The Sound of a Snow Queen: Perspectives on Synchronic Intermediality and 'Let It Go'

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Abstract: In this essay, I use the song 'Let It Go' from *Frozen* as a steppingstone for addressing song and animated musical film as combined media, or rather *integrations*, and, based on the models put forward by Lars Elleström, propose a framework for discussing different kinds of synchronic intermediality. I propose that when analysing synchronic intermediality, we need to consider (at least) three types of combination: 1) combination of modalities (understood as formal structures framing the content), 2) combination of qualified aspects (understood as conventions of media products, herein those aspects tied to media representation), and 3) combination of semiotic content.

Keywords: intermediality, song, musical, combination, *Frozen*

Since its release in 2013, Disney's *Frozen,* particularly the main character Elsa, has attracted considerable popular and academic attention. Elsa has been analyzed from a feminist or queer perspective, with scholars discussing the degree of feminist or queer potential (Myren–Svelstad; Davis; Bunch; Whitfield), or arguing against such potential, emphasising the inherently conservative traits of the film or the missed opportunities to present truly subversive heroines (Llompart and Brugué; Halsall). As a Disney Princess musical, loosely based on "The Snow Queen" by H.C. Andersen, *Frozen* has also been analyzed as an adaptation (Llompart and Brugué; Halsall; Myren–Svelstad). Remarkably few, however, have paid any sustained attention to the musical qualities (beyond the lyrics) of the film's greatest hit song 'Let it Go'.[1] Song, like animation, is inherently intermedial, often referred to as a combined medium. In this essay, I put aside the critical and ideological discussions of *Frozen* and Elsa and focus on the *intermedial* and *musical* construction of Elsa in her key song 'Let It Go'. In doing so, I use 'Let It Go' as a steppingstone for addressing song and animated musical film as combined or integrated media and to propose a framework for discussing different kinds of synchronic intermediality, based on the models put forward by Lars Elleström.

1. Intermediality: Basic concepts and categorisations

Intermediality is still a problematic area with a lack of consensus concerning terminology. Several influential frameworks and classification systems for understanding intermedial phenomenon have been proposed, amongst others by Werner Wolf, Irina Rajewsky, Hans Lund, Claus Clüver and Lars Elleström ("The Modalities of Media"; "The Modalities of Media II"). Common to these various systems is an understanding of intermediality as a medial phenomenon where different types of communication or art meet, directly or indirectly, breaking down media borders and creating new expressive constellations. While the precise definitions vary between approaches, a rough division can be made between two different kinds of intermedial encounters, 1) intermedial integrations or combinations (in Wolf's terminology referred to as 'overt' or 'direct' intermediality (39–40)), where

two or more media forms, such as moving images and music, are combined or integrated into a new media product, such as a film, and 2) intermedial transformations or transpositions (referred to as 'covert' or 'indirect' intermediality in Wolf's terminology (41–43) such as adaptation or musicalized literature. Rajewsky works with a third category titled 'intermedial reference' in which "the given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means" (53), which is partly or fully covered in the transformation category of the other systems mentioned.

Starting in 2010, and repeating it as late as 2021, Elleström has argued that basic intermedial research is hindered by a lack of clear definitions of 'medium' and of the media types compared within intermedial frameworks ("The Modalities of Media" 11–12; "The Modalities of Media II" 5–8). As a response to this problem, Elleström has put forth a comprehensive media model meant to aid in discussing similarities and differences among media, while also serving as a basis for discussing the two overarching categories of integration and transformation. In Elleström's framework, the two types of intermedial encounters mentioned above are maintained, but Elleström further divides media trans-formation into 'media representation' and 'transmediation'. Media representation refers to cases of "a medium representing another medium of a different kind" (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 81). In other words, in media representation, another type of medium is evoked, often through a verbal reference or through the representation of some formal characteristics of said medium, e.g., if a story in a book mentions someone painting a picture, or if a poem is structured like a musical sonata. Transmediation, on the other hand, refers to cases where the semiotic content, i.e., ideas, narrative or story content, is transferred, the most common case of transmediation being adaptations.

