



Cinematic Intermediality

Theory and Practice

EDITED BY

KIM KNOWLES AND MARION SCHMID

EDINBURGH STUDIES IN FILM AND INTERMEDIALITY

Cinematic Intermediality

Edinburgh Studies in Film and Intermediality

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Theory and Practice

Edited by Kim Knowles and Marion Schmid

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The Contributors

Stephen Barber is Professor of Art History at Kingston University's Kingston School of Art, and a Fellow of the Freie Universität Berlin. His recent monographs include *The Projectionists: Eadweard Muybridge and the Future Projections of the Moving Image* (2020), *Film's Ghosts: Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh and the Transmutation of 1960s Japan* (2019) and *Berlin Bodies: Anatomising the Streets of the City* (2018). He is currently working on a new book about film and wastelands.

Martine Beugnet is Professor at the Université de Paris, affiliated to the Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Cultures Anglophones (LARCA) and Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). Her books include *Claire Denis* (2004), *Proust at the Movies* (2005, with Marion Schmid), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (2012) and *L'Attrait du flou* (2017), on the history and aesthetics of blur. She co-edited the volume of collected essays *Indefinite Visions: Cinema and the Attractions of Uncertainty* with Allan Cameron and Arild Fetveit (2017). Her new monograph, *Le Cinéma et ses doubles: L'Image de film à l'ère du foundfootage numérisé et des écrans de poche* is forthcoming.

Barnaby Dicker is a Visiting Research Fellow at King's College, London, and sits on the editorial board of *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. His research revolves around conceptual and material innovations in and through graphic technologies and arts, including cinematography and photography, with particular emphasis on avant-garde practices. This has led to work on topics such as animation, proto-cinematography, experimental film, graphic reproduction technologies, comic strips, paleoart and the historiography of aesthetic theories and practices of abstraction.

Steven Jacobs is an art historian specialised in the interactions between film, the visual arts and architecture. His publications include *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock* (2007), *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (2011), *The Dark Galleries: A Museum Guide to Painted Portraits in Film Noir* (2013), *Screening Statues: Cinema and Sculpture* (2017), *The City Symphony*

Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars (2018) and *Art in the Cinema: The Mid-Century Art Documentary* (2020). He teaches at Ghent University and the University of Antwerp, Belgium.

Gabriele Jutz is Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and Head of the Department. She has published numerous articles on the history, theory and aesthetics of film – in particular on the cinematic avant-garde, expanded cinema, experimental film sound, art and the moving image and experimental animation. Her books include *Cinéma brut. Eine alternative Genealogie der Filmavantgarde* (2010); *RESET THE APPARATUS! A Survey of the Photographic and the Filmic in Contemporary Art* (co-editors Edgar Lissel and Nina Jukić, 2019); and *Animating Truth(s): The Films of Maria Lassnig and Their Context* (2019).

Kim Knowles lectures in Alternative and Experimental Film at Aberystwyth University in Wales and curates the Black Box experimental strand at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. She has published widely on historical and contemporary forms of avant-garde film, as well as intersections with poetry, photography, architecture and dance. She is the author of two books – *A Cinematic Artist: The Films of Man Ray* (2012) and *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* (2020). She co-edits the Palgrave Series in Experimental Film and Artists' Moving Image with Jonathan Walley.

Ágnes Pethő is Professor of Film Studies at the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca (Romania). She has published extensively on cinematic intermediality, the relationship between film and the visual arts, and on the aesthetic of the *tableau vivant*. She is the author of *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between* (2011). Her edited books include *Words and Images on the Screen: Language, Literature, Moving Pictures* (2008), *Film in the Post-Media Age* (2012), *The Cinema of Sensations* (2015) and *Caught In-Between: Intermediality in Contemporary Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (2020).

Sarah Pucill has, for three decades, been making 16 mm experimental films that have been shown and won awards at festivals and in museums, galleries and cinemas internationally. Both her recent films, *Confessions to the Mirror* (68 min, 2016) and *Magic Mirror* (75 min, 2013), screened at international venues, including Tate Modern, London Film Festival, Alchemy Moving Image Festival, Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), National Portrait Gallery and White Cube Bermondsey, and were staged in museum galleries, including Cobra Museum Gallery, Netherlands (2021), an installation at Ottawa Art

Gallery, Canada (2020), and Nunnery Gallery, London. She lives in London and is a Reader at the University of Westminster.

