

Artistic Research in Film and Philosophy

Artistic Research in Film and Philosophy:

Transversal Interlacings

Edited by

Christine Reeh-Peters and Stefan Winter

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2026

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN: 978-1-0364-6246-8

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-6247-5

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTINE REEH-PETERS
AND STEFAN WINTER

Christine Reeh-Peters: Let me start with how we conceived the title of this anthology. First, “transversality” originally stems from topological mathematics, namely Georg Cantor’s set theory, and was picked up by philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre, and, finally, by Félix Guattari as a concept of institutional transformation and political activism. It is opposed to both verticality (in relation to hierarchies and power structures) and horizontality. Transversality thus reveals different ways of perceiving and relating that constitute new types of groupings or institutions. Its central idea intends to substitute dominant power relations, designating an associative principle of an a-central multirelationality, which interconnects different topics and levels not in the expected way, beyond hierarchical standards and norms. Relying on transversal principles further implies framing different practices of experimentation and favours multiperspectivity in a dynamic and process-based way: transversality is a concept that implies movement and transformation. In the context of aesthetics, transversality refers to forms of art that transverse existing structures. By choosing to integrate the word transversality in the title, we intended to favour a kind of artistic research (AR) in film which opens up new approaches, affinities, and entangled relationships between different artistic and audiovisual practices and discourses. Transversality has a political meaning, which reflects on how to transverse power relations in the art world and how the presupposed supremacy of science coins the existing framework.

Second, the word “interlacing” refers to the interweaving, intertwining, entangling, integrating, and interconnecting ways through which transversality is happening. It evokes the entanglement designated in quantum physics when particles of differently defined states become dynamic composites when regarded as one system.

Thirdly, the term “film” is used in the sense of an all-encompassing concept for various forms of audiovisual media such as cinema, television,

video, experimental film, etc. and differs from the designation of single films or movies.

Fourth, the overarching word “philosophy” stands for different definitions, approaches, and fields of thought and what they may have in common as a background or origin. Philosophy is therefore to be understood as a term of plurality, as “philosophies”.

However, and this comes in fifth place, a consensual understanding of “AR” or “AR in film” could not be referenced as a premise.

Stefan Winter: In the European sphere, we had a broad and vivid debate about AR that started in the 1980s in the UK and led to the development of various AR cultures, unfolding in accordance with their particular understanding of AR and their institutional framework conditions. In about ten European countries, there is state funding and national representation for AR, and institutions of higher education offer an artistic PhD that in some places has existed for more than twenty years. In these countries, archives of well documented AR works can be referenced, and consistent AR communities have been established. In other countries, however, these three features are not yet in place—in Germany, e.g., there is no state funding for AR available and no artistic PhD format offered in higher education institutions; only a scientific-artistic PhD format is accessible. So, the profile that AR shows in Europe is quite heterogeneous. While the Dublin Descriptors, which lay out the qualification objectives for first, second, and third cycle education in the European Bologna format, have, since 2005, acknowledged AR as a genuine kind of research on its own ground, authorities at German institutions and a broad majority of scholars still maintain that AR research should take place exclusively in the sciences and humanities.

CRP: In German, the word “research” is translated as “Forschung” and for many scholars has an exclusively scientific connotation. From that perspective “Forschung” contradicts what was intended by the designation “AR” in the UK where the term originated. In the wider Anglo-Saxon world, there are the terms “practice-based research” or even “creative research”. Practice-based research is a more overarching term that does not necessarily include an artistic perspective. It can also designate, for example, technology-based research. The fact that it is often used as a synonym for AR makes it difficult to achieve a uniform understanding of the wording “AR”.

In this context, I would like to point out the diversity of positions engaged in defining what AR is. First is the growing importance of the fine

arts market on the regulation of artistic production and the dependence of artists on recognition in such a market that is ruled by the laws of capital investment and by a logic of social exclusivity in the sense of cultural elitism. Although multilayered in its different manifestations, the market often severely restricts artistic freedom of production, because it understands art production as entangled with demand and exclusivity: low demand and few limits to accessibility (i.e., everybody can buy it) means low prices and little recognition for the artist. Art fairs are often criticized as “shopping malls for the rich” who desire to transform their economic capital into cultural capital. At the same time, the fine arts market has become increasingly conservative due to numerous crises, including economic ones. And in this context, AR simply means the freedom of artistic experimentation, to dare to do something independent from the demands of the market. This gives AR a radical and political stance. The counterargument for such a definition of AR is that the fine arts market should be regarded separately from the quality of the artwork anyway; one is art, the other is the market and its rules, therefore a market-independent production cannot be at all a criterion for AR but simply a basic condition for the emergence of art itself.

