
Between the Media: Media Relations in Literature and Art

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Most discussions on mediality and intermediality take their point of departure as contemporary digital media, social media included. Hence, earlier periods in cultural history are often regarded as simple forerunners for the highly complex situation in today's globalized media culture based on digital technologies. It is true that electronic media technology and its social effects now have reached an unprecedented and accelerated technological complexity. However, this perspective tends to ignore the fact that from ancient times up to the late nineteenth century, a wealth of media innovations exercised an impact in their contemporary cultures and societies; innovations that equal the influence of digital media today: the introduction of writing, book printing, the printed press and its technologies, visual reproduction technologies, the telegraph, photography, film, the telephone and other innovations in the media world. The focus of this article is a few specific media innovations and the radical changes they generated over the last few hundred years in literature and art as well as in their cultural and societal contexts. Such innovations are steps in the long process that leads to recent media developments and their influence on experiences, knowledge, ideologies and human self-understanding.

The Web of Media: Three Points

A verbal text is often characterized as a monomedial phenomenon. Yet, this is not the case when we look at the text from the point of view of reception and the multitude of images it produces in the reader's mind. Any reader of Luo Guanzhong's *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*sanguo yanyi* 三国演义), Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tales, William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* or the poetic visions of Matsuo Bashō's haiku poetry will produce images together with

memories of sense impressions that arise from the text and accompany its reading: the raging Zhang Fei, the Little Mermaid in love, the innocent Juliet, Bashō's flash-impressions of nature. Unavoidably the modern readers' visual imagination blends with conscious and unconscious memories of illustrations, movies, TV series, videos, gaming scenarios, posters, advertisements – in fact images from every corner of our present media landscape, however different it may be from the media context in which these texts originated. Separating one medium from its mingling with other media in our actual perception of it is an analytical abstraction and maybe useful in very particular contexts of teaching, theoretical reflection or technological experimentation. But it does not work from the perspective of media use, neither in the context of production nor that of reception. Any concrete media application – verbal or visual, haptic or disembodied, static or moving images, acoustic or silent, interactive or autonomous, multimedial or monomedial – is always embedded in a larger media context of several media. This is my first point.

When I do not read but attend an actual performance of a play, such as Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, several media are already working jointly to produce the performance (speech, body movements, sounds, lighting effects, décor, space, various backstage technologies and maybe interactive engagement with the audience, as in children's theatre or modern improvised performances). Moreover, the experience of the performance is overdetermined by my visual memories of earlier performances of the play, or just of 'going to the theatre', and by films, TV, videos, exhibitions and maybe my own participation in amateur theatre. If there is a temporal gap between the textual origin and the reception of a performance, a host of historical references to costumes, language, music, objects, etc., may be deployed in the performance. Nevertheless, it is the contemporaneity that defines the function and meaning of any elements from the past. Tradition is an integration of the past in the present and not the other way around. Hence, a tradition always contains references to the past, but for a tradition to be alive it must embrace the entire media landscape of the present and its users. My second point is that the relevant media context is always overdetermined by the reception of a media product, not with the historical context of the origin of the text or artwork.

My third point concerns the historicity of media and their use. Given the fact that no medium stands alone when used, its changing role and material manifestation depend on its relation to other media, and also when it comes to well-known and age-old media such as oral expressions, texts, drawings, sculpture, textiles, paintings, etc. Later media developments change their relationships but do not eradicate them. This dynamic is not just a matter of skilful combinations of various media in any given moment or in the creation of a media event. Whenever a medium is operating, the process activates the historicity of this medium as it is defined by the history of its media relations. The storyteller uses language and body expression when he or she tells a story, or rather performs the story for an audience, and also for the audience of social media platforms. This has been the case since pre-historic times and continues to be so today, only now with different verbal and bodily expressions adapted to the

modern media environment, such as my storytelling for my grandchildren who are digitally native and media-savvy even before they learn to read and write.

