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Editorial The Cinégraphic Imagination

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EDITORIAL

The Cinégraphic Imagination

We are living in an age of instability, where lines of demarcation have lost their efficacy in favour of hybridity, fluidity, transience, mutability and ductility, of shifting contours and dynamic, unsettled forms, driven by the wider mandate to adapt and embrace change. No humanities publication worth its salt can afford to ignore the cross-disciplinary, transversal implications of this condition, nor disregard how knowledge and understanding range over multiple fields and / or modes of enquiry. The journal that this editorial is heralding, in this inaugural issue, is no exception. Its title, *Cinégraphia*, might seem clear-cut and self-evident: *ciné-* as pertaining to cinematic creation, consumption and distribution; and *-graphia*, concerned with the practices and conventions of writing and representation. But there are other factors to consider. The ‘cinematic’ is no longer as straightforward or clearly defined as it was in the first century of its existence. Today, it forms part of an increasingly complex and proliferating skein of systems and networks, not confined simply to the industry or pastime that is the cinema. Equally as slippery is the *-graphia* of the title, which has its own shifting historical acceptations.

What is writing? In our day, the word or concept has been partly annexed by the ubiquity of computers in everyday life. From this angle, to ‘write’ is, according to the OED, to “cause[...] data to be entered into memory, or recorded in or on a storage medium or device”. But there is an older, more cinégraphiccognizance of what writing entails, and what it can do. In this earlier understanding, writing is a form of thinking – way to express thought – and is not restricted to the pen. The seeds of this ‘cinegr-

-aphic turn' in critical thinking were sown almost eighty years ago, when Alexandre Astruc reflected on film's prospects. The cinema, he claimed, "is gradually becoming a language", like the essay or the novel: "[F]ilm language is the exact equivalent of literary language. [...] The film-maker / author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen". This was a profoundly significant discovery, realisation and / or hypothesis. What Astruc called the 'film-pen', *le camera-stylo*, was not just an age, or a technological mode of production; instead, for Astruc, the 'film-pen' was the critical forceps that would allow the future to be born.

Although Astruc's piece was pitched between the popular and the scholarly, his intervention created ripples inside the academy. By the 1960s and 1970s, the productive affiliation between pen and camera was sufficiently accredited to underwrite the emergence of 'adaptation studies' as a field of critical enquiry, achieving its mature disciplinary form in the 1980s and 1990s. On the surface, adaptation studies aspired to do exactly what Astruc proposed: to consider literature / cinema as a symbiotic form of writing, and thus to demonstrate the potential of new modes of thought and action. To study adaptation, then, was to chart and develop heuristic models that could reveal the transformation of literary form into cinematic form, the word into its imagistic analogue.

But whilst adaptation studies remains a watershed moment in the broader discourse of textual studies, adaptation *per se* tended to concretise the stable, inviolable boundaries that defined each form and that distinguished one from another: the literary with its words or *graphemes* (as the film theorist, Dudley Andrew, termed it); the cinematic with its audio-visual sound-images. Indeed, in the impulse to chart the process of adaptation as an *outcome*, it was the radical separateness of word and image that crystalised their stark differences and re-established the hierarchy of literary and cinematic form that informed English departments in the US and UK throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Cinégraphia returns the analysis of writing and images, conjoined parts of a whole, to the philosophical model proposed by Astruc's film-pen. But although Astruc

brought the cinema closer in spirit to writing's projection of thought, even his model cannot fully reckon with the radically discretized media technologies, environments and screen platforms of our time. *Cinégraphia* thus proposes that we think not of 'intersections' in textual forms, but of *intersectionality* as a technological and cultural logic. And it is this environment, with its proliferating technologies, which reminds us that Astruc's *camera-stylo* was neither pen nor camera, but a mode of creating – and also of *thinking* – adequate to what Astruc saw as the challenge of cinema as art form, mass entertainment and political instrument. *Cinégraphia* engages writing as *text*, in its myriad graphic forms, in its social embodiment, in its political import; and it engages writing as *image*, in its fertile visual and aural imaginaries. Further, it engages writing as *sound* in its affective capacities to produce thought, ideas, and sensation. In this sense, Astruc's 'writing' permeates the page, the screen, the eye, and the mind.

We therefore present *Cinégraphia* as a critical and creative platform for thinking through contemporary challenges in social, political, and aesthetic systems of meaning. From a twenty-first-century vantage point, we look forwards and backwards to envision what might be in a technological future, and what might be possible for 'writing' in its fullest aesthetic and philosophical expression. This first issue begins to outline just such a project, in its focus on how the Anthropocene and the climate crisis have been 'written' by filmic practices and narrative formations. At the core of the issue is a cluster of articles that emerged from the fifth *Caméra-Stylo* conference – the biennial forum that is the major 'event' platform for the Sydney Literature and Cinema Network, just as *Cinégraphia* is the Network's publishing outlet – in 2023. Presented under the auspices of the "Approaching Extinction" thematic, these articles consider the climate emergency through various generic frames and ways of thinking.

How can the eco-documentary simultaneously raise awareness, change attitudes and foster political action, in the face of environmental collapse? Robert Sinnerbrink argues that neither didacticism nor aestheticism *alone* can achieve these goals, but together, in what he calls a 'poetico-discursive' approach, they might provide a sufficiently probing response to the crisis. For Andrew B. R. Elliott, the disaster movie

is the most reliable barometer of post-apocalyptic anxiety – principally, because it looks not to the future but to the past, in reproducing the colonialist logic of geographic escape. Other histories, in Elliott's estimation, might yet offer ways of seeing beyond the anthropocentric dicta of globalisation. Jakob Boer brings eco-cinema into a taut dialogue with slow cinema, taking note of spectatorship and modes of viewing. He finds eco-cinema scholarship to be insufficiently empirical, and proposes that it engage more with other disciplinary practices (media psychology, sociology of the arts). And Thomas Britt shifts the discussion away from the cinema to analyse how forms of survival are figured in television and graphic literature. As Britt argues, the threat of extinction is tempered by graphic novels or comics that exert formidable influences over the wider stories and the human agents embroiled in them.

As well as these 'print' articles, the issue features two video essays that also expatiate on the poetics of extinction premise. Cormac Donnelly uses the aesthetics of the movie trailer to reconsider the 'anthropocene', downgraded from *epoch* to *event*, as a self-devouring reflection of zombie-horror disruption. And Anastasia Goncharova suggests that the coming-of-age story, the stalwart genre that traditionally lauds maturity, is now riven with anguish, uncertainty, and despondency about the future. (As the video essays are online artefacts, they are represented in the journal by interviews with their creators.) The final article in this issue is from the Caméra-Style archive: David Kelly's searching analysis of Dashiell Hammett's prose and John Huston's direction, outlining how an Astruc-like symbiosis of word and image cannily begat the *noir* genre. In our book review section, there are encounters with studies of David Lynch's 'dreamscapes', and how they interact with non-cinematic cultural forms, such as literature; a Western-inflected, graphic novel series that posits the United States as divisive and dystopian; and the adaptational strategies implemented by Apple TV+ to bring a post-apocalyptic SF novel series to the screen. Future issues of *Cinégraphia* will expand the review remit to encompass literary works, both new

and perennial, that have recently been adapted as films, television series or graphic narratives.

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