Writing for the Screen: Beyond the Gospel of Story

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There's a different weight that a moment (of picture and sound) carries in film, compared to the same moment conveyed by the written word.

(Murch 1997)

In this article, I would like to examine the tensions between working with words and images that have been part of my experience as a writer and filmmaker, in the particular context of the script development process. Why do so many screenwriting theorists and industry personnel insist on the primary importance of Story in cinema? What kinds of scriptwriting processes are utilised by filmmakers wishing to place more emphasis on a greater range of storytelling strategies, and on the cinematic qualities of images, locations, gestures and sounds? In other words: what does it mean to write for the cinema?

In 1914, cinema was still in its infancy. Only a few years earlier, three Chicago based producers cooked up a plan to buy up all the world’s stories for a cool one million bucks. Everything from the Bible to the Mahabharata, from Aesop’s Fables to Dostoyevsky - they were all to be part of the deal. Perhaps not surprisingly, this rather ambitious scheme failed. Meanwhile, an actor who fancied himself as a director was part of a low budget outfit who were making some of the ‘guerilla films’ of the day. Turning up at events, he and his colleagues would set up their cameras, introduce the actors into the setting and improvise from scenarios (not unlike a filmmaking process used subsequently by filmmakers including Peter Watkins, Gus van Sant, Michael Winterbottom and Wong Kar Wai). This 1914 guerilla filmmaker was, of course, Charlie Chaplin in his first outing as The Tramp: *Kid Auto Races At Venice*.

I never tire of watching this film. The Kids’ Auto Races were held at the beach resort of Venice, Los Angeles; the competitors boys in go-karts or soap-box cars. It is a film about cinema. Henry Lehrman plays the director, and Chaplin a man who keeps spoiling his shots by trying to squeeze into the picture. Chaplin claimed that the scenario was inspired by a visit to Jersey with the Karno Company. During the filming of a carnival procession, a local official kept trying to get into the picture. Charlie The Tramp smiles, simpers, twirls his cane, loses his bowler hat as he tries to position himself in front of the camera. In 1975, Walter Kerr wrote that, pushing his way through the crowd, Chaplin’s Tramp elbowed his way into immortality, drawing our attention not just to himself but to cinema and its possibilities (Kerr 1980: 22). It is this inventiveness of early cinema that I find so inspiring - a time before the screenwriting manuals were written, before the rules of cinema were seen as fixed. Moreover, *Kids ’ Auto Races* was not a film that required any vast commitment of funds; it is played out at a real life event, the races providing not only a location, but background action as the go-carts are pushed to the top of the hill and the drivers’ whiz their way around the track. Crowds of holiday makers are the extras. Yet it introduced a character who was to become one of the icons of global cinema. Chaplin, of course, was well suited to the improvised scenarios of early cinema, having already served a long apprenticeship as a performer on the music hall and vaudeville circuit.

More than ninety years later, as the language and practices of cinema continue to evolve and shift in response to both digital technologies and globalisation, many filmmakers are looking back to early cinema for inspiration. The more fluid relationships between writing, performance and shooting that were commonplace in the era are of particular interest. In his much-quoted 1948 manifesto advocating the freedom of the caméra-stylo or camera pen, filmmaker and theorist Alexandre Astruc, too, looked to silent film. Cinema was grain, light and shade, shadow and gesture, characters and movement, he claimed. As have successive generations of filmmakers ever since. So how did screenwriting come to be so exclusively equated with the power of Story?
The Gospel of Story

Script guru Robert McKee observes that Hollywood spends an enormous amount on script development: “By the 1990s, script development in Hollywood climbed to over $500 million per annum, three quarters of which is paid to writers for options and rewrites on films that will never be made” (McKee 1997: 13-4). For McKee, this state of affairs can be blamed on a lack of craft. In America alone, hundreds of thousands of screenplays are attempted each year, but few of them are of sufficient quality to make it into production. Overwhelmingly, these screenplays, and those of many other screenwriters around the world, lack well-told stories, he claims. Lamenting what he sees as the decline of storytelling in the contemporary world, McKee, arguably the most influential screenwriting guru of the last decade, claims in surprisingly moral terms:

While the ever-expanding reach of the media now gives us the stories to send beyond borders and languages to hundreds of millions, the overall quality of storytelling is eroding…The art of story is in decay, and as Aristotle observed twenty three hundred years ago, when storytelling goes bad, the result is decadence. (McKee 1997: 12)

