Mysteries of
Cinema

REFLECTIONS ON FILM THEORY,
HISTORY AND CULTURE 1982–2016

ADRIAN MARTIN

Mysteries of Cinema

Mysteries of Cinema

Reflections on Film Theory, History and Culture
1982-2016

Adrian Martin

Cover illustration: WITHIN THE LIGHT (2017) by Vicky Mousoulis

Cover design: Kok Korpershoek, Amsterdam
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

para Cristina,
mi angelita

Table of Contents

I don't believe in the influence of one form of expression on another: painting on literature, sculpture or architecture on music, etc.
There is simply an aptitude for one form or other, and the predominance of a certain orientation.
So don't ask me about the influence of cinema on writing. Rather, ask me about the influence of cinema on behaviour: that's real. Modern love directly flows from cinema, and by cinema I mean not only the spectacle on screen, but also the theatre itself, the artificial night.

– Robert Desnos, response to an inquiry on "Literature, Modern Thought and Cinema", *Les Cahiers du mois*, no. 16/17 (1925), reprinted in Desnos, *Les rayons et les ombres* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992), p. 77.

Part I

Letters of Introduction

1.   Retying the Threads

Abstract

An introductory essay to the collection *Mysteries of Cinema*, outlining author Adrian Martin's path as a film critic and cinema scholar from the early-1980s cultural scene in Melbourne (Australia) to writing for the Internet and making audiovisual essays in the late 2010s. This introduction explains Martin's method, developed over these years, of "tying threads" between the numerous films he has seen, and the cinematic theories or cultural ideas he has encountered along the way. Martin's particular involvement in, and unusual position in-between academic and journalistic modes of discourse is explained. The introduction ends by speculating that, while conventional critical writing constitutes a singular "personality", the newer, collaborative form of the audiovisual essay disperses this subjectivity and opens different possibilities.

Keywords: Film criticism, film theory, popular culture, Australia, audiovisual essay

It is an alternative life, freed from the tyranny of "that old devil consequence", from the limitation of having only one life to live. One's favourite films are one's unlived lives, one's hopes, fears, libido. They constitute a magic mirror, their shadowy forms are woven from one's shadow selves, one's limbo loves.
– Raymond Durgnat, 1967[1]

1.

This book covers 34 years of a writing life, so far. (I plan for a Volume 2 in 2050.) It is not a "collected essays" that contains all my work to date (far from it), nor is it a "selected essays" that tries to represent all the different areas and modes in which I practice (again, far from it). It is not quite a book of film criticism,

because it lacks articles on specific films or directors's careers; nor is it a book of conventional academic scholarship, since I have worked within the tertiary education system only for a couple of relatively short periods in my life, and none of the essays contained here derive from university-approved publications.

So, what kind of assemblage is this, exactly? It is a book of general, transversal reflections – clusters of associations, each time around a different centre or theme. It is, as I would like to describe it, a book of *threads*. There are threads that accompany all of us as we make our way through time – historical time as well as personal, subjective, lived time. This book is a record of how I have constantly tried to tie or weave two particular threads together: to put this in the simplest way, the thread of films (and other creative works) I have experienced, with the thread of written texts I have read, heard, noted, and upon which I have reflected. When bound together, collectively, these threads form what we (sometimes airily) refer to as a film culture. Maybe that threading – things we have seen plus things we have read – sounds like a minimal definition of what most of us in the field of studying film (however we define or mark out that field) do. But I mean it in a more particular way.

Most of the time, I have not been explicitly asked by my editors or publishers to reflect on whatever point I have reached in my personal threading-together of films and ideas; I am rarely obliged to speculate on the state of a film culture *per se*. The commission is usually more straightforward: review this or that movie trend, group art show, or timely conjunction of books released at the same moment. But the strange destiny of a freelance writer's life is to walk a particular type of tightrope: the passions you pursue in your head – which you may frequently draw up imaginary plans for, in the form of one phantom book after another that you will never have time to write – will inevitably force their way, whether you consciously want them to or not, into almost anything you happen to be working on materially. And, at any given pit stop of an unruly career, that turns out to be the writing you have actually achieved, the writing that has managed to come into existence and express itself. Writing is what happens (to tweak a folk expression) while making other plans? Something like that. Raymond Bellour puts it more grandly, discussing the journalistic output of his friend Serge Daney as gathered in the 1986 book *Ciné journal*:

> Daney knew, and this is the most astonishing thing, how to constantly maintain the whole of his thought within the contingency of the journalistic event (a film, whether old or new, TV show, shoot, obituary, anniversary celebration). Even better, he understood that this contingency became his pretext, and (for a while at least) his very form – spurring him to live and to write. And we feel that. Each of his texts reconciles, in the best

way, the charming lightness of the quotidian with the weighty demands
of rationality.[2]

And Bellour concludes his remarks by zooming out from this generative strug-
gle of the daily and the weighty: "From the tension, as always, emotion is born."[3]

One will see in the following pages, under specified rubrics (and also
dancing between them), a few phantom books never written *per se* by me,
yet somehow elaborated, and constantly updated, along the Ariadnean
thread of years. These rubrics are an attempt to capture or corral some of
my longstanding obsessions, waxing and waning over time. Putting together
any book, as a friend once remarked to me, is all a matter of "retying the
threads", gathering up the lines of the past.

2.

Like many people, I have often wondered what to call myself, how to describe
myself in public. Critic? Scholar? Independent researcher? Freelance intel-
lectual? I felt great relief on the day – which finally arrived somewhere in
my 40s – when I suddenly thought that I should simply call myself a *writer*.
Writing (about film, primarily) has been the most consistent thread in my
life. But, alongside the Romantic connotations of being a writer, which I fully
embrace – in the sense that I have tried to develop, in writing, a voice, a
particular style, a persona, and a form of expression – there is also a material,
even industrial side to such a designation. As a freelance writer for long
periods, I have tried to keep myself open to any opportunity that has come
(and hopefully may continue to come) my way. I have frequently written
about art, as well as TV, books, music, and culture (popular and otherwise) in
general. The result of all this is that my writing-persona has been dispersed
across multiple sites – print, radio, TV, public speaking, teaching, DVD audio
commentary – and over many different pitches or modes of address. And
it also means, finally, that nobody except me has much of a grasp of the
totality of my efforts. (Curriculum vitae available on request.)

There is also an unavoidable geo-cultural aspect to being a writer con-
stantly on the move between different sites and modes of writing. I was
born in Australia in 1959 and lived there until the beginning of 2013, when I
decamped to Europe. I was a weekly reviewer at the Melbourne newspaper
The Age between 1995 and 2006 but, in that mainly pre-Internet period (at
least as far as the Fairfax Media conglomerate was concerned), few people
beyond the state of Victoria read me there and then. Many of the magazines

local to Australia for which I have written since the beginning of the 1980s (with titles such as *Tension*, *Mesh*, *Stuffing*, *Cantrills Filmnotes* and *Photofile*) led an ephemeral, small-scale existence within their particular subcultures, and are almost entirely unknown and unarchived beyond Australian shores – and likely are not so well known or archived even within them. Not many of these magazines were, indeed, solely or even centrally devoted to film: the 1980s were a period of generalist "art and culture" publications aiming for a diverse, broad audience. This diffuse targeting has, today, assisted in their banishment from tidy catalogues, indexes and archives.

So, part of the impulse behind the selection for *Mysteries of Cinema* is to retrieve the best and most transversal of these now quite obscure, hard-to-access texts. Because – and this is a point I was at pains to make at the start of my previous book *Mise en scène and Film Style*[4] – Australia has (and it is not unique in this regard), until quite recently, hardly ever been included on the map of global film culture. This national horizon is important in many of the essays that follow: these were the threads of films and ideas that came to me in that time and place – even (or especially) when my imaginary life, my "shadow self" formed from those same threads, was intensely cosmopolitan.

3.

