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## CROSSING THE TEXTUAL FRAME AND ITS TRANSMEDIAL EFFECTS

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### Abstract

The year 2022 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Juri Lotman's birth. On this occasion, I propose to return to one of Lotman's concepts, namely that of *frame*. The term was proposed in *The structure of the artistic text* (1970/1977), in the traditional understanding of a limit that separates a text produced in any kind of medium from extra-textual structures (other texts) or non-text (real-life contexts). This notion of frame comes close to its understanding in literary studies, as well as the theory and philosophy of art and should not be confused with a well-known concept of frame propagated in AI Studies (Minsky 1975; Petöfi 1976) and which refers to a global cognitive pattern of storing common-sense knowledge about particular concepts and situations in memory. Lotman returned to the discussion of the textual frame in *Universe of the mind* (1990), mainly in application to the fine arts. He also elaborated there a more inclusive concept of *boundary* (proposed in Lotman 1984/2005) as a demarcation of the semiosphere and of its internal subsystems, which necessitates constant translations between particular codes and languages. Lotman dubbed transgressions of textual borders *transcoding*, which in contemporary parlance is a clear manifestation of *transmediality*. Therefore, I propose to analyse the concept of frame in relation to Intermedial Studies (cf. Elleström, 2014). Such crossings of boundaries between different media/modes/modalities are simultaneously creative and potentially confusing, in that they display a semiotic collision of artistic codes and require a heightened processing effort on the part of the addressee.

My vantage point is basically semiotic, with the focus of interest going less to verbal texts and more to the issues of frame in the visual arts. Semiotic considerations on the problem of boundaries are complemented with brief *phenomenologically-oriented ponderings* on aesthetic and cognitive import of *framing devices* (Crowther, 2009) that emphasize their *antithetical function* as: a) devices with their own artistic value, even complementing the text vs. b) "defences against the exterior" and hindrances to creative liberty.

First, I turn to two areas of interest of Lotman himself: 1) the extension of artistic media in Baroque art and 2) collages, which I treat as transmediality through surface. Lotman perceived collages as a collision of *the fictitious* with *the real*, referring to their doubly figurative nature (metonymical and metaphorical). Next, I complement this discussion with examples taken from 20<sup>th</sup>-century painting and sculpture, e.g. Spatialism, Minimalism, and Hyperrealism. Of particular interest is the situation in which the frame becomes a text commenting on its content or plays a metatextual function. Another game worthy of attention is embedding of frames.

The discussion closes with the case of transmedial effects between painting and theatre, illustrated by Polish painter and stage-director Tadeusz Kantor's theatrical experiments in Cracovian Cricot 2 Theatre: a) Velázquez's Infanta Margarita entering Kantor's self-portraits and a photo-portrait frame in the performance

*Today is my birthday* (1990); b) Kantor stepping out of the frame of his own self-portrait on the illusory boundary between real life, painting and theatre.

The article posits to treat frame and multiple ways of transgressing it as an integrational phenomenon that opens a path for further interdisciplinary studies across the borders of artistic semiotics, Intermedial Studies, literary theorizing and the theory and philosophy of art.

**Key words:** textual frame, boundary, border, Yuri Lotman, transcoding, transmediality, semiotic collision, collage.

### 1. Introduction – the concepts of frame and transmediality

The term *frame* has so far appeared in several scholarly paradigms and disciplines. In traditional stylistics and rhetoric it was known under the name of *horismus* (Gr. ‘marking out by boundaries’) but it was only in the 1970s that this concept started to be examined by scholars active in different fields of research.

Goffman in his sociologically-oriented *Frame Analysis* (1974) proposed frames as culturally determined visions of reality that allow people to make sense of objects and events (e.g. a secular vs. a religious frame).<sup>1</sup> In turn, Fillmore’s *Frame Semantics* (propagated since 1975 up till now), which relates the meaning of words to the encyclopaedic knowledge of the world, has defined frame as a system of interrelated concepts necessary to construe a particular lexical entry. Yet, probably the most influential conception of frame has had its source in AI Studies (Minsky, 1975; Petöfi, 1976) where it refers to a global cognitive pattern of storing common-sense knowledge about particular concepts in memory, a data-structure that allows us to adjust ourselves to clichéd situations. This idea of framing has been present ever since also in theoretical considerations of cognitive linguistics, notably as Contextual Frame Theory, a model of building mental representations of shifting literary contexts by the reader, developed by Emmott (1997) and elaborated by Stockwell (2002/2020) within cognitive poetics.

