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## 29 Intermediality and Performance Art

**Abstract:** Intermedial interaction among various media or sign systems has always existed in most cultures, but since performance art is a relatively new phenomenon, this chapter focuses on the relationship between intermediality and performance art. With the increasingly frequent use of sophisticated digital technologies in multimedia performance, the question regarding what happens when several media interact in performance art has become a pressing one. What is the relationship between intermediality, performance and performativity in multimedia art forms? How does the sense of openness and of unravelling of the source or pre-text translate into the intermedial adaptation that a performance involves? This chapter discusses issues of semiotics, performativity and self-reference in relation to intermediality. For its application of these theoretical concerns, it will use Laurie Anderson, the American performance artist, whose large and complex multimedia productions have not only revolutionised the art form, but also offer interesting insights into the adaptation of the intersection of narrative, visual, musical and gestural source texts mediated by new technologies and the performing arts. In particular, Anderson's "O Superman" from her groundbreaking performance *United States* (1980) will allow us to discuss the close relationship between intermediality and performance art.

**Key Terms:** Intermediality, performance art, performativity, self-reference, self-reflexivity, multimedia, Laurie Anderson

### 1 Intermediality and Performance Art

Intermediality has become intrinsic to performance art in which diverse media and art forms intermingle or even stage hybrid genres such as the media and digital arts by drawing attention to a particular medium's specificity. A fairly new phenomenon compared to the other arts, performance art is today as omnipresent and complex as any other art form. It started out as an experimental artistic event in the form of cabaret performances by the European avant-garde in the early twentieth century, when the Futurist manifestos by Marinetti and Boccioni or the Dada exhibitions took place by and for artists in a limited artistic community (cf. Carlson 2006). In the early 1960s, however, it emerged as a popular live art form used to bundle the various forms of live events that were taking place across diverse disciplines such as literature, poetry, theatre (↗28 Contemporary British Theatre and Intermediality), music,

dance, architecture and painting, often combining various media such as film, video, photography, and slide projection, making it inherently intermedial.

## 1.1 Defining an Art Practice

A performance, as conceptualised in performance studies, can range from the most highly elaborated artistic activity to minimalist events such as a sporting contest or a veteran's parade to an informal gathering. In performance art, the key medium is the artist's body and the work of art is what the performance produces through the live actions s/he performs. However, it mostly involves some kind of staging and, as earlier mentioned, interaction with various media such as film, video, photography, slide projection, digital arts or digital technologies in some form, which accounts for its intermedial character. Due to this, a precise definition of performance art has proved difficult to provide. The *OED* defines it as an "art form that combines visual art with dramatic performance", *Macmillan Dictionary* presents it as "a type of art in which an artist gives a performance using different art forms such as acting, dance, and painting" and *Merriam Webster* calls it "a type of art that is created in front of or presented to an audience by the artist". MoMA, the New York Museum of Modern Art, uses Roselee Goldberg's description of performance art as "'live' presentations by artists" (Goldberg 2004). What these various definitions have in common, however, is that they designate the genre as a combination of different art forms presented live in front of an audience. Performance art shares these characteristics with theatre, musical performances and opera.

In addition, there are local differences in the use of the term. In Great Britain, the expression "live art" is used together for both performance art and "time-based art". In Australia, by contrast, "performance" indicates work in the theatre tradition and "performance art" denotes performances by artists with "bona fide art-school diplomas" (Goldberg 2004, 12). Hence, performance art is an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie 1964, qtd. in Strine, Long, and Hopkins 1990, 183, and Carlson 2006, 2), "a complex and constantly shifting field in its own right" (Carlson 2006, 2), made even more complex because of its entanglement with ideas of performance from other areas and with contemporary intellectual, cultural and social currents. Here we find, for example, the quest for contemporary subjectivity and identity, the eternal question of the relationship between art and power, as well as issues of gender, race, and ethnicity, just to mention some of its most prominent characteristics (cf. Carlson 2006, 6).

