writing. One can summarize this by paraphrasing Schröter statement, 'the intermedial field includes the intermedial process on writing about intermediality.' I tried to engage with the performances on a level of equals, of not imposing something onto them but of developing something in interaction with each performance. This has resulted in the following three chapters, differing significantly in tone and content, each introducing its own insights, elements, and style. And yet, they form part of an organic whole, an intermedial argument about intermediality, as it were, which grows and evolves through these chapters. At the same time, just as it is possible to consider Rancière's philosophy independently from Arendt's, the unique approach of each company makes it possible to read each chapter independently. For this reason I have included a section on a general methodology of the directors / production company involved; I have omitted this section in the third chapter as the project was the result of an international co-operation and thus not necessarily representative of other works by the company.

I would like to advise the reader not to read the chapters as studies of 'political theatre,' but rather as an exploration of the politicity of various forms of intermediality. This is evident in the wide range of medial functions appearing in the performances, and the analytical implications resulting from them. Theatre no more than prepares ground for intermediality, just as social / political ground will always be contingent. There is no ultimate ground, just as there it no ultimate

83 Igneous began as an artistic collaboration in 1993 and was formally established in 1997 with a mandate to create "multimedia dance-based performances for the stage, installation performances in alternative spaces, movement-based videos, and conduct forums, workshops and masterclasses" (see http://www.igneous.org.au/thanatonauts.html). liquid skin is unique within this structure as the product of a cooperation with the 2005 Theater der Welt Festival, Bobvan (Belgium) and Franks Soehnle (Germany). It also toured to several countries in a revised version with puppeteer Bruce Ellison (USA/Belgium).
'political theatre' that resolves the contingency once and for all.

**Chapter 1: Rimini Protokoll – A Communitarian Approach to the Politics of Intermediality**

The performances by Rimini Protokoll have been described as 'documentary theatre,' insofar as they combine biographical elements of their performers and explicit references to issues that are commonly associated with 'politics.' The performers are almost exclusively non-actors who appear as themselves and tell their own stories as 'experts' of their own life. When approached from this point of view, the performances appear to follow a tradition of 'political theatre' that includes aspects of collective creation / création collective (e.g., Ariane Mnouchkine), German documentary theatre of the 1960s, and Brecht's epic theatre. At the same time, the performances do not establish a 'dramatic' narrative, especially not in the sense of a structure of exposition, climax, and conclusion. They comprise an assemblage of individual perspectives that could be called 'postdramatic' and make the audience an active co-creator of the performance by staging their dramaturgical function qua audience. But the performances do not simply break the Fourth Wall and call for audience participation on stage in the form of playing a small role. Instead, they 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 in this light, as an intermedial 'realm,' principles of separation emerge that 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. These thresholds are unique to each performance, which is why the chapter is structured in three large sections, each of which focuses on one performance.

*Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Band 1* is an unusual production for Rimini Protokoll insofar as it has a specific person and object as its theme. Given the influence of *Das Kapital* on the events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one might expect the performance to follow the tradition of documentary 'political theatre' particularly as its mise-en-scène is quite 'conventionally' theatrical. Yet approaching the performance from an intermedial point of view makes it clear that Marx's hypotheses play only a subordinate role; the dramaturgical core of the performance is the mediality of the book qua book which starts to interact with and reveal other medial elements of the performance realm. Within its episodic structure, the performance evaluates the underlying mediality of Marx's hypotheses in terms of their influence on individuals (including the 'experts' and, a fortiori, each individual audience member) in the twenty-first century.
Underlying Marx's concept of value, for instance, emerges a medial function that is independent of any concrete meaning: value appears first and foremost as a tool for measurement, a medial function of 'translation' that makes phenomena comparable. This realization calls attention to various forms of measurements in the context of the performance that condition the signification of perception. This shifts the focus from specific content to an inter-medial process affecting signification in interaction with a dynamic process of perception. In this sense, Rimini Protokoll creates the performance 'realm' as a community of performers, media, and spectators, while deconstructing it by emphasizing mediality and the individual perspective of each audience member. This results in a heterogeneity and surplus of signification which sets each individual human being apart, and stages a plurality of unique perspectives which break out of this unity and encourage the spectators to transpose their perception onto a broader (extra-theatrical) context. This individualization and quasi-equality of performers, media, and perceivers, in turn, becomes the basis for a new inter-esse, a community that is united not by 'facts' but by insights triggered by the performance. Rather than any specific action, issue, or quality, 'politics' emerges as an activity that, like intermedial signification, is literally in between.