However, neither of the above-mentioned approaches is my focus of interest in this article. Since the year 2022 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Juri Lotman’s birth, I propose to return on this occasion to his own idea of frame, still under-researched in artistic semiotics. The term appeared in Lotman’s early study *The structure of the artistic text* (1970/1977: 209), in the traditional understanding of a limit or border that separates an artistic text (produced in any kind of medium) from extra-textual structures, namely other texts or non-text (real-life contexts). This notion of frame comes close to its definition in literary studies as well as in the theory and philosophy of art. In the context of verbal and musical texts, the frame boils down to something apparently banal, that is, *the beginning* and *the end* of such a construct (Lotman, 1977, p. 212). In his last work, *Culture and explosion* (1992/2004, Ch. 18), Lotman claims that the end endows both texts and human lives with ultimate sense.

Lotmanian conception of framing has been approached in recent semiotic research mostly under the more general label of *boundary*, discussed by Lotman in his seminal paper “On the semiosphere” (1984/2005, p. 208): “One of the fundamental concepts of semiotic delimitation lies in the notion of boundary”. Basically, it refers to the separation of *the semiosphere* from extra-semiotic reality (Lotman, 2004, p. 115), as well as to any kind of borderline between various semiotic subsystems, languages and codes within the semiosphere itself. As such, the notion of boundary, developed further by Lotman in a separate chapter of *Universe of the mind* (1990), becomes related to a capacious understanding of *translation*, which in Lotman’s paradigm refers to a constant need of reinterpreting semiotic subsystems and codes within the all-encompassing semiosphere: “The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa” (Lotman, 2005, p. 208; cf. also Monticelli, 2012).<sup>2</sup> Kroó (2022) provides a comprehensive overview of how the phenomenon of transgression of textual borders analysed by Lotman has been subsequently developed in literary criticism and literary semiotics.

My purpose in this article, however, is to relate the notion of frame to *Intermedial Studies*, and in particular to what Elleström (2014) referred to as media transformation. *Transmediality*, which is

a key concept in the subsequent parts of this article, is defined by Elleström as a sub-category of the more inclusive conception of *intermediality*: “Whereas I use the term *intermedial* to broadly refer to all types of relations among different types of media, the term *transmedial* should be understood to refer to intermedial relations that are characterized by actual or potential transfers” (Elleström, 2014, p. 3, emphasis original). In what follows, I posit that in the majority of cases the crossing of a textual frame produces transmedial effects, especially within the visual arts and the theatre, which will be my focus of attention.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1. Lotman on framing and transcoding

*The frame of a picture, the footlights of the stage, the borders of a film screen – all constitute the borders of an artistic world, self-sufficient in its universality. [...] the beginning and end of a literary or musical work, the surfaces which mark the borders between a sculpture or an architectural edifice and the space artistically excluded from it – all these are various forms of a law that applies to all art: a work of art is a finite model of an infinite universe”* (Lotman, 1977, p. 210).

Although the frame in a picture is “usually located on the *other* side of the line demarcating the canvas, and we do not see it when we look at the picture”, sometimes “a picture frame may be an independent work of art” (Lotman, 1977, p. 209). Lotman returns to the discussion of the textual frame in *Universe of the mind* (1990), mainly in application to the fine arts, architecture and theatre.

Lotman’s examples of transgression of textual borders bear straightforwardly on the phenomenon which he dubbed *transcoding* and which is nothing else but transmediality, namely any kind of the transformative crossing of the boundaries between media, modes and modalities. Due to terminological differences among researchers from various schools (cf. Sobita, 2018, Ch. 2), for the purposes of our discussion I assume the following understanding of these terms (after Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, 2019):

- **Medium** can refer to: 1) channel of transmission (verbal, non-verbal; radio, TV, Internet, etc.); 2) distinct art form (painting, sculpture, installation, architecture, theatre, film, etc.); 3) technique of execution (watercolour, oil, woodprint, neon light, etc.); 4) technical support/carrier (paper, stone, gypsum, light, screen, etc.).
- **Mode** stands for a semiotic code/system, a specific language: image (two- or three-dimensional), moving image, sound, dance, architectonic structure, interior/urban/ garden design, gesture, etc.
- **Modality** is a platform of delivery understood as a sensory perception (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinaesthetic, etc.).

It can be claimed that such crossings of boundaries between different modes/media/modalities are simultaneously creative and potentially confusing or even straightforwardly manipulative, in that they display a *semiotic collision* of artistic codes and require a heightened processing effort on the part of the addressees, who may not be fully aware of the aesthetic game in which they are involved.

In what follows, my focus of interest will be directed to the issues of frame in the visual arts rather than to transgressions of boundaries within verbal and composite media. Lotman (1977) discussed in detail examples of literary open-ended texts with non-endings or genres such as chronicles that can be extended when need arises; we could add memoirs, serial stories or filmic series to this list. Also, traversing boundaries between subworlds within fiction worlds created in different genres and media can be adduced, well-exemplified by Scolari’s (2009) study of a transmedia storytelling (TS) called *24* that combined imaginary worlds drawn from a TV series, graphic novels, games and paperback novels.