*Early Beginnings – Conceptual Art:* From the time of its inception, performance art has been closely if also ambiguously related to *conceptual art*. While the term was coined by Edward Kienholz (*Merriam Webster*), the concept has been traced back to Marcel Duchamps' 1913 definition of the artist as "one who selects material or experi-

ence for aesthetic consideration rather than forming something from the traditional raw materials of art” (cf. Carlson 2006, 111). Furthermore, the notion that art should examine its own nature developed in the 1960s. Creating a new work from something already existing rather than using raw materials, so-called “ready-mades” of ordinary objects or real life activities called attention not only to the creative process itself but also to the materials used and often staged, as in e.g., Jasper Johns’ collages or David Hockney’s early photo montages. Other examples are the intermedia or even multimedia aspects in the mixed media abstract art by Judy Pfaff, or the works by Christo who extended concept art to include natural and human environments, wrapping objects such as coastlines, rivers or trees for his political or social statements. Over time, the interest in perception and in the creative process itself began to include everyday activities that also involved the body as a ‘made’ or constructed part of the environment. Among these are, e.g., Kaprow’s happenings, the anti-elitist large-scale photoworks by Gilbert & George, and Joseph Beuys’ multifaceted and multimedia art which included happening and performance art, sculptures, installations, graphic art as well as art theory and art pedagogy.

*Body Art:* In performance art, the artist’s body, bodily processes and spatial environments as well as bodily interactions with various media became the focus of attention. Among early examples of this are, e.g., Yves Klein’s “body paintings” in France in the 1960s. Three women covered each other’s bodies with paint, which then served as ‘stamps’ for a colour print on large-size paper. Simultaneously, Klein, dressed as a conductor, directed musicians in his single note *Monotone Symphony*. Gilbert & George’s “living statues” in Britain document further sources. In Germany, performances such as Joseph Beuys’ *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) ironically commented on the difficulty of aesthetic communication with his head coated in honey, covered in gold leaves.

In the U.S.A., the trend first caught on in the 1970s in New York and California where *body art* became the most common term for this kind of performance art (cf. Carlson 2006, 111). Bruce Naumann, allegedly inspired by Duchamp, pioneered body art, making videotapes of body parts or manipulating them, later involving participants performing to closely controlled prescriptive gestures or actions. As has been pointed out by several critics (cf. Anderson 2004; Carlson 2006; Goldberg 2004; Jackson 2004), almost all art forms of action and activity during the 1970s were explored by performance artists as artistic provocations, happenings, art workshops, or real-time activities such as walking, sleeping, eating or drinking, emphasising the open-endedness of an art form that seemed to defy definition.

*Performance Art:* This live art form was termed ‘performance art’ as its American practitioners were looking for a way to refer to and describe the many live events taking place at that time. As Laurie Carlos, one of its practitioners, expresses it, “[p]erformance art was the one place where there were so few definitions” (qtd. in Gold-

berg 2004, 9). Since then, performance art has broadened to comprise a wide-ranging spectrum of practices including social activities that range from sporting contests or even parades to spontaneous gatherings of young people to stage street parties (cf. Goldberg 2000; Carlsson 2006; McAuley 2008).

In recent art and media theory, interest has increasingly focused on the intermedial relationships that have become typical of performance art. Despite arguments to the contrary that performance art was more “body oriented” and that “more complex, technologically innovative” performance art is more typical of the 1990s (Spackman 2000, 5), ‘body artists’ already made use of such technologically innovative and sophisticated work in the 1960s and 1970s (Carlson 2006, 133). As digital technologies became increasingly more easily available, multimedia techniques became more essential to experimental groups (Wooster Group, Builder’s Project), avant-garde theatre (Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage) and mainstream theatre or stadium productions, such as rock operas (The Who’s *Tommy*, Frank Zappa’s *Joe’s Garage*), among many others.

*New Media:* The interaction between performance art and cybertechnology has opened new fields of innovative investigation for artists as it makes possible the exploration of the body in cyberspace (cf. Ascott 1999; Santaella 2003; Ljungberg 2006; Nöth 2006). Those working in digital media in particular have been insistently interrogating the consequences and the potential of such intermeshing processes. Artists have readily seized the opportunity to both thematise and realise what these new techno-social cyber environments *mean* and what positions and perspectives they create, not least by attempting to blur the boundaries between subject and object by mapping their bodies into cyberspace as an expansive and dynamic field.

