
Towards an Intermedial Theory of Medial Agency: Environing Media

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Based on a rough conceptual divide of (parts of) media studies, including intermedial studies, this article presents two positions based on interests in media as transmission and representation, or media as ecological frame, or media agency. Following that, the article discusses how a new concept in environmental studies, ‘environing media’ or ‘environing technologies’ – where representation and media ecological agency seem to find a fruitful meeting point – is discussed in more detail. That description and discussion are put into a debate with central ideas of intermedial studies, before the final part of the article briefly exemplifies the theoretical ideas in the case of the IPCC report’s *Summary for Policymakers* (2021).

Introduction

Let me begin this rather abstract theoretical article by pointing to a very specific text with quite concrete implications: the *Summary for Policymakers* is a 32-page abbreviated version of the more than 3000-page scientific report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2021). The peer-reviewed, very detailed, and thorough scientific assessments are, in the full report, checked and written by thousands of top scientists, but it is the shorter, more popularized, and much more accessible *Summary* that is read, commented on, and summarized further by journalists, politicians, activists and business leaders. And finally, the scientific findings reach so-called ordinary readers or laymen.

The *Summary* is one of the absolute key texts relating to the current planetary climate crisis and even though there are disturbing and important political and scientific questions that relate to the report (concerning who gets to draft it and who

gets to veto specific phrasings, among other things), that is not what I will discuss here. Instead, I am interested in better understanding how such a report, and in principle any other text or media product,^a can be conceptualized from a media theoretical point of view. I want to discuss whether to regard the *Summary* as a representation of a scientific description of the world or if it makes more sense to see the report as being an agent in the world. Hence, I will try to investigate whether the report's most important function is to represent something outside the media system, or if the report is a tool whose main characteristic is that it exerts a certain agency towards humans and nonhumans, as part of a complex media ecology. Or both.

To initiate the discussion I will sketch some very general tendencies in media studies, including intermedial studies. There are, of course, different ways to conceptualize the diverse media theoretical approaches, but in the following I discuss what I consider to be an unproductive division in the general field of media studies, including intermedial studies, namely whether to see media as *representing* the outer world or being *agents* in this same world. I am well aware that this dichotomy is rather coarse, and that I would have a hard time defending the division via strict scientific or historical terms, but I will test whether it is fruitful to rethink some basic ideas in media studies along such lines.

Therefore, I first sketch the two positions that I refer to as the 'transmission tradition' and the 'media ecological tradition'. After that, I open a conversation between them via the concepts of 'envirning media' and 'envirning technologies' that I find to be fruitful responses to the media split. Equipped with a new understanding of the possible functions of media, I briefly return to the *Summary for Policymakers* before my conclusion, where yet another important media theoretical option will be touched upon.

Two Approaches to Media

I am working with an admittedly broad division of media studies. In 2006, Mark B. N. Hansen suggested a media theoretical dichotomy where one tradition 'explores the experiential dimensions of media, including new media, and another [...] excavates the technical logics of media, logics which – for Kittler at least – are only contingently and impermanently synchronized with the ratios of human perception'. More simply put, 'whether to foreground the infrastructure conditioning experience (media materiality) or the experience thereby realized' (Hansen 2006). Both, I would say, are on the side of media agency and ecology in the dichotomy I suggest. The distinction that I work with lies closer to another dichotomy that has been debated in theatre and performance studies, between a semiotic and a phenomenological approach (Fortier 2016, discussed in chapter 1), and of course in several other fields of communication and cultural theory, too. Let me lay out the two positions.

