

## **Intermediality in early cinema studies:**

### **An interrogation of a widely used concept for research practice**

Working Paper, July 2011 (revised January 2012)

#### **1. Introduction**

This working paper is the result of our interrogation of the concept of intermediality. All of us are currently writing a PhD thesis at the Research Institute for History and Culture and the Department of Media and Performance studies at Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

Klaas de Zwaan writes on the Dutch armed neutrality policy during WWI and its promotion in visual media with special regards to cinema, Dafna Ruppin researches the production, distribution and exhibition of early cinema in colonial Indonesia and Sarah Dellmann investigates where the stereotypical depiction of the Netherlands in popular visual culture originates from. The last two projects are funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

All these projects, which we obviously see embedded in early cinema studies, consist of a comparative study of different media, therefore prompting us to examine questions of “intermediality”. This paper is part of our interrogation of what “intermediality” has to offer for studies in early cinema, in general, and for our projects, in particular. The question we want to answer is not “Is Early Cinema best studied independent of or in relation to other media of that time?” – Here we follow what is an established consensus in studies of early cinema, namely that cinematographic practices did not emerge out of the

blue, but from and in relation to other media and performances.<sup>1</sup> Instead, we raise the question: “Is the media landscape that early cinema is part of best understood via the concept of ‘intermediality’ and how does the latter need to be conceptualized?”

After sharing our thoughts with colleagues from Zürich and Trier<sup>2</sup> as well as with researchers associated to the project “Mediating public knowledge 1850-2000”<sup>3</sup> we currently think that other concepts to address a medial landscape – such as “remediation” or “transmediality” – are likely to be more fruitful to answer our research questions. Still, instead of dropping the concept of “intermediality” all too quickly, we want to examine what is possible and which perspectives we gain when looking at our research through the lens of “intermediality”. After all, “intermediality” still is a “hot topic” within the humanities, especially in interdisciplinary working fields such as literary and media studies and should not be ignored. Furthermore, both “remediation” and “transmediality” are terms that emerged within discussions on intermediality. An interrogation of the concepts thus leads us to the points we need clarification or other tools.

This working paper starts with an overview of concepts of intermediality as used in media studies by Sarah Dellmann. Then, Dafna Ruppin and Klaas de Zwaan will discuss examples from their projects and show how they adopt the concept of “intermediality” to make it productive for their projects.

### **1.1. Intermediality as a research problem in media studies**

In the course of our work, we discussed texts that deal on a conceptual level with intermediality as a research problem in media studies. All scholars whose texts we consulted observe that the term “intermediality” is used in various contexts, for various purposes and in different, even contradictory research designs. All authors agree that scholars therefore need to state their use of intermediality explicitly.

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<sup>1</sup> “It is not revolutionary to point out that early cinema operated intermediately. John Fullerton traces the emergence of intermediality as a subject of inquiry in early cinema studies to such early 1980s essays as Charles Musser’s 1984 work on the interrelation of early film with the magic lantern.” Andrew Shail, “Introduction. Intermediality: Disciplinary Flux Or Formalist Retrenchement?” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, No. 1 (February, 2010): 3-15, 4. Fullerton refers to Charles Musser, “Towards a History of Screen Practice” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9, No. 1 (1984): 59-73, 59.

<sup>2</sup> Colloquium “The Early Cinema Studies Colloquium”, Session III – see

<http://www.uu.nl/faculty/humanities/EN/project/nation-and-its-other/news-and-events/Pages/default.aspx> (07.02.2012)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.idehist.uu.se/mpk/programme.htm> (07.02.2012)

One of our observations is: even studies that aim to give an overview of various uses start from different questions, causing the definitions of intermediality to be hardly comparable. This incomparability is grounded in the different motivations to define intermediality: The goal of Irena Rajewksi is definitory, seeking to set up categories and subcategories of intermediality; Jürgen E. Müller and Chiel Kattenbelt want to overcome an – in their view – reductionist research perspective and address intermediality as a tool to describe complex phenomena more adequately. They start with a research problem and look for useful methods to solve it. Andrew Shail reverses this perspective and summarizes what is actually studied with regards to, and by means of, intermediality in studies of early popular visual culture. Employing a strategic approach, he explores the various research designs and discusses the usefulness of a concept from a disciplinary standpoint. Without summarizing their arguments in detail here, we would like to point out that even those who want to give a *general* overview are not answering the same question (such as “What is, actually, intermediality?”).

