Playing the media and playing the senses

Interpretar os media e jogar com os sentidos

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Abstract

In my essay I consider theater as the paradigm of all arts and as the art of the performer. I focus on the performative aspects of art as manifested in worldmaking, staging, self-referencing and self-reflexing. These last two aspects are particularly relevant in my understanding of intermediality as a specific mode of performativity, causing with all its frictions, contrasts and disjunctions a creative force according to the principle of both-and. I also discuss theater functioning as a hypermedium, providing a stage for other media to be staged or rather a playground for other media to be played with and thus also to play with the senses and the positioning of the spectator as experiencer. With a brief discussion of three performances, I want to demonstrate how the both-and principle of intermediality can work.

Keywords: Hypermedium – Intermediality – Performativity – Performer – Experiencer – Both-And

Resumo

Neste artigo considero o teatro como o paradigma de todas as artes e como a arte do *performer*. Concentro-me nos aspectos performativos da arte tal como manifestados na construção de mundos, no posicionamento em palco ("staging"), auto-referenciação e auto-reflexão. Estes dois últimos aspetos são particularmente relevantes na minha interpretação de intermedialidade como um modo específico de performatividade, provocando – com todas as suas fricções, contrastes e disjunções – uma força criava que ocorre de acordo com o princípio de "ambos-e". Também abordo o facto de o teatro funcionar como um hípermeio [*hypermedium*], servindo de palco para que outros *media* possam ser encenados ou até mesmo, e sobretudo, funcionando como um local de interpretação e prazeroso usufruto de outros *media* permitindo um jogo com os sentidos e conferindo ao espectador um papel de experienciador. Através de uma breve análise de três espectáculos, proponho-me demonstrar como o princípio intermedial do ambos-e pode funcionar.

Palavras-chave: Hípermeio – Intermedialidade – Performatividade – *Performer* – Experienciador – Ambos-E

Author's short bio

Chiel Kattenbelt is an emeritus associate professor in Media Comparison and Intermediality at the Department for Media and Culture Studies of Utrecht University. He is particularly interested in media, art and performance theory, aesthetics, semiotics, and phenomenology. One of his main interests in science, philosophy and art is thinking in triads. He is affiliated as a researcher and dramaturg with the Belgian company CREW, which mainly specializes in creating performances and installations using technologies like virtual reality and motion capture. He is also a board member of the International Society for Intermedial Studies.

| Introduction[1]

In my essay I define theater as a collective term for all live performing arts, as the art of the performer. To consider the specificity of theater in more detail, I compare theater with film, especially with film as a mass medium. I focus on the difference in how film audiences and theater audiences are usually addressed and positioned. Then I turn my attention to the concept of intermediality, which I ultimately define as a specific mode of performativity, related to worldmaking, staging, self-reference and self-reflexivity. To place theater within the domain of the arts, I discuss the aesthetic orientation, which is characterized by an interest in creating experiences and reflecting on these.

With a focus on intermedial theater, I argue that theater in its capacity to function as a hypermedium can provide a stage or playground for other media like film and video to be staged or played with and thus also play on the senses of the spectators. The creative force of intermediality is mainly expressed in the principle of both-and. In a brief discussion of three performances, I demonstrate how this principle could work. To frame the topics I address, I would like to start by reviewing some ideas from well-known philosophers and critics who have been an important source of inspiration for me to claim theater as the paradigm of all the arts and to explain how it could function as a hypermedium that provides a stage for other media to be staged and played with and by doing so playing on the senses of the spectator as well.

| Theater as the paradigm of all arts

My suggestion to consider theater as the paradigm (fundamental pattern) of all arts is a reaction to a long tradition of thinking of theater as an art composed of different arts, in which the very combination starts a process of theatricalization (as the Prague structuralist Jan

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[1] In case I use he, him and his in general terms I also include she and her as well as they, them and their.

