Exploring Photographic Multiformity:
The Medium, Intermediality and Transmediality

PAULIUS PETRAITIS

Lithuanian Culture Research Institute
info@pauliuspetraitis.com

Today, photography transcends its traditional boundaries as a strictly autonomous and self-contained medium. Particularly within the realm of art photography, it frequently emerges in diverse and dynamic intermedial contexts and forms. This article delves into these phenomena through the lens of photography theory. Beyond exploring the concept of photography as a medium that inherently mediates and stands in-between, this discussion examines two related concepts: intermediality and transmediality. These concepts revolve around the intricate relationships between different media forms. Given their cultural and historical context, this discourse aims to elucidate their relevance and applicability within the realm of photography theory.

Keywords: Media Concepts, Intermediality, Transmediality, Art Photography, Multiformity.

In contemporary culture, photography has transcended its traditional boundaries, evolving into a dynamic, networked, and multifaceted medium. Art photography, in particular, has embraced diverse contexts and forms, effectively blurring the lines between different media as modes of expression. This article examines this transformation from the perspective of media concepts applied to photography theory. Beyond exploring the idea of photography as an inherently mediating medium, it delves into two key notions – intermediality and transmediality – both addressing the intricate web of relationships that photography shares with other forms of media. By considering the cultural and historical contingencies of these concepts, it aims to illuminate their relevance and utility for photography theory.

The embrace of a multiform nature is one of the notable critical features of contemporary art photography. Today, the photographic image is not only manifestly multi-layered and dynamic but also engaged in a dialogue with other media, operating within context-shifting environments. While theoretical vocabulary provides valuable concepts to address this situation, it's essential to recognize their context-dependent specificities. This article explores concepts related to the multiplicity of formal relations from the perspective of photography theory. It commences by examining the notion of the medium, highlighting its inherent mediating role before delving into the concepts of intermediality and transmediality. Given the historical and cultural connotations

associated with each concept, the discussion aims to elucidate their specific utility within the cultural landscape of photography. Through this theoretical exploration, it aims to uncover some of the complexities inherent in contemporary photography theory. While this discussion does not aim to provide an exhaustive analysis of these conceptual frameworks, it seeks to establish groundwork for the critical study of multiform photographic practices.

Photography does not exist in isolation, either technically or culturally. As Ben Burbridge rightfully observes, it is always entangled within practices, platforms, contexts, and discourses beyond itself[1]. Interconnectedness is a fundamental precondition for all photography. In today's context, photography is always in a state of expandedness, one way or the other. This suggests that when we engage in discussions about photography, we are inherently considering the multiplicity of its networked relationships, involving various actors and support agents, whether we do so consciously or not. Thus concepts allowing to address this situation merit examination. At the same time, it's essential to recognize that media-related theoretical concepts have specific currency, both in their historical context and via often very practical present-day usage. A discussion of intermediality and transmediality may be useful in establishing common discourse parameters, each notion providing a slightly differentiated perspective into the intricacies and complexities of the photographic multiformal relations.

The Medium

The medium forms the foundation for understanding intermediality and transmediality. Lars Elleström argues that comprehending the fundamental conditions of the medium is crucial for fully grasping the phenomena of intermediality and intermedial relations[2]. While the concept of the medium may seem more stable compared to trans- and intermedia, it is far from being simple or fixed[3].

A medium inherently "stands in-between," thus always engaging in a process of mediation. There is no inherent "transparency" to it, nor does it possess a fully "neutral" state. Every medium contextualizes, translates, and even mutates – essentially, it mediates. In the case of photography, this mediation includes cropping, distortion, and filtering. This is particularly relevant to keep in mind concerning photography and its historical association as a medium for transparent information, claiming to "show the world as it is"[4]. No media, photography included, is fully transparent or invisible – indeed, we can think of a medium as a filter that is added between information and a receiver. There are various instances and a large range of possibilities of photographic filtering, but there is

---

1 Burbridge, B. *Photography After Capitalism*, p. 16.

2 Elleström, L. "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations", p. 13.

3 It's worth acknowledging that in communication and media studies, the term "media," and particularly "mass media," typically refer to traditional mass media channels like newspapers, television, Internet, and radio. In this context, I am using "medium" to denote a single medium and "media" to indicate its plural form, which is a more widely accepted terminology in visual studies.

4 See Walden, S., ed. *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*.

never a truly neutral form of representation offered by a photographic medium.