Despite these differences, there are some points the authors share, other than just the use of the term “intermediality”. They agree that one gateway for an imprecise use of “intermediality” and, consequently, fuzzy and in effect weak research, is grounded in the imprecise use of the same term for two fundamentally different research questions or starting points (especially Müller 1994, 119-138; Müller 2002; Shail 2010, 3-15; Rajewski 2005, 43-64). In the first research design, intermediality is used as a concept (term) to *describe* characteristics (and eventually functions) of media and their configuration. Here, the *object of research is the intermedial character itself*. The research question is “What are the qualities and characteristics of a medium, or a configuration of media, or a media landscape, what does it involve, what does it look like”? The second research design uses intermediality as a method (approach) to *explain* what the background of the studied topic is. Here, intermediality is used to answer any research question that is different from the one mentioned above – media or a media configuration are *not the object* of the research question, but a *means* to answer it. Intermediality in this sense is used in pragmatic and historical media studies; more often than not grounded in a semiotic framework. To further sharpen the argument: whereas

the first question asks “What is specific about a medium or a media configuration?” the second asks “What does a given configuration do?”

Without stating this explicitly, still relevant to our possible adaptations of intermediality in our research: Both starting points, we call them “intermediality-as-term” and “intermediality-as-concept”, use intermediality within synchronic research designs. For historic studies of how media came into being, how they were conceptualized, how and in what regard the function of a medium changed in a specific but changing medial and social configuration, Shail and Rajewsky refer to the concept of remediation as outlined by David J. Bolter and Richard A. Grusin (Bolter and Grusin 1999), and Kattenbelt introduces another concept, performativity, to enable himself to address these questions (Kattenbelt 2010, 29-37, especially 35).

## **1.2. Definitions without borders: Conceptualizing media for early cinema studies**

The question we need to answer for our projects that are not exclusively synchronic is: can intermediality serve as a useful tool within diachronic research designs, at least for the descriptive parts with regard to a media landscape? Being confronted with a configuration of emerging media, any concept must fulfill two requirements. First, it needs to clarify which relations or aspects are compared through the “inter”-lens. Second, it needs to define where the “inter” is located, taking into consideration that in the process of its emergence, the borders and the identity of the becoming medium are not yet clearly defined.

Does it really make sense, then, to address “the genealogical relations between media and the process by which new media are ‘born’” and “the processes that synthesize and resynthesize each medium as a popular agreement” – as Shail conceptualized the use of “intermediality” in diachronic research designs (Shail 2010, 7) – through the concept of “intermediality”? This skepticism is nourished when reading texts by scholars of media studies who stress the necessity to define media when talking about intermediality. Müller, for example, regrets that this is not always the case and consequently starts with a definition of media (Müller 1994, cf. especially 127).

Obviously, there is a tension between these requirements: whereas the first approach calls for a definition of media to start the study of intermediality, the second one uses intermediality as a tool to grasp a not yet definite mediascape. One example of each approach should suffice to outline the potential of each use of intermediality. First, a meta-theoretical text by Lars Elleström (Elleström 2010, 11-48) and second the concept of “cultural series” by early cinema scholar André Gaudreault (Gaudreault 2011).

### **1.3. From Intermediality to Inter-modality (Elleström)**

Lars Elleström, professor for comparative literary studies, developed a model in his text “The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations” that provided a good starting point for our exploration of intermediality. A particularly helpful observation of Elleström was that intermediality requires perceivable, clear-cut lines between media. As early cinema has not been a clearly defined, conceptualized unit at that time, one can indeed ask the question whether intermediality is a helpful term and tool to describe the media configuration in which the kinematograph emerged.

Elleström’s starting point is the observation (shared by Müller, see above) that intermediality often is studied without clarifying what a medium actually is: “Without a more precise understanding of what a medium is, however, one cannot expect to comprehend what intermediality is.” (Elleström 2010, 11)

Elleström then distinguishes analytically between “intermediality” and “inter-modality”: By replacing what would be named “media” in everyday use with the term “conceptual units”, he can look at characteristics of media (“conceptualized units”) more systematically. Radio or photography are thus not perceived as discrete entities but as a specific combination of different “modalities” (e.g. audio emission or visual emission; received in a determined or non-determined time span; media with material surfaces or projected media; modes of attribution of meaning). By comparing which *modality* they share, Elleström’s definition of categories and subcategories clarifies which aspects actually are compared and which relation actually is studied: Is the entity of two or more *media forms* compared – that would be intermediality – or are certain *characteristics* of two or more media compared (and if so: are those characteristics material, sensory or

cognitive) – that would be inter-modality. Making explicit what kind of relation one addresses in the name of “intermediality” decreases the chance for messy research results caused by imprecise formulated research questions, sloppy use of terminology or a comparison of elements that are not in the same category the comparison supposedly addresses.

Do these modalities offer a means to analyze the overlap between meanings expressed in different media or “conceptual units”? Does Elleström help us in analytical rigor when we examine the *function* of intermediality, and can we see how modalities of different conceptual units blend in practice? These questions will be addressed in the third part of this working paper (“Intermediality as re-mediation”).