One of the most decisive moments in the long history of media is the introduction of the first digital medium – written signs, language in particular. This development of the verbal medium materializes visually in the many scripts that exist across the world. They all work by means of a limited set of distinctive features in digital either-or relations, both in alphabetic languages and in scripts such as the Chinese type. A tiny dot, curve or line makes a difference in meaning, articulated by the limited number of letters in the Latin alphabet, as well as by the Chinese script which includes thousands of characters. Writing is a media technology involving several material and social dimensions and implications: (1) the introduction and invention of a material on which to apply the signs (stone, clay, wood, parchment and paper, white board and screen) and of writing utensils (sticks, quills, pencils, brushes, fountain pens, ball pens, typewriters, laptops, tablets and smart phones); (2) the formation of educational institutions and systems for the teaching of writing skills and of social hierarchies that define who is entitled to develop the skills, and decide which topics and discourses may or must be turned into writing and which are inadmissible; (3) the creation of certain types of objects to ensure dissemination of which subjects are socially permissible in written texts (letters, books, newspapers, journals, telegrams, radio, television, media platforms, etc.) and of legal bodies to control the dissemination of such textual objects. Changing a medium – say from orality to writing, from book to tablet – transforms the entire network of media and its larger social and cultural context as well as the power relations implied by the media, and such transmutations are basic drivers for social and cultural history. On a historical macro-level, at least three decisive changes deserve to be mentioned.

- (1) *Writing*. With the transition from a culture based on orality to one founded on writing, then social memory, social power relations and the role of other media changed dramatically. Writing has to be learned, speech not; writing can be controlled, canonized and censored more easily than speech; writing creates a professional elite based on formalized skills, curricula and exams; finally, writing came to allow for new media relations – illustrations could be added when the writing material and utensils allowed for this supplementary media use (pen, brush, paint, ink, wood, paper, etc.). Of course, orality did not disappear, but its social role changed.
- (2) *Printing*. Book printing may be seen as the next major transformation as it occurred across the world at different historical junctures. With improved printing techniques and the expansion of literacy, reading as an individualized activity became possible, based on books that were easily accessible and could be kept in one's private bag or pocket, but also books forbidden by central authorities. This media development weakened the centralized control of what could be written and disseminated, and individual acquisition and communication of new knowledge became more widespread and posed a threat to basic social institutions such as the Church and other centralized political powers. In Europe, the fight since the eighteenth century for universal schooling, free speech, democracy, secularization, science, etc., had printing and the book as an essential precondition.

- (3) *Electronic media*. Digital electronic media form the latest momentous development with huge and still evolving cultural and social repercussions. For the first time in centuries, the basic literacy of an essential medium is not taught in schools through a centralized control of reading lists and exams, but is learned outside and often before schooling begins, and schools have a hard time integrating the digital media in teaching programmes and pedagogical practices. Social media, in particular, have wide-ranging implications with regard to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, to the responsibility for media content and to the validation of its reliability. The seamless integration in a digitized electronic universe of all kinds of media, which previously were singled out and related to their own specific media technologies (image, sound, text, videos, etc.), makes multimediality or intermediality the new standard, not monomediality. All of this has revolutionized culture and society by generating new types of personal, social and cultural powers and connectivities on a global scale: new international relations between states, new types of economy and politics, and new and boundless relations between individuals; and, at the same time, also new types of disruptions such as encrypted platforms and hacking, together with a profound questioning of the common criteria for truth. This is our contemporary highly dynamic media landscape which also frames the use of what we now might call classical media. Media history is cultural history and vice versa in a shared and interdependent historical formation.

Together, these three points claim that (1) the change of any medium has to be contemplated within its larger media context (2) from the point of view of its contemporary use and reception, which then (3) provides media change with a historicity that is embedded as a central dynamic in social and cultural history throughout human history. With this perspective in mind I will briefly offer some conceptual clarifications, and then, with this backdrop, show in two steps how the three points may work as guidelines for an analysis of intermedia relation in literature and art. The first step will concern the static intermediality of book illustrations, the second the performative intermediality of theatre.

