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From Text-Centered Intermediality to Cultural Intermediality; or, How to Make Intermedia Studies more Cultural

Intermediality can be broadly defined as "the participation of more than one medium of expression in the signification of a human artefact" (Wolf, *Musicalization* 1). It became a buzzword in academic discourse in the 1990s and, according to some critics, has now reached a state of maturity.[1] In the case of musico-textual intermediality, which is the systematic study of relations between literature and music, research has, however, largely bypassed a central development in literary criticism: the turn from a new critical philology towards the culture-oriented study of literature. In order to refute simplistic declarations of a musical "presence" in literature and in order to question vague musico-textual analogies, critics have mainly concentrated on text-immanent interpretation. "[W]henever one enters a new field, research first concentrates on describing, comparing and classifying the new phenomena," Werner Wolf explains. "In the initial phase this is often done in a more or less eclectic way without reference to wider contexts, which is also what happened in intermedia studies" ("Towards" 15). The *structuralist* focus on literature and music as *autonomous texts* may indeed have been a necessary cautionary step in the development of a new critical apparatus, but I am convinced that it is high time to make musico-textual intermedia studies more cultural.

A heuristic distinction between two schools of musico-textual analysis proposed by Lars Eckstein and Christoph Reinfandt is a useful starting point for such an endeavor. The more traditional of these schools can be called "text-centered intermedia criticism" and has emerged from *interarts* scholarship.[2] Text-centered intermedia critics systematically describe the literary techniques through which authors can and do suggest a musical dimension in their works— evoking and imitating musical sound, form, and content by literary means: through language, voice, narrative structure, and so forth. The catch phrases of this approach include "thematization," "imitation," and "musicalization."[3] The second school, Eckstein and Reinfandt note, takes a "cultural studies approach

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[1] Rajewsky writes in 2004: "Die Intermedialitätsforschung ist inzwischen ihren Kinderschuhen entwachsen" ("Intermedialität" 27).

[2] The pioneers of musico-textual studies in the interarts field, a subdivision of comparative literature, are Calvin S. Brown and Steven Paul Scher.

[3] See Wolf's *Musicalization* and related publications; see also Gier.

to narrative and music," foregrounds "the performative conventions and ideological frameworks of certain musical styles," and considers literary works "as discursive markers of larger cultural issues" (3). This school, which offers no consolidated approach or theory and therefore is a "school" only in the loosest sense of the term, may be called "culture-oriented intermedia criticism" in analogy to text-centered intermedia criticism. A distinction can thus be made between "text-centered intermediality" and what I have called "kulturelle Intermedialität," or cultural intermediality.[4]

Despite the extensive mapping of potential music-text relations by the text-centered school and the wider scope of the culture-oriented school, a critical gap remains between the structuralist study of musical influences in literary texts and the cultural study of contexts, conventions, and ideologies refracted in, and engaged by, the treatment of music in literary works. The problem with an exclusively text-centered methodology is that it may capture certain, mostly modern and postmodern, literary experiments with textually-simulated musical effects but all too frequently assumes a notion of music as pure, unmediated sound. Since the "cultural turn" in music studies in the 1980s and 90s, however, such a notion has become untenable.[5] The questions of culture and discourse that attend this paradigm shift necessitate more than a cursory glance at the contextual dimension of literary texts and musical performances. They challenge structuralist typologies of music-text relations and raise serious doubts about the efforts of text-centered criticism to reject as subjective and arbitrary the more daunting contextual and cultural dimensions of literature.[6]

The problem with many culture-oriented readings lies in the analytical flexibility of the critical concept "culture." While Eckstein and Reinfandt

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4   See Stein, "Jazz-Autobiographie." I focus on approaches to intermedial phenomena offered by literary and cultural studies (*Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft*), not media studies (*Medienwissenschaft* and *Medienphilosophie*). On this distinction, cf. Rajewsky, "Intermedialität" 30. Wolf's notion of "literaturzentrierte Intermedialität" ("Paradigma" 85), or "literature-centered" intermediality ("Revisited" 14), is largely synonymous with my understanding of "text-centred intermediality," but the latter term is preferable because it foregrounds the discrepancy between text-based and context-sensitive (i.e., cultural) intermedia research.