In any case, this logic does not apply to cinema and the film industry, whose origins lie not in an elite cultural context, but in a popular one. Cinema, and this is the origin of every narrative form of film, was born in the fairgrounds together with the development of the technical possibilities of audiovisual reproduction. Although there is a melding with Richard Wagner’s experiments in his “Gesamtkunstwerk” as a new kind of immersive dramatic form, the technical possibility of reproducing the image triggered the demand of the masses to have access to what had been reserved for the elites—art. And cinema is the art form whose genesis and market are directly based on reproducibility, distribution, and audience numbers. There is no “original” in cinema or an exclusivity of presence, and an aura (such as the star system) arises differently and has a different significance than in the fine arts. This shows that it is complicated to define AR with valid criteria that apply to all art media and why it is worth thinking about AR in film separately: there is AR in film within the system of the fine arts (linked to the art market) and there is AR in film in connection with the film industry.

Secondly, there is the view on AR as a kind of avant-garde stance in art production. I use this phrasing because the term *avant-garde* in the fine arts usually refers to art movements or positions that break with the status quo of what is considered art. It may be seen as neoteric and transgressive. Because of its radical stance and because it defies (pre)existing practices,

procedures, criteria, and concepts, avant-garde art has often been discussed controversially and rejected. AR fulfils this definition because it has its own rules, processes, and forms of artistic practice; it works with its own means and in its own contexts of experimentation. It questions and challenges existing rules and boundaries. It is innovative in the sense of differing from preceding forms of art creation, and it is controversially discussed and even rejected. Nevertheless, such a definition of AR can be refuted by arguing that AR has been present in art production since the origins of modern art, even if it has not been designated as such. An acclaimed example is the research practice of Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci.

And then there is a third current that claims that AR is something that explores the boundaries between science and art, between theory and practice. What is often demanded here is a theoretically or even scientifically formulable interrogation that can be pursued with artistic means. As a result, there is an intelligible meta-reflection that is often put into words. Such discourse accompanies the artistic process, which no longer stands alone but works together with critical reflection, and very often is documented. It is often argued hereby that the borders between art theory and artistic practice blur and that a “theorization of the arts” moves towards a “becoming art of theory”.

These are the three main discourses on AR that I see, and they are all controversially discussed. The conversation gets even more complicated when we look at different art forms, such as film, theatre, performance, music. There are very different possibilities and practices of AR, which are conditioned by the nature of the artistic media, their social context, and their cultural history.

SW: When I look back at the European debate on AR, in which I have taken part since 2007, it has clarified in my view that AR is a genuine and autonomous way of research. It works in its own languages, e.g., in the pictorial language of photography or in the audiovisual language of film. AR uses its own tools and procedures; it follows its own laws and criteria. This is evident in artistic practice as well as in artistic reflection. When working with colleagues from the arts, sciences, humanities, and technology development, I have witnessed that these knowledge cultures often have difficulties communicating among each other on their respective methods, working processes, and so forth. From my own background, I think that philosophy can build bridges between the various knowledge cultures, and in this respect, I characterise AR by three core competencies:

The first competence is analysing and criticising. AR illuminates the structures and processes of society. It enquires into ways of thinking, attitudes, and forms of behaviour. It analyses forms of perception and desire. It asks how the identity of individuals is built. It reflects on the media and the means of artistic work. In its analyses, AR puts us at a distance from the self-evident—it makes familiar things unknown and thus allows us to see them anew, to rediscover them.

The second competence is projecting and designing. AR opens up new horizons. It sets up new spaces. It creates new meanings. It builds cultural and aesthetic identities. It projects new ways of being in the world. It creates a knowledge of the possible. It thinks in scenarios. These scenarios can be whole utopias or dystopias.

The third competence is drifting and navigating. The transformation of society often takes the form of a turbulent current. That is, we encounter an unknown future that is not already determined in advance by the laws of the past. Adventure opens up in breaks and leaps, in unforeseen spaces of possibility, in chance and risk. Art has experience with movements of this kind. It constantly deals with the unknown. It is constantly in dialogue with something that calls for form. In daily experience, art builds up a knowledge of how we can move in open systems, in turbulent currents.¹

All of this, however, could be considered as elements for a description of what art is, if it lives up to its potentialities. So why do I employ the term “AR”? I use it firstly because the ability to open insights and new horizons that has traditionally been assigned to art came to be superseded by what I call “mere art production,” in which no question is asked and no new perspectives are put forth, but instead a commodity is produced that can be sold in the galleries and art fairs. And secondly, I use the term to designate an artistic practice in which the artists are ready to lay open and reflect their working processes and the contexts with which they interact. This can be done by writing in a poetic, essayistic, or scientific format, or it can be done in the respective artistic medium itself. And again, this can be found already in the arts of former times.