Although Mnemopark is similar in terms of general methodology, it differs significantly in tone, subject, and mise-en-scène. The performance comprises multiple narrative levels that revolve around a model train landscape replicating areas in Switzerland but serving also as a stage for a 'sub-plot' which merges facts about a globalized environment with the virtual 'realm' created in and by Bollywood movies. While these facts seem overtly 'political,' approaching the technico-medial setup from an intermedial perspective reveals another dimension: the green-screen, cameras, sound effects, and projection screen produce a life-size threshold between a model, virtual-fictional 'realm,' and the corporeal performance 'reality.' The model landscape becomes an intermedial simulacrum which is both equal and different, that is, it attains a medial ambiguity which affects perception. The intermedial realm of Mnemopark creates a threshold between model scale and 'reality;' live, corporeal and mediatized; past (memory, experience of 'flash-back-moments'), present (performance), and future (collapse of 'flash-backs'). This threshold induces breaks in perception that reveal the contingency of spatio-temporal perception in an intermedial environment; the very assumption of a 'self-evidence' of 'facts' reveals their contingency and exposes the distribution of the sensible.

The spectator finds him- or herself in the peculiar position of having to find a way through the episodic structure, of being forced to take a stance when being directly referred to, yet
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

simultaneously being immobilized in the role of an audience. The spectator is exposed to a 'narcotic' (see McLuhan 2001, 45) medial environment that absorbs the human being in its medial function. This medial force culminates in a scene in which one of the experts is trapped in a bleak and empty future, in which the model landscape is no longer a model of but a model for 'reality,' a Baudrillardian simulation (see Baudrillard 1978). The fictional-virtual 'sub-plot' affirms the reach of global media in pervasively conditioning perception on a global scale. And yet, it also becomes clear that they can create a surplus of signification that is more than the sum of its constituting elements and reflects its own status, condition, and contingency in light of the larger medial 'outside.' This results in an intermedial process of spatial and temporal relationships that points to a transformation of 'reality' into an 'environment' conditioned by media. A Deleuzean fold (see Deleuze 2000, 120) emerges, an outside that is located at the inside and introduces a critical perspective that offers a chance for politicization by re-activating “ossified” (Marchart 2007, 139) conditions and conventions. The performance assembles 'experts,' media, and 'spectators,' in an intermedial environment which dissolves this unity into thresholds of its constituents, and attains a politicity that concerns the challenges an inter homines esse faces in a time of globally operating media.

Cargo Sofia goes even further in intermedially dissolving theatrical spaces and signification into thresholds when it invites the audience to join the drivers on a road trip from Sofia to the actual location of the performance. The performance cleverly uses medially to 'project' another signification on real landmarks and thus creates a realm that is situated between fiction and reality. Although the performance physically separates audience and performers, this separation functions as a paradoxical threshold between the two realms. By turning the audience into cargo, the performance induces breaks in perception that bypass medial constraints and open up for discussion fundamental concepts and tenets of our contemporary consumer societies. The intermedial realm exposes medially as both separating and connecting various spheres of perception, turning 'political' demarcations and the distinction between global and local into a threshold. It also highlights an anthropomorphic dimension of media affect our 'way of life' by creating new possibilities on a technical level (e.g., opening new spaces, abilities, expanding senses, etc.).

While Marx believed that technology would free man from labor (see Arendt 1998, 43ff, 104), Cargo Sofia indicates that every 'new freedom' comes at a cost: the GPS illustrates a gradual and voluntarily surrendering of privacy to an increasing need-to-know of a political system, along with the contingency in the interplay and interdependence between freedom, equality, and
separation. It becomes clear that political structures are neither the source of freedom nor the source of change, but rather the effect of both. At the same time, freedom and politics do not simply vanish with a regime change, but form a dynamic and interdependent relationship, whose contingent delimitation shifts with any renegotiation and forms new separations. In this light Cargo Sofia stages how globally operating media subject the individual to an equality that can be as liberating as it can be suppressive, and thereby embodies and performs the contingency at the core of 'the political.' Conversely, the fundamental sameness can also become a means to empower the individual to disrupt the complex medial machinery by positing alterity. Theatre turns into a communitarian intermedial 'realm' that is located at a threshold between 'reality' and 'theatricality' and has the ability to induce *mediacleshes* which reveal and renegotiate separations and signification.