5   See Clayton, Herbert, and Middleton; for an earlier collection of essays that argue against the concept of absolute music, see Leppert and McClary. Wolf asserts a "recent 'culturalist turn' in both music and literary studies" ("Revisited" 15) but bases his analyses of musicalized literature on the notion of music as "pure form" (*Musicalization* 26). For a more culturally aware music-text criticism (albeit *sans* intermedia vocabulary), see Kramer, *Musical Meaning*.

6   Wolf sees musical contexts as a "Faktor[, der nur] genannt, aber nicht weiter ausgeführt werden kann" ("Problem" 50). He acknowledges "that works of art and literature and their constitutive elements are dialogically related to contexts" ("Towards" 16) but views these contexts as "partially arbitrary": "The exact [...] context that a particular analysis focuses on is [...] ultimately as open to the interpreter as is the choice of objects singled out for analysis" (17).

identify central objectives of culture-oriented analysis, many critics take recourse to vague conceptions of culture, discovering, for instance, a musical dimension in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) by equating the multiple storytellers with improvising jazz musicians and alleging literary equivalents to jazz in order to illustrate a musicalized force in Morrison's writing. Alan Munton justifiably faults such readings for ignoring the musical specifics of jazz, for disregarding references that "will not lead to a 'culturalist' interpretation" (237), and for falsely assuming "that the whole meaning of jazz is to be found in its cultural context" (243). The danger is to overwhelm music—its elusive sonicity as well as the phenomenology of listening—with false notions of literary musicality (riffs and solos are metaphorical terms at best) or with cultural conclusions (rhythm, repetition, improvisation, and call-and-response as romanticized signifiers of African-Americanness) that cannot pass musical analysis. As Brent Edwards reminds us, we must "take into account the complexities of the music itself as much as the intricacies of the literature it inspires" (5). This precludes static conceptions of music (here: jazz) as product and demands instead a dynamic perception of music as process (performance, interaction, improvisation).

Reductively text-centered and expansively culture-oriented approaches often remain unsatisfying because intermedial crossings and interfaces inevitably appear on a formal, textual level *and* on various cultural, contextual levels. Moving the paradigms of text-centered intermedia studies into the realm of cultural studies in order to accommodate this assumption and in order to supply culture-oriented approaches with a theoretically and methodologically sound basis, however, is more complicated than may appear at first glance. The controversial elements of cultural approaches to literary analysis are heightened—perhaps doubled—when the question of context concerns two media: music and text. The proliferation of contexts in cultural analysis and the difficulty of dealing with these contexts has motivated the bulk of text-centered intermedia critics to dismiss the contextual dimension altogether, but this does not have to be so. We can come to terms with the context-"problem" by synthesizing text-centered intermedia approaches with the critical tenets of New Historicist and related approaches to literature and culture. A central point of convergence, I will illustrate below, is the indebtedness of both critical practices to theories of intertextuality.

Despite the criticism that has been raised against the New Historicism, three suggestions for a cultural theory of intermediality can be drawn from Stephen Greenblatt's cultural poetics—the "study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among those practices" (*Shakespearian* 5). The first suggestion is that the relation between literary and musical media does not necessarily have to be one in which a musical source is transposed into literary form or explicitly evoked by a text. Instead, cultural codes structure the circulation of meaning. This view runs counter to the

premises of text-centered intermedia criticism.[7] Two, these cultural codes are neither arbitrary nor definitive, but discursive and performative: They pre-structure and delimit the range of possible (i.e., meaningful) expressions and guide their reception, but they never totally determine them. Three, these discourses and performances are intermedial: They integrate textual, musical, and visual communication and thus contradict assertions of musical and textual autonomy. In the following, I shall discuss these three suggestions and make the case for a theory of cultural intermediality.[8]

