



A Critique of the Established Notion of Multimodality

Lars Elleström



Traditional one-level distinction

“medium”, “artefact” or
“expression plane”



“mode”



My two-level distinction

“medium”



“modality”



“mode”



What is a medium?

Media:
similarities & differences –
explained by multimodality



Intermediality & multimodality

Bottom up: a model based not on the entities of established media but on the features, qualities, and aspects of all media



The four modalities of media

- The *material modality*
- The *sensorial modality*
- The *spatiotemporal modality*
- The *semiotic modality*

... to be found on a scale ranging from the tangible to the perceptual and the conceptual



Modes of the material modality

- Human bodies
- Demarcated materiality
- Not demarcated materiality



Modes of the sensorial modality

- Seeing
- Hearing
- Feeling
- Tasting
- Smelling



Modes of the spatiotemporal modality

- Space manifested in the material interface
- Cognitive space
- Virtual space
- Time manifested in the material interface
- Perceptual time
- Virtual time



Modes of the semiotic modality

- Convention (symbolic signs)
- Resemblance (iconic signs)
- Contiguity (indexical signs)



The two qualifying aspects of media

- The *contextual qualifying aspect* (origin, delimitation, and use of media in specific historical, cultural, and social circumstances)
- The *operational qualifying aspect* (aesthetic and communicative characteristics)



Three complementary facets of media

- *Basic media* (media that are mainly identified by their modal appearances)
- *Qualified media* (media that rely strongly *also* on the two qualifying aspects)
- *Technical media* (any object or body that “realizes”, “mediates”, or “displays” basic and qualified media)



Two variations of intermediality

- *Combination and integration* of (basic or qualified) media
- *Mediation and transformation* of (basic or qualified) media