This special issue addresses the avenues via which the production, exhibition, reception and discussion of early and silent cinema were influenced by, and came to be predicated on, the protocols for cultural practice possessed by a number of pre-existing ‘cultural series’. It examines the processes by which ‘the cinematograph’ became the media institution ‘the cinema’, and asks whether the pre-c.1908 cinematograph’s insertion in pre-existing and neighbouring media – which leads André Gaudreault to distinguish this era of film practice as ‘kine-attractography’ (2006, passim) – was qualitatively distinct from the versions of intermediality in which cinema participated in the c.1908-1927 period. As the category ‘intermediality’ is defined and subdivided differently by its exponents, this introduction will discuss a range of salient definitions in order to establish the parameters of intermediality as a method of study for early film. I must make clear here that the field in general does share a definition of ‘media’ as ‘conventionally distinct means of communicating cultural contents’ (Wolf, 253).

For Irina Rajewsky, intermediality serves as

a generic term for all those phenomena … that in some way take place between media. “Intermedial” therefore designates those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media, and which can thereby be differentiated from intramedial phenomena as well as from transmedial phenomena (i.e. the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic or discourse across a variety of different media). (46, emphasis in original)
Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy, for example, use ‘intermediality’ to mean Rajewsky’s transmediality: ‘By intermediality we refer to the contemporary market-driven form of intertextuality in which texts and activities may refer to the same fictional ‘world’ despite presenting themselves as different media’ (255). Their transmedial intermediality describes the existence of a story-space in multiple media, which, in the case of *The Lord of the Rings* world they discuss, include film, computer games and tabletop wargaming. The transmedial, however, does not understand media forms as discrete (Rajewsky’s example of a transmedial phenomenon is futurism (46)), whereas intermediality is a temporary overcoming of a recognised discreteness.

For some, Werner Wolf writes, intermediality is ‘intracompositional’: ‘a direct or indirect participation of more than one medium in the signification and/or structure of a given semiotic entity’ (253). The category of *direct* participation would include an opera involving projected moving pictures (Rajewsky calls this ‘media combination’ (253)), and an *indirect* participation would be a theatre performance featuring sets that reference iconic environments from cinema history (Rajewsky and Wolf both call this ‘intermedial reference’ (Rajewsky, 51; Wolf, 253)). Rajewsky and Wolf both point out that in the case of the latter the media object does not become a hybrid, since it merely imitates, instead of incorporating, the properties of another medium (Wolf, 253; Rajewsky, 55). For others intermediality is also ‘extracompositional’, in such instances as the text/illustration unity that became systemic in short fiction publishing at the beginning of the 1890s (Wolf, 253). Although both see indirect intracompositional intermediality as occurring either via content or form, Wolf cites a third sub-set of intracompositional intermediality, the purely ‘formal intermedial imitation’ (255), and this would seem initially to be the most relevant to early cinema. Both in the sense of the cinematograph’s lasting circulation as a new tool to add to the various pieces of hardware employed by older media, and its formal operation – by professionals who had spent most of their professional lives doing something else – as if it was certain of those pre-existing media, it manifested a compositional practice which
was, in two senses, not its own. Unlike André Bazin’s c.1958 example of the influence of Gothic sculpture on Renaissance painting (56), this intermediality was formal because the cinematograph had no constitution as a medium, and unlike the example of a dramatic performance that includes scene changes that attempt to adequate montage, this intermediality was, although compositional in the sense of being a part of the original work, not compositional in the sense of being a decision to transgress a border, because the cinematograph did not yet have media borders of its own.