Wistfully, he looks back to a golden era of Hollywood where seasoned story editors oversaw the training of their apprentices, insisting always on the pre-eminence of Story. The flood of screenwriting texts and How-To-Write-A Screenplay manuals crowding bookshelves today share McKee’s emphasis on the value of Story. But what is it that McKee means by Story? In his bestselling instruction manual Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting, McKee offers the following definition: “A beautifully told story is one in which structure, setting, character, genre and idea meld seamlessly” (McKee 1997: 29). Elaborating on his principles of good story design, McKee does acknowledge that there is more than one approach; he categorises the major screen story structures as the archplot, the miniplot and the antiplot. Firmly at the top of McKee’s hierarchy, however, is the archplot or classical story design:

Classical design means a story built around an active protagonist who struggles against primarily external forces of antagonism to pursue his or her desire, through continuous time, within a consistent and casually connected fictional reality’, to a closed ending of absolute, irreversible change. (McKee1997: 45)

Advocating this model, McKee argues that it is timeless and trans-cultural, and fundamental to every human society, whether civilised or primitive. Although the classic story reaches back through to the origins of human culture, it is the basis of the vast majority of films that have found an audience around the world in the last hundred years; story design mirrors the workings of both the human mind and memory. Even memory, he suggests, is organised around archplots (many theorists of memory, I suspect, might take exception to this). Even Ken Dancyger, presenting and critiquing a number of traditional approaches to screenplay structure (including three act structure and what he terms counter-structure) in Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules, insists on this primacy of conflict: “The focus on conflict is so central to storytelling that its use can be traced from the original Ten Commandments” (Dancyger 1995: 2).

Screenwriting Texts as Self-Help Literature

In addition to conflict, words like ‘success’, ‘tips’ and ‘techniques’ all feature strongly in screenwriting books, and the language of both religion and pop psychology abounds in both screenwriting texts and seminars. It is perhaps not surprising that many of the script gurus earn their living - and build their book and DVD sales - on the international ‘infotainment’ circuit, presenting high profile story seminars and private audiences with the chosen few. Typically, these seminar programs are aimed at experienced writers and producers looking to break through into the big-time, and novice writers looking to break into the movie business. In a seminar that I attended in Sydney in the early 1990’s, Christopher Vogler, author of The Writer’s Journey, even advised participants to “take the template and go out into the world. See the changes it will make in your life” (Millard 1995: 4). It is not that big a leap then, to view many of the (mostly North American) screenwriting books as having most value as contributions to the literature of the self-help movement.
Investigating the American preoccupation with self-help books, Steven Starker argues that contemporary self-help literature has developed from the guides published by the Puritans in the eighteenth century (Starker 1989). Readers were urged to follow the practical advice contained in guides like The Way to Wealth and Man’s Unerring Guide to a Healthy, Wealthy and Happy Life in order to achieve success in the spheres of family, work, finances and health. The heyday of these guides occurred in 1960s and 70s America, with its explosion of self help and popular psychology books. Starker suggests that most of these books and manuals are intended to communicate with wide audiences, rather than specialised audiences. They are best categorised on the basis of the following three dimensions of their content. Firstly, the anecdotal versus the informational, secondly the prescriptive versus the descriptive and thirdly closed versus open systems or underlying philosophies (Starker 1989: 9-10). The vast majority of screenwriting manuals are descriptive in that they link prescribed behaviours to results: “The prescribed behaviours usually are linked with the presumed utility of the work by way of a simple promise: do this and you will get that”(Starker 1989: 9). Failure to achieve the desired results usually suggests that the prescribed behaviors have not been followed faithfully.

The language of the self help and recovery movements has been taken up with alacrity by film funding bodies, in the script workshops, clinics and hothouse programs which have become these agencies’ favoured models of script development. The Australian Film Commission and Australian Film Television Radio School’s Spark Workshop even goes to the extent of employing a creativity coach, available to assist writers in identifying parallels between blocks in their screenplays and those in their lives. Dr Carlos Raimundo, a Sydney psychiatrist who developed the psychodrama technique called ‘Play of Life’ used within the Spark workshops describes its methods thus:

Play of Life …involves using little stages, dolls and props and in this way acts as a three-dimensional problem-solving tool that gives deep insights not only into the past, present and ideal future, but also the first step one needs to take in order to get there. (Australian Film Commission 2004)