Basic Concepts: Media Functions

Prior to exemplifications, a basic conceptual framework will be helpful with a set of definitions of ‘medium’, ‘mediation’, ‘mediality’ and ‘intermediality’, which focus on the *function* of the media, not on their technological specificity. A *medium* is a material channel for the production and transmission of meaning, while *mediation* is the dynamic relationship between subjects and subjects via a medium (for example, an exchange of opinions through words); between subjects and objects (for example, in verbal argumentation, by pointing fingers or the use of maps); and, finally, between objects and objects (for example, between my computer and someone else’s device via electronic signals). The body in particular is an essential medium for the basic mediation between us, other people and the entire surrounding world. We may take for granted that our experience of the outside world is spontaneous and unmediated because we just use our senses without thinking about how we do it. However, like the body of any living organism, the human body and its sense

apparatus, with its neurological networks, also function as a medium, a filter that selects and thus mediates what we are able to perceive and digest with our brains and transform into meaning. The olfactory filter of a canine body is inaccessible to humans.

This observation leads to the next basic definition. *Mediality*, then, is the media specificity of a given mediation – verbal, visual, perceptual, electronic, etc. – the relevance of which depends on the complexity of the mediation and, hence, the extent of the specification needed in order for a certain mediation to succeed in a given situation. Take for example the mediality of a film: we do not have to explicate the entire neurological circuit of the brain to explain our reception of a movie, we can restrict ourselves to explain the basic technology of a camera and a microphone and the aesthetic effects of camera angle, close-ups, long shots and so on.

The last basic notion is that of *intermediality*, which designates the media specificity of a given mediation defined by a relation between all the media-specific medialities engaged in a given mediation. I prefer this term to *multimediality* which only points to the number of media (multi-) involved, while *intermediality* stresses the relationships (inter-) between them and thus opens up questions about their relative dominance, their influence on each other, the historical development of such dominance, the choice of media for the transmission of meaning, etc.

The above definition of *media* may look self-evident: ‘A material channel for the production and transmission of meaning’. However, it contains an internal tension. We may either emphasize the first part or the second part of the definition, each option leading us in a different direction. By underlining the first part – the material channel – we may be tempted to adopt a *context independent* view of a medium and focus on its technological aspects alone, the general principles of coding and the algorithms behind them, formalities of grammar and spelling, the mechanism of a camera, the machinery of a printing press, etc., all of which operate independently of where and when we use the medium, and they may be replaced by robots. This is the approach taken by social media providers such as Facebook and Twitter in their attempts to block the uploading of certain contents of an allegedly offensive nature. They develop algorithms to define and delimit a cultural context by means of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

By contrast, the second part of the definition highlights a *context-dependent* approach to the understanding of the function of media. Here, the point of departure is the use and reception of media in a social and cultural context with a focus on communication, reception, meaning production, etc., which require human interaction that cannot be replaced entirely by algorithms and robots. The technologies open for new social and cultural contexts of media use, and hence, the understanding and evaluation of their function, are determined by the cultural contexts they create. In this context, a media analysis of mediation and intermediality in literature and art becomes particularly relevant, for the simple reason that these phenomena are fundamentally engaged in meaning production with human interaction at the centre. It is the tension between the context-dependent communicative approach and the context-independent technological approach that

defines the cultural dynamics of intermediality, and literature and art can be characterized as cultural activities that explore precisely the complementarity built into the tension. They explore new media technologies by embedding them in the cultural context they represent and interpret (Giedion 1948; Larsen 2020).

Visualizations

Didactic Function

The technology of book printing is instrumental for the early mass distribution of texts and images. In Europe, printing by means of single and movable types, which was invented by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440, revolutionized production, dissemination and reading of texts. Well before this technological breakthrough, block printing had been known in China and East Asia (with movable type printing also emerging in Korea with the introduction of the Korean alphabet under King Sejong at the same time as Gutenberg introduced the printing press – Kim 2010). Book printing gained momentum across Europe during the fifteenth century, not only because of the printing technology itself, but rather because of the larger cultural context in which the technology was embedded and which it reshaped. Here, the gradual shift from the use of Latin to various vernacular languages was spurred by the accessibility of printed books for local audiences in their own languages at an affordable price compared with the costly hand-written books from previous centuries. In this way, the level of literacy increased slowly but surely, not least because of the confrontation between Protestantism and the Catholic Church. The Protestant movement insisted on education in local languages and on the individuality of faith, while the Catholic Church as an institution promoted the universal role of Latin to sustain its centralized ideological and political power. Supporting the growing individualism that gained ground in the following centuries, printed books made individual reading, thinking, expression and often anti-institutional claims possible beyond the control of central authorities. A rapidly growing series of Bible translations enabled people across Europe to read God's word for themselves, and new hymns and prayer books in local languages gradually made religious practice a local and personal activity.