It is not revolutionary to point out that early cinema operated intermedially. John Fullerton traces the emergence of intermediality as a subject of inquiry in early cinema studies to such early 1980s essays as Charles Musser’s 1984 work on the interrelation of early film with the magic lantern (Fullerton, viii). This tradition, now mature, has worked towards iterating what becomes clear when examining the popular discourse of the time: that early cinema was more continuous with earlier traditions than it was with later cinema. I wrote in 2006 that early film production ‘was a cultural practice for which popular and dominant notions of the practices of display and spectatorship were built in concord with categories central to streams of earlier techniques, and it was far more closely aligned with conventions of working-class social sites and optical amusement than with the ‘cinema of narrative integration’ that succeeded it’ (Shail, 210), and André Gaudreault argued in 2004 that ‘it would be better to connect films from the early days to a non-cinematic cultural series than to cinema itself’ (2004, n.p.). ‘Intermediality’ seems an appropriate term for describing the initial practices of projected motion photography, given that they were invented in the light of multiple existing media protocols and in the absence of a claim, on the part of this mere device, to the status of medium.

‘Whereas research before the mid-1980s often sought to define film and television through accounts that privileged the stylistic or institutional development of the two media,’ Fullerton remarks, ‘accounts in the last two decades have increasingly addressed the intermedial relation of film and television to other media’ (vii). The renaissance in studies of early cinema that emerged
at the same time as this new set of accounts is surely linked to the perceived need to seek out historical documents with which to frustrate late-twentieth-century expectations that a history of cinema will be a history of its uniqueness. But as the period 1895-c.1908 invites a description of cinema as intermedially embedded, what scholarly possibilities exist in a study of intermediality in early cinema? We are obliged as scholars not to merely point out the composite nature of our object of study: now we must ask what functions early cinema’s intermediality had, what processes underpinned the historical shift from ‘early cinema’s’ explicit intermediality to ‘cinema’s’ implicit intermediality (hence this special issue's look at the transition to the seemingly less intermedial post-c.1908 period referred to as ‘silent cinema’), how its mixture of multiple intermedialities varied temporally and geographically, and whether, historically or formally, groupings of media can be said to exist.

In her discussion of the various meanings of the term, Rajewsky begins to build a three-axis array of the various (and often competing) approaches that concern themselves with intermediality (46-9), which I will endeavour to complete here. I would like first to assert that ‘intermediality’ must be used as distinct from ‘intertextuality’ rather than as a sub-category of it. So as the transmission of content from an object in one medium to an object in another medium is merely heteromedial intertextuality, I will define intermediality as merely formal (while taking into account that content can also determine the media expectations with which intermediality is concerned, in such cases as unusual genre markers in content serving to assign a certain media object the status of ‘out of medium’). I thus do not agree with Peter Zima that intermediality is ‘adaptation and transformation of literature in other media such as radio, film or television’ (7). Intermediality is not merely ‘intertextuality transgressing media boundaries’ (Lehtonen, 71). Jürgen Mueller, for example, states that ‘intermediality would not be a question of content (which I would link to intertextuality) but of form, or more precisely, of interactions between specific media ‘structures’/‘procedures’ which can/could be reconstructed on the basis of the traces which these processes left in the media ‘products” (Letter to the author, 25 January 2007).
Rajewsky’s first division is the simple diachronic/synchronic difference of priorities. The second is the question of whether intermediality is understood as an identifiable aspect of media objects or as the media equivalent of the ‘intertext’ – the virtual body of texts, material and cultural, brought to mind in the consumption (and production) of a primary text, through which meaning is produced in the case of all texts, a touchstone upon which constants are constituted out of undecidability (see Rifaterre 1981 & 1981). In the latter case, a media object’s intermediality is the body of knowledge about media forms that its producers and consumers bring to the text, and which allow that text’s media undecidability to be likewise transformed into a media identity.

These two divisions generate four perceptions of the intermedia ‘subject’:

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<th>Studied diachronically</th>
<th>Studied synchronically</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediality as a trait of certain objects</td>
<td>The genealogical relations between media, and the processes by which new media are ’born’.</td>
<td>The multiple, conventionally distinct, media in operation in a single media object: its ‘plurimediality’ (it makes use of multiple medium, what Wolf calls ‘direct intracompositional intermediality’), or the functioning of a media object as if it is an object in another medium, consciously or unconsciously, implicitly or explicitly (it imitates another medium, what Wolf calls ‘indirect intracompositional intermediality’).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediality as the media equivalent of the ‘intertext’</td>
<td>The processes that synthesise and re-synthesise each medium as a popular agreement.</td>
<td>A finite typology of media identities, as formed by each medium’s formal tendencies – and the resulting differences and similarities between media – at any one time.</td>
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Figure 1. Intermediality on two axes.