Similarly, it's challenging in contemporary discourse to envision any medium possessing a pure, singular essence or to establish definitive and rigid boundaries, as attempted by Clement Greenberg in relation to painting in the 1940s. Greenberg's pursuit of medium-specific purity can be regarded as a historical project tied to abstract painting, aimed at shedding its reliance on language, both in narrative forms and broader theoretical and cultural contexts. The inclination to maintain firm borders, especially between the visual realm and language, along with a general inclination toward purer forms, characterized modernist thought, which was subsequently deconstructed by postmodernism[5]. Today, it is widely accepted that all media function in interaction with various cultural, theoretical, and social frameworks, and, as W. J. T. Mitchell describes, they are essentially "mixed media"[6].

It is essential to emphasize that we never encounter a medium in isolation as an abstract category. Instead, our interaction with a medium always occurs through specific works or individual instances. That is, we always encounter media as *mediating something* – whether it's a film, a theatrical performance, television, or a sheet of paper. Even when this sheet is empty, it mediates precisely this: that it is blank, as well as other material properties we can discern (the colour of the paper, size, form, condition, etc.). Therefore a medium by itself is

a theoretical entity. As Irina O. Rajewsky has stated, "to speak of 'a medium' or of 'individual media' ultimately refers to a theoretical construct"[7]. Consequently, we must recognize its constructed nature and be mindful of how it depends on time, context, field, and culture. There is no inherent "the medium" in a natural or absolute sense.

Defining or distinguishing a medium from other media is always contingent upon historical and discursive contexts, as well as the perspective of the observer or the system involved. This process also considers technological advancements and the interactions between different media within the broader media environment during a specific period. Despite a medium always-already being intermediary and reactive, we can still talk about the relative boundaries of various media, and understand them as in constant relation and play within a multitude of their forms. To quote Rajewsky:

> Neither the fact that we are always dealing only with specific individual medial configurations, nor the constructedness and historicity of media conceptions, should lead us to the conclusion that we ought to cease altogether to speak of (historically transformable) medial specificities and differences, of media borders and eventually of intermedial strategies and practices[8].

This perspective remains relevant in our current cultural landscape, where different media forms engage in ongoing interactions

---

5   Mitchell, W. J. T. "Ut Pictura Theoria", p. 352.
6   Mitchell, W. J. T. "There are no Visual Media", p. 257.

7   Rajewsky, I. O. "Border Talks", p, 54.
8   Ibid, p. 54.

and practical dialogues, yet we can still ordinarily recognize different forms; for example, we recognize a video used in theatre, or distinguish a use of photography together with sculpture. The differentiation between media, grounded in a shared understanding of their boundaries, still plays a significant role in culture. It is evident in various contexts, such as artistic and cultural funding applications, where individuals need to specify the field they are applying for. This distinction is also apparent in the designation of social structures and exhibition environments as "photographic". Examples include the Lithuanian Photographers Association and its galleries in Vilnius ("Vilnius Photography Gallery") and Kaunas ("Kaunas Photography Gallery") and publication of a journal *Fotografija* ("Photography"); annual editions *Lietuvos fotografija* ("Lithuanian Photography") and *Latvian Photography*; dedicated museums in Šiauliai ("Photography museum"), Riga ("Latvian museum of Photography"), and Tallinn ("Museum of Photography"); and larger regional events like "Tallinn Photomonth", "Riga Photomonth" or "Riga Photography Biennial". Even though these events increasingly embrace intermedial approaches and, in some cases, move away from photography, they still retain the term "photography" in their names as a practical reference to historical legacy and contemporary areas of interest.

Photographic Indexicality as Ontological Uniqueness and Mechanical Autonomy

The practical acknowledgment of media borders, still widely operative in cultural and social contexts, as demonstrated by the earlier examples, underscores the historical significance attributed to the concept of the medium as a distinct and separate entity. Photography is an especially fitting illustrative case on this point. The notion of photography as a unique entity with well-defined borders emerged through efforts to define its apparent essence. As Andrew Dewdney aptly notes, "historically the photographic image was formed by means of purification"[9]. Ontology played a crucial role in this process. A specific reading of indexicality was employed to define the supposed ontological uniqueness of the photographic medium. In the words of Diarmuid Costello, the notion of the index "is about the ontology of photography; it is a claim about what photography really is"[10]. If it's a claim about what photography is, it is also, at the same time, an equal claim about what photography isn't. In essence, the concept of the photographic medium involved not only its definition but also a crucial question of what it excludes. This exclusion was often articulated through differentiation, a theoretical manoeuvre aimed at establishing a functioning "template" that any instance must conform to in order to be labelled "photography" or a "photographic image." If a photographic image is understood as indexical, it logically follows that anything lacking indexicality is not a photographic image. This challenge became particularly prominent in the digital debates of the 1990s and early 2000s when technological affordances to convert light into a virtual

---

9   Dewdney, A. *Forget Photography*, p. 196.
10 As remarked by Costello in "The Art Seminar", p. 168.

code has dispensed with the need for concrete material support – which, supposedly, dispensed with indexicality altogether.