On the one hand, we understand media as the defining part of human communication, where media are communicative tools connecting agents across temporal or spatial distances. This tradition works with a (more or less) modified

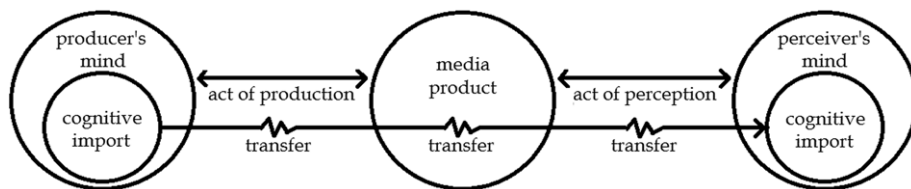


Figure 1. Elleström's medium-centred model of communication. Reprinted from Elleström (2018), CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence.

version of a transmission model – such as is discussed and criticized in Lars Elleström's (2018) article 'A media centred model of communication'. In the article, Elleström critically discusses the possibilities of influential communication models by researchers including Shannon, Jakobson, Schramm, and Stuart Hall. Elleström distils what he considers to be the three minimum requirements for communication to take place: '1. Something being transferred, 2. Two separate places between which the transfer occurs, 3. An intermediate stage that makes the transfer possible' (Elleström 2018: 277). Carefully selecting features from the earlier models, and adding important aspects to refine and revise them, Elleström suggests a model which is, I would argue, a representative of an updated and refined transmission understanding of human communication (see Figure 1).

The model borrows the form and the conceptual frame from preceding left-to-right communication models, but the information science notion of 'message' from Shannon is redefined into the more flexible notion of 'cognitive import'. Importantly, a certain level of feedback (shown by the two-direction arrows) between the entities is taken into consideration. Present in Elleström's argument is the Peircean semiotics insight that any media product, like any sign, is not meaningful before it is considered as, exactly, a sign.

Thus, the originating communication models' crude transmission is turned into a more relational understanding despite the visual similarity. Elleström's modelization, and other contemporary ideas of communication, are far removed from Shannon and Weaver's mathematical information transport model (Shannon and Weaver 1998) – but still adhere to a transmission idea of communication. The model includes a human subject-position functioning as the sender ('producer's mind' as Elleström calls it), and receiver ('perceiver's mind') signalling that agency belongs to human beings. Researchers that directly or indirectly follow such an understanding of communication tend to focus on and analyse individual media products or texts trying to describe how a text, or a limited group of texts, function and how they work as communicative tools between perceivers and senders.

On the other hand, we have what I call a media ecological tradition: here, media are integrated parts of the world (hence the term 'ecological' which has nothing directly to do with biological ecology, it rather denotes 'holistic', or 'contextual'). Christer Johansson, discussing media theories that are sceptical of the 'semiotic' bias quotes Mitchell and Hansen saying that when media are seen as an environment or

ecosystem they are seen as ‘a form of life, [...] a general environment for living – for thinking, perceiving, sensing, feeling’ (Mitchell and Hansen 2010, quoted in Johansson 2021). Johansson also refers to John Durham Peters for a similar idea: ‘Once communication is understood not only as sending messages – certainly an essential function – but also as providing conditions for existence, media ceases to be only studios and stations, message and channels, and become infrastructures and forms of life’ (Peters 2015: 14).

As a consequence of this, media have a certain agency, here understood as a ‘power to act’ as Latour has casually phrased – and this also means that the agency is not exclusively based on human intention or subjectivity (agency is described in a number of different ways, in particular in Chapter 2 in Latour 2017: the quote is from p. 4). Or rather: some sort of medial agency interacts with some kind of human agency. The idea is that media construct worlds and interact with other agents, human or non-human, rather than represent aspects of the world that can be communicated between human beings. A rather conventional but nevertheless convincing example of a media ecological communicative tradition is James Carey’s work (for instance, Carey 2009); the position is more spectacularly suggested in Marshall McLuhan’s works (for instance, McLuhan 2001); and, more recently, the diverse German Media Archaeology tradition offers a more technical and often more deterministic version of this line of thinking (Siegert and Winthrop-Young 2015).