## 2.2. Phenomenology in support of semiotic considerations on the nature of framing devices

The semiotic considerations on the problem of boundaries can be complemented with phenomenologically-oriented ponderings on aesthetic and cognitive import of *framing devices* discussed by philosopher of art Crowther (2009) in the study with a much-saying title *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame)*, with some reference to the earlier conceptions of Simmel (1994) and Derrida (1987). The ideas of the aforementioned philosophers emphasize the *antithetical functions* of frames, which can be perceived as:

- 1) devices with their own artistic value, even complementing the text; unifying and integrating mechanisms;
- 2) “defences against the exterior”; hindrances to creative liberty, favouring closed rather than open textual formats.

This ambiguous functionality of frames, alternating between their potentially either positive or negative influence on the content enclosed, was also raised by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996/2006, pp. 203-204) in the description of *inner framing* within a visual work of art (based on connecting and/or disconnecting elements of the visual composition). I hope the examples to be discussed below will corroborate the dual nature of framing.

## 2.3. Crossing the frames in Baroque art

Lotman (1990, p. 57) claimed, quite justifiably, that Baroque art is strongly rhetorical, marked by a collision of semiotic codes, hence – in our present parlance – heavily transmedial. Not without reason did Deleuze in his treatise *The fold* (1988/2006) point to an *extension* of artistic modes in the Baroque period, aimed at the formation of the *bel composto*, the total art, the unity of all the representational arts and architecture (cf. Moreira Soares & Gonçalves, 2022, for a more detailed elaboration of this topic). We can perceive both a semiotic collision and a semiotic extension as clear instruments of transmediality:

*In wall paintings of the Baroque churches [...] the motif of little angels in a frame is frequently encountered. The frame is painted to look like a window, and the angel sits on the window-sill, as it were dangling one leg over the edge of the frame. This leg which does not fit into the composition of the picture is sculptural. It is added on to the painting as a continuation of it. So the text is a combination of painting and sculpture. [...] The whole text is constructed as a game between real and unreal space and as a collision of art-languages, of which one has the natural quality of the actual object while the other is an artificial imitation of it (Lotman, 1990, p. 57).*

An excellent illustration of such transmedial effects can be found in the interior of St. Anne’s academic collegiate church of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the most beautiful Baroque church in the city, whose interior decoration was executed in stucco by Balthazar Fontana in the years 1695-1703. The sculptures of the putti holding Latin inscriptions on tablets and the sculpted clouds on which the painted saintly female figures are seated all extend beyond the surfaces allotted to them. This kind of spatial crossing produces a dynamic effect in the architectural interior. In the side chapel of the right aisle, which houses the sarcophagus of St. John of Kęty, the putto above the painting of the Holy Family has left its ledge under the ceiling and is shown as if hovering in the air. The sculptural, the painted, and the architectonic spaces of the chapel overlap, forming the Baroque *bel composto*, a ‘beautiful artistic whole’. In the nave aisle, the painting-sculpture (dual medium) that represents St. Topaz reaches beyond the space assigned to it on the pilaster, as if illustrating Lotman’s (1977, pp. 211-212) mention of “[a] baroque statue which does not fit on a pedestal” and classified as “a form of conflict” within an artistic text. Walking further down the right aisle, we come across a side altar devoted to St. Joseph, whose image is shown in an oval frame, the shape frequently used in

Baroque art. Folds of the sculpted angel's robe overhang the image and a small modern representation of the Merciful Jesus, also enclosed in an oval frame, overlaps the frame of the main painting.

Probably one of the most exquisite examples of how different artistic media can intertwine and blur their boundaries is the Altieri Chapel with the altar-tomb of Blessed Ludovica Albertoni in the church San Francesco a Ripa in Trastevere in Rome, a creation of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1671-1674). As Moreira Soares and Gonçalves (2022, cf. also Fig. 4 and 5 in their article) rightly observe, we are involved in an unusual *framing game* with space – we face a chapel housing another chapel in the background, where the marble sculpture of Ludovica, shown in agony, in the pain of dying but also in a rapture of the mystical communion with God, is framed within an archway cut into the wall. This looks like an illustration of Deleuze's reflections on the Baroque framing as an all-inclusive artistic programme:

*[...] the painting exceeds its frame and is realized in polychrome marble sculpture; and sculpture goes beyond itself by being architecture; and in turn, architecture discovers a frame in the façade, but the frame itself becomes detached from the inside and establishes relations with the surroundings so as to realize architecture in city planning. From one end of the chain to the other, the painter has become all urban designer (Deleuze, 2006, p. 141, quoted also in Moreira Soares & Gonçalves, 2022, p. 6-7).*

This sublime instance of the *bel composto*, “a chapel within a chapel within a church”, presents a multiple embedding of sculptural and architectonic frames that resembles a theatrical stage: “The dividing line between media and materials disappears and a grand total effect emerges” [...] “to make churches like theatres, where a concert of the arts performed a prelude to future heavenly bliss” (Marien & Fleming, 2005, pp. 373, 386, quoted also in Moreira Soares & Gonçalves, 2022, p. 8). This theatrical effect, according to Moreira Soares and Gonçalves—who expand the ideas of Sergei Eisenstein on the cinematic qualities of architecture as well as Careri's (1995) claims about the presence of cinematographic montage effects in Baroque interiors—can be extended to become “a living-montage”, in which the body of the spectator, and particularly their brain, plays a prominent role in the reception of the play of artistically-loaded spaces.