Such understanding, equalling indexicality to a material or causal relation, is based on an imprecise, but rather popular, interpretation of Charles S. Peirce's semiotics. This interpretation restricts the inherently flexible and inclusive notion of Peirce's index to just one of its functions. This is evident in a revealing admission by film scholar David Rodowick in *The Virtual Life of Film*: "In C. S. Peirce's logic the index is determined by causal relations"[11]. Such reading is incomplete and could hardly be formed from a direct and thorough engagement with Peirce's texts. Instead, it can be found abundantly in the theoretical literature concerning the transformation of the index from semiotics into photography and film theory, a transformation that unfolded during the late 1960s to the 1980s.

The overarching goal of the theoretical project concerning photography during the late 1960s to the 1980s can be characterized as an endeavour for "purification". During this period, the medium of photography was isolated and defined, not only in terms of its presumed ontological uniqueness (often linked to the narrow interpretation of indexicality) but also in relation to its mechanical nature and perceived autonomy from human subjectivity and agency. Rudolf Arnheim, in his theoretical exploration of photography's specificity in the 1970s, highlighted this aspect, noting, "the fundamental peculiarity of the photographic medium: the physical objects themselves print their image by means of the optical and chemical action of light"[12]. The belief in photography's autonomous and objectively mechanical character has roots as old as the medium itself. Arnheim's formulation is not unique in photography theory and can be traced back to a pioneering book *The Pencil of Nature* by Henry Fox Talbot, one of photography's inventors. Talbot remarked on the photographic images presented in the book, which he created himself, emphasizing that they were "formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone", without the intervention of an artist. In essence, he stressed that "the plates... have been obtained by the mere action of Light upon sensitive paper"[13]. The very notion of photography as "the pencil of nature" emphasized a supposed self-determination and sovereignty of the photographic process[14].

This idea that photography has a singular essence based on its ontological indexicality – still occasionally espoused today – remains at odds with its present-day practical multiformity and those theoretical notions addressing the phenomena, for instance, intermediality.

Intermediality

The notion of intermediality involves a range of connotations that are not all entirely compatible. Jürgen E. Müller acknowledges the complexity of this concept, stating: "The

---

11 Rodowick, D. *The Virtual Life of Film*, p. 115.

12 Arnheim, R. "On the Nature of Photography", p. 155.

13 Talbot, H. F. *The Pencil of Nature*, p. 1.

14 Samuel Morse echoed Fox Talbot's marvel, observing with respect to daguerreotypes: "Nature ... has taken the pencil into her own hands" (Morse, E. L. *Samuel F. B. Morse*, p. 144).

variety of aspects of the concept of 'intermediality' makes it very difficult or almost impossible to present some sort of general overview with regard to all the options"[15]. What is attempted here is by no means an exhaustive analysis of these options, but a rather brief overview of some of the main points with regards to the development of the notion, and an exploration of how intermediality is helpful to address in analysing the photographic field.

What can now be considered an older understanding of intermediality, often linked with Peter Wagner, largely defines it as a practice of describing one medium by means of another. Wagner himself confined his analysis to the process of ekphrasis (literary description of a visual work of art). His definition of intermediality mirrors that of another definition, "intertextuality"[16], and indeed Wagner even uses "intertextual/intermedial" directly co-joined, and says that intermediality is a "subdivision of intertextuality"[17]. This is a specific (and quite narrow from our contemporary perspective) application of intermediality, as Wagner was mostly interested in works of literature and in how visual matter enters it both in concrete sense and by way of allusion.

While this limited perspective is still occasionally practiced[18], contemporary discussions on intermediality have expanded beyond a narrow focus on literature and visual elements to encompass a broad and multidimensional range of relationships. Müller highlights this shift in intermedial research, noting that the concept of intermediality had to move beyond the confines of literary studies and shift its research focus toward interactions and interferences between various audiovisual media, not limited to literature alone. This reorientation has led to a renewed emphasis on questions related to materiality, the creation of meaning, traces of intermedial processes, and social functions[19].