#### **1.4. Intermediality as characteristic of emerging media (Gaudreault)**

In *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, Gaudreault uses the term “intermediality” to study the emerging phase of cinema – i.e. for him the time span before cinema was called “cinema”, and until it was perceived autonomously in relation to other media. Gaudreault looks at a new technology/medium from “the perspective of the other media and cultural spaces which initially welcomed the new technology into their orbit and to develop an approach founded on the very principle of intermediality” (Gaudreault 2011, 158). Gaudreault defines “intermediality” as a *principle*, i.e. an observable pattern, a descriptive category for structures and not as a method or as a tool. He cites a longer passage of cinema historian Rick Altman:

“[...] in the strong sense of the term, intermediality, to my mind, should *describe a historical stage*, a transitional state in the course of which a form in the process of becoming a full-fledged medium finds itself still torn between various existing media, to the extend that its own identity is not yet resolved.”

(Altman 1999, 37-53, 35 cited in Gaudreault 2011, 168. Emphasis added). This definition of intermediality relocates the “inter”: It is not about the “between” of two distinct media but about something that emerges in the space between the already institutionalized media which is not yet distinct. Gaudreault then introduces two “conceptual tools” to enable him to *understand the relations* of the stated intermediality, namely, “cultural paradigm” and “cultural series”, which he adapts for cinema studies from semiotician

Louis Francoeur (cf. Gaudreault 2011, 159). Whereas the “cultural paradigm” is a meta-system, containing various forms of signification, the “cultural series” are the forms of signification. As an example for a “cultural paradigm” Gaudreault gives “late nineteenth century stage entertainment” with the “cultural series” music hall, shadow plays, magic tricks, sketches and more (Gaudreault 2011, 159-160). Within the cultural series, different media forms and technologies can be used (e.g. magic tricks can appear in live-performance and on film).

The concept of cultural series is thus not situated on the same analytical level as practice, institution or genre and is constructed theoretically rather than reconstructed factually by the historian. In other words, “cultural series” provides an interpretative backdrop from which practices, institutions and genres are reconstructed. Put simply, looking at *relations* between cultural phenomena is a different perspective than *describing* phenomena.<sup>4</sup> One potential benefit of the concept of cultural series for our projects is its possibility to address a media environment without determining media – neither by the exact period of occurrence nor by one exclusive system (or in Gaudreault’s words: cultural paradigm) where a medium/technology appears.

Second, the concept of cultural series might prove useful for data collection: Everyday practices change, and they do it slowly, not in sudden ruptures. Cultural series can also be used to *describe* relations between different phenomena. Gaudreault explicitly states that he does not study *practices* (Gaudreault 2011, 162); we think that the concept of cultural series also allows understanding media in their performance situation. The concept of cultural series constructs the object of research analytically and thus enables us to position the described phenomena theoretically. Turning back to the phenomena, we can explain aspects such as *style* and *convention* of cultural practices with their intrinsic intermedial character. We will address this in part 2.

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<sup>4</sup> The concepts “cultural paradigm” and “cultural series” should also avoid describing phenomena and practices but look at the structures (cf. Gaudreault 2011, 162). If the opposition of phenomenology versus semiotics proves to be productive for our projects is beside the point here. We wish to note that this did not remain unchallenged – Chiel Kattenbelt explicitly wishes to bring both perspectives together by making the term “performativity” productive in his concept of intermediality (Kattenbelt, *Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity*, 29-37, especially 29).

## **1.5. Intermediary conclusion: Conceptualizing intermediality**

Before finally playing through what these thoughts can mean in research practice, we will sum up our findings.

- First, while studying the possible application of “intermediality”, all outcomes accentuate the material, technological and media side – thus questions about form. That is a clear difference to transmediality that is used to study imagery, content and content migration or the circulation of aspects of content in various media. An intermedial perspective offers one possibility to balance out transmediality’s emphasis on the imagery, to address the mutual dependency of technology and materiality of media as well as the aesthetics of the provided imagery.
- Second, intermediality can be used to address the question how *media culture* is experienced. Again, this is a promising perspective to complement the transmedially traced occurrence of imagery. Intermediality can help answer the question how media content is perceived if it is used to inquire about assumptions on their audiences that media (and especially mass media) carry in them. To do this, intermediality needs to address “the media” as part of the socio-cultural and not as distinct from it or as its context. Only then we can use intermediality in pragmatic studies as one element to address the performative dimension of cinema culture and to theorize spectatorship, experience and meaning. An example of this use of intermediality is discussed by Dafna Ruppin in part 2 “Intermediality and/as Transmediality”.
- Third, conceptualizations of intermediality that presuppose the different media as pure entities that are subsequently mixed need to be left aside for those addressing the hybrid in practice. After all, such clear-cut understandings of media build on a form of media literacy, for a comparison requires the perception of difference that is not always the case for the (historical) moments we study. To complicate things, intermediality in diachronic research designs also needs awareness of the fact that new and emerging media not only change the media landscape but also the role “old” media play. It needs to consider that a medium does not stay identical over time (e.g. the medium

“cinema” is quite a different one in the 1950s and nowadays).

