

Panel 27
Film, Phenomenology and Storytelling

**‘The Book of the Film’:
Inscribing the Cinematic Experience**
Benjamin Alexander Slater
Nanyang Technological University

This paper explores what happens when a writer reconfigures a film into prose. Not as plot summary or textual analysis, but as a sustained act of using written language to evoke, track, and in some ways document the complex interplay of elements that constitute cinema. This ‘film-to-text’ translation occurs in critical writing of various kinds, including creative nonfiction and memoirs. It could also be viewed as adjacent to writing novelisations (commercial adaptations of films into novels), a denigrated literary form. I’m interested in how ‘Thick Description’ (Geertz) can be used not only to describe films but to convey the experience of watching a film, and the various levels of memory related to film watching. This includes misremembering sequences and even re-imagining films that have had a significant impact on us. I will briefly survey the history of books that attempt to textually re-present a film from beginning to end, starting with Jonathan Rosenbaum’s *Moving Places* and Raymond Durgnat’s *A Long Hard Look at Psycho*, moving on to Jonathan Lethem’s *They Live*, Geoff Dyer’s *Zona*, Nathalie Léger’s *Suite for Barbara Loden*, and Ander Monson’s *Predator*. These writers interweave filmic description with memories, commentary, digressions, and personal reflection, producing a intermedial form that sits between literature, criticism, and cinema. I will also reflect upon my own practice of this writing within my creative PhD thesis, *Lost Cinema*.

Biography

Benjamin Alexander Slater is a writer and educator who has been teaching at Nanyang Technological University since 2010, where he is a Senior Lecturer. He has written extensively on film, and has worked as screenwriter and script advisor on film and television projects.