

Intermediality: an alternative paradigm to interdisciplinarity in contemporary art

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Abstract:

This article explores the concept of intermediality as an alternative paradigm to interdisciplinarity in the field of contemporary art. It examines how the interferences between artistic media generate new forms of production and reception. Through a historical and analytical approach, the study highlights how intermediality transcends mere disciplinary connection to establish itself as an autonomous mode of creative thought. It also shows that the intermedial dynamic, by fostering permeability between different means of artistic expression, redefines operational, perceptual, and mediating modalities. In this sense, intermediality is not simply an aesthetic process today, but constitutes a promising semiotic and critical framework that invites us to rethink the constantly shifting boundaries of contemporary artistic creation.

Keywords: Intermediality, Interdisciplinarity, Media, Contemporary Art, Information and Communication Technologies.

البينية الوسائطية: نموذج معرفي بديل للتداخل التخصصي في الفن المعاصر

نزار الموخّر - قسم العلوم الإنسانية - كلية الآداب والعلوم - جامعة قطر

الملخص:

يسعى هذا المقال إلى استكشاف مفهوم البينية الوسائطية بوصفه نموذجًا معرفيًا بديلًا للتداخل التخصصي في مجال الفن المعاصر. ويبحث في الكيفية التي تُفضي بها التفاعلات والتداخلات

القائمة بين الوسائط الفنية المختلفة إلى إنتاج أشكال جديدة من الإبداع والتلقي. ومن خلال مقارنة تاريخية وتحليلية، تُبرز الدراسة كيف تتجاوز **البيئية الواسطية** مجرد الربط بين التخصصات الفنية لتؤسس لنفسها نمطاً مستقلاً من التفكير الإبداعي. كما يبيّن المقال أن دينامية **البيئية الواسطية**، بما تتيحه من نفاذية وتفاعل متبادل بين مختلف وسائل التعبير الفني، تسهم في إعادة تعريف آليات الإنتاج والتشغيل والإدراك والوساطة داخل العمل الفني المعاصر. ومن هذا المنظور، لا تقتصر **البيئية الواسطية** اليوم على كونها إجراءً أو ممارسة جمالية فحسب، بل تمثل إطاراً سيميائياً ونقدياً واعداً يدعوننا إلى إعادة النظر في الحدود المتحولة باستمرار للإبداع الفني المعاصر، وفي أنماط تشكّله وتلقيه ضمن سياق ثقافي وتقني دائم التغيّر. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** البيئة الواسطية، التداخل التخصصي، الوسائط الفنية، الفن المعاصر، تكنولوجيات المعلومات والاتصال.

"There is no researcher who does not recognize the weakening of the division, and the cross-fertilization of one discipline by another. "

- M. Serres (1988, pp. 24-25) -

Introduction:

Before beginning this article, and to avoid burdening myself with a potentially significant assumption, I must clarify the definition of the term "media" that will be adopted in this study. Indeed, I use this term not in the restrictive sense of mass media (press, radio, television, etc.), but rather as a "medium" or means of expression for artistic works. Given this semantic extension, it would be relevant to situate my approach within an interdisciplinary perspective.

This article attempts to reflexively understand the concept of "media" through its multiple implications in the field of contemporary artistic creation and, consequently, to situate the notion of intermediality within a transversal and open perspective. It thus seeks to move beyond any strictly definitional approach to examine intermediality as a dynamic field of production, circulation, and presentation of contemporary works. From this perspective, intermediality is considered not only as a phenomenon of intermedial

intersection, but also as a genuine mode of creative thought that entails a redefinition of the processes of creation, reception, and mediation. To this end, we propose to develop a conceptual framework for intermediality capable of discerning its various manifestations, identifying its epistemological foundations and the resulting aesthetic issues, and elucidating - as far as possible - the conceptual ambiguities and/or aporias that continue to fuel this rapidly developing field of research.

This article also aims to highlight the relationships that intermediality maintains with other related concepts such as interartiality, transcreation, hybridization, and métissage, in order to better define its specificities and contributions to the analysis of current artistic practices.

Finally, we will demonstrate how intermediality constitutes a relevant theoretical framework for understanding the evolution of artistic practices and the transformations of visibility regimes in a context marked more than ever by media interference.

1- Research Problem, Objectives, and Methodology:

The increasingly recurrent and profound transformations affecting contemporary artistic practices, driven by media hybridization and the digitization of creative and exhibition processes, call for a reassessment of the historical frameworks and analytical approaches that have long prevailed.

In this context, although interdisciplinarity has traditionally served as the dominant paradigm for examining relationships among artistic disciplines, it now appears insufficient to account for the complexity of the interactions that characterize contemporary artistic practices. Indeed, going beyond the mere convergence of disciplines, these practices involve intricate networks of connections among heterogeneous media, often combined, shaped, and enhanced by technological developments.

It is precisely within this perspective that intermediality increasingly emerges as an alternative paradigm to interdisciplinarity. Far from being a simple extension of the latter, it constitutes a more appropriate methodological framework for understanding the processes of medial interference at work in contemporary artistic practices.

Nevertheless, despite the growing interest shown by art theorists in this expanding field of research, the epistemological status of intermediality remains unclear and, in many respects, controversial. The distinctive features that, at first glance, appear to distinguish it from related concepts - such as interdisciplinarity, interartiality, transmediality, and hybridity - remain imprecise, often leading to ambiguous or even inappropriate uses. This conceptual ambiguity undermines the heuristic potential of intermediality, making it necessary to clarify its epistemological foundations and theoretical contours.

