Understanding Media Relations in the Age of Convergence: A Metatheoretical Taxonomy

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Abstract

Multimediality, crossmediality, intermediality, transmediality. Over the last three decades, media (as well as comparative) studies have been characterized by the emergence of new categories, aimed at describing and analysing the variety of relations established by different media in the age of convergence. Despite their widespread diffusion in many research fields, however, these categories still lack a shared and stable meaning, having eluded any attempt of theoretical systematization so far. As a consequence, they tend to overlap semantically, making it impossible for scholars to share a common vocabulary. The objective of this paper is to propose a meta-theoretical rearrangement of the abovementioned categories, with the aim of outlining a systematic taxonomy in which each term can find a definition and a position.

Keywords

Multimediality; Crossmediality; Intermediality; Transmediality; Media Convergence.

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Media after media

In the chapter entitled *Electronics Takes Command* of his *Technologies of Freedom*, originally published in 1983, Ithiel de Sola Pool carries out a groundbreaking analysis of the «joint metamorphosis» (Brand 1987: 11) media have faced since the second half of the 1970s, that is, after the advent of the "electronic revolution" (de Sola Pool 1995: 24). «A [new] era has been ushered in – the author writes – by an innovation of at least as much historical significance as the mass production of print and other media. Pulses of electromagnetic energy embody and convey messages that up to now have been sent by sound, pictures, and text. All media are becoming electronic» (24). Coining a term destined for great success in the following decades, de Sola Pool identifies specifically technological convergence as the main process of media transformation in the electronic age: «A single physical means […] – he states – may carry services that in the past were provided in separate ways. Conversely, a service that was provided in the past by any medium […] can now be provided in several different physical ways» (23). For de Sola Pool, this process has momentous consequences. Technological convergence elicits, in fact, the erosion of the original «one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use» (23), «causing the blurring of the boundaries between media that "for the first three-quarters of the twentieth century […] were neatly partitioned from each other, both by technology and by use» (27).

The publication of *Technologies of Freedom* dates back to the dawn of the present "information age" (Castells 1996) – when the penetration of digital networks in the universe of communication was just at its beginnings. Nevertheless, de Sola Pool's observations about convergence provide essential indications – almost prophetic, I would say – in order to understand the evolution of the contemporary media system (and of the relations established within it). In his perspective, in fact, convergence is a dialectical and dynamic process, bringing about media "unification" at the same time as their "differentiation" (53). As noted by Henry Jenkins, de Sola Pool has (already) understood that convergence is a phenomenon with "two sides" (Jenkins 2006: 10). On the one hand, media devices are interconnected, sharing the same technological infrastructure in an integrated manner; on the other, they specialize, acquiring a specific function within the «universal telecommunication system» (de Sola Pool 1995: 53). With a play on words, I could say that if media before convergence were separated but homogeneous (because, although not related, they showed unvarying internal properties), media after convergence are united but heterogeneous (because, although integrated, they embody different qualities).

In the 1980s and 1990s, however, de Sola Pool's observations have only partially been embraced (and understood) by media (and visual arts) studies. Until the new millennium, in fact, the debate has been dominated by two main perspectives that, although with different approaches, explored the relationship between technological convergence and the material and social dissolution of traditional media. Some authors affirm that convergence has originated a full-fledged "post-medium condition" (Krauss 1999), erasing «the very concept of medium» (Kittler 1986: 2) within an undifferentiated global media aggregate. Others state instead that convergence has inaugurated a new "unimedia approach" (Lévy 2001: 47), determining the (con)fusion of all communication languages in a single integrated digital network.

At the end of the 1990s, Roger Fiedler is one of the first scholars to problematize both these perspectives: «common assumptions that the

present convergence will lead to fewer forms of communication, or ultimately to the demise of established forms […] – he writes in his book *Mediamorphosis* (1997) – are not supported by historic evidence» (26). Echoing de Sola Pool's argumentations, Fiedler underlines instead that, on the phenomenal plane, convergence has taken a completely different direction, that is, has moved towards the expansion and the improvement of the media landscape: «rather than […] replacing older forms – he writes –, newer forms have tended to diverge and add to the media mix» (26-27).