The effects described by the aforementioned authors are all an outcome of several transmedial operations and seem to support the following observation made by Lotman (1990, p. 32): “Just because the interior of a church is a code and not merely a text, we perceive it not only aesthetically (only a text, not the rules for its construction, can be perceived aesthetically), but also in a religious, philosophical, theological, or other non-artistic way”.

Churches were not the exclusive places for tricks with borderlines. In the palace of King John III Sobieski at Wilanów in Warsaw, built in the years 1681-1729, the interior decoration offers its visitors several visual tricks. In one of the halls, the painted bust of a mysterious black animal (monkey?) overlooking the cornice below the ceiling becomes an intrusion of the imaginary world into the space of our reality, marking a *collision of worlds*, a common phenomenon in transcoding. Interestingly, the creature seems to draw our attention by gesturing towards the frieze painted below in which figural scenes appear. They all boast frames that bear Latin inscriptions which complement and explain the content of the paintings and thus perform the first, positive cognitive function assigned to framing devices by Crowther (cf. 2.2).

Transmedial games are not uncommon in Baroque paintings, to mention only a well-known “Self-portrait” by one of the leading Spanish artists of the time, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1670, The National Gallery in London). In a visual play with the viewer, it is not an image but a real person who extends his hand beyond the space of the image and holds the oval frame on the outside. Apart from being transmedial (a pictorial representation seemingly turns into a real world person, whose body is a medium in itself), the picture is also multimodal—the inscription painted on a piece of paper below the frame informs the viewer that the portrait was made at the request of the artist's children (Langmuir,

1997, p. 221-222). Such tricks with personages stepping out of picture frames have remained present in European art until our times—in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish art, Tadeusz Kantor will play with his own images in a similar way (cf. 2.6).

#### 2.4. Transmediality through surface

Contrary to a verbal text limited by its linearity, the painting—apart from the edges that mark the frame—offers several ways of escape through its physical surface. In the heyday of Cubism, Georges Braques and Pablo Picasso started a new technique called *collage* (Fr. *papier collé*), in which pieces of paper, fabric, wallpaper, sand, newspaper clippings, etc. were glued onto the surface of the painting. We can thus claim that collages bear a distant similarity to those half-painted and half-sculptured figures in Baroque art, instantiating a transgression of one medium (painted image) into several other physical media.

Lotman (1990, p. 41) perceives in collages several collisions: “Painted and glued-on objects belong to different and incompatible domains by virtue of features of reality/illusion, two-dimensionality/three-dimensionality, semiotic value/absence of semiotic value, and so on”. In addition, he emphasizes a tropological potential of a collage, thus relating transcoding (transmediality) to *figuration*. The painted details of an image adjoin natural objects pasted onto the canvas – these scraps of reality become simultaneously *metonymies* in syntagmatic relations with the painted parts and *metaphors* standing paradigmatically in place of the painted detail.

By way of illustration, let us mention briefly three instances of collages. In 1913, Pablo Picasso created an artwork titled “Bottle of Vieux Marc, glass, guitar, and newspaper” (Tate Modern, London). According to *The handbook to Tate Modern*, the painting—typical of late analytic Cubism—presents heavily fragmented objects, of which only a glued on newspaper piece (*Le Figaro*) is easily recognizable (Morris, 2008, p. 92, commentary Matthew Gale). A year later, Picasso produced another collage “Bowl of fruit, bottle and violin” (The National Gallery in London), an instance of synthetic Cubism, in which the dispersal of objects into fragments has been supplanted by an attempt at synthesis. The violin as the most salient object of this still life is reconstructed in its central part (Langmuir, 1997, p. 308-309). A piece of newspaper and grains of sand pasted onto the surface of the painting show its escape from an imaginary pictorial world into the reality of physical objects.

Yet, the most striking in its effect is a much later collage of 1954, titled “Sacking and red”, the work of Italian artist Alberto Burri (Tate Modern, London). Burri used discarded sacks for food imported under the Marshall Plan to add weight and texture to his works. This transmedial collage employs a piece of badly torn sacking glued onto an intensely red background covered with acrylic paint. Burri’s ruptured surfaces were taken either as an allusion to the horrors of the nuclear era or a reminiscence of his World War II experience as an army doctor. This possible association with the wounded body (sacking→skin) provoked some controversies among critics (Morris, 2008, p. 82, commentary Matthew Gale). It is worth stressing that similarly to sculptures, the entire surface of the body of a living organism, including human beings, counts as its frame/boundary.