**Chapter 2: Christoph Schlingensief's 'Bitte liebt Österreich – erste europäische Koalitionswoche' - Antagonism, Provocation, and the Contingency of an Intermedial Performance**

Schlingensief's 'Aktion' takes the reflections to a more general level of performativity. It was a unique event whose structure makes it very clear that any repetition would have jeopardized its integrity. It also differs in terms of its overall reception, as a politicity which concerned a reflection on the 'current state of the world' was quite apparent to most spectators. In fact, the 'Aktion' so effectively questioned the boundaries of autonomous 'Art' that it became an inseparable part of the realm constituting the events it addressed. The medial mechanisms were thereby quite 'conventional,' but interacted with the mediality of theatricality and formed an intermedial realm that deconstructed the signification process so effectively that all conventional forms of interacting with media failed. In this sense, its intermediality is both apparent and opaque, doubling the *mise-en-scène* which consists of a *Big Brother* scenario around an obtrusively visible deportation camp for equally obtrusively invisible asylum seekers. 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.

This results in what Schlingensief compares to a mirror for 'self-provocation,' a function which undermines the mechanism of performativity that would allow control over signification. Everybody that comes in contact with the event, even in a form of mediation, becomes a participant...
who faces a mirroring surface which constantly confronts oneself with the image of seeing others perceive oneself. Any attempt of a beholder to take a stance in order to separate him- or herself from the performance backfires and results in an even more intricate involvement. As a consequence, the storyline depends entirely on the audience-as-participant. While this structure has been associated with postdramatic performance (see Balme 2010), the chapter shows that on its own this concept is insufficient to capture the intricacies emerging from intermediality. In engaging and internalizing 'external' media (e.g., newspapers), the intermedial realm extends beyond the 'immediate' context and undermines any distinction between inside and outside (e.g., in endowing 'real' acts with theatricality, while 'fictional' elements attain a certain 'reality'). The dramaturgy of the 'Aktion' thereby creates a situation that resembles what Deleuze calls a fold, which differs from the folds of Rimini Protokoll insofar as the status of the 'Aktion' as Art becomes extremely contentious. It becomes a 'space of exception' that stages the social system as a biopolitical panopticon, and whose very existence transcends metapolitics by calling attention to the fact that there is ultimately nothing apart from convention that distinguishes the modes of one sphere from the other. This deconstructed not only the signification process but also the protective function of 'Art' and exposed the 'Aktion' to the radical force of reality which manifested itself in the form of physical attacks (including arson and acid attacks), attempts to free the inmates, and attempts to control the 'Aktion' on a 'political' level.

The chapter evaluates the notion of 'political theatre' within the context of the performance, as Schlingensief completely breaks down the signifying system and explicitly rejects any therapeutic aspect to the performance. Schlingensief does not believe in any 'political change' as a direct result of 'Art' and actively resists attempts to integrate its signification within the logic of the pre-existing social ground. The simple declaration that what is happening is 'Art' stages the encounter between antagonist and communitarian mechanisms in grounding / re-grounding a contingency at the heart of the Social and raises the question of who determines such a status, while labeling any attempt to control this status as an example of censorship. This results in the impossibility of taking any definite stance in an environment in which all relations are constantly shifting; it also indicates that political 'eruptions' are extremely limited in their temporality. 'Politics' becomes an event that clashes its own contingency with the groundlessness of the Social and interrupts the continuity of 'the political' by counterposing another ground. This means that 'politics' cannot be repeated, and its occurrence and outcome is unpredictable. While many participants expressed a desire to repeat the 'Aktion' in other places and contexts, the very repeatability would
Introduction: Intermediality and Politics in Theatre and Performance

retroactively affirm its status as 'Art,' and thereby undermine its politicity.