At the turn of the new millennium, Fiedler's point of view is developed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their *Remediation* (1999). The two scholars as well observe, in fact, that convergence has multiplied and diversified the communication technologies in use in our culture (225), creating new tools and social practices. According to Bolter and Grusin, though, convergence has simultaneously started a complex process of "remediation" – that is, a process by which media mutually appropriate other media forms, techniques and social meanings (65). In other words, far from dissolve or implode, old and new media establish strong dialectical relations in today's media landscape, remaking and reforming each other.

In the years 2000s, Jenkins revives the debate on convergence by opposing his well-known paradigm of "convergence culture" to what he defines «the black box fallacy» (2006: 13). «Media convergence is an ongoing process, occurring at various intersections of media technologies, industries, content and audiences» – the author writes in an article significatively titled *Convergence? I Diverge* (2001: 93). «There will never be one black box controlling all media. Rather, thanks to the proliferation of channels and the increasingly ubiquitous nature of computing and communications, we are entering an era where media will be everywhere, and we will use all kinds of media in relation to one another» (93). Just like Fidler and Bolter and Grusin, also Jenkins maintains therefore that convergence can reconfigure the media landscape by expanding it and making it more connected, determining «a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them» (2006: 282).

Jenkins's argumentation can be summarized as follows. Directly referencing de Sola Pool – and updating his ideas to the years 2000s –, the scholar observes that the digital revolution has caused the total deconstruction of the traditional techno-linguistic media structure. As already claimed by the author of *Technologies of Freedom*, in fact, in the new convergence era single media are not based anymore on a biunivocal relationship between a specific technological device and a specific linguistic system[1] – while, until at least the 1980s, such relationship strictly (inter)defined their semiotic and social status.

According to Jenkins, however, this deconstruction has not caused the disappearance of media, as claimed for instance by Pierre Lévy (1997) or Peter Lunenfeld (1999) during the 1990s. On the contrary, contemporary media have become more pervasive and socially "ubiquitous", thanks to a double mechanism of technological transcendence (of their languages) and linguistic emancipation (of their devices): languages are by now free to "flow" through multiple devices, entering previously unreachable contexts (think about watching a movie on your smartphone while traveling on a train); at the same time, devices are by now capable to support different languages, multiplying themselves according to the unification/differentiation logic already highlighted by de Sola Pool. This means that today the media are composed by wide socio-technological constellations, within (and through) which contents circulate and intertwine. Jenkins's work therefore represents a turning point in the debate on the relationship between media and digital technologies, reframing convergence as a process of systemic change – and no longer generic dissolution – of the «ways media circulates within our culture» (2006: 282).

In the wake of Jenkins's observations, over the following years many scholars have continued to investigate the media in the age of

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[1] Throughout this article, I employ the term "linguistic" to refer not only to verbal language but also (and mainly) to media languages (such as the language of cinema, of videogame, of comics, etc.) following a long-standing theoretical tradition rooted in semiotics (see for example Metz 1974; Groensteen 2007).

convergence, finding that they are characterized by at least two equal and opposite tensions: one tension towards relocation, examined by Francesco Casetti (2015); and one towards hybridization, explored by Lev Manovich (2013). In his book *The Lumière Galaxy*, Casetti observes first of all that after the digital revolution a medium «no longer appears to be a predetermined, closed and binding structure, but rather an open and flexible set of elements; it is no longer an apparatus, but rather an assemblage» (2015: 69). Precisely thanks to its openness and flexibility – the author says – the medium-assemblage is physiologically inclined to cross its traditional borders and to penetrate new spatial and media contexts, while not losing its "social" identity. More specifically, Casetti employs the category of "relocation" in order to describe the «physical (so to speak) shift that brings one medium to occupy a new place – on a new platform or in a new environment – and to contaminate this place with its own presence» (2008a: 27, my translation). According to the author, the most interesting element within this process is the medium's capability to reactivate and repurpose inside this new context «the system of sensations» and «the cultural form» (2015: 27) that have historically characterized it. «Thanks to a new medium – thanks to a new support or a new device – an experience is reborn elsewhere, and the life of the previous medium […] continues. It is in this way that we can think of "being at the cinema" and "watching a film" even in bright light in front of a digital screen» (2015: 28).