Lucy Reynolds has lectured and published extensively. Her research focuses on questions of the moving image, feminism, political space and collective practice. She co-ordinates the PhD programme for the Centre for Research in Education, Art and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster. As an artist, her ongoing sound work *A Feminist Chorus* has been heard at the Glasgow International Festival, the Wysing Arts Centre, the Showroom and the Grand Action cinema, Paris. She is editor of the anthology *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image*, and co-editor of the *Moving Image Review and Art Journal* (MIRAJ).

Adam Roberts has made prize-winning films, notably with dancers Jonathan Burrows and Sylvie Guillem. He co-founded the film collective *À Nos Amours* with Joanna Hogg to curate overlooked or important moving image work that might not easily find an audience. A retrospective of films by Chantal Akerman and an exhibition of her installation work resulted between 2013 and 2015. A book, *The Chantal Akerman Retrospective Handbook*, was published in 2019. Adam Roberts has recently published *Lamentation. In the Stuart Croft Archive* (2020) and is working on a new film.

Isabel Rocamora is an artist-filmmaker and scholar. Her multi-awarded moving image and performance works have been curated in museums, galleries and festivals worldwide, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; CCC Palazzo Strozzi, Florence; National Museum of Photography, Copenhagen; Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Israel; Austrian Cultural Forum, New York; and Koffler Gallery, Toronto. Her AHRC-funded PhD thesis (Edinburgh University, 2019) examines the existential impact of aesthetic experimentation in modernist and contemporary cinema in dialogue with Martin Heidegger's phenomenology and metaphysics. Isabel has taught film extensively, including at the University of Edinburgh. She is a Visiting Scholar at Pompeu Fabra University.

Marion Schmid is Professor of French Literature and Film at the University of Edinburgh. She has published extensively on the interactions between literature, film and the visual arts and on modern French literature. Her books include *Processes of Literary Creation: Flaubert and Proust* (1998), *Proust at the Movies* (2005, with Martine Beugnet), *Proust dans la décadence* (2008), *Chantal Akerman* (2010), *Intermedial Dialogues: The French New Wave and the Other Arts* (2019) and the co-edited collection of essays *Chantal Akerman: Afterlives* (2019,

with Emma Wilson). She co-edits the Peter Lang series *European Connections: Studies in Comparative Literature, Intermediality and Aesthetics* with Hugues Azérad.

Christopher Townsend is Professor of the history of avant-garde film in the Department of Media Arts, Royal Holloway, University of London. Recent publications have concentrated on the avant-garde's use and imagination of media from the 1910s to the 1930s, including studies of Francis Picabia, Fernand Léger and Duncan Grant. He is presently completing a book on the relationship of the POOL Group of modernist filmmakers and critics to the mainstream media industry. He is a Senior Research Fellow of the Henry Moore Institute, and recipient of the H.D. Fellowship in American Literature from the Beinecke Library, Yale University, 2019.

Anna Vasof is an architect and media artist. Born in 1985, she studied architecture at the University of Thessaly (2010) in Greece and transmedia art (2014) at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Since 2004, her videos and short movies have been presented in several festivals, some of them winning distinctions. She is currently working on her PhD thesis about an animation technique that she is developing with the title *Non Stop Stop Motion*, and at the same time working on designing and building innovative mechanisms for producing critical and narrative videos, actions and installations.