It is hard for individuals to view themselves within history, as a symptom of some cultural moment, or movement, or a sensibility that reigned in a particular time and place. But I'll have a stab at it. To this end, a little autobiography is in order. I began seriously writing (more than seriously partying, alas) as a teenager in the late 1970s, and by the early 1980s, I was appearing (partly through sheer, dogged persistence) in a wide range of publications. The path of my sensibility fits fairly snugly – as much as I hate to periodise myself – into the postmodern culture that sprang to life during that time, even before it received this name. And nowhere more intensely than in the "neo Popist", post-Warholian art scene of Melbourne, led by the charismatic, self-styled "impresario" Paul Taylor, editor of *Art & Text* magazine. It was a formative experience that I have testified to, at length, elsewhere;[5] and the white heat of it is reflected in this book's earliest piece, "Scenes", from 1982. Suffice to say here, the Melbourne scene of that period was (to use words we never used then) intensely interdisciplinary and multi-media in approach: almost everyone dabbled in just about everything, from writing and performance art to music (live and recorded) and fashion design. Our major watchword

across all this activity was *appropriation* (in its many variations: quotation, pastiche, parody, copy, simulacrum, repetition, *détournement*): the re-use (usually involving little or no money) of what was already lying around.

My initial grounding in film study – as, largely, an autodidact who locked himself up for long periods of time in various university libraries – derived from what was recognisably a 1970s culture: in the pages of journals that I pored over, such as *Screen*, *Camera Obscura* and *Framework*, it was the heyday of Barthesian semiotics, Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. (It took only four decades after I first picked a bound 1976 volume of *Screen* from the shelf to actually appear in it as a contributor myself.) But then, for many reasons, I took a turn, in the company of those friends I had made in the course of Melbourne's Popist adventure: something intensely spoke to me in a newer wave of desire-mad theory associated with figures such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva, Jean-François Lyotard and Luce Irigaray. And these ideas chimed in very well with the types of art practice and experimentation blossoming all around me in the early 1980s.

There was something doubtlessly apolitical and dandy-like in this early phase of postmodernism, but there was also – to speak of cultural symptoms in hindsight – something that sincerely expressed the life-experience of a certain generation in a particular place and time: this conviction that, distinct from the phantom revolutions of various types promised (and not delivered) by those who came before us in the 1960s and 1970s, what now mattered was a coming-to-terms with what we found around us – not in acquiescence or mere acceptance, but in the spirit of transformative play and re-presentation. The appropriation ethos of the 1980s scene was less (we believed, or hoped) about aristocratic, elite, leisure-time fun than about scarcity (or precarity, as we say today) and strategies for surviving it. I was moved, in this light, by Guattari's proclamation in a mid-1980s interview about hardboiled, American crime fiction:

> Look at the warmth of intimacy, of suspense, of subjectivity that you need to grab to stay warm, to sleep, to feel good, to feel sheltered; it's really something. What are they using to create that? [...] [They] produce a more than tolerable and comfortable subjectivity, warm, passionate, exciting, in this pile of metal, this heap of shit, this load of stupidities. Isn't that really quite a feat?[6]

My early texts also contained a premonition of a theoretical and critical model I was later to develop more explicitly: already, the taste for culture grasped as a merry swirl of signifiers, signs, figures, tropes, clichés and

stereotypes not only helped me to get clear of the blackmailing tenets of a three-dimensional, humanist depiction, but also instantly clinched the alliance between what would later be endlessly debated as the apparently opposed realms of high and low culture.[7] I did not really need, as a 21 year old, to be drawn into any polemic on this apparently very postmodern, relativistic manner of looking at things; it was not so much an intellectual position for me (even less a perverse stance, as it was sometimes interpreted) as a natural expression of my taste, right back to early childhood.

The beloved Bugs Bunny cartoons and Frank Tashlin movies playing on my parents's black-and-white TV were always mixed up, in my head, with the weird, experimental rock music that came my way as a kid (courtesy of my big brother's record collection) and with strange, allegorical texts such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that I stumbled upon in the local, suburban library, and that fascinated me. Secretly, in my heart, I have never felt any particular need to defend myself publicly on this score: you more-or-less come into this world loving what you love, and you had better be prepared to stick by it, come what may.