Manovich's proposal counterbalances Casetti's. In his book *Software Takes Command* (explicit reference to the de Sola Pool's chapter mentioned at the beginning of this article), the author first of all claims that the digital revolution has freed the traditional media from their material supports, transforming them into «cultural software» (2010: 20) capable (so to speak) of "running" – in the double meaning of circulating and being supported – on different hardware (urban screens, computers, smartphones, etc.). According to Manovich, though, this softwarization does not only determine media relocation, but also (and above all) their hybridization: «After representational formats of older media types, the techniques for creating content in these media and the interfaces for accessing them were unbundled from their physical bases and

translated into software – he writes –, these elements started interacting to produce new hybrids» (171-176). More precisely, Manovich states that this process has originated new «cultural or artistic metalanguages» (276) in which «the unique properties and techniques of different media» (176) are imported and recombined within another medium, as it happens for instance in *Sin City* (Dir. Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller, USA, 2005) or *300* (Dir. Zack Snyder, USA, 2007). That is, these metalanguages develop the expressive possibilities of the contemporary media, implementing «new stylized aesthetics» that arise from the mixture of «multiple media techniques» (Manovich 2010: 259).

A terminological knot

Having become assemblages or software, today the media tend to expand and intertwine, establishing links of cooperation and interchange on both the technological and the linguistic level. As already observed by Jenkins, in fact, one of the main consequences of convergence is the multiplication of relationships between different media contents and the platforms through which these contents circulate (Jenkins 2001: 93). Obviously, the media used to establish mutual relations in the pre-digital age too (just think for instance of the decades-long practice of film adaptation [Bluestone 1971]). In the new era of convergence, however, these relations have become (so to speak) intrinsic and *consubstantial* to the functioning itself of the media, decisively contributing to their very existence and cultural persistence. In other words, convergence seems to have taken one of the most famous aphorisms by Marshall McLuhan – that is, «the content of any medium is always another medium» (1994 [1964]: xii) – to its extremes.

We should, however, try to figure out exactly *what kinds* of relationships the media are establishing in the current context and *how* we can distinguish them. Since the 1990s, scholars from different disciplines have identified four main categories in order to tackle the complexity of this new scenario: multimediality, intermediality, crossmediality, and transmediality. As we will see in the next paragraph, these categories are extremely useful in order to describe the

relationships between media in the age of convergence, but still lack a shared and stable meaning in the field of media (as well as comparative) studies, having eluded any attempt of (meta)theoretical systematization so far. From a survey of the existing literature on the subject, in fact, it appears quite clear that these categories tend to blur into one another and overlap semantically, creating – as also Erica Negri states – a full-fledged «terminological and conceptual knot» (Negri 2015: 182). Here are some examples.

In her 1991 chapter dedicated to the analysis of the economic and cultural strategies informing Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*, Eileen R. Meehan writes that media conglomerates «view every project as a *multimedia* product line» (52, my emphasis) – a term that she frequently uses in her piece. Taking Burton's movie as an emblematic case study, the author observes in fact that it has favored the interests of its producers – that is, the media conglomerate Warner Communications Inc. – in a wide variety of sectors, such as comics, books, music, cinema, videoclips, TV networks, home video, and so on. The category of multimediality is then employed by Thomas Schatz in his 1993 essay on the New Hollywood. Directly referencing Meehan's observations, Schatz coins the term «multimedia reiteration» (34) in order to describe the process of integrated exploitation of a movie in different secondary and ancillary markets (cable TV, home video, videogames, press, music, comics, clothing, toys, theme parks, etc.). As we see here, Meehan and Schatz identify three different meanings of multimediality: the production of merchandising related to a specific film; the distribution of the film (and of its promotional paratexts) through multiple channels and platforms; the transfer or remake of the film into new media products.