The inclusion of these diverse dimensions is crucial. While it may be tempting to view intermediality primarily as the study of interactions between established media, often associated with being "in-between", Eric Méchoulan cautions against reducing it to a mere intersection of media[20]. Intermediality encompasses much more than an increase in relations between media. It encompasses connections and critical insights into the broader culture and the social and technological framework that enables such interactions. In essence, intermediality allows us to grasp some of the underlying conditions of our contemporary reality; it is part of the pulse of our time. As Méchoulan puts it, "intermediality is a method for making environments appear"[21].

Intermediality also encompasses the emergence of novel possibilities in terms of ideas and material forms that arise from these relationships. It has the potential to disrupt established social constructs. Each

---

15 Müller, J. E. "Intermediality Revisited", p. 237.
16 Intertextuality, in the words of Eric Méchoulan, "seeks to retrieve the text from its presumed autonomy and to read in it the *mise en oeuvre* of other, pre-existing texts" ("Intermediality", p. 3).
17 See Wagner, P. "Introduction", p. 17.
18 See Alzamora, G. C. "A Semiotic Approach to Transmedia Storytelling", p. 440.

---

19 Müller, J. E. "Intermediality Revisited", p. 244.
20 Méchoulan, E. "Intermediality", p. 3.
21 Ibid, p. 5.

instance of intermediality represents a critical opening with radical potential. This can manifest as previously unseen or unforeseen material forms or thoughts that challenge personal and collective narratives, mythologies, and systems of knowledge. To further clarify the understanding of intermedial processes and their relevance to contemporary art photography, it is helpful to employ insights by Christina Ljunberg. She outlines three characteristics of intermedial operations in the context of art, each of which denotes a significant potential:

- *Radical performativity* – the emergence of hybrid forms that generate something new and unique;
- *Strong self-reflexivity* – intermedial instances draw attention to their own mode of production and their specific semiotic characteristics;
- *Effective communication* – providing readers, viewers, and listeners with access to different levels of meaning[22].

Ljunberg's framework is largely semiotic (drawing directly from Peirce's sign theory), and while she doesn't present a comprehensive theory based on these characteristics, but rather uses them in practical discussion of intermedial works of art, I find her approach valuable for addressing the current landscape of photography. The concepts of *radical performativity*, *strong self-reflexivity*, and *effective communication*, when applied interpretatively, offer a systematic and potent structure for analysing the intermedial relationships present in contemporary art photography.

Intermedia(lity): Historical Context

Intermediality is not an entirely new notion; it re-emerged in the 1980s, and gained prominence during the 1990s and 2000s as a suitable framework for describing and analysing cultural developments at the time. This period marks the starting point for the contemporary usage of the term "intermediality" and aligns with the understanding adopted here. However, there were noteworthy earlier discussions and applications of the term, and given its centrality, it's worth briefly exploring these early discussions to gain a better understanding of the evolution and evolving meanings of intermediality.

The term "intermediality" stems from "intermedium," a term coined by English poet and literary critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). Coleridge used it in his lectures during the 1810s in the context of narrative allegory. While this is typically regarded as the terminological starting point for intermediality, the broader cultural concept of fusing disparate elements has much older origins. Müller points out that "considerations of intermedia processes can be traced back to antique poetics"[23].

Coleridge's notion was further developed by art theorist and Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, who wrote about "intermedia" in the 1960s. In a pioneering article from 1966, Higgins observed that "much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media"[24]. Higgins used the term to describe artistic works that "conceptually fall

22 Ljunberg, C. "Intermedial Strategies in Multimedia Art", p. 83.

23 Müller, J. E. "Intermediality in the Age of Global Media Networks", p. 20.
24 Higgins, D. "Intermedia", p. 49.

between media that are already known"[25]. In essence, intermedia opened up new possibilities within the realm of art by challenging traditional boundaries of media and encouraging conceptual amalgamation of multiple origins.

Higgins distinguished intermedia from "mixed media" which he saw as fundamentally different. For him, mixed media consisted of works where each individual medium was clearly distinguishable, and "one knows which is which." In contrast, intermedial works were generated through a more conceptual and daring fusion[26]. In a 1999 interview, Higgins reiterated this distinction, explaining that intermedia involved a conceptual fusion, making it difficult to separate the different media in a integral way[27]. So while mixed media is a more conservative category for Higgins, his notion of intermedia is much more exploratory and can be seen as already opening up to some of the radical potentialities as formulated by Ljunberg. In particular, to the characteristic of *radical performativity*, which stands for an ability to generate new and unique forms through intermedial combinations. While Higgins does not explicitly reflect on that, it is an implication one can reasonably get from engaging with his texts – while mixed media presents distinguishable forms of recognizable media, through intermedial fusion new configurations are entirely plausible. Thus while not explicitly developed, the now-recognized ability of intermedial relations to generate novelties was already hinted at in Higgins' texts.