This shifts the attention from the individual body to complex human technology interfaces within collective infrastructures. The resulting interactivity indicates “a new understanding of environments of relations / responsibility and a relational aesthetics based on interhuman exchange or physical interaction as well as a new technological kinesthetics” (Birringer 2006, 300). Scrutinising body interiors, Mona Hatoum’s *Corps étranger* (1994) challenges body boundaries by turning her body’s inside into an outside, making the spectator both subject and object, both penetrator and engulfed. The Australian performance artist Stelarc, claiming that the body is ‘obsolete’ (cf. Stelarc 2008) as well as redesigning it to be plugged into the Internet, was one of the first to engage with these technological kinesthetics and thus opening a productive dialogue between corporeality and cybernetics (cf. Ljungberg 2006).

## 1.2 “Border Talks” – Semiotic Interaction

The increasingly sophisticated and innovative use of digital technologies in multimedia performance raises the question as to what actually happens when several

media interact in performance art. According to the results of intermediality research, it involves the issue of which intermedial strategies are used to negotiate the “border talks” (Rajewsky 2010) taking place between the various media. According to Rajewsky, intermediality can thus be perceived as the study of:

- (1) medial transformation such as film adaptations of literary texts, novelizations, etc;
- (2) media combination such as opera, film, theatre, illuminated manuscripts, computer or Sound Art installations, comics, or multimedia, mixed media, and inter-media;
- (3) intermedial references such as a literary text referring to a specific film, film genre or film as medium, or in a film to painting, a painting to photography, or ekphrasis (cf. Rajewsky 2010, 55).

But what is a ‘medium’ and how do we account for the media specificity involved in multimedia performance when several media are involved? In a technical or material sense, a ‘medium’ can be described as the channel enabling communication between a sender and a receiver. In its broader semiotic sense, the sign itself functions as a medium (Peirce 1998, 477). A sign is anything that stands for (represents) something, called its object, to generate another sign as its interpretant. According to this definition, the *sign is itself* a mediator or medium, acting as a translator between its object and its so-called interpretant, which is the result or the *effect* of its interpretation (cf. Colapietro 1993). It initiates a process which makes it interact relationally or *functionally* with its object. This also pertains to a performance, since signs have neither to be material objects nor a class of objects: They exist in the mind of their interpreters, in other words, they have a cognitive effect on their interpreters (cf. Nöth 1990, 42).

What is also crucial in this respect is that the media involved in multimedia performance art belong to different sign systems – music, gesture, film/video, and verbal language. Semiotics, the general study of signs and sign systems, offers a useful framework for analysis here. It broadens the scope from a more narrow focus to a wider range of how a particular sign system converges with many other types and modalities of signs. Sign systems foreground different sign aspects, the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic, which concern the relation between a sign and its object. Icons are signs that resemble the object they represent. However, they can also be iconic because of the qualities that they possess themselves intrinsically. This allows them to create a world of their own, like music, which does not need much reference to the actual life-world but comes to us in the form of a mere quality. The same goes for digital media, which consist of numerically translated information without any direct relationship with the life-world, creating a virtual world of its own.

Indices are signs that are *causally linked* or *factually related* to their object, for example, by pointing (“There!”) or in a cause-effect relation as smoke to fire and photographic images. In the case of photography and film, the factual linkage is due to their mode of production since they record light reflected by their objects and background.

Photographic recording is either done on film or converted to electronic signals in the sensor, which makes them *predominantly* indexical – despite their strong iconic traits since they look *like* their objects. Symbols are typically conventional or habitual as well as socially ‘legislated’ signs. This is where we find painting to be predominantly symbolic, insofar as it adheres to the styles and cultural (and ideological) conventions dominant in the period in which it is executed or used. Thus there are no ‘pure’ sign forms, there are no ‘purely’ visual, verbal or aural media or, in W. J. T. Mitchell’s words, “*all media are mixed media*” (Mitchell 2005, 258; Ljungberg 2010, 84).

It is when various sign *systems* interact that we encounter the phenomenon of intermediality. Intermediality concerns the negotiations of the various media borders in the process of media transformations. Such instances of intermediality are radically performative, as we are confronted with hybrid forms that generate something new and unique. Since they focus attention both on their own mode of production and on their own semiotic specificity, they are also strongly self-reflexive, and their self-reflexivity is heightened by the increasing digitalisation of interacting media. Hence, they constitute a highly effective communication strategy: they give viewers/listeners access to different levels of meaning (cf. Ljungberg 2010, 88).