Mukařovský (1974) suggests), but also a reaction to Immanuel Kant's classification of the arts according to the articulation of words, the gesticulation of images, and the modulation of sounds in literature, visual arts, and music (Kant 1986, 256-272). If we assume, then, that the arts can be traced back to human expression in words, gestures, and sounds, and that these are most directly related to the human faculties of understanding and intuition, of reason, imagination and feeling, we can also think in the opposite direction: If we consider the performer who, with all his means and capabilities of expression in words, gestures and sounds, stages himself in front of the other as spectator, thus taking and getting the space to create a possible world to which he can relate in different modes of presentation, then it is obvious to start from a broad definition of theater. Tadeusz Kowzan prefers the term "*l'art de spectacle*" instead of "*théâtre*" precisely because this notion refers to the aspect of visuality, of seeing and being shown (Kowzan 1975, 25). This, however, also applies to the Greek verb "*theaomai*" (to look at, see, behold with amazement or admiration) and the noun "*theama*" (spectacle), to which the noun "theater" is etymologically related and implies visual perception. The notions of amazement and admiration presuppose that the perception is of a specific quality and guided by a specific interest and intention. This will be elaborated in the discussion of the aesthetic orientation, which I will further specify with my concept of theater as performing art and aesthetic object.

When it comes to the question of the relationship between the arts, we should of course mention Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* [*Laocoon or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry*] (1766). In this essay, Lessing presents the distinction between poetry and visual art as the distinction between time and space. Visual art uses figures and colors in space to present bodies in a single moment, at best in a concise moment from which the viewer can reconstruct a story based on his own imagination. Poetry, on the other hand, uses articulated tones in time to present actions and thus development. When judging bodies, it is mainly about beauty, when judging actions, it is mainly about truth. The art of acting occupies a kind of intermediate position: it presents moving bodies and thus actions and is therefore ideally suited to present the acting human being. For Lessing, truth is a validity claim on a higher level than beauty. Lessing's concept of truth implies a correspondence between the inwardness of experience and the outwardness of action. Lessing's theater theory is both a theory of drama and a theory of acting. The theater is a public institution in which the playwright speaks to the spectators through the actors and produces an effect / affect in them that cannot be achieved by reading the text alone. The kinetic signs of the theater are indispensable. The spectator is addressed on his capacity for emotional involvement, and it is the effect of that experience itself that makes the spectator a better person. The moral effect is

already included in the affective effect. The actor is not allowed to lose himself in the character, thinks along with the writer everywhere, and even thinks for him based on his insight into the entire play and the function of his role within it.

In his *Ästhetik* [*Aesthetics*] (1842), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argues that the drama (i.e. the dramatic text) has developed both in form and content into the most accomplished totality. For this reason, in his opinion, the drama is the highest form of art (Hegel 1976, vol 2, 512). The dramatic unites within itself the objectivity of the epic and the subjectivity of the lyrical. He highlights the theatrical performance primarily as "the external execution of the dramatic artwork" (Hegel 1976, vol. 2, 535 – my translation). It is in the theatrical performance that the dramatic text finds its completion, in its concrete and direct presence in action. In Hegel's view, theater is primarily the art of the actor ("*Schauspielerkunst*"), within which he distinguishes two systems. According to one system the actor is an instrument of the dramatic work of art; according to the other, acting is an art in its own right (like in *commedia dell'arte*, in which acting is above all a matter of improvisation). However, if acting is primarily at the service of the playwright and his dramatic artwork, this does not mean that the actor would not be an artist ("*Künstler*"). The art of acting

> [...] demands much talent, intellect, perseverance, diligence, practice, knowledge, indeed at its peak even a richly gifted genius. For the actor must not only penetrate deeply into the spirit of the author and the role and make his own individuality inwardly and outwardly completely appropriate to it, but he must also supplement it with his own productivity in many points, fill in gaps, find transitions and generally explain the poet to us through his acting, insofar as he brings out and makes comprehensible all the author's secret intentions and deeper masterly traits to a living presence. (1976, vol 2, 543 – my translation). Hegel emphasizes the importance of absolute presence, in which theater performance takes place as a direct encounter and interaction between performers and spectators. In his view, art is all about an immediate and therefore sensual knowledge, a knowledge in the form and shape of the sensual and objective self, in which the absolute becomes perceivable and experienceable. The absolute that is at stake here concerns the living effect of the self-reliant need to resolve any struggle or contradiction.

Richard Wagner's concept of the *work of art of the future* aims at a reunification and reintegration of the various arts: the art of the word, poetry; the art of the body, dance; and the art of sound, music. The music functions as the heart that reconnects the head and body (Wagner 1850, 68). The illusionism that Wagner aimed for with the performances of his music dramas at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus led Friedrich Nietzsche to argue that Wagner was the disease of

that time, since, by depriving the spectator of any opportunity for reflection, he reduced art to entertainment.