While Higgins did not originate the concept of "intermedia", he is occasionally credited with naming and defining the phenomenon in such "a way that created a framework for understanding and categorizing a set or group of like-minded activities"[28]. This group of like-minded activities included those of artist and educator Hans Breder. In 1968, Breder established the first university program offering a degree in intermedia at the University of Iowa. The program aimed to challenge the fixed boundaries between different media and promote artistic experimentation. Breder conceived of intermedia as a constant collision of concepts and disciplines, with a strong focus on performance and video as integral aspects[29].

Breder's emphasis on "collision" can be seen as a step further than Higgins' idea that intermedial fusion can transcend the recognizable borders of individual media. Furthermore, Breder's view of intermedia as a "constant collision" underscores an attitude of ongoing exploration and experimentation. This openness and willingness to explore new possibilities have had a notable influence, particularly on the work of Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985).

Mendieta enrolled in Breder's program in 1972–1977 and began creating performances and documenting her work. Her art often blurred the boundaries between documentation and performance, as well as between photography and the rituals of everyday life. Mendieta was interested

---

25 Ibid, p. 52.

26 Ibid, p. 52.

27 Higgins, D. and Zurbrugg, N. "Looking back", p. 24.

28 Ox, J. and Mandelbrojt, J. "Intersenses/Intermedia", p. 47.

29 Breder, H. "Hans Breder", https://www.artforum.com/events/hans-breder-193383/.

in the processes and specificities of mediation. Her focus was not solely on the live performance but on how it could be documented and mediated. As Stephanie Schwartz pointed out, Mendieta's performances examined how media functions to organize and homogenize audiences, even challenging the notion that performance art must be solely live and unmediated[30].

An example of Mendieta's work reflecting these ideas is the photographic series "People Looking at Blood, Moffitt" (1973). In this series, Mendieta documented the reactions of random passers-by to a pool of fake blood she set up on a doorway to her apartment building in Iowa City. The reactions ranged from indifference to closer inspection. This investigation of (potentially gendered) violence remained a key impulse of Mendieta's short-lived career as an artist[31]. The meaning of this work emerged from the combination of staged encounters in a public space, the act of photography, and the mediated image documents. The fact that we can only experience the work through these mediated images, as well as its existence in film form, is central to its conception.

Mendieta's work aligns with early theories of intermedia, particularly Breder's emphasis on performance and its documentation through photography. While her work relied on technology, specifically analogue photography, it did not explore technological conditionality to the extent that some later photographic work does.

Additionally, while her work created something new and operated between gaps of information and absence, it did not exhibit significant self-reflection, a characteristic of intermediality proposed by Ljunberg. Contemporary intermedial works are not only successful in conveying multiple layers of meaning but often also draw attention to their own specific mode of production.

Higgins' notion of intermedia serves as a precursor to the contemporary understanding of intermediality. Higgins' emphasis on conceptual fusion and the inseparability of individual strands finds resonance in the work of artists like Ana Mendieta, who skillfully blend performance, photography, documentation, and fiction. Intermedia as a concept hints at some of the potentialities of intermediality, but the latter appears to be more fully developed, especially in articulating how border-crossings between media can be more self-reflective and give rise to entirely novel forms. Another aspect of intermediality to be explored is its relationship with the digital realm.

Intermediality as a Culturally Conditioned Strategic Response

The concept of intermediality, much like that of the medium, is a construct that is contingent upon cultural and historical contexts. Its resurgence in the latter part of the 20th century was heavily influenced by cultural and technological factors, particularly the proliferation of digital networks. This resurgence also arose from an academic necessity to grapple with the changing landscape. Rémy Besson emphasizes that

---

30 Schwartz, S. "Tania Bruguera", p. 228.
31 Osterweil, A. "Bodily Rites", https://www.artforum.com/print/201509/bodily-rites-the-films-of-ana-mendieta-55531.

the concept of intermediality owes its success to favourable socio-cultural and technological conditions, particularly its alignment with the development of the web and the rise of social networks. These conditions created an environment conducive to reflecting on new technologies[32].

The transition from analogue photography to digital technologies generated significant theoretical concerns, challenging not only the concept of indexicality as an ontological feature of photography but also traditional views on the medium itself. Intermediality emerged as a relevant approach to address this evolving landscape and recognize the fusion of various forms. It is essential to note that intermediality, as a concept, is closely intertwined with the digital shift. In a networked digital environment, where nearly everything could be converted into the same digital code, maintaining the distinctions of media-specificities or the purity of notions seemed increasingly obsolete. The digital era facilitated new forms of intermedial relationships and played a role in shaping the very notion we employ today.