- Fourth, intermediality may prove to be very useful when it comes to studying the specificity of media, as their specific aspects become more apparent by comparison. Another use of intermediality in this sense is to trace how media cite and echo previous mediations. Media (analogue to genres) can comment on each other’s level of authenticity. This finding needs to be linked back to questions of content and consumption: By expressing one experience in a medium that is usually consumed by upper or lower classes (and attributed with more or less prestige), an experience or content would get available for a new audience. In this kind of study, intermediality can contribute to trace the reference of one media in and to another. Klaas de Zwaan addresses this point in part 3 “Intermediality as re-mediation”.

In all cases, intermediality would neither offer an all-encompassing method and perspective nor an all-in-one-solution, but a very specialized tool to look at media dynamics from the angle of the (technological, material) medium in an environment of various media to address questions about relations among the various (technological, material) media. It is one necessary, but not sufficient tool to answer questions about the dynamic relation between the technological/material aspect of media, content, consumption, and perception. These questions can only be answered with the help of other concepts.

## **2. Intermediality and/as Transmediality: The Russo-Japanese War on Screen**

The examples that will discussed in this section initially seem to be rather transmedial phenomena than intermedial ones, if we think of the transmedial as “the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic or discourse across a variety of different media”, according to Rajewsky (Rajewsky 2005, 46). For her an example of the transmedial is “the aesthetic of futurism, which was realized in different media (text, painting, sculpture, etc.). The concrete realization of this aesthetic is in each case necessarily media-specific,

but *per se* it is nevertheless not bound to a specific medium. Rather, it is transmedially, i.e., available and realizable *across* media borders.” (*ibid.*) The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, which saw an Asian power defeating a European one for the first time in modern warfare, was mediated transmedially around the world: from newspaper reports accompanied by photographs and illustrations, through magic lantern slides and films (war re-enactments and actualities), to theatre performances and other stage arts.

Nevertheless, the representational *function* of these Russo-Japanese War films changes over time, according to their exhibition context. It therefore is useful to speak of Gaudreault’s “intermedial meshing”, with the cinematic medium borrowing from and at the same time referencing “other media and cultural spaces in vogue at the turn of the twentieth century”, as well as his distinction between “cultural series” as “the subsystems or forms of signification which make up the larger system, the ‘cultural paradigm.’” So, for example, the variety shows, magic lantern slides, shadow plays, pantomimes etc. make up the cultural paradigm of nineteenth century stage entertainment, while each signification system is itself a “cultural series”. It is the cinematic medium’s “multiple personality” at the time of its emergence and attempts to embed and establish itself as an institution which makes it susceptible to be attached at one moment in time, for instance, to one “cultural paradigm” – the journalistic, and to be later detached and re-assigned to another paradigm – that of entertainment. This paper will provide some examples of how the Russo-Japanese War was mediatized in the Netherlands and in the Dutch colonies in Indonesia. These should enable us to think about the intermedial potential of film images, as journalistic documents and later entertainment products. We will then move on to some thoughts about the exhibition context and conclude with the role of the exhibitor in negotiating early cinema’s intermediality and status as a medium. Turning now to some examples, about a month after the breakout of war, in the first week of March 1904, we find the following ads in newspapers in the Netherlands:

- Book ads for “The War in East-Asia: Russia and Japan” and “The Japanese People”.
- Screening of “Naval Battle between Russia and Japan over Port Arthur” at the Bioscope Tivoli Wintertuin in Rotterdam.

- The pantomime spectacle “The War between Russia and Japan” presented at the Circus Maximiliaan in Rotterdam.
- Caricature of the Russo-Japanese War: “Russia and the War”.

These examples, which appear just a month after the breakout of war, pick up the Russo-Japanese conflict as the hot topic of the day from newspaper headlines. “Naval Battle between Russia and Japan”, a Pathé film, is part of an on-going series of war re-enactments generally known as *Évènements russe-japonais*, were even filmed and set up in accordance with reports on the war in major French newspapers of the day (Bousquet 1993–1996). They are thus able to fulfill a journalistic function, at a time when there is a public craving for moving images of the war and yet no means of producing or receiving such documentation directly from the front.

I would argue that the Pathé films’ heavy reliance on the newspaper reports endows them with a certain truth-value and authenticity. Indeed, in the Netherlands at least, such films are not always perceived as “fakes” (cf. Bottomore 2007), and the cinema is praised for being up to date with events from the war. Through their stated intermediality, basing themselves on newspaper reports of the war, the re-enactments could overcome their “fake” status and gain recognition as true representations of news events.

Turning our attention now to the Dutch colonies in Indonesia, traveling showmen across the archipelago often offered what one journalist refers to as “war evenings” (*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 14.12.1904, 2). These were apparently especially popular among the native Indonesian and Chinese residents of the colonies, who were often recorded as cheering and applauding at the sight of Japanese victories on screen, though probably not because they were pro-Japanese. Surprisingly, findings so far suggest that there were in fact more films of the Russo-Japanese War distributed in the colonies than in the homeland. These included the Pathé films, on top of films from the Charles Urban Trading Company, the Biograph Company, Gaumont and even a Japanese cinematograph. Alongside these, pantomime acts, *tableaux vivants* and operettas with a Japanese theme were available at the time.