A third axis, which Rajewsky only hints at, is the variation between positions that see some manner of formal contact between media as a fundamental tendency of all media, and positions that see intermediality as a historically specific phenomenon. Subdividing each of the four above areas gives a further eight areas of concentration:
<table>
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<th><strong>Intermediality as a fundamental property of all media</strong></th>
<th><strong>Intermediality as historically specific</strong></th>
<th><strong>Intermediality as a fundamental property of all media</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The genealogical relations between media, and the processes by which new media are 'born'.</td>
<td>7. The multiple, conventionally distinct, media in operation in a single media object: its 'plurimediality' (it makes use of multiple medium, what Wolf calls 'direct intracompositional intermediality'), or the functioning of a media object as if it is an object in another medium, consciously or unconsciously, implicitly or explicitly (it imitates another medium, what Wolf calls 'indirect intracompositional intermediality').</td>
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<td>2. The concentrations of borrowings that comprise discrete episodes in a medium's history.</td>
<td>3. The convergence of media forms in the context of, for example, the multi-media holdings of modern entertainments and information corporations.</td>
<td>8. The manifestation of traits prevalent in one medium in certain media objects in another.</td>
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<td>4. The processes that synthesise and re-synthesise each medium as a popular agreement.</td>
<td>10. A finite typology of media identities, as formed by each medium's formal tendencies – and the resulting differences and similarities between media – at any one time.</td>
<td>9. Some media are identifiably more multi-media than others.</td>
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<td>5. Historical variations in perceptions of inter-media compatibility.</td>
<td>6. How technologies achieve media identities at all.</td>
<td>11. How a media object identifies itself as behaving like another.</td>
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<td>12. How every 'distinct' media profile relies on likenings nonetheless, via the set of alliances and disavowals made by the 'paratexts' (Genette, 1997a &amp; 1997b) that attempt to determine the expectations that consumers bring to texts.</td>
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**Figure 2. Intermediality on three axes.**
Exponents have emerged, at various times, in each category, even before and beyond the use of the term ‘intermediality’:

1. This is the primary function of intermediality for Jürgen Heinrichs and Yvonne Spielmann: ‘Whereas intertextuality explores a text-text relationship, intermediality addresses the merger and the transformation of elements of differing media’ (5). Heinrichs and Spielmann see intermediality as the necessary historical process ‘during which previously distinct media merge with each other, resulting in the creation of a new (art) form and shaping the form of a new medium’ (6). Intermediality is a phase of the genealogy of media. Likewise, for Darin Barney, ‘[i]ntermediality refers to the hybridization of existing but otherwise distinct media formats and practices, in some cases representing a transitional moment that leaves these existing media intact, in others resulting in the establishment of a ‘new’ medium or practice which, wholly incorporating its constituent elements, effectively replaces them’ (Letter to the author, 24 January 2007). This has been a tendency of warnings against the search for formal purity since at least 1944, when Eisenstein wrote that ‘it is always pleasing to recognize again and again the fact that our cinema is not altogether without parents and without pedigree, without a past, without the traditions and rich cultural heritage of the past epochs. It is only very thoughtless and presumptuous people who can erect laws and an esthetic for cinema, proceeding from premises of some incredible virgin-birth of this art!’ (232)

2. Virginia Woolf listed the stages of literature’s influence by other media in 1925: ‘sculpture influenced Greek literature, music Elizabethan, architecture the English of the eighteenth century, and now undoubtedly we are under the dominion of painting. Were all modern paintings to be destroyed, a critic of the twenty-fifth century would be able to deduce from the works of Proust alone the existence of Matisse, Cézanne, Derain, and Picasso’ (140). Likewise, André Bazin commented in one of his last essays, written c.1958, that ‘[t]he influence of a dominant neighbour on the other arts is probably a constant law’ (61). To study this history is to assume that by virtue of the formal differences between media, media practitioners will
experience periodic fascination with the properties of a medium in which they are not currently producing media objects, and so will experiment with the possibility of some equivalent in their own medium.