Despite being mainly interested in the synchronic media relations in this paper, all of these cat-egories of media relations become relevant when considering the intermedial architecture of *Frozen* and 'Let It Go'. Besides the transmedial relation between H.C. Andersen's source text and *Frozen,* one might also consider the relation between 'Let It Go' and *Frozen* as a media transformation. As noted by Ryan Bunch (96), the sequence of 'Let It Go' feels somewhat like a music video. The sequence begins with a 'cut' to a scenic view simulating an extreme long shot of a snowy mountain, combined with a simple, high-pitched melody played by a piano and the 'magical' sound of chimes. A small dot, unidentifiable at first, shows us Elsa moving up the mountain. Over the first eight measures of the music, the 'camera' gradually pans and zooms in on Elsa, and she starts singing. The sequence ends with Elsa shutting a balcony door in her ice palace, shutting out the camera and viewer, while the music dies out. Both the beginning and the end of this sequence clearly demarcate it from the rest of the film. Furthermore, this sequence was published on YouTube by Walt Disney Animation Studios on the 6. Dec. 2013 – nine days after the official American release of the film on 27. Nov., and well before the film had finished its worldwide release. According to IMDB, *Frozen* was not released in countries like Sweden, China, or Japan until well into 2014 (whether or not these countries were able to view the YouTube video at this point, is unclear) ("Frozen: Release Info"). Many audiences will therefore have had access to the YouTube version of the song *before* they watched the full film, and with 850.713.634 showings (at the time of writing, 13 July 2023), 'Let It Go' have achieved a semi-autonomous status *as* a music video. While I believe it is *generally* unpro-ductive to consider films to be a *combined* medium due to the deep perceptual and interpretive integration of auditive and visual media, 'Let It Go' constitutes a border case where we might consider a certain level of independence on the part of the song and the 'music video'. However, as I will show below, the meaningful construction of Elsa as a character is deeply dependent on this song, and as such, the song might be meaningful outside of the film, but the film is less meaningful without the song. As with adaptations, the relation between 'Let It Go' as a music video and *Frozen* as a whole can be considered to be dialogical (Bruhn), as the song informs our reading of the film, but the film and its narrative context also inform our reading of the song. In fact, when interviewing three Danish children aged 11 about *Frozen,* they said that even though they normally watched the

film in the Danish language version, they preferred to listen to 'Let It Go' in English, and one of them would even change the language of this sequence when watching the whole film. Albeit not necessarily generalisable, this shows an example of real audiences treating the sequence as a music video within the film. As such, we might talk about the sequence of 'Let It Go' as both a conventional component of the Disney musical, it is Elsa's 'I want' song following the Broadway tradition (although it might be more suitable to talk about an 'I won't' song as Colleen Montgomery (113) does, or an 'I am' song as Bunch (97) does), but also as a media representation allowing for a different kind of viewing experience.

2. Lars Ellestrom's media model

Before moving on with the intermedial analysis of *Frozen* and 'Let It Go', it is necessary to clarify Ellestrom's framework and explain his basic concepts.

Ellestrom proposes to distinguish between three different dimensions of media, 'the technical medium of display', 'the basic medium', and 'the qualified medium'. The technical medium of display is a material entity that can be used to distribute a communicative and/or artistic message to someone. A computer, TV, or a canvas are technical display media. The technical medium of display is thus the *realization* medium, i.e., the material which can present semiotic content to a viewer or listener (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 33–34). Basic media, on the other hand, are expressive resources like *written text*, *sound*, *still image*, *moving image,* and *body performance* that can be used to communicate with, but are not organized into artistic or communicative genres (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 56–57). These basic media are the building blocks used in *qualified media*, which are art- and communication forms that are organized in accordance with artistic and communicative conventions, such as *music, painting, literature, dance* or even such a thing as *scholarly writing* (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 57–58).