As in the scriptwriting theories of the gurus, a strong correlation between perceived issues in the lives of the writers and the so-called problems with their screenplays is a central principle. ‘The Play of Life’ method also assumes that ‘deep insights’ into the creative process are possible in often single sessions of ‘coaching’ where a ‘first step’ can clearly be identified. This problem-solving approach – often associated with the recovery movement and its twelve step programs – would seem in conflict with the many theories of creativity proposed by psychologists, and the insights into their own creative process articulated by many writers, artists and scientists. The Victorian poet, John Keats, for example, wrote eloquently about the qualities required in order to achieve in the arts, using the term negative capability: “When a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable straining after facts and reason” (Storr 1972: 239). Many psychologists preoccupied with the creative process(Csikszentmihalyi 1996, John-Steiner 1997, Sternberg 1999)suggest that a hightolerance for uncertainty, doubt and ambiguity is one of the characteristics of creative thinkers, and is necessary to ensure that solutions are not imposed prematurely on the materials being molded and shaped. In his inquiry into the dynamics of creation across the arts and sciences, Anthony Storr notes that creative practitioners exhibit a strong preference for tasks involving both design and form and complexity and incompleteness. It may be the latter especially, he suggests, which acts as spur to the creative process (Storr 1972: 237). As British writer and director Chris Petit explained, discussing the process of making his 1997 film The Falconer: “I was interested in seeing if there was a way of producing a film which was constructed more like writing – because when you are writing something you don’t know where it will end up.” (screenonline 2006).

Central Conflict Theory

Chilean writer and director Raul Ruiz expresses his astonishment at the assumptions underlying what he terms the ‘central conflict theory’ popularised by the screenwriting gurus. Rather than being drawn from many cultures, the idea that conflict drives all behaviours drawn from one particular culture, he argues - that of the United States. Consequently, the central conflict theory of stories excludes far more than it includes (Ruiz 1995: 21). Ruiz is just one of those who reject the universalising tendency to see myths as stable and unchanging, equally relevant to all cultures across all times. Historian,
Robert Darnton, for example, argues that it is the differences and discontinuities between versions of folk tales in different cultures in different eras that are far more revealing than the similarities and continuities (Darnton 2000).

Wim Wenders, too, is particularly critical of overarching notions of Story:

Directors, writers, producers work for years sometimes to develop The Story. …To get the story right is the paramount objective, more so than ever. The actors are exchangeable, the director, too, of course, and so is everybody else, except for The Story. (Wenders 2001)

Film theorist Jean-Pierre Geuens argues that the over-emphasis on scripted stories in contemporary American cinema does not necessarily contribute to the production of good films. For Geuens, the primary purpose of these scripts is to deliver core stories that can then be controlled by executives throughout the production process. Scripts do not always represent the beginning of a collaborative production process, but can become ends in themselves. Writing about Hollywood, he asserts:

The fundamental concern of writers is to pitch to catch the interest of agents, readers and producers during a pitch session…The goal of writers is to come up with a screenplay that flies, material that pitches well. They no longer care what happens on the screen. (Geuens 2000: 88)

Writing from Images

In 1996 my short feature Parklands was released. I began research and writing the project in the early 1990’s. Its writing process might best be described as a search for form. I began by writing a feature length thriller, drawing heavily on research into the corruption in police forces in the 1980s, especially the South Australian Police Force. Reviewing the first draft, however, I found that the conventions of the genre had not allowed me to explore fully the ideas, images and dramatic scenarios that had initially inspired the project. Re-conceiving the project as essayistic fiction, I began again by writing a treatment that collaged key images and excerpts from a policeman’s diaries and place and character. It even included notes about writing and the term I had borrowed from Wenders, ‘broken stories’. The next stage of the development of Parklands involved further research into settings, characters and colour palettes. I compiled lists, from the favourite foods of the central character through to a chronology of the cars that he had owned in the course of his life. As part of this development phase, I wrote an essay Morris Blue (Millard 1994: 122).

Excerpt from Morris Blue:

Family legend had it that Dad once had a red sports car. But along with a family and three children came a succession of blue Morries. Old Morries. Always blue. One after the other. I seem to remember the sports car of Dad’s youth being advertised in the paper and someone coming to collect it. I remember that bright red – it was almost scarlet – disappearing down the driveway. A hot summer’s evening, the sound of the footsteps on the gravel drive and the red sport scar being towed away.