Accordingly, the central research question of this article may be formulated as follows: Under what conditions, and within what conceptual framework, can intermediality establish itself today as an alternative paradigm capable of accounting for contemporary artistic practices beyond the scope of traditional interdisciplinary approaches?

Based on this research question, the article pursues the following objectives:

- to identify the epistemological, historical, and conceptual foundations of intermediality;
- to distinguish intermediality from other related concepts with which it is frequently associated;
- to explain how interactions among different media reshape the processes of artistic creation, exhibition, and reception, thereby contributing to the emergence of new aesthetic experiences.

Methodologically, this article adopts a historical and analytical approach. It begins with a critical review of the literature on

intermediality in order to trace the principal stages of its theoretical development.

It then examines the major conceptual implications of intermediality, highlighting its profound impact on contemporary aesthetic experience.

Finally, in order to substantiate the argument, the article analyzes a representative artwork whose various components make it possible to identify their respective contributions to understanding forms of artistic transversality grounded in medial interferences.

The purpose of this article is neither to provide a definitive history of intermediality nor to establish an exhaustive inventory of intermedial artworks and artists. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate, through theoretical and analytical evidence, the relevance of intermediality as an alternative paradigm to interdisciplinarity, one capable of accounting for the successive transformations that characterize contemporary artistic creation.

2- A brief archaeology¹/genealogy of Intermediality:

Although it is a hallmark of the contemporary era, the concept of intermediality appears to have relatively distant roots, its modes of operation changing from one period to another, and which theorist Jünger Ernst Müller traces back to the Quattrocento (Müller, 2006, pp. 99-110). According to him, intermedio defines the theatrical or musical interlude that evolved into a stage genre during the Renaissance. It is also worth recalling that, long before, since Aristotle, poetry and music constituted an intermedial unit; for Simonides of Ceos, painting was "like silent poetry." This observation was revisited during the Renaissance by several writers and philosophers. We will simply mention the principle of media interactions advocated by the Italian freethinker Giodano Bruno, author of the *Essay on Light and Images* (1591): "For true philosophy, music or poetry is also painting, and true painting is also music and philosophy, and true poetry or music is a kind of divine wisdom and painting." (Bruno, 1991, p. 129) This would

become one of the central ideas of poetic and aesthetic modernity in the 19th century. At that time, when the term "Intermedium" was coined in 1812 by Coleridge, it was to signify a narratological phenomenon. "For him," Müller explains, "intermedium designates a narratological phenomenon based on the narrative functions of allegory as an intermedium between person and personification, between the general and the specific." (Müller, 2006, p. 101)

The concept of "intermedia" itself would not gain widespread acceptance until the 20th century. First coined by Dick Higgins in the early 1960s, the term "intermedia," which the Anglo-American artist applied to his own work, means "between media," "a novel mixture of media." It was taken up again in the 1980s by Müller, which then spurred the development of a multidisciplinary conceptual approach.

In his writings, Müller acknowledged the legacy that the intermedial approach owes, in particular, to theorists of Antiquity and Romanticism, who were aware of and concerned with the interactions operating between different genres. In what follows, we will outline - without claiming exclusivity - the "theoretical conceptions" that preceded intermediality (the "intermedial prehistories" (Bem, 2018), with many early intermedialists. Müller has repeatedly outlined, in the form of theoretical clarifications, the history or even the "prehistory" (Müller, 2010, pp. 237-252 and p. 241) or even the "archaeology" (Müller, 2006, pp. 99-110 and p. 101) of the concept of "intermediality." He recalls its etymology, but also the existing resonances between the postulates of intermediality and the "intermedial aspects" of "classical and modern poetics" (Müller, 2000, pp. 105-134 and p. 108). He explains: "The concept of intermedium appeared as early as the Italian Quattrocento, where intermedio was a theatrical or musical interlude. In the Renaissance, it became a stage genre independent of the main play."

The concept of "intermedia"² was theorized in the 1960s by the "poly-artist"³ Dick Higgins⁴, active in music, performance, visual arts, literature, film, and theory. His book *Postface*, published in 1964, contributed to the development of this concept, which he revisited in 1966 in an essay entirely devoted to it. Higgins returned in 1984, in a book entitled *Horizons* (Higgins, pp. 6-7 et p. 16), to the importance of

the notion of "conceptual fusion in the intermedium," which allows us to experience what belongs to the realm of the margin, the limit, or the threshold, at a time when the erosion of boundaries seems complete. Thus, he states: "I find I never feel quite complete unless I'm doing all the arts - visual, musical and literary. I guess that's why I developed the term Intermedia, to cover my works that fall conceptually between these." (D. Higgins, C. Dreyfus and J. Donguy, 1999) To summarize the above, we can argue that, as far back as we can trace, it was evident, as this historical context demonstrates, that Intermediality invites us to consider the interplay between many artistic media.

3- Definitions:

The notion of intermediality has established itself over the past fifteen years as a key term in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in the English-speaking world, where it is used all the more frequently because it appears familiar enough that everyone feels they know what it is about, yet also sufficiently enigmatic to be laden with a certain polysemy.

Lacking a strict and consensual definition, intermediality represents a vague, even polysemous, concept with imprecise boundaries and uncertain properties. Nevertheless, it enjoys a certain familiarity due primarily to its frequent and sometimes overused application in current critical writing. Given the diversity of its semantic uses, we propose below to provide an overview of the main definitions established by a number of specialists. It must be noted that these do not less maintain some overlaps, interconnections, nuances, echoes, games of influence/confluence, etc.