The position has ties to a philosophically and anthropologically inclined understanding of media, as described by Jacob Lund who, in the following quote, paraphrases French techno-philosopher Bernhard Stiegler:

The human being is a faulty and limited creature, who compensates for its lacks and limitations by using tools and media outside the human being itself, and thus enters the surrounding environment. This environment simultaneously influences the human being by restricting its possibilities to become – developing and individuating itself – in a social sphere [socialitet]. (Lund 2020: 132, my translation)

In such a perspective, tools and media are partly interchangeable as concepts. Media, we could say, are probing instruments, and they are central ingredients in the human condition, defining the human condition as Mitchell and Hansen demonstrated (in the Introduction, Mitchell and Hansen 2010). But let us keep in mind, for later discussions, that human beings in this description nonetheless seem to be at a distance from nature and the environment.

Summing up, this understanding of media remains critical towards the idea that the main function of media is to *represent* something, be it inner psychological experiences or an outer reality: media are not only *communicative* instruments connecting people. Instead, media are tools or instruments with which humans navigate in a complex reality already dominated by media – to the extent that human subjectivity is partly seen as the effects of technical and cultural media constellations rather than the other way around.^b An important consequence is that agency does

not belong to humans alone: agency is distributed along other lines, and agency is negotiated through technology, infrastructural systems, and media.

One way to distinguish between the two formations is regarding their preferred objects of study. The transmission/communications tradition often focuses on some kind of text (be it artistic material in different media types or journalistic texts or science communication – or in the multimodal and intermedial tradition where not only a novel or a conversation but also a cough, a wine bottle, or a dog, may be read as meaningful media products) to establish some kind of meaning in this media product. The second tradition would often be interested in other sorts of constellations or networks (as opposed to isolated objects). McLuhan, famously, was interested in all sorts of ‘extensions of man’, from electricity to book printing, James Carey investigated the railway as a communication form, and media archaeologists of the German school often investigate technical inventions’ influence on not only communication but also human subjectivity. Individual texts are, from a media ecological perspective, less interesting than the structures that make these texts possible in the first place.

Apart from unusual positions in the extended field of media studies, such as John Durham Peters, who vigorously combines classical ideas from communication studies with media ecology (in particular in Peters 1999), the two traditions sketched above are not conversing well with each other. This lack of – well, communication – has to do with widely diverging understandings of human subjectivity, the limits of communication and the different notions of agency and intention. In the following, however, I want to find ways to understand the communicative and agency potentials of media that in some ways combine aspects of both positions, and to do so I will discuss two texts that suggest a passage leading through, or rather beyond, the dichotomy. The proposed position is characterized, I will argue, by seeing media as communicative tools that create environments.

A Media Approach to the Question of ‘Environments’

Needless to say, the dichotomy of understanding media as either transmitters or as agents, a dichotomy that may be reformulated as between communication on the one side or as conditions for communication and subjectivization on the other, can be found in many different academic areas. In comparative literature, for instance, the first trend would be more interested in specific literary texts, whereas the media ecological trend would try to better understand some of the material and technical conditions for writing, reading, publishing or disseminating literature. In contemporary media studies, as hinted above, investigating the efficacy of, say, science communication or the impact of journalistic texts on political issues, would fall in the first group of interest in communication. Studies of the impact of digitalization on subjectivities, or the use of new media forms as impacting political discourses, would instead characterize the media ecological approach.

In Environmental Humanities – which is the field that I want to enter now – these issues are very present. For instance, the sub-field of Environmental Humanities called ecocriticism, which from its beginnings in the 1990s as a literary studies tradition, has developed into several different theoretical and historical, and philosophical branches.

However, there is a blind spot in ecocriticism (and Environmental Humanities) regarding seriously including a media studies and/or intermediality perspective to the questions (as discussed in Bruhn and Salmose 2023; Bruhn *et al.* 2023; Bruhn 2020a, 2020b). Existing work in the Environmental humanities and ecocriticism stresses how an engagement with media or mediation is important for the field and there is work that takes the step away from a monomedia approach (for example in film, or in literature, or other particular art or media types) to a broader approach, where the question of the ecological crisis as media-related is discussed in different media types. One of the most important approaches that cover many media types is the research agenda of ‘ecomedia’, first proposed by Rust *et al.* (2016) and recently taken up from an African media perspective (Iheka 2021),^c but even these important eco-media approaches have an understanding of media that can be further developed.^d

I will do this by discussing a theoretical concept offered by Adam Wickberg and Johan Gärdebo, who also argue that media studies and environmental humanities are a sub-developed combination. They develop a system of ideas in a few recent texts, but originally, I think, in the programmatic ‘Where humans and the planetary conflate: an introduction to environing media’ (Wickberg and Gärdebo 2020), which, with some modifications, became the base of their introductory chapter of the volume, *Environing Media* (Wickberg and Gärdebo 2022), where the idea of environing media is put to use on a range of diverse historical and geographical material.