In this dynamic cultural context, printed books became a unique tool for the advancement of literacy in schools. To support this process, books could now include images, the cheaper ones based on simple wood cuts while the more expensive ones used etchings or engravings to explain the new natural sciences and to transmit literature and art to an elite audience. In this development, the visual media moved from serving a *didactic* function that reduplicated the text, via an *expressive* function that added an emotional dimension beyond the written text itself, and, finally, to an *interpretational* function that suggests alternative interpretations of a text. All three types of visualization belong to the same type of intermediality, that of one medium – the visual – being incorporated in another – the textual – in a combination that requires a mental interaction with the reader-viewer to release the meaning of the



Figure 1. Johann Comenius: *Orbis Pictus* (1658; Wikimedia commons, public domain).

verbal-visual text. Such texts also exhibit a feature that belongs to all kind of intermediality: intermediality always creates a reciprocal relation between the media involved, which determines the reception of the intermedial product.

An early example of a printed book containing illustrations with a *didactic* purpose is the widely translated schoolbook *Orbis Pictus* by the Czech erudite Johann Comenius, the title meaning ‘the world in pictures’ (1658 – see Comenius 1967 [1672]). It was intended for language teaching with a double text in Latin and a vernacular language, which was first German, then through translations it spread into a variety of European languages. Using images to visualize the vocabulary, the book established a triangular intermedial translation between two languages and a visual illustration. The structure of the book was not composed according to a grammatical structure, but was systematized with reference to a series of basic sensual experiences of the surrounding world already known by the students, for example animals (and a coachman) and their sounds (Figure 1).

The didactic intermediality of the text–image relation establishes an unambiguous relation between text and image: the image clarifies the meaning of the text while the

text defines the didactic context of the image – language teaching, not anatomy or biology. If the images look old-fashioned to a modern reader, this basic intermedial function is not. Any visual-textual guide helping the reader to operate a dishwasher or assemble a piece of IKEA furniture follows the same didactic principle.

Emotional Function

With the further development of media technology and the broader dissemination of printed books and other printed material such as leaflets, popular songs, magazines and such like, the illustrations took on a new function with an ambiguous relation between text and image that triggered an appeal to imagination rather than to learning. This is the *expressive* text–image relation, here exemplified by a modern photo that accompanies Matsuo Bashō's canonical Japanese travelogue *The Narrow Road to a Far Province* (*Oku no Hosomichi* 奥の細道), written after one of his hikes through Japan during the Edo dynasty in 1689. With modern travel writing in mind, his poetic and philosophical text is very different from the many European reports on travel adventures and scientific explorations from the same period and could hardly serve as a guidebook for today's tourists wanting to follow in the footsteps of Bashō. He offers very few descriptions of sites and details, but his poems and thoughtful reflections create a spiritual attunement between the traveller and the places he visits (Miner 1990, Ch. 4).

Since the last half of the nineteenth century, photography has often been used for visual documentation and for the establishment of forensic evidence as unambiguous as Comenius' wood cuts; however, the photograph in Figure 2, which refers to a poem in Bashō's text, fulfils an entirely different function, that of representing or expressing the mood of Bashō's work, whose editor, Soryū, wrote in 1694 in his epilogue: 'When you read *The Narrow Road to a Far Province*, at times you will find yourself rising up to applaud. At other times you will quietly hang your head with emotion' (Bashō 2002, 86). The photo is placed in the book's chapter on Kanazawa, an important provincial city during the Edo dynasty and shows a walking path in the iconic Kenroku-en Gardens, which were created around 1620. The caption added by the photographer quotes one of the haikus in the chapter: 'The red summer sun/still blazes, mindless of/the lonely autumn.' In Dorothy Britton's translation it runs: 'How hot the sun glows,/Pretending not to notice/An autumn wind blows' (75). In contrast to Comenius' didactic use of illustrations, this visualization neither refers to a glowing or blazing sun nor an autumnal wind, only to the mental state evoked by these elements. Actually, in the photo the leaves on the trees are more a sign of summer than of autumn and not affected by even the slightest breeze or a blistering sun. The absolute stillness and peace of the place without any humans visualizes the mindless forgetfulness that defines the atmosphere of the poem. Through the walking path that leads the viewer-reader into the represented space, this mood also penetrates the whole travelogue to which the photo alludes. In the lower right corner, though, a stone serves as a meta-reference to the poem which is actually inscribed on its surface; it almost looks like a headstone or a small memorial monument serving as

