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Mapping moving media: film and video

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Introduction

Ten Thousand Waves, Two Media, and a Voyage on the North Sea

The viewfinder of a surveillance video camera frantically scans the dark waving surface of the ocean. The images of dizzying, frantic camera movements over undulating stretches of grey, pixelated water are accompanied by alarming reports to the coastguard. First, a panicky woman's voice is telling how a group of Chinese cockle-fishers is stuck in Morecambe Bay. "Can you please, just please get something out there now," she begs. As the water has already risen above the waist of the young men (most of whom are unable to swim) the woman continues to plead: "They need a plane or something. They have got to get out!" A few minutes later, police officers report that they are arriving on scene. From their rescue helicopter, they search for the 25 Chinese immigrants who were caught by the rapidly rising tides in the so-called quicksand bay near Lancaster on the night of February 5, 2004.

In Isaac Julien's installation *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010), the impressive archival video footage of the rescue operation is projected onto nine large screens. Together, seven of these screens form an oval, with two screens placed in the middle. As a consequence, the viewer of the installation is surrounded by nine stretches of moving, foaming water which can never be seen all at once. While the police officers report from their helicopter how they can only recover one person, and while the camera keeps scanning the rolling waves, the spectator is spurred to move, to turn from screen to screen, in order to join the search for signs of life in the dark blur of grainy water. Later on in *Ten Thousand Waves*, handheld images of Morecambe Bay by daylight show deserted sandbanks and vast expanses of water. The cockle-fishers are nowhere to be found. A short sample from a video documentary on the Morecambe Bay tragedy proves that the rescue operation was not completely successful. The scene focuses on a family member of one of the 23 drowned immigrants, who is going through the personal effects of the deceased loved one.

In between these instances of poignant, grainy video footage, the images of *Ten Thousand Waves* turn into something else. First, the pixelated grey ocean is replaced with smooth, sharp waves. Instead of blurred moving images, the installation's nine

screens are now filled with bright images in which we can see each ripple on the ocean's surface. When the camera dips under the water's surface, it shows in medium close-up how three drowned Chinese fishermen sink slowly into the depth of the sea, their lifeless bodies swaying in the rocking ocean. Suddenly, a woman with long, waving black hair and piercing dark eyes appears on the installation's screens. Dressed in a sumptuous white gown, she seems to float in midair. What is more, like the helicopter's surveillance camera, the woman is looking downwards from her airborne viewpoint, which suggests that she too is scanning the ocean's surface.

When both the flying woman and the drowning men reappear within a densely grown Chinese landscape instead of the North Sea as their backdrop later on in the installation, the mysterious woman can be identified as the goddess Mazu; the most revered female deity in China. The age-old "Tale of Yishan Island" tells how Mazu – savior and protector of ocean travelers, rescuer of the drowning – once saved a group of 20 fishermen from a sudden squall at sea. First, she leads them to an unknown, thickly wooded island. When the storm has subsided, the goddess shows them the way to their home port, where the fishermen all arrive safe and sound. This story is especially meaningful in relation the Morecambe Bay tragedy because it originates from the Chinese province of Fujian, where Mazu has been worshipped since around CE 1000. Twenty of the 23 drowned cockle-fishers were impoverished farmers and workers from Fujian province – the home of most Chinese workers who emigrate to Europe.

The medium by which *Ten Thousand Waves* re-tells this age-old myth, however, is not as old as the "Tale of Yishan Island" itself. The installation narrates the story of Mazu through *filmic* means. First of all, the smooth and sharp images which depict Mazu's rescue of the cockle-fishers look like film images because of their contrast with the preceding low-quality video footage. As the difference between the media of film and video has long been marked particularly by the discrepancy between video's low resolution and low contrast ratio on the one hand, and film's high quality images on the other hand, it seems obvious to understand the cut from blurred, pixelated footage to smooth and focused images as a switch from one medium to the other. In addition, the tale of Mazu is told by way of conventional cinematic narrative strategies which are absent from the video surveillance footage. The gaze of the goddess is for instance "sutured" to the images of boiling surges. This cinematic device – which connects shots to the viewpoint of onscreen characters – returns in the installation when Mazu flies through Pudong's high-rises (people are drowning in Shanghai's high-tech business hub, too).