The environment in which intermediality developed also influenced artists working across diverse artistic domains. Jack Ox and Jacques Mandelbrojt, in their introduction to the "Intersenses/Intermedia" section of *Leonardo* journal in 2001, underscored the impact of digital transformation on enabling intermedial relationships: "We have reached a period in time when it is not only much easier to perform intermedia, but our tools invite us to do so, owing to the natural capabilities of computers"[33]. Digital tools like Photoshop empowered artists to blend various visual sources and layer materials in more advanced and precise manner. Artists took advantage of these capabilities to explore the digital transformation and produce work that uncovered some of the underlying conditions of its technological makeup. Works by Nancy Burson, Pedro Meyer, Esther Parada, Keith Cottingham, Aziz and Cucher, and Nancy Davenport, to name a few, pioneeringly combined traditional photographic images with new digital tools. They and their colleagues explored not only what it meant to make work in the changing cultural landscape and offered some ways to respond to the challenges of digital transformation, but also pointed to some critical features of the new reality.

While theorists often approached the digital era with caution, artists from this period exhibited a more exploratory attitude and a value-neutral response to the new conditions. If we consider Ljunberg's insights that intermedial formations exhibit *strong self-reflexivity* and *radical performativity*, which inherently point to their mode of operation and have the potential to generate entirely new forms, then the works of these artists can be seen as conscious efforts to perform digital existence – a probing of the new milieu.

This exploratory and reflexive approach found its way into academia. Besson argues that intermediality as an approach helped counter the hyper-specialization of

---

32 Besson, R. "Intermediality", p. 139.

33 Ox, J. and Mandelbrojt, J. "Intersenses/Intermedia", p. 47.

research in the humanities[34]. Intermediality allowed scholars to address old topics from new perspectives and opened up new avenues of study. In this sense, intermediality is closely related to interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity. It signifies a shift in perspective for scholars, particularly in response to evolving world conditions.

In summary, intermediality, when understood broadly and appreciated for its radical potential, serves as a suitable concept to analyse the novel relationships emerging in contemporary art photography. It has been adopted as a strategic response by both artists and theorists to the changing cultural and technological landscape. This shift in perspective has grown in tandem with the development of the internet and digitally enabled platforms and technologies, making intermediality a valuable framework for addressing the shifting dynamics in the realm of art photography, especially within the context of art exhibitions and spaces.

Transmediality

If we consider that intermediality, in its contemporary interpretation, was shaped within the context of the digital transformation, the notion of transmediality is even more closely aligned to it. Historically, transmedia was reintroduced by media scholar Henry Jenkins as a concept designed to address some of the transformations resulting from the digital shift[35]. Jenkins described transmedia storytelling as the practice of weaving a narrative using

elements from different media forms. His definition highlighted the entertainment value of such diverse usage: "Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience"[36]. Jenkins' approach focused on multisensory audience engagement and emphasized blockbuster-style media products, such as American comic books and popular television series from the period like *Lost*. However, Jenkins was criticized for placing excessive emphasis on user participation and for overlooking the corporate motivations of major media companies[37].

Despite these criticisms, during the digital era, transmedia (storytelling) became an umbrella term for describing the use of multiple media to convey information, particularly in the context of popular media and entertainment. Elisabeth Evans, who studied transmediality in the context of television, noted in 2011: "Most explicitly theorised by Henry Jenkins, transmedia storytelling… has become central to the understanding of how emerging new media technologies are leading to the creation of new forms of narrative content and audience engagement"[38]. Today, transmediality remains a widely employed but somewhat loosely defined term. It primarily focuses on storytelling through popular entertainment media and places

---

34 Besson, R. "Intermediality", p. 139.

35 Freeman, M. and Gambarato, R. R. "Introduction", p. 1.

36 Jenkins, H. "Transmedia Storytelling 101", http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.

37 See Hay, J. and Couldry, N. "Rethinking Convergence/Culture", p. 481.

38 Evans, E. *Transmedia Television*, p. 19.

importance on consumer agency. Since the advent of social media, transmediality has also been used to describe the integration and interaction between online platforms and older forms of media, such as television, radio, video games, or comics. Matthew Freeman and Renira Rampazzo Gambarato argue that "transmediality remains an important concept for understanding the fundamental shifts that digital media technologies have wrought on the media industries and their audiences"[39].

