

Title	Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between (Second, Enlarged Edition), by Ágnes Pethő
Authors	Murphy, Jill
Publication date	2022
Original Citation	Murphy, J. (2022) 'Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between (Second, Enlarged Edition), by Ágnes Pethő', <i>Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media</i> , 22, pp. 127-132. https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.22.14
Type of publication	Review
Link to publisher's version	http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue22/HTML/ReviewMurphy.html - https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.22.14
Rights	© 2022, the Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/
Download date	2024-07-16 00:39:09
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/12630



UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between (Second, Enlarged Edition), **by Ágnes Pethő. Cambridge University Press, 2020, 499 pp.**

Jill Murphy

Raymond Bellour observes that, in terms of the *dispositif*, it has been some time since cinema could be classified according to Serge Daney's designation of "cinema, alone", that is, when it was the only art that could provide moving image and sound; indeed, Bellour suggests that, although we came to believe that cinema was "the *dispositif*", perhaps it was only ever just one of multiple *dispositifs* (2). In *Cinematic Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between*, which has been reissued in a second, enlarged edition, Ágnes Pethő considers that, from an intermedial perspective, cinema has been inextricably linked to other media and arts since it was first presented in a theatrical environment, presenting narratives that provoked an emotive response by means of "a combination of images in movement, music and words" (14–15). In retracing the steps of early scholars of cinematic intermediality, she makes the case for cinema, in this respect, never having been truly "alone". However, as she points out, in terms of the study of intermediality, cinema possesses a "unique paradoxical status" in that it has not been incorporated into general intermediality studies in the same way, as for example, literature or digital media have, while film theorists have been slow to incorporate intermediality, viewing it as "an unwelcome hybridization" (5).

Bellour's thinking on the related subject of *l'entre images* or the in-between, which he describes as a "permanent reevaluation of the mutations and exchanges between different image media", is central to the theoretical underpinning of Pethő's book as its inclusion in the title suggests (3). However, rather than adopt a monolithic approach, Pethő uses David Bordwell's concept of "piecemeal theorizing" to deploy an impressive array of theories related to cinematic intermediality, including Bellour's in-betweenness, Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the figural (which is also approached via D. N. Rodowick's interpretation of the same), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's remediation theory and Gilles Deleuze's theory of the fold (9). Considered, meticulous and dense, the reissued book mirrors Pethő's deep and longstanding engagement with her subject, which has been amply demonstrated not only through her writing but in her involvement in creating platforms for film scholars to disseminate and discuss their research on cinematic intermediality including conferences, workshops and scholarly publications.

In this second edition, Pethő has revised some of the existing chapters and added three new chapters that in their respective ways update the 2011 edition to take account of the relationship between intermediality and the postcinematic: Chapter Two from a theoretical perspective; Chapter Ten in relation to the postcinematic application of Godard's aesthetic and

Chapter Fourteen examining the “expansive intermediality” of Romanian filmmaker Cristi Puiu (419).

The book is divided into four sections: the first dealing with theory; the second and shortest is an essay on Alfred Hitchcock’s use of intermediality; the third and largest section is devoted to what Lúcia Nagib, in her preface to the book, terms Jean-Luc Godard’s “recurrent intermedial theorising in practical form” (x); while the fourth and final section examines the work of Agnès Varda, José Luis Guerín, Mircea Daneliuc and, as mentioned previously, Cristi Puiu.

In the first chapter of Section One, Pethő seeks to locate intermediality within film studies in a theoretical contextualisation and overview that provides an expert account of the major paradigms, theories, concepts and methodologies employed in the study of cinematic intermediality. It also serves to show from the outset the theories that work in tandem with the author’s thinking and the ones that she respectfully outlines but with which she does not enter into any meaningful engagement. Over the course of the book, she tends to lean towards the embodied multisensorial model of cinematic intermediality in which the interart or intermedial relationship is not viewed as trespassing or border crossing but rather as a passage in-between.

Pethő continues her survey of theories and concepts in Chapter Two, setting out three paradigms of cinematic intermediality motivated in part by the work of French post-structuralists and the philosophical thinking that has come in their wake. The first paradigm views intermediality as a crossing of media borders along with the different modalities contained within that metaphor. Pethő finds this first paradigm overly prescriptive. The second paradigm is one of in-betweenness, based on the work of poststructuralists such as Deleuze and Lyotard, within which Pethő sees the figural as an ideal model (45). The third paradigm, influenced by the work of Bellour, Alain Badiou, Lúcia Nagib, Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben, extends the second one, mapping post-structural concepts onto new perspectives. This final paradigm is particularly significant in Pethő’s formulation of a coherent approach to cinematic intermediality in the twenty-first century and will resurface in some of the case studies presented later in the book.