One: In *Shakespearian Negotiations* (1988), Greenblatt considers the role of medicine in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and makes a startling proposition: "The relation I wish to establish between medical and theatrical practice is not one of cause and effect or source and literary realization" (86). Instead of limiting critical practice to describing the transposition of musical elements into literary texts and to the ways in which literature may imitate music, this view suggests that writing practices can be connected with other cultural practices, values, and institutions beyond a source-and-realization dynamic. The existence of a "cultural matrix" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 9), a reservoir of materials and practices on which musicians, writers, and audiences draw in specific historical moments, indicates the potential for medial relations apart from those evoked textually. Greenblatt therefore speaks of "a shared code, a set of interlocking tropes and similitudes that function not only as objects but as the conditions of representation" (*Shakespearian* 86).

Two: The major critical reservation against the consideration of contexts in intermedia analysis is the alleged arbitrariness of context selection. New Historicists have countered this allegation by questioning its central premise, the distinction between text and context itself. Louis Montrose has phrased this famously "as the reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (410), while Greenblatt has challenged "the assumptions that guarantee a secure distinction between 'literary foreground' and 'political background'" (Introduction 6). In this sense, analytical shortcuts that reduce music to a static signified—"jazz is ...," "the blues are ...," "punk rock means ..."—must be investigated as discursive effects rather than sonic

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[7]   Wolf writes: "Es ist zuzugeben, dass die Fokussierung auf Zeichenkomplexe [...] der Intermedialität zu einer Einseitigkeit führt, die sowohl autoren- bzw. produzentenseitige Phänomene (z.B. die biographisch-psychologische Erscheinung der 'Doppelbegabung') als auch rezipientenseitige unterbelichtet. Allerdings erlaubt diese Fokussierung [...] immerhin noch den Blick auf die in keinem Fall zu vernachlässigende Dimension des Werks [...]" ("Feld" 167-68). Speaking of "werkinterne Intermedialität," he notes further: "[Sie] wird denn auch in der Regel bewusst vom Autor oder Künstler für bestimmte Zwecke der Sinnstiftung eingesetzt" (172). For an opposing view, cf. Baßler: "Erst im (von keinem Autor mehr kontrollierten) Zusammenspiel vieler [...] Diskurse konstituiert sich [...] der Sinn, die symbolische Energie [einzelner] Details" (Einleitung 21).

[8]   This essay confines itself to a theoretical scope. For practical suggestions and applications of my insights, see Stein, "Jazz-Autobiographie."

realities.[9] While this leads to an emancipating "broadening of the field" of objects to study, it simultaneously gives "rise to a sense of archival and interpretive inexhaustibility" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 10, 15) that can be construed as positive—it enables new readings—as well as negative—these new readings must achieve interpretive plausibility beyond what Winfried Fluck has called the New Historicist's "interpretatorische Performanz" (240).[10] Identifying plausible contexts and references to expressions in other media is, however, less difficult than theoretical considerations would make us believe. In the case of American jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk, whom I have discussed elsewhere as an exemplary phenomenon of iconotextual representation, album covers, promotional photographs, and stage performances provide an obvious visual context for musical reception, while liner notes, record reviews, interviews, and fictional evocations in poetry and prose supply the textual narratives within which the listening experience is placed (see "Hearing").[11]

Three: Text-centered intermedia criticism circumvents the problem of contextual plausibility by basing its models on a narrow version of intertextuality. For Wolf, "intertextuality is restricted to specific relations between texts, as opposed to the poststructuralist concept of culture as a huge echo chamber of texts in which each text echoes some other text(s)" (*Musicalization* 36).[12] New Historicist interpretations assume a position in contradistinction to this understanding: It is exactly this "echo chamber" that constitutes the cultural poetics. Things echo for a reason, and it is the analysis of the ways in which a specific echo travels, indeed becomes audible as an echo in the first place, that motivates New Historicist practice and has made intertextuality "zu einem— wenn nicht *dem* Kernbegriff des *New Historicism* [...]" (Hebel 332).