Transmedia scholar Kevin Moloney examined photography from the perspective of transmediality studies. His interest centred on how a photograph can function as a narrative device. Moloney acknowledged that photographic images represent incomplete stories, as they capture moments within an ongoing flow of time and space. Nevertheless, he saw the potential for photographs to imply "a complex narrative of events though they are only frozen moments sliced from the otherwise unstoppable flow of time"[40]. "Imply" is a key descriptor: "the photograph is not in and of itself a narrative", Moloney admits, yet "through reading of the isolated and frozen moment one contextualizes, emotes, and intuits a fully fleshed narrative from the sparse hints contained therein"[41]. This approach appears to prioritize the visual information within an image and relies on viewers' ability to interpret and contextualize the image, drawing from cultural, historical, and social knowledge. It aligns more closely with historical and photojournalistic photographs than with contemporary art pho-

tography, which often expands beyond the confines of a single frame in multi-layered and unpredictable ways.

This perspective is evident in the photographic material Moloney uses as illustrations: various journalistic images, a photograph from American football match, Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother". Aside from Lange's well-known photograph, these images served factual and straightforward purposes, lacking the complexity and imagination-driven meaning-making often found in contemporary art photography. Moloney's analysis prioritized narrativity and focused on historical and journalistic imagery, offering limited insights into contemporary artworks that employ photography. His transmedial conceptualization of photography failed to acknowledge the performative and self-reflexive potential inherent in art photography – a potential that intermedial theory provides tools to explore.

Lauren Walden has explored the subfield of photo-literature from a transmedial perspective. She argues that what sets transmediality apart is the collaboration between different forms of media to produce the same meaning, rather than creating deliberate contrasts[42]. In transmediality, these separate art forms do not rely on each other for coherence; they remain comprehensible even when distinct from each other. This perspective aligns Walden's understanding of transmediality more closely with Dick Higgins' concept of "mixed media", where individual media remain distinguishable. In contrast, intermedial works involve a more conceptual and daring

39   Freeman, M. and Gambarato, R. R. "Introduction", p. 2.
40   Moloney, K. "Transmedia Photography", p. 173.
41   Ibid, p. 176.

42   Walden, L. "Transmediality in Symbolist and Surrealist Photo-Literature", p. 215.

fusion of media, capable of producing entirely novel forms, as suggested by Ljunberg's insights regarding *radical performativity* in intermedial relations.

In summary, while intermediality and transmediality share common ground in their exploration of multiple media, they differ in their focus and approach. Transmediality, historically influenced by Henry Jenkins, leans more toward storytelling in popular entertainment media and emphasizes consumer agency. In contrast, intermediality, rooted in intermedial relations, encompasses a broader and more conceptual fusion of media, often leading to the creation of entirely new forms. Therefore, intermedial theory provides a more suitable framework for analyzing the complex and self-reflexive nature of contemporary art photography, which frequently defies traditional storytelling and classification.

Concluding Remarks

In today's era of interconnectedness, we may overlook the fact that the postmodern critical focus on hybridity and intermediality in the 1970s was, at the time, an innovative and groundbreaking approach. This critical perspective challenged conventional notions of what was once deemed "contaminated," "promiscuous," or "impure" in cultural expressions[43]. However, the contemporary landscape has shifted significantly, and we now tend to approach calls for unmediated transparency or a return to inherent purity with scepticism.

In our digitally interconnected culture, where we seamlessly multitask across various platforms, applications, and screens, concepts implying hybridity seem more natural than any aspirations for purity. Photography, in particular, exemplifies this trend. While it was once celebrated as a medium capable of producing transparent representations mirroring the world "without the aid of the artist", it has now evolved into a complex and ever-changing network of virtual nodes and data clusters, capable of operating in diverse contexts and frameworks.

In this ever-evolving landscape, both notions of intermediality and transmediality have found their usages, responding to changing cultural and technological conditions. Transmediality, influenced by Henry Jenkins' perspective on storytelling and audience engagement, tends to focus on more conventional narratives within popular entertainment media. While it has its merits, transmediality's emphasis on comprehensibility and distinctiveness between media seems to fall somewhat short in capturing the unique characteristics of contemporary art photography, which thrives on ambiguity, interplay, and the blurring of boundaries. Intermediality, as a concept rooted in the fusion of media and the generation of novel forms, appears to offer arguably a more natural framework for understanding the complex, self-reflexive, and multi-layered nature of contemporary art photography. It provides a conceptual perspective to appreciate photography as a dynamic and evolving medium, constantly reinventing itself to reflect the shifting currents of our cultural and technological milieu.