Soon, other artistic experiments followed, playing with the idea of an escape from the content of the painted images through their very surface. In 1960, another Italian painter, Lucio Fontana, produced the work titled “Spatial concept waiting” (Tate Modern, London). Fontana was a representative of Spatialism, an artist in search of the representation of the three-dimensional space extending towards the fourth dimension. In the 1950s and 1960s, he experimented with the canvas’s surface through making holes or slashes in them. Such punctures marked for him “a passage into the infinite void” (Morris, 2008, p. 117, commentary Evi Baniatopolou). Apparently, the slash in this painting is “a prelude of the futurity, an opening that leads to the outer space”. The critic says that the title suggests a “positive expectancy of leaving our reality and travelling towards another universe”. From the transmedial perspective, instead of overstepping the frame, the picture offers an escape to a new dimension through its surface.

The 1960s saw the rise of an important current in art, called Minimalism. In 1962, Sol LeWitt, one of best known American artists within this trend, creates the work “Wall structure, white” (Wadsworth Atheneum, The LeWitt Collection, Hartford, Connecticut). LeWitt comments here on the relationship between the two-dimensional painted surface and a three-dimensional space. His work is a combination of painting and sculpture—a wooden block, painted white, protrudes from the equally white surface of the canvas into the viewer’s space (Batchelor, 1997, p. 37). We are faced here with an extension of one medium into another through the painting’s surface, which bears a certain resemblance to Baroque half-painted-half-sculpted angels described by Lotman.

Somewhat similar in nature was an experiment of Robert Gober, “Untitled” (1989-1992; Tate Modern, London). An instance of Hyperrealism, this work shows a male leg, wearing a sock and a shoe, shown as if severed below the knee, extending from the gallery wall close to the floor (Morris, 2008, p. 124, commentary Rachel Taylor). The intrusion of the leg through the wall into the viewer’s space, comic but uncanny or even repulsive, plays on the transmedial effects between the painted surface of the wall and a clothed human body as a medium, which the sculpture tries to imitate through the use of such materials as wood, wax, leather, cotton and even the human hair visible between the cuff of the trouser leg and the sock.

### 2.5. The frame as text

Now, let us consider Dan Flavin’s work of 1968 that bears a mysterious title “Untitled (to the innovator of wheeling peachblow)”, exhibited in The Museum of Modern Art in New York (Batchelor, 1997, p. 9). An instance of Minimal Art and a eulogy on a new medium (neon light), this work consists of the fluorescent frame alone, fitted to the wall, absolutely devoid of content. Lotman (1977, p. 210) aptly remarks: “We need only turn our attention to the frame as an independent text for the picture to be transformed into the boundary of the frame, and in this sense it does not differ from the wall”. And this is exactly what happens here – the picture does not exist in itself so the wall becomes simultaneously the background and the semantically empty content for the frame, which is placed entirely in focus. In my opinion, the frame becomes a *metatext* that seems to announce “I alone am important”. According to our phenomenological valuation, the cognitive import of such framing is obviously of what has been dubbed above as a “device with its own value”, in fact not complementing any text, but speaking for itself alone.

Talking about frames that do enclose the content which they complement and strengthen, I would like to bring to the readers’ attention a large-scale composition “The torches of Nero” by Henryk Siemiradzki (1876), on show in the Cloth Hall department of the National Museum in Krakow. This famous work, painted in Rome, known also as “The candlesticks of Christianity”, presents the scene of martyrdom of Christians ordered in 64 AD by Emperor Nero. Surrounded by his court, he observes the terrible ‘ceremony’ of Christians being burnt at stakes ironically decorated with flowers. The deep symbolic meaning of this scene finds a commentary in the Latin inscription running along the upper and lower part of the richly gilded frame: ET LUX IN TENEBRIS LUCET/ET TENEBRAE EAM NON COMPREHENDERUT (John 1, 5), “The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it”. Owing to this inscription, the painting communicates a powerful message of hope addressed to all victims of tyrants and oppressors. It is an instance of the frame that not only possesses its own considerable artistic value but also inalienably complements the signification of the work contained within its scope.

