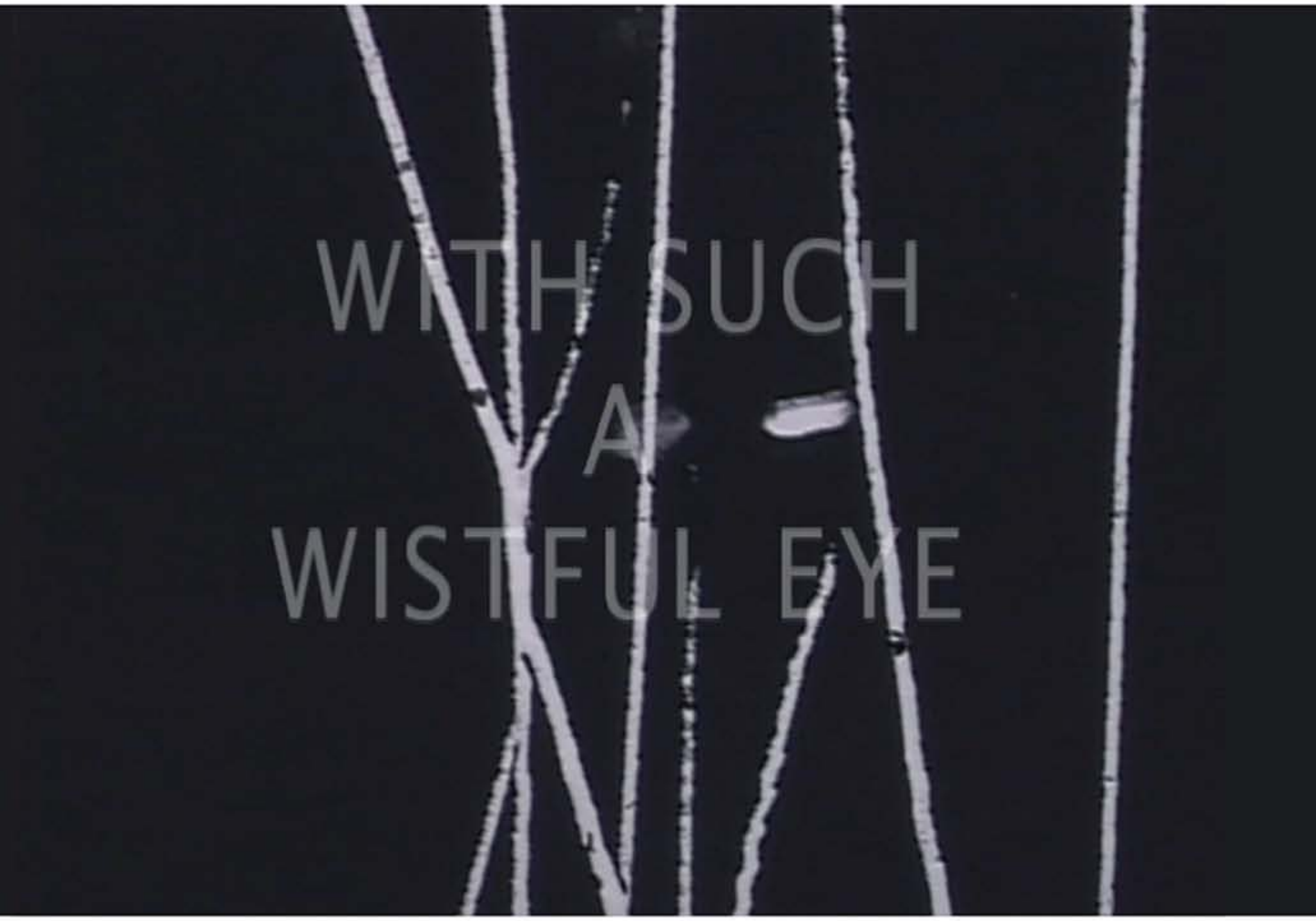
THE LITERARINESS OF MEDIA ART


WITH SUCH
A
WISTFUL EYE

Claudia Benthien, Jordis Lau,
and Maraike M. Marxsen

THE LITERARINESS OF MEDIA ART

The beginning of the 20th century saw literary scholars from Russia positing a new definition for the nature of literature. Within the framework of Russian Formalism, the term 'literariness' was coined. The driving force behind this theoretical inquiry was the desire to identify literature—and art in general—as a way of revitalizing human perception, which had been numbed by the automatization of everyday life. The transformative power of 'literariness' is made manifest in many media artworks by renowned artists such as Chantal Akerman, Mona Hatoum, Gary Hill, Jenny Holzer, William Kentridge, Nalini Malani, Bruce Nauman, Martha Rosler, and Lawrence Weiner. The authors use literariness as a tool to analyze the aesthetics of spoken or written language within experimental film, video performance, moving image installations, and other media-based art forms. This volume uses as its foundation the Russian Formalist school of literary theory, with the goal of extending these theories to include contemporary concepts in film and media studies, such as Neoformalism, intermediality, remediation, and postdrama.

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and Maraike M. Marxsen

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Please visit the online platform doi: 10.25592/literariness for selected video material of the featured artworks.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the outcome of the research project *Literarizität in der Medienkunst*, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) from July 2014 to June 2018. The project was conceptualized and initiated by Claudia Benthien, who also published several articles on the topic in the preparatory phase. The corpus of about one hundred works of media art was assembled through extensive research in distinguished international archives and museums, such as Electronic Arts Intermix (NYC) and ZKM | Center for Art and Media (Karlsruhe), as well as international art exhibitions, such as the Venice Biennale, Documenta (Kassel) or Dak'Art (Dakar).

This has been a thoroughly collaborative project, and the book has been jointly written by all three authors: Each chapter had two co-authors, and the third author was responsible for the final editing. This process ensured that each author's ideas and voice entered the book, which is also why the individual chapters do not have bylines. As they were writing this monograph, Jordis Lau and Maraike M. Marxsen also worked on their dissertations, which are related to the project but follow independent research agendas. The working title of Jordis Lau's dissertation is *Foregrounding the Past. Literary Modernism into Media Art*; Maraike M. Marxsen's dissertation has the working title *Deviant Girls, Deviant Forms. Female Adolescence in Experimental Film and Video Art*. Their dissertations are, respectively, related to the strategies of adapting literary texts and to literary genres in media art.

We would like to thank the DFG for its generous grant to conduct this research in four highly intense and productive years. We would also like to thank Jennifer Abbott (Routledge) for her enthusiasm and support.

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Hamburg, December 2017

1

INTRODUCTION

A Literary Approach to Media Art

“Language can be this incredibly forceful material—there’s something about it where if you can strip away its history, get to the materiality of it, it can rip into you like claws” (Hill in Vischer 1995, 11). This arresting image by media artist Gary Hill evokes the nearly physical force of language to hold recipients in its grip. That power seems to lie in the material of language itself, which, with a certain rawness, may captivate or touch, pounce on, or even harm its addressee. Hill’s choice of words is revealing: ‘rip into’ suggests not only a metaphorical emotional pull but also the literal physicality of linguistic attack. It is no coincidence that the statement comes from a media artist, since media artworks often use language to produce a strong sensorial stimulus. Media artworks not only manipulate language as a material in itself, but they also manipulate the viewer’s perceptual channels. The guises and effects of language as artistic material are the topic of this book, *The Literariness of Media Art*.

The force of language can be framed by the concept of literariness, which guides the theoretical discussions and the analyses of media artworks in our book. This concept was introduced by the Russian Formalists in the early 20th century as a new view of what constitutes the nature of literature. Literariness refers to the specific qualities of literary language, which the Formalists considered to be made distinct from the habitualized language of daily communication by the aesthetics of estrangement. Literary language defamiliarizes and disrupts perception, startling recipients and inviting them to take a second look. Hill’s statement resonates with the Formalists’ vision of literature—and art in general—as a means of revitalizing human perception that has been numbed by the automatization of everyday life.

As we will demonstrate, forms of literariness have played a significant role in media artworks by renowned international artists from the 1960s to the present, visible in poetic titles, lyrical elements, the playful use of script, narrative structures, and dialogical settings reminiscent of drama. Other artworks adapt specific literary genres or even appropriate material from pre-existing literary texts. When we visit art exhibitions today, we notice that a growing interest in an aesthetics that integrates language is often evident, and this is related to a documentary turn in media art. While this trend emphasizes narratives and voice-overs, it does not necessarily refer to literariness because language is mostly used in a pragmatic sense. This book focuses exclusively on works that integrate language in such a way that the “poetic function” dominates, leading to the "palpability of signs" (Jakobson 1960, 356)—the sensorial stimulus effected by media artworks that foreground the materiality of language.

Using literariness as a guiding concept, however, does not suggest that we believe certain features of language use are sufficient to define a work as literature. Literature is more than 'the sum of its devices'; it is defined by various factors such as the context, the canon, individual taste and setting, or the ideology underlying culture. The qualities of language alone do not suffice for a definition but are one factor among others and change over time. In the discussions that follow, literariness serves as a heuristic tool—rather than a rigid, stable category—to analyze the aesthetics and effects of spoken and written language in analog and digital video art, experimental film, video performance, moving image installations, and a few instances of 'net art' (media art projects and practices that are based on web technologies and are thus usually not presented in an institutional context but can be individually accessed online). In this context, literariness strengthens the premise that the aesthetic features attributed to literature may also be valid for other forms of artistic expression.