In the following years – after the impact of the digital revolution, which has brought to the extreme some of the processes already in place during the 1980s and 1990s, as we have seen in the previous paragraph – scholars have subdivided multimediality, re-framing its different typologies in new analytical categories. More specifically: 1) The production of merchandising has been at least in part included in the category of *transmediality* – or rather in its "expanded" meaning, as it's

been defined by some scholars inspired by the work of Henry Jenkins (2006), such as Christy Dena (2009), for instance; in this sense, merchandising is considered as a narrative or diegetic "extension" of the original movie; 2) Multi-platform distribution has been included in the category of *crossmediality*, as it's been defined by Henry Jenkins (2016), Gary Hayes (2006), Francesco Casetti (2006) or Max Giovagnoli (2013), among others. As Hayes states, for instance, crossmediality «in its simplest form [implies that] exactly the same content [is] delivered on multiple platforms such as mobile, TV and broadband web». Similarly, for Giovagnoli the term crossmediality describes narrative forms that «remain the same as they adapt to different platforms» (pos. 126, my translation); 3) The transfer or remake of a film (or of some of its parts) into a different medium has been included in the category of *intermediality*, as it's been used by Jürgen E. Müller (2006), André Gaudreault (2009), Silvestra Mariniello (2011), among others. According to Gaudreault, for example, intermediality is «the process whereby form and content are transferred and migrate among media, a process that […] has become today a norm to which every medium is likely to owe a part of its configuration» (156).

However, the boundary lines between these categories seem to be anything but clear; on the contrary, they vary – mutually intersecting and crossing over each other – depending on how they are used by the different authors. Let's go back, for instance, to the definition of crossmediality proposed by Hayes. The author states that crossmediality is articulated into four levels, characterized by increasing breadth and complexity. The first and second level (which he defines "Pushed" and "Extras") actually refer to the distribution of the same text, and of its paratexts, on several technological platforms. The third and fourth level (defined "Bridges" and "Experiences") refer instead to the dissemination of a single narrative through different technological platforms. Hayes writes that precisely these last two levels represent «the truest form of cross-media where the story […] is specifically authored to drive the audience […] across media devices», building «narrative bridges» capable of encouraging the spectator to follow the development of the narrative across different media forms.

Interestingly though, this definition of crossmediality has many points of contact with the definition of transmedia storytelling proposed by Jenkins (yet not having any direct link whatsoever to it). Jenkins (2007) defines in fact transmediality as «a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience» – a definition that has been referred to and further developed by many scholars, such as the already mentioned Christy Dena, Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2004), Carlos Alberto Scolari (2009) and Renira Rampazzo Gambarato (2013). In this sense, Hayes includes in the definition of crossmediality even those processes that Jenkins and others describe through the notion of trasmediality.

Conversely, Giovagnoli's definition of transmediality (2013) seems to exceed the one proposed by Jenkins, making it appear interchangeable with the category of intermediality. Giovagnoli considers, in fact, all the «forms of narration that share the same narrative and imaginative elements (plots, characters, atmospheres…), but change depending on the platform through which they are distributed» (pos. 134, my translation) as examples of transmediality. More precisely, in his perspective, the category of transmediality includes for instance both the many Harry Potter fanfictions that have expanded and autonomously explored the narrative universe created by the original novels and films and *The Walking Dead*, the TV adaptation of the Image Comics comic book series of the same name, which has expanded «with new characters and different locations the universal synthetic structures of the comics» (pos. 505, my translation). Giovagnoli therefore subsumes into the category of transmediality part of those phenomena that other scholars include in the category of intermediality. Besides, it is interesting to note that Giovagnoli adopts the term trasmediality only starting from his 2011 book *Transmedia Storytelling: Imagery, Shapes and Techniques*; in his previous works (2009; 2005), the author employed instead the category of crossmediality to describe the very same phenomena he would then include in the category of trasmediality – not differently from what happens with Hayes.