### 1.3 The Performative Elements in Intermediality and Performance Art

Negotiations between hybrid media forms involve performativity in the sense that, within our cultural life, performative utterances and acts bring something new into being. This intermediality already demonstrates how a seemingly simple transgression is inherently performative, since it creates something new and unprecedented at the same time as one medium is reflected in another. Thus, performative acts are acts that are neither true nor false since the reality to which they refer is *only* created by the statements being uttered. For instance, when a writer – or a performer – presents a fictional narrative as real, this is a reality only created by its very presentation (cf. Loxley 2007). The effect becomes intensified in a performance which is an event that does not exist on its own, but only in the creative activity of the performer and as experienced by the viewers/listeners (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2004, 13). This releases a transformative potential based on a shared cultural understanding as well as a cultural – and appropriate – context (cf. Bal 2002, 176), which enables it to constitute a reality. Other contributing factors are the rituals and practices linked with attending a performance (noting the time of performance, going to the location and entering the building, buying and showing the ticket, occupying one’s seat, cf. Schechner 2006, 189).

In intermedial art forms such as multimedia, these relationships become radicalised. The various media are not just layered one on top of the other, or juxtaposed but interact and transform each other, often “remediating” one another (Bolter and

Grusin 2002). This process does not take away any of a medium's particular characteristics, its 'specificity' as it were. Moreover, it enables media mixtures and innovations as well as the transformations of old media by means of new media. It creates new varieties and new diversities: "If all media are mixed media, they are not all mixed in the same way, with the same proportions of elements" (Mitchell 2005, 260). That may explain why the performative effect of intermediality has become increasingly dominant in performance art. The incorporation of digital processing in a performance not only changes experiential aspects of it effectively, but it also transforms contexts and forms (Yap 2009, 161). This process also affects the reception of a performance. Digital technologies with live bodies on stage create an "effect performed in-between mediality, supplying multiple perspectives, and foregrounding the making of meaning rather than obediently transmitting meaning" (Boenisch 2006, 103). The complexity of the performance and the individual gaps produced by the spectators' subjectivities create a broad spectrum of experience, which points to the inherently indeterminate character of performance.

#### 1.4 Self-referentiality

Intermediality in performance art is, therefore, both a technological and a performative phenomenon. Intermedial relationships in performance art also display high degrees of self-referentiality or self-reflexivity. Iconic self-reference is typical of the aesthetic sign, since one of its characteristics is that it calls attention to diverse aspects of itself, above all its sensuous qualities and formal structures, its actual materiality and its rhetorical strategies. Self-referentiality can thus be understood in terms of iconicity (at least in part), insofar as all iconic signs are self-referential. This could appear paradoxical since a sign should really stand for or represent something else. In Peircean semiotics, however, the sign's referent can be another sign, and self-reference can be a chain of signs referring to other signs (cf. Nöth 2007, 19).

Self-reference therefore contributes to the radicalisation of the performative aspects of contemporary performance art because it "reinforce[s] the materiality or expressive qualities of the aesthetic utterance, emphasize[s] the situation as a staging and world-making event taking place in the presence of the here and now, and intensif[ies] the aesthetic experience as an embodied experience" (Kattenbelt 2010, 33). A performance always reflects on itself, its meaning and its aesthetic situation. This is part of the aesthetic experience as well as being an intrinsic component in both artistic production and reception. When an artwork reflects on its meaning, or on what it represents or how it does it, it is *semantically self-reflexive*, i.e., reflecting on "the reality, fictionality, or probability (verisimilitude) of what a work of art shows or tells about" (Nöth 2014, 447). When it concerns "the aesthetic involvement of the author, the narrator, the actor, the reader, or the spectator" it is *pragmatically self-reflexive* (Nöth 2014, 447). An intermedial or multimedial performance is paradigmatic-

cally self-reflexive insofar as the switching between or among various media forces its viewers or, rather, participating audience, to make comparisons. It also exposes the particularities of the various semiotic systems that each medium embodies. Such performances also frequently involve intertextuality in the form of repetitions of and references to the performing artist's earlier performances or to other works in the *same* genre. Examples are, e.g., texts alluding to other texts, music recalling other pieces of music, visuals reminding viewers of other visuals; such quotations are self-referential, especially when digitised or originating from software (cf. Nöth 2002; Nöth and Bishara 2007, 3; Ljungberg 2007, 294).