Boris Wiseman is a Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen and Director of the Fondation Deutsch de la Meurthe, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. He has written about French anthropology, as viewed in its relationship to contemporary philosophy, especially aesthetic thought, and to French literature in general. Past publications include *Lévi-Strauss, Anthropology and Aesthetics* (2007). He is currently finalising a monograph on Degas and cinema. He has coordinated an eye-tracking experiment at the Sainsbury's Centre for Visual Arts on dancers' embodied viewing of sculpture (see *The Senses and Society*, vol. 14 (3), 2019) and has an abiding interest in methods of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Introduction

Kim Knowles and Marion Schmid

Since at least the turn of the millennium, notions of film as a medium and cinema as an institution have undergone significant transformation. The shift from film to digital media, now a familiar historical narrative, has given rise to a moving image culture no longer bound to traditional sites of encounter and modes of address but taking on fluid identities in new contexts. Circulating widely in the wake of the digital revolution, the ‘death of cinema’ discourse describes the latest in a series of ‘deaths’, that, as André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion argue, have come to define a modern medium in a continual state of flux and transformation. Nonetheless, ‘[w]hat has incontestably changed today’, in their view, ‘is that cinema no longer has exclusive claim on our heart and is having a lot of trouble getting over the fact.’¹ In an era of media convergence, the association of the seventh art with what Raymond Bellour refers to as ‘the lived, more or less collective experience of a film projected in a cinema, in the dark, according to an unalterably precise screening procedure’ is now only one of the many ways that audiences see, feel and think the moving image.² The wealth of scholarly attention paid in recent years to redefining the contours of film as an art form and recasting the theoretical paradigms employed to understand it point to a form of self-searching that has several historical parallels. For D. N. Rodowick, ‘there has never been a general consensus concerning the answer to the question “What is cinema?”’ And for this reason the evolving thought on cinema in the twentieth century has persisted in a continual state of identity crisis.³

For if ‘convergence culture’ – to quote the title of the influential book by new media theorist Henry Jenkins – increasingly describes the contemporary media landscape, one could equally argue that the medium of film has always, to some extent, been defined by its intersection with other art forms and technologies.⁴ Paradoxically, the search for specificity has frequently folded the other arts into ideas of what constitutes and characterises cinematic expression, from visual music and film poetry to kinetic painting and photography in motion. While the early film theorists of the 1910s and 1920s – Germaine

Dulac, Jean Epstein and Ricciotto Canudo, for example – fought for film to be taken seriously as an art form through analogies with these more established forms of expression, the pioneering works of avant-garde cinema were made primarily by artists working in other media. Man Ray, Fernand Léger, Marcel Duchamp, Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling and László Moholy-Nagy invigorated film language with formal ideas derived from painting, photography and sculpture, rejecting the reliance on narrative causality and characterisation that had come to dominate an art form in the grasp of commercial concerns. The element of time inherent in the film medium allowed Man Ray to set his photographic compositions in motion and extend his interest in light and shadow, whilst for Richter, Eggeling and Ruttmann it provided the means to explore the temporal evolution and rhythmic relations of simple forms on a flat plane.

The ontology of film, it seems, is intricately bound up with other art forms, and the pursuit of its essence inevitably brings us back to its fundamentally hybrid nature. It is hardly coincidental, then, that the wave of scholarship devoted to redefining film studies in this most intensive period of self-searching should be accompanied by a corresponding ‘intermedial turn’. Although reflections on creative cross-fertilisation have been present throughout the history of film – from André Bazin’s 1952 article ‘For an Impure Cinema: In Defence of Adaptation’ to the numerous studies of literary adaptation – intermediality as a term and as a key critical paradigm has gained traction from the late 1990s onwards.⁵ In her extensive and thought-provoking study, Ágnes Pethő argues that intermediality has the potential for ‘becoming one of the major theoretical issues of contemporary thinking about cinema’.⁶ Rather than simply focusing on artistic hybridity as an object of analysis, contemporary scholars have uncovered the radical theoretical implications of its application as a method, opening up, in the process, new ways of understanding cinematic expression in all its hybrid complexity. This is cogently articulated by Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev in the introduction to their collection of essays *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film*:

By calling impure cinema a method rather than an object, we are proposing not to betray or thwart Bazin’s original purpose but, on the contrary, to bring to the fore his dramatic call for a new emancipated criticism, capable of understanding cinema beyond the constraints of the medium’s specificity.⁷