As such, literariness not only delineates diachronic characteristics of an aesthetic use of language but is also useful for understanding forms of art beyond the sheer linguistic realm. Therefore, in our discussions we use literariness as a transmedial concept that is especially effective for analyzing art that features figurations of language, yet at the same time it is by no means limited to it. For example, the idea of literariness sheds light on the notion of the 'poetic' image, a term that is often used somewhat vaguely in art criticism to describe audiovisual moving image art that does not necessarily feature language. Literariness helps to frame and sharpen the subjective tone of this definition in an investigation of just what gives an image a 'poetic effect' (see Chapter 4, Section 1).

Our discussion focuses on the defamiliarization of linguistic elements in media artworks and the artworks' communicative settings. Other audiovisual elements—such as sound, music, images, colors, movement, and rhythm—are nevertheless important for the aesthetic experience and creating meaning. In media art, meaning established through language inevitably enters into a relationship with other elements, which leads, for instance, to experimental "forms of interplay between visual and textual dimensions" or to the "reconstruction, deconstruction and dissolution of narrative structures and textual practices" (Lehmann 2008, 16). Media art can be characterized as an attempt to blend different art systems and forms; it looks for "the frictional process that comes about when [. . .] both strategies for semanticizing new materials and for desemanticizating of conventional signs are probed" (Schneider 1998, 237). Investigating media art with the concept of literariness means to acknowledge language not as a mere transmitter of meaning but also considering its potentials that "do not depend on its phonic dimension," such as the "spatio-visual representation" on a book page or a computer screen, or the atmospheric 'gestalt' of oral speech (Androutsopoulos 2007, 73).

Experiments with letters, words, and literary structures indicate that language and literature are at least as important for contemporary audiovisual arts as they were for the avant-garde visual arts (cf. Louis 2004). Many art movements from the early 20th century onward are precursors of language-based media art. The Dadaists and Futurists, for instance, used language as material by destroying and recombining linguistic signs (cf. D'Ambrosio 2009; see also Chapter 3, Section 1). The conceptual and aesthetic roots of media art are found in practices such as image montages, collages of linguistic and visual materials, or the integration of ready-mades and found footage (cf. Jana and Tribe 2006, 7f) . The 'neo-avant-gardes' also devised many artistic innovations based on language, such as the invention of concrete poetry in Austrian and German art circles. The Fluxus movement has left its traces on experimental film and video art (cf. Meigh-Andrews

2006, 92–100; Eamon 2009, 72f). Language-based media art is also closely related to conceptual art (cf. Eamon 2009, 8f), such as the text-based paintings, works on paper, or sculptures by artists including Carl André, Marcel Broodthaers, On Kawara, Barbara Kruger, Lawrence Weiner, or the Art & Language collaboration.

These and other art movements have contributed to an ongoing process of (re)negotiating the boundaries between traditional art genres. While some artists embarked on (and critics praised) a quest for the purification of art forms by analyzing and foregrounding the essence of painting or film, for instance, others challenged such ideas by radically tearing down long-held presumptions and questioning the very existence of an essential core in an art form or medium; for example, consider John Cage's seminal performance, *Untitled Event* (1952), in which he collaborated with a group of interdisciplinary artists. Media art, with video art emerging around 1960, continues this tradition. Framing media art through literariness acknowledges the blurred boundaries between the traditional art genres that are still characteristic of contemporary artistic production. Thus, this book also contributes to the field of interart studies (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2010). Similar to the concept of intermediality, interart studies developed as an academic response to artistic developments primarily in the second half of the 20th century. Its domain can seem like a battlefield at times, charging and challenging the 'canon' with sharpened definitions that, however, create more blur than clarity and seem to be motivated by academic politics (cf. Schröter 2012, 16–20).

The concept of literariness is constructive, as it neither aspires to challenge or perpetuate the idea that specific art forms are bound to specific media (in the sense of a material base) whose goal is purification (cf. Greenberg 2000); nor does it need to view media art in general as just another possible form of literature. The concept also allows recognition of the impact that technology has had on literary forms, emphasizing what Marjorie Perloff, following Richard A. Lanham's notion of "radical artifice" (Lanham 1993, 9) has defined as "a return to *artifice*" (Perloff 1991, 27): "Artifice, in this sense, is [. . .] the recognition that a poem or painting or performance text is a *made thing*—contrived, constructed, chosen—and that its reading is also a construction on the part of its audience" (ibid., 27f). The awareness of how artworks are made implies a heightened focus on the materiality of the medium, its features, and its effects on the viewer, as opposed to a focus solely on the seemingly transparent illusion created by the artwork.

Some basic similarities between literature and audiovisual arts strengthened our decision to undertake a scholarly investigation into the diverse field of media art from the viewpoint of literariness. One shared feature is the relationship to temporality. Just as the reading of a literary piece unfolds along with the unfolding of time, media artworks are in themselves time-based, as the actual artwork is of a specific duration, independent from the viewer. The media artworks discussed in our study often reflect on the qualities of time, enforced by performances that emphasize duration. They also explore how the experience of temporality may change perception, as the works often possess a "time-criticality" (Blom 2016, 14), that is: an artistic investigation of passing time that becomes palpable as the sensation of boredom or, in contrast, a stimulus overflow that the recipient cannot process. This may happen, for instance, when one word is repeated over the span of several minutes, as in Jochen Gerz's *Rufen bis zur Erschöpfung* (see Chapter 3, Section 1), or when multiple sensory channels are addressed, or even attacked, at once.

Thinking about the literariness of media art sharpens an understanding of the potential of specific arts, but this specificity is inclusive: what is at stake is the mutual elucidation of the arts. However, thinking about art and media is impossible without drawing demarcations. For purely practical reasons, we must define the objects of investigation. In its conceptual demarcations, our approach is heuristic: While this perspective makes use of the traditional, institutionalized classifications of art forms, it neither supports an essentialist notion nor aims to add fuel to the fire of a 'new paragon' (cf. Benthien and Weingart 2014b, 15–18). And yet, scholarship must not be caught unaware by the pitfalls of mistaking taxonomy for hierarchy. As Irina Rajewsky points out: "Demarcations and the border as such can be understood [. . .] as enabling structures, as structures that provide room to maneuver and create new contexts of meaning and experience" (Rajewsky 2010, 47). In this sense, our research investigates the performative dynamics shared by the arts and their potential to create a perceptual and affective impact.

Our research originated in literary studies, although as scholars our backgrounds are in German and English literary and cultural studies, film studies, and art history. As such, it is a truly interdisciplinary project, which—as recent trends in the humanities suggest—may be the future of these disciplines. Literariness is the nexus that allows us to move among different viewpoints and interests. Related to this, estrangement is a theory that adapts well to a variety of concepts and contexts. Our theoretical approach reaches back to the origins of Russian Formalism and extends them to contemporary concepts in film and media studies such as Neoformalism, intertextuality, intermediality, remediation, postdrama, and historical poetics, as well as phenomenological approaches such as embodied perception or haptic cinema.

The tremendous development in digital media technologies, which permits the rapid global circulation of images (cf. Schaffner 2005, 87), has brought the long-standing primacy of language and literature into question within the humanities. In light of the 'iconic' or 'pictorial turn' as put forth by the literary scholar W.J.T. Mitchell and the art historian Gottfried Boehm (cf. Boehm 1994, Mitchell 1994), the prominence of the semiotic concept of textuality—the 'writing culture' debate, the notion of a 'legibility of culture'—has diminished. This turn against language in general, and literature in particular, has been accompanied by an increased interest in the volatility of cultural expression. Due to the high esteem in which language was once held, primarily written sources were said to evoke associations such as "depth, meaning, thought, and seriousness" (Bachmann-Medick 2006, 349). Now, audiovisual and performance arts are considered more relevant expressions of contemporary mindsets and media culture. When we discuss media art, theoretical impulses against language and literature need to be questioned, since many works do, in fact, possess the potential for an expanded literary analysis. In exploring media-related aspects of literariness in media art, in this book we also examine the visual in relation to the acoustic—a phenomenon that has recently attracted attention in the emerging interdisciplinary field of sound studies. Various media artworks are enlightening in just this respect because it is spoken language that creates aesthetic and consequently literary dimensions.

Contrary to previous studies that deal with digital literature (cf. Hayles 2008, Gendolla and Schäfer 2010, Pressman 2014) or that transfer concepts from literary theory, for instance from narratology or lyricology, to film (cf. Kuhn 2011, Orphal 2014), our study investigates a corpus of works that has not been analyzed with methods from literary studies. Even in art history and media studies, research on media art is still an emerging field. This may be due in large part to its selective and temporal accessibility. Annette Jael Lehmann suggests why literary studies has expanded into the domain of media art:

> In terms of both production and reception aesthetics, the use of new media changes the interaction with language, texts and discourses. Media art thereby transforms both the concept of text and the interaction with and use of linguistic and scriptural sign systems.