Chapter 3: liquid skin – Intermedial Thresholds of the Human Being, Technology, and Media

*liquid skin* consists of a wonderfully lyrical, multi-structural process of abstract, intermedial signification which combines dance, puppets, video projections, and an elaborate soundscape. The visual level of signification thereby engages with the complex spatio-temporal soundscape, renegotiating images and actions on stage and transforming their meaning. Each element affirms its independent medial contribution and brings to attention 'discontinuities' within a non-hierarchical, non-absolute, synaesthetic, unpredictable, and individual intermedial perception. Of particular importance to this process is dancer James Cummingham's paralyzed left arm which enhances this process by introducing an element of alterity. This results in a plurality of possible structural principles which occur simultaneously, and each of which contributes signification to the performance while maintaining a degree of independence. Several moments that resemble 'recapitulations' involve each individual spectator as an active co-creator of the performance in *making sense*, and give this process an essentially spiral structure. In light of the conspicuous absence of language, one can say that the performance questions the medial status of language as something lyrical, particularly in its relationship with other, equally lyrical media that are distinguishable even though their boundaries 'liquefy' into an intermedial whole.

The intermedial realm of dissolving boundaries also extends to the human being, whose skin, as the title suggests, liquifies and produces a threshold between human being, mediality, and technology. This threshold points to an ethico-political dimension: is identity nothing but a threshold, an ambiguity? It is symptomatic of this intermedial realm that there is no longer a difference contained by equality, but rather an ambiguity pertaining to identity which creates an unresolvable tension and turns identity into a political condition. A medial biopolitics emerges that attempts to normalize the human body in its medial function and create a new type of functional equality that abolishes human individuality. The initial curiosity of the dancer faces an increasing aggression from the puppets and turns into a battle between forces of integration and forces of resistance. The medial environment becomes associated with a manipulative power (e.g., quite literally manipulating the paralyzed arm) that assembles a plurality of normalized human beings as its *distribution of the sensible*, and whose individuality it recognizes only medially. Politics no longer concerns primarily human interaction but the self-affirmation of the individual in the face of an ever-encroaching medial environment. In other words, the contingency at the core of this politics is not a variation of an *inter-homines-esse* but the boundaries of identity, which determines whether
any notion of an 'inter' can even be maintained. Thresholds between human being and media question the mode and location of their separation in the post-foundational tradition.

Each audience member fulfills a dual role as individual and representative of an oppressive medial environment that threatens to replace the Social and abolish individuality. The confrontation with this duality heightens the tension between the Self and its medial environment and introduces self-reflexivity, which has significant effects on the theatrical environment. liquid skin structurally doubles the encounter between two contradictory dynamics; on the one hand it maintains the aesthetic status of theatre, while, on the other hand, the medality on which this status is founded turns the very distinction into a threshold. The body no longer 'embodies' a character but produces a stream of images whose signification it refers to the medial and perceptive process. These images blend into each other in a constant transformation of appearance and signification, which provides them with a fluidity that almost make them seem alive. Theatrical space dissolves into a heterogeneity, into a threshold between live and mediatized, corporeality and medality, space as a 'container' and as (aesthetic) separation.

The performance with its open-ended structure and the striking reappearance of the corporeal human body at the end of the performance, makes conceivable that the ultimate consequence of this intermedial biopolitics is a separation of human mediality from the body, an existence that is no longer limited by physical constraints. In my analysis I compare this state to an 'intermedial promise of immortality' in which the medial environment entirely replaces the body and provides identity with a 'medial life.' At the same time, the recurring incursions of corporeality in liquid skin and the alterity introduced by the dancer's disability encourage a critical stance towards a purely negative outlook regarding the effects of media. In this light the disability takes on a representative function of human uniqueness, a manifestation of the possibility of breaking through the oppressive norm, a 'dis/ability' which suddenly becomes an 'ability' to affirm uniqueness. If we apply this to the post-foundational 'models' of politics, a ratio of communitarian and antagonist elements emerges which differs from the other performances: the efforts of breaking out of an existing order to avoid the normative aesthetic mechanisms (police) of a medial environment are rooted in a Rancièrean antagonism, but also re-introduce an element of the Arendtian communitarian political process of individuality and debate. Given the abstract mode of communication, however, the ultimate 'empowerment' of individuality is that any conclusion remains to be made by each individual spectator.