Basic media are characterized by their 'modalities'. Note that even though Ellestrom is inspired by studies in multimodality, his use of the term 'modality' differs significantly from the way it is used in this field. Modalities, in Ellestrom's framework, are the formal structures of a medium, and these decide how basic media behave in terms of what can be communicated/represented and how (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 46–47). Accordingly, the modalities are the *form* that frames the *content*, and the modalities are crucial in Ellestrom's framework as they enable systematic comparison of basic media and a heightened understanding of the semiotic affordances. Ellestrom distinguishes four such media modalities;

- the 'material modality' is the material interface of a medium, such as human bodies, sound waves and flat surfaces (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 47).
- the 'sensorial modality' is related to the senses that are evoked by the medium such as the auditory sense (or just 'hearing') and the visual sense (or 'seeing') (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 49).
- the 'spatiotemporal modality' relates to the spatial and temporal aspects of a medium as well as the medium's capabilities for *representing* time and space (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 48).
- the 'semiotic modality' relates to the kind of signs used to create meaning. In Ellestrom's model, this is related to the use of C.F. Peirce's 'icons', 'indices' and 'symbols'. Icons represent by *similarity,* that is, by looking or sounding like the thing they represent. Indexical signs (indices) represent by having a direct relation to that which they represent – common examples are footprints, which are indexical of whoever made the print. In literature, handwriting will be an indexical sign of who ever wrote it. Lastly, symbols are signs that represent by convention, as happens with most written and spoken words (Ellestrom, "The Modalities of Media II" 49–51).

Thus equipped with a terminological toolbox for understanding media and media relations, I now move on to discussing perspectives on synchronic intermediality in *Frozen* and 'Let It Go' more in-depth.

3. Three aspects of synchronic intermedial analysis

The integration category is also sometimes described as a synchronic intermedial perspective (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 73; Bruhn and Schirrmacher, "Media Combination" 103), while the transformation category is described as a diachronic perspective, focusing attention on the "temporal gaps among modality modes, media products and media types" (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 74). Such a distinction is useful as it highlights the differences between an analytical focus on the overt (c.f. Wolf) mix of media in a media product, e.g., the mix of music and poetry in song, and the more indirect medial references happening when content is adapted (transmediation) from a literary fairytale to an animated film, or when a film mimics conventions or structures from a music video (media representation). However, as pointed out by Elleström ("The Modalities of Media II" 73) and by Bruhn and Schirrmacher ("Media Combination" 105), these categories are analytical perspectives, and all media products can be analyzed from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective. When we take a closer look at an actual media product, like *Frozen*, and how a film like this is perceived, the distinction between synchronic and diachronic perspectives starts to dismantle. Should we consider 'Let It Go' to be a media representation of a music video, as discussed above, thus belonging to the diachronic perspective? Or should we consider the sequence to be, at the same time, *both* a music video and a film sequence, thus belonging to the synchronic perspective? Once a medium is evoked in another type of medium through reference or representation, is that medium not 'synchronically' present in the new medium, if not through the signifiers of the medium,[2] then at least through the perceiving mind which calls up this idea of the 'other' represented medium? In this way, media representation brings into being the represented media type. The case of 'Let It Go' is special in this regard as the animated music video and the animated musical film share the same basic media and only differ in their qualifying aspects, thus allowing for a seamless and complete integration, but the sequence still serves to shed light on the larger issue of getting hung up on classification systems. Furthermore, it is a case which is characteristic of all pre-composed film music – when John Cale is heard singing his version of 'Hallelujah' in *Shrek* (2001) (Adamson and Jenson)[3] or when Merlin puts on 'That's What Friends Are For' to "help set the mood" in *Shrek the Third* (2007) (Miller and Hui), then the music is not just film music and thus part of a synchronic relation, it is also a medial reference pointing to the qualified medium of pop and rock (or even the qualified submedium of pop song, see below). The fact that the music in the first example is used non-diegetically (i.e., the music is not heard by the characters), and the music in the second example is used diegetically, doesn't change the dominance of the media representation aspect. This is not to say that there is no point in distinguishing between synchronic and diachronic relations or in using classification systems but to highlight the blurry and sometimes problematic borders between categories. Categories and concepts are 'thinking tools' (Queiroz and Atã 187–88), and as such they will both aid our analysis in helping to point out and organize different kinds of relations, but they might also act as blinders if we use them uncritically.