In the early twentieth century Wassily Kandinsky opposed the illusionism of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. With his so-called *stage compositions* ("*Bühnenkompositionen*") he brought together the various arts − not to present an imaginary world that seems to exist in itself and in which the spectator is completely absorbed − but to express the "vibrations of the artist's soul" in a dynamic play of colors, sounds and movements in their pure forms, as these have developed in an increasing independence of the arts from each other, making the intensity of these vibrations also experienceable for the spectator in a similar way (Kandinsky 1979). Kandinsky is often considered one of the inventors of abstract art, but for him his art is not abstract but concrete. And rightly so, since his art works, including his stage compositions, are above all about the inwardness of experience and not about the outwardness of actions, let alone actions in an overarching structure of causality and verisimilitude. Actions can be retold and therefore objectified, and it is precisely this possibility that Kandinsky conceives as abstract instead of concrete. The concrete manifests itself in the immediacy of a corporeal sensorial experience.

Clement Greenberg (connects the purity of forms of the individual arts with the methods of modernism. Modernism is

> ... the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence ("Modernist Painting", 1982).

In modernism the individual arts reflect on themselves, they strive for purity in expressive forms as these are assumed to be inherent in their materialities and the techniques for processing them. According to Greenberg, modernism focuses on the recognition and exploration of the essence of the individual arts.

At the same time, in the first half of the twentieth century, we observe an integrative trend precisely with a view to a blurring of the boundaries between the arts and everyday life (think of the "ready-mades" of Dadaism and the aestheticization of everyday objects of constructivism). In his *Theorie der Avantgarde* [*Theory of the Avant-Garde*] (1974), Peter Bürger explains how the historical avant-garde movements released the means of art ("*Kunstmittel*") from the epochal structures within which they were developed and thus made them available for a free exchange between the arts. The theater, often literally, offered a

platform for these encounters and exchanges between different disciplines to take place as performance-like manifestations.

| Theater as the art of the performer

To use theater as an umbrella term for *all live performing arts* has some advantages, especially if we consider the diversity of manifestations in which the role and function of the performer can be fulfilled. In contemporary theater, especially since the emergence of the so-called *postdramatic theater*, a term coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006), in the late 1960s, we often see that the boundaries between different disciplines are being crossed or blurred. I am thinking of performances in which performers from different disciplines – equal in their actual physical presence on stage – work together, or of performances in which the performers themselves fulfill different roles and functions, whether or not with the intention of breaking down the academic and institutional boundaries between the individual disciplines. I deliberately leave open the specific role(s) or function(s) the performer fulfills, if only to avoid a logocentric approach to theater as being a dramatic artform per se, according to which the performer is usually reduced to an actor playing a character.[2] What makes the performer a performer is that he stages himself for the other who is a spectator. A performance "is always a performance for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance" (Marvin Carlson 1996, 6). What makes a performance *live* is that the interaction between performer and spectator takes place in the absolute presence of the here and now.[3] Performer and spectator are there for each other, support each other and give each other meaning in what they do in their actual encounter. The one's right is the other's duty. This also includes an ethical aspect: what the performer and spectator do is based on an assumed mutual consent with the roles and functions they fulfill and therefore also on their shared responsibility for the performance, which implies a sense of commonality (Kattenbelt 2006, 33).

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[2] We could even follow Carl Lavery (2016) and distance ourselves from a purely anthropocentric approach to theater and include the agency of animals and plants in discussions about theater and performance, especially regarding ecological issues.

[3] With this strict definition of theater as live performance I do not want to leave unmentioned that there have been intense debates about liveness and, by extension, presence. My main concern here is a strictly formal demarcation without denying that new technologies (might) have radically changed experiences of liveness and presence, also in terms of their cultural, social and personal significance. We should also acknowledge that these debates are based on numerous cultural, social and economic assumptions about how new technologies could or should function – in terms of affordances and challenges – within the cultural and social economies of our times. Regarding liveness and presence, I would like to refer here to, respectively, Philip Auslander (1999) and Cormac Power (2008).