According to Eric Méchoulan, the concept of Intermediality aims to study "how texts, images, and discourse are not only orders of language or symbol, but also media, modes of transmission, ways of learning codes, and object lessons." (Méchoulan, 2003, p. 10) Therefore, it seems to deal with a kind of interrelation, an in-between, and even more so, a "being-between," to use Méchoulan's expression⁵. Furthermore, as Johanne Villeneuve (2000, pp. 7-12) points out, one cannot speak of Intermediality without evoking the idea of mediation;

and this mediation seems to be contained in the very orthographic form of the term through the prefix “inter.” The founder of the journal *Intermédialités* provides insightful proof of this: “The prefix ‘inter’ aims to highlight an unnoticed or hidden relationship, or, even more so, to support the idea that the relationship is primary in principle: where classical thought generally sees isolated objects that it then relates, contemporary thought insists that objects are first and foremost nodes of relationships, relational movements slowed down enough to appear immobile.” (Méchoulán, 2003, p. 11)

Media theorist Jürgen E. Müller understands intermediality not only as *multimedia* (the juxtaposition of media) but also as a conceptual process in which the relationships between media are questioned and give rise to new forms of media experiences for the recipient (Müller, 1998, p. 32). It is a movement of transfers of techniques and aesthetic processes between media⁶. Irina Rajewsky, for her part, sees intermediality as a continuation of concepts such as plurimediality, transmediality, and mixed media, as “phenomena of transgression of boundaries between media, which involve at least two distinct media.” (Thiers, 2012) She differentiates the simple juxtaposition of media from the transfer of aesthetic processes (cited in Kliems, Raßloff & Zajac, 2007). Meanwhile, Karel Teige conceives of intermediality as the fusion of the arts (Teige, 1990, p. 172).

More important than the definition of intermediality is how it is used or how it functions. In this regard, it is worth noting that for Müller, intermediality is primarily an “intermedial approach,”⁷ meaning it is less an object of study than an analytical tool. He emphasizes that this concept is not, in his view, a theory with exhaustive pretensions, but rather an “axis of relevance” (Jürgen E. Müller) that allows us to understand, from an intermedial perspective, all the factors related to the existence of one or more media⁸. Thus, as Jean-François Robic asks: “[...] one might wonder whether it is necessary to define it, that is, to confine it to words, when the situation would seem a priori always to be broader and more fluid than circumscribing it within a logical system. Why not describe how it is constituted in objects rather than defining it, even if only in terms of a principle of migration (if I may coin this neologism), thus leaving the notion open to all its identifiable current or future possibilities?” (Robic, 2011, pp. 8-9)

Adopting this conception ourselves, we would like to clarify here that the notion of Intermediality designates less a theoretical concept than a process of questioning the very nature of a medium through the prism/detour of the other. It starts from the principle that no medium can be reliably and effectively understood without considering the correlations it maintains with other media. This leads us to reflect on the capacity of any given medium to make sense when it correlates with another that is more or less heterogeneous to it, and therefore to consider the porosity of their internal⁹ and/or external, "apparent" and/or "subterranean"¹⁰ boundaries.

Intermediality, as understood here, claims a single authorial voice. This means it is not the result of collaborative works created by four hands, that is, through the collaborative practice of a collective (at least two, one of whom is an artist or recognized as such)¹¹. It is not a matter of transferring, translating, or transposing a well-defined medium (source or initial) into another (secondary) according to the principle expressed by the adage *traduttore, traditore*¹² (illustration¹³, interpretation, parallelism¹⁴, conversion, restitution¹⁵, adaptation, recycling, etc.), like a play that becomes an opera and is then adapted for film¹⁶. It is not a transitional effect: if a stance is expressed more through the conceptual components brought by the medium than by the medium itself, the artist could change mediums while preserving their intentions¹⁷.

Intermediality here calls for a transversal methodology of creation, which presents itself as the prologue to a quest marked by a fruitful dialogue between the arts (Denizeau, 2008), or even interartiality. In this regard, François Guiyoba was right to think that "interartiality is a specific variation of intermediality." (Guiyoba, 2012, p. 22) This helps us understand the link between interartiality and intermediality, whereby the former is the descendant of the latter.

Indeed, by studying the notions of friction, porosity, and articulation, particularly in technological, communicational, and media contexts, intermediality allows us to rethink¹⁸ the dynamics of dialogues and exchanges that increasingly characterize contemporary creation. It participates in this movement that advocates for the

abolition of divisions between artistic media, which, in our view, can only benefit the emergence of artistic practices¹⁹ that are necessarily hybrid in nature. Thus, as Jean-François Robic observes: "For many artists [...] mixing techniques and artistic universes is becoming commonplace, not only in terms of means but also as a methodology: thinking about art from several simultaneous perspectives, using several concurrent media. This is what we call intermediality here." (Robic, 2011, p. 8)

Based on the foregoing, intermediality cannot be identified with any particular artistic current or movement. Moreover, wouldn't it be contradictory to attempt to categorize the uncategorizable? And this methodology is by no means systematic: artists may resort to intermediality sporadically in some of their works, without it being characteristic of their entire output. On the contrary, we can see in intermediality the symptom of a crisis of categories, unless what still appears to us as a crisis is in fact a new order in the process of being established. In this regard, like Juliane Rebentisch, we find that Adorno's problematic of "fragmentation" (*Verfransung*) is rather synonymous with the emergence of intermediality, which she describes as a "meta-genre" shared by the various arts²⁰. Rebentisch's argument rests both on a shift in Friede's notion of "theatricality"²¹ (what transpires between different arts is not theatrical, but rather intermedial, she argues) and on a reinterpretation of Adorno (*Art and the Arts*) (Adorno, 2002): the author, she suggests, extended his concept of modernism to include practices related to intermediality.