When the goddess flies through the landscape of Yishan island, however, the images conform to well-known, yet quite disparate instances of contemporary Asian cinematic aesthetics. As Mark Nash has pointed out, the sumptuous images of Mazu suspended over a river, framed by the vertiginous limestone peaks, makes one think that one might be participating in the Taoist aesthetic of a fifth-generation Chinese filmmaker, such as Zhang Yimou. The zip pans through the bamboo forest, on the other hand, can rather be

understood as an homage to the prestidigitations of Hong Kong popular cinema and Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) (Nash 40). The installation's tie to cinema is consolidated all the more by the fact that Mazu is played by a famous film star, Maggie Cheung.

What is more, Julien's installation references Chinese cinema by telling yet another well-known story. For, in addition to the Morecambe Bay tragedy and the Mazu myth, *Ten Thousand Waves* revisits the classic Chinese film *The Goddess* (Yonggang, 1934). The woman who prostitutes herself in order to support herself and her son in Yonggang's film, is first depicted in a historic architectural setting in Julien's version of the story. Yet, this old Chinese city turns out to be an old Shanghai film studio. The female protagonist moves through this historic film décor, yet she also ends up in contemporary Chinese interiors. One of these interiors offers the woman of easy virtue a splendid view on Pudong's Jin Mao Tower, in front of which Mazu is suddenly flying by.

The latter's presence connects the fictional character of the prostitute to the drowned immigrants, for whom Mazu as well as the surveillance video camera were looking earlier on in the installation. Mazu's gaze upon the prostitute suggests that the latter is either lost and drowning, just like the cockle-fishers, or that she is somehow related to the victims of the Morecambe Bay tragedy. She might very well be missing her emigrated son, like the woman in the installation's sample from the video documentary on Morecambe Bay. By being cinematically sutured to the gaze of a mythical deity, the fictional female character from a classical Chinese film story becomes a contemporary Chinese woman who seems to be affected by a real overseas tragedy in the present. *Ten Thousand Waves* manages to intricately relate as well as blur the boundaries between past and present, home and away, and reality and fiction, through a combination of filmed stories with video footage.

Two Media

This combination of cinematic features with forms of video complicates the definition of *Ten Thousand Waves* in terms of its medial character. As the work's images – including the cinematic ones – are stored and projected in high-definition digital video format, the piece is a video installation in technological terms. Yet, should a video installation which so overtly foregrounds cinematic devices, and which moreover includes so many references to film, primarily be defined in terms of video? On the other hand, it seems inaccurate to understand Julien's piece – which is not only video in a technological sense, but which also looks like video in so many formal respects – as principally film(ic).

Most discussions of *Ten Thousand Waves* circumvent the relation between film and video in the installation by ignoring one of the two media. Notably, institutions of contemporary visual art which exhibit the installation usually emphasize the medium which operates most prevalently within the field of art, that is, video. In press releases from the Boston Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) and the Brandhorst Museum in

Munich, to name but two, Julien's piece was referred to as a nine-screen *video* installation. However, when the installation is shown or discussed in institutions, exhibitions or articles concerned with film, the medium of video is often left unmentioned. In 2012, *Ten Thousand Waves* was, for instance, shown in an exhibition entitled *Expanded Cinema* at Amsterdam's Filmmuseum EYE. The museum's exhibition leaflets and captions referred to Julien's piece as a *film* installation. To give one more example here: in an article which aims to outline the installation's cinematic predecessors, the aforementioned scholar Mark Nash refers to *Ten Thousand Waves* as a multi-channel film, or even more simply, as a film.

These definitions of *Ten Thousand Waves* in terms of one single medium are limiting, because the complexity of the installation cannot be fully seen, appreciated, analyzed, or understood without acknowledging the fact that the piece contains both cinematic and "videomatic" elements. The meanings, effects, and affects which are generated by the installation largely depend on the difference between video forms and film features within the piece, as well as on the interplay between the features of these different media. In Julien's installation, the two media for example offer the viewer different, yet complementary ways of relating to the problems of China's impoverished working class.

Although definitions which group *Ten Thousand Waves* under expanded cinema or classify it as video installation art are both justifiable, the installation's psychological and physical effects, as well as the critical reflections on (amongst other things) migration which the artwork gives rise to, can be grasped more fully when the difference between video and film is not overlooked or ignored. This not only goes for *Ten Thousand Waves*. Many contemporary moving image objects are, on the one hand, ruled by (a group of) elements which derive in the first place from the field of film, and, on the other hand, by features which are more typical of the video medium. This mixture of the cinematic and the videomatic is most prevalent in museum pieces such as Julien's, yet it is also common in contemporary narrative fiction films – both mainstream and so called art-house ones. In addition, the combination of film and video forms functions in the ubiquitous moving images which surround us outside of the museum, art gallery, or film theater today. It infuses home movies, videos on the Internet, commercials on TV, and clips on cellphones.