Furthermore, we may add that the category of multimediality is still quite common in the scientific discourse, where it is employed in at least two ways. On the one hand, multimediality still represents a sort of "umbrella term" used to generically describe the connections and systemic relations established between different media, whatever their typology (cfr. Valentini 2002; Casetti 2008b). On the other, it is instead employed in order to describe the integration and material co-presence of different media in the creation of specific works or texts (as it is the case with artistic installations) (cfr. Klich, Scheer 2011; Monteverdi 2020). I would just add in passing that for Jürgen E. Müller (2006) – but also for other leading scholars on this topic such as Werner Wolf (1999), Irina O. Rajewsky (2000; 2005) or Pietro Montani (2010) – the notion of co-presence is an integral part of the semantic foundation of the category of intermediality: this opens another possible interesting direction in the investigation of the "slippages" from one term to another… which I could certainly follow another time.

A metatheoretical taxonomy

This quick overview – only the tip of the iceberg of a much more complex situation – demonstrates that the categories of multimediality, intermediality, crossmediality, and transmediality undeniably show a certain degree of semantic instability within the critical and academic discourse. As we have seen, in fact, these categories are not part of a previous vocabulary, shared by the scientific community; on the contrary, they are employed in a different (and partly contradictory) way by each single scholar, depending on their research objects and theoretical backgrounds. This means that the same process may be described through different categories; or, that the same category may be employed to designate different processes. In this paragraph, then, I propose to systematize these four categories by means of a metatheoretical taxonomy, which will allow us to circumscribe and (inter)define their heuristic and semantic boundaries. More precisely, I will try to reframe and stabilize definitions of the categories discussed in the previous paragraph according to some basic parameters.

The first useful parameter is closely related to what discussed in the first paragraph. As we have seen, the digital revolution has deconstructed the traditional techno-linguistic structure of the media, to a point that now languages transcend (and emancipate themselves from) devices and vice versa. According to this perspective, we can start by dividing those categories into two main typologies, depending on whether they focus primarily on the technological or on the linguistic dimension of the medium. More precisely, we can say that crossmediality and multimediality concern the relations established between different media at a technological and infrastructural level; whereas transmediality and intermediality concern the relations established between different media on the linguistic dimension.

More precisely, crossmedia relations are based on the circulation of the *same* content in *different* environment or devices (think for instance of a film that "flows" through movie theatres, satellite TV, video streaming platforms, urban screens, etc.). On the contrary, multimedia relations are founded on the "material" co-presence of *different* contents in the *same* environment or device (as it happens, for instance, in specific artistic installations or theatre performances). Transmedia relations develop instead from the joint articulation of the same content through different media languages (as in the emblematic case of transmedia storytelling). And finally, intermedial relations are based on the transfer of the same content from one media language to another (as it happens in film adaptations of comics, for instance).

These four categories can therefore be distinguished depending on whether the relations between media are based on the technological dimension or the linguistic one. Other two parameters can be added to this initial bipartition: the *objects* on which the relation is based (in other words, *what* relates with what); and the *modes* through which the relation develops (in other words, *how* the relation forms). In addition to the first one, these two further parameters provide essential information in order to assign each category a (more) univocal and homogeneous heuristic foundation. For more clarity, prior to discussing each category in more detail, I have schematized my observations with the help of the following table:

	Plan of the relation	Object of the relation	Mode of the relation
Crossmediality	Technological	Media product	Conduction
Multimediality		Material signifiers	Combination
Transmediality	Linguistic	Narrative universe	Dispersion
Intermediality		Linguistic configurations	Translation