Like the cars of its era, the blue Morris offers the possibility of freedom. When it gets really hot, there are trips to the beach. Dad’s a policeman. At the wheel, he never really loses his sense of being on patrol. (1994)

I fed images and ideas back forth from the essay and the script. In Parkland’s voiceover narration, I drew on the image of patrolling:
This process was not only designed to generate new images and possibilities for scenes, but to keep the project imaginatively alive through what I anticipated would be a lengthy process of development and fund raising. Although the script subsequently went through many formal drafts in order to raise production funds, the initial collage of images and fragments of text became the document to which I returned over and over throughout the production, considering the film’s, look, design and shape and in working with the actors. Parklands further fuelled my interest in less traditional scripting processes.

Atom Egoyan, commenting on his own preference for complex, fragmented screen stories, observes that it is only possible to script for overall shape and dramatic coherence in such films; it is inevitable that the actual fragments that make up the overall design will be shifted and re-arranged in post-production. He observes:

One of the most important decisions you make is not necessarily the material you are working on but the production apparatus that you choose to develop the project with…(Burnett 1988)

The work of many screenwriters and filmmakers is, of course, inspired by working with images. Acclaimed playwright, screenwriter and novelist Jean-Claude Carriére described his process of working with Jean-Luc Godard.

He would collect images that for some reason meant something to him; obsessed him; a landscape, the face of an actor, a photograph from a newspaper. Then he would show these to me and ask…Is there a scene in that? (Geuer 2000: 89)

Wenders, who produces work across the media of film and photography, finds the beginnings of his stories in still photographs: “Within every photograph there is also the beginning of a story” (Wenders 2001: 12). Maps are like screenplays. They suggest possibilities for story; they imply dramatic tension, rather than dictating the Story:

I started (Wings of Desire) without a script. On my wall in my office I just had loots of pictures, photographs and Polaroids of all the places that had to appear in the film and of all sorts of people I wanted to discover via these angels, and lots of ideas for scenes. Possibilities were endless. These angels could appear anywhere, and through their perception anything could be revealed. Not only were they invisible,
they could also hear people’s most secret thoughts.” (Wenders 2001)

Figure 1 & 2: *Wings of Desire* (1987) Wim Wenders, West Germany/France

Wender’s insists that he wants to make films about the times in which he lives, all aspects of those times. Consequently, his films de-emphasise dramatic high points and emphasise instead spaces that could almost be seen as empty. His films struggle with the tensions between images and stories: “I like the word insight. It suggests you can have truth and understanding just from seeing...For me, seeing is immersing myself in the world” (Wenders 1997: 46). Graf suggests that one of the features of Wender’s films is their open, episodic form: “a strategy to minimise the dominance of story in a film as well as the similarity of their narratives to conventional filmic narration” (Graf 2003: 49). Consequently, many of his stories unfold on the road.
Perhaps appropriately for a film that records a journey, Michael Winterbottom’s *In This World* (2003) was filmed from an outline more like a map than the usual summary of plot and character. The story of two young Afghan refugees and their clandestine journey from Pakistan to London, *In This World* - a screen hybrid combining documentary and fictional techniques - was shot on a digital camera using available light. In the film’s Production Notes, Tony Grisoni, the screenwriter explains that he began researching the script by reading literally hundreds of first hand accounts of refugees’ experiences, followed by interviews with those willing to contribute. Grisoni and Winterbottom then traveled from London to Pakistan in late 2001 - a particularly turbulent period in the region post 9/11 - taking note of places and situations that might be incorporated into their planned film. Grisoni wrote an outline by mapping out a geographical spine of the story. This material was supplemented with notes on character and lines of possible dialogue: “Such an approach allowed for flexibility in terms of narrative while also accommodating non-professional actors” (Rotten Tomatoes). “There was never really a script”, Grisoni says (BBC Films2003). “Instead of a narrative we had a 25-30 page outline which named places, how (the characters) traveled there, border crossing points and how they crossed them” (Rotten Tomatoes). The screenwriter also had an unusually active role in setting up scenes during the shooting of *In This World*: “As we were filming, I went on ahead and found people and places to fit into our scheme and our idea of what the journey was going to be and where we were going to go. Because we were working in such a fluid way, we were always open to what we found and then responded to that” (BBC Films2003).