Medium Specificity Revisited

In order to study the combinations of film and video within contemporary cultural objects, an analysis of their intermedial relationship may seem an obvious starting point. When it comes to *Ten Thousand Waves*, definitions of the piece as, for instance, a "multi-media work" or "post-cinematic video installation" (Julien's own description) appear to be suitable onsets to such analyses, as they take the medial plurality of the installation into account. Moreover, the above-mentioned definitions are only two instances in a wide range of possibilities. For, in spite of the fact that the multi-medial character of installations like Julien's is often left unmentioned, contemporary (new)

media theory offers a wide range of terms by which interrelations between media can be defined and conceptualized.

In addition to prefixes and adjectives such as inter-, mixed, multi-, or hybrid media, (new) media scholars such as Noel Carroll (1996), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), and Steven Maras and David Sutton (2000) have conceptualized the relationship between media in terms such as aping, imitation, convergence, remediation, hypermediation, repurposing, re-forming and refashioning, transition, bundling, absorption, and so on. Most of these notions are applied in concord with the theoretical conclusion that it is no longer possible to detect pure media in the contemporary digital age. Today, all media are entangled in processes of remediating or repurposing another's forms, which leaves us with nothing but intermedial cultural objects. The once dominant, modernist idea that artistic media have their own, autonomous, unique essence, is highly problematized by these objects in which media are so overtly involved in imitating and refashioning each other. Any claims at medium specificity are impeded by the ubiquitous intermedial and mixed media artworks.

Although I do not disagree with such a characterization of today's situation, and take the wide variety of notions such as remediation and hypermediacy as helpful tools in analyzing the relationships between media, I argue that the starting point of an investigation into intermedial interactions should be the concept of medium specificity instead of the many notions which define forms of intermediality. For, an investigation into relationships between or even convergence of, different media still starts out with the presupposition of different, distinguishable media. As Steven Maras and David Sutton rightly point out in their article entitled "Medium Specificity Re-visited" (2000), theorists who deal with intermedial relationships often critique and problematize essentialist notions of the medium through concepts such as refashioning and remediation. Yet this method often merely delays and defers the question of essentialism. In their critical discussion of Bolter and Grusin's medium theory, Maras and Sutton aptly remark on the former's methodology that: "Their approach is based around acts of refashioning that ultimately problematise the essence of a medium, but at the outset of each act the predecessors of that medium [...] stand more or less fully formed" (108). Thus, models of intermediality which supposedly demonstrate the end of medium specificity, are often implicitly based on an originary ground on which media do have essences, are fixed, and achieve a final form.

The fact that influential theories of intermediality are unable to circumvent the essentialist notions of medium specificity which they wish to defy, does not mean, of course, that we should return to these seemingly inescapable, persistent essentialist ideas on medium specificity. Yet, it is nevertheless imperative to ask what mediality means when we discuss intermediality. In order to investigate what happens between media, it first needs to be clear how these media are (to be) understood. The rightful conclusion that essentialist ideas on medium specificity are rendered untenable by today's mixed, multi-, and intermedia, too often overshadows the question of *what* is

being mixed, expanded, remediated, refashioned, converged or combined. Maras and Sutton are right to state that, when faced, for example, with a definition of multimedia that incorporates “video, text and graphics” it is simply a useful question to ask: “what do you mean by video?” (112).

In this study I ask the questions “what is meant by video?” and “what is meant by film?” How are these two media (to be) understood? Can film and video be defined as distinct, specific media, and if so, how? I argue that in this era of mixed moving media, it is vital to ask such questions precisely and especially on the media of video and film.

From a technological point of view, however, it no longer makes sense to differentiate between film and video. Upon its arrival in the 1960s, video started out as an analogue electronic medium which clearly differed from film. In its initial phase, it was only able to produce grainy black-and-white footage. Its magnetic tape, moreover, could not easily be edited and was prone to electronic distortion. In addition, video footage could only be watched on a TV monitor. Hence, the early low-quality video images did not look like film, and could, moreover, not be looked at in the same viewing set-up as back-lit film projections. However, the formal and technological properties and abilities of the video medium evolved rapidly. The differences between film and video became less distinct with the arrival of video projectors, the development of video editing equipment, as well as the improvement in video image quality.