The same room in the Cracovian Cloth Hall that houses “The torches of Nero” features among its other exhibits an interesting painting executed by Paul Merwart, a French painter of Polish descent, which brought him a medal at the EXPO in Paris in 1878. The frame, richly decorated with vegetal motifs associated with Egypt, bears the French title “Le jeune Moïse” and refers to a little known incident of the young Moses killing an Egyptian who assaulted a Jewish couple. The verbal insert (in French) within the frame, inscribed on a decorative plaque, complements and explains the content of the image. This commentary to the painting tells us the following brief story:

*And the Hebrew man Dathan told Moses: “Master, this Egyptian came to me this night and, trying to suffocate me, he violated my wife Salomite”. The young Moses, indignant, killed the Egyptian and they hid the corpse in the sand (A Talmudic legend from Midrasch-Rabba about Exodus, Ch. 1).*

All the frames provided with explanatory inscriptions can be classified as multimodal—the verbal inserts they bear work in tandem with the pictorial representation they are meant to complete or explain (cf. also Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, 2017).

## 2.6. Embedding of frames

Another play with framing in Western art is the so-called *frame(s)-within-a frame* pattern that was already known in Baroque painting, like in the composition “Cabinet of art and rarities” by an Antwerp painter Frans II. Francken (1620-1625, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). It shows the interior of a gallery of paintings, with several framed images on the wall. Artefacts are juxtaposed with natural objects exhibited on the table in the foreground, according to the fashion of the epoch.

The *embedding* of frames reappears in modern art, to mention only the composition “Clock” by a well-known American artist Joseph Kosuth (1965, Tate Modern, London). A prime instance of Conceptual Art, it encloses within one frame a readymade object (a real wall-clock), its life-sized photograph (a documentary element, inside a smaller frame) and three enlarged texts – dictionary definitions of words/concepts related to the passage of time (Morris, 2008, p. 89, commentary Ann Coxon). It is a frame-inside-a frame composition, with verbal language being programmatically given a prominent role, as was the case in the entire Conceptual Art.

Another composition worthy of attention that shows the embedment of a framed picture within another picture is “Wonderland”(2022) by Ukrainian artist Lesia Khomenko, displayed during a temporary exhibition of Ukrainian art in Krakow. A larger composition depicts a mountainous landscape, with thick forests covering the slopes, not yet spoiled by civilization. The picture embedded in it treats the previous landscape as a kind of background, referring to the transformation of wild nature into a holiday resort (?), comfortable but boring, due to the monotony of the row of identical buildings.

The “frame-within-a frame” pattern in painting can be categorized as transmedial in the sense of inviting the viewer to cross the inner borders of different represented worlds, be they either fictional or mimetic representations of the actual world around us.

## 2.7. “Travelling motifs” and transmediality

On show in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna there remains one of the most recognizable portraits in European tradition—“Infanta Margarita Teresa” painted by Diego Velázquez in 1656, when Infanta was still a very young girl. It is one of the most famous representations of Margarita by Velázquez, who was a court painter to Philip IV of Spain and used to portray all his family members. The image has become a symbol of a royal child, beautifully dressed but imprisoned in her robes and in the court etiquette. It stands as a double metaphor of the girl’s beauty but also a reification of a royal child as a precious object. Since that time, Infanta—immortalized by Velázquez—has passed into popular art in Spain and in Europe at large.

The second famed representation of the same girl goes under the Spanish title “Las Meninas” (1656, Prado Museum, Madrid). This rendering of Infanta Margarita, among her court-ladies and accompanied by the painter himself appearing in a self-portrait not far from her, is very similar to the Vienna portrait, but for the direction of Infanta’s head, now turned to the left. This image, likewise, will soon become a ‘travelling motif’ in European art.

Interestingly, Infanta will find her way into the creation of Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990), a Polish painter, theoretician of art, director and stage designer in the Cricot 2 Theatre, an



experimental, avant-garde theatre he created (1955-1990). Every performance of his plays was a happening, with Kantor present on the stage as an actor and director. Infanta Margarita started to meander through Kantor's art since 1966, rendered in different poses and in different painterly techniques. The composition "One night Velázquez's Infanta came into my room for the second time, now clearly irritated" (1990, acrylic on canvas, private collection) is the artist's second self-portrait with Infanta, who in her transmedial voyage has become liberated from her courtly apparel. She stands before us barefooted and dishevelled but her gesture is royal—by pointing to a blank canvas on the easel she is demanding her portrait from the painter, seated naked (except for the immortal black hat he used to wear) on a stool (Gołubiew, 1999, p. 16; Gołubiew, 2000, p. 49). The scene takes place inside Kantor's "Poor Little Room of Imagination", so Infanta's transmedial journey has been from Velázquez's realistic portraiture to Kantor's transcoded visions of it both in his mind and in a painted representation.

But painting is not the only medium claimed by Infanta in Kantor's oeuvre. Under the label "Infanta strikes poses", she reappears as a grown-up woman, dressed in an elegant black evening robe which she spreads before us fan-like. Now, she begins playing her role as an actress in the last play by Kantor *Today is my birthday* but soon enters the frame of a large portrait, resembling a family photo (Gołubiew, 1999, p. 18; Gołubiew, 2000, p. 48). Thus, the recoded Infanta becomes framed twice, first as an actress in the play (a living person as a theatrical medium) and then as a photo/painting enclosed within the frame and placed on the stage as a prop.