With this in mind, and branching across the traditional integration/synchronic-transformation/diachronic divide, I suggest that there are (at least) three important aspects to consider in synchronic analysis: combination of modalities, combination of qualified aspects – including covert media representation – and combination of semiotic content.

3.1. Combination of modalities

As stated above, Elleström's model is useful in providing a framework within which to discuss and compare different media types. A qualified medium's *specificity* (i.e., those things that make a medium type unique and recognizable) is given in its modal configuration and its qualifying aspects. Therefore, when we have media combinations and integrations, we need to first look at what a media product gains in terms of modalities from the combination, and what representational possibilities this opens up (what new possibilities are there of representing content due to the combination?).

Elleström defines genre as a qualified submedium, "a genre is a qualified media type that is qualified also within the frames of an overarching qualified medium" (Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II" 63–64). This makes animated musical film a qualified submedium of animation, which shares the same basic modalities as film. Film consists of the integration of the basic media types of moving images, auditory text, non-verbal sound, and organized sound. These basic media provide the resources for the images we see, the dialogue, sound effects (sounds of objects and environments) and the music we hear.[4] It is outside the scope of this paper to go into a detailed account of the modalities here (such an account can be found in Jensen and Salmose), suffice it to say that this integration of images and multiple auditory media types ensures an encompassing range of available modalities, which most importantly combines two senses (hearing and seeing) and allows the auditive media types to connect with visual icons in the images in the semiotic modality, and the images to connect with auditory symbols in the dialogue and the music. This combination in the semiotic modality creates a broader range of affordances for semiotic expression and the combination of semiotic content (which I will discuss in more detail in section 3.3). Most importantly, the broader semiotic frame allows for both visualization and for resources to create mood and atmosphere. In the case of 'Let It Go', the song can be listened to alone, and the lyrics are perfectly capable of invoking cognitive imagery and giving voice to Elsa, but hearing the song while *seeing* (icons) Elsa creates another level of storytelling and characterization, just like the combination of visual colours and music enhances the emotional and dramatic potential (symbols). Watching Elsa construct her ice castle in 'Let It Go' would hardly be the same without the colourful ice spectacles *or* the musical buildup supporting the sequence.

3.2. Combination of qualified aspects and covert media representation

Just like the combination of basic media modalities alter the representational possibilities, so the qualifying aspects which are invoked through overt intermediality or media representation influence the meaning potential.

Films will often reference other qualified media as media representation, such as painting, newspapers, or poems, and when this happens, the qualifying aspects of the media are also referenced (see Bruhn and Gjelsvik for a detailed discussion of media representation in film). Thus, when a film, like *Shrek* (2001) (Adamson and Jenson) makes references to the qualified medium of literary fairy tales in its opening by showing pages from a storybook, supplemented by a voice reading from it, it also makes references to aspects that characterize this genre (in this case, it is probably more the Disney fairytale that is referenced), such as the convention of finding true love in the form of a beautiful prince or princess and living happily ever after. The reference is here used to set up *Shrek* as a parody of these conventions right from the start. Besides the media representation of music video discussed above, there is a moment in 'Let It Go' where Elsa is moving around in a gliding circular motion while constructing the inner ornaments of her castle, resembling somewhat a figure skater. We might see this as a media representation of the qualified medium of figure skating, emphasizing Elsa's elegance and how at home she is in this icy environment, not to mention how the qualified medium of architecture is used to mirror Elsa's new state of being; majestic, spectacular, and cold. Tim Reus also notes that Elsa's new ice castle resembles her childhood castle, seeing this as a symbol of isolation, but with positive connotations for the ice palace, due to the brighter colours (277) (for a discussion of architecture as a qualified medium and a topic for intermediality, see Vieira).