One could even argue that my objects of research – the media of film and video – disappeared while I was writing this book. When I initiated my research project in 2006, the difference between the media of film and video was still a noticeable technological fact. Although both media had already been taken up in the process of digitalization, and hence came to share important aspects of their technological support, neither analogue nor digital video images were able to meet the high image quality of analogue film footage. When narrative fiction films were screened in digital video formats, members of the audience would often complain that the images didn’t look as good, as bright, as sharp or as smooth as “real” film. Today, such a perceptible difference between film and video images is no longer a technological necessity.

Yet, in spite of the fact that technological differences between the two media have largely been bridged, distinctions between film and video are still ubiquitously perceptible – for instance in works like *Ten Thousand Waves*. This demonstrates that the difference between video and film is made rather than given; it is repeatedly shown, (re-)produced and applied by visual objects and artworks. In addition, the distinction is made by spectators, who (sometimes only subconsciously) recognize and thereby respond to the difference between film and video features in the process of viewing and reading moving images. Defining video and film as two distinct media, then, first of all begs for a definition of medium specificity which does not solely rely on the given technological, material components of a medium. How can the constantly mixing, merging and rapidly evolving media of film and video be defined as distinct media when the technological differences between them have become almost superfluous? What is

more, how can film and video be defined as distinct, specific media without reverting to essentialist notions of medium specificity?

A Voyage on the North Sea

My search for a non-essentialist definition of medium specificity starts with *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1999). In this pamphlet-sized book, art historian Rosalind Krauss aims to distance the notion of the specific medium from its unfortunately loaded meaning. From the 1960s onwards, Krauss explains, a definition of the medium as mere physical object, in all its reductiveness and drive towards reification, has become common currency in the art world. The word “medium” has been pervasively “Greenbergized,” as Krauss rightly states. The ideas of the former art historian on the relationship between the history of art and medium specificity have been highly influential.

In his well-known essay “Modernist Painting” (1961), Clement Greenberg depicts the history of art as a continuous development in which the different arts – such as painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature – gradually sought to discover their own unique, exclusive qualities. Within this process, which reached its highpoint in the period of modernism, it became perfectly clear that “the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium,” according to Greenberg (102). During modernism, he claims, works of art approached the boundaries of their own medium in order to determine each medium’s unchanging essence. According to Greenberg, this fixed and autonomous essence of every medium could eventually be reduced to a single, unique property of its material, technical support.

In line with many of the aforementioned new media theorists such as Bolter and Grusin, Krauss argues that Greenberg’s essentialist ideas have first and foremost been superseded by the fact that intermediality is now ubiquitous. According to Krauss, contemporary art exists in the era of the “post-medium condition.” For, since the 1970s, it has become especially difficult to divide the visual arts into specific media. In contrast to the modernist arts described by Clement Greenberg, recent artistic practices do not set great store by the distinction between media. The traditional media into which art was long subdivided are made subordinate to a whole range of expressive means that artists have at their disposal. Since the 1970s, all kinds of techniques are mixed within artworks, with no possibility left to define them as pure media. Medium purity is no longer a goal, and in many works of art it is even determinedly undermined. Through this, the concept of medium specificity seems to have become superfluous.

In addition to her observations of contemporary artistic practices, Krauss argues that the concept of medium specificity is no longer tenable in theoretical terms either. Poststructuralist ideas in particular have contributed to the fact that the idea of a pure, autonomous medium has become a mere fiction:

From the theory of grammatology to that of the paragon, Jacques Derrida built demonstration after demonstration to show that the idea of an interior set apart

from, or uncontaminated by, an exterior was a chimera, a metaphysical fiction. [...] That nothing could be constituted as pure interiority or self-identity, that this purity was always already invaded by an outside, indeed, could itself only be constituted through the very introjection of that outside, was the argument to scuttle the supposed autonomy of the aesthetic experience, or the possible purity of an artistic medium. The self-identical was revealed to us, and thus dissolved to, the self-different. (32)

After the poststructuralist deconstruction of the self-contained medium, the opinion that media have a specific essence can no longer be sustained.

Nevertheless, the notion of medium in itself is retained by Krauss. After explicitly distancing herself from Greenberg's views, she replaces his essentialist ideas with another definition of medium specificity: "the specificity of mediums, even modernist ones, must be understood as differential, self-differing, and thus as a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support" (53). According to Krauss, a medium is to be seen as a layered structure that is constantly being repeated. This structure is not given; it is made and composed out of the physical support plus a set of rules and conventions. These conventions determine how the expressive possibilities offered by the technical support of a medium are delimited or applied.