But if the concept of ‘impure cinema’ derives from Bazin, modern theories of cinematic intermediality express an interest in the creative articulation of ‘in-betweenness’, a concept first developed by Raymond Bellour in a series of essays exploring the intersections between film and other art forms.⁸ Riding

the edges and in-betweens of different artistic media can be a way of exploring liminal identities and states, eliciting complex affective responses that appeal to the physical body of the spectator. Pethő's *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between* remains the most detailed theorisation of intermediality from this perspective, offering valuable insights into how artistic overlaps draw out the inherently multi-sensory nature of the film medium. Drawing on the phenomenological tradition, Pethő states: "Sensing" the intermediality of film is therefore grounded in the (inter)sensuality of cinema itself, in the experience of the viewer being aroused simultaneously on different levels of consciousness and perception.⁹ This approach highlights the difficulty in consciously articulating artistic boundary crossings in the viewing process, arguing that the merging of media calls upon the body to make 'sense' of these often very tangible layers. Pethő's formulation of in-betweenness benefits from its extensive theoretical scope and provides a source of inspiration for a number of chapters in this volume.

Emerging from the International Research Network 'Film and the Other Arts: Intermediality, Creativity, Medium Specificity', funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (2015–17), the present collection of essays develops ideas first explored in a series of workshops that brought together researchers from a range of Humanities disciplines (Film and Media Studies, History of Art, Theatre and Performance, Modern Languages), as well as creative practitioners. Fostering dialogue between theory and practice, the network examined the manifold ways in which the moving image is revitalised by artistic crossovers and fusions, with a particular emphasis on the permeability between cinema and the other arts in avant-garde and experimental practice and its legacy in mainstream film. Veering away from the relationship between literature and film, which has tended to dominate discussions of cinematic intermediality, our aim was to explore how intermedial practice, both historical and contemporary, can be understood either outside a narrative context or in relation to works that problematise narrative in some way. Central to this examination was the consideration of process – how and why artists work with specific materials, technologies and aesthetic approaches – as well as a plural interpretation of intermediality as a theory, method and intersensual approach.

Pursuing these reflections, this volume investigates a broad range of films – from cinema's beginnings to the digital era, including both mainstream and experimental practice, world cinema and peripheral cinemas – with a view to offering a more comprehensive understanding of the role of intermediality in moving image creation. Giving voice to both theorists and cinema practitioners, we try to emphasise the material gesture as much as the visual texture, and the chapters shift variously between the haptic image on the

screen and the lived experience of making and thinking between one art form and another. From the spaces of creation to the sites of artistic encounter, our attention also turns at times to works made not only for the cinema but also for the gallery space, bringing us back to the problematisation of those once-familiar terms 'film' and 'cinema'. If intermediality involves the consideration of sensuous in-betweens, then the liminal space of the gallery and its itinerant visitor surely open up fertile ground for a reassessment of how the spectator of moving image works can, to return to Pethő, be 'aroused simultaneously on different levels'. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, this collection aims to stimulate debate along some recognisable trajectories, whilst at the same time opening up new pathways for thinking about how intermediality, as both a creative method and an interpretative paradigm, might be explored alongside probing questions of what 'cinema' is, has been and can be.

In light of our aim to develop a more varied critical framework for exploring the relationship between cinema and its sibling arts, the book is organised into four thematic parts. The first, 'Mapping the Interzone', maps out cinema's rich encounters with some of its most influential artistic predecessors: performance, sculpture, painting and photography. Our focus here is on the pathways and fusions between cinema and other non-verbal arts, as well as on the theoretical implications of these inter-artistic exchanges. The collection opens with a programmatic piece by Stephen Barber on the long-standing intermedial relations between moving-image culture and performance. Looking at the ways in which film reframes and refashions the experience of the live performance, Barber argues that the concept of intermediality – traditionally associated with the 1960s and 1970s – can, in fact, be traced back to early cinema's roots in performance culture. Spanning more than a hundred years of film history, from Eadweard Muybridge's experiments in sequential photography to the Berlin-based film pioneers Max and Emil Skladanowsky and contemporary Lebanese visual artist Rabih Mroué, the essay explores cinema's enduring preoccupation with and incorporation of performance. Shifting our attention to the often overlooked intersection between cinema and sculpture, Steven Jacobs turns to Michelangelo Antonioni's short film *Lo Sguardo di Michelangelo* (*Michelangelo Eye to Eye*, 2004) as a poignant example of filmmakers' endeavours to give visibility to an art which, in all respects, seems diametrically opposed to their own. Reflecting on the differences between the two arts, Jacob foregrounds the ways in which the mobile, immaterial medium of film evokes, but also reconfigures and remediates, the static, tactile materiality of sculpture.