Alan Liu has coined the term "cultural *intertextuality*" to criticize this expansive understanding of culture as a giant intertext, or archive (756). My

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9   Radano argues that music entails "something more than hearing 'the sound itself'" and "may best be likened to a 'soundtext,' to a sonic palimpsest that accumulates tales on those already written" (2-3). It is "the instability of music existing within and against linguistic signification," music's instable relation to discourse (22), that enables it to "tell […] stories that convey a range of meaning, its power deriving precisely from its accessibility and capaciousness, from its forceful articulation of a broad base of social realms" (xiv).

10 Fluck asks, "wie sich eine vom Enthierarchisierungsgedanken geleitete Interpretation von anderen Interpretationen abzusetzen vermag und als treffend, angemessen oder relevant zu autorisieren vermag[, insbesondere dort, wo sie] nicht mehr durch den Bezug auf die Autorität einer 'großen' Erzählung abgesichert werden kann oder soll" (235).

11 The concept of iconotext is most lucidly discussed in Wagner's *Reading Iconotexts* and Rippl's *Beschreibungs-Kunst*.

12 Rajewsky contrasts "[einen] weitgefaßten, ontologischen bzw. kultursemiotischen Intertextualitätsbegriff im Sinne [Julia] Kristevas [texte général … mit] eine[m] eingeschränkten, kommunikativ-semiotischen Begriff der Intertextualität, der auf intentionale bzw. markierte Bezüge zwischen Texten und deren Funktionen im Textganzen abhebt" (*Intermedialität* 48).

suggestions for a concept of "cultural *intermediality*" should be seen as a response to Liu's criticism. While cultural intertextuality and intermediality are useful metaphors, Liu demands a more elaborate theoretical foundation and more stringent analytical practice than Greenblatt and fellow critics offer. In other words, both cultural intertextuality and cultural intermediality must address a question posed by Moritz Baßler: "Was sind eigentlich diese intertextuellen Verbindungen, wenn sie ausdrücklich nicht hermeneutisch, also nicht als konkrete kausale Einflüsse auf einen Text, gesteuert durch einen Autor, gedacht sind" ("New Historicism" 147)? Adding an intermedial dimension: How can we identify intermedial relations among cultural expressions beyond hermeneutic (concrete, causal) and author-controlled references?[13] Liu's answer is negative: "A New Historicist paradigm holds up to view a historical context on one side, a literary text on the other, and, in between, a connection of pure nothing" (743). But instead of confronting an intermediary "nothing" between texts and contexts as well as among expressions across media, culture-oriented interpretation can turn to a media-sensitive form of discourse analysis in order to thickly describe the integrative function of discourses.[14] Baßler notes:

> [Diskurse machen] Gegenstände aus verschiedenen 'Medien', d.h. verschiedenen kulturellen Bereichen und Zusammenhängen [...], vergleichbar [...]. Sie können im engeren Sinne literarisch, aber durchaus auch außerliterarisch und sogar außertextuell sein—sofern sie *einer* Kultur angehören, stehen sie auch miteinander in Zusammenhang und Austausch. Die Diskurse sind nun das Verbindende zwischen diesen Medien, sie werden in verschiedenen Medien geführt und stellen damit die Fäden dar, die auch den Historiker von einem Medium in das andere leiten. (Einleitung 14)

Baßler's nod towards cultural material—ideas, images, sounds—in different media and its integration through discursive threads, or cultural codes, leads to my third conclusion: In the realm of musico-textual study, discourses should be conceptionalized as intermedial entities—rule-based enunciations and strategic performances in connected cultural fields and media through which cultural intermediality constitutes itself.[15]

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[13] Rippl criticizes semiotic approaches to non-textual medial expressions and advocates approaches based on medial specifics (see "Text-Bild-Beziehungen"), which is why the cultural intertextuality of the New Historicist bent must be amended with the notion of cultural intermediality.