One of the most important benefits of Krauss' definition is that it opposes the temporal fixity of Greenberg's notion of the medium. In Krauss' model, a medium's specificity is never complete; media are always caught up in the process of differing from themselves. Instead of understanding media as static entities, Krauss defines them as changeable and differing structures. Secondly, she rewrites the concept's meaning by adding a layer to the medium's technological or physical base in her definition. Whereas Greenberg located a medium's specificity purely in the materiality of its support, Krauss argues that the specificity of media is built out of conventions, too. The word "built" in the previous sentence already points to the third way in which Krauss' definition differs from Greenberg's. The former art historian emphasizes that a medium's specificity is a construction, which disables an understanding of medium specificity as an autonomous, given essence.

Since Krauss stresses that media are not given units, but that they are built and made, the medium specificity of which she speaks depends on medium specification. The difference between the terms "medium specificity" and "medium specification" is important. Medium specification indicates that media *are being* specified, while medium specificity rather indicates what *is* specific about media. In contrast to Greenberg, Krauss holds the opinion that media do not have absolute and fixed specificities, but that their specificities are made, and hence, that medium specificity is established through specification.

When it comes to medium specification, Krauss mostly focuses on the production of

conventions. A technology or material becomes a specific medium as soon as it is repeatedly being used according to a specific set of conventions. The structure of conventions defines how and which possibilities of a certain physical support are applied. Such a conventional structure is a kind of grammar; a coherent set of rules which is iterated each time a technology is used. In her writings on medium specificity, Krauss particularly discusses how artists invent sets of conventions, and consequently produce specific media.¹ Hence, she pays most attention to the senders; to the ones who apply a certain technology or material according to a specific set of conventions in order to (re)produce something – information, sound, image, text, art.

However, Krauss' definition of the medium implicitly implicates another party. Like grammar, the rules of the medium are not mainly applied (and hence produced) by those who utter messages or produce objects with a certain technological or physical support. Conventions are also to be understood by the audience, by the receivers of medial objects, if a medium (or language, for that matter) is to be recognized as such. Often, recognition is something of an understatement, for the conventions which specify a medium are equally *produced* by the spectators of media. It is illuminating, in this regard, to speak of multiple layers rather than one layer of conventions. For, quite apart (but not entirely so) from the actual conventionalized applications of a technology, medium specificity comes into being by sets of conventions which determine how a medium is *seen*. The specification or definition of a medium depends on conventional notions/ideas on what a medium "is." The governing opinions or expectations about the possibilities of a medium are just as important for a medium's specification as the way in which these possibilities are used in practice. An example may help to clarify this.

A canvas painted totally ultramarine would not have been considered as a painting two hundred years ago. It wouldn't even have been regarded as a painting's *impematura*. Nowadays, such a canvas meets our expectations of what painting is and what it can do. Of course, these expectations are in part determined by the manner in which the medium is often used within our social and historical context. We have become used to monochrome paintings, and therefore they meet our opinions about the specificity of the medium of painting. Even so, these conventional opinions on what painting "is" are important for the specification of the medium itself. Painting is only painting when it is recognized as such by its viewers. It goes without saying that opinions on medium specificity are – like the use of media – socially determined and historically relative. Which once again affirms Krauss' statement that medium specificity can differ and alter.

My investigation into the media of film and video relies heavily on the idea that conventional opinions shape medium specification. Although I will focus on some of the (ever-changing) technological differences between film and video, and moreover aim to

1 In addition to *A Voyage on the North Sea*, Krauss has reflected on the concept of medium specificity in a number of articles, such as: " '...And Then Turn Away?': An Essay on James Coleman" (1997), "Reinventing the Medium" (1999) and " 'The Rock': William Kentridge's Drawing for Projector" (2000).

map out the most distinct conventions which shape the specific dominant applications of each medium's technology, my study also comprises comparisons and analyses of the most dominant reflections on film and video. I hold that the distinct specific features of film and video can only be defined by also studying definitions of the media. Reflections on the two media do not only describe, but also (co- and re)produce the specificity of film and video. Following art historian David Green (2005), I take the view that media are to a large extent simply what we think they are. And what we think they are, moreover, very much depends on dominant reflections on what they are. The reflections I study are mostly theoretical texts. However, the distinction between reflections and applications is not always clear cut; many of the visual objects I analyze can be understood as self-reflexive reflections on the specificity of their medium or media. Such objects specify and produce the media with which they are produced in more than one way.

