

The (inter)medial turn and musicology

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For some time, the concept of (inter)mediality has travelled between different subject fields, making visible the idea that we live and always have lived in a multimodal and intermedial culture.^[1] Although the concept has existed at least since the early 1980s (and the phenomenon since the dawn of time), it was only around the turn of the millennium that intermediality became part of a ‘discourse’ within the general study of the interrelations between arts and media. As Werner Wolf stated in 1999: there was ‘a marked tendency towards intermediality in our century’, which was part of an (inter)medial turn (Wolf, 1999, p. 2; see also Wolf, 2008, p. 16). This notion was followed up by others. In *Cultural functions of intermedial exploration*, published in 2002, the editors took note of this intermedial turn as a part of new and emergent media forms (Hedling and Lagerroth, 2002, p. 8).

Today one can say that the study of intermediality has increasingly found its feet within the humanities – albeit still with rather vague (theoretical) contours. Discussions have focused on its continued establishment, such as Jørgen Bruhn (2008), who suggests two possible ways: either in a ‘formalistic solidification’ of the study in a separate discipline, or as an open intermedial discourse to integrate with disciplines such as comparative literature, art history, media and communication studies, cultural studies, and musicology (p. 22). I would argue that these two ways do not stand in contradiction to each other. On the contrary, they both can be fruitful for the further development of intermedial studies. But they both face problems. In what follows, I would like to highlight some of these problems, which have arisen as the intermedial turn has penetrated the various humanistic disciplines, and say a few things about their relationship to musicology.

Before I continue, however, it should be said that in various ways I already have discussed intermediality within the framework of musicology. I refer to these texts for anyone interested (Arvidson, 2012; 2014; 2016). Here I will go straight to the point and argue for the relevance of (inter)mediality in the study of music. The problems presented below have been formulated by Wolf and are based on the relationship between (inter)mediality and comparative literature. I intend to redirect these problems to musicology and suggest a possible solution.

The *first* problem deals with the definition of media and intermediality, both of which seem to diverge in meaning. For instance, music could be understood as a medium as opposed to literature, cinema, photography, etcetera, but it could equally be

understood as a technical submedium such as recorded music, live music, and other forms of mediated music, as well as a medium that refers to literature, cinema, etcetera, in different ways (Wolf, 2008, p. 18; Elleström, 2010, pp. 11–48). This also applies to intermediality. Simply put, intermediality arises in the crossing of constructed media borders that can be expressed in different ways (Wolf, 1999; Elleström, 2010). I would add another aberrant definition, which mainly comes from a culturalist perspective that focuses on cultural systems within which media circulates, represented by Henry Jenkins and Mikko Lehtonen, as well as a formalistic definition, represented by the abovementioned Wolf and Elleström (see Arvidson, 2012). I will not dwell on these problematic concepts, but rather urge for continued discussion by musicologists, not least since issues that concern (inter)mediality will constitute an important understanding of the function of music in different media now and in the future.

The *second* problem deals with competence. Today, the disciplinary differences (still) create a specialised competence in one medium, such as music, literature, cinema, etcetera. This might create problems for those interested in studying (inter)medial phenomena. One possible solution is that (inter)medial studies in musicology should be music-centered (see Arvidson, 2014, pp. 24–25; Wolf, 2008, pp. 19–20), another would be cooperations with scholars in other disciplines, and finally, a third solution would be elective courses for students interested in (inter)mediality studies. On the basis of the above-mentioned problem areas, I would like to propose one example of how the study of (inter)mediality can be integrated into musicology – a proposition which is by no means exclusive. In this sense, it follows the open intermedial discourse suggested by Bruhn.

Studying *narratology* has so far been reserved for comparative literature. But as musicology is becoming more interested in studying music that includes narrative structures, such as cinema, opera, theatre, game plays, and radio drama, at the same time as narratology has undergone changes in both theory and method (such as post-narratology), I would suggest courses in narratology as a natural part of musicology. Here, I would also suggest the field called *audio narratology*, where *sound studies* would be a central theme. Finally, studies that focus on *voices* in the form of dialogues/monologues as well as *performance studies* are included in this proposal.

With this proposition about the future of research on music in Sweden, the open (inter)medial discourse would make musicology relevant to new media forms while still remaining historically rooted – the latter to emphasise the importance of music history.

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[\[1\]](#) ‘(Inter)mediality’ combines two concepts: *intermediality*, referring to the concrete border crossings that occur between different media forms, and *mediality*, referring to something that mediates between a sender and a receiver.