3. Convergence, Martin Meisel asserted in 1983, may be a formal property of media rather than a specific historical period, but even if it is the latter it at least began to occur much earlier than the late-twentieth-century ‘media convergence’ seen, by some, as intensifying the heteromedial contact of both form and content (e.g. Lehtonen, 74, 76-7): for him the pictorial and narrative arts in the nineteenth century each had their sub-components in the other, with fiction, drama and painting all incorporating, to some extent, a pictorial illustration of narrative or a narrative elucidation of picture (3). This was linked to a technologically induced ‘explosion of print and picture’ in the early nineteenth century (4). (The emergence in the late twentieth century of intermediality as a field of study also suggests that it is an intensification of media convergence that is either stimulating an interest in, or cultivating a conviction of, the intrinsic formal intermediality of earlier media cultures (Heinrichs and Spielmann suggest that the former is the case (7))).

4. The genealogy of media would seem not to need to concern intermediality as the equivalent of the ‘intertext’. However, intermediality as the baggage of expectations brought to a media object by its consumers and producers is particularly pertinent to the birth of a medium. Although the genealogy of media is an account of how discourses describe a media form by drawing on known specifications of other media, the proto-medium must first be practised in a certain way to earn a certain identity profile as a medium, and the direction of its practice will be determined by the intermedia entity that its practitioners bring to it. This baggage thus doubly determines the medium’s establishment. Hence André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion’s insistence that ‘specificity by no means signifies separation or isolation; in order to comprehend this particular manifestation of the arrays of differentiation between media, the way they
resemble and diverge from one another must be solidly grasped. A good understanding of a medium thus derives from its relationship to other media’ (7).

Similarly, practice continues to contribute to the specific kind of media profile that emerges for a new medium. Gaudreault and Marion have used the term ‘spontaneous intermediality’ to denote the cinematograph’s initial use as part of the multiple existing cultural series that comprised the popular cultural landscape of the end of the long nineteenth century, and ‘negotiated intermediality’ or ‘subjugated intermediality’ to refer to the ways that the institution ‘the cinema’ has, since its ‘second’ birth (i.e. its c.1908 establishment as autonomous), imitated certain other forms to identify itself, once qualified as a medium, as like pre-existing practices and unlike others (12-13). Intermediality therefore also describes the processes of a medium independence, its cultural disembedding through the construction of an autonomous identity that was and is nonetheless a concretion of borrowings from other media identities. If the initial intermedia existence of cinema was a subordination of a medium to the priorities of several existing cultural series, then as the institutionalisation that led to ‘the cinema’ was itself an erecting of laws with a basis in the cultural milieu of its era, this represents as much of a subordination of a medium to the priorities of existing cultural series as an independence of a medium on the basis of its singular priorities.

5. This study is closely allied to category 4. Meisel, for example, insists that reconstructing the ‘popular familiarity’ of an oil painting, for example, requires one to find out about ‘exhibitions, renderings in glass, paint, dioramic projection, graphic parody, “living pictures,” and the theatrical “realization”’ (4). That is, the meaning of an object’s designation as existing in the cultural series ‘oil painting’ is derived, at least in part, from the territory not left to oil painting by the other, primarily visual, media in existence at that time.