The perhaps most obvious combination of qualified aspects in a film musical is that happening between the media of song, dance, and film. As discussed above concerning music video and film music, there is a distinction to make here between what we consider to be integration and what we consider to be media representation. In the case of *Frozen* and 'Let It Go' it is relevant to note that the animated Disney musical, as an established genre, can be considered a qualified submedium in itself, which, like other genres of film musicals, is constituted by the integration of film and musical (again an integration of song, music, dance and theatre). As Rajewsky notes,

> [t]he conception of, say, opera or film as separate genres makes explicit that the combination of different medial forms of articulation may lead to the formation of new, independent art or media genres, a formation wherein the genre's plurimedial foundation becomes its specificity". (52)

As this combination is integral and constitutive of the medium itself with its own qualifying aspects, it might be accurate to consider any references to genres of dance, song, music, theatre, or film that originate from *outside* of the tradition of film musical, or in this case, the Disney princess musical, to be *media representation*. Considered in this way, the line between synchronic and diachronic aspects is once again blurred. The Disney princess musical relies heavily on media representation in the form of references to other vocal-musical cultures, which change throughout the development of this qualified submedium. Whereas the early Disney Princess musicals, such as *Snow White and the Dwarfs* (1937), had their princesses singing in an operatic style – evoking qualifying aspects of high-class music culture, the princesses of the Disney Renaissance, such as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) recall conventions of the Broadway singing style, while the princess revival films (*Tangled* (2010)*, Frozen, Brave* (2012)) to a larger extent draw on pop music. Jennifer Fleeger argues that,

> In all three eras, Disney relied on the female voice to validate new animated musical forms. Although the voices of the periods belong to particular styles of performance, they nevertheless serve as shorthand for authenticity, alerting listeners to the scene in which real bodies would be singing these songs (opera house, Broadway stage, pop concert). (128)

As musical trends and animation techniques have developed, new kinds of media representation have thus been employed in the Disney princess musical to keep the princesses authentic or relatable and to "justify" and "validate" new animation techniques (Fleeger 129). Although written by Broadway composers Robert Lopez and Kristin Anderson-Lopez, 'Let It Go' follows the revival tendency with a notable pop sound, not least carried by the electric orchestration towards the end of the song. Following Fleeger's argument, Bunch suggests that for contemporary audiences "[t]he song's resemblance to a pop anthem makes Elsa sympathetic and allows fans to take on her empowering embodiment as a heroine rather than a villainess" (97), suggesting that the reference to pop song enhances the feeling of intimacy compared to other songs in *Frozen* more closely aligned with a dramatic tradition.

3.3. Combination of semiotic content through integration

As noted above, animated film musicals are incredibly complex integrated media products, with several expressive resources providing meaning potential which is integrated into one narrative experience in the perceiving mind. To date, a number of models exist to address this meaning integration, which is often taken to be emergent, that is, the sum of the combination is bigger than the parts. Many scholars in this area do not refer to themselves as intermedialists but work in the areas of word and music studies (e.g., Bernhart; Kramer), word and image studies (herein studies of picture books, comics and graphic novels, Bateman gives a comprehensive overview), film music studies (Buhler gives a comprehensive overview; see also Jensen 107–15) or multimodality (Jensen gives an overview). Although the models differ in how to name and categorize different kinds of word/image/sound relationships, an often shared denominator across the mentioned fields is to distinguish between different levels of alignment of the semiotic content of the various media types, ranging from complete consonance (e.g. Nikolajeva and Scott 14) or conformance (Cook 98–99) (by Walter Bernhart referred to as "fusionist, interpretive") between the represented meaning potential to contest (Cook 102–03) or counterpoint (Nikolajeva and Scott 17) (by Bernhart referred to as 'separatist'). These kinds of models also tend to operate with categories in between the poles of coherence and contrast, the simpler models simply referring to a 'middle' category of complementation, where both media contribute with complementary information necessary for understanding the overall narrative or meaning of the media product. These kinds of classification models have also

been criticized within film music studies for being reductionistic in assuming that coherence on a structural and a semiotic level will always occur simultaneously, and for suggesting too strong a hierarchy between image and music.[5] One of the most famous critiques has been made by Michel Chion, who stated that "there is no image track and no soundtrack in the cinema" (40) critiquing the idea that cinema should be a combined medium with two autonomous tracks which can be taken apart.