Ultimately, intermediality should be understood as the approach that grasps the systems of more or less deliberate correspondences within a single artistic experience that can refer from one artistic medium to another, a medium that is more or less heterogeneous, whether conceptually ("intersemioticity") or factually ("interartiality"). This is what allows new combinations, whether premeditated or fortuitous, to emerge heuristically, but also visually, materially, kinesthetically, and so on. Therefore, Intermediality rebels against the classical functions and/or conceptions of "isolated media" (Müller, 1998, pp. 31-40) to play an important role as an interdisciplinary catalyst, at the antipode of modernist purism and the fiction of the self-sufficient medium.

4- Intermediality and contemporary art:

For contemporary artists, the term "Intermediality" remains relevant to describe the dynamic exchanges that animate what Régis Debray calls the "mediasphere."²² It represents a vast laboratory for artistic experimentation, and even more so, a perpetually evolving field. Indeed, one of the key characteristics of the intermedial approach is its emphasis on the importance of experimentation, which is one of the keys to innovation in art, as it is in science.

However, approaching Intermediality from the perspective of contemporary art implies a semantic shift. Specifically, it involves granting the word "media" a flexibility that allows it to acquire a broader meaning. This term designates not only a medium or any particular artistic genre, but also mass media²³. These are understood as the set of techniques and media for the mass dissemination of information, advertising, and culture, and more specifically the "new media" (Internet, mobile phones, social media, etc.). Given this new terminological clarification, it seems legitimate to note that the media are constantly mutating and permuting, proliferating and merging, sizing each other up and intersecting... And in doing so, they are no less conditioning our ways of thinking about and/or practicing art, bringing it more closely into line with Joseph Beuys's credo: "Art is life, and life is art." (Mèredieu, 2003, p. 222)

In truth, from its very inception, modern art immediately demonstrated its autonomy from the hierarchies and/or technical taxonomies in place since the old Fine Arts system. It was only later, and more precisely in the post-Duchampian period, that the idea emerged that there were no truly strictly artistic techniques and/or materials, and that, consequently, the artist could use "anything" to create their work; this engendered a movement of "de-specification of art," in the words of Couchot and Hillaire (Couchot & Hillaire, 2003, p. 114).

In order to invalidate any separatist attitude, a growing number of artists readily embrace the status of interdisciplinary creators, positioning themselves at the intersection of several artistic languages.

In this regard, we find it useful to point out, as an example, that the experiments conducted by John Cage over the past few decades have constituted an essential milestone in the reflection on "interdisciplinarity"²⁴ in art. This "undisciplined" artist's project consisted of challenging not only the classification of the arts, but also what underlies it and what it promotes. In doing so, he shattered the hermetic aspect of the artwork (whether musical, visual, or poetic) which has always developed at the margins of established media.

The development, in the 1990s, of "new media," indebted to a profound technological revolution in the field of information and communication, accompanied the emergence of intermedial research. In other words, at a time when artistic practices are becoming increasingly cross-disciplinary, the rapid development of new ICT-related devices has enabled significant interaction between artistic forms that were previously clearly differentiated and distanced.

In the digital age, ICTs represent a major constitutive element in contemporary artistic experiences, supporting the development and amplification of intermedial phenomena. Indeed, the passage of the artistic medium through the prism of ICTs contributes to optimizing its *Verfransung* (to use Adorno's term) (Adorno, 2002) or "effrangement"²⁵ and has significant consequences for the boundaries of art, both between different art forms and between these and other branches of human activity²⁶. Moreover, even classical artistic disciplines (painting, photography, sculpture, architecture, theater, cinema, dance, etc.) seem, under the influence of certain technological hybridizations, to demonstrate experimental intermediality. "Digital technology, Couchot & Hillaire assert, has an irrepressible tendency to displace traditional arts as soon as it penetrates them and to gradually alter the purity of their original specificities." (Couchot & N. Hillaire, 2003, p. 113) There is, in a way, a desire to emancipate artistic practice from the materiality of traditional media²⁷ in order to envision another form closely linked to "new media." Thus, as Jean-Paul Fourmentraux writes: "Artistic creation and technological research, which were once clearly separate and virtually impermeable domains, are now so intertwined that any innovation in one affects (and influences) the development of the other." (Fourmentraux, 2011)

The history of contemporary art has always been characterized by a progressive proliferation of cross-disciplinary experiences²⁸ based on the transgression of their disciplinary boundaries. “In fact, we can no longer continue to consider works of art as separate islands with fixed identities and susceptible to normative classification.” (Mouakhar, 2021, p. 18) Today, it is no longer sufficient for a work of art to be always embodied in a medium that tends to transcend itself without crossing the boundaries of its own medium: the internal breakdown of artistic media (what is called “intramediality”²⁹) induces their external breakdown (“interartiality”). In this regard, it is interesting to observe, as Schelling (Schelling, 1999) noted, that within each art form lie certain attributes of another; This means that a work of art belonging to any artistic field inherently contains inter-artistic elements, and its meaning depends on the nature and intensity of their interaction. The identity of the arts is defined less by their separations, guaranteed by supposedly hermetic boundaries, than by their unique way of experiencing their “artiness” through the crossing of these boundaries. This is taken into account, albeit allegorically, by the kinds of “elective affinities” - to use Goethe's expression (Goethe, 2009) - between many forms of artistic expression. For example: in music, there is plasticity³⁰ which, in turn, is possibly present in cinema (Chateau, 2009, pp. 123-143); in drawing, there is musicality³¹, and so on.