It is precisely this aspect that has often been put forward as a distinguishing characteristic of theater audiences compared to film audiences. It has often been assumed that film audiences consist mainly of individual spectators who prefer to imagine themselves being alone with the possible world presented in the film. Theater audiences, on the other hand, would rather be a collective of spectators, who remain aware of their shared presence outside the possible world presented in the performance.[4] This distinction is perhaps especially relevant when it comes to film as a mass medium, as a medium that focuses on a heterogeneous audience that it defines as a mass, as anonymous loners, as invisible witnesses. The film spectator is, as it were, ignored in his presence and thus granted the comfortable position of completely losing himself in the possible world presented in the film. Because of the accessibility of the possible world, film as a mass medium addressing an international audience, makes itself invisible. It is as if the presented world exists in and of itself, according to its own logic. This logic is usually the logic of causality and continuity of action, which ensures that the presented world can be experienced and understood according to a development of actions and events with an overarching structure of a beginning, middle and end – with a wink to Jean-Luc Godard: "Certainly, but not necessarily in that order" (quoted from Rattcliff 2018). Even if it concerns a possible world that is anything but like the world we experience as the real world, everything is still "real" and "probable" within the constraints of the possible world. Ideally, this possible world is an *absolute world* in the sense in which Peter Szondi (1987) has defined "the absolute drama" as a theoretical concept for an illusionism that has only been pursued as a historical norm and dramaturgical strategy in a relatively short period in the history of theater and in which, I would add, the theater was soon overtaken by film as a mass medium.

In its simplest form, the theater offers an empty space (cf. Peter Brook 1996) – an arena (cf. Boris Eikhenbaum 1974) – in which the performer stages himself being the only living and moving element of the performance. With all his means and capabilities of expression, he gives substance to the possible world he presents. Insofar as the theater performance takes place in a static space (one in which the passing of time is not visible) and is largely determined both in terms of content and structure by the predominance of spoken words, we could regard this, following Erwin Panofsky, who undoubtedly read Lessing's *Laokoon*, as an autonomization of time in relation to space with language as in particular being a carrier of thoughts and emotions (1985, 218). Like Béla Balázs (2020 and 1973) earlier,

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[4] Comparisons between theater and film regarding their audiences are mainly found in the so-called classical film theories. I am thinking of the film aesthetic writings of Béla Balázs, Walter Benjamin, Arnold Hauser, André Bazin and Christian Metz.

Panofsky assumes the frontality[5] of the theater, which means that every spectator with his seat in the auditorium occupies a fixed position in relation to – opposite or around – the stage. The performance is perceived as a spatial totality and distance and perspective are unchangeable. The uniqueness of film is that the spectator, despite his fixed position in the auditorium, is constantly moving by identifying with the eye of the camera – if only for the sake of orientation – and constantly changing distance and perspective. The space is presented in fragments of space, while the experience of spatial totality is formed in the imagination of the spectator. The more this is the case, the stronger the spectator has the impression of being in and surrounded by the imagined space (cf. Balázs 1973). Since film is based on the illusion of movement and efficiently appeals to the spectator's own imagination to fill the gaps between the images, it can therefore be the art of illusion par excellence. Moreover, camera work and editing add an extra dimension of movement to the presented space. The dynamics of cinematography, in a way also understood as a collective term for all screen media based on camera work and editing, have also been characterized as the *spatialization of time* and the *temporalization of space*. If, following Immanuel Kant (1998),[6] we conceive time and space as two a priori organizing principles of human perception and cognition, then time stands for the principle of *succession* (after each other) and space for the principle of *juxtaposition* (next to each other). The spatialization of time then means that time is presented as juxtaposed and therefore as *simultaneity*. This becomes especially meaningful when it concerns two or more events and/or actions that take place in relative independence of each other and are thus related to each other, with or without the expectation that the events and/or actions in question will ultimately come together. The temporalization of space then means that the passing of time is made visible through a change in or through a movement in or through space. Indeed, the language of

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[5] The notion of "frontality" was later taken up by Susan Sontag (1966) with reference to Panofsky in her essay "Film and Theatre." She argues that it would be far too simple to regard films as being theatrical just because they forego the dynamics offered by camera work and editing.