> In particular, their order and organization is dealt with temporally and spatially. It is not processes of the intentional generating of sense and meaning that are at the forefront, but rather performances of communication and exchange within these sign systems. (Lehmann 2008, 16)

Examining the artifacts of media culture with a focus on words and texts may offer specific insights. Central to this task is the recognition of the role played by interpretation, in contrast to a strong tendency in recent years of "favoring an attention to the materiality of the signifier over any examination of its deeper meaning" (Simanowski 2011, ix). Literariness helps dissolve these binaries: It is a tool with which to consider materiality and meaning, to combine phenomenological and semiotic approaches. To make the defamiliarizing effects of language in media art palpable to the reader, our analyses combine detailed descriptions that allow the artworks and their literariness to take life in the reader's imagination. These descriptions are followed by theoretically informed close readings, on the premise that the techniques of semiotic interpretation established in literary studies are also largely applicable to nonliterary works.

Russian Formalism and Neoformalism

> Poetry is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality. (Jakobson 1987 [1933/34], 378)

This description of poetry by the Russian Formalist Roman Jakobson can be easily applied to many media artworks discussed in this volume. His words point to the sensorial dimension of literary language, emphasizing its materiality, its form, rather than its ability to create fictional worlds in which the readers can lose themselves. The primary goal of literary language is not to construct meaning but rather to explore the linguistic material self-reflexively. This is implied in the Russian Formalists' concept of literariness.

The Russian Formalist movement of literary and film critics emerged in Russia during the second decade of the 20th century and remained active until about 1930. Although they focussed first on literature and later on film, the Formalists conceptualized their theories as a general "art theory" (Brokoff 2014, 487), an approach pursued in our book. From its early days, the Formalist movement consisted of two distinct groups of scholars: the Moscow Linguistic Circle, founded in 1915 by Roman Jakobson and including critics such as Grigory Vinokur and Petr Bogatyrev, and the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOYAZ), founded by scholars such as Viktor Shklovsky, Yury Tynyanov, Boris Eikhenbaum, and Boris Tomashevsky in St. Petersburg in 1916 (cf. McCauley 1994, 634). The Moscow circle was largely interested in linguistics and considered the study of poetics to fall under that broader category. The St. Petersburg group maintained a division between literary studies and linguistics, and was more oriented towards literary theory (cf. ibid., 635). Both strands of the Formalist school rejected the contemporary standard of literary criticism and, often polemically, did not examine literature alongside the life of its creator or as a by-product of its sociocultural milieu (cf. ibid., 634). The term 'formalist'—first used in a pejorative sense by critics outside the movement—thus refers to the method of isolating the work from its context and investigating its formal features and internal mechanisms.

Formalist scholarship focuses on poetry and prose (see Chapter 4, Sections 1 and 3) and only occasionally deals with drama (see Chapter 4, Section 2). The main concern of Formalist research, literariness, is built on the hypothesis that poetic language is distinct from everyday language: "With slight variations, literariness in Formalism denoted a particular *essential* function present in the relationship or system of poetic works called literature" (McCauley 1994, 635). Formalists propose that literariness results from deliberate artistic deviations from the conventionalized norms of everyday language. This deviation is created by literary techniques such as "sound, imagery, rhythm, syntax, meter, rhyme, narrative techniques" (Eagleton 1983, 3) that modify and deform ordinary language in various ways. Terms specific to Formalism that are used throughout our book and have entered literary studies are *ostranenie* (making strange), the alienation of the *fabula* through the *sužet* (foremost in prose), and the 'thickening' and 'complicating' of form.

These literary devices or techniques of defamiliarization slow and thereby prolong the process of perception. It is thus important to note two points of interest in Formalism: the poetics and the perceptual effects of art. Frank Kessler notes "the two-sidedness of defamiliarization as a constructional strategy and an effect produced at the level of reception" (Kessler 2010, 64). Similarly, Viktor Shklovsky stresses the link between form and perception in his early, pre-Formalist, monograph, *The Resurrection of the Word*:

> If we should wish to make a definition of 'poetic' and 'artistic' perception in general, then doubtless we would hit upon the definition: 'artistic' perception in which form is sensed (perhaps not only form but form as an essential part). (Shklovsky 1973 [1914], 42)

Form is inherently tied to perception, and Boris Eikhenbaum comments on this quote in his treatise, "The Theory of the Formal Method" (1926), in two regards. First, that perception must be understood "as an element in art itself" and second, that the element of form "acquires new meaning." As such, "it is no longer an envelope, but a complete thing, something concrete, dynamic, self-contained, and without a correlative of any kind" (Eikhenbaum 1965 [1926], 112). The spoken and written word as raw material gains "esthetic efficacy" (Erlich 1980, 188) through artistic devices. Artistic self-consciousness—a "language [that] draws attention to itself, flaunts its material being" (Eagleton 1983, 2)—is based on techniques of 'laying bare' or 'foregrounding' the dominant poetic devices to deautomatize the reception process and to destabilize a mimetic, immersive experience of reading.

Critical approaches developed by Formalism can be connected to media art, since it often works with estranged perspectives, with a complication of form, or with other aesthetic techniques such as iteration. Anna Katharina Schaffner's application of Formalist and Structuralist terminology to the examination of avant-garde poetry could also be applied to media art:

> The taking apart of linguistic units from text to word, the discovery of the visual and acoustic dimension of the linguistic sign, the instrumentation of typography, the reduction of the word material and the conceptual use of space by means of non-linear arrangement of letters on the page are vital innovations of the movements of the historical avant-garde. Of particular interest here is their distinct method of operating with language: the foregrounding and scrutiny of the linguistic material, the poetic act of cutting open and laying bare structures and properties of language at different levels of organization—be it at the level of text, sentence, word or letter, at the level of semantic compatibility, syntax, lexicology or phonetics. (Schaffner 2005, 150)

This quote mentions many techniques found in media art: Video performances, for instance, repeat a single word or line without variation for the duration of the performance. Other artworks integrate kinetic typographic elements that move across the screen, are blown up to enormous size, and/or challenge both viewers' perceptual capacities to see and their intellectual response when reading. Still others explore unfamiliar acoustic dimensions by distorting the language material by varying the way of speaking or by technological means.

We want to stress once more the close link between avant-garde arts, particularly the Russian Futurists, and Russian Formalism. Scholars have emphasized that the tradition of the historical avant-gardes "addresses the question of technology from the viewpoint of the uncanny and de-familiarization" (Gunning 2003, 52). When framed in this way, the notion of 'techniques' or 'devices,' so prominent both in Russian Futurist and in Formalist discourse, points to both the artistic and the technological dimension of an artwork (cf. Van den Oever 2010b). More generally, the concept of literariness, of focusing on the materiality of language and art, seems to be embedded within contemporary visual culture, when notions of seeing and vision were redefined (cf. Efimova and Manovich 1993, xxi–xxiv). Just as language was made palpable, avant-garde art movements such as Cubism and Constructivism deconstructed the notion of 'internal' pictorial space in favor of an 'external' space, building up plastically on the picture plane so that space became nearly 'tactile' (cf. Bowlt 1974, 6f).

In short, what was valid for literature was factually true for other arts as well, as evident in the Formalists' discussions on early cinema. The arts and their techniques were fundamentally reframed by an approach "from a new, primarily *perceptual* perspective" (Van den Oever 2011, 11). As Annie van den Oever and others have argued, the Formalists were "medium-sensitive viewers" (ibid., 9) and very stimulated by early cinema, which is reflected in their scholarship. Van den Oever even claims that important essays such as Shklovsky's "Art as Device" should not primarily be considered as literary scholarship but "first and foremost an urgently required and utterly relevant *theoretical* answer to the tremendous impact early cinema had on the early avant-garde movements in pre-revolutionary Russia" (Van den Oever 2010a, 11). Making this claim about critical essays that explicitly deal with literature—in this case the narrative prose of Leo Tolstoy—and not with film may be disputed, but that is not the point here. Her line of argument reveals the potential of the concept of defamiliarization to cross the boundaries of disciplines and shift between perspectives of literary and film studies.

As we discuss in Chapter 2, the propositions by Russian Formalism connect to a wide range of theoretical schools, which makes their concepts appealing to an interdisciplinary investigation of media art from the perspective of literariness. While some schools directly evolved out of Formalism (such as the Prague School of Structuralism), links to other schools such as the Russian linguistic circle around Mikhail Bakhtin may be more indirect. For example, the Bakhtin school attacked the Formalists for ignoring social and ideologist discourse and focusing exclusively on the form of the artwork; nevertheless, their work remains "historically connected to the broader aims and implications of the Russian Formalist movement" (McCauley 1994, 636). Both Formalists and Prague School Structuralists contributed to the development and enhancement of the concept of literariness, which is why their ideas—especially those by the later Jakobson as well as Jan Mukařovský—are discussed in this book to shed light on the use of poetic language in media art.