I experienced an extension of this particular network of elements thanks to my first screen studies teachers at Melbourne State College in the late 1970s, where I developed an immense investment in (and high tolerance for) for experimental, avant-garde work of all stripes and tendencies. That much is evident from the 1980s pieces included in this collection: Chantal Akerman, Michael Snow and Marguerite Duras swim with Brian De Palma, Larry Cohen and Kathryn Bigelow in these surveys of certain motifs across the media field. In the section titled "Scenographies", one can also see the development of a particular, haunting concept that has stuck to me since the early 1980s: the pop culture myth of a "Book of Life", in which all the significant and crucial events of a lifetime are already pre-set, pre-written. There was (and still is) something profoundly disquieting about the ideological underpinning of this image or scenario – at the time, I was impressed by Genesis P-Orridge's proto-punk proclamation that "our identity is fictional, written by parents, relatives, education, society" – and I have never ceased trying to find, within culture, ways of turning this Book upside down.

The art world context of the early 1980s gave me some sustenance and support in the first period of my writing life – and that thread along my path continues today – but, ultimately, I always considered myself more a film person than an art person. The same goes for cultural studies, which had already formed a solid pedagogical block in Australian universities by the mid 1980s, and in which I participated with articles about TV, media trends, blockbuster movies, pop music, fashion, and so on (the culmination of this

thread of work came in my first book, published in 1994, *Phantasms*).[8] But I felt myself at risk of getting lost in a sea of rhizomatic connections and generalities, so I shifted my priorities and focused, during the second half of the 1980s, on the need to produce solid, analytical work on cinema as a material microcosm of culture – to work from the inside out, as it were, rather than vice versa (in this collection, "Wishful Thinking" and "Mr Big" mark that reorientation). I was also, in that same self-help campaign, trying to move beyond the by-then reflex "critique of film theory" – which can sound hollow by the umpteenth repetition, especially when the worst, anti-intellectual conservatives in the vicinity chummily start agreeing with you – and trying, instead, to actually deliver the goods on a better, more inclusive kind of critical film study.

So I went looking for a mode of synthetic film analysis attuned to what I call here the mysteries of cinema, in homage to Raúl Ruiz's magnificent TV mini-series and feature film, MISTÉRIOS DE LISBOA (2010). Cinema is mysterious on many levels: in its craft (how did they get that effect?) as well as its art (why is this film making me cry?), in its general, cultural role (simultaneously pro-social and antisocial) as well as in the disputed meaning or "reading" of individual films.

When I turned myself more squarely toward cinema, I also merrily plunged into what is called today, in the era of quality TV, binge-watching. This was, above all, an experience of film genre, and the subsequent course of my attention in this area is tracked in the section titled "Genre Games". Indeed, in 1987 alone, I clocked up 1000 feature-length movies on VHS: I still have the list. The video shop revolution of the later 1980s, seemingly happening on every suburban street corner, revealed an incredible explosion of contemporary, popular genres: teen, horror, romantic comedy, action, thriller. I became fascinated with analysing networks of films, both within and across genres, following this hunch articulated by my Melbourne comrade, Philip Brophy:

> I prefer to treat the movies as though they have lives of their own; as though they are working together, talking and referring to one another, reworking each other's forms, styles, contents and themes. That's why I'll always enjoy writing about a group of movies rather than a single film.[9]

Like many cinephiles of the 1980s, I spent most of my time spinning on an Anglo-Euro axis – more particularly fixated on the twin peaks of American cinema and French theory. Of course, and certainly in my case, there were influences from elsewhere, too – especially the various factions of film criticism and theory washing in from the UK (*Movie*, *Screen*, *Framework*, etc).

My long 1987 essay "No Flowers for the Cinephile" – comprising the entire section of this book devoted to "A Cinephile in Australia" – is testament both to the obsessive depths and the blinkered limits of that engagement.

Of all the pieces in this book,"No Flowers for the Cinephile" is the one that most calls out for a postscript or update that would likely be as long as the original text. So much has changed, and often surprisingly so, since I surveyed what I, in that time, took to be the intransigent, outsider status of cinephilia. Not only has cinephilia arrived at a place of honour at the academic table, but its rather cloistered, nerdy gender bias (prime symptom: the cinephile is "he" throughout much of my essay, and most of its hero figures from cinema and theory alike are male) has been knocked sideways by successive, salutary social movements spotlighting the successive stations of an identity politics (sexual, racial, etc.). The dawning of some conscious-ness of all this can be traced across the book, and is especially evident in its final two sections, "Interventions" and "Envoi".