The last self-portrait of Kantor, titled "Some figure has fallen out of the picture and turned out to be only a fiction" (1990, acrylic on canvas, private collection) shows him, in a scanty T-shirt and trousers, barefooted, sitting in a careless pose on the chair placed within the frame. One of his feet is protruding in front of the frame. Indeed, it is not a painted character but a theatrical personage from his last performance *Today is my birthday* (Gołubiew, 1999, p. 23; Gołubiew, 2000, p. 55). Like in the case of Murillo (cf. 2.2), it is a transfiguration of a portrait of the actor into Kantor himself. A naked male is lying at his feet, like somebody just fallen down from on high. The transmedial blurring of fiction and reality is obvious: Kantor is a living person who alludes to a theatrical stage. The borderline between the theatre, painting and real life (plus the Room of Imagination, which the artist invoked on several occasions) becomes the transmedial space of the game, *das Spielraum*, as if in corroboration of Lotman's (1990, p. 60) statement that "life and painting in many cases relate to each other through theatre which serves as a mediating code, a translation-code".

All the instances of transmediality discussed in Section 2 point to the fact that the role of framing is, practically speaking, fundamental to this phenomenon. Shukman (1977, pp. 170-175) reminds us about different angles from which a textual frame can be conceived. In this connection, she juxtaposes a comparatively stable Lotmanian conception of frame to a more dynamic view adopted by Uspensky in his study *A Poetics of Composition* (1970/1973). Namely, Uspensky claims that no definition of the structure of a text can be carried without a recourse to the notion of "points of view from which a narrative is presented (or a picture constructed [...])" (Uspensky, 1973, p. 5). Importantly, an examination of a multifaceted interaction of several *points of view* that usually structure an artistic text should be combined with analysing the role played by the frame, *foreground* and *background* (cf. Shukman, 1977, p. 174). Uspensky's claims have proved fruitful in semiotic studies of visual texts (icons in particular) and reverberate in Lotman's (1990, pp. 55-56) analysis of the "non-natural" point of view employed in representations of mirrors in the pictorial arts as well as in the description of shifts in the foregrounding of figures in Piero Della Francesca's "Flagellation of Christ" (Lotman, 1990/2007, p. 211). In my opinion, they still lay out one of possible directions of research in transmedial studies.

### 3. Conclusions

The concept of frame as devised by Lotman presents itself as an important *integrational category* in all kinds of semiotic research. In application to artistic visual texts, the problem of crossing the frame (whether direct or from the surface of a pictorial artwork) is closely tied to Lotmanian notion of transcoding, akin to transmediality in contemporary research.

Transmediality, realized as a crossing of the boundaries of an artwork, may result in:

- a) a collision of worlds, in which imaginary worlds are juxtaposed with reality;
- b) a collision or blend of artistic modes, media and modalities, like for instance the painting→photograph→theatre prop chain of framing the same motif.

The phenomenological ponderings on the cognitive function of framing prove valuable in that the material gathered corroborates their claims. Indeed, in the majority of cases explored in this article the frame functions as a unifying and integrating mechanism and/or a “defence against the extra-text”. Sometimes, the frame will complement the pictorial text with a proper inscription, in which case it will boast its own artistic value. In extreme cases (Dan Flavin’s *Untitled*), the frame becomes the only element of the representation, acquiring a metatextual import. Should a regular framing pose hindrance to creative liberty, authors may seek an escape from the rigidity of the frame itself by manipulating the surface of the pictorial representation (like in collages). The stratagem of embedding frames one inside another offers another possibility of a transmedial game.

I cannot find a better closure to our brief considerations on Lotman’s idea of frame and framing than this short quotation from Kroó that may be easily projected from literary semiotics onto semiotics of the visual arts, architecture, theatre, cinema, and other artistic media:

*The possibility of the dynamic rearrangement of borders in the various forms of textual interaction and transfiguration – intertextuality, text-metatext, text within the text, text-internalization and so on – offer an unrestricted openness for creativity, all the more so that culture generates an unlimited range of communicating text types* (Kroó, 2022, p. 359).