The starting point for their article is that, as a result of the

rapidly escalating eco-crisis of mass extinctions, desertification, and other life-altering processes, the environment has gone from being understood as nature – that which is out there and that humans can destroy or save – to become an acute political, social, and philosophical concern. (Wickberg and Gärdebo 2020: 1)

The major objective for redefining the notion of environment is to move away from an anthropocentric understanding of nature as something independent of human beings but available for manipulation: the underlying idea is to leave behind a position where humanity is the subject that acts upon the inert object of nature, an ontology and epistemology that in Western thinking dates back at least to the Cartesian division between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. The suggested alternative is the notion that human actors turn nature into environments, not in a one-directional, manipulating subject–object relationship, but in a constellation where nature and culture are inextricably intertwined. This position brings with it a host of new possibilities, as well as questions and problems, when areas of politics and philosophy and the arts are suddenly mapped in dramatically new ways, as discussed

in the well-known work of, among others, Haraway (2016), Moore (2015), Latour (2015; Latour and Weibel 2020) and Morton (2010).

Wickberg and Gärdebo do not claim that their position is original. Instead, the originality of their argument lies in the idea that this perception of the non-autonomous character of what used to be called nature entails a new understanding of media and mediation, and they stress, as I did above, that surprisingly little work has been done in combining media studies and environmental humanities. The important strategic move of the article is, therefore, to stress the way that nature is constructed by human interventions. To denote this they suggest the strange-sounding verb form ‘environing’, and ‘environing media’.

Gärdebo and Wickberg, in a sense, radicalize the media ecological tradition by stating that nature-turned-into-environment is the result of what they call ‘environing media’. Among the typical environing media, deemed from the examples they mention in their articles, are maps or other spatial navigation tools. These ‘media’ are characteristic of not only offering a spatial overview of the world (i.e., *representing* the world in a medial form) but also maps for conquering foreign lands (i.e., being tools that have agency, potentially leading to dominance). Defined as such it becomes clear that the real inspiration for Wickberg and Gärdebo is not media studies as such, but rather environmental history and techno-studies, as is exemplified by Sverker Sörlin and Nina Wormbs’ article ‘Environing technologies: a theory of making environment’ (Sörlin and Wormbs 2018).

Sörlin and Wormbs open their article with general reflections on how, in recent years, many of the basic parameters of global history tend to collapse: the collapsing notions include the idea of intentionality and (human) agency and thus the classical epistemological opposition between natural history on the one side and cultural history on the other, a collapsing distinction discussed among others by postcolonial historian Dipresh Chakrabarty as well as Latour (Latour 2004; Chakrabarty 2009). Therefore, they suggest a verb designating the emerging techno-humanistic understanding, a verb that captures the new historical situation where former distinctions dissolve. The suggested term, in 2018, was ‘environing’:

Environing is the process through which humankind impacts nature to form environment. Technology is one of the central means through which humans exert their influence on the world. Environing, like technology, is formative both in the material and the immaterial domains. The environment is therefore not only the material world ‘out there’ that human activities impact. The environment is also increasingly a word to signify the knowledge-based representation of the material world in which humans and their actions are embedded. Hence, we suggest that environing consists of processes whereby environments appear as historical products and technologies as the tools required for the environing to take place. (Sörlin and Wormbs 2018: 103)