As I have argued elsewhere (Schirrmacher and Jensen), multimodality and intermediality can fruitfully be considered two research areas with complementary approaches, and when analyzing the meaning generation happening in integrated media products, I argue that a multimodal approach, preferably informed by the relevant research traditions mentioned above, is best able to provide a systematic and detailed framework. Taking into account that film is not just a combination of two media with each their distinctive and independent meaning potential, I argue to extend and reframe the coherence – contrast model to take account of all the expressive resources in film. In referring to the integration of meaning potential as a 'multimodal dimension', I mean to address two problems: 1) Film is an integration of a vast number of *semiotic modes* (here defined as a socially constructed system of semiotic resources which can be manipulated independently) such as facial expression, colour, dialogue, sound effects, and melodic shape (of music). These semiotic modes cannot be reduced to the qualified submedia of filmic dialogue, moving images, and film music. 2) A semiotic mode, such as melodic shape, might be coherent with some semiotic modes, such as facial expression, while being complementary or contrastive with other modes, such as colour, at the same time (see Jensen, (chap. 5) for a detailed account of this model). Thus, discussing the integration of meaning potential necessitates a transcription of meaning-making material – here referred to as semiotic resources, and an analysis of how these resources combine over time throughout the analysed sequence.

The multimodal dimension is my development of the term 'audiovisual dimension' first used by sound designed Walter Murch and later by media scholar Iben Have to denote "the metaphoric distance between the images of a film and the accompanying sounds" (Murch XXII) – a distance which is both flexible, i.e. it changes from moment to moment, and perceptual, i.e. the relative depth of the audiovisual dimension refers to the time and ease with which the brain is able to fuse the sound and image and make sense of the connection. By rephrasing the concept as a *multimodal* dimension, I mean to acknowledge that "it is not music + image that equals film, but a multitude of auditive and visual modes that in interaction equals film" (Jensen 128), which echoes Chion's notion that "each audio element enters into simultaneous vertical relationship with narrative elements contained in the image (characters, actions) and visual elements of texture and setting" (40).

The tables below, quoted from Jensen gives an exemplification of how the concepts of semiotic modes and resources are understood in this paper, along with a schematic overview of the various semiotic modes deemed most important in 'Let It Go' and a simplified transcription. Note that the semiotic resources of the lyrics are notated both for the official Danish lyrics and for the original English lyrics.

The tables show that analyzing 'Let It Go' is not just a matter of determining the meaning potential of words, images, and music, but of locating the meaning-making structures within the individual features of these media, i.e., through analysing lyrics, facial expression, colour, melodic shape, and instrumentation individually. As a second step after doing the transcription, a transcription allows for the consideration of how the meaning potential of these different semiotic modes combines over time. The transcript provided here is a simplified transcript meant to illustrate rather than give a true account of the combination of semiotic resources, and what is important to note here is that all the different modes develop in a similar manner towards employing more powerful and active resources, effectively constructing a contrast between the beginning of the sequence and the end (see Jensen 142–53 for an in-depth explanation of the transcript and analysis of the sequence). The horizontal viewing perspective begins with a high angle and long zoom, making Elsa seem small, and while the high angle is also used towards the end, the very last image shows Elsa face-on at eye

System of modes	Semiotic modes	Semiotic resources employed
Moving Image	Colour composition	Blue, Violet, Red, Yellow, Orange, Green, Silver
	Horizontal viewing perspective	High angle, eye level, low angle
Music	Pitch/register (of accompaniment)	High, medium, low
	Harmony	Minor, Major, Unstable/modulating
	Volume	piano (low volume), mezzo forte (medium loud), forte, (loud), fortissimo (very loud)
	Instrumentation	Strings, classical piano, harp, horns, woodwinds, percussion (non- drums), chimes, drums, electrical guitar, bass-guitar, glockenspiel, electrical piano, synth
	Voice register	High register (head voice), medium register (mix), low register (chest voice)
	Lyrics	- *Participants:* Elsa, 'dem'/'them' - (main) *actions:* at være dronning/being queen, storm indeni/swirling storm inside, lukker ingen ind/concealing feelings, lad det ske/let it go, ikke gemme sig mere/can't hold it back, lytter ikke/not caring, at være fri/feeling free, at blive til den man er/here I stand and here I stay, forbi med bitter gråd/not crying, kan aldrig vende hjem/not going back) - *Circumstance and setting* (ingen fodspor/no footsteps, isolation/isolation, sne/snowy, storm/stormy, koldt bjerg/cold mountain
Represented Body	Body language	Dance, closed/insecure, open/inviting/confident, angry/violent, seductive, shrugging/hopelessness
	Facial expression	Joy, sadness, anger, surprise, contempt, fear