Furthermore, intermediality cannot ultimately lead to the obliteration of the boundaries between the media in question. Rather, it takes into account the otherness or “immanence” (in the sense given to it by George Steiner³²) of each of them. Similarly, it does not induce the annihilation of their differences³³, whether these differences relate to the materiality of the media or to their semiotic perception. The intermedial dynamic consists of achieving a form of complicity between media without thereby leading to the exclusion of the specificities of one medium at the expense of another. On the contrary, the difference between the media here plays the role of guarantor of their interference. Thus, as we mentioned in our work entitled *Art and Interference. Reflections on the In-Between*: “The back-and-forth that [the media] engage in among themselves does not lead to the abolition of their differences but rather embodies, paradoxical as it may seem,

the sign of an interaction and, in the best-case scenario, a happy complicity: such is this ambivalent relationship of unification within separation and vice versa. [...], there is no possible interference outside of the points of difference which, in this instance, are simultaneously points of connivance.” (Mouakhar, 2021, p. 21)

By pushing their exploration to the most porous of boundaries, the media lose their established autonomy and/or taxonomy in order to connect with one another and contribute together to their mutual enrichment. This does not, however, lead to one medium being subservient to another: “The dialogue between the arts allows one art form to be freed from its subjugation to another,” as Lorraine Verner (Verner, 2005) aptly observes. In other words, interconnected media resonate with each other without one imposing itself on the other, without reasoning about one another. It should not be assumed that any one medium can encompass - in whole or in part - another from a position of superiority: no medium is, of course, reducible to or limited by another. This means that when one medium engages in exchanges with another, it must do so from and according to its own specific characteristics.

In other words, by elevating the dialogic relationship between art and technology to its highest degree, current artistic practices no longer subordinate their approach to the sacrosanct tradition of a particular medium. They highlight intermedial exchanges that are more pronounced in terms of both their scope and intensity. Indeed, they increasingly prefer to engage in a kind of intermediality that encompasses a prodigious diversity of materials, instruments, techniques, protocols, and processes, generating improbable combinations, heterogeneous assemblages, unusual hybridizations, and so on. Within this operational framework, the boundaries between different, neighboring art forms tend to diminish to such an extent that it becomes futile to discuss a medium in its specificity without that discourse being able to be assimilated – indiscriminately – to one or more other media. Thus, as Jean-François Robic aptly observes: “Extending this exploration would allow us to identify the functions and effects of intermediality across different situations and concepts specific to or shared by the arts, such as [...] digital or telemedia spaces, spaces of mixing (of cultures, of objects), but also public space, the

space between the real and the virtual, etc. [...] the incessant and perpetual reworking (mail art, interactive online works).” (Robic, 2011, pp. 13-14)

Consequently, current intermedial practices adhere to new epistemic registers and aesthetic biases. They also mark the adoption of a new methodology better suited to addressing the problematic nature of current intermedial research. In doing so, they give rise to new artifacts that engage us, whether we like it or not, in unprecedented or, where applicable, original aesthetic and/or synesthetic experiences. Hence the interest in rethinking today the impact that these can have on the viewer and in explaining, among other things, how the "contemporary imagination"³⁴ that they arouse would be an "intermedial imagination"³⁵.

This is precisely what leads us to express serious reservations about the ability of traditional aesthetic theories, decontextualized from current historical, social, and cultural circumstances, to grasp the new challenges at play in this kind of intermedial experience. In other words, the old epistemological and aesthetic paradigms are proving increasingly inadequate for properly understanding the artifacts of contemporary art, particularly those *acheiropoiete* that stem from a communicative sensibility and within which the question of "flow"³⁶ takes on paramount importance. On a broader level, and within the flow of artistic movements making increasing use of digital technologies (multimedia installations³⁷, net art, virtual/augmented/mixed reality, hypermedia, etc.), we often observe that the old reflexive systems have proven ill-suited, even ineffective, for understanding the divergence of current practices and experiences. Indeed, according to Mario Costa, the theorist of "communication aesthetics" and the "technological sublime," the theoretical edifice erected from the 18th century onward by traditional aesthetics, and fundamentally based on the question of "form," has now fallen from its pedestal, even become obsolete, particularly in the face of the emergence of a new aesthetic sensibility. Along the same lines, in his "Manifesto for an Aesthetics of Communication," Fred Forest states: "To understand what is sensory for us today, an aesthetics rooted solely in philosophy is no longer

sufficient. We must broaden our scope." (Poissant, 1995, p. 26) Even more significantly, he went so far as to defend the following opinion: "The significant changes in our perception and our relationship to the world that result from them, in our most everyday behaviors, attest to the birth of a new aesthetic." (Poissant, 1995, p. 58)

These theoretical considerations would benefit from being substantiated more concretely through the analysis of a contemporary artistic practice in which interactions among different media do not result from mere juxtaposition but from a genuine intermedial dynamic. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's artistic practice provides a particularly relevant case in point. In order to preserve the coherence of the methodological approach adopted in this study, the analysis focuses on Lozano-Hemmer's artistic corpus as a whole rather than on a single artwork. This choice makes it possible to identify the principal interferences among different media and to gain a deeper understanding of the intermedial phenomena that have shaped his artistic practice to date.

4-1. Intermediality in the Work of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer:

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (1967–) is a Canadian multimedia artist internationally renowned for his interactive installations, which integrate architecture, digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), and interactive performance³⁸ (Van den Braembussche, Kimmerle, & Note, 2008).