Stressing that there are ‘several types of environing technologies’, they exemplify the notion by way of three important forms: ‘*writing, sensing and shaping*’, which – and

this is crucial – are characterized by ‘*both* environing through perception and understanding *and* physical changes in nature’ (Sörlin and Wormbs 2018: 107, emphasis in original). The environing technologies have, in other words, both representational and agential functions. ‘Shaping’ is the activity of directly changing the environment, for instant landscapes, and examples are ‘technologies related to herding, forestry, irrigation, fishing or the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere’ (Sörlin and Wormbs 2018: 107). The two other forms, writing and sensing, are typically cooperating with the ‘shaping’ function. They operate more indirectly than shaping, but they can both register and change environments, which as a result of the sensing and writing can be manipulated. Consequently, a certain *sensing*, via instruments, leads to a register (for instance a *writing*) of certain aspects of the surrounding world – for instance, the climate – which will, later on, be the object of institutional written reports from, for instance, the IPCC, where political measures to change aspects of the world (carbon dioxide emissions) are suggested. Importantly, the two historians of environment and technology, Sörlin and Wormbs, stress that novels, films and images are also examples of ‘environing technologies’: this broad selection of communicative forms is unusual for a media and communication position, even if it is the methodological starting point for intermedial studies and for other fields in the humanities.

Sörlin and Wormbs present four cases to exemplify their theory. The first example is relatively technological: it concerns the remote sensing of satellites and their value for worldwide ecological measurements. The three subsequent examples are more conceptual: first, the modern idea of a ‘planetary computerized climate science’ which ‘brought into being a climate that hitherto had not existed’ (Sörlin and Wormbs 2018: 111). Second, the economic ideas of ‘ecosystem services’, which are based on technological sensing and writing combined with ideas of shaping. Third, they mention the idea of institutionalizing the assessment of environmental science results: Sörlin and Wormbs see this as an environing technology resulting in the policy-advising activities of the IPCC panel. All four examples clearly represent, as well as act upon, the environment, and by conducting this double mediation action, a new human–environment constellation is in place.

The general tendency of Sörlin and Wormbs’ four examples differs in aim and tonality from Gärdebo and Wickberg.^e The major difference among them is the application of the Foucauldian concept of governance to their media theoretical positions:

The work performed by the environing technology can be seen in the light of Foucault’s concept of governmentality, developed around 1980. The environing technology is what makes nature governable through the work of assembling, identifying, monitoring, articulating, quantifying, conceptualizing and visualizing; through to the search for policy instruments with which to apply the environing technology to governance. When this stage is reached, the technology has performed the environing work with a high level of impact. (Sörlin and Wormbs 2018: 115)

Gärdebo and Wickberg, too, use the notion of governance, but less distinctly, and without referring to its (perhaps obvious?) Foucauldian source. But they employ the term with a much more critical, even pessimistic vectorization: governance, for them, is related to new ways of measuring and mapping the world, giving possibilities of acting upon environmental crises. But it is crucial for them to stress that the ‘enviroming media’ historically are connected to control, colonial power and, more recently, to sophisticated – and unescapable – digital surveillance. Big Data and AI are not only tools for intergovernmental global action based on scientific knowledge – these enviroming technologies have the ominous downside of being subordinating surveillance instruments:

The integration of all environmental scales in Earth system science is not only a question about epistemic power but also property. [...] digital environmental data are the currency with which our present-day ecological crisis is being enumerated, described, and known, and increasingly also the focus of commercial interest as a commodity. A number of initiatives by tech firms like Microsoft, Amazon, and Google show a growing interest in environmental data, in particular to apply artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool for surveillance capitalism to manage everything from natural resources to wildlife conservation. (Wickberg and Gärdebo 2022: 64)

For now, let me summarize the two texts on enviroming: both offer valuable ideas about how to reorientate media studies and Environmental humanities, and they do this by entering the debate from a post-anthropocentric point of view where the unhelpful distinction between nature and culture is replaced with a relation where the human and the environment are mutually interrelated. Both enviroming positions designate the ways that media and technologies are not only representations of external phenomena, but rather are phenomena that act upon the outer world, either as sensing or measuring or geo-shaping functions, either with productive outcomes (Sörlin and Wormbs) or with a quite dark interpretation of the colonizing and destructive surveillance downsides of these media and technologies (Wickberg and Gärdebo 2022).