Figure 1: *Overview of semiotic modes and resources in 'Let It Go'*
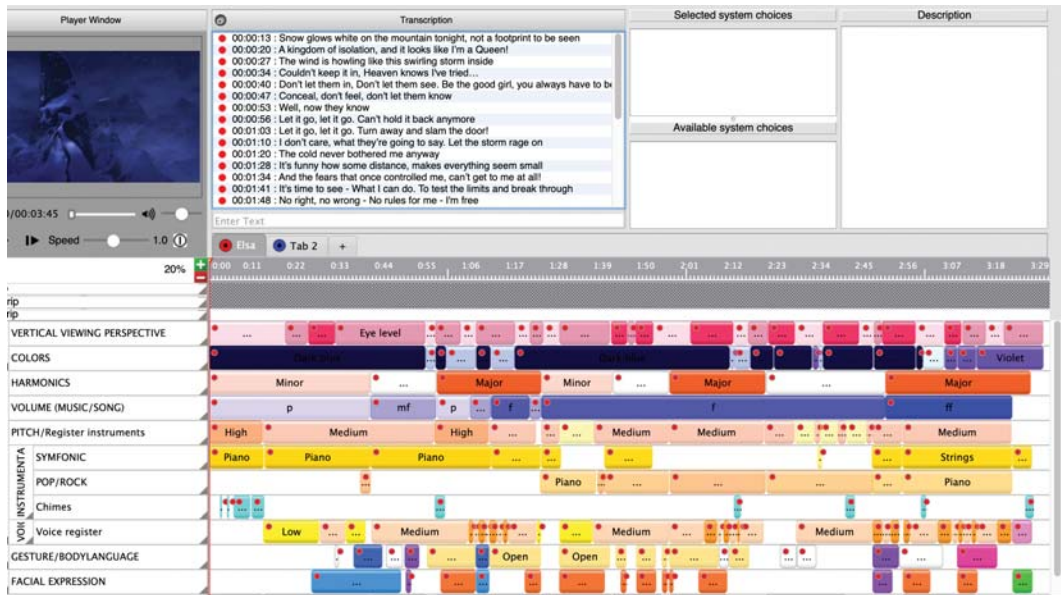(Buck and Lee, 00.29.50)*, quoted from* Jensen *(142–43).*

Figure 2: Simplified overview of the employment of semiotic resources in 'Let It Go' using the multimodal analysis video software by Multimodal Analysis Company, quoted from Jensen (144).

level, allowing her to look straight into the camera with a powerful gaze. The colours develop from being dominated by relatively dark and cold colours to more bright and vibrant colours, and both Elsa's body language and facial expression develop from being closed and sad to being open and happy (and perhaps angry or contemptuous) in the end. Musically, the sequence beings with a high-pitched, acoustically sounding solo piano with a fragile sound, played at a low volume and in minor (minor keys are often associated with sadness), and develops into a full pop orchestra playing at a more powerful medium timbre and high volume in major.[6] The lyrics, along with the musical modes, develop through four phases mirroring Elsa's process: 1) 1. Verse and bridge: Elsa is insecure and lonely, with the lyrics focusing on the cold and isolated mountain and how this reflects Elsa's feelings. 2) 2. Verse and bridge, the lyrics here focus on how Elsa gains confidence and discovers that isolation means freedom and the ability to explore her powers. 3) The contrast sequence, in this part, the lyrics focus on Elsa's "powers and her integration with the natural forces" (Jensen151) along with Elsa determining to "never going back, the past is in the past" (Buck and Lee), which she sings out with a powerful voice. 4) Final chorus, this part signals the final stage of Elsa's transformation where Elsa embraces a bright new day and declares that "the cold never bothered me anyway" (Buck and Lee), which can both be understood literally as the cold mountain being a not un-suitable home, and metaphorically, as her accepting the isolation of her new home.