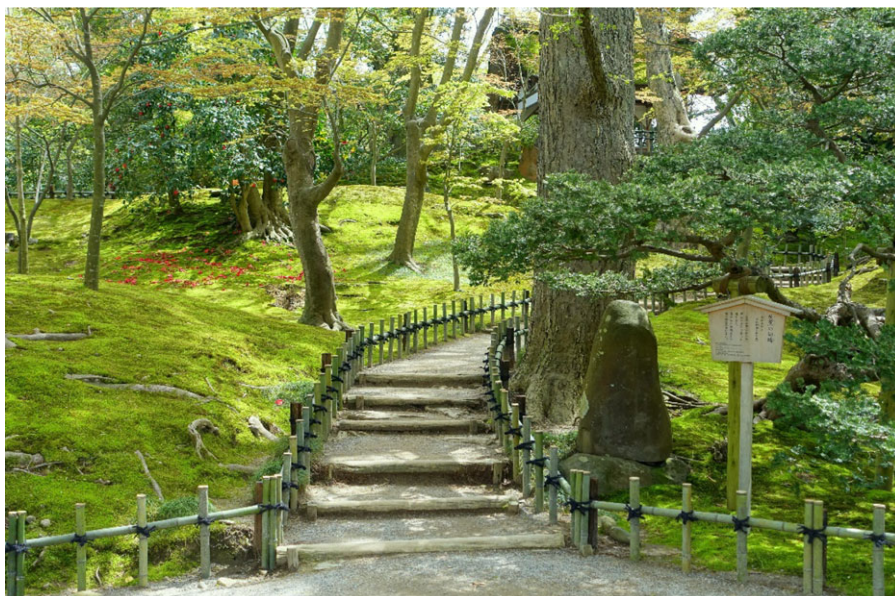


Figure 2. Photo by Daderot (pseudonym) (2018; Wikimedia commons, public domain)

a tacit reminder of the main event of the Kanazawa-chapter: the memorial service for Issho, a recently deceased local poet. The expressive type of visualization takes the text as an opportunity to highlight and enlarge its emotional effect and, at the same time, the photo itself becomes a work composed in its own right, deploying specific visual aesthetics, the central perspective, also known in other visual media.

Interpretational Function

This reciprocal intermedial complexity is also at the core of the third kind of the text–image relationship, the *interpretational* one. Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* (1837) (*Den lille Havfrue*) (Andersen 1899) has inspired countless visualizations. Here, just two illustrations will serve as my examples. They rely on different materials and media technologies and, at the same time, they suggest two different interpretations, each of which inscribes the story into two different cultural contexts.

A brief recapitulation of core elements may be relevant in our context. Living under the sea, the adolescent mermaid falls in love with a sunken statue of a beautiful human male, and when she is finally allowed to mount to the surface, as the adult mermaids, she saves a prince from drowning – as handsome as the statue but in flesh and blood. Enraptured by the young unconscious man she wishes to be human and decides to have her tail split into two legs and pays an old underwater witch for the operation with her tongue, even when she is warned that there is no way back to the world of mermaids. Once on land, the mute beauty impresses the court, but the legs