Our work also applies ideas from Neoformalism, a U.S. school of film analysis that is based on the Formalists' writing on literature. Neoformalism, as conceptualized by Kristin Thompson, offers insights into which devices film uses to cue audience responses (cf. Thompson 1995, 6). She interprets 'device' as any element that can make up a film, such as editing or framing, and claims that artworks "achieve their renewing effects [. . .] through an aesthetic play the Russian Formalists termed *defamiliarization*" (Thompson 1988, 10):

> Art defamiliarizes our habitual perceptions of the everyday world, of ideology [. . .], of other artworks, and so on by taking material from these sources and transforming them. The transformation takes place through their placement in a new context and their participation in unaccustomed formal patterns. But if a series of artworks uses the same means over and over, the defamiliarizing capability of those means diminishes; the strangeness ebbs away over time. [. . .] The frequent changes that artists introduce into their new works over time reflect attempts to avoid automatization, and to seek new means to defamiliarize those works' formal element. Defamiliarization, then, is the general neoformalist term for the basic purpose of art in our lives. (ibid., 11)

Thompson describes a general artistic principle, valid both for avant-garde arts and contemporary artistic practices. Neoformalism not only supports the validity of the Formalist approach for the study of audiovisual media, but it also makes clear that defamiliarization is a dynamic principle, continuously changing over time. When we discuss the concept of literariness as device, technique, or artistic maneuver in this book, we do not want to imply that it is a timeless, essential, and unrelated category but rather a feature that is constitutively related to the leading aesthetic paradigms of its time and culture. Neoformalist film scholar David Bordwell therefore rightly emphasizes in his 'historical poetics' of film "the importance of looking at individual works against the broader background of historical norms" (Kessler 2010, 64) and applies terms closely related to Formalist ideas such as "deviations" and "disturbance" (Bordwell 1979, 4). In an argument similar to that made by the Neoformalists, Cylena Simonds states that video art productions "overtly manipulate language and [. . .] negotiate the bombardment of image/text juxtapositions in everyday life." Moreover, "the use of text to present and represent language in video art" can be regarded "a strategic device" (Simonds 1995, 27).

Two decades after Simonds made this observation, the bombardment of everyday life by images and texts is ubiquitous. The generation of digital natives who grew up with every form of social media and smart mobile devices is familiar with navigating, using, and manipulating an endless stream of texts and images and all their combinations. Video art that once had the power to defamiliarize language might now seem normal, even dull. When we discuss defamiliarization, our analyses therefore take into consideration not only theoretical reflections on art-immanent aesthetic devices but also the artworks' historical contexts. The often-stated criticism that Formalism is an 'autonomous' study of the artwork is thus negated, and our analyses demonstrate how a reading informed by Formalism also offers insight on the cultural implications of media artworks.

Reflecting on Terminology: Media Art and Its Categories

What do we mean by the term 'media art'? Film scholar Vinzenz Hediger observes that media art is a "product of practices that often involve rapidly changing technologies and ephemeral performance elements" and as such it "is difficult for critics, curators, and archivists to pin down in terms of the established taxonomies of art history or film and media studies" (Hediger 2013, 23). The individual terms 'art' and 'media' are already intractable. Definitions depend not only on the specific object under investigation or the critic's aesthetic preference, but also on historical and institutional contexts, and they vary according to (and within) the focus of academic disciplines (cf. Wiesing 2010).

Using literariness to frame media art is connected to an examination of media from a phenomenological perspective, which generally regards language as medium and literature as art made of linguistic material. Lambert Wiesing considers media as "tools that make possible to separate genesis from validity" (ibid., 126f). In reference to Edmund Husserl, 'genesis' here signifies processes of production or emergence, whereas 'validity' denotes the existence of something that remains 'the same' (cf. ibid., 127f). 'Same' is used in the sense of the Husserlian *Selbigkeit* ('self-sameness'), which means that "media allow for the production, in different places and at different times, not only of an equivalent but also of the very same thing" (ibid., 129). Validity is in Wiesing's view an abstract entity, perceived only through a concrete medium (cf. ibid., 131). In the case of media art, it refers, for instance, to a performance that took place at a certain point in time, which is then distributed and made visible and audible via video, film, or whichever medium is chosen as carrier. In this way, the recorded performance as validity is made present to people in various locations and across time.

One characteristic of media art is the disruption of the transparency of media, resulting in the self-thematization of language, sound, and moving images. Wiesing has criticized phenomenological media theories that "define media exclusively via their presence with the user" and thematize the "transparency of media or the self-denial of the medium" (ibid., 123). However, according to Wiesing, 'transparency' is only one side of this coin; 'opacity' must not be ignored (cf. ibid., 126). These opposing terms—also relevant for other approaches discussed in our book, such as the concept of 'remediation'—imply dependency on perspective: If recipients are concerned solely with the content of a message, they may block out the technological properties. Yet if they shift their awareness, they might also observe the mediating technology as such. This means that the phenomenological *sine qua non* of unthematized media transparency is not a sufficient criterion: While media usually remain as transparent as possible in order to fulfill the function of everyday communication, in media art the aesthetic function dominates, so that the medium itself becomes opaque and palpable.

The compound term 'media art'—albeit firmly established in European museums and academia—might sound redundant because different genres of art have long been categorized according to their specific media in the sense of 'material,' and, therefore, all art could be regarded as media art (cf. Westgeest 2016, 6). Depending on the perspective, the terms 'medium' and 'material' are often used synonymously. 'Media' may refer to materials such as clay, celluloid, or language, as well as to the electronic media of mass communication such as radio, television, and the internet. To complicate things even more, a general term such as 'film' can mean a specific physical carrier as well as an art form that transcends its very carrier. In addition, an artwork may be immaterial or created by using various technologies, which often makes the differences and relationships between work, medium, and material difficult to delineate. These difficulties of terminology are not necessarily a result of scholarly persnicketiness or rivalries; they also mirror tremendous technological developments and drastic changes in artistic practices that have profoundly transformed the notion of art.

Since the emergence of photography and film in the 19th century, and particularly that of the ready-made in the early 20th century, the concept of art has been in constant flux. After Marcel Duchamp "performed the subtle miracle of transforming, into works of art, objects from the *Lebenswelt* of commonplace existence: a grooming comb, a bottle rack, a bicycle wheel, a urinal" (Danto 1981, vi), a general aesthetics, a definition of what constitutes works of art based on the essential characteristics of their materials, is hard to defend. Art theory has reacted to the challenge of works that dispute the boundaries between traditional artistic genres and the increasing 'contaminations' between the realm of 'art' and 'non-art' with the diagnosis of a 'post-medium' condition of art (cf. Krauss 1999), as well as with a new emphasis on the category of 'experience.' This does not imply neglecting the notion of artworks (or genres) as such but emphasizes a certain 'processuality,' which leads to the realization that the artwork "only appears in and as the dynamics unfolding between itself and a subject relating to it" (Rebentisch 2013, 93).

Literary theorists have followed a similar approach. As definitions of literature based on formal comparisons of standard and literary language often prove deficient, Terry Eagleton discusses literariness as "a function of the *differential* relations between one sort of discourse and another" that frames literature subsequently as "'non-pragmatic' discourse" (Eagleton 1983, 5 and 7). This means that language can, strictly speaking, be defined as literary only in relation to its context (cf. ibid, 7f) and that one should "think of literature less as some inherent quality or set of qualities displayed by certain kinds of writing [. . .], than as a number of ways in which people *relate themselves* to writing" (ibid., 9). Therefore, literariness is not a fixed feature of literary texts themselves, but rather an outcome or effect of a treatment by both writers and readers. The literary status of a text does not depend exclusively on its intrinsic aesthetic qualities; rather, it is also informed by recipients, contexts, or paratexts. To borrow from art philosopher Arthur Danto: It needs the world of literature, to constitute literature.

In this book we understand 'language' as material, and 'literature' as an umbrella term for the art that makes language palpable. As philosopher Sybille Krämer emphasizes, the graphic and the phonic need to be considered as distinct media (cf. Krämer 2009, 159); language itself is realized as script and voice. Another terminology for the different manifestations of language is suggested by, for instance, Ludwig Jäger, who defines language "as a medium that appears both as multi*modal* and in different *medial* formats" (Jäger 2010b, 302). Voice and script are two 'modalities' of language that are presented in different 'medial formats,' such as live performances, audio recordings, or analog and digital books. Following this line of thought, media art could be considered a format that draws "the *mediality* of the medium of language [. . .] into the focus of attention" (ibid.). Voice and script become palpable in media art when their materiality or sign character is foregrounded. Literariness is a specific processing of language, which can be experienced in many works of media art. Thus, our assertion: Literariness may itself be considered 'the dominant' of many media artworks.