Reviews from the period in Dutch colonial newspapers indicate that the Russo-Japanese War films were appreciated for their topical relevance, and often also for their aesthetic quality. Most strikingly, in comparison with the Netherlands, the truthfulness of the representation was also praised, as in the case of the Joseph Rosenthal footage, the Urban cinematographer who was accompanying the Japanese, which were being shown in September 1905 in Batavia. The next day's review argues that these are "the most important images of the Russo-Japanese War that we have seen. This is nothing new, some may say; the hill climbing and fortification assaults etc. have been seen so often before. But the difference is that these images are real, that these are not play battles with extras dressed as Japanese, but the realities of the march of Russian prisoners who were captured in Port Arthur, the realities of the Japanese army arriving victorious at the fortress." (*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 11.09.1905) Of course, the review further claims, since these images were approved by the Japanese they tend to show strong Japanese soldiers as opposed to helpless Russian ones, but since the images are apparently taken from nature, their value should not be diminished by this fact.

To sum up so far, one could say that, as the battles were being waged, the Russo-Japanese War films were trying to attain a certain status of newsworthiness which they seem to have achieved in the Netherlands and in the Netherlands Indies. Alongside newspaper reports, photographs and other war illustrations, such topical war films served as "links in the chain of news reporting", as Luke McKernan has recently argued for early newsreels at the Girona Seminar 2011 dedicated to the Construction of News in early cinema. Nevertheless, 1905 was not the last time these films were screened, as we know they had a rather long shelf-life exceeding their topical newsworthiness. A 1904 installment from the Pathé series, for instance, was shown in China on July 19 1906. Mustafa Özen has found reference to a Russo-Japanese War film screened in Turkey as late as 1911 (Özen 2007, 153-54). And back in the Netherlands Indies, a newspaper report from Banda Aceh dated March 30 1907 recounts:

“There is a cinema here that is showing scenes from the Russo-Japanese War. For a few days, in order to add luster to the capture of Port Arthur, a few shots were fired behind the white screen on which the images are shown. It didn’t take much to create panic in the club, where officers’ wives became nervous and wanted to go home. The shooting during performances is now forbidden [...].”

(*Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 30.03.1907).

It is the exhibitor’s unconventional choice of performance of this Russo-Japanese War film that reinforces its intermedial potential, moving it from the realm of news reporting to the domain of “cinema of attractions”. In conclusion, one should add some remarks on the role of the exhibitor in negotiating the medium’s intermediality. For while a production company catalog may have included these films under the category or genre of Russo-Japanese War, sometimes alongside other views unrelated to the fighting, such as Japanese dancers or traditional sword-fighting, it was up to the exhibitor at the end of the day to decide how to frame these images in the cinema program, and which “cultural paradigm” was to be evoked. Furthermore, exhibitors in the Netherlands Indies seem to play a role in the early institutionalization of the cinematic medium – as a technical tool as well as an aesthetic one. The language of advertising of early cinema is revealing of exhibitor’s attempts to align themselves with the “cultural series” of other moving image displaying apparatuses of the day, at the same time as setting themselves apart and highlighting their special status. For instance, The American Animatograph, which advertises itself as the newest apparatus for presenting living pictures, absolutely without flickering, and as the winner in the field at the St. Louis World Fair. The Royal Bioscope, “the king of cinematographs, biographs, cinematoscopes, animatoscopes, etc. etc. etc.”, advertises that its shows are of the same genre as seen at London’s Alhambra Theatre. The Eastern Bioscope Company, “Pioneers of Animated Photography”, boasts of its equipment which is run fully on electricity. The Urban Bioscope, used in New York, London, Paris and all the big world cities, and therefore is undoubtedly the best in the field.

These are all arguments as to why the medium is technically qualified (and worthy of viewers’ time and money). Interestingly, they establish a certain status for the cinematic medium based on, a reputation that

cinema in the metropole at the time did not even dream of. Yet, soon after, exhibitors also start arguing about what qualifies as suitable cinematic content, setting out the rules of proper screenings. In June 1906, the Royal Bioscope returns to the Indies and, in the face of fierce competition from another operator, Royal Vio, posts the following advertisement: “This cinema will soon give a series of new films, which in large part are based on reality, unlike other cinemas whose films always come out of the same production company and in which the same faces continually appear.” In another ad a few days later, after some banter back and forth, it claims its shows have enjoyed a great reputation in Surabaya, Semarang, Djocja[karta] and Buitenzorg (contemporary Bogor) as not only enjoyable but also educational. They are better and more realistic than the fantastical Pathé films (or as they refer to them, the films with the so-called “Rooster” logo), and that its ever-changing program does not include any previously seen films or re-titling of a pre-shown film, unless otherwise requested by the public. The same day and in an adjacent ad, Royal Vio insists in response that its shows are diversified, and that films are only repeated in order to allow more viewers to see them and this is always announced in advance in their program. In an advertisement of their last screening, Royal Vio offers visitors 2 bioscope photos as souvenir, thanking the people of Batavia for attending their shows despite the vilifying advertisements by its competitor who will follow in the same screening hall. They invite visitors to attend the new shows and make the comparisons themselves, confident of the result from their previous experiences from Buitenzorg.