As we can see, according to this hypothesis of metatheoretical reorganization, crossmediality is based on the *conduction* of a single *media product* (a feature-length film, a TV episode, a song, a news bulletin, etc.) through different media platforms (TV screens, computers, smartphones, urban screens, etc.). The term "media product" is employed here in a broad sense, to describe a "finished" object, recognizable at a social level and ascribable to specific discursive genres and production categories (film horror, sitcom, rock music, press commentary, etc.). I draw instead the term "conduction" from physics in order to describe the "logistic" operations (Pescatore 2010: 22) that characterize crossmediality – precisely the transfer and delivery of products through several channels and media.

Moreover, on the socio-economical level, crossmedia relations are at the crossroads between two convergent drives. On the one hand, they are in fact closely related to the new multi-platform distribution strategies the media industry has been implementing after the digital revolution with the aim of maximizing profits. On the other, they are directly related to the new forms of "anytime, anywhere" access to

media products that characterize the current "on demand culture" (Tryon 2013), and that emerge also thanks to "informal" consumption practices, such as piracy (Lobato 2012).

Multimediality is based instead on the *combination* of *material signifiers* related to different media in one single (new) artifact – which originates precisely from their sum. In other words, multimedia relations postulate the *actual* co-presence – within a single work or text – of semiotically autonomous media units, which correlation is first and foremost infrastructural. Think for instance of an artistic installation like Chris Marker's *Zapping Zone* (1985). This installation «brings together elements from Marker's previously known film and photography projects […] with a new set of computer-generated works, and a series of short video pieces» (Lupton 2005), with the aim of reflecting (and encouraging reflections) on the relationship between scopic regimes, social imaginaries, and different technologies of vision. Or, the so-called "real time films" by the New York based Big Art Group ensemble (Fazi 2005), in which elements of theatre (the stage), cinema (the screen, the camera) and television (the green screen) are materially and spatially combined in order to create a performance capable of reflecting on its own multimedia composition.

Transmediality is related instead to the systemic and coordinated *dispersion* of a (single) *storyworld* across different media. I use the term dispersion as it has been employed by Jenkins in his definition of transmedia storytelling as «a process where integral elements of a fiction get *dispersed* systematically across multiple delivery channels» (2007, my emphasis). Drawing on Marie-Laure Ryan, I use the term "storyworld" to identify a specific environment inhabited by specific characters, in which a series of events occur in accordance to specific physical and social laws (2014: 34-37). More precisely, this process of transmedia dispersion takes at least two different forms (Dena 2009; Rampazzo 2013): narrative continuation, in which a single story (and its universe) is developed in an integrated manner across multiple media products (films, TV series, videogames, comics, etc.), each of which actualizes a specific portion of the storyline; and diegetic expansion, in which different media products deliver autonomous and independent stories,

each of which, however, contributes systemically and by accumulation to the expansion of a shared storyworld. A "classic" example of the first form is the renowned *Matrix* franchise (1999-2005), in which the story of Neo and the other members of the resistance against the dictatorship of the machines is told across a film trilogy, an animated TV series, a series of comics, and two videogames. An emblematic example of the second form is represented instead by the Marvel Cinematic Universe (created in 2008 and still in progress), which includes not only the movies inspired by Marvel superheroes, but also several TV series, web series, and comic series – each developing stories that are autonomous though integral to the same storyworld, sharing (again according to Ryan) the same physical and social laws.

In both cases, however, transmedia relations aim to embed the viewers (and their consumption practices) in a complex narrative system, transforming them in "hunters and gatherers" ready to "jump" from one medium to another in order to reconstruct the stories and the universes in their entirety and depth.