The crossing of the textual frame, an important instrument of transmedial experimentation, is a creative, gamesome and potentially manipulative strategy within the semiosphere. Such collisions of semiotic codes, in Lotman’s view endowed with a considerable rhetorical potential, likewise elaborative transfers of properties among media, modes and modalities remain well worth a more in-depth treatment across the borders of semiotics, Text and Discourse Studies, Intermedial Studies, the theory and philosophy of art, and literary theorizing including neuroaesthetic studies.<sup>3</sup>

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In her Afterword to the English translation of *Culture and explosion*, Marina Grishakova (2004, p. 182) reminisces that Lotman was acquainted with Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* and recommended this book to her. In *Universe of the mind* Lotman (1990, p. 131) examines a social aspect of the boundary in the process of individuation, which shares some characteristics with Goffman’s social anthropology.
- <sup>2</sup> In his foundational study in biosemiotics, Giorgio Prodi (1977/2021, p. 76) defines *translation* as a process in which “two corresponding, complex, complementary structures (for example, DNA and protein) are yoked together”. Such mutual complementariness of biochemical, material signs “extends the frontiers of contact and knowledge” (p. 79). A certain analogy between this understanding of translation and what we find in Lotman’s semiospheric paradigm is not difficult to notice.
- <sup>3</sup> Paul B. Armstrong’s (2021) ponderings on the creative rule-breaking, transgressional capacities of the human brain and language seem to square well with the semiotic idea of frame-breaking.

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## ПЕРЕТИН МЕЖ ТЕКСТОВОГО ФРЕЙМУ І ТРАНСМЕДІАЛЬНІ ЕФЕКТИ

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### Анотація

У 2022 році виповнюється 100 років від дня народження Юрія Лотмана. З цієї нагоди я пропоную повернутися до однієї з концепцій Лотмана, а саме до фрейму. Термін був запропонований у "Структурі художнього тексту" (1970/1977) у традиційному розумінні межі, яка відокремлює текст, створений будь-яким носієм, від позатекстових структур (інших текстів) або нетексту (реальних життєвих контекстів). Це поняття фрейму наближається до його розуміння в літературознавстві, а також у теорії та філософії мистецтва, і його не слід плутати з добре відомою концепцією фрейму, поширеною в дослідженнях (Minsky 1975, Petöfi 1976), яка посиляється на глобальний когнітивний патерн збереження здорового глузду в пам'яті про певні поняття та ситуації. Лотман повернувся до обговорення текстового фрейму у "Всесвіті розуму" (1990), головним чином відносно до образотворчого мистецтва. Там він також розробив більш інклюзивну концепцію межі (запропоновану в Lotman 1984/2005) як демаркацію семіосфери та її внутрішніх підсистем, що вимагає постійних перекладів між окремими кодами та мовами. Лотман назвав трансгресію текстових кордонів транскодуванням, що в сучасному розумінні є яскравим проявом трансмедіальності. Тому я пропоную проаналізувати концепцію фрейму у зв'язку з інтермедіальними дослідженнями (пор. Elleström, 2014).

Такі перетини меж між різними медіа/модами/модальностями є водночас творчими та потенційно заплутаними, оскільки вони демонструють семіотичне зіткнення художніх кодів і вимагають посиленних зусиль обробки з боку адресата.

Моя точка зору в основному семіотична, з центром інтересу, що зосереджується не на вербальних текстах, а більше на питаннях кадру у візуальному мистецтві. Семіотичні міркування щодо проблеми меж доповнюються короткими феноменологічно орієнтованими міркуваннями про естетичний і когнітивний імпорт засобів фреймування (Crowther, 2009), які підкреслюють їхню антитетичну функцію як: а) засоби із власною художньою цінністю, які навіть доповнюють текст vs б) «засоби захисту від зовнішнього» та перешкоди творчій свободі.

По-перше, я звернуся до двох сфер інтересів самого Лотмана: 1) розширення художніх засобів у мистецтві бароко та 2) колажі, які я розглядаю як трансмедіальність через поверхню. Лотман сприймав колажі як зіткнення фіктивного з реальним, маючи на увазі їхню подвійну образність (метонімічну й метафоричну). Далі я доповню це обговорення прикладами, взятими з живопису та скульптури 20-го століття, напр., спаціалізм, мінімалізм і гіперреалізм. Особливий інтерес викликає ситуація, коли фрейм стає текстом, що коментує його зміст, або виконує метатекстову функцію. Ще одна гра, яка заслуговує на увагу, це вбудовування фреймів.

Дискусію завершує випадок трансмедійних ефектів між живописом і театром, проілюстрований театральними експериментами польського художника та режисера Тадеуша Кантора в краківському театрі Кріко 2: а) Інфанта Маргарита Веласкеса входить до автопортретів Кантора та рамки фотопортрету у виставі “Сьогодні мій день народження” (1990); б) Кантор виходить із рамки власного автопортрета на ілюзорну межу між реальним життям, живописом і театром.

Стаття розглядає фрейм і численні способи його трансгресії як інтеграційний феномен, який відкриває шлях для подальших міждисциплінарних досліджень через кордони мистецької семіотики, інтермедіальних студій, літературного теоретизування та теорії та філософії мистецтва.

**Ключові слова:** текстовий фрейм, межа, кордон, Юрій Лотман, транскодування, трансмедіальність, семіотична колізія, колаж.