Media versus Technologies – an Intermedial Understanding of Enviroming Media?

There is one further aspect of the ‘enviroming’ ideas that I want to discuss, namely the lack of clarity concerning ‘technology’ and ‘media’ in the texts. This will lead me to specify insights from the ‘enviroming’ position and get me back to the IPCC *Summary for Policymakers* mentioned initially.

Sörlin and Wormbs are explicit concerning their inspiration from techno-history and define ‘technology’ historically and conceptually, but they do not clarify the connection leading from technology to media. And the opposite is, more or less, the case in Gärdebo and Wickberg’s ‘enviroming media’ text, where contemporary

German media theory holds the central place.^f So, Sörlin and Wormbs talk about media and meditation by way of technologies, whereas Gärdebo and Wickberg talk about technologies by way of media.

What seems to be a confusing problem, as discussed in Nina Wormbs' (2022) essay, may actually be reformulated to be a productive tension, because it points to the fact that certain (but perhaps not all) technologies may indeed be seen as media, and vice versa, depending on the intellectual trajectories you prefer.

We are thrown back, then, to a discussion concerning how to define media. In the field of intermedial studies, this debate, which was quite intense around 2005–2015, seems to have landed in a broad, but not necessarily vague definition, saying that everything *can* be a medium but not everything *is* a medium. Behind the paradoxical phrasing is the semiotic insight that anything can function as a sign if it is perceived as such – a definition that mirrors most post-Marcel Duchamp definitions in modern art, where anything can be art if we consider it to be art (as argued in Kyndrup 2008). With this basic definition in mind, we can note that 'technology' and 'media' do more or less the same job in the two *environing*-texts: they act in and upon the world in intricate negotiations with humans and non-humans, and it is this position I want to pursue further. Media/technologies *represent* selected and new aspects of the world and thus, simultaneously, *act* upon the world in new ways that make it governable – where the notion of governmentality can be negatively or positively invested from a political or environmental point of view.

It seems possible and even tempting to establish the contours of what could be called, a bit clumsily, 'environing media technologies'. With this awkward term I want to eat the medial cake and have it: the term combines and conflates the agency (technology) and representing/transmitting (media). Let me test what such a term might offer when I return to the IPCC *Summary*.

Summary as an *Environing Media Technology*

Nina Wormbs (2022) analyses the ways that the 2014 IPCC reports' *Summary for Policymakers* (SPM) exhibits the characteristic double *environing* function. On the one hand, it visualizes (represents) temporal aspects of the scientific data on historical and future developments concerning climate change and carbon dioxide. On the other hand, as a result of this, the summary gives some administrative and political outlines of how to react to prevent the most disastrous aspects of a future warming world. It acts, or perhaps more precisely, it offers agency.^g

Nevertheless, it seems to me that Wormbs' article, and most of the other articles in the *Environing Media* volume, works with a concept of mediation and media that might be developed one or two steps further – thus refining the foundational idea regarding *environing media technologies*. I will exemplify this in a constructive critique of Wormbs', in many ways very rewarding, text.

Wormbs is not hiding the fact that her main focus is on environment and technology, not media, and this is exactly where I, as an intermedial scholar, would

like to develop the terminology. I argue that Wormbs' position, and even the other 'enviroming' texts discussed here, could be further refined to be more productive by way of the central but undertheorized notions of 'mediation', 'visualization' and 'translation', and the verbs directly extracted from these.

Wormbs' main example in her article on 'enviroming time' is the visualization of time in the *Summary for Policymakers* of the 2014 IPCC report. Wormbs describes both some of the general features of the IPCC reports and the specific challenges of concentrating the immense IPCC material into a short, understandable summary report, and the considerations of trying to visualize the threats of future carbon dioxide emissions on unusually long timescales. She argues convincingly for the probable effects of the design choices, and she concludes that the visualizations of data are indeed giving a good impression of what the science is intended to communicate, namely that despite the long timeframes used, the visualizations offer the reader ways to seriously understand the ecological threats. However, her argument leaves behind the formal questions and more freely discusses the assumed efficacy of the communication.