[6] To quote Kant: "[…] different times are not simultaneous, but successive (just as different spaces are not successive, but simultaneous)" (1998 [1787], 162). We must bear in mind that time and space are conceived here as categories of experience, not as physical phenomena. The theory of relativity, quantum mechanics and the loop quantum gravity theory deal with very different ideas of time and space and their mutual relationships. Kant would say that we cannot say anything about that, the "*Ding an sich*" [*The thing itself*] is not knowable on the basis of how we perceive and experience it in time and space. It is also important to add that sensory perception and the conceptual processing of what we perceive are two processes that are directly interrelated, as has been convincingly proven in the early twentieth century experiments of the Gestalt psychology. The perception of movement in the case of film is a striking example of this phenomenon.

cinematography is still primarily based on the relation between the movement *of* the image and the movement *in* the image.[7]

Up to this point I have mainly focused on the specificity of theater as a live performance in comparison to screen media such as film and video. In what follows, I would like to focus on the concept of *intermediality*, which I regard as a specific form of *performativity*. I assume that theater in its capacity to function as a hypermedium can offer a platform or playground for other media to be staged and played with.

| Intermediality

For several decades, intermediality has been a common concept in various disciplines within culture, communication, media, art, and performance studies. It always refers to relations between media, often considered as taking place in an *in-between*. This, however, doesn't mean that the concept has an unambiguous meaning. It is often unclear what exactly the in-between stands for, what the logic of the in-between entails, and in what sense the notion of media is used. Is the in-between the space where different media come together or are connected and/or interact, where boundaries between media blur or are crossed, or is it a free space for experimentation? What exactly is meant by media? Does it refer to sign systems (words, images, sounds, etcetera), artistic practices (writing, painting, sculpting, designing spaces, acting, directing, making music, etcetera) or technologies of mediation, transmission and (re)presentation of information? In any case, if you use the term intermediality, you will also have to say in what sense.

Contributions to discourses on intermediality on a more meta-theoretical level are quite limited in number. They usually aim to further differentiate the concept of intermediality and to systematize the discussions about relations between media by distinguishing different "discourse models" and provide insight into the themes related to these models (Schröter 2011). Or to identify and analyze concrete manifestations of specific relations between media, wondering about how media can be combined given the material(s) they consist of, about the senses they address and the ways in which they occur in time and/or space, about how and what kind of transpositions take place from one medium to another medium, or about how one medium refers to another medium (Rajewsky 2005).

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[7] The kinesthetic effect/affect of cinematography is highly dependent on the properties of the recording, the projection and the screen, and on the conditions under which the screened images are perceived.

In my own contribution to the more meta-theoretical discourse on intermediality, I initially referred the concept to the phenomenon of media *redefining* each other and thus *resensitizing* the spectator's perception (Kattenbelt 2008, 25-27). Although the notions of redefinition and resensitization are closely related to the notions of *defamiliarization* (*ostranenie*) of the Russian Formalists and *alienation* (*Verfremdung*) of Bertolt Brecht, they primarily relate to the act of staging (showing), which means that what is staged (shown) is stripped of its contingency.[8] This is especially the case when different media are consciously used or played off against each other to create contrasts, frictions, confusions, etcetera. I use the concept of medium/media as a collective term referring on different levels to sign systems, artistic practices and technologies of mediation and (re)presentation.

For example, in the theater we expect the performer to be physically present in the here and now on stage.[9] In case the performer is not merely physically present in the performance, but also recorded live on a screen, it allows to play with possible differences that occur, not only in terms of differences in the expressive qualities of the physically present body of the performer versus its recorded live (re)presentation on screen, but also in terms of differences in how the spectators are positioned and addressed and what this means in terms of how they are invited to or challenged to become involved or engage.

| Theater as aesthetic object and functioning as a hypermedium

Further developing the concept of intermediality, I emphasize its specific mode of presenting and argue that theater is not only the art of the performer, but also that it provides a platform for other media to be staged. That theater can *function* as a hypermedium – which is not the same as claiming that theater *is* a hypermedium per se – that can include other media without affecting their material, sensorial or spatiotemporal modalities.[10]

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[8] I have in mind here Umberto Eco's concept of *ostension* as the basic feature of performance: to show (to "de-realize") an object to make it stand for the entire class to which it belongs (Eco 1977, 110).

[9] The performance *Ergens Anders* [*Somewhere Else*, 2016] by Micha Wertheim is a one-man Dutch cabaret performance (made for small black box venues) in which the comedian does not appear on stage, resulting in commotion, although the audience could or should have known better given the title of the performance. Many spectators felt cheated. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O97CVha9sc0. Last accessed May 13, 2025. This performance is part of a diptych with the performance *Iemand Anders* [*Someone Else*, 2016].