6. Gaudreault and Marion’s ‘negotiated intermediality’ refers to those alliances established, by a new medium, with existing media forms, usually for the purpose of borrowing the cultural prestige of these existing institutions through claims of similarity. In the case of cinema, the
earliest of these alliances (established in the early 1910s) included the institutions of the legitimate theatre and periodical short fiction (both themselves only very recently ‘upgraded’), and both of these alliances were co-opted into a rewriting of the previous years as a period of juvenile immaturity, a waste of potential before cinema’s medially was discovered to be composed of dramatic structures and histrionics making it equivalent to the stage and the same narratorial and reading portable private selves of literary fiction (see Burrows, passim, and Shail, passim). As Gaudreault and Marion write, ‘[t]he ‘second birth/constitution’ paradigm … derives, in a pragmatic sense, from a virtually locutionary force: as a hermeneutic incitement, it encourages, guarantees and legitimises the deciphering of an earlier gestation, which it has inferred after the fact’ (5). This deciphering synthesises an implicit media history for consumers to bring to every act of media consumption.

7. For Rajewsky, Wolf’s ‘direct intracompositional intermediality’ is ‘media combination’ or ‘plurimediality’: she defines this as ‘the material manifestations of two or more conventionally distinct media within a single given medial configuration’ (59). A single media product is composed by a ‘medial constellation’ (52). This is, for her, distinct from ‘intermedial reference’, where just one medium is present (52). Her example is Sasha Waltz’s dance theatre production Körper (Berlin, 2000), which features a construction comprised of two large panels, set very close together and facing the audience, the front panel transparent and masked on all sides, and between which the mostly naked dancers move, slowly and apparently weightlessly, by pressing against the two panels, the overall effect being of a giant live painting. The intermedial aspect of this type of intermediality ‘has to do with the reference itself which a given media product … makes to an individual product, system, or subsystem of a different medium … Hence, the media product (and its overall signification) constitutes itself in relation to the media product or system to which it refers’ (59, emphasis in original).

8. Lev Manovich states that his aim in The Language of New Media (2001) is to situate new media in relation to ‘other arts and media traditions: their visual languages and strategies for
organizing information and structuring the viewer’s experience’ (13). ‘New media’ are rarely new, in that they are comprised partially of techniques ostensibly specific to older media. He observes, for example, that ‘[c]inematic aesthetic strategies have become basic organizational principles of computer software. The window into a fictional world of a cinematic narrative has become a window into a datascape’ (86). This intermediality may evidence the non-distinctive nature of every practice that we have called a medium. As early as 1983 Martin Meisel was concerning himself wholly with ‘the intricate web of local connections that show the arts to be one living tissue’ (13), dealing specifically with fiction, drama and painting in the nineteenth century. Only to common sense, he wrote, was the first ‘the most thoroughly narrative and serially progressive of forms’ and the last ‘the most pictorial and static’ (3). Painting was ‘the moment’s story’, drama ‘speaking pictures and the novel an arrangement of ‘telling scenes’ (17, 52). The fact that certain media share expressive conventions may merely show that there is only one medium, of which all so-called ‘media’ are just different incarnations. If media form plural groups by the sharing of aesthetic practice, then, this is a solely historical plurality of function.

9. For Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, ‘all current media remediate’ (55), i.e. they carry objects from other media as their content – television removed from the technological and practical structures of video-tape or cine-film, scheduling and broadcasting. Websites, they point out, predominantly transmit pre-existing media objects from such media as television, film, music and literary fiction as their content – as a medium, much of the world-wide web simply presents media objects accessible, in their original shape, digitally (45). If this aspect of digital media is not a step that every new medium takes on the road to discovering its own singularity, then digital media may all be intrinsically intermedial.

10. For Niels Ole Finnemann ‘it is not possible to understand the impact of a new medium … if it is not seen in its interrelationships with other media. The proper object for an analysis of media is the whole matrix of media in which each medium is interwoven’ (236). For this approach a clan system of media groupings determines the functioning of each medium.
11. While this category might seem indistinct from formal ‘lendings’ between media (category 7), it does not evidence intermedia influence. Fritz Senn, for example, has referred to the presentation of the section of the ‘Lestrygonians’ chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* where Bloom sees ‘shots’ of various men eating in the Burton restaurant – the titular Lestrygonians – as ‘cinematic’ (Senn, 2004; Joyce, 215). But there is a distinction between the more diffuse influences that the emergence of cinema likely had on Joyce’s work (and on the work of his contemporaries) and this very explicit moment in which Joyce momentarily adopted an identifiable equivalent of film form – scene-dissection – to accrue a further marker of modernity for his work. Rather than literature practiced as if it is film, this aspect of *Ulysses* is literature advertising its cinematicity.