In her essay on the interpenetration between the 'photographic' and the 'cinematic', on the other hand, Ágnes Pethő looks at the photo-filmic qualities inherent in three films at the periphery of world cinema: Abderrahmane

Sissako's *Timbuktu*, Alexander Kott's *Test* and Elchin Musaoglu's *Nabat* (all made in 2014). For Pethő, the recurrent tableau shots, as well as the incorporation of genuine photographs, in these films offer an 'adequate form to unfold a kind of post-human landscape', allowing them to address urgent questions of human violence, destruction and vulnerability. Martine Beugnet, in a wide-reaching essay that takes us from French Impressionist filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein to our digital era, identifies low definition and blur as intermedial figurations that tend to 'draw the cinema image towards painterly forms'. Connecting the concept of absorption – first developed in the context of painting – to the moving image, she examines the effect of blur on human representation, notably its soliciting of a more empathetic spectatorial involvement and its negotiation of intimacy and distance.

From the intermedial experiments of the historical avant-garde to Fluxus, Pop Art or Structural Film, the avant-garde has been a particularly fertile breeding ground for media encounters. Our second part, 'The Intermedial Avant-gardes', shines a spotlight on the 1960s and 1970s as a moment of heightened intensity for intermedial thought and practice, where questions of medium, method and creativity were being reconsidered and revitalised. In a historiographical piece examining the period from the 1970s to the present day, Christopher Townsend identifies two major tendencies in the study of the avant-garde. Whereas the first extensive scholarly scrutiny of the cinematic avant-garde originated in the visual arts and was conducted by practising filmmakers, he demonstrates, it gradually migrated into the discipline of literary studies. Cautioning against the use of intermediality as 'a tool of academic recuperation and reification', Townsend outlines the benefits and pitfalls of both approaches. Homing in on film artist Annabel Nicolson's seminal 1972 article 'Artist as Filmmaker', Lucy Reynolds pinpoints striking commonalities in the use of the film medium between two movements in 1970s Britain that held themselves apart: conceptual artists and artist filmmakers. With reference to Nicolson's 'film actions' and the film installations of David Dye, as well as to their conceptual counterparts such as Dan Graham and John Hilliard, she redraws the map of the 'wider cultural networks, allegiances and art communities in London and internationally during the early 1970s'. Taking us to the other side of the Atlantic and into structural filmmaking, Barnaby Dicker illuminates the intermedial practice of visual artist Paul Sharits, whose 1968 flicker film *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* and its corresponding 'Notes', published in *Film Culture* the following year, establish a dialogue with Johannes Vermeer's *A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal*. By means of connecting the theoretical notion of 'differential specificity' to the nexus between artwork and statement inherent in *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*, the essay

unravels Sharit's 'theoretically and emotionally driven' stop-frame meditation on one of the most iconic paintings by the Dutch master.

To what extent was the invention of cinema the result of technological innovations or, rather, should we understand its emergence as an inherently intermedial phenomenon? How does intermediality alter the filmic apparatus, *dispositif* and conditions of spectatorship? And what role can cinema's sister arts play in the non-verbal expression of affect and thought? These are the guiding questions our contributors have asked themselves in Part 3, 'Technology, Apparatus, Affect'. For Boris Wiseman, the origins of cinema are intimately – indeed, inseparably – linked to intermediality. Whether it be in early camera obscuras, Carlo Ponti's *Megaletoscopia*, designed to view albumin photographs, or the 'speaking photographs' of Georges Demeny's *Phonoscope*, Wiseman argues, 'cinema emerges, here and there, in different forms, including accidental, in-between media'. His remarks on the 'oddly in-between state – neither moving nor entirely still' of moving images before the invention of cinema resonate in Gabriele Jutz's chapter on the aesthetic potential of the film frame as an interstitial entity between photography and cinematography. If Jutz acknowledges the inherently intermedial character of visual practices predating the birth of cinema, her focus here is on the installations and filmic and photographic works of four contemporary visual artists: Gebhard Sengmüller, Peter Tscherkassky, Susanne Miggitsch and Eric Rondepierre. Broadening the discussion to 'migrations' between film and several other arts, including literature, painting and theatre, Marion Schmid identifies intermedial strategies at work in two recent French films revolving around questions of personal growth and transmission, Pascale Breton's *Suite armoricaine* and Eugène Green's *Le Fils de Joseph* [*The Son of Joseph*]. With special reference to Proust, Georges de La Tour and Caravaggio, she argues for the significance of the other arts in the two films as a way of 'making "sensible" central human concerns without recourse to language'.