This brings me to yet another way in which medium specificity is produced according to Krauss' definition of the concept. The art historian defines a medium's specificity as differential, indicating that a medium's specificity is in part determined by differences from other media. Remarkably, this idea of differential specificity was not unknown to Clement Greenberg, who claimed that the specificity of a medium can be determined by comparison to other media. The unique essence of a medium, Greenberg argued, lies in that characteristic by which it differs from all other media. However, Greenberg basically undermines his own idea of autonomous media by acknowledging the importance of difference to a medium's specificity. For if medium specificity is dependent on differences with other media, a medium cannot be regarded as an autonomous, isolated unit. It is specified by other media. Medium specificity comes into being through medium specification; it is not a given fact, but is made and determined, in part by differences with other media.

The differences between media can be considered of importance without adopting Greenberg's opinion that the unchanging essence of media can be determined on the basis of this difference. A medium can, amongst other things, be specified because it can do things other media cannot. However, such unique qualities are temporary. As soon as the unique possibilities of a medium are equaled or imitated by means of technological development or an alteration of medial conventions, the specification of the existing medium changes.²

In addition, medium specification doesn't necessarily imply the demarcation or recovering of a medium's unique essence. Although media can only be distinguished by way of the differences between them, these differences do not always point to unique

² A well-known example of such a change is the invention of photography. Because of the creation of this new medium, the specificity of painting had to be drastically revised. Of all existing media, painting was best able to depict reality. This feature of painting lost its uniqueness with the invention of photography. With the latter medium, it was possible to depict reality in a more real, more direct, faster, and cheaper manner. Consequently the specification of painting had to be defined by other qualities.

properties or capabilities. Analogue film, for instance, shares its photochemical base with the medium of photography. Yet, it distinguishes itself from photography by producing moving instead of still images. This capacity to produce moving images, however, is not unique to film: it is also a capability of the video medium. The latter medium, however, doesn't rely on a photochemical process for the production of its images. Within this web of differences and similarities between lens-based media, no single property is unique to film. Yet the latter medium's position within the web of intermedial relations, the precise ways in which it differs from as well as resembles other media, *is* unique, *is* specific. Hence, I argue that media are specified by mutual differences from as well as specific similarities with other media. I take the differentiability in Krauss' definition of medium specificity as a term which suggests or refers to the comparison of different media, rather than a notion which solely focuses on differences. Following this train of thought, the act of defining a medium's specificity can in part be understood as a process of mapping the differences and similarities between media, rather than the disclosure of a medium's single, unique essence.

The idea of differential specificity indicates the direction of my investigation into the media of film and video. By way of comparing and contrasting the differences and similarities between the two media, I aim to map out the layers of their related and similar, yet specific structures; that is, parts and sections of their specific structure. It is not possible to outline all media which constitute the specificity of film and video by way of differences and similarities, nor is it possible to provide a historical overview of all forms and functions, specifications and applications of film and video over the past decades in one study. However, it is possible to locate times and places where film and video met, crossed paths, altered each other's course. To point out discourses, contexts, functions, forms, and objects in which the two media have specified, or still specify each other most strongly. To point out which – often already changed or neutralized – differences and similarities between the media have led to the forms of film and video which we have and see today. As I will demonstrate, the two media have thoroughly altered and influenced each other's specificity over the last decades. This strong mutual influence is not so much the result of differences, but is mostly caused by the fact that in many ways they are so alike.

The above shows that, although the primary aim of this research is to gain understanding in contemporary intermedial objects which combine film and video features, it necessarily comprises media-archaeological components. Yet, in some ways, these media-archaeological passages should rather be defined as media-theory archaeological analyses. For, as media specificity depends on medium specification, the related histories of film and video are histories of related medium specifications. As explained previously, media are specified both in practice and by theory. When it comes to the media of film and video, there has been much cross-over between medial practices and theoretical specifications. As I will demonstrate, the medium of video has not only influenced the specificity of film through video practices which, for instance, have taken

over some of film's dominant applications, but also via the medium specifications which film theory forms. The arrival of video made film theorists sensitive to some of the abilities of cinema. Abilities, that is, which had not yet been widely noted before video images brought them fully into sight. In this way, video managed to shed a new light on film, which was consequently viewed differently.