Addressing these findings through the concept of “intermediality” provokes a re-thinking of assumptions largely shared among scholars of early cinema studies. Thus, finally, while it is often thought that early cinema (in 1905) was not yet an institutionalized medium, but rather one of many popular visual phenomena of the period still seeking its embeddings, could it be that it was already a fully-fledged institution, at least by perception, in the colonies? What could this mean for our periodization of cinema history? And how does this change our perceptions of the geography of cinema?

### **3. Intermediality as re-mediation: Appropriative, critical and formal functions of intermediality. Media expressions of the Dutch neutrality policy in World War I**

With regard to early cinema studies, the concept of intermediality usually refers to the hybrid identity of moving images not yet institutionalized as being “cinema”. The “early”, from this perspective, refers to the multiple ways in which cinema is understood in terms of other media – lantern slides or theater for example – in its pre-institutional state, lacking a recognized status as an autonomous medium.

A very relevant aspect of intermediality – an aspect that is rarely addressed – is its *functioning*. What are the functions of intermediality – or what could they have been? In what ways were intermedial (b)lending practices intentionally used as a representational strategy designed for shaping audience perceptions?

The (b) in blending is bracketed, to make clear that intermediality is to be understood in terms of mixing and borrowing. To illustrate this point further, we will not only demonstrate how the cinematic medium borrows from other media – as far as this research is concerned – but also point out how other media thrive on the conventional stylistic schemes of the institutionalized cinema. In conclusion, some functional categories of intermediality will be suggested.

#### **3.1. Remediation of performance. Appropriative intermediality in *The Army and Navy film***

The first example is the opening scene of the first Dutch feature-length propaganda film, called the *Army and Navy Film*. This film, released in January 1917, was shot by the Dutch cameraman and film entrepreneur Willy Mullens and was designed as counter-propaganda for the famous British propaganda film *The Battle of the Somme* from 1916.



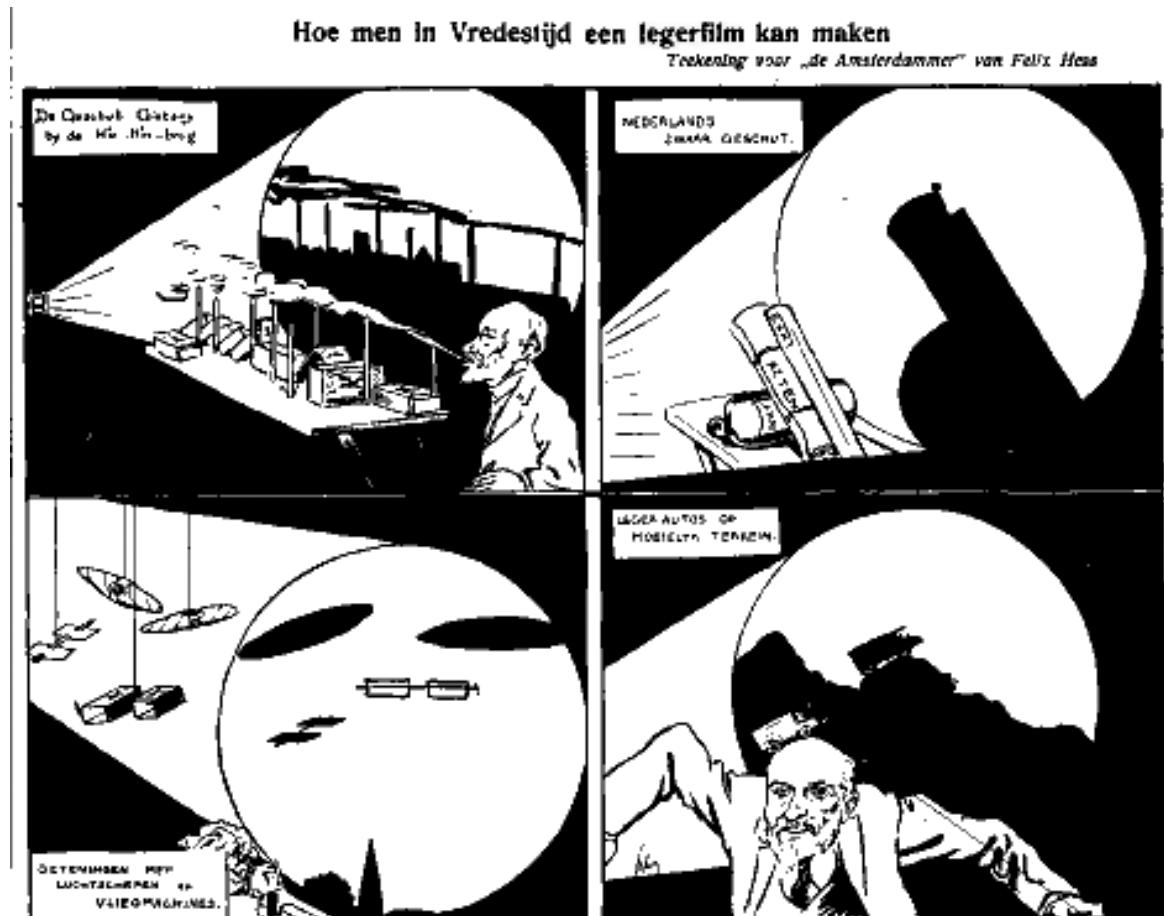
Film Still: *Holland Neutraal* (*The Army and Navy Film*)