[10] I borrow the concept of *modality* from Lars Elleström (2021), who argues that any medium can be characterized by means of four modalities, with each of these further specified in modes. To explore the relations between media, it is important to examine how their modalities relate to each other. The *material modality* refers to the material(s) that make(s) up the medium and can be related to the techniques (tools and procedures) developed to process the material(s) in question. The *sensorial modality* relates to how media are perceived, and which senses are addressed. This of course also points to how perceivers (readers, listeners, and spectators) are addressed and positioned by a

In a theater performance functioning as a hypermedium, film or video images are not only screened and shown as part of the performance but also staged and therefore 'converted' into theatrical signs, making them "signs of signs" rather than "signs of objects" (Bogatyrëv 1971). In their intentionality, which is inherent in the act of showing or being shown, theatrical signs refer to the possible rather than to the actual. They literally create (a) possible world(s). I consider *worldmaking* and *staging* as two basic features of performance (Kattenbelt 2010). Even more so if we − as I propose to do − position theater as performance within the domain of the arts and thereby define it as an *aesthetic object*, as an object that is perceived from an *aesthetic orientation*. This orientation is guided by a specific interest in the presentation of the qualities of experiences which allow to perceive and experience – within a given form of life – the relevance and inner state of one's own experience (Seel 1985, 127). It implies a reflexive orientation towards one's own subjectivity in the context of life experiences assumed to be shared with those who belong to the same lifeworld. The aesthetic perceiver is first an *experiencer* (Nelson 2010, 45), who perceives and experiences himself as being involved in his world. From an aesthetic orientation, experiences are not just taken for granted. On the contrary, the aesthetic perceiver is eager to experience and to explore the meaning(fullness) of the experiences that he makes, which implies at the same time his willingness to take risks in the experiences that he wants to experience (Seel 124, 247). The relevance and validity of aesthetic expressions and experiences ultimately lies in a transcendence of subjectivity, in *intersubjectivity* with its claim of *authenticity*. Authenticity relates to validity within the broader cultural and social context of a specific lifeworld.

I relate the involvement and reflexivity inherent in the aesthetic orientation with the two additional aspects of the performativity of art in general and therefore of theater as an aesthetic performance within this domain, namely *self-reference* and *self-reflexivity*. It is precisely these two aspects that are emphasized in my notion of intermediality as a specific mode of performativity, which implies a shift in focus from in-betweenness to *both-and*, as will be explained below.

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medium. The *spatiotemporal modality* relates to experiences and conceptions of time and space, both in how time and space manifest themselves in the object of perception and in the perception itself. The three modalities mentioned are pre-semiotic in the sense that they are primarily concerned with mediation as a channel for information and entertainment. The fourth, *semiotic modality*, comes into play in meaning-making and communication and is primarily dominated by (re)presentation. The distinction between mediation and (re)presentation as determining the distinction between the pre-semiotic modalities and the semiotic modality is not always self-evident if we approach media – as I suggest doing – from a phenomenological perspective with a focus on intentionality and experience.

In summary: performativity here relates to (a) expressions that refer to what is literally created in the expressions themselves (worldmaking), (b) to the act of staging (by the performer) aimed at the other as spectator, (c) to the situation in which objects, events and actions are shown (the performance) and (d) to the orientation from which the performance is perceived (the aesthetic orientation as a specific mode of a performative orientation) (Kattenbelt 2021, 24-25).

My definition of intermediality as a specific mode of performativity more explicitly accounts for the inherent doubleness of what Sybille Krämer would consider as "corporalizing [*korporalisierende*] performativity" (2004, 17-22), which starts from the performance as an instable and ephemeral phenomenon, with its focus on the act of staging and spectating, on the sensual and actual tension between performer and spectator, on the physicality and materiality of the performance as an event,[11] as a presentation rather than a representation. The latter may remind us of Lehmann's concept of the *postdramatic theater*, which in a sense also implies a kind of intensification of the real which is no longer subordinated to illusion(ism). The principle of the *both-and* (or doubleness) manifests itself above all in how in the act of staging everything becomes *intentional*, *purposeful*, and *meaningful*. It is precisely in acting together that the different media (sign systems, artistic practices and/or technologies) reinforce each other in their phenomenality, in their materiality, in their physicality, in how they occur in time and space and affect our senses.[12] With a focus on the principle of both-and as a creative force, intermedial theatre not only provides a platform for media to be staged as rather a playground for playing and staging the media as well as playing the senses of the experiencers (Kattenbelt 2021; Kattenbelt and Mancewicz 2023).