As mentioned briefly earlier, art historian Rosalind Krauss countered the "exhausted modernist paradigm of medium specificity" (Balsom 2013, 71), and in particular its most prominent proponent, Clement Greenberg, with the idea of the post-medium condition of art. Instead of restricting the discussion of art to an analysis of a medium's essential characteristics, she proposed an understanding of medium as "differential, self-differing, and thus as a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support" (Krauss 1999, 53). This means that although an artwork is, of course, defined by its material, and the medium becomes palpable in relationship to other media, the use and perception of a medium is always influenced by conventions that determine its use and must never be confused with its (physical) properties. Several scholars have subsequently made similar arguments. In her study of video art, art historian Helen Westgeest defines a medium "as both a technology that enables communication and a set of interconnected social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology" (Westgeest 2016, 8). Media scholar Michael Z. Newman underlines that "[b]eyond technology, the concept of the medium also includes typical or authorized formats, genres, and other textual qualities" and therefore "a medium is understood not only as a technological form but also [as] a set of supporting protocols" (Newman 2014, 100). When recognizing these ideas, two general notions become clear: Although the terms 'medium' and 'material' may be understood and used as synonyms, media are more than physical carriers or technologies, and artworks cannot be defined by essential properties but are in fact an effect of processing and perception.

In the introduction to an anthology on the preservation and exhibition of media art, media scholar Julia Noordegraaf defines media art as "[t]ime-based artworks that rely on media technologies for their creation and exhibition such as slide-based installations, film-, video-, and computer-based artworks, and net art" (Noordegraaf 2013, 11). This pragmatic definition does not conflate 'media' with all (artistic) materials, but specifically refers to electronic media. Preventing essentialist interpretations of the definition, she moreover underlines that:

> Media artworks often play on the wider cultural role of media, such as the formats of television broadcasting or the sociocultural and economic uses of software and online social media. Understanding the role and function of media in art thus requires knowledge about the nature of time-based media (technical features, narrative, aesthetics, *dispositifs*, and specific sociocultural and economic contexts of production and distribution) and of the relationship between work and viewer (spectatorship, use, participation). (ibid., 13)

Similar to arguments made by Krauss, Westgeest, and Michael Z. Newman, Noordegraaf highlights that media art is not sufficiently defined by a characterization of the technology alone. From her perspective, the term 'media art' does not encompass photography because photography is neither time-based nor does its exhibition require media technologies, yet it is more inclusive than 'new media art' or 'digital art.' These often-used terms are limited to media art whose production and exhibition rely on digital technologies, media art that is composed of digital code, and is based on algorithms (cf. Paul 2003, Simanowski 2011). New media art is often characterized as "process-oriented, time-based, dynamic, and real-time; participatory, collaborative, and performative; modular, variable, generative, and customizable" (Paul 2007, 253)—although these characteristics apply equally to analog works or even performance art.

In analog media, data are continuous, while in digital media data are converted into numeric codes, or 'digitized' (cf. Manovich 2001, 28). An analog film, for instance, consists of hundreds or thousands of individual photographic frames printed on a transparent film strip, whereas digital film is a representation of individual data points as binary code. Despite the fact that analog film has seen a revival in recent years and the use of film projectors in museums seems to have become a spectacle in its own right, digital devices and processes now dominate the production, exhibition, and distribution of film. To account for this media convergence (cf. Partridge 2006, 180), many scholars use the term 'moving images,' as it is more inclusive than film or video art and more specific than media art (cf. Newman 2009, 88; Westgeest 2016, 7). According to art philosopher Michael Newman's definition:

> Moving image is an art that implies both time and a spatial display in the gallery. [. . .] A bodily relation to the image may be established that is very different from that experienced by the spectator of cinema fixed to their seat and taken out of themselves, identifying with the image and engrossed by the narrative. Contrary possibilities are opened up by moving image installation: the freedom to move around the space may enable a more detached and inquisitive attitude towards the apparatus, or alternatively the multiplication of screens may induce an absorption into a panoramic spectacle. (Newman 2009, 88)

Although the term 'moving image art' is tempting, it has one disadvantage in relation to our study: It latently excludes the dimension of sound through its terminological focus on images. We therefore prefer the term 'media art,' while considering corresponding theoretical approaches to moving image art.

Based on the definitions and descriptions noted here, we use 'media art' as an umbrella term for audiovisual time-based artworks that rely on analog and digital media technologies for their creation and exhibition, and that make palpable the cultural practices surrounding and the communicative contexts enabled by these technologies. We consider works in the following categories: experimental film, video art, video performance, video installation, and multimedia installation. These classifications arise from our own taxonomy but are based on information provided by archives, exhibition catalogs, research publications, and the websites of artists and galleries.

We speak of 'experimental film' when the work is based on analog film, the analog material is foregrounded, and the filmmaker "set out to create films that challenge normal notions of what a movie can show and how it can show it" (Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 369). Although the terms 'experimental' or 'avant-garde' are controversial (cf. Rees 1999, 3f; MacDonald 2007, 2; Balsom 2013, 21f), they usually refer to films that investigate the possibilities of the filmic medium (the film strip, the projector, the screening space) and refer to the history of film and cinema; challenge traditional modes of production, exhibition, and distribution; and reflect on the filmic *dispositif*. The context of experimental films is often the black box, the movie theater, and when screened in a white cube it is important to consider that the "protocols of the gallery space are strikingly different" and "inextricably tied to the ideology of modernism and the desire for an artistic autonomy free of the contaminating tentacles of a mass culture" (Balsom 2013, 39).

The terms 'video,' 'videotape,' or 'video piece' are used for single-channel works that are based on various video technologies. Although 'video' is now frequently used to describe any moving image clip that is not celluloid film, it originally referred

> to an electrical analogue waveform produced by scanning the light (the latent image) focused onto a photosensitive plate in the video camera which is then re-created into the pattern (or raster) of horizontal scanning lines made by an electron beam onto the photosensitive surface of a cathode-ray-tube that in turn creates the image that appears on a television. (Partridge 2006, 181)

In contrast to film, video images do not need to be photochemically developed but are instantly visible on a monitor (video is also a technology of surveillance). Because they are recorded on magnetic tape, they cannot be watched without a device, whereas individual images on film can be seen without a projector. Video technology is related to audio recording (cf. Sundberg 2015, 264) and at the same time must be considered in the cultural context of television (cf. Newman 2014, 30).

Video art emerged in the 1960s when Sony introduced a portable and affordable video technology known as Portapak (cf. ibid., 31; Balsom, 2013, 11f). Until the 1980s, video artists not only critically engaged with the mass medium of television but also with more traditional art forms, such as sculpture. In the gallery space, video art was often presented on a TV set mounted on a pedestal, but it was also broadcast as experimental television programming, as in Jan Dibbets's *TV as a Fireplace* (1969; produced by Gerry Schum for the German TV station WDR) or

Stephen Partridge's *Sentences* (produced for the British Channel 4; see Chapter 3, Section 2). From the 1990s onward, large wall projections became the standard (cf. Martin 2006, 11f). Due to their size (and surround-sound technology), projections tend to be more immersive than 'TV sculptures,' and they are often presented in a black cube, which is tied more to the public-yet-isolating viewing experience of the cinema than to the shared intimacy of watching television. Today, digital technologies dominate the workflow of moving image production, post-production, and exhibition, which makes considering video art "as a separate and distinct practice within the fine art canon" (Meigh-Andrews 2006, 283) increasingly questionable. In line with common practice, we use the term 'video' or 'digital film' for all single-channel works that are not analog film.

A subgenre of video art that was especially prominent in the 1960s and 1970s is 'video performance'—a "time-based and ephemeral" artwork also termed "performance video" (Eamon 2009, 85). Video performances are usually also presented on television monitors, and they are closely related to performance art that evolved simultaneously in the 1960s and 70s. Video performances present a singularly executed action, although the performer and the audience are temporally and spatially separated. The performance is recorded in a temporal continuum with a single, often stable camera. The artist performs alone, not in front of an audience but in front of and for the camera (a set-up that led Krauss to define video as a 'narcissistic' medium; see Chapter 3, Section 1). Coherence is not created through editing but evolves in real time.

A 'video installation' involves more than one television set or projection screen and highlights the spatiality of the exhibition environment. Confronted with spatially arranged monitors or screens and often various sources of sound, the audience is often overwhelmed by acoustic, visual, and spatial signals. Whereas a single-channel video demands full attention—especially when the sound is presented with headphones—video installations potentially deny the possibility of experiencing the work in its entirety. The aggressive "spatial paradigm" (Lehmann 2008, 158) forces viewers into a disorienting situation that not only highlights the parameters of the exhibition space and the time-based nature of the moving images but also ultimately makes viewers aware of their own subjectivity. Because each spectator decides how much time to spend in the installation and how intensely to engage with what he or she sees and hears, each spectator experiences and thus co-creates a different work. This individuality of the viewing experience with its "structure of temporal openness" (Rebentisch 2012, 185) is constitutive for installations in the museum context.

'Multimedia installations' are closely related to video installations. They either combine different audiovisual media (for instance a television set with an interactive wall projection) or media artworks with artifacts that are not based on media technologies; in the latter case these installations are also termed 'mixed-media installations.'