12. A media form must be agreed upon as possessing a specific identity – most often constituted by lists of nearest and most distant neighbours – by its interpretive community to be able to even exist as a media form. I see this as the case in spite of the common term ‘the media’, which expresses the understanding of the content of media as similar, not the form. The most common popular answer about cinema’s nearest neighbour is still the theatre, and even academic work on intermediality makes this assumption, Lehtonen writing that ‘the cinema, that in its time was a new mode of representation, probably did indeed in the course of time conquer terrain previously dominated by the two earlier modes of representation, the novel and drama’ (73). Livia Monnet argues that at any point cinema is accompanied by a ‘structuring conceptual architecture’ (236), a schema of how it works and how it should function that determines the operations each film undertakes. Her example is that (as also argued by Lev Manovich (302)), computer-based cinema now functions in relation to animation as its structuring conceptual architecture (236). This intermediality also includes the attempt to control reception practices by likening the media form to others with desirable reception practices.

Most of these twelve categories do not describe mutually exclusive areas of study, but one area in which the diachronic and synchronic approaches do seem to be incompatible is when
studying the objects produced by a phenomenon that does not yet possess a distinct media identity, when one medium cannot imitate another because it is not yet a medium but a tool employed by several cultural forms to expedite the production of, and further broadcast, their existing genres, no perception yet existing of a norm which it might temporarily suspend by acting intermedially. ‘The cinematograph’ before the institution ‘the cinema’ is widely seen as a new device manifesting the cultural techniques of those exiting cultural series (including screen practice, stage illusion, the press and sequential drawing) brought to it by its first operators: the magicians, lanternists, travel lecturers, itinerant showmen, etc. of the late Victorian and Edwardian era (see de Klerk, passim, and Popple, passim). In the case of such a non-media phenomenon, for the synchronic approach, no intermediality would seem to exist. This might lead to one further category of intermediality: the employment, by several existing media forms, of a technology that is not yet itself a medium, the ‘intermedia’ existence of a technology. Or early cinema might be defined as transmediality, as the new technology – the cinematograph or the internet, for example – is used as a labour-saving or dissemination device by plural media with no view of its being medium-specific, as opposed to containing plural media. The .mpeg file format as used for viewing anything from digitised live video to animation on a personal computer and as used as the basis of film on DVD exists intermedially, but it is not seen as a distinct medium contacting media which it is seen as usually other to.

Yet while the use of a new technology by several existing media might appear not to include the observance of the differences between those media, every medium is based on a technology that could be and has been used as if it is not a medium at all, and each medium therefore only achieved its status as a medium by acting to replicate the formal behaviour of certain existing media more than it did others, by developing its distinctness in transmitting a certain kind of form. For example, André Gaudreault’s earlier work suggested that the only reason that cinema developed the apparently cinema-specific narrative technique of cross-cutting between two parallel forms of action after 1907 (rather than the earlier film practices of showing the two
simultaneous events one after the other or using a split screen) was because it was called on to replicate short fiction, which at the time was preoccupied with time-based plots, including race-to-the-rescue situations and deadlines. Cinema discovered its ‘unique’ time sense only because literary fiction specialised in a time sense at the time (Gaudreault 1983, 326-7). As every medium’s continuity with earlier cultural structures is multiple, its constitution may be merely the institutionalisation of components from only a select few of the pre-existing media. In addition to the ‘spontaneous’ intermediality of the proto-medium and the ‘negotiated’ intermediality of the medium confident enough of its distinctness to emulate other media, a third historical intermediality may therefore exist, not a likening or absorbing but a continual fabricating of media practice and identity through the influence of its immediate contemporaries: ‘generative’ intermediality. It is not what is done to a technology – spontaneous intermediality – or what a medium undertakes with other media – negotiated intermediality – but the process by which media are in constant formulation in relation to their contemporaries.