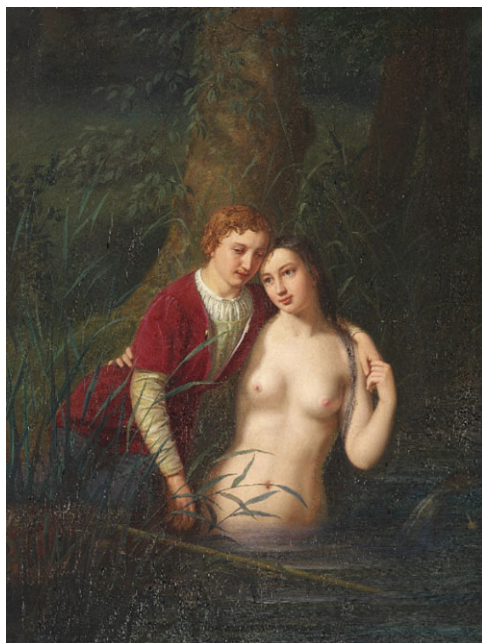


Figure 3. Ludvig August Smith: *The Little Mermaid and the Prince* (1851, oil on canvas) (Wikimedia commons, public domain)

cause her unbearable pain for every step. At the end, the prince marries a princess, and the little mermaid jumps to her death from a ship, sacrificing herself for the happiness of the prince. Transformed into foam and evaporating into the air, she joins the daughters of the air, and as a reward for her selflessness she is promised access to paradise after 300 years. This simple paraphrase does not take into account Andersen's rich symbolic language and complex style, jumping from lyrical prose to everyday parlance, from ethical reflections to naive childish rhetoric, and from the surface of innocence and noble feelings to the subconscious dimensions of sexuality and the painful process of irreversible bodily maturation.

The story's complexity invites several interpretations of the fundamental meaning of story. (1) Is it about resilience in love, which at the end is gratified? (2) Or about the reward of innocence? (3) Or about longing for a full life – body and soul? (4) Or about the painful shift from child to adult as a sexually conscious being? (5) Or about suppressed destructive sexual urges? (6) Or about human life on land as an alienated existence? There might be more interpretations, but at least two opposite ones are emphasized by two illustrations (Figures 3 and 4).

Although the mermaid in Smith's painting shows a naked, mature young woman, the rest of the painting removes all sensuality and sexuality from the amorous couple. She looks dreamingly away from him, and the downcast eyes of the fully-dressed prince look to a point beyond her body while the fingers of his right hand placed near her crotch are turned away from her body, of which her sex is hidden under the quiet

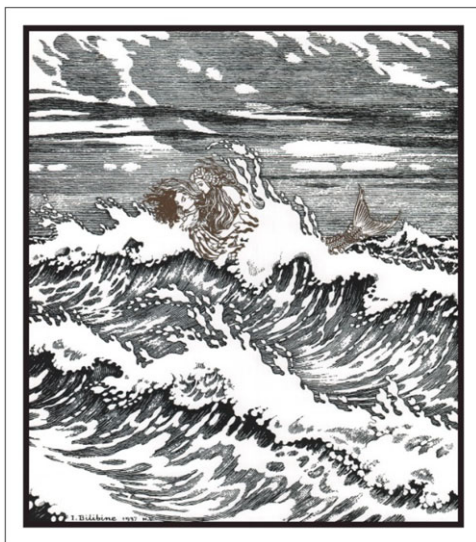


Figure 4. Ivan Bilibin: *The Little Mermaid and the Prince* (1937, print) (Wikimedia commons, public domain)

water that looks more like a puddle than an ocean. He is a boy rather than a man, with only the faint traces of the first soft moustache of an adolescent. Despite the nudity the picture alienates their bodies from each other as if the mermaid were still more in love with the sunken statue than the real prince. The interpretation of the painting emphasizes the innocent, childish and asexual dimension of the fairy tale.

Ivan Bilibin offers another interpretation. Engulfed by the waves of the big ocean the couple are caught in the moment of the mermaid's transformation from a girl to a woman: the encounter with the prince when she for the first time breaks the surface of the water and enters adult life. She is saving the drowning prince in a full embrace, a moment of an erotic awakening which – as her passionless and his unconscious face show – is still a subconscious and suppressed urge. No nudity is needed to interpret the sexual dimension of the fairy tale from the point of view of a passion that absorbs her entirely, body and soul; instead, its symbolic representation by the agitated waves and the stormy sky dominates the entire scene.