Finally, intermediality is based on the *translation* of the *linguistic configurations* of one medium into another. I draw the idea of linguistic configurations from Louis Hjelmslev (1961) to describe the modes through which the *figures* of expression and the *figures* of content are articulated within a text[2]. The term "translation" is instead employed here in its intersemiotic meaning (Dusi 2003; 2015) to describe the process of transfer and remake of these configurations from one medium to another. As I stated elsewhere (Zecca 2013; 2017), this very complex mechanism can affect elements of different textual depth and width. Considering, for example, the cinematic translation of US comic books, the transfer can extensively affect the entire narrative structure of a source text, as it happens for instance in *V for Vendetta* (Dir. James McTeigue, USA-UK-DE, 2005), film adaptation of the homonymous

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[2] According to Hjelmslev, figures are "non signs [that] enter sign systems as parts of signs" (1961: 46). Both the plan of expression and the plan of content of every text are formally articulated in different figures.

graphic novel (written by Alan Moore and drawn by David Lloyd between 1982 and 1985). Or, it can focus on a single strategy of expression generally employed in comics, as it happens in *Scott Pilgrim vs the World* (Edgar Wright, USA-UK-JP-CA 2010) – film adaptation of the homonymous comic book series by Bryan Lee O'Malley (released between 2004 and 2010) – in which live action images are interspersed with "drawn" onomatopoeia. Or again, it can involve specific "fragments" of a source text, as it happens in the opening credits of *Sin City*, in which the names of the leading actors are superimposed on parts of the original panels of the source comic book series (written and drawn by Frank Miller between 1991 and 2000).

Moreover, as observed by Werner Wolf (2005), intermedial relations can be covert or overt. In the first case, the typical configurations of a source medium are, so to speak, completely "overwritten" by the target medium, which tries to appropriate them by erasing (or at least relativizing) the traces of their origin. This is what happens, for instance, in several film adaptations, which try to convert the source text in pure and autonomous cinematic spectacle. In the second case, the configurations of the source medium appear instead iconically present in the target medium, within which they create fully-fledged «semiological interferences» (Metz 1974: 212). For example, a number of shots in the first sequence of *Gamer* (Dir. Mark Neveldine, Brian Taylor, USA, 2009) explicitly try to mimic the graphic interface of videogames, interpolating the cinematic image with the typical control icons (such as the ones showing the available weapons and ammunitions) that characterize a first-person shooter. In general terms, intermedial relations seem to be based on two counterposed movements: the appropriation by the target medium of narrative imaginaries and expressive tools of the source medium; and/or the hybridization of the target medium with the source medium, which becomes therefore at least in part "other than itself".

To sum up: crossmediality describes the conduction of a single media product across multiple platforms in order to multiply its profits and social diffusion; multimediality is the combination of the material signifiers of different media aimed at creating a new artifact;

transmediality is based on the dispersion of a single narrative universe across multiple media in order to embed the viewers into it; intermediality occurs when one medium translates the linguistic configuration of another medium, with the double goal of appropriate or hybridize each other.

Finally, I would like to add that some specific phenomena exceed the single category and are best described by the interaction of two or more of them. For instance, *alternate reality games* (ARG) are interactive games that combine online and real-life activity and are sometimes used to advertise films or TV series – as in the case of *Why So Serious*, ARG related to the movie *The Dark Knight* (Dir. Christopher Nolan, UK-USA, 2008) or *The Lost Experience*, ARG related to the TV series *Lost* (2004-2010). Alternate reality games are indeed characterized by what we can term "multimedia-transmedia" relations, given that in this case the combination of the material signifiers of different media (multimediality) is not aimed at creating a new artifact, but is instead designed for expanding a specific narrative universe (transmediality), to which these games represent a further access point.

In conclusion, through this hypothesis of metatheoretical reorganization, I think that it is possible to provide these four categories – multimediality, intermediality, crossmediality and transmediality – with more precise theoretical foundation and heuristic value. Of course, this is just a first attempt at systematization, which needs to be developed on both the theoretical/metatheoretical and the methodological/analytical level. However, I hope these observations could already be of some use and help encourage further elaboration.

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