## 2 Intermediality in Laurie Anderson's Multimedia Performance Art

Laurie Anderson's innovative and radical multimedia performance art is an illuminating example of the genre's intermedial transformations. As one of today's premier performance artists, she has cast herself in roles as varied as visual artist, composer, poet, photographer, filmmaker, electronics whiz, vocalist and instrumentalist. Her large and complex multimedia productions have not only revolutionised the art form but her intelligent and innovative performances also testify to her interdisciplinary knowledge and creative capacity in the fields of literature, film, art and music. Anderson's performances pluck components from various genres of cultural performance such as theatre, ritual, dance, music, popular entertainment and sport, which she mingles with autobiographical references, everyday life events and media culture. She has also pioneered the use of multimedia in performance, not least with her self-invented electronic gadgets: the Talking Stick, her self-playing violin and her custom-built vocoder, among other things. With all of these aspects and innovations, her ability to transgress the cleft between high and low culture, between avant-garde and mainstream culture, becomes even more pronounced.

All this was probably the reason for the success of Anderson's performance *United States* in 1980, which catapulted performance art into cultural consciousness, introducing a degree of sophistication and style it had so far been lacking. Her groundbreaking performance was a "portrait of the country", as she has said in an interview (Prasad 1990). A good seven hours long, it combined stories, songs, films, slide projection as well as an extraordinary percussion solo performed on Anderson's wired skull, which turned her body into a musical instrument. Over the next few years, Anderson added thousands of slides, short film clips and projections devices, collected further material and developed new gadgets such as her fake hologram projecting a room hovering in mid-air (Goldberg 2000, 57). The work was performed in its entirety four times, in New York, San Francisco, London and Zurich, each performance lasting roughly eight hours. Later, the performance was recorded and adapted

to fit the consumer TV screen's small scale for her first music video. Here, she used close-up shots and exaggerated silhouettes of her shadow-puppet hands, which illuminated her glowing face by means of a small pillow speaker inside her mouth. A pre-recorded violin solo emanated from it, which she modulated with her lips, while her skull was all wired for the famous percussion solo performed on it.

In addition, the signature song, "O Superman", added a year after the initial performance (1981), opened up the music world for Anderson and led to collaborations with Peter Gabriel and Brian Eno. It is also one of the "strangest records to make number 2 on the UK [Singles] Charts" (cf. BBC) in 1981. Whereas the song's title was inspired by Jules Massenet's opera *Le Cid*, its lyrics confronted crucial contemporary issues. Anderson had heard the American tenor Charles Holland singing the aria "O Souverain" from the opera, which made a deep impression on her both musically and thematically. Rewriting Massenet's piece – which is a prayer for a knight on the eve of a hopeless battle – into her own, more ominous, late twentieth-century version, her use of electronics suggests the extent to which technology obstructs rather than facilitates the communication of emotions. It begins as a phone conversation between the speaker and a mysterious voice, which first leaves a message claiming to be the narrator's mother but, upon receiving no response, reveals itself as someone who the narrator "doesn't know" but "who knows" the narrator. The narrator finally responds, asking: "Who is this really?" The song's ironic twist, alluding to the naïve belief of American self-reliance, becomes particularly obvious in its last part: "'Cause when love is gone, there's always justice / And when justice is gone, there's always force / And when force is gone, there's always Mom – Hi Mom!" (Anderson 2007, n. pag.). Addressing the "pillars of the American dream" (Goldberg 2000, 90) – Superman, Mom and Dad, justice and the army – in a world of technological alienation, God – the 'sovereign' in Massenet's aria – has been replaced by a cartoon character (722 Comics and Graphic Novels) from outer space and communication takes place via answering machines, with legal as well as armed violence coming to the fore when the machines break down.