As visual interpretations, both illustrations interpret the text by selecting and emphasizing certain connotations and excluding others. The text delivers the same motif to both artists – the intimacy between the mermaid and the prince – but the images provide the text with two alternative semantic centres. Smith uses the classical medium of oil painting, and, together with the painting's traditional composition and visual aesthetic, his interpretation enters seamlessly into the middle-class culture of the period and its suppressive approach to love, gender, sensuality and sexuality. Bilibin's picture is part of an illustrated Russian edition of the fairy tale commemorating its publication 100 years earlier. He was inspired by the new ideas of body and sensuality from the body culture and psychology of the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries and by the aesthetics of symbolism and *art nouveau*. In this context, and in that of the modern mass society of the 1930s, his choice is not a unique painting but a mass-produced print. In both cases the particular interpretational intermediality of the two illustrations and their material manifestations are co-determined by the larger cultural context of their time.

Transformations

The visualization of a text offers a stable relation between two media of a didactic, expressive and interpretational nature. However, *The Little Mermaid* is also transformed – remediated (Bolder and Grusin 2010) – into film, theatre, ballet, cartoons and advertisements. Here, a textual medium is *transformed* into a new complex intermediality that more strongly activates the imagination and interaction of the receiver. The same holds for the interactive didactic use of digital technology in language teaching by e-learning replacing the static visualization of Comenius and expressive visualizations. The final step of my two-step argument on the nature of intermediality exemplifies media transformation based on Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) (*Et dukkehjem*, Ibsen 1889).

Until the mid-twentieth century, a classical theatre performance was a transformation of a text into a physical performance in a three-dimensional embodied space occupied by actors and a physical audience. This transformation from text to stage is a complex process that runs from a textual medium to an intermedial event; from a disembodied medium to an embodied event; from a static and repeatable object to a unique event with flexible although recurring features; and from a distance between production and reception to the co-presence of actors and audience. Hence, a theatre production does not put a text on stage; it transforms a text in order to make possible a performance which is relevant in the cultural context of its audience (see also Larsen 2023). Even if the words of Ibsen – Norwegian or translated – may be identical across a broad spectrum of performances over a long period of time, each new production will use new technologies for its lighting effects, props and décor as well as new styles of action or modifications of the text, all of which may be inspired by film and TV drama, although such media events belong to a type of intermediality different from a theatre performance and are of a later date than Ibsen.

Translation between two or more different languages is the simplest media transformation, together with a paraphrase such as the following. Ibsen's play is set in the home of the well-to-do Helmer family, which turns out to be an explosive bourgeois idyll. The core event is known by many people who may not know the play itself: Nora leaves husband and children to gain her own freedom as a woman. Out of love and loyalty Nora has secretly committed fraud to save her husband. Feeling sure to receive his forgiveness when the crime is revealed, she is appalled by his hypocrisy when it turns out that he fears public shame more than the loss of her love. Enraged,

and to the reverberating sound of the heavy front door, she leaves the home to an unknown future.

From the very first staging in 1879, the play's open ending ignited both moral and aesthetic controversy and produced its first media transformation. For the first staging of the German translation of the play in 1880, Ibsen was forced to write an alternative ending. Enraged by the fact that he did not have today's legal protection for authors' rights and copyrights, Ibsen had to make Nora regret her decision and turn around on the doorstep for the sake of her children. Thus, the new version was both a translation and a rewriting of a realist drama that turned it into a different genre, a sentimental melodrama, a version which was often used well into 1890s.

The play has witnessed not just countless translations and performances across the globe since its first appearance in 1879, but also rewritings as poems or parodies (Ibsen Bibliography 2020, see also Wirak and Lexow 2008, Holledge *et al.* 2016). In an evolving process of media transformation since 1911, the play's popularity also spurred some 175 transformations into films and TV-dramas (see IMDb 2020, IbsenStage 2020), and more recently The Beatles' *White Album* had the working title *A Doll's House* before the group chose to change the title because, in July 1968, another British group, Family, had just released their debut album under the title *Music in a Doll's House*. Thus, Ibsen's drama has been embedded in the radical change of media, technologies of reproduction, types of publication and other means of dissemination that have shaped the transformative modern intermediality.