As a response to this approach, I would suggest that what is referred to as 'mediation', 'visualization' and 'translation' in the enviroming media texts can be subsumed under the heading of 'media transformation' as has been defined and discussed by Lars Elleström and others (Elleström 2014; Salmose and Elleström 2020). Media transformation is an intermedial process defined by *temporality* and *change*: in a media transformation process, there is initially a constellation of data and meaning actualized in a specific media product – and parts of the form and content of this initial media product are then transferred into another media constellation, with all the well-known but complex changes that necessarily follow when the multimodal affordances of one media type are changed to another. To put it even more skeleton-like: first, we have x in media product 1, then we have x' in media product 2. This relationship between environment and media, where the mediation of the environment is investigated as a media transformation process, underlies the research ideas of so-called intermedial ecocriticism (Bruhn 2020a; Bruhn and Salmose 2023). Intermedial ecocriticism investigates how ideas of the socio-ecological crisis are represented in different media types, and a major strategy is to take seriously the basic insight that most of the knowledge about, for instance, the climate crisis, can be understood as a media transformation: from science results to popular science, from popular science to political statements or business policies, from popular science forms (such as the IPCC *Summary*) to educational material: the list is almost endless.

Such an intermedial analysis of media transformation should, ideally, be complemented with a thorough description of the media integration of the product in question, in this case the *Summary*. Without going into detail, an intermedial analysis of such a media product would take seriously the highly complex meaning-making process that is somewhat underplayed in the enviroming articles I have discussed here. Seemingly obvious and banal questions should be dealt with, including the use of colours, the actual setup of diagrams, the semantics of the

language concerning scientific uncertainty and scale, the relation between words, photographs, and other visual material. As Niklas Salmose and I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere (Bruhn and Salmose 2023, chapter 4), such an analysis of the Summary (though a more recent version than the one Wormbs analyses) may profit from an intermedial perspective in that it clearly distinguishes the affordances of a shorter, visually pleasing and popularizing form as opposed to the original thousands-of-pages report. In particular, an intermedial focus on the media transformation as a process including a necessary change, which can be described in detail, would have made Wormbs' argument even more persuasive.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I began and ended by briefly discussing a media product – the IPCC *Summary for Policymakers* (though in two different versions). The *Summary* is, as mentioned initially, an immensely important text, but I could in principle have chosen any text, or media product, to demonstrate what I find is an inherent tension in media studies, between considering such a text as *either* 'transmitting' or 'communicating' *or* seeing this text as 'doing' something by being part of a larger ecology or context.

I have discussed in some detail the theoretical 'envirning' texts because they demonstrate that this is a partly false opposition, and that media, even if perhaps media theoretical discourses tend to overlook this, are very likely to represent and transmit form and content, and by doing so they have an agential influence upon what they are representing. Future research will demonstrate if the inspiration comes from media studies or communication theory – or perhaps from other areas investigating how cultural artefacts interact with the world. One example is art critic T.J. Demos, who works roughly along the lines I am discussing here, without explicitly discussing media or intermedial studies. Demos, in the quote below, goes via 'complex forms' that are 'representational' and 'affective' that result in 'interventions'. His case studies are:

innovative complex forms in ways that are both representational (creatively portraying conflict geographies through innovative signifying systems) and affective (expressing emotional intensities and linking them to political ecologies through moving images), thereby working in tandem toward ambitious and collective interventions within forms of sensibility, critical thinking, and experimental modes of living otherwise. (Demos 2020, 21)