Indeed, Bolter and Grusin suggest that media never become autonomous. For them Steven Holtzmann’s commentary on the impending autonomy of digital media appeals to a comfortable, modernist rhetoric, in which digital media cannot be significant until they make a radical break with the past. However, like their precursors, digital media can never reach this state of transcendence, but will instead function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced. Once again, what is new about digital media lies in their particular strategies for remediating television, film, photography, and painting. (49-50)

As a historical concept, ‘remediation’ refers to the tendency for media to act intermedia ly (Bolter and Grusin also use remediation, for example, to refer to the double logic of a culture that ‘wants
both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation’ (5)). This ‘constant dialectic with earlier media’ is a property of media for them: ‘Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media’ (58). Gaudreault and Marion’s model partially coheres with Bolter and Grusin’s by distinguishing between an initial instinctive reproducing and a later – when autonomous – conscious ‘commenting-upon’ other media, such as the ‘painting film’, with its moments of reproducing filmically the narrative arrangements of still visual tableaux (e.g. Peter Weber’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003)). This later, negotiated, intermediality, however, is not proof that an implicit, generative cinema-painting intermediality does not also continue, in the shape of a much more general tendency in cinema to operate through the arrangement in three dimensions of still tableaux: it is not, after all, necessary for narrative duration to occur for narrative to occur. A film manifesting one of cinema’s seemingly most autonomous states – i.e. versatile use of editing – merely transfers the spatially juxtaposed quadrilaterals of the cartoon strip into the temporal juxtapositions of the lantern slide sequence. Indeed, notions of ‘pure cinema’ are the consequence of whichever of its various possible pedigrees a practice is seen to descend from at any one time. Persistence of vision cites pure cinema as movement, public projection cites pure cinema as montage, mass-reproducibility cites pure cinema as documentary, and fairground exhibition cites pure cinema as spectacle. As statements of cinema’s essence are historical, the historical change from kine-attractography to a media institution ‘the cinema’ might only have been a change from domination by one existing paradigm to domination by another existing paradigm, a change from one set of intermedia connections to another – from ‘views’ to the ‘silent drama’, for example. If a medium is continually invented through the implicit relationships formed by its surrounding constellation of older and newer media, intermediality describes the basis of media forms, rather than a fundamental tendency to or exceptional behaviour of flirtation.

Gaudreault and Marion’s work does suggest that intermediality should be a study not of the ‘essence’ of media forms but of the historical emergence of media forms, which implies that
uniqueness is simply a historical concept, but their work nonetheless cites the medium as emerging because of ‘insubordination’. Can we see cinema as thrusting its uniqueness out of an embeddedness in, and constriction by, existing media institutions, or was its ‘autonomy’ merely a historically-specific definition of its unique properties, a definition itself comprised of implicit borrowings from existing definitions of unique media properties. Is cinema intrinsically anything? Lehtonon writes, in the realm of category 8, that ‘there are strong similarities between the hero-centred classical realism and the language of close-ups of the television’ (73). This begs the question of whether manifesting a formal attribute that is an equivalent of the mode of operation of another medium, but not a formal technique in that medium, qualifies as a crossing of formal boundaries if, in spite of discursive specificity, no media form has a property that cannot be duplicated by another? The ‘similarity’ of the bildungsroman of classical realism and the close-ups of television, for example, is better described as the consequence of the two forms being shared by the same cultural economy than as ‘cross-overs’. The difference between the dominant habits of media forms may simply be the consequence of the multiplicity of modes in which a certain cultural economy manifests itself. Does a medium have distinctiveness in spite of the sharing of modes across media because it constitutes the primary vehicle for certain modes, or do media exist in groupings in which each is an outlet of that mode?