Situated at the intersection of multiple media, Lozano-Hemmer's works - such as *Vectorial Elevation* (1999–2000), *Body Movies* (2001), and *Pulse Room* (2006) - create environments in which each medium, while fulfilling a specific function, remains in constant interaction with the others, thereby contributing to a synchronized and collective dynamic. Moreover, these works fundamentally challenge the conventional relationships between artist, artwork, and spectator. The spectator is no longer confined to the role of a passive observer but becomes an indispensable active participant whose bodily, physiological, and biometric data, translated into images, sound, or

light, contribute to - and even drive in "real time" (Couchot, 1985) - the process of the artwork's creation and continuous transformation.

Consequently, Lozano-Hemmer's artistic corpus provides an exemplary case for adopting a relational approach based on the interferences among four principal components: media, technologies, spaces, and audiences. This approach reflects the contemporary conception of intermediality outlined earlier, according to which intermediality is understood as a dialogue among different media that gives rise to a new artistic artifact, whose meaning is constructed and continuously transformed through the very dynamics of intermedial relations.

In Lozano-Hemmer's work, intermediality is manifested in each installation through the interaction of multiple media, including digital technologies, video, light projection, sound, architecture, public space, the spectator's body, and biometric sensors (fingerprints, heartbeat, respiration, voice, etc.).

Lozano-Hemmer's installations demonstrate that intermediality should not be understood as the mere juxtaposition or simultaneous presence of multiple media within a single artwork. Rather, they provide an exemplary model for understanding how medial interferences reconfigure the processes of artistic creation, exhibition, and reception. It is precisely this new configuration that distinguishes intermediality from interdisciplinarity. Whereas the latter essentially refers to the association of different disciplines, intermediality designates the processes of interference established among different media within a single creative framework.

This artistic practice therefore contributes to renewing analytical approaches while opening new perspectives for the critical study of contemporary artistic experiences. In other words, it shifts the aesthetic focus from the intrinsic properties of individual media to the relational dynamics that emerge from their interaction. The artwork is thus conceived less as a closed entity than as an open, relational, and continuously evolving system.

These observations confirm the central hypothesis advanced in this article: intermediality has now emerged as a particularly relevant paradigm for understanding the transformations of contemporary artistic creation.

5- Recommendations:

5-1. Proposals for future research:

The reflections developed in this study highlight several avenues that could enrich future research on intermediality. Although this concept is gaining increasing prominence in contemporary art discourse, its theoretical foundations continue to evolve. It therefore appears necessary to pursue a critical examination of its conceptual frameworks in order to better define its specificity in relation to related notions such as interdisciplinarity, interartiality, transmediality, and the hybridization of artistic practices.

Particular attention could also be devoted to the analysis of emerging forms of creation developing at the intersection of art, science, and technology. Immersive environments, interactive devices, AI-generated artworks, as well as artistic experiences based on virtual and augmented reality, constitute especially fertile fields for deepening our understanding of contemporary intermedial dynamics. These practices invite us not only to rethink the relationships between media but also to reconsider the modes of production, reception, and circulation of artworks.

Furthermore, the study of intermediality would benefit from being approached from an intercultural perspective. At a time when cultural exchanges are intensifying on a global scale, contemporary artistic productions reveal an increasing number of processes involving translation, transfer, and appropriation among different artistic traditions. Investigating these phenomena would provide a deeper understanding of how artworks contribute to the construction of new spaces of dialogue between cultures.

Finally, future research could devote greater attention to the experience of viewers confronted with intermedial works. The

transformations of perceptual, sensory, and cognitive regimes generated by such artistic dispositifs constitute a particularly fruitful field of inquiry for contemporary aesthetic studies.

5-2. Impact of the findings on researchers and practitioners:

The findings of this study underscore the relevance of intermediality as a valuable analytical framework for understanding the ongoing transformations of artistic creation. By emphasizing the phenomena of interference and interaction among media, this approach provides researchers with a theoretical perspective capable of accounting for the increasing complexity of contemporary artistic practices. It also encourages scholars to move beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and to develop more open research perspectives that are attentive to the changes brought about by digital technologies.

For artists, the conclusions of this study highlight the creative potential generated through dialogue among different media. Intermediality emerges as a space of experimentation in which disciplinary boundaries become increasingly permeable, fostering the emergence of innovative forms of creation and new modes of aesthetic expression. In this context, the specificity of each medium does not disappear; rather, it is redefined through its interaction with other media in a continuous process of exchange and mutual enrichment.

These findings are also of particular relevance to cultural institutions, exhibition curators, and art educators. They point to the need to adapt modes of presentation, mediation, and teaching to the realities of an artistic landscape characterized by technological convergence, hybrid practices, and increasingly diversified modes of reception. In this regard, intermediality is not merely an object of theoretical reflection; it constitutes a genuine framework for understanding the transformations currently reshaping contemporary art and its modes of existence.

This research is also of particular significance within the Arab academic context, where the concept of intermediality remains

relatively underexplored compared to other well-established critical and aesthetic approaches. Despite the profound transformations affecting contemporary artistic practices across the Arab world, studies devoted to media interactions, hybrid forms of creation, and the theoretical implications of intermediality remain limited. From this perspective, the present article seeks to contribute to the introduction and dissemination of this field of inquiry among Arab scholars by demonstrating its relevance for the analysis of contemporary artistic production. In doing so, it opens new avenues for both theoretical and empirical investigations that may enrich Arab art studies and facilitate their integration into current international debates concerning the transformations of art, media, and technology.