In many senses and on many levels, something was coming to an end as the 1980s pop ethos waned, although I did not quite see the truth of this straight away. The salutary aftershocks came some way into the 1990s, such as the startling presence on the international film festival circuit of a "world cinema" that was suddenly too large, visible and important to ignore (although most commercial art house cinema chains – still stuck in a largely 1960s-formed taste – had managed to keep it at bay almost entirely). The emergence of world cinema in Western consciousness brought to light such master auteurs as Abbas Kiarostami and Hou Hsiao-hsien, but also the belated catch-up by genre-freaks like me on the extensive, florid forms of Asian horror, action, comedy and *anime.*

The mid 1990s also brought another kind of critical engagement to me, and another kind of immersion: in the areas of journalistic film reviewing (which I pursued, only timidly at first but later on a weekly basis, for almost two decades) and radio (with an occasional, bitter taste of TV experience). Personally, this was the period of negotiating, sometimes combatively, with the restrictions placed upon my writing style and voice by these media institutions – and thus diversifying my critical modes of address. Almost nothing of what I wrote or spoke in those gigs, beyond "The Path and the Passeur" from 1993, appears here (they form the material for a website project).[10] Simultaneously, however, I kept chipping away at longer, freer formulations of my central obsessions – in particular, my long-stewing hunches about the role of artifice and lyricism in a "cinema of poetry" (to borrow Pier Paolo Pasolini's term), which comprise the central core of this book ("The Lyrical Impulse").

Then another adventure happily opened up. The decisive change in my wayward career came with my involvement in the Internet, as writer and co-editor/publisher of online magazines (*Senses of Cinema* in its early years, and later *Rouge*, *Screening the Past* and *LOLA*), beginning in the late 1990s. Suddenly, I had many more readers beyond my small, national-local space. I was being regularly invited to film festivals, conferences and arts events around the world. The effect on me of all this commotion was, frankly, intoxicating; it altered my life and my outlook in many ways.

And, beginning in 1997, I was lucky enough to be part of a truly international project led by Jonathan Rosenbaum, a series of epistolary exchanges that eventually found book form in 2003 as *Movie Mutations*, which continues to be translated in new editions around the world, inspiring projects of programming and collective critical writing.[11] But it is precisely because of the (in the main) greater visibility of this entire period of my Internet writing work that I have mostly withheld its presence from the pages to follow; I hope to gather that material elsewhere, in ways more suited to the affordances of digital media.

After I quit journalism (that's another tale) in 2006, I was invited to take up a university position at Monash in Melbourne, which allowed me, at that point, a different, precious kind of freedom: to escape the weekly calendar of commercial film releases and dive back into cinema history. It also allowed me to pick up the thread of many research projects I had started in the 1980s and 1990s, but had been unable to complete before journalism imposed its ever-rolling deadlines: essays on Australian cinema, B movie auteurs (Edgar G. Ulmer, Tod Browning, Jean-Claude Brisseau), aspects of cinema theory, and the historiography of film culture and criticism.[12]

Since the start of 2015, I have returned to the life of a freelancer. That has brought me back, in a 21st-century context, to the world of "small magazines" (now mostly online) across several arts and media, and to the fervent, early-1980s dream of a creative form of writing on cinema – but, this time, with an all-important twist.

4.

Probably like some readers of this book – and also like Theodor Adorno[13] – I have intermittently kept, since my early teenage years, a dream diary. I have long been amazed that studies of film directors (with the striking exception of Raymond Durgnat and Scott Simmon's book on King Vidor)[14] do not access this type of record, where it is available, more often. Although it is

highly unlikely I will ever publish my own diary of this kind (too much of it is incomprehensible to anyone but me), I have already given it a title: *Last Night's Dream*, because I always scribble down the memory of these audiovisions the moment I wake, before they vanish altogether from consciousness.