**Story Design**

Drawing on his own body of work as a filmmaker, Ruiz proposes an open story structure based on *ars combinatoria*:

A system of multiple stories overlapping according to certain established rules. This process is capable of generating new stories. For example, ten themes or designs (like designs in a Persian carpet), storylines
which are both dramas and vectors. ..This is not just a way of writing but filming. (Ruiz 1995: 88-9)

For Ruiz, such story designs work better when they arise during the shoot. For him, there is no need to make any distinction between writing and shooting, since both are a part of the same process. This is not dissimilar from a scripting method favoured by the extremely inventive Wong Kar Wai.

Writing about Wong Kar Wai’s Fallen Angels (1995), Tony Rayns comments: “Scenes turn out to be linked as much by the rhythms of movement and colour as by theme and motif; what starts out looking like a patchwork turns out to be a fauvist mosaic” (Rayns 1995). Peter Brunette, too, notes that Wong often privileges visual and audio expressivity over narrative structure. (Brunette 2005: 54) Like the films of Wim Wenders, locations and places assume considerable significance. Both Chungking Express (1994) and Wings of Desire (1987) could almost be seen as love letters to Hong Kong and Berlin respectively.

In an interview on the completion of In The Mood for Love, Wong says that he initially imagined himself as a director like Hitchcock who would do a great deal of pre-planning. However, he soon found himself departing from his scripts and technical preparation, making a lot of changes on set. Chungking Express, produced during a break in production for Ashes of Time, was written as it was made. Wong wrote during the day and filmed the city at night: “We didn’t have any permits, we didn’t have any set-ups, we just went to places we already knew well” (Pomeranz 2006). Wong insists on the role of intangibles such as images, sound and music in the scripting and production process. Like those of Antonioni, his films are informed by the idea that “abstract lines, and forms, and shapes, and colours can give emotional meaning and expression just as much as narrative lines, dialogue and characters” (Brunette 2005: 119).

You can’t write all your images on paper, and there are so many things – the sound, the music, the ambience, and also the actors – when you’re writing all these details in the script, the script has no tempo, it’s not readable. It’s very boring. So I just thought, it’s not a good idea (to write out a complete script beforehand) and I just wrote down the scenes, some essential details, and the dialogue. (Brunette 2006: 126)

Wong, who trained as graphic designer and then wrote television scripts for many years, attributes part of his current working methodology to his background making television and films in Hong Kong. When he began working in the Hong Kong film industry, films were typically produced in a month. The director and production team often began the production process with a story – not necessarily written down - and assigned locations. Writing was something that happened along the way. An important part of the director’s process now involves playing music on set to key collaborators, including director of photography, Chris Doyle and the actors. While many other directors, like Wong, play music on set in order to communicate or shape the rhythms of the camera or performances, it is less usual to view music as a substitute for more conventional scripting. Playing music to his collaborators, suggests Wong, is far more effective than asking them to read a script. Typically, his scripts begin with two or three short stories which are integrated in the process of shooting and editing the film. In an interview, he elaborated further on the reasons for this working method.

Sometimes people think, "Well, why don't you work with a script?" I said, "The script is only a part of this process. It's only the foundations. It is only a blueprint." If a script is good enough, then you should be a writer, make it into a novel. Cinema has certain qualities, and it's the image. Sometimes this image has its own breathing or tempo. It has to linger, and will linger because you want to have more. (Pomeranz 2006)

For Wong, all scripts are post-production scripts; that is, documents that record decisions that have already been taken.
Improvising with the Camera

Independent American feature film, suggests film theorist Geoff King, while primarily a narrative form, tends to have more in common with international art cinema than classic Hollywood cinema. In particular, these films are likely to be characterised by a looser, de-centred sense of narrative drive or by a greater degree of structural complexity (King 1995: 60). The methodologies of many independent and art-house filmmakers – including Wong Kar Wai, Wim Wenders and Gus Van Sant – could perhaps best described as ‘improvisations with the camera’. While the potential for improvised performances is being increasingly explored in the digital environment – after all, improvisations with actors are one of the staples of the digital cinema movement, from Dogma to the US indie scene – there is, of course, just as much potential for improvising around other elements of a film. Atom Egoyan observes that his film Family Viewing (1987) was not improvised in terms of the actors’ performances but “in terms of the design of the film, the choreography of the various shots” (Burnett 1998).