On the other hand, film theory can provide insight into the specificity of video. Film-theoretical concepts have proven to be either elucidating or useless in the analysis of video works. Either way, in the absence of a coherent field of video studies, film-theoretical ideas have guided, and still guide, the specification of video as a medium. Therefore, the notion of differential specificity which forms the basis of this study goes hand in hand with differential specification – the latter involving both visual objects and theoretical texts. How do theoretical specifications of film relate to specifications of video? In what way do reflections on video differ from thoughts about film? How do ideas on film affect the use and understanding of the video medium? How have video works influenced film theory, and hence film?

What is more, interestingly, the idea of differential specificity shows that the answer to my initial questions (How can film and video be defined as distinct, specific media? How are these two media to be understood?) can be sought in the intermedial objects of which I aim to gain a better understanding by way of investigating those questions on the specificity, or rather, the specification of film and video. If media are fundamentally specified by their mutual differences and similarities, then this process of specification can be presumed to be visible and active in visual objects in which film and video images are placed in, over, or after one another. All in all, analyses of the intermedial relations in mixed film/video objects require insight into general specifications of the two media. Yet, the intermedial objects which I study in this book each constitute contributions to these specifications of film and video as well, and therefore need to be approached with the question of how film and video are specified by and within the specific intermedial piece.

Traveling Forward, Expanding the Voyage

It is remarkable that Krauss does not embrace intermedial artworks in her writings on differential medium specificity, of which *A Voyage of the North Sea* is the most comprehensive. As film and video scholar Ji-Hoon Kim has noted, there is no reason why intermedial artworks contradict Krauss' medium theory. Yet, in contrast to her predilection for obsolete media, she excludes intermedia or mixed media from the outset (Kim 121). In fact, Krauss condemns the international fashion for installation and intermedial work with the argument that, in this trend, "art finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital" (Krauss 1999: 56). However, Krauss' idea of differential specificity is sustained and carried out precisely by the intermedia works which she despises. As Kim puts it, Krauss' criticism on intermedial art works "brackets out any potential for investigating the relationship that makes the 'differential

specificity' of a medium, such as film, become dramatized and altered by other new media [...]” (56).

Kim rightly concludes that the fact that differential specificity is not intrinsic to Krauss' privileged artworks makes clear that her thesis on medium specificity is still anchored in a belief in the uniqueness and singularity of the means of expression that is part of the modernist argument on medium specificity that she intends to renew (Kim 121). Such implicit, unintended recourse to essentialism can be discovered in more than one way in Krauss' medium-theoretical work. Thus, although her definition of medium specificity forms the starting point of my research, I will discuss the problems and shortcomings of Krauss' thesis throughout this study. In each of the following four chapters, I propose a supplement to her definition which can obviate the recurrent “pull” of essentialism. The first supplement, however, can already be found in the common denominator of the chapters, each of which is structured around an effect of the two media on their users. Krauss diverts attention from the essentialist question of what a medium is by focusing on the question of how a medium is produced. To Krauss' question of how a medium is made and specified, I add the question of what a medium does. What are the (distinct and/or similar) performative effects of film and video? How do the two media affect their viewers? How do they relate their users? Which positions do they enable, preclude or create for the subject? The four chapters of this book are organized around four effects which surface most pervasively in specifications of film and video. Those four effects, moreover, form a suitable ground for comparison, as the most notable differences and similarities between film and video are tied to them.

In Chapter One, I compare the way in which film and video each produce reality effects, yet in different ways. Some of the most famous discussions of film's specificity circle around the medium's inherent realism. Video has, however, altered the way in which the relation between film and reality can be understood, as the technology of the video medium relates video images differently to referents in reality than film does. What is more, although film and video both produce a reality effect, their impression on the viewer is slightly different. In addition, the conventional devices by which film and video produce their respective reality effects are disparate. Intermedial video artworks and films often combine the reality effect producing devices of both film and video. What is the effect of such double, yet different, reality effects in one visual object? In two close readings of *Benny's Video* (Haneke 1992) and *Family Viewing* (Egoyan 1987), I analyze how the videomatic reality effect enhances the cinematic one, while the two films in turn constantly specify the video images they show as “real.” In addition, the specific (yet conventional) relation between video images and reality turns out to offer new narrative possibilities to fiction films.

The comparison of the reality effects of film and video leads to some questions on the concept of medium specificity. Krauss' definition proves to have its shortcoming, as it cannot account for the fact that film and video each have many, sometimes even opposing abilities and characteristics at the same time. In Chapter One, I therefore

suggest to expand Krauss' definition with a term which spatializes Krauss' predominantly temporal term, namely, George Baker's notion of the medium as "field".