My attachment to dreams, and the narration of dreams, immediately indicates my highly sympathetic relation to, on the one hand, Surrealism (long before I discovered, in my mid 20s, the films of Raúl Ruiz), and on the other hand, psychoanalysis; and, following along the line of these threads, later to various theories of dream comprehension, and to what Lyotard called "the unconscious as *mise en scène*".[15] My dreams are frequently very cinematic (if not meta-cinematic); I even once transcribed verbatim the dream-analysis of a particular film and delivered it (without telling its origin) in a lecture that same day.

There is one, particularly ecstatic dream that I regard as being so central to my life that I have recounted it in several different contexts over the 34-year period circumscribed by this book. I first used it soon after experiencing it, as part of a talk given to a film discussion group in Melbourne in the early 1980s; it arose in the aforementioned Popist period of furious activity. In the dream, which amounts to less a narrative than a single scene or a sequence of jump-cut images, I have the magical power to reach up to a cinema screen – complete with some movie still playing loudly and brightly upon it – and to take, handle, fold, and reduce it. The dream ends as I happily stride down a busy city street, holding a kind of cinema-suitcase by its handle: it is a screen, still containing and "projecting" its movie content.

One of the most notable things about this final image, for me, is its aspect of burning, bright daylight – a light that, however, can no longer dim or cancel the cinematic image that swings along with me. This seems to respond to an evocative expression that entered my head at an early adult age, and now provides the epigraph to this book: cinema as the "artificial night". That is how Robert Desnos characterised the "condition" of cinema, as an apparatus/experience that is not dependent on the diurnal and nocturnal, rhythmic cycle of nature, but imposes its own, pre-emptory black-out upon the rational world and its consciousness.[16] My dream went one better than Desnos: it freed cinema into the open daylight, without any diminishing of its soulful, mysterious power.

Remember, this was a long time (at least in my sphere of experience) before mobile phones, touch screens, personal computers, or the Internet; the dream took place at least three years before I even owned a domestic video player. It expressed a wish to access and interact with cinema directly, to domesticate and customise it in the sense of bringing it down from the

separate, magisterial, but also somewhat alienating realm of "the big screen". When I first retold the dream in public, I linked it to a sketchy but passionately held theory that all art and media forms were connected, under the umbrella of something I even then called "audio-vision", but in a funky, lo-fi form characteristic of the avant-garde practices of the time. I argued that projected slides, Polaroid photos and freeze-frames printed from films onto paper could be combined and "sped up" in our imaginations (or in makeshift performance-installations) to form previously unseen, unexpected films – and the soundtrack could derive from the selections on any old audiocassette compilation, the way that George Kuchar in the 1980s shot his videos while fiddling with the humble cassette player hanging around his neck. I speculated that, for the public cinema to truly become our "secret cinema", each of us must find a way to absorb, incorporate and remake our most beloved films. Some avant-garde artists (like Joseph Cornell), and even some especially "literary" critical writers (such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante) had illuminated this path, but we still needed to seize it for ourselves.

I was unaware, then, that Ado Kyrou had already essentially made the exact same case almost 30 years before, in the first 1953 edition of his great book *Le surréalisme au cinéma*:

> Watching a film, I necessarily perform an action upon this object – I duly transform it and, on the basis of its given elements, I *make my own thing*, so as to withdraw from it some scraps of knowledge and better place them within myself.[17]

Moreover, Kyrou had claimed the postmodern lingo of 1980s appropriation art well before its time, with a nod to Marcel Duchamp and his contemporaries:

> Certain films (their genre hardly matters, only a particular detail, an ambience, an impression of *déjà-vu* count) are especially mine. I could take them just as they are, simply adding my signature. Ready-made films …[18]

This web of dreams coincided with another, concerning more specifically a certain style or manner of experimental writing. I was very inspired, as a teenager, by the work of Roland Barthes, and many others (such as, in the Australian context, Meaghan Morris) who toiled in the wild grass of what was later labelled "ficto-criticism".[19] Ficto-criticism is neither fiction nor criticism, but some untamed, anti-formulaic hybrid in-between, making use of fragmentation and vivid evocation, scattering quotations (cited and uncited), adopting different "voices", applying what were known at the time

as "shifters" to all matters of pronoun, tense and address. Some pieces I did in this period were collaborations with artists or graphic designers, trying to break down the longstanding wall between text and "illustration". I never took such experiments as far out as I wished, but "Scenes" in this book testifies to the desire I pursued during the 1980s to write in a way that was proudly different from either "straight" film criticism or straitjacketed academic prose.