Considering intermediality as an intensification of the performativity of art occurring in playing the media and playing the senses, we could relate it to the *performative turn* in the arts, which – traced back to the historical avant-garde – could be conceived as a *radicalization* of the performative aspects of art in order to reinforce the materiality or phenomenality or expressive qualities of the aesthetic utterance, to emphasize the aesthetic situation as a worldmaking and staging event taking place in the presence of the here and now, and to intensify the aesthetic experience as a pre-eminently embodied or corporeal experience. In as

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[11] The Dutch word for event is *gebeurtenis*, which is etymologically related to words like *gebeuren* (to happen or happening), *gebaar* (gesture), *baren* and *geboorte* (to bear [=produce] or (give) birth). All these words refer to the act of bringing into existence. The notion of performance in fact also has this meaning: *per formare* means to form in the sense of to create.

[12] In terms of Iris Van der Tuin and Nanna Verhoeff, how the media "reflect, refract, and diffract one another" (2022, 35).

far as media are used in such a way that they mutually radicalize (instead of redefine or refashion) each other, distinctions and oppositions occur (presence versus absence, physical versus virtual, inside versus outside, et cetera), which affect illusions and/or confusions, uncertainties about what we actually perceive and experience and how we relate to what we perceive and experience (Kattenbelt and Nelson 2023; Kattenbelt and Mancewicz 2023).

| Three instances

In conclusion of this essay, I would like to briefly discuss three performances in which the relation(ship) between theater and screen media such as film and video becomes thematic and how the principle of *both-and* could work.

Are you ready, are you ready for love?

The performance *Are you ready, are you ready for love?* − Theater Malpertuis and Productiehuis Brabant, 2005, reprised in 2011;[13] directed by Piet Arfeuille − forces the theater spectator into the position of voyeur, or invisible witness, as we are used to from mainstream film as a mass medium. The two performers, a man and a woman, never show any awareness of the audience's presence. The fourth wall is not broken at any time. There is a strict separation between stage and auditorium – the key feature of Szondi's concept of the "absolute drama" – which is even more noticeable in the small black box theaters for which the performance was conceived. Arfeuille associates the voyeuristic gaze of mainstream cinema with that of the anonymous, isolated loner in the big city, where people usually live close together but on their own alongside each other. The stage presents two adjoining apartments that, as it turns out, are separated by a one-way mirror, because of which the audience becomes complicit, as it were, in the voyeurism of the man who spies on the woman next to him. In a sense, the man 'cinematizes' his gaze by using a light filter for his eyes and for the lamp that illuminates his room, and by adding music to the scene. He turns reality, so to speak, into a film.

The performance constructs a clash between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. In one of the reviews, it is dubbed "webcam theater in split screen" (de Smet 2005, n.p.).

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[13] The discussion of this case is a slightly revised version from Kattenbelt and Nelson (2023), in which this performance is classified under the category of the *dramatic mode of presentation* as a resonance of the illusionism intended by Richard Wagner, which Friedrich Nietzsche strongly opposed, because it prevents any possibility of reflection, resulting in a disconcerting experience of emptiness and complacency. https://vimeo.com/91711993. Last accessed May 13, 2025.

Indeed, it makes sense to consider the one-way mirror as a screen and the imaginary fixed-frame camera as a webcam. But what is also important here is that the voyeuristic gaze of the webcam, and that of the film spectator who slyly looks on, conflicts with the shared viewing experience of the theater spectators, who are usually aware of being part of the audience as a collective (Kattenbelt 1995, 159–162).

Gerucht [*Rumour*]

The performance *Gerucht* (2007),[14] by Lotte van den Berg, takes place in a public space, on a square in the city, such as Janskerkhof in Utrecht. The spectators sit on a stand in a soundproof box directly opposite a glass wall, through which they look out over a part of the square. Everything that happens outside is framed as a performative situation and therefore stripped of its mere coincidence or contingency. Seen from the stands, there is a door on the left of the glass wall through which the performers who really 'belong' to the performance can change stages from the inside to the outside. In the public space on the square, they carry out all kinds of 'interventions' to which unsuspecting passers-by may or may not respond. For example, one of the performers, pretending to be an old lady, who is struggling to cross the busy street along the square, forces – by choosing the right and maybe not too risky moment – the driver of the approaching vehicle to stop to allow her a safe crossing.