*The Army and Navy Film* was intended as propaganda for neutrality politics, showcasing the army's strength, preparedness and willingness to defend the nation's sovereignty at all costs. This propagandistic message is symbolically highlighted in the first scene, which pictures soldiers running down from the dunes, forming the words "Holland Neutraal" (Holland Neutral) with their own bodies. What has this got to do with intermediality? How could this scene be called intermedial?

If we would allow ourselves to treat remediation as a form of intermediality, the question rises how this scene borrows from other medial configurations. This scene explicitly does. In foregrounding the propagandistic meaning of the film, Mullens "lends" from other representational practices. What seems to be a director's gimmick is in fact a remediation of open-air public propaganda manifestations. By 1917, it had become customary to visualize the nation's strength by showcasing army exercises in public, usually in a sports arena. These so-called army days were well-planned propaganda performances with their own conventional narratives, drawing on the physical presence, their liveness, of military personnel. During the army days the alleged discipline and fitness of the soldiers functions as a *paris pro toto* for the entire army. A conventional way of stressing this was to form words with bodies, in the same manner as this opening scene depicts. *The Army and Navy Film* is, in fact, a cinematic remediation of these public propaganda manifestations. What the film adds, is a closer spectatorial perspective and the showing of military exercises *in situ*, what it lacks, is the sensation of live witnessing, but it basically draws on existing

representational practices to establish a propagandistic narrative, using its materiality of the body to display symbolic messages. Trying to establish a propagandistic narrative that could be recognized as such, Mullens drew on the dramaturgy of the so-called “army days” and *remediated* the orchestrated bodily performance. In this case, an intermedial perspective could reveal how medial forms influence each other – in ways that are not always evident.

### 3.2. Example: remediation as comment on form. Oppositional intermediality in “How to make a war film in times of peace”



“How to make a war film in times of peace” *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 24.02.1917

A second example we would like to address is this strip-like cartoon, which appeared in *De Groene*

*Amsterdammer*, an opinion magazine that comments on the *Army and Navy Film*. The protagonist in this cartoon is the Dutch prime-minister Cort van der Linden, who in this cartoon is immediately held responsible for the making of the film. We see the prime-minister faking scenes, making use of his cigar, for example, to conjure up the illusion of smoking munitions factories and flying zeppelins. What is truly at stake here, of course, is the gross exaggeration of the army's capabilities. *The Army and Navy Film* is not what it appears to be – that's the “preferred meaning” the cartoon gets across. Here, intermediality is found in the referencing of formal cinematic similarities within a strip format. The cartoon not only represents the *faking* of film scenes, it actually mimics cinematic framing and montage movement by means of its strip-like character. In so doing, it presupposes a lack in media literacy of cinema audiences, suggestively not being able to evaluate the manipulative essence of cinematic representation. It is a clear example of one qualified medium referencing the other, the written press commenting on the mediality of the cinema, and the alleged authenticity of non-fiction material in particular. In response to the dominant discourse of non-fiction film's alleged epistemological superiority and “objectivity”, this cartoon foregrounds a critical awareness towards film's alleged truthful and non-political nature. It does so in treating cinema as a medium that is manipulative in essence, in clear contrast to the non-conceiving nature of the written word (or so seems to be suggested). This is all the more revealing, given the rise of a journalistic discourse *on* film in the 1910s that rivals the written press as a trustworthy, journalistic institution. By evoking the medial similarities between the cartoon and the cinema, their “flatness” – in a literal and figural sense – and subjectivity are regarded as two sides of the same coin.

This small example might point at ways in which intermediality is used to stress similarities between media, or ways in which certain media are treated as essentially different, as the medial Other.