The worldwide dissemination of the play also illustrates the degree to which textual translation is integrated in a media transformation in which the new media technologies interact with local cultural and aesthetic norms, forms and traditions. The Chinese reception of Ibsen's play can serve as a compact example of such interwoven processes of media transformations. From the later years of the Qing Dynasty and even more so after its fall in 1911, Ibsen became an important source of inspiration for Chinese discussions about social reform, in particular about women's liberation, which in Chinese was given the name 'Nora-ism' (*nuolazhuyi* 諾拉主義). One of the main figures within the Chinese cultural movements in the 1910s and 1920s, Hu Shih, translated *A Doll's House* from German in 1917 and called it *Nora* (*nuola* 諾拉), and in 1918 he coined the term 'Ibsenism' (*yi busheng zhuyi* 易卜生主義) to designate the general reform debate in which Nora came to serve as an emblematic figure. Hu Shih was not alone in promoting Ibsen (see Zhao 2009; Yang Shu 2016). In 1923, Lu Xun, the most celebrated among the early Chinese realists, discussed Nora in a talk entitled 'What happens after Nora walks out?' (Lu 2017). First of all, Nora would need money, he argued, using the play as an argument for economic reforms in China to support Nora-ism. One hundred years later, the Shanghai-based centre *Ibsen International*, established in 2010, confirms the still active presence of Ibsenism in China today (International 2020).

Moreover, Hu Shih, who had lived in the United States for some time, rewrote the play in English in a short version which he labelled a 'Farce', "The Greatest Event in Life: A Farce in One Act" (1919) (Hu 2013). Behind the explicit Ibsenism of the post-1911 reform movements, this version of the play epitomizes in under 30 minutes the

deep cultural difference between Europe and China with regard to women and marriage. In the farce the daughter wants to marry the man she loves against the wish of her parents. Her mother makes use of a fortune-teller to warn against it, while her father, rejecting his wife's obvious superstition, instead argues that the family genealogy, which reaches back 2500 years, will not allow the two families to be united. While Hu Shih himself considers fortune-telling and the age-old Confucian tradition of arranged marriages according to family history as obsolete, he knows that they continued to flourish in the new China after 1911. In Hu Shih's rewriting of *A Doll's House*, the problem for a woman is not the decision to leave or not to leave her husband; instead, she has to decide whether she should insist only on her own choice and leave her parents rather than enter into a forced marriage. This is precisely what the daughter in Hu Shih's version decides to do – an act of emancipation no less radical than Nora's in Ibsen's play.

In contemporary China, this perspective has taken yet another turn, captured in the stigmatizing term 'leftover women' (*sheng nu* 剩女) (see Fischer 2014; Shlam and Medalia 2019). The availability of young daughters, who at the age of 25 are still unmarried, may be posted in corners of public parks by some parents looking for suitable husbands. In 2019, a group of four women, Guo Yangyang, Selena Lu, Lin Cuixi and Lelia Taha Burt, created the grotesque and experimental bilingual Chinese–English interactive intermedial performance *The Greatest Event in a Doll's Life*, which merges elements and notions from Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Hu Shih's *The Greatest Event in Life*. The Chinese title of the production is "Home of Leftover Women" (*sheng nu zhi jia* 剩女之家) (Lu 2019). It has travelled globally and in 2019 received the international Ibsen Award (Award 2019), both for its critical focus on the push to coerce young Chinese women into marriage and motherhood and for its innovative intermediality, which blends languages and various media with social action, in this case an interaction with the audience that involves male theatre-goers on stage in improvised dialogues and actions. This comprehensive media transformation keeps Ibsen alive as a controversial playwright and epitomizes the intermediality of a theatre performance as an embodied and interactive event involved in broad cultural movements.

Interaction

All media use is interactive or participatory. The act of reading and viewing requires a mental interaction to trigger understanding and imagination. The act of writing and speaking is a physical interaction using a medium that addresses present or absent receivers. Today, with the technological development of media, the spectrum of physical interactions has been widened, as in the case of the changing performances of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and has also created the possibility of participatory cultural activities based on informal and often individual initiatives, today supported by social media. In some cultural contexts, this development had caused conflicts with local and national authorities for political and ideological

reasons when social media communications are transformed into demonstrations, in others, such interactions have been integrated in society by law as a civil right. Media technology opens the cultural context, the cultural context defines the direction of the use of technology, and the creative intermediality in literature and art moves both.

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