The sophisticated interplay among the visual, the vocal and the gestural in Anderson's performance is highlighted by the complex interaction generated by various digital media. Her impressive artistic arsenal comprises shadow play, microphone, sound editor, animation, projection, video as well as Anderson's own bodily and vocal performance. The text is half spoken, half sung through a vocoder, one of her own electronic inventions, by means of which she can distort and 'technologise' her voice against a musical background formed by two harmonising chords repeating the syllable "Ha", with occasional bird tweets throughout and with a saxophone track at the end. In addition, there is a video projection of Anderson in a white coat, white sunglasses and white gloves, signing the same text in ASL, American Sign Language.

What is particularly striking is the way Anderson deals with the pre-'texts' or source texts derived from the various media with which she dialogues throughout her performances. This necessarily involves some kind of adaptation and translation of

its pre-‘texts’ or source texts, as in every new staging of a play, or any other work of art. Such processes also always require interpretation, which makes them at the same time similar and dissimilar, but *never identical*, to their pre-texts. Each performance takes place at a specific historical and cultural moment. It is also produced according to media-specific rules (language, screen play, film or new medium format). Hence, it depends on a wide array of cultural practices, which will necessarily be influenced by a contemporary context as well as conditions of production and reception. This is even more so in multimedia art, which concerns the transformation and juxtaposition of several media in order to create the work of art. How can we account for these pre-texts? How important is an analysis of these processes for the understanding of Anderson’s multimedia performance which thus concerns adapting a highly complex intersection of narrative, visual, musical and gestural ‘pre-texts’ mediated by new technologies and performance art? Such an undertaking would seem to call for a theorising of the performative effect of the intermedial and intertextual processes involved.

Anderson’s performance illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing among the various modalities of intermediality in order to make a more specific definition of this relationship since, as in this case, as a live performance, it can “only partly be described as a fixed set of media relations” (Elleström 2010, 29). Using a broad definition of intermediality as a flexible genre “that can be applied, in a broad sense, to *any* phenomenon involving more than one medium” (Wolf 1999, 36) does not seem particularly useful in this context. That it is a “media combination” (Rajewsky 2010, 41) is quite clear. What is important here is the performative effect that this intermedial combination achieves, as well as its self-referentiality.

What we have here is an interesting array of intermedial transformations. Anderson’s pre-‘text’, that is, Massenet’s opera, first performed at the Paris Opéra in 1885, is based on Corneille’s tragicomedy *Le Cid* (1637) about love and honour in eleventh-century Spain at the time of increasing Moor colonisation. Interestingly, Corneille’s play was as new an art form in 1637 as that of Anderson’s *United States* performance in the 1980s since Corneille’s play is regarded as the first classical French tragedy (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Corneille was inspired by, or even partly adapted *his* piece from, the play *Las Mocedades del Cid* (*The Youth of Cid*, 1612–1615) by the Spanish playwright Guillén de Castro, who was one of the first to revive the Cid narrative and myth. Castro’s play is, in turn, based on the oldest monument of Spanish literature, the thirteenth-century long narrative poem, *El Cid, el Campeador*, a so-called Castilian *cantar de gesta* originating from the myth of the legendary hero who led the *reconquista* of the territories captured by the Moors. The poem itself is another divergence from its sources, the uncertain oral narratives of the youthful exploits of the legendary hero El Cid that gave rise to the foundational narrative. In other words, the intermedial transformations run from a legend to a poem to a play to another play to an opera to a live multimedia performance which was then recorded on video and more recently reissued digitally.

The importance of the source text for the intermedial transformation of “O Souverain” into “O Superman (for Massenet)” may not be entirely obvious. Nevertheless, Anderson’s explicit reference to and own comment on her song’s genesis direct the audience to look for the source text and search for resemblances. For, as she goes on to point out,

“O Souverain” was written as a prayer for a knight on the eve of a hopeless battle. Its iconic themes made me think of Napoleon at Waterloo as he looks out over the desolate battlefield strewn with bodies of men and horses. “O Souverain” was a prayer about empire, ambition, and loss. (Anderson 2007, 17)