This book also analyzes some works of net art, which is often interactive—or, in its other extreme, radically abnegates interactivity, as in the text-based works of Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries discussed in this book. A category that is not media art *strictu sensu*, but interesting for the focus of thus study, includes text-based 'neon sign works.' The neon sign installations by Bruce Nauman, for example, are demanding word plays that create a very peculiar literariness. The same is true for 'xenon light projections,' such as the works by Jenny Holzer that are projected in public spaces, or site-specific sound art installations by Nauman. They are particularly relevant to our study when they exhibit the poetic use of kinetic script or the uncanny effects of the acousmatic voice.

Four Artistic Approaches: About the Structure of this Book

All our discussions of media art are structured chronologically, starting with the oldest artwork and moving towards the most recent. This offers insight into the development of the guises of literariness and illustrates its persistence. In this book we group media artworks according to their central aesthetic strategies with regard to voice and script. This organizational scheme made more sense than a medium-based or a purely chronological ordering of all the works discussed, for the two reasons Edward Shanken gave for his thematic approach in his book, *Art and Electronic Media* (2009): "it would foreground the technological apparatus as the driving force behind the work" and "it would fail to show how related conceptual and thematic issues have been addressed by artists using varied media" (Shanken 2007, 61). In our analyses, we highlight the detail under examination while considering other aspects in the background. This is why, for instance, a few works that rely on existing literary texts are not included in Chapter 5, "Works of Literature in Media Art," but are discussed earlier. A few works are also analyzed more than once, each time focusing on a different aesthetic strategy.

We investigate the literariness of media art on four different levels: the use of spoken poetic language; the poetically motivated integration of written texts; the exploration of literary genres; and the adaptation of works of literature into media art. While the first and second categories highlight the defamiliarization of the media of language (voice and script), the third and fourth explore experiments with literary genres and concrete literary texts. The main chapters in this book correspond to these central aesthetic practices. The theoretical scope of the book is developed in Chapter 2, establishing the general theoretical background of literariness and related concepts. Each following chapter develops additional theoretical approaches that connect the analyses to a more specific historical and academic framework.

Chapter 2, "Literariness and Media Art: Theoretical Framing," is divided into two sections. The first, "The Aesthetics of Language: Literary Theory," investigates the notion of literariness as introduced by the Russian Formalists. As previously noted, the Formalists saw literariness as the leading aesthetic quality of literary language. Literary language is distinct from other forms of language in that it intentionally deviates from established norms and rules. In Section 2.1, these observations are connected to, inter alia, Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, hybridity, and double-voiced discourse; Mukařovský's principle of foregrounding; Jakobson's concept of 'the palpability of signs' and his structural model of language; and Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality.

Section 2.2, "Literariness Beyond Literature: Transdisciplinary Perspectives," promotes a new understanding of literariness as a transmedial device and effect. From the outset, Formalism was not solely concerned with literature but was also highly invested in exploring general aesthetic, as Formalist writings on film reveal. Therefore, our research highlights tendencies that are present in the original Formalist theory. The re-emergence of Russian Formalism in film theory is also discussed, including the advent of Neoformalism, formulated by Thompson and Bordwell. The section moreover introduces theories of intermediality, which we propose as an artistic device that affects the viewer and promotes an aestheticized perception. The concept of intermediality opens the way to the domain of media theory. Concepts from media theory that are linked to literariness are remediation (Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin) and transcription (Ludwig Jäger), both of which work with media's oscillation between states of transparency and opacity. This oscillation is foregrounded in many of the media artworks we analyze. Finally, in this section these notions are related to corresponding concepts in postdramatic theater and performance arts as well as phenomenological theories such as those proposed by Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks.

Chapter 3, "Voice and Script in Media Art," is dedicated to media artworks that explore literariness in the two media of language. Section 3.1, "Voice and the Materiality of Sound," investigates the voice as artistic medium, its performative and atmospheric qualities, and how the effects of mediated voices influence aesthetic perception. Of particular importance to the theories discussed here is the Formalists' idea of *zaum'*: poetry created purely with the effects of sound, freeing it from meaning. Media art also alters and defamiliarizes the human voice, which we discuss by referencing early performative works by Vito Acconci and later technical-synthetic manipulation by artists such as Pipilotti Rist or Ursula Hodel. Other works discussed in Section 3.1 deal with iteration and the alphabet as aesthetic devices or exhibit the power of the acousmatic voice. As a transition to Section 3.2, we explore artworks that demonstrate the relation of voice and image or voice and script.

Under the heading "Script: Between Visuality and Legibility," Section 3.2 investigates the spectrum of defamiliarizing effects triggered by the use of script. The theoretical discussion introduces concepts that underline the pictorial dimensions of written language. We consider the complex relationship of script and image as discussed across disciplines, including the importance of layout and typography in Russian Formalism. In contrast to the conventional use of written text in moving images, script in works of media art often resists intelligibility: its pace is too fast or too slow, or an individual letter might be blown up to fill the whole screen. Through different uses of fonts and highlighting spatiality, the materiality of script becomes palpable. Some artworks, like those by the net art collective Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, feature both different script systems (e.g. Latin versus Korean) and juxtapose them deliberately to foreground script's iconic dimensions.

Chapter 4, "Literary Genres in Media Art," explores how media art investigates and appropriates literary genres. The triadic classification into poetry, drama, and prose is an effective tool for forging a path into the complex terrain of a literary language use in works of media art. We discuss in detail how the Formalists considered genre a "central mechanism of literary history, and its proper object of study" (Duff 2000, 7), claiming that it is defined by evolving functions and forms. Media art both joins the critique on genre norms and refers—implicitly or explicitly—to literary genres as such. Our book therefore uses the genre triad as a background against which allusions to and deviations from norms can be retraced.

Chapter 4, Section 1, "Elements of Poetry," is based on an understanding of poetry as the literary genre marked by an 'excess structuring' as a key aesthetic characteristic. Our theoretical discussion introduces prominent discourses on poetry from the perspective of literary theory—the idea of lyric subjectivity, for instance, or discussions on versification, rhyme, or written versus oral poetry—with a focus on the notions of verse language explored by Russian Formalism. We then introduce forms of poetry that are especially suited to audiovisual transformations, such as concrete and visual poetry. Lastly, we discuss the adaptation of poetry theory to the field of experimental and avant-garde film practice and studies, referring to Pier Paolo Pasolini, Bordwell and Thompson, and P. Adams Sitney, among others. The analyses of media artworks—video poems by Bill Seaman and Seoungho Cho—rely on both literary and film theory and highlight their benefits and shortcomings that become evident when discussing works of media art.

The second genre section, 4.2, "Elements of Drama," discusses media artworks that apply formal elements of drama, such as the dialogical and stage-like setting of multi-channel video installations. Other artworks employ elements of classical tragedy, such as versified and choral speech, messenger's report, or teichoscopy, as in recent works by Magdalena von Rudy or Hajnal Németh. A critical attitude toward dramatic structures and tragic telos is evident throughout the 20th century, most notably in the Brechtian alienation effect and Bertolt Brecht's notion of epicization, which is closely related to *ostranenie*. Brecht's innovations are based on a theater that demonstrates rather than embodies, one that creates distance between the showing and the showed, the represented and the mode of representation. This results, as Hans-Thies Lehmann argues, in contemporary 'postdramatic' theater. Media art often employs similar strategies, such as ironic distancing, foregrounding, multimediality, a 'constitutive overload' of meaning, or a 'retreat of synthesis.' Media artists play with meta-theatrical elements, such as voice-over comments that appear to be from a stage director or repeating the same scene with different dialogs or protagonists, alluding to the theatricality of staging.

Chapter 4, Section 3, "Elements of Prose," focuses on instances of narrative prose in works of media art. In contrast to narrative feature film, media artists often allude to 'peculiar' narrative subgenres, such as the epistolary novel, as in an auto-fictional work by Mona Hatoum; autobiography, as in works by Tracey Emin; and, more generally, variations of first-person narration, as in a work by Tracey Moffatt. Devices include the self-conscious exposure of the act of mediation, the pluralization of communicative channels, and the dominance of a disembodied articulatory instance. In the theory subsections, we review basic concepts from recent narratology that are necessary for an understanding of the genre conventions, such as narrative order and integration, narrative voice, and narrative mode. The section thus encourages a more comprehensive notion of narrative, time-based arts: We highlight how elements of narrative prose can operate as defamiliarizing devices that heighten the perception of mediacy instead of fostering illusionary immersion as associated with narrative feature film.

Chapter 5, "Works of Literature in Media Art," is devoted to allusions to, quotations from, and appropriations of concrete literary works. These references occur mostly in abstract media artworks, which are fundamentally different aesthetic objects than conventional feature film adaptations. Often, even the cues themselves are easily overlooked. Chapter 5 opens with a discussion of adaptation theory and considers the most promising, prevalent, and controversial approaches to this practice. The idea of adaptation as a dialogic and intertextual practice, as proposed by Robert Stam and Linda Hutcheon, offers an essential background to inform our analyses. Its strength lies in erasing any hierarchical structures between the 'original source' and allegedly 'secondary' or 'inferior' adaptation. Film adaptations of literary works are almost as old as film itself, and a discussion of the phenomenon surfaced in Formalist theory. We link Eikhenbaum's writings to recent contributions to the field of adaptation studies and develop a practical framework for the analyses that follow. We also show how an adaptation may be considered a defamiliarization of the literary work, but the defamiliarization is not a destructive attack; instead, it is a perspective that emphasizes the interdependence of all artistic production.