Likewise, the environing texts do not explicitly participate in the media theoretical discussion I set up, but they help me begin to clarify the possibilities and the limits of this dichotomy between transmission and agency. One noticeable question in the environing media texts, and one that has not been addressed among the authors, regards the further potentials of environing media. Wickberg and Gärdebo, I find,

adopt a somewhat deterministic understanding of what (enviroming) media do, which is more or less synonymous with suppressing and dominating (a position that is less marked in their introduction to the 2022 anthology, though). The tonality in Sörlin and Wormbs, and Wormbs' article, to me, seems more productive. With them I would argue for a balanced position, stating that media very often have enviroming functions and that such functions can be made to suppress and dominate – or participate in providing knowledge that may be put to use in different ways. Another way to formulate this position is by way of Bruno Latour's discussions of politics, the culture/nature-relation and science under what he calls 'the new climatic regime' (Latour 2017). Exemplifying the Actor Network Theory in a specific analysis of textual representations of nature–culture relations, where the supposedly strict lines between politics and science inadvertently collapse, he reminds us how 'one never plunges into descriptions except in order to act' (Latour 2017: 49) and how utterances relating to the climatic regime are at the same time 'constative' and 'performative' (Latour 2017: 48).

Returning to the *Summary* after these discussions, and having added to it some suggestions from intermedial theory, I argued that even if the enviroming texts definitely contribute to solving some important issues that are under-developed in, for instance, intermedial studies, I would argue that insights from the same intermedial studies may add analytical clarity and thus a heightened specificity to the enviroming media position.

More work is needed, and more examples, also from areas that do not explicitly deal with environmental issues, must be taken into consideration when understanding the inherent double nature of media: not perhaps as a problematic split, but as two tendencies that push each other into a third, productive position. One way to develop the idea of enviroming media would be by adding an analytical and descriptive layer of intermedial terms, but furthermore to implicate Latour's philosophical idea that 'on the side of the subject, there is no mastery; on the side of the object, no possible deanimation' (Latour 2017: 54) – and that '[b]eing a subject does not mean acting in an autonomous fashion in relation to an objective context; rather, it means sharing agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy' (Latour 2017: 62). Media, agency and subjectivity are connected to what we used to call nature, but we still do not know exactly how they are connected – the only thing that seems certain is that these entities cannot be meaningfully separated but should be regarded as a mutually interrelated productive network.

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Notes

- a. In this article I employ both the traditional ‘text’, but more often the term ‘media product’ to refer to ‘a specific communicative object or event’ regardless of media and not restricted to verbal or written texts. See Bruhn and Schirmacher (2022: 4).
- b. A position argued in Kittler *et al.* (1999). Kittler’s deterministic combination of post-structuralism and media theory (blending inspiration from Foucault with McLuhan) has been an inspiration for many scholars but has also been modified into positions where the human subject has a limited but detectable capability of acting upon its conditions as these are set in contemporary digital media constellations. This is the case, for instance, in some of the work of Mark B.N. Hansen or N. Katherine Hayles.
- c. There are current positions that connect a broader notion of media or intermediality with the themes of Environmental Humanities. These include ‘Mediating the Ecological Imperative’ (<https://ecological-imperative.ch/>) situated in Bern, and the Utrecht research group ‘Green Media Studies’ (<https://greenmedia.sites.uu.nl/>), as well as ‘Mediations of Climate and Ecological Emergency’ at Linnaeus University Center for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies in Sweden (<https://lnu.se/forskning/forskargrupper/mediations-of-climate-and-ecological-emergency/>).
- d. Part of the problem in these approaches is that ‘media’ is being roughly synonymous with digital media, social media, and mass media: media and environmental humanities become tightly connected to ‘the broader scholarly umbrella of *environmental communication* – defined as any communication activity that engages ecological contexts and concerns’ to quote a recent introduction to the Environmental Humanities, which also concludes that most questions in eco-communication studies have to do with ‘transmission’, see Hubbell and Ryan (2022: 232, emphasis in original).
- e. I should stress that the article I chose to discuss in most detail here is more radical in its critical stance than, for instance, Wickberg and Gärdebo’s introduction to *Environing Media*.
- f. In particular as this has been rethought via John Durham Peters, whose work clearly inspired Wickberg and Gärdebo.
- g. Other essays in the volume offer other convincing examples of the usefulness of this double notion of the representational *and* agentical idea of ‘environing’.

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