In addition, Anderson first performed this piece just after the so-called “Iran hostage affair”, a bungled undercover mission to rescue American hostages in Tehran. It resulted in American helicopters crashing in the desert, destroying Americans’ and the world’s trust in Jimmy Carter, the Democratic president at the time, who would later be replaced by the Republican Ronald Reagan. Thus, it had severe political consequences since, as Anderson reminds us, the U.S.A. “is still fighting the same war of economic and military aggression” (Anderson 2007, 17). Anderson performed the song again after the attacks on the World Trade Towers on September 11, singing it in the New York City Town Hall in September 2001. Suddenly, the text was no longer about the past but about the present, utterly sinister situation in the face of the loss of lives and terrorist threats. Things have changed: Massenet’s protagonist Rodrigo finds solace in the “souverain’s”, that is, in God’s, hands, singing “ta seule image est dans mon âme / que je remets entre tes mains” (Massenet 1976 [1885]). In Anderson’s version, these hands can no longer be trusted, nor is there any hope left for divine assistance. Instead of giving relief, there is a hand projecting the shadow of a gun onto the circular projection behind her as she sings “This is the hand, the hand that takes / This is the hand, the hand that takes [...]”. Then she goes on:

Here come the planes  
They’re American planes. Made in America  
Smoking or non-smoking?  
And the voice said: “Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night shall stay these couriers  
From the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” Anderson (2007, n. pag.)

This quotation is an inscription on the James Farley Post Office in NYC taken from Herodotus’ *Histories* (8.98), which makes a reference to the courier service in the ancient Persian Empire, and thus implicitly reminds us of the transience of empires. At the same time, it emphasises the role of language in human communication, in its spoken, written or gestural, as in the ASL projection against a globe backdrop, as well as in the cultural importance of ancient documents: Even though the empire disappeared thousands of years ago, verbal communication has remained essential.

The intermedial transformations of Anderson's performance of "O Superman" are also interesting from a self-reflexive viewpoint. When she performed the work live, Anderson made clever use of the theatre spaces, appearing as "a small figure with signature spiked hair" (Goldberg 2000, 86), alone on a huge stage with a brilliantly white globe as a backdrop. The smallness of her body suggested human fragility in the face of alienating technology, self-reflexively drawing attention to *semantics*, "evoking reflections on its meaning, on how or what it represents" (Nöth 2014, 447). By highlighting the influence of technology in daily practices such as trying to communicate without response in an increasingly technological environment, Anderson's performance created a world ruled by machines. At the same time, the scenario can be read as a critique of American life as being too dependent on technology, a society in which verbal language needs more and more translation. In this world, even communication between family members is mediated by technology. Simultaneously, her performance is *pragmatically self-reflexive* (cf. Nöth 2014, 447) since it concerns the involvement of both the performer and, not least of all, the audience who, with their own experience and imagination, actively participate and fill in gaps, thus creating their own version of Anderson's performance.

This is why Anderson finally consented to producing a video recording of her performance and then digitally reissuing it. Pointing to her own dilemma, Anderson comments on her own performance art:

Live art is especially ephemeral. Once performed, it tends to become myth and a few photos and tapes. [...] I myself used to be very proud that I didn't document my work. I felt that, since much of it was about time and memory, that was the way it should be recorded – in the memories of the viewers – with all the inevitable distortions, associations and elaborations. (Anderson 2004, 6)

However, realising the extent to which her audiences distorted their memories of her performance by, for instance, 'remembering' false details and elements that were never part of it, she started to record her performances in order not to have them disappear or be wrongly remembered. Besides the question of how this affects the art form, what is also of interest here is the question of what is involved in such intersemiotic makeovers – from live performances made up of various intermedia pre-'texts' into a digitally produced video – and which both adapts and translates the process of performance into other media and other art forms. What happens to the dynamic interaction between performer and audience, which is partly due to the very ephemerality of performance, when it is filmed or registered?

In the case of "O Superman", the digital version testifies to what intermedial transformation does to performance art. Instead of using a theatre's large stage, the video works with close-ups, side shots, exaggerated silhouettes and fade-aways, which are more suitable for the television screen. If the live performance was a (multi) media combination, this video is an adaptation of the original performance. It is still highly performative, as it calls attention to the aesthetic utterance achieved through

the various art forms and media involved. It is, however, also self-reflexive, not only because it so clearly reflects on itself and its aesthetic situation but also because the digitisation of the performance and the various media involved is the result of software. Her performance art can thus be seen as a highly interesting example of the close link between intermediality and performance art. This interconnectedness not only leads to new and hybrid art forms, it also succeeds in retaining the performative and self-reflexive character of Anderson's works in their recorded media versions.

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