### **3.3. Remediation of experience/remediation through imitation. Poetical intermediality in *Het verhaal van den Provinciaal* (The Story of the Provincial)**

We would like to push this idea of medial comparison a bit further through a third example, which is a

poem titled *Het verhaal van den Provinciaal* (Van Looy, 1981 [1917], 34). Only one verse is translated here – an almost impossible endeavor. The “I” in this poem is a man from the provinces – a provincial – who goes to town and visits a cinema hall. The film he watches can easily be identified as the *Battle of the Somme*, the British propaganda film mentioned earlier, and the poem mediates the protagonist’s experience in watching this particular film.

### **Het verhaal van den Provinciaal**

Kolonne-lange kudden  
Gemobiliseerden maarcheerden door het ruim,  
Zonder glorie of pluim  
En zonder marketensters,  
Zonder te blikken naar vensters,  
Ze beenden fel  
En groeide snel ...  
Ik zag hun hurken gaan en eten gaan uit blikken,  
Ik zag de bajonets op de geweren prikken...  
Er kwamen telkens woorden op het bord,  
In spiegelschrift en dikwijls schoot de laatste zin  
te kort.  
Het leek bijwijlen een gecensureerde brief;  
En aldus zag ik de voorbereidselen van het  
groote offensief  
Aan de Somme [...]

### **The Story of the Provincial**

Convoy-long hords of  
Mobilized men marched into the open,  
Without glory or praise  
And without ‘washing ladies’  
Not looking at the frame  
They marched fiercely  
And grew fast ...  
I saw them kneeling, eating out of cans,  
I saw them fixing the bayonets on their rifles,  
And every time words appeared on the screen  
In mirror writing - often the last sentence was  
lost.  
It seemed like a censored letter;  
And so I saw the preparations of the great  
offensive  
At the Somme [...]

*The Story of the Provincial* could be called an *ekphrasis* of the *Battle of the Somme*: it is a depiction of another medium by mimicking its stylistic features and formal qualities. In this sense, the cartoon could be called an *ekphrasis* as well, where the cinematic experience is translated into a poetic experience. The short staccato sentences mimic montage while the continuous flow of perceptions resembles a “bombardment of images”. Van Looy uses the sensorial and spatio-temporal modalities of cinema in writing “attractional poetry”: a poetry based on the Eisensteinian notion of the attraction as an emotional shock principle *avant la lettre*. In describing the visual sensation of the cinema, the stimuli overflow of the cinematic experience and its uncanny nature, the author attributes an *ostrannenie* effect to cinema: a term proposed by the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky that, as Annie van den Oever has recently pointed out, “proclaims a revolutionary shift in the way art should be studied: *from the perspective of techniques and their perceptual impact, and not as a form to be interpreted.*” (van den Oever 2012, 33-59). Within this perspective, the concept *ostrannenie* refers to the making strange of reality, a defamiliarization of conventional ways of beholding reality. As described by Van Looy, the cinematic screening of the *Battle of the Somme* mashes up fragments of war, cutting through time and space with no chronological order or narrative logic, intersected by moving maps and wrongly projected intertitles (the protagonist mentions their occasional upside-down appearance), all within a singular frame, accompanied by music and the disturbing presence of a fellow audience.

It is this fundamental perceptual complexity of cinema (or rather: the cinematic *dispositif*) that is responsible for its *estranging effect* that triggers the fascination of the poet and leads him to reflect on the meaning of war, or, more precisely, its fundamental lack. Endowing the cinematic experience with art-like qualities, the poem diminishes a clear distinction of high and low culture, incorporating elements of popular culture into the higher ground of poetry by using formal features of the cinema. This is all the more true, if we consider the fact that the poem was published in a literary magazine entirely devoted to literature. The function of intermediality in this poetic case points to the discourses of cultural respectability surrounding the felt hierarchy between different media.

In these examples, remediation of the same content into another medium can be observed. This, however, is not a satisfying statement, as these remediations serve different functions. In order to use remediation as analytical tool for this research, it needs to be refined. As work-in-progress concepts, one could propose the terms explanatory, critical and poetic intermediality.

- **Explanatory (appropriative) intermediality** uses existing representational strategies and draws upon established conventions. It appropriates from one sign system what is lacking in its own sign system. It uses medial foreknowledge in creating new horizons of expectation.
- **Critical (oppositional) intermediality** refers to the ways intermediality *uses* to question the conventionality of media. It negotiates the status of a medium and is adequacy (or not) to communicate a certain content. Critical intermediality will show in what ways particular institutional media function as a qualified Other.
- **Poetical (formal) intermediality** comments on the cultural respectability of the medium it borrows from. By appropriating formal aspects of other media, it legitimizes its qualification as a medium, or as an object of art. Through remediation, the audience sees a conventional medium content in an unfamiliar way.

These, of course, are by no means clear-cut, unproblematic categories, and one could no doubt come up with more. Whatever the objections, it is crucial to think of intermediality in terms of its strategic functioning, if one would address the question how and what role intermediality plays in the cultural process of mediality and meaning-making.

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