The final part of the book, 'Intermedial Creation', gives voice to four award-winning moving image artists, who draw on and reconfigure cinema's sister arts in their filmic practice. We are delighted to showcase a selection of their works at the crossroads between film, dance, performance and photography, and to offer them a platform to reflect on their creative practice. The section opens with an essay by London-based filmmaker, writer and curator Adam Roberts, who has made a series of films with dancers and choreographers, including Sylvie Guillem and Jonathan Burrows. Meditating on the intimate relationship between the filmmaker and the dancers in movement, Roberts evokes his 'pursuit of the curve or stretch or reach of the body', his 'search of its capacities or its potential', which the filmmaker captures in filmic frames. The expressiveness and fragility of the human body are

equally central to the creative practice of British–Spanish artist filmmaker Isabel Rocamora, who pursues her own roots in performance in her films and installations shaped by ‘human gesture, place, temporality and presence’. Rocamora foregrounds the humanist concerns behind her films *Body of War* (2010) and *Faith* (2015), two works that draw on the performative nature of combat or ritual to interrogate questions of trauma, human transgression and alterity. In an altogether different register, teeming with irony and mischief, Vienna-based architect and media artist Anna Vasof takes inspiration from and reframes the pre-cinematic experiments of Eadweard Muybridge – evoked previously in Stephen Barber and Boris Wiseman’s essays – in her animation work. At the intersection between video, performance and photography, her ongoing project *Non-stop Stop-motion* ‘investigates where we can find the essence of cinematic illusion when we look into everyday life and what happens when we use everyday situations, objects, spaces and actions as cinematographic mechanisms’.

The volume closes with an essay by the British artist Sarah Pucill on her creative responses to Surrealist photographer, sculptor and writer Claude Cahun, an avant-garde artist best known for her gender-bending self-portraits. In her films *Magic Mirror* (2013) and *Confessions to the Mirror* (2016), Pucill re-enacts Cahun’s photographs in the form of *tableaux vivants*, creating new connections between the French artist’s visual and written work and her own creative practice. Pucill’s ‘dialogues’ with an artist engaged in questions that deeply resonate with her own, yet which were initially pursued in a different medium, sharply throw into relief what has concerned us throughout this volume: the manifold, dazzlingly creative ways in which moving image artists – from the origins of cinema to our digital era – have drawn on the other arts to nourish their imaginaries and enrich their artistic language.

NOTES

1. André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, *The End of Cinema? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 14–15.
2. Raymond Bellour, ‘The cinema spectator: A special memory’, in Gertrude Koch, Volker Pantenberg and Simon Rothöhler (eds), *Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2012), p. 9.
3. D. N. Rodowick, ‘An elegy for theory’, *October*, 122 (Fall 2007), p. 11.
4. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006).
5. The original title of Bazin’s article, ‘Pour un cinéma impur: Défense de l’adaptation’, has been translated into English as ‘In defense of mixed cinema’; André Bazin, ‘In defense of mixed cinema’, in *What Is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Gray, 2 vols (London: University of California Press, 1967–71), vol. 1, pp. 53–75.

6. Ágnes Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), p. 1.
7. Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev (eds), *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014), p. xxi.
8. Raymond Bellour, *L'Entre-images: Photo, cinéma, vidéo* (Paris: La Différence, 1990).
9. Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between*, p. 69.