

## The rise of intermedial research\*

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Intermedial research is a relatively new discipline that is supposed to supplement or replace aesthetics. The editor of this volume seems convinced that Hegelian aesthetics is outdated since it has ignored 'das Spezifische des Mediums' (p. 3) by interpreting the work of art as a perceptible manifestation of some philosophical idea. Particularly harsh is his criticism of *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen* (1963), a long work by György Lukács, on the grounds that (a) it presents art as an instrument of cognition, (b) it subordinates the visual arts and music to literature, and (c) it relegates avant-garde works to the status of decorative activity. Although some readers might miss a comparison with the early work which Lukács had started in 1912 and left unfinished, the non-Marxist dissertation published posthumously under the title *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst und Heidelberger Ästhetik* (1974), only old-fashioned Marxists could find fault with Zima's disparaging comments about the same philosopher's dated definition of mimesis given in one of his last books.

Less devastating is the attack made on the views of Benedetto Croce. His Kantian emphasis on the autonomy of artistic creation is given a more sympathetic approach, although his rejection of translatability is dismissed as untenable from the perspective of those who believe in the possibility of art history. More recent theories are also characterized as invalid. One example is the sociological interpretation exemplified by Pierre Bourdieu's *Les Règles de l'art* (1992). In Zima's view the French scholar's analysis of social experience in the works of Flaubert fails to do justice to the verbal aspect of the novels. What Bourdieu intends to present as a sociology of art is regarded by the editor of this volume as a slightly modified version of content analysis.

\* Peter V. Zima (ed.), *Literatur intermedial: Musik — Malerei — Photographie — Film*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995.

The purpose of the historical sketch at the beginning of the opening chapter of the book is to suggest that it is because of the irrelevance of the legacy of aesthetics that the interrelations of the arts have to be reexamined. The legitimacy of this task cannot be questioned. What the reader may find somewhat unsatisfactory is the rather narrow scope of the historical outline. No attempt is made to assess the significance of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, no mention is made of the work of Hans Robert Jauß on the interrelations between hermeneutics and aesthetics, and no analysis is made of Nelson Goodman's comparative inquiry into notation in the different arts. The impression is that while the criticism levelled against the theories of Lukács, Croce, Bourdieu, and others may be justified, Peter V. Zima's introduction entitled 'Ästhetik, Wissenschaft und "wechselseitige Erhellung der Künste"' could have profited from a consideration of more trends in the history of aesthetics.

Most collections of studies by different authors tend to be inevitably uneven. This volume deserves special attention because it contains some articles that offer insight into the use and abuse of interarts studies. Although Albert Gier's opposition between 'traditional narrative' and 'experimental novel' (in 'Musik in der Literatur: Einflüsse und Analogien') is too general from a historical perspective, his main point is worth serious consideration. Up until the late eighteenth century music was viewed as language, whereas the more recent period brought a radical change: the cult of language as music led to the rise of an anti-mimetic conception. This historical process is examined with considerable subtlety by a scholar who is fully aware of the dangers of subjectivity in making purely associative comparisons between music and literature. His attack on critics using 'counterpoint' as a synonym for 'contrast' may remind the reader of terminological weaknesses in the works of such eminent theoreticians as Ingarden or Bakhtin.

No less justified is Gerhard Schein's remark, in his essay 'Die Oper als Gesamtkunstwerk', that the interpretations of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* by Kierkegaard, Ernst Bloch, and Julia Kristeva are based on the libretto rather than on the score. Distancing himself from such literary approaches, Schein sets about examining both the verbal and the musical structure of the same work. Pointing out significant differences between Lorenzo da Ponte's libretto and Molière's comedy, his argument is that in the opera buffa, text was always at the service of music. This observation is made to support a more general conclusion. Discrepancy between the original text and the opera seems almost a distinguishing feature of a 'Gesamtkunstwerk', as a comparison of Büchner's fragmentary *Woyzeck* and Berg's highly organic opera may suggest.

Reservations about earlier theories go together with original perceptions in Hans Holländer's analysis of literariness in painting ('Literatur, Malerei und Graphik: Wechselwirkungen, Funktionen und Konkurrenzen'). In his view the distinctions drawn by Gotthold Lessing (*Laokoon*) and Ernst Robert Curtius (*Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*) between temporal and spatial, conceptual and non-conceptual art cannot hold, because paintings do not remain inimical to thought and descriptions play a major role in literature. He makes a convincing case for the interrelations of different semiotic systems in fields ranging from narrative painting, illustration, 'gemalte Sprachkritik', and conceptual art to verbal interpretations of visual objects. This general treatment has two advantages: it is based on material taken from various historical periods while never ignoring the complexity of the relationship between text and image. More limited is the scope of Rolf Günter Renner's examination of landscape as psychic or historical space, or as 'Signatur des Verlorenen', although his essay ('Schrift-Bilder und Bilder-Schriften: Zu einer Beziehung zwischen Literatur und Malerei') is the only chapter in the volume that contains reference to the seminal works of Cassirer and Goodman.

One of the reasons for the rise of interarts studies is the growing influence of 'new' media. Intermediality is bound up with a changing relationship between art and technology, high and popular culture. Unfortunately, one of the two essays on film, 'Literatur und Film: Entwurf einer praxisorientierten Textsystematik' by Franz-Josef Albersmeier, is less theoretical than its title would suggest; most of it is devoted to Spanish cinema. More substantial is Volker Roloff's contribution ('Film und Literatur: Zur Theorie und Praxis der intermedialen Analyse am Beispiel von Buñuel, Truffaut, Godard und Antonioni'), focusing on the transformation of literature into film. His comparison of Cortázar's short story *Las babas del diablo* (1959) and Antonioni's *Blowup* (1966) is particularly illuminating, since it deals with an autoreferential literary work and its cinematic transformation. The interdependence of text and image is described in terms of both continuity and disruption. Robbe-Grillet's film *La belle captive* (1982), based on Magritte's self-referential paintings, is also briefly examined with the aim of showing how intermedial imagination may involve the deconstruction of mimesis, causality, continuity, and identity.

In view of the fact that the theory of the new media is still in its early stage of development, it is quite understandable that the essays on film are less systematic than the thoughtful treatment of photography and literature by Hubertus von Amelunxen ('Photographie und Literatur: Prolegomena zu einer Theoriegeschichte der Photographie'). Taking it

for granted that 'die Photographie steht nicht für eine Gegenwart, eine Präsenz, noch für eine Erinnerung, eine Vergangenheit, sondern für eine Auslassung, eine Synkope, eine Pause' (pp. 213–214), his claim is that the development of this art is closely tied to the shift from an allegorical view of visual presentation to the concept of the unreadability of images. The ideas of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man on translation serve as a starting point for the argument that photography is inseparable from the tension between uniqueness ('Einmaligkeit') and semiosis ('Zeugenschaft'), and from the disintegration, fragmentation, and decanonization of both objectivity and presence.

The shortcomings of *Literatur intermedial* are those of most collective works: some of the contributions ('Literatur und Musik: Vertonungen von Literatur' by Ulrich Müller is an example beside others already mentioned) are limited in scope and descriptive rather than theoretical. What makes this collection superior to most comparable volumes is the way immanence and transcendence are presented as two important characteristics of art. Works are interpreted as media-specific and intermedial, objects for both perception and conceptual understanding. Such a dual perspective may prove to be indispensable for future interdisciplinary study of the arts.

## References

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