Theory and analysis interact in Chapter Three, in which the focus is placed more concertedly on film as a medium, proposing that filmic mediality be viewed as intermediality where the different media play a part in “shaping the messages conveyed by the cinematic flow of images” (xvi). In focusing on the separation of intermediality from intertextuality the author makes the case for the embodied spectator sensorily experiencing film as the Bazinian ideal of “total” cinema, whereas intertextuality is viewed instead as an intellectual transaction (71). Within the intersection of the senses and media, Pethő suggests a *mise en abyme* can occur where one medium is transposed into the other as a “figure of in-betweenness” (82). As practical examples of total cinema, Pethő uses the work of Abbas Kiarostami and Ingmar Bergman, whereas she discusses the cinema of Michael Snow and Peter Greenaway in terms of figural in-betweenness.

In Chapter Four the author discusses possible ways in which intermediality is present in the viewer’s perception of cinematic images, examining gateways which allow the image to be reframed in other media, all the while remaining in the cinematic frame of the real world. She proposes the “structural” and the “sensual” modes as interpretative methodologies (97). In the sensual mode of intermediality the viewer perceives cinema in terms of sensations relating to music, painting, or architectural form, for example. Here, she uses the analogy of the *flâneur*

who sensorily experiences the modern city as a fluid environment. The author includes the work of Francis Ford Coppola, Wong Kar-wai and particularly Michelangelo Antonioni as examples of the sensual mode. The second, structural mode is seen as a breaking down of the real world into media representations (97). This mode envisages a form of metalepsis or collage where cinematic reality jumps between the natural and the artificial. In teasing out the difference between intertextuality and intermediality and equally between the sensual and structural modes, Pethő deploys the Deleuzian idea of the fold leading to the unfolding of the mediality of the moving image in the first case, while in the latter case the fold works to distinguish the immediate and the mediated. She concludes by proposing that in postcinematic imagery the sensual can fold into the structure thus merging the haptical with the optical (163).¹

Having comprehensively dealt with the theoretical, conceptual and methodological underpinnings of cinematic intermediality in Section One, the remainder of the book concentrates on applying the results of this inquiry to the analysis of specific films and directors ranging from the classical to the postcinematic. As Lúcia Nagib observes in the preface, this selection is not accidental in that it reconceives “the classical, modern, pre- and postcinematic paradigms in the light of intermediality” (x).

Hitchcock’s use of interart relations in his work is considered in Chapter Five, with particular focus placed on the role of painting in a range of films from *Rebecca* (1940) to *Vertigo* (1958). Pethő identifies how Hitchcock’s work, in which the themes of mirroring and doubling predominate, incorporates painting to embody the Other, the doppelganger, the shadow, while evading narrative continuity. As she rather beautifully asserts, in Hitchcock’s films the narrative mysteries are normally resolved; however, “his painterly images forever haunt the cinematic world with the impression of the inscrutable nature of things, the indelible trace of Nothingness and mesmerizing attraction of a forbidden world” (214).

The next five chapters of the book address Jean-Luc Godard’s cinema as “perhaps the most intellectually challenging meditation upon the intermedial nature of the moving pictures” (217). Pethő states with good reason that “Godard’s intermediality and self-conscious thematizations of interart relations” should be assigned an importance equal to that of his cinematic innovations and “*cinéphile* allusions” (217). Chapter Six looks at the tension Godard creates in his early work between word and image or literature and cinema and the chiasmic interplay he employs to achieve this. In addition, Pethő analyses how Godard attributes medial qualities to different characters. For example, Camille, Brigitte Bardot’s character in *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963), is a painting, Lemmy Caution in *Alphaville* (1966) is pulp fiction detective stories and, following Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier’s analysis, Patricia in *À bout de souffle* (1960) is “language and literature” (229), while Michel is popular cinema. Somewhat conversely, in *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), Pierrot is literature while Marianne is painting (to the extent that her surname is Renoir) (245). Using Godard’s own key to his approach to word and image relations as outlined in *Scénario du film Passion* (1982), in Chapter Seven Pethő examines the “blank page” and the “white beach” (a typically Godardian wordplay in French: *page blanche* and *plage blanche*, respectively). The first model, according to Pethő, highlights the fracture between linguistic discourse and pictorial representation, while the second is the chiasmic transmutation of word into image and image into word. She concludes the chapter by flagging that these two paradigms are not mutually exclusive as, across Godard’s oeuvre, “images are shot through with poetry and shot as poetry” (273). Returning to the concept of in-betweenness, Chapter Eight continues the investigation into the cinematic intermediality of Godard, applying the rhetorical device of ekphrasis, or what W. J. T. Mitchell describes as “the verbal representation of visual representation” (277), and comparing it to Bolter and Grusin’s

theory of remediation as “the representation of one medium in another remediation” (276–77). Chapter Nine moves on to *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989–99), Godard’s intermedial project par excellence. Pethő examines the ekphrastic impulse at the heart of this sprawling film essay, which is also classifiable as a type of in-betweenness. Indeed, what results from the description of the visual in terms of the verbal inevitably leads to a passage between the two forms. Godard has described his work in these terms: “to me what exists is mainly between, and I try to put this between in my films” (Rosenbaum 104). This in-betweenness comes emphatically to the fore in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in its intermedial, fragmentary format, which as the author identifies is “a meditation upon the complex mediality of cinema, discovering in it layers of mediality and culture specific to an archaeology of cinema as a medium” (304).