The glass wall instantly installs a cinematic effect: the spectators look at a wide screen – as if watching a movie – without being seen themselves, because the outside world on the other side, beyond the screen, is reflected in the glass. Several fixed microphones have been placed in the space outside the box and the performers are equipped with wireless (contact) microphones, which are switched on at specific points in the performance. At those moments a dynamic play of sounds fixed in space and sounds moving through space occurs in the box, especially when the experiences of distance in image and those in sound diverge, which is the case when a performer moves further and further away in space in the image, while his sound, being connected to the performer's body, remains close. In the fixed frame image, the sound might become an important instrument to direct the audience's attention. Spectators who are very familiar with the environment where the performance takes place can undoubtedly easily imagine the surrounding space that is not visible through the glass wall and in which the

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[14] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iehglv35evk. Last accessed May 13, 2025.

performers disappear or from where they appear, not only those who 'belong' to the performance but also those who pass by unsuspectingly and therefore become part of the performance. In cinematic terms we could argue, with reference to Bazin's plea for the use of long takes and deep focus, that *Gerucht* is a performance in one long take, which offers, although the frame is fixed, plenty of space to edit *within* the image by focalizing with sound instead of switching from one image to another image, and to reinforce the impression that space extends outside the image in all directions. Diegetic sound from outside can be heard in the box, but also music and other superimposed previously recorded environmental sounds, the latter used to increase the contrast between image and sound. It may be that the sun is shining while the performance takes place while, at the same time, we hear the sound of rain. We are, as it were, confronted with how much we tend to match what we perceive through the various senses. Again, the principle of both-and is at work here, playing the media (image and sound) and the senses of the experiencer.

Bimbo

In the performance *Bimbo* (2011)[15] − by and with the artist duo Suzan Boogaerdt and Bianca van der Schoot; final director: Sanne van Rijn − the spectators are positioned in two different ways, thus creating a tension between what I have called above the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. The first way concerns the live performance that physically takes place on the stage behind the spectators sitting around it on wooden benches. Anyone who turns around, which may be noticed by fellow spectators, will see the performers staging themselves in front of a fixed-frame and fixed position camera. The very fact that the camera frame and the position are fixed emphasizes the fact that the performers are not subject to the camera's gaze. They retain full control over their own image, over the composition of the image, over what does or does not fit within the frame of the image, over the staging. The performers ignore the physically present spectators, although there might be moments when the spectators are indeed challenged to look behind them. The performers focus entirely on the camera and, via the camera, on the spectators who can watch them on flat screens in front of them. The reality threatens to disappear behind the spectacles, simulations and simulacra of the contemporary mediatized visual culture. Boogaerdt and van der Schoot (BVDS) were indeed inspired by the work of Guy Debord (1994) and Jean Baudrillard (2008). But maybe the theater still offers the opportunity of

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[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR-Of99OhyI. Last accessed May 13, 2025.

deconstructing, demystifying and unmasking the illusion of reality, which in *Bimbo* mainly manifests itself as an "objectification of women in the media" and a "pornification of the public sphere", with the reality of the illusion, that of the live performance as a collective event.[16]

| Endnote

I have discussed some ideas of philosophers and artists about how the different arts relate to each other, both hierarchically and formally in terms of their materialities and manifestations. I then discussed the key concepts that I have developed – of course in collaboration with many colleagues from media, performance and theater studies – to understand intermedial theater in its capacity to function as a hypermedium, providing a platform and playground for other media to be staged and played with, and thus playing the senses of the experiencer. With the brief discussions of three performances, I hope to have provided insight into how the principle of both-and can work as a creative force in intermedial theater. In all three performances, the notion of live performance as an actual encounter between performers and spectators is problematized, precisely by playing off the presentative modes of theater against those of screen media such as film and video, whether or not by literally using the technology of these media.

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[16] The quotes are taken from the website of BVDS: https://bvds.nl/en/production/visual-statements-2/bimbo-2/. Last accessed May 13, 2025.

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