

NOTE TO THE READER, ALSO A LISTENER AND SEER

This is a book about experience in a world that looks and feels so much like cinema—the sensory textures of this experience, and the circumstances of their crafting. Books on cinema typically focus on films already known for their critical value or popular appeal. They are usually written with the assumption that their readers would know something about these films.

This book, however, concerns a Tamil cinema still marginal in the contemporary world. More to the point, my choice of films is almost purely an accident of ethnographic circumstance: it so happened that I found myself in the midst of these projects as they unfolded.

What follows is therefore written with no assumption that you do know, or even should know, anything about these particular films. The chapters take up various cinematic moments as events in their own right, and my hope is that these stories will hold all that you may need as a reader. Still, though, I'm guessing that you might sometimes want a bit more—after all, the book seeks to think with the tangible sensations of cinema.

If and when such curiosity strikes, there is a website, www.reelworldbook.org, meant to accompany this book. There you'll find a number of photographs and film clips that may resonate with the words that follow here, each keyed to one section of a particular chapter.

These are images and sounds that confronted me ceaselessly in the writing of this book. But I'd like to think that you might also see and hear them, or something like them, even as you thumb through these pages. This is something that tends to happen in a world of pervasive cinema. I'm trusting that your faculties have gotten as restless and entangled as mine.