43 Kapchan, D. A. and Strong, P. T. "Theorizing the Hybrid", p. 239.

Bibliography

Alzamora, Geane Carvalho. A Semiotic Approach to Transmedia Storytelling, *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, Freeman M. and Gambarato R. R. eds. New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 438–446.

Arnheim, Rudolf. On the Nature of Photography, *Critical Inquiry*, 1974, 1 (1), p. 149–161.

Baetens, Jan, Costello, Diarmuid, et al. The Art Seminar, *Photography Theory*, Elkins J. ed. New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2007, p. 129–203.

Besson, Rémy. Intermediality: Axis of Relevance, *SubStance*, 2015, 44 (3), p. 139–154.

Breder, Hans. Hans Breder. *Artforum*, 2012. Available at: https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201207/hans-breder-32003. Burbridge, Ben. *Photography After Capitalism*. Cambridge, Mass. & London: Goldsmiths Press, 2020.

Dewdney, Andrew. *Forget Photography*. London: Goldsmiths Press, 2021.

Elleström, Lars. The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations, *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, Elleström L. ed. New York: Palgrave, 2010, p. 11–48.

Evans, Elizabeth. *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life.* New York: Routledge, 2011.

Freeman, Matthew and Gambarato, Renira Rampazzo. Introduction: Transmedia Studies – Where Now?, *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies,* Freeman M. and Gambarato R. R. eds. New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 1–12.

Hay, James and Couldry, Nick. Rethinking Convergence/Culture: An Introduction, *Cultural Studies*, 2011, 25 (4-5), p. 473–486.

Higgins, Dick. Intermedia, *Leonardo*, 2001, 34 (1), p. 49–54.

Higgins, Dick and Zurbrugg, Nicholas. Looking back, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 1999, 21 (2), p. 19–32.

Jenkins, Henry. Transmedia Storytelling 101, *The Official Blog of Henry Jenkins*, 2007. Available at: http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.

Kapchan, Deborah A. and Strong, Pauline Turner. Theorizing the Hybrid. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 1999, 112 (445), p. 239–253. Ljunberg, Christina. Intermedial Strategies in Multimedia Art, *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, Elleström L. ed. New York: Palgrave, 2010, p. 81–95.

Méchoulan, Eric. Intermediality: An Introduction to the Arts of Transmission, *SubStance,* 2015, 44 (3), p. 3–18.

Mitchell, W. J. T. There are no Visual Media, *Journal of Visual Culture,* 2005, 4 (2), p. 257–299.

Mitchell, W. J. T. "Ut Pictura Theoria": Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language, *Critical Inquiry,* 1989, 15 (2), p. 348–371.

Moloney, Kevin. Transmedia Photography: Implicit Narrative from a Discrete Moment, *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies,* Freeman M. and Gambarato R. R. eds. New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 173–182.

Morse, Edward Lind. *Samuel F. B. Morse: His Letters and Journals*, vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Müller, Jürgen E. Intermediality in the Age of Global Media Networks – Including Eleven Theses on its Provocative Power for the Concepts of "Convergence," "Transmedia Storytelling" and "Actor Network Theory", *SubStance*, 2015, 44 (3), p. 19–52.

Müller, Jürgen E. Intermediality Revisited: Some Reflections about Basic Principles of this *Axe de pertinence*, *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality,* Elleström L. ed. New York: Palgrave, 2010, p. 237–252.

Osterweil, Ara. Bodily Rites: The Films of Ana Mendieta, *Artforum,* 2015. Available at: https://www.artforum.com/print/201509/bodily-rites-the-films-of-ana-mendieta-55531.

Ox, Jack and Mandelbrojt, Jacques. Intersenses/Intermedia: A Theoretical Perspective, *Leonardo,* 2001, 34 (1), p. 47–48.

Rajewsky, Irina O. Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality, *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality,* Elleström L. ed. New York: Palgrave, 2010, p. 51–68.

Rodowick, David. *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Schwartz, Stephanie. Tania Bruguera: Between Histories, *Oxford Art Journal*, 2012, 35 (2), p. 215–232.

Talbot, William Henry Fox. *The Pencil of Nature.* London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844.

Wagner, Peter. Introduction: Ekphrasis, Iconotexts, and Intermediality – the State(s) of the Art(s), *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, Wagner P. ed. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1996, p. 1–42.

Walden, Lauren. Transmediality in Symbolist and Surrealist Photo-Literature, *Open Cultural Studies*, 2017, 1 (1), p. 214–231.

Walden, Scot, ed.. *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*, Malden: Blackwell, 2010.