In Chapter Two, I study the ways in which film and video each affect the viewer's sense of being a physical body in time and space. Why is the medium of film usually theorized as a medium which produces a disembodied viewer; a viewer who forgets her own bodily presence in time and space? Why has video, on the other hand, been defined as a haptic, embodying medium? In order to answer these questions, I turn to Jean-Louis Baudry's influential film-theoretical concept of the *dispositif*. Not only has this concept formed the basis of the discourses of so-called apparatus theorists, who more than anyone have produced the dominant view that the film spectator is a disembodied one, it is also a very useful concept in explaining why video often functions as an embodying rather than a disembodiment medium. What is more, the intermedial cinematic video installations by David Claerhout and Douglas Gordon which I will discuss in this chapter combine some of the most typical disembodiment and embodying qualities of film and video, most of which concern features of the media's *dispositifs*; features such as the spatial viewing set-up of their technologies, the spatial and architectural features of the viewing room, (institutional) viewing conventions, as well as the position of the spectator.

In Chapter Three, I frame film and video within society. In addition to the fact that the concept of the medium in general necessitates attention to the social field, this field is especially important to an investigation of film and video. First of all, video came into being in a decade in which medium theory (as formulated by, most prominently, Marshall McLuhan) centered on the idea that media produce social structures. Many early video practices relate to this dominant, influential idea. The technological determinism which is expressed by these theoretical texts and objects gives rise to new questions on Krauss' definition of medium specificity. The concept will be redefined in this chapter by way of Raymond Williams' ideas on so-called soft determination.

Out of all the domains within which the two media operate (culture, politics, art, etc.) the social field can be said to point out the internal differentiation of the two media the most. When film and video are framed by their operation within the social field, the specificity of the two media turns out to be fraught with contradictions. In addition to these internal contradictions, film and video overlap, differ, and oppose each other in the social field. Besides theoretical texts which specify the social effects of film and video, I analyze how the different social meanings, functions and effects of the two media are (further) exposed as well as applied in intermedial artworks by video artists Lynn Hershman and Sadie Benning.

The positive and sometimes even utopian specifications of film and video which are discussed in Chapter Three have dominant negative counterparts. In addition to texts and objects which emphasize the specific ability of film and video to produce stable subject positions within (democratic, emancipated, utopian) social structures, many practical and theoretical works specify the two lens-based media as cold, objectifying

media which hurt and obstruct, rather than aid or create the subject. Although some of the dystopian views of film and video are discussed in Chapter Three, I zoom in on these other sides of film's and video's respective "Janus heads" in Chapter Four, which deals with the violent features of the two media. As the violent impact of film and video can hardly be considered separately from harmful social discourses, I investigate whether the concept of the medium can be related to, or embedded in, Foucault's notion of *discours*.

What is more, the violent features of film and video cannot be understood without taking the common ancestor of the lens-based media into account, that is, photography. A triangulation with photography will provide insight into the specific ways in which film and video are each able to hurt their users, most notably the subjects in front of the lens. Such triangulation with another medium is not unique to Chapter Four; mapping the differential specificity of the two media vis-à-vis each other necessarily involves comparing the ways in which the two media relate similarly or differently to other, closely related media. In the first chapter, literature and literary theory will bring out some of the specific qualities of film and video. In Chapter Two, art-historical ideas on painting, theater, and sculpture are brought to bear on film and video. The medium of television will mostly play an important part in Chapter Three. The influence of the computer, finally, runs through all four chapters. The question of how digitalization has (or hasn't) altered the applications and possibilities which are specific to analogue film and video will be addressed throughout this study.

Near the end of Chapter Four, the Janus heads of film and video are turned again – by films and videos themselves. In the final section of Chapter Four, I will compare the different ways in which feminist films and videos work to oppose the misogynist traits of traditional narrative cinema. Whereas feminist films radically disengage themselves from classical film conventions, intermedial video works such as *Phoenix Tapes* (1999) by artist duo Christoph Müller and Matthias Girardet, and *Approximations* (2000-2001) by Johanna Householder and b.h. Yael form critical reflections on misogynist film conventions by mimicking or sampling scenes from classical narrative films. These videomatic strategies of mimicking and sampling will bring me back to *Ten Thousand Waves* in the conclusion, where I will demonstrate how my differential mapping of film and video can form a guide through the blurry, swirling waves of intermedial film/video works.