Conclusion:

To conclude this article, it is important to reiterate that remaining narrowly confined to already established and/or hermetically sealed fields and systems of knowledge is an attitude poorly suited to the spirit of openness and renewal that characterizes both the field of artistic creation and the domain of scientific research today. This is why the question of intermediality is not solely a matter of media and/or artistic transformation, but also marks, in a specific context, the beginning of a logistical and institutional opening. It is also considered a condition for experiencing the "equipped being," which, as Johanne Villeneuve (Déotte, Froger, Mariniello, 2007, p. 8) defines it, is neither the "mediated" being of communication technologies, nor the technologized being of the philosophy of disenchantment. He is rather the "being acted upon by" as much as he "acts upon" his technical environment, or even the "being acted upon by" who grasps, in his chosen artistic fields, as many forms of sensitivity acting on the future of science, technology and politics.

1 See for a precise archaeology of this concept: J. E. Müller, « Intermedialität als poetologisches und medientheoretisches Konzept. Einige Reflexionen zu dessen Geschichte », in Helbig, J. (Éd.). (1998). *Intermedialität. Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets* (pp. 31–40). Berlin: E. Schmid Verlag.

2 See, for more details on this concept: D. Higgins, C. Dreyfus and J. Donguy, “Dick Higgins 1938-1998: intermedia”, in *Inter: art actuel*. (1999). No. 73, Spring-Summer 1999 (pp. 32–52). Haute-Ville, QC: Intervention.

3 The authorship of this term goes to R. Kostelanetz (Kostelanetz, R. (1980). *The theater of mixed-means: An introduction to happenings, kinetic environments, and other mixed-means presentations* (pp. 8, 41, 276). New York, NY: RK Editions).

4 This term, he noted in 1981 in an expanded version of his article "Intermedia" (1966), first appeared in Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812, in the same sense that he himself used (Higgins, D. (1984). *Horizons: The poetics and theory of the intermedia* (p. 23). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press).

5 In discussing the concept of intermediality, É. Méchoulan defines “being-between” as “that which produces presence, comparative values between the people or objects brought into contact, as well as the material or ideal differences between these people or objects presented” (Méchoulan, 2003, p. 11). See also: Méchoulan, É. (2010). *D’où nous viennent nos idées? Métaphysique et intermédialité*. Montreal, QC: VLB Publishing.

6 This conception is shared by U. Wirth, “Intermedialität”, in Antz, T. (Ed.). (2007). *Handbuch Literaturwissenschaft: Bd. 1. Gegenstände und Grundbegriffe* (p. 257). Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler.

7 The “intermedial approach” (an expression he often uses as a synonym for intermediality) is used to examine intermedial manifestations. In fact, in 2000 he published a fundamental article from a theoretical point of view, the first part of whose title is none other than “Intermediality, a new interdisciplinary approach”.

8 In particular, the interactions existing within a single medium or between several media, the relationship of a medium to its environment or the links it forges with older media or previous media utopias.

9 According to Adorno, what abolishes the boundaries between the arts is the "movement of historical forces which have awakened within the boundaries of the different arts and have finally submerged them" (Adorno, T. W. (2002). *L’art et les arts* (J. Lauxerois, Trans.) (p. 25). Paris: Desclée de Brouwer).

10 The authorship of these two epithets belongs to M. Duchamp (Château, D. (2015). *L'art du fragment: Frontières apparentes & frontières souterraines* (p. 6). Paris: L'Harmattan).

11 For example, P. Eluard who made a collage with M. Ernst, K. Schwitters who collaborated with Th. van Doesburg or with J. Arp.

12 In the sense of the translation of one art by the other: Barbe, M. (Ed.). (2011). *Musique et arts plastiques: La traduction d'un art par l'autre*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

13 For example, G. Chirico illustrating Apollinaire's Calligrams, P. Eluard illustrating Man Ray's drawings with poems, etc.

14 Today, the parallelism of the arts (or *Paragone*) concerns less their hierarchy than their contiguity and their confluence (Sauvanet, P. (2014). *Éléments d'esthétique*. Paris: Ellipses).

15 In reality, numerous examples drawn from art history can demonstrate the impossibility of reproducing the painted image in spoken or written form, and vice versa. This exercise of rendering the artwork in writing was known in antiquity through the concept of ekphrasis. Linked to the key concept of *evidentia*, this concept found further development in the 18th century in the *Naturlyrik* of B. H. Brockes or in the work of A. Haller.

16 For example, Tirso de Molina's *Don Juan*, rewritten by Molière, revived with a libretto by L. Da Ponte and music by Mozart, and becoming a film by J. Losey.

17 Conversely, when at a given moment certain questions become more relevant than others, they can motivate production and induce a preferred medium as well as a particular artistic form.

18 "The reference to other disciplines gives it [each discipline] the opportunity to reflect on itself, philosophically speaking" (Serres, M. (1988). *Hermès II: L'interférence* (p. 158). Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit).

19 To understand it in the Foucauldian sense as extended by P. Ortel: "Beyond the cut - the apparatus is precisely this overcoming of the closure, since it separates and maintains separation while uniting and bringing together -, cut of disciplinary fields, of genres, of practices, of modes of communication" (Corrons, F., Garnier, E., Gobbé-Mévellec, E., Lumière, É., Martinez Thomas, M., Mohring, A., Péran, B., Surbezy, A., & Yemsi-Paillissé, A.-C. (Year). « De la critique des dispositifs à l'intermédialité pour approcher les productions

artistiques : bilan des travaux du séminaire *Intermedialidades* (Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, France) », in Bem, C. (Ed.). (2018). «Cartographier (l'intermédialité) / Mapping (intermediality)». In *Intermédialités: Histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques*, 30–31. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/im/2017-n30-31-im03868/1049955ar>).