Building on this theoretical base, the analyses in Chapter 5 investigate the relation of more than a dozen particularly complex media artworks that artfully adapt literary texts, mostly novels or poems by a diverse group of international writers. The first group of analyses relates to Chapter 3, Section 1, and presents 'acousmatic adaptations' of literature by filmmaker Matthias Müller and video artist Cho, where texts are spoken by a voice-over and combined with moving images, music, and sound. Adaptations that are grouped under the heading "Baring the Signifier: Written Allusions" foreground the aesthetics of poetic script and are therefore related to Chapter 3, Section 2, and include works by Rick Hancox, Jonathan Hodgson, and Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries. The third and fourth subsections deal with an "Aesthetics of Superimposition": with media art that foregrounds mediality and employs both script and voice. By superimposing and layering, the first two works by Eder Santos and Daniel Reeves employ strategies similar to poetry. Three works by Tom Kalin create narrative collages but also vaguely refer to the aesthetic of music clip composition while dealing with existential topics such as loss, displacement, and alienation. Works by media artists Gary Hill and Mike Kelley are discussed under the heading of "Theatrical Appropriation: Personifying Literary Figures", in which alludes to Chapter 4, Section 2, creating an intricate relation to the literary work through embodiment or verbal articulation. In a final set, two extensive performative-installative works by the artists Joan Jonas and Nalini Malani are presented in a comparative analysis with regard to their 'transcreation' of literariness in media art.

Taken as a whole, this book sheds light on the multifaceted and enigmatic ways in which the literariness of media art startles viewers to make them take a second look and envision what has become automatized in a fresh way.

2

LITERARINESS AND MEDIA ART

Theoretical Framing

2.1 The Aesthetics of Language: Literary Theory

The Obstreperousness of Poetic Language

In this study, the Russian Formalist notion of literariness is the key that opens the door to our analysis of the various aesthetic uses of language foregrounded in works of media art. Roman Jakobson coined the neologism *literaturnost* (литературность) for what he conceived of as the central "subject of literary scholarship" (Jakobson 1973 [1921], 62). The term is a variation on Alexander Potebnja's *poetičnost* (поэтичность), translated into English as 'poeticness' or, more common, 'poeticity' (cf. Potebnja 1976 [1862], 174). Both literariness and poeticity were used by the Formalists and continue to be used—often quasi-synonymously—in literary theory. Whenever poeticity is not equated with literariness, it denominates the linguistic specificity of the literary genre of poetry (cf. Van Peer 2003, 111; Philipowski 2011, 172). For an investigation such as this—which is not solely concerned with reflections of poetry in media art but considers aesthetics that could be described, more generally, as literary—the term 'literariness' is preferable.

Literariness suggests a certain quality within texts that "makes of a given work a work of literature" (Jakobson 1973 [1921], 62). Literary scholar Lutz Rühling situates the concept in the broader scope of aesthetics, arguing that literariness "is merely the text-related variant of a property that could be described as 'aestheticity,' an attribute that, in general, distinguishes objects of art from items that do not belong to the realm of art" (Rühling 2003, 26). Media scholar Frank Kessler emphasizes the concept's validity beyond the realm of literature (cf. Kessler 2010, 61), a claim backed by the Formalist Boris Eikhenbaum, who summarized that the Russian Formalists aimed at "a general theory of aesthetics" (Eikhenbaum 1965 [1926], 104). In so doing, "they narrowed the distance between particular problems of literary theory and general problems of aesthetics" (ibid.).

On the most basic level, literariness is defined by the dynamic between the automatization and deautomatization of language. This dynamic is not limited to language and literature; it has already proved fruitful for the study of film and can be transferred to the analysis of media art (cf. Benthien 2012). If what applies to the aesthetics of literature may also be valid for other forms of art, Russian Formalism can become a tool with which to perforate the borders between academic disciplines, a perspective that puts the fraying of the arts into the spotlight. This line of thought will be pursued later, after the basic concepts have been introduced.

Art as Device: Estrangement and Complicating Form

Formalism was guided by the question of which attributes define literary or poetic language. Generally speaking, the literary text distinguishes itself from nonliterary texts by its particular use of language. It is distinct from nonliterary texts because it activates the "aesthetic function" (Jakobson 1973 [1921], 62) of language. This assumption, whose "importance [. . .] for the entire Formalist enterprise cannot be overstated" (Steiner 1984, 139), was later defined by Jakobson in Structuralist terms. Within his general model of communication, he distinguishes six functions of speech that exist, to a varying degree, in every utterance: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic (cf. Jakobson 1960, 353–359). For instance, the referential function establishes a certain "set (*Einstellung*) towards the referent, an orientation toward the CONTEXT" (ibid., 353), whereas the poetic (or aesthetic) function focuses "on the message for its own sake" (ibid., 356). As Jakobson stresses, early Russian Formalism's equation of a poetic work with a solely aesthetic function was too limited:

> [A] poetic work is not confined to aesthetic function alone, but has in addition many other functions. Actually, the intentions of a poetic work are often closely related to philosophy, social didactics, and so on. Just as a poetic work is not exhausted by its aesthetic function, similarly the aesthetic function is not limited to poetic works. (Jakobson 1987 [1935], 43)

By mentioning philosophy and social didactics, Jakobson clearly recognizes how embedded literary artworks are in culture and, in a very important point for our study, extends the aesthetic function beyond the literary text. He recommends being aware of the different functions of a text while also focusing on the intrinsic function that "unites and determines the poetic work," concluding: "From this point of view, a poetic work cannot be defined as a work fulfilling neither an exclusively aesthetic function nor an aesthetic function along with other functions; rather, a poetic work is defined as a verbal message whose aesthetic function is its dominant." (ibid.)

Though dubbed 'Formalism,' Russian Formalism considered not form but rather the literary device as its central concept for the study of literature and art (cf. Eikhenbaum 1965 [1926], 115; Jakobson 1973 [1921], 63). The Formalists regarded a literary work as a unit, "a structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices" (Jakobson 1987 [1935], 44). Inspired by Broder Christiansen (cf. Christiansen 1909), the concept of the 'dominant' became a guiding principle for the Formalist study of literature to describe the hierarchy and functioning of the devices. As Jakobson claims: "The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure" (Jakobson 1987 [1935], 41). The dominant can take on various shapes and influence, structure, and subordinate all other elements of the artwork. Dominants can be found in individual artworks, for example in the use of intonation, the canon, or in a "set of norms of a given poetic school" (ibid., 42), or even in entire epochs (Jakobson refers to music as the dominant that influences the Romantic and verbal arts). He thus makes clear that a dominant can also be "external to the poetic work" (ibid.). In our study, literariness is considered the dominant of the media artworks discussed.

Jakobson saw the internal relations in literary works—which are responsible for cohesion and density—as a result of parallelisms and equivalences, and established an influential structural model: 'the horizontal axis of combination,' which is characterized by relational contrasts and connectivity (one subject, one verb, one object); and the 'vertical axis of selection,' which is characterized by alternatives from which one has to choose (the grammatical subject of the phrase, for example). A brief look at the famous couplet in Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18" illustrates this model: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, | So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (Shakespeare 1986 [1609], 85). On the horizontal axis, the words of each line are combined based on grammar, forming a syntagmatic unit. The two lines are also linked by the vertical axis: Their first similarity is the parataxis at the beginning of each line ("So long") along with the sentence structure. Another similarity is their equal meter, and a third is the end rhyme. The two lines are further connected by a rhetorical comparison of the duration of life, and the self-referential mention of the 'life-preserving' qualities of the poem itself. The two images in lines one and two are united by a principle of selection: Shakespeare selected his specific formulae from a much larger—even infinite—spectrum of possible poetic images.

With his axiom, Jakobson aims to define the poetic function of language as establishing intensified relations of similarity and proximity between words and letters. These relations correspond structurally to the syntactic connectivity established by grammar. In poetic texts, however, linguistic entities are connected not only through grammatical relations alone but also through various other layers of equivalence and correspondence, such as sounds, letters, syllables, or phonemes (rhyme, rhythm, paronomasia, alliteration, anaphora, etc.), so that "[e]quivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence" (Jakobson 1960, 358). For instance, the second line of the Shakespeare sonnet consists of many identical vowels (lives, this, this, gives, life) that create coherence and emphasis. Jakobson gives numerous examples of such equivalences:

> In poetry one syllable is equalized with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assured to equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress; prosodic long is matched with long, and short with short; word boundary equals word boundary, no boundary equals no boundary; syntactic pause equals syntactic pause, no pause equals no pause. Syllables are converted into units of measure, and so are morae or stresses. (ibid.)