Throughout, these four phases are closely co-constructed by the other semiotic modes, which transform along with the lyrics. Analysing the expression of isolation across lyrics, visuals and music in the English version of the sequence compared to two Dutch translations, Reus states that

> [t]he ST [source text, i.e. the English language version] uses the lyrics' singability to develop isolation in unison with the harmony, beginning with many close and close-mid vowels and ending with many open and open-mid vowels to express Elsa's development from isolation to liberation". (278)

Reus thus shows how the development of semiotic modes located above extends also to vowel use in the lyrics. It should be noted that 'harmony' in this quote refers to "the emotional effect of the music itself, as dictated by issues including chord progression, key, and tempo" (Reus 274), and not simply to the harmonic quality of the chord scheme.

In this particular example of 'Let It Go', we are dealing with a large degree of 'coherence' between all the semiotic modes employed, something which is typical of Disney and Pixar movies. The semiotic modes here are all developed through time to support and co-construct Elsa's psychological and physical development and maturation, from a timid and lonely girl (or princess) to a mature, sensual, confident ice queen (or even a femme fatale, as noted by Alison Halsall (145)). The intermedial integration of semiotic potential from multiple sources is responsible for making this transition more engaging, powerful, and convincing. The musical modes and colours add an extra level of emotionality and construct an immersive spectacle, the lyrics allow audiences to sing along and take on Elsa's words as their own, and Elsa's body language and facial expression trigger the potential for recognition and empathy. As the relative depth of the multimodal dimension is flexible, however, one should not assume either a flat multimodal dimension (coherence) or a deep dimension (contrast) without careful consideration of all semiotic modes.

4. Conclusion

For songs, animated musicals, and other combined media, synchronic intermediality is key to understanding how meaning potential is composed. Based on, but also developing, Elleström's media model, I have proposed that when analysing synchronic intermediality, we need to consider (at least) three types of combination: 1) combination of modalities, 2) combination of qualified aspects, herein those aspects tied to media representation, and 3) combination of semiotic content. The case study of 'Let It Go' shows that even a short, animated song of just 3:38 minutes represents an immensely complex intermedial architecture, where both media representation and the combination of basic and qualified media add layers of meaning potential and alternative viewing experiences.

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Notes

[1] See, however, Jensen (142–53) for an in-depth musical and multimodal analysis. Stilwell; Reus; and Bunch also give brief considerations of the musical accompaniment.

[2] Wolf argues that in covert intermediality, a non-dominant medium is "not present in the form of its characteristic signifiers but, at least minimally, as an idea, as a signified" (41).

[3] Even though John Cale's version of the song is used in the film, it is the version by Rufus Wainwright that is used on the soundtrack album (Fetters). This highlights the fact that *soundtrack albums* are a qualified medium which transmediates content from the qualified medium of *film music*, but the two media types are very much distinct.

[4] I have previously argued that when studying film from a perception perspective, rather than a production perspective, it should be treated as an integrated medium, not a combined medium, and that moving images, dialogue, sound effects and film music differ to such a large degree from their non-filmic counterparts, and are so highly conventionalized within the filmic medium, that they should be considered qualified submedia in themselves, see Jensen and Salmose (30–31).

[5] Note that Walter Bernhart distinguishes between fusionist interpretive songs where the semiotic potential aligns, and fusionist non-interpretive songs where melody and lyrics are aligned on a prosodic level (296). See also Arvidson et al. (123–29).

[6] The verses are played in f minor, and the choruses in A flat (the major key which is parallel to f). Stilwell has observed, however, that the song emphasizes and ends on the subdominant to A flat, namely D flat, and even a D flat sus2. The tonic chord (here A flat) is located on the first step of the scale on which a melody is based, and this chord is often symbolically referred to as the 'home' of the melody. Ending a song on a dissonant (the sus2 makes it dissonant) subdominant rather than the tonic (here A flat) can thus be felt and interpreted to destabilize the ending of the song, here perhaps suggesting that Elsa's new ice castle is not her ideal home despite all that has proceeded. Stillwell's interpretation is that the song showcases that Elsa achieves individuation, but also that "this isn't a resolution available for female characters, or for society" (Stilwell).

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