[14] My conception of a culture-oriented intermedia analysis follows the basic scope and interpretive logic of Clifford Geertz's "thick description" (cf. 3-30) but makes room for an extension of the textual paradigm (culture as text) to a medial paradigm (an intermedial cultural poetics).

[15] My understanding of cultural intermediality rests to a significant degree on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production. In particular, I suggest an intermedial extension of Randal Johnson's introductory remarks to *The Field of Cultural Production*: "Unlike intertextuality as conceived by Bakhtin or Kristeva, [...] which tends to relate texts only to other texts, [...] texts must be analysed both in relation to other texts and in

The cultural anthropology of Milton Singer and Victor Turner provides the tools with which Liu's "connection of pure nothing" can be overcome and the discursive intermediality of music can be grasped. Turner bridges the gap between textual autonomy and contextual anarchy by describing cultures as intersecting sociosymbolic fields—among them music, theater, and literature—and by focusing on what Singer calls the "units of observation" of cultural processes: cultural performances, such as "plays, concerts, and lectures," and, once we conceive of writing as a performative cultural practice, novels, short stories, plays, poems and non-fictional forms of writing (70-71).[16] These performances, or performative genres, are usually "composed of [...] 'cultural media'—modes of communication which include not only spoken language, but such nonlinguistic media as 'song, dance, acting out, and graphic and plastic arts—combined in many ways to express and communicate the content of [... a particular] culture.'" They "are often orchestrations of media, not expressions in a single medium" (Turner 23).[17]

Conceiving of music and literature as cultural performances offers a compelling rejoinder to allegations of arbitrary context selection and idiosyncratic plausibility. In the case of jazz autobiographies, which have been the focus of my studies in the past years, the musician's name and face (on book cover and album sleeve, for instance) and the construction of a public persona that inextricably integrates name, face, voice, music, visual forms of representation, (auto)biography, and critical reception, make the cultural performance inevitably intermedial.[18] Mobilizing *one* element in *one* medium of the discourse—using coded language and imagery to render musical experience in live performance, for instance—triggers the larger discourse, including prominent images, sounds, and narratives of music, and vice versa.

Addressing the text-context "problem," confronting the challenges that have been leveled at cultural intertextuality, and finding media-specific solutions to these challenges makes for a productive study of cultural intermediality. Greenblatt's notion of "resonance" may serve as a final impulse for rethinking text-centered intermediality as cultural intermediality. "By resonance I mean the power of the object [or medium] displayed to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer [reader, or listener] the

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relation to the structure of the field and to the specific agents involved" (17). What is needed is "a method which retains a notion of intertextuality, seen as a system of differential stances, and reintroduces a notion of agent (i.e. producer), acting (consciously or unconsciously) within a specific set of social relations […]" (14).

[16] Poirier's *The Performing Self* conceives of literature in these terms.

[17] The phrase "content of [...] culture" suggests a holistic understanding of culture. I would suggest an understanding of culture more attuned to questions of complexity and hybridity. Turner quotes "'song, dance, acting out […]" from Singer 76.

[18] See Stein, "The Performance of Jazz Autobiography" and "Jazz-Autobiographie." Both essays formulate theses and present findings that are part of my doctoral thesis (working title: "Satchmo's Jazz Autobiographics: Toward a Theory of Cultural Intermediality").

complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which as metaphor or more simply as synecdoche it may be taken" ("Resonance" 79). The specific ways in which texts and music resonate and the theoretical premises for the study of such resonances may be debated. But an extended critical focus that includes non-text-centered musico-cultural interfaces and strives to account for these interfaces in a theoretically and methodologically precise manner will certainly enrich our understanding of intermediality in modern media cultures.

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