20 She goes even further by admitting that each art is already intermedial by essence. An opinion that D. Chateau also seems to share: "The specific domain of each art, the field where it can be exercised more or less purely, is not simple and homogeneous, but complex and heterogeneous" (Chateau, D. (2009). *Philosophie d'un art moderne: Le cinéma*. Paris: L'Harmattan).

21 Criticizing the problem of the "between" in the minimalist sculpture of R. Morris and D. Judd, M. Fried writes: "What lies between the forms of art is theater." What he means by "theater" is the background which, according to him, belongs to the category of "non-art" and against which the forms of art stand out: Fried, M. (1967, June). "Art and objecthood". *Artforum*, 5(10), 15, 21.

22 "A mediasphere is a dynamic system of (complex) ecosystems reorganized by and around a dominant (simple) media, generally the most recent one" (Debray, R. (2000). *Introduction à la médiologie* (p. 94). Paris: P.U.F.)

23 The term media is often used as an abbreviation for mass media. Some, opting for a more broad definition, have gone so far as to claim that anything can be considered "media" provided it is linked to other things.

24 J. Cage used this term in his writings: Cage, J. (1976). *Pour les oiseaux: Entretiens avec Daniel Charles* (p. 221). Paris: P. Belfond.

25 This is a neologism coined by J. Lauxerois in his translation of Adorno's work.

26 For more information on this subject, simply refer to our recently published collective work:

Mouakhar, N. (Ed.). (2021). *L'art à l'épreuve de l'intermédialité: Pratiques artistiques et enjeux esthétiques*. L'Harmattan.

27 Some speak of an extension of the field of visual arts, a fortiori of a "creolization" of forms according to the concept dear to Édouard Glissant.

28 Referring to a category of works with a "transversal dimension", Deleuze thinks that they allow "not to unify" but rather to make "communicate" components which are a priori "incommunicating" (Deleuze, G. (1970). *Proust et les signes* (p. 201). Paris: P.U.F.)

29 Hence the emergence of many variants of Intermediality such as intermusicality, interpictoriality, etc.

30 Upon discovering Schoenberg's music, Kandinsky said he discerned in his works the independent life of individual voices and other cacophonous ones, leading his painting towards an anti-geometric, even lyrical, style. This style is based on autotelic graphic elements and a palette with strong sonic connotations.

31 This is the case, for example, in the schematic table by Victoria Llorc Lopart (Denizeau, G., & Pistone, D. (2010). *La musique au temps des arts: Hommage à Michèle Barbe* (p. 73). Paris: PUPS.).

32 In this regard, G. Steiner states: "All art and all literature begins in immanence." To understand what he means, one must read the preceding sentence: "The arts are wonderfully rooted in color, in the vibration of the string, and in the weight of the wind on the reeds" (Steiner, G. (1990). *Réelles présences: Les arts du sens* (M. R. de Pauw, Trans.). Gallimard).

33 For Kandinsky, this difference remains a matter of appearance: "Each art has its own language, that is to say, its means which belong only to it. [...] Thus the means of the various arts are in appearance perfectly different... But, in the end, in their depth, these means are absolutely similar; the ultimate goal erases the apparent differences and lays bare the very identity" (W. Kandinsky, "De la composition scénique", in Kandinsky, W., & Marc, F. (1981). *L'almanach du Blaue Reiter: le Cavalier bleu* (p. 247). Klincksieck).

34 "Exploring and activating the universe of communication media means at the same time constructing the phenomenology of the contemporary imaginary" (F. Forest, quoted in Poissant, L. (Ed.). (1995). *Esthétique des arts médiatiques* (Vol. 1, p. 48). Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec).

35 This is the title of a work by the Italian philosopher Pietro Montani. See also: Haraway, D. J. (2009). *Des singes, des cyborgs et des femmes* (O. Bonis, Trans., p. 268). Arles: Jacqueline Chambon.

36 Extending his thinking from “cinematic flow” to “neo-technological aesthetic flow,” Costa suggests that the latter is also capable of highlighting essential elements of contemporary ontology. These elements, he argues, are intimately connected to our relationship with time and to our existential experience: see Costa, M. (2010). *Arte contemporanea ed estetica del flusso*. Mercurio Edizioni.

37 According to A. Cauquelin, installation art is by definition an intermedial practice that draws on all other genres, “hybrid in its diversity of materials and its use of diverse techniques and fields” (Cauquelin, A. (1996). *Petit traité d’art contemporain* (p. 157). Paris: Le Seuil). Also, as F. de Mèredieu writes: “Installation art is the prototype of the hybrid device and the privileged site for the embodiment of multimedia. All encounters are possible there, all collusions of medium to medium, object to object, genre to genre” (de Mèredieu, F. (2003). *Arts et nouvelles technologies: Art vidéo, art numérique* (p. 135). Paris: Larousse).

38 “Intermediality focuses on the crossbreeding of conventional media, disciplines and technology: film with dance, painting with architecture, graffiti with literature, gaming with installations, and so on - in order to forge new alliances. [...] intermediality can also be found in [...] Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's relational architecture” (A. Van den Braembussche, H. Kimmerle et N. Note (dir.), *Intercultural Aesthetics: A Worldview Perspective*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2008, p. 21).

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