For many reasons – among them the fact that ficto-criticism became increasingly hard to get published (beyond a few subcultural art magazines) and thus paid for, and that efforts in this field quickly gathered a repertoire of over-familiar moves – I gave up the ghost of this dream. Instead, I immersed myself more deeply in professionalised discourse-genres such as journalism and, later on, university research. But I never forgot the ficto-critical dream – even though, as late as 2004 (in the penultimate piece of this book, "My Back Pages"), I was still, somewhat melancholically, rehearsing to myself the vaguely poststructuralist adage that "you cannot write film criticism only in rhythms, colours and shapes, even if you long to do so", that a gap between the subject of writing and the object of cinema is insurmountable, and perhaps even constitutive of the act of criticism.

Terrence Malick and George Miller had to put aside, in the 1980s, their cherished, respective projects for Q (later morphed into THE TREE OF LIFE [2011]) and MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (2015) for the better part of three decades, until the capabilities of digital technology had caught up with their imaginations. On a tiny fraction of that budgetary scale, I, too, as it turned out, had to wait for a machine to reignite my "ancient teenage dream" (as John Cale sang it) of a hands-on, customised and "writerly" (in the Barthesian sense of *scriptible*)[19] approach to the available materials of culture. That machine was the personal computer, and specifically the software that allowed the manipulation and re-editing of downloaded films. The spirit of appropriation had made its cultural comeback at last! Even more decisive was my personal encounter with Cristina Álvarez López, with whom I today explore and enjoy both the fruits of collaboration and the elaboration of a critical practice we call the *audiovisual essay* – film analysis using the very materials (in digital form) of image and sound. We think of it as creative film criticism (see the essay "No Direction Home"). Again, the prescient vision of Kyrou, outlining long ago what he wanted to do with his favourite, chosen films:

> Perhaps I would have to work on them – make some editing modifications; cut, raise or lower the intensity of the sound – in short, *interpret* them so that, ultimately, my subjective vision could become objective. [...] All it needs are some small changes for everyone to perceive what I sense and detect.[20]

Those particular audiovisions I have helped make are, in their substance, beyond the scope of this printed, literary, word-based book.[21] But the final chapter cowritten with Cristina, "The File We Accompany" (the title is a play on Bellour's essay "The Film We Accompany"),[22] returns the written portion of this multi-media work to its intersection with a particular itinerary (mine), and closes a circle just at the point where the type of work I do (and the type of place or space I do it in) is, once more, in the process of mutating.

In embracing the audiovisual essay form (without, of course, abandoning writing), I have gratefully experienced the sensation of breaking the seductive spell that imprisons far too many critics: the sense that one's "life's work" is the strenuous effort to individually measure up to the medium of cinema (or whichever art form), to comment upon and include more and more of it within the domain of a single, ever-enlarging, relentlessly forward-moving, literary sensibility (as Bellour said of Daney: "the whole of his thought"!).[23] This is the "fiction" that, according to Jean Louis Schefer, animates the modern figure of the essayist: "the idea [...] of covering the world with paper, with bits of writing".[24] In that scenario, the Romantic credo of what Surrealism's chronicler Jean Schuster called the "indestructible nature of the [writer's] interior poetic voice",[25] not to mention his or her public persona, can easily become a trap, a recipe for endless repetition and sterile reflexivity. Fracturing the through-line of relentless progress and accumulation in this way can have a freeing effect on a writer; in my case, at any rate, it opened the liberty of ransacking my own archive, of sometimes taking an idea, phrase or description from an old text and using it as the springboard for a new and different, collaboratively reworked, image/sound montage. The threads are being scrambled again, for retying in another way, at another time.