If media do possess distinct techniques that cannot be replicated by other media, the period of their early embeddedness in existing media forms will contain, in addition to a subjugation to pre-existing techniques, elements of the uniqueness soon to emerge, meaning that the history of the emergence of new media is a history of the haphazard manifestations of particularity in the period before it receives institutional recognition. But even if this is not the case, Bolter and Grusin’s study of the formation of the internet as a medium suggests that even transparency may be a measure of autonomy. Although, in the case of those digital media objects that merely make available older media objects as their content, the new medium ‘wants to erase itself, so that the viewer stands in the same relationship to the content as she would if she were confronting the
original medium’ (Bolter & Grusin, 45), this granting of access to older materials is nonetheless, for them, the most basic attribute of a new medium. Although the cinematograph’s initial, ‘spontaneous’, intermediality saw it practised as an addition to the technologies already employed by existing media, it must be remembered that there would have been no reason to invent it had it not been possible to perceive it as an improvement on these technologies. Its consequent use to communicate wholesale – form and content – such existing media as the conjuring show, the music hall performance, farce and ‘travel views’ would have meant that while it was not yet operating under the sway of an attitude towards it that understood it as a medium, it was operating under the sway of a perception of its newness as a permitting of greater access to existing media. In addition, its use of a series of exiting entertainment genres was, at least partially, not a feature of its embeddedness within existing media forms, but rather precisely how it distinguished itself as a proto-medium, by being practised as doing what existing media did but better, just as three-dimensional digital animation is currently described as doing precisely what cinema does (rendering the photo-real) but better (in such ways as allowing superior camera mobility). While Gaudreault and Marion see this as an aspect of the medium’s initial lack of self-consciousness (12), Bolter and Grusin suggest that this is the origin of this self-consciousness.

Some wariness of possible generative anxieties behind the emergence of intermediality as a field of study is warranted. Attention to the networks in which film moves has comprised a significant part of the recent historical turn in film studies. In this context, intermediality, with its commitment to examining how formal habits normal in one medium appear in another, is a particularly conservative sub-section of this scholarship, a niche carved out to allow scholars to continue to look at film form while also ticking the box of locating film in its discourse networks. If it is now imperative to study film as a ‘public presence’, which ‘refers to the conditions of production, distribution, reception and consumption, as well as the larger cultural frameworks by which the are governed and in which they operate’ (Mathjis, 8), intermediality, although ostensibly an account of the hybridity of media-specificity, is a way of doing this by
returning, nonetheless, to form. Although cinema’s public presence does include the influence of notions of the identity of the medium held by its own makers and authorisers – the way that they regard and operate film as a result of its existence in a media environment – this historical context is presently either a description of how becoming autonomous is the end-point of the story or how that autonomy is only ever temporarily suspended by intermedia contact. The model of ‘spontaneous’ intermediality, which sections off early cinema into ‘kine-attractography’, may be an amputation of what historical research has revealed to be cinema’s ‘infected’ phase for the sake of the rest of cinema, saving it from dissolution into an intermedial soup where media are only ever distinct by virtue of the particular ratios in which they mix a range of formal tendencies specific to none of them.

But while placing other media in the place of primary historical context of media may risk a renewed formalism, a study of this synchronic intermediality can provide answers to the historical question ‘what is the essence of cinema?’ by charting the cinema’s forms as manifestations of historically specific media concretions. It can mediate between the reductive position that every medium was invented thousands of years before its ostensible emergence and the equally reductive position that sees media as historically revolutionary.¹

References


Notes

1 One impulse for this special issue is the very slim number of Anglophone contributions to the intermediality debate. For example, only one of the nine texts cited as examples by Livia Monnet in her 2002 list of five definitions of intermediality is written in English (six are in French and one is in German) (229-30). This issue therefore takes the opportunity to bring recent work carried out by two of the term's Francophone proponents into English in the form of André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion's 'The Mysterious Affair of Styles in the Age of Kinematography'.