After the early chapters dealing with and expertly condensing complex theoretical constructs related to cinematic intermediality, followed by the application of that theory to detailed analyses of canonical work by Hitchcock and Godard, in Chapter Ten one feels Pethő’s pleasure at relaxing and kicking back a little as she traces Godard’s influence in the postcinematic world of music video, art and fashion. Indeed, her playful description of feeling a Godardian sense of self as she flits between writing and videos on her computer screen demonstrates to the reader how deftly she can handle different modes of scholarship (344–5).

The final section of the book applies the notion of intermediality as a reflection of the multisensory experience of the embodied spectator, examined in Chapters Two and Three. In Chapter Eleven, Pethő considers the “hypermediated” aspect of the work of Agnès Varda and José Luis Guerín using Grusin and Bolter’s remediation as a theoretical methodology (351). Language, literature, painting and photography are considered in terms of this remediation of the real—understood, citing Grusin and Bolter, as the real of the viewer’s experience, which elicits an emotional response (371)—and the collector’s tendency towards collage. Chapter Twelve surveys Varda’s work more generally through the lens of metalepsis, a concept previously discussed in the theoretical section of the book. For Pethő, intermediality in Varda’s work (both her films and her installations) performs metaleptic leaps between immediacy, or the real as represented by the filmmaker’s presence as author-narrator, and hypermediacy, seen as a self-conscious overlaying of media, while at times demonstrating the impossibility of such leaps. Chapter Thirteen examines how intermediality enables filmmakers to use esoteric media to covertly critique repressive regimes using as a case study the implicit criticism of the Ceausescu regime in Romania in Mircea Daneliuc’s allegorical, highly stylised *Glissando* (1982). In this case study, Pethő employs Michael C. Finke’s theory of metapoesis to examine how Daneliuc’s use of intertextuality, self-referentiality and intermediality allowed him to send a powerful message to those viewers who were able to decode it, while evading the unwelcome scrutiny of those who couldn’t.

The closing chapter introduces Pethő’s third mode of the “expansive”, inspired by Cristi Puiu’s film *Sieranevada* (2016) and an accompanying photo exhibition: the former a surrealist comedy, the latter a collection of minimalist photos the director took in the area around the apartment block where the film was shot. These two contrasting projects demonstrate how, within the expansive mode, film breaks free of the cinema, spreading to other formats. This third mode can also of course give rise to other “expanded” phenomena such as installations, video, site-specific projection and gallery film, and the reimagined life of cinema in both the white cube and black box of exhibition space.

Lúcia Nagib astutely observes that one of Pethő’s strengths is to metaphorically operate the telescope and the microscope with equal dexterity so that rather than solely broad

brushstrokes or forensic detail of one specific theory, she can operate both in tandem (ix). This ability results in a remarkable range and depth, not only in relation to theory but also to the practical examples and case studies she employs. Pethő's sophisticated theoretical workings may prove a little daunting for students searching for an introductory text; however, for scholars, critics and those students who are further advanced in their studies, this book will prove an authoritative companion in the exploration of the multiple interpretations and modes of cinematic intermediality.

Notes

¹ Elsewhere, Pethő refers to the “structural” mode as “intellectual”, which echoes the distinction mentioned earlier between intertextuality and intermediality (*Caught*, 18).

References

- Bellour, Raymond. “‘Cinema Alone’/Multiple ‘Cinemas’.” Translated by Jill Murphy. *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 5, 2013, pp. 116–43. <https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.5.08>.
- Danlieu, Mircea, director. *Glissando*, Casa de Filme Trei, 1982.
- Godard, Jean-Luc, director. *À bout de souffle* [*Breathless*], Les Films Imperia, 1960.
- , director. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Canal +, 1989–99.
- , director. *Le Mépris* [*Contempt*], Rome Paris Films, 1963.
- , director. *Pierrot Le Fou*, Films Georges de Beauregard, 1965.
- , director. *Scénario du film Passion*, JLG Films, 1982.
- Hitchcock, Alfred, director. *Rebecca*, Selznick International Pictures, 1940.
- , director. *Vertigo*, Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions, 1958.
- Pethő, Ágnes, editor. *Caught In-Between: Intermediality in Contemporary Eastern European and Russian Cinema*. Edinburgh UP, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474435499.001.0001>.
- Pethő, Ágnes. *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between*. 1st ed., Cambridge UP, 2011.
- Puiu, Cristi, director. *Sieranevada*, Mandragora, Iadasarecasa, 2016.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Bringing Godard Back Home." *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, edited by David Sterritt, UP of Mississippi, 1998, pp. 100–6.

Suggested Citation

Murphy, Jill. "Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between (Second, Enlarged Edition), by Ágnes Pethő." *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 22, 2021, pp. 127–132. <https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.22.14>.

Jill Murphy is an independent scholar and Reviews Editor of *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*. Her research interests include the intersection between art and film, with particular focus on the body. She has published in several journals and edited collections. She is co-editor, with Laura Rascaroli, of *Theorizing Film through Contemporary Art: Expanding Cinema* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020).