A final, prefatory note. With all the essays in *Mysteries of Cinema*, I have returned to my original manuscripts, rather than the edited versions as published, and restored them. Bibliographic references have been (wherever possible) duly updated (thanks to the many friends who helped with this arduous, archaeological task), factual errors corrected, and infelicities of expression removed. I have suppressed some (but not all) inevitable re-use or repetition of certain material across the years. For the most part, however, I present these pieces as I first wrote them, in part as a chronicle or document of the times in which they were composed.

(2016)

Notes

All unattributed translations are mine.

1. Raymond Durgnat, *Films and Feelings* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 135.
2. Raymond Bellour, "Le voyage absolu", *Le Magazine littéraire*, no. 232 (July/August 1986), p. 79.
3. Ibid.
4. Adrian Martin, *Mise en scène and Film Style: From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art* (London: Palgrave, 2014).
5. See Helen Hughes & Nicholas Croggon (eds), *Impresario: Paul Taylor, The Melbourne Years, 1981-1984* (Melbourne: Surpllus/Monash University Museum of Art, 2013).
6. Charles J. Stivale, "Pragmatic/Machinic: A Discussion with Félix Guattari", *Pre/Text*, Vol. 14 No. 3/4 (1995), p. 12.
7. See Adrian Martin & Philip Brophy, "The Archaeology of Culture, or How to Say Everything at Once", *Cantrills Filmnotes*, no. 37/38 (April 1982), pp. 44-53.
8. Adrian Martin, *Phantasms* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1994).
9. Philip Brophy, "Editorial (Kind of ...)", *Restuff: Horror/Gore/Exploitation* (Northcote: Stuff Publications, 1988), p. 3.
10. See the website *Film Critic: Adrian Martin* [www.filmcritic.com.au]. Accessed 28 October 2017. Its accompanying Patreon page is at: [www.patreon.com/adrianmartin].
11. Adrian Martin & Jonathan Rosenbaum (eds), *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (London: British Film Institute, 2003).
12. See "'Trust Your Instincts' – Adrian Martin Interviewed by Deane Williams", in Noel King & Deane Williams (eds), *Australian Film Theory and Criticism: Volume 2 – Interviews* (Bristol: Intellect, 2014), pp. 205-218.
13. See Theodor Adorno (trans. Jan Philipp Reemtsma), *Dream Notes* (London: Polity, 2007).
14. Raymond Durgnat & Scott Simmon, *King Vidor, American* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
15. Jean-François Lyotard (trans. Joseph Maier), "The Unconscious as *Mise en scène*", in Michael Benamou & Charles Caramello (eds), *Performance in Postmodern Culture* (Madison: Coda Press, 1977), pp. 87-98.
16. See Robert Desnos, *Les rayons et les ombres* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992), p. 77.
17. Ado Kyrou, *Le surréalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Ramsay, 2005), p. 292.
18. Ibid.
19. See Roland Barthes (trans. Richard Howard), *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).
20. Kyrou, *Le surréalisme au cinéma*, p. 293.
21. See the website *The Audiovisual Essay: Practice and Theory of Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies* (Sussex University, 2014) [http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/]. Accessed 11 March 2017.

22. Raymond Bellour (trans. Fergus Daly & Adrian Martin), "The Film We Accompany", *Rouge*, no. 3 (2004) [http://rouge.com.au/3/film.html]. Accessed 13 November 2016.

23. See, in this vein, Colin MacCabe's similar eulogisation of André Bazin: "Every review and preview, however short, brought the whole weight of Bazin's experience and thought about the cinema to bear [...] Bazin was a writer who at every moment and on every occasion that he sat down to write brought with him the entire history and theory of cinema in a continuous reflection". In Dudley Andrew (ed.), *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and its Afterlife* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 66-67.

24. Jean Louis Schefer, "Preface", in Paul Smith (ed. & trans.), *The Enigmatic Body: Essays on the Arts by Jean Louis Schefer* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. xix.

25. Jean Schuster quoted in Paul Hammond, "Specialists in Revolt", *New Statesman*, no. 2958 (4 December 1987), p. 23.

About the author

Prof. Adrian Martin (Monash University, Melbourne) is the author of *Mise en scène and Film Style* (2014), *Last Day Every Day* (2012), *What is Modern Cinema?* (2008), *The Mad Max Movies* (2003) and *Phantasms* (1994).