While the emergence of digital cinema (and more fluid relationships between the stages of planning, shooting, editing and post production that it makes possible) has accelerated the interest in less prescriptive methods of scripting and filmmaking, it is important to note that working processes like these have existed since the earliest days of cinema. Gus Van Sant is one of many who look back to early cinema to reinvent their own practices. In his case, the actuality films of the Lumiere Brothers provide inspiration. In the late 1890s and early 1900s coverage in actualities was much simpler, allowing audiences to watch the story events unfold. The filmmaking machine now however, requires scripts that allow the many departments and crew members to pre-plan the production. More and more, scripts are managerial tools. In contrast, shooting Van Sant’s Gerry (2002): “We didn’t have production designers or a lighting department – we were shooting in the desert. Since we didn’t have to plan those things, we didn’t get locked in. We just had a selection of locations, and we chose at that moment, or maybe the day before, where to shoot” (Macauley 2002). Van Sant’s current project - Gerry (2002), Elephant (2003) and Last Days (2005) - involves simplifying and clarifying every aspect of his writing and directorial practices; using outlines instead of scripts, reducing coverage to master shots, and eschewing non-diegetic music as much as possible.

Atom Egoyan, reflecting on his early work in an interview with John Tusa, distinguishes between films intended for small audiences and those intended for commercial distribution. Higher budget levels, he argues, demand a greater responsibility on the part of the filmmaker to deliver on audience expectations. Many of the films that he produced earlier in his career...
(Family Viewing, The Adjuster) were not intended for commercial distribution. This, however, is yet another boundary that is blurring in the contemporary world as new delivery platforms and modes of distribution foster the development of niche audiences and networks.

Increasingly, too, the script workshops that are popping up everywhere make assumptions about the process of writing screenplays. In 2004, for example, Gus Van Sant was invited to participate in the New South Wales based Aurora workshop as an instructor and mentor. In order to be eligible for the competitive selection process, applicants were required to submit second draft screenplays. The Australian film industry – like its counterpart in the United States – has adopted a series of fairly rigid conventions about how dramatic screenplays should be written and presented, sometimes even down to the use of specific fonts. Yet, many of Van Sant’s own films are not based on conventional scripts. The Palme d’Or winning Elephant, for example, was improvised on set from an outline. It is difficult to understand why a range of script materials could not be considered; from collections of images and texts, poetic narratives, film-works in progress – the possibilities are many. Given his recent scripting methodologies it is perhaps not surprising that in a media interview during his visit to Sydney, Van Sant advocated that the writer, producer and director teams participating in the scripting workshop would be better advised to take the $30,000 script development funds and begin shooting their films. Commenting on the development process common in North America, Atom Egoyan says: “The whole attitude of a lot of film organisations is that you delay the process of filming until the last possible moment. In the case of a film like Family Viewing it is all about the opposite, about taking certain types of risk and seeing whether or not you can succeed” (Burnett 1988).

In a recent review of Tarnation (Cauoette 2003), writer Helen Garner speculates on the limited range of narrative strategies explored within contemporary cinema: “I have often wondered why cinema so rarely makes full use of what it can do better than any other art form except perhaps music; recreate the mind's random movements, its swooping back and forth in time, its fleeting connections and smashes, its lightening recoveries” (Garner 2006). For American screenwriting theorist, Howard Rodman, the over-emphasis on utilitarian screenplays, aimed primarily at attracting actors on the route to production finance, has contributed to a lack of life in contemporary screenplays. The complexity, beauty and messiness of life has been edited out of the picture, he complains: “The screenplay needs to be freed from utility. It needs to forget its planned itinerary – to open itself up to the beauty and terror glimpsed at the periphery of one’s vision” (Rodman 2006: 1).

I would argue that the processes of filmmakers from Chaplin and the Lumiere Brothers, to Wenders, Wong and Van Sant, all offer new possibilities for revitalising cinematic scriptwriting. The pre-planned, conflict-driven Story, evangelised in texts and seminars around the globe, points towards a narrow and overly prescriptive conception of cinema. Much can be learnt about the possibilities of cinema by examining how filmmakers have written, revised, rewritten and refined cinematic texts in the process of shooting, designing, editing and post producing their films. Studying scripts and their structures can only get us so far; examining instead how filmmakers have worked with images, and the traces that they and their collaborators have left of those journeys, returns us to the possibilities of cinema. After all, inherent in the caméra-stylo advocated by Alexander Astuc, was the idea that a more fluid way of writing with the camera would allow filmmakers to explore new philosophies, new world views.

References


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