He continues to explain this dynamic with regard to the general phenomenon of parallelism (cf. ibid., 368f; Winko 2009, 387), for instance when formal correspondences are foregrounded and establish isotopic (i.e. semantic) relations. As Ralf Simon states, levels of equivalence can be formed between "elements that contribute to word formation (e.g. parts of speech, tempus, modalities)," "elements that contribute to sentence formation (e.g. sentence types, sentence elements, punctuation)," and "elements of phonology," and they can also be found in "figures and tropes," as well as "the iconicity of script" and "genre-specific features" (Simon 2009, 187). The various literary devices that establish correspondences within literature are also prominent within language-based media art. They can all become an artwork's dominant, or contribute to the deautomatization of perception, the latter being a central concern of Viktor Shklovsky's theory.

The concept of the device—'technique' in alternative translations—was put forth in Shklovsky's seminal essay, "Art as Device" (or "Art as Technique"). Our study uses both translations, as each brings out different aspects of concern to our investigation into the literariness of media art. Shklovsky wrote his essay to refute the notion, as held by Alexander Potebnja, that poetry is essentially a form of thinking in images, with the metaphor serving to clarify "the unknown by means of the known" (Shklovsky 1965 [1917], 6). In contrast, Shklovsky regarded a work of art as the result of devices or techniques "designed to make the works as obviously artistic as possible" (ibid., 8). Consequently, the poetic image is classified as one device among others (cf. ibid., 9). With regard to prose, the Formalists—Shklovksy and Yury Tynyanov, in particular—perceived the *sužet* (sujet) as the most important device and construction factor, weaving motifs and plot elements into a composed structure (cf. Brokoff 2014, 501; also see Chapter 4, Section 3). In "Art as Device/Technique," Shklovsky proposes the now famous concept of the artistic devices of "'enstranging' objects and complicating form" (Shklovsky 1990 [1917], 6):

> Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. 'If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.' And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.* (Shklovksy 1965a [1917], 12)

Or, as another translation reads, this device has the power to liberate perception from the deadening effects of automatization:

> Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war. | If the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it's as if this life had never been. | And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By 'enstranging' objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious.' The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. *Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant.* (Shklovsky 1990 [1917], 5f)

This rich quote—reproduced here in its two common English translations—contains many of the key ideas that resurface in the writings of other Formalists and Structuralists: the emphasis on perception as central to the aesthetic experience, an experience made unfamiliar by using artistic devices in a particular way; the importance of materiality for the process of perception; and a socio-critical move against the dulling automatization of daily life. Shklovsky defended art's potential to effect a "complete perceptual overhaul" (Lesič-Thomas 2005, 17). The concept of *ostranenie* (остранение) has been translated into "making objects unfamiliar," the "enstranging" of objects, or "defamiliarization" (cf. Lachmann 1970, 228). It is also referred to as "estrangement," "deautomatization," or "alienation," while Frank Kessler assumes the translation of "making strange" to be closest to the Russian term (cf. Van den Oever 2010a, 12; Kessler 1996, 52). Kessler takes into account both meanings of the concept of *ostranenie*, resulting from the different translations of the term. According to him, "*making strange*" refers to the estranging devices of an artwork; the notion of "*defamiliarization*" delineates the effect on the perception of the recipient, which is caused by the devices being 'made strange' (cf. ibid.). Shklovsky uses several narrative sequences by the novelist Leo Tolstoy as examples of how devices achieve defamiliarization. For instance, by not "call[ing] a thing by its name, that is, he describes it as if it were perceived for the first time" (Shklovsky 1990 [1917], 6), or by observing a social interaction from the unusual perspective of an animal, so that "the objects are enstranged not by our perception but by that of the horse" (ibid., 8).

The concept of poetic language encompasses "all literature that is deliberately structured to present an artistic impression" (Sherwood 1973, 28), including poetry, prose, and drama. Literary language is viewed in opposition to prosaic, functional, everyday language, whose main purpose is communication. From a phenomenological perspective, Maurice Merleau-Ponty has described everyday language as necessarily self-effacing in order to fulfill its communicative function: "The perfection of language lies in its capacity to pass unnoticed. *But therein lies the virtue of language:* it is language which propels us toward the things it signifies. In the way it works, language hides itself from us. Its triumph is to efface itself" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 10). In daily communication, language needs to become transparent in service to its content, whereas artistic language strives for the opposite effect, opacity.

Shklovsky differentiates between poetic and practical language by looking at their "laws of expenditure and economy" (Shklovsky 1965 [1917], 11), denoting different levels of perceptual energy demanded by a verbal expression. While ordinary language, as Rudolph Helmstetter puts it, is "over-hasty, hurrying ahead towards the intended meaning" with comprehension following suit, "[p]oetic language hinders, slows down and problematizes comprehension" (Helmstetter 1995, 34). Shklovksy himself explains this issue:

> In our phonetic and lexical investigations into poetic speech, involving both the arrangement of words and the semantic structures based on them, we discover everywhere the very hallmark of the artistic: that is, an artifact that has been intentionally removed from the domain of automatized perception. It is 'artificially' created by an artist in such a way that the perceiver, pausing in his reading, dwells on the text. This is when the literary work attains its greatest and most long-lasting impact. The object is perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity. (Shklovksy 1990 [1917], 12)

Art demands a higher level of energy from its recipient by slowing down the process of perception. Instead of tapping into the realm of the known by relying on 'recognition,' art enables 'seeing' as if for the first time. This opposition between recognition and seeing plays a pivotal role in understanding how media artworks create effects of literariness.

As Shklovksy concludes: "The language of poetry is, then, a difficult, roughened, impeded language" (Shklovsky 1965 [1917], 22). The idea of a roughened form is related to the formula of making the 'stone stony.' The reader 'stumbles' over and pays attention to the words of the text. The resulting slow down of perception caused by the complicated form offers the chance of "observing language at work" (Helmstetter 1995, 34):

> By staging 'the word as word,' poetic language draws our attention to the material, structural and relational qualities of the words themselves: the words do not carry their meaning within them; their meanings are assigned to them in speech. When language comes around to itself in poetic language, it loses its transparency with regard to the objects being signified (feelings etc.); it confounds the automatism of signification. (ibid.)

Poetic language is characterized as opaque, no longer serving a primarily referential function. Literary art and art in general are a means to experience the very process of creation or of becoming 'something.' This is most evident in certain works of media art that feature, for instance, an extreme use of devices such as deceleration or iteration.

A final point on the device of 'estranging' objects is the German translation of *ostranenie* as *Verfremdung* (alienation) because of the similarity to the well-known Brechtian concept of the same name (cf. Lachmann 1970, 229, 246 and 248). Brecht may have been aware of Shklovsky's ideas and adapted them for his concept of the 'A-effect' in the theater, a question that is still discussed among scholars (cf. Kessler 1996, 52; Günther 2001; Robinson 2008; Brokoff 2014, 491). The potential relationship between these concepts is explored in Chapter 4, Section 2.

Poetics of Deviation

In order to perceive a defamiliarization of language, the recipient must be aware of that which has been made strange. In Formalist theory, everyday language is seen as literary language's 'other.' In general, literary language may differ from everyday speech on three levels: pragmatics, semantics, and syntax. First, literary language uses signs differently depending on its pragmatic context. Second, it is characterized by the modification and extension of the way that the signs signify. Third, it is distinguished by anomalies in the syntactic combination of those signs (cf. Saße 1980, 698).

Some scholars consider the Structuralist notion of 'foregrounding' as one of the "resurgences" (Sternberg 2006, 126) of *ostranenie*. Indeed, in his essay "Standard Language and Poetic Language," Prague School Structuralist Jan Mukařovský introduces the notion of foregrounding (*aktualisace*) as "the opposite of automatization" (Mukařovský 2007 [1932], 19). A process of deautomatization makes conscious an act or utterance:

> In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake; it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself. (ibid.)

This quote resembles two ideas that are included in Russian Formalist criticism. First, making the communicative act secondary echoes Jakobson's notion of literature as language whose poetic or aesthetic function is dominant. Second, the idea of foregrounding an utterance that has no need to communicate may increase the awareness of the language's material. Deviations from existing standards appear in many guises. Helmstetter rightly remarks that "poetization is not limited to the stylistic level [. . .], but can avail itself of a wide range of techniques" (Helmstetter 1995, 36).

Linguists as well as literary theorists have claimed that the idea of literariness as a poetic 'deviation' from standard language is relevant to both written and spoken texts (cf. Mukařovský 2007 [1932], 20f)—which is important when examining audiovisual artworks and their oral performances of literary aesthetics. Mukařovský refers to the possibilities of foregrounding certain components through intonation (cf. ibid., 19f). Literariness generated through foregrounded iteration is, for instance, prominent in Gary Hill's video *Mediations*, in which the plosives of the uttered sentences are stressed, or Bruce Nauman's menacing *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room* (see Chapter 3, Section 1). Another example offered by Mukařovský is the inclusion of foreign words in everyday language: "Words originating in slang, dialects, or foreign languages, are, as we know from our own experience, often taken over because of their novelty and uncommonness, that is, for purposes of foregrounding in which aesthetic valuation always plays a significant part" (ibid., 25). This device is most common in media artworks that