In his *Trattato della pittura* (1482–1519), Leonardo da Vinci saw painting as “prima scientia”, the first and foremost knowledge in all the

¹ Stefan Winter, “Exposure to the Unknown. Artistic Research in the European Sphere”, in *How Does Artistic Research Decolonise Knowledge and Practice in Africa?*, ed. Christo Doherty, 109–115 (Johannesburg: Wits Wired Space 2020).

spheres below theology. During the Renaissance, art, science, and technology were three knowledge cultures that worked together in productive ways. In all subsequent changes of this constellation, their exchange and cooperation continued up to the times of German idealism, where they were still affiliated in an overarching unity of knowledge that was claimed by philosophy. In modern times, however, from the early nineteenth century on, these knowledge cultures separated, and it is only over the past perhaps three decades that they increasingly cooperate again in mobile constellations. In our networked societies, it has become increasingly clear that the complex questions of orientation and transformation can only be answered via new cooperations between art, science, and technology development.

CRP: In my opinion, all this you just said means that art is always in a state of flux, and it has changed its significance, meaning, and social function throughout centuries.

On the one hand, AR has not been a broader theme or present in discourse before the last decades of the twentieth century. It is something that has evolved with the flow of the contemporary society and its emerging social and political needs, discursive and self-reflective necessities, as we can see in the characterization of your competences. It goes hand-in-hand with an increasing crisis of democracy: a lack of social cohesion, the disappearance of critical discourse in public debate, and the rise of the so-called post-factual age. In any case, an underlying and unresolved question in what you just said seems to be the quality of art: Is AR a criterion for “good art” while what you call “mere art production” is a symptom of “bad art”? Analytic philosophy of art has advanced on this matter in parallel to the growing debate on AR.

On the other hand, society changes its relationship to the arts through emerging media and new art forms. There has always been an interplay between technology, science, and art. The history of the emergence of the film medium confirms this: with the invention of the photographic reproduction, art itself changed, for example, it has been freed from the demand of realist depictions of physical reality and of craftsmanship. Furthermore, the relationship between art and society has changed, namely, between art and the urban masses, who are a result of industrialization. As I have already said, the cultural origin of film is the fairgrounds, and its form is based on its mass reproducibility, which technological means made possible. It resulted from the demand of the masses to get access and, entangled with it, the cultural retreat of the social elites into a high-priced fine arts market and its institutions—an exclusive market that responds to

the demand of accessibility by the masses via the public museum. They are institutions that were born together with industrialization and the subsequent growing urbanization, and in parallel to the rise of what Vilém Flusser calls the technical image and, with it, the reproducibility of any kind of picture or artwork. This had huge consequences on science as well as on the humanities, for example, art history was reborn. It is necessary to keep in mind that photography and film are the first art media to rely on technical images—images that are not handcrafted and whose creation builds on nonhuman input, an automatic mechanism. Art should thus not be seen as a closed system that stands on its own or without a cultural, technological, and a socio-political context. You mentioned the necessity of new cooperations between arts, sciences, and technology development. Could you define what you mean exactly mean by science, in this cooperative, contemporary sense?

SW: The character of modern science itself prefigures a collaboration with the arts. Hegel resumed the epochs of metaphysics in his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* where timeless essence (*Wesen*) and temporal appearance (*Erscheinung*), ideal forms and real objects, were an inseparable unity. The productive forms of divine reason were revealed to the human subject as being the essential forms in which all things come to be and pass away. And since these forms are conceived in their unity and purpose, being is “completely transparent” in Hegel’s absolute science.² In the field of science, the radical change into modernity—which is tearing this unity apart—can be seen early and exemplarily in the first non-Euclidean geometry, developed by Gauss from 1817 to 1824. Gauss looked at Hegel’s presentation of mathematics, considered the foundation of Euclidean geometry as a hypothesis, and thus felt free to replace it by another hypothesis from which he derived a coherent geometrical system of curved space. Gauss was left with two alternative systems of geometry and noted that by no means was he able to determine which system of ideal forms and relations would *represent* real spatiality and spatial relations. In this indeterminability, the old mediation between being and knowledge, was undone, and the character of science changed. Modern science no longer presents its subject matter in a natural given order of meaning, in an order of representation, but instead throws a net of conceptual terms over a field of objects that are essentially unknown in order to determine and design them.

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic, The Doctrine of the Notion*, III. 3., trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 752.

Georg Cantor, the creator of set theory, succinctly summarised the features of this new scientific character in 1883:

Mathematics is in its development entirely free and is only bound in the self-evident respect that its concepts must both be consistent with each other and also stand in exact relationships, ordered by definitions, to those concepts that have previously been introduced. . . . Every mathematical concept carries within itself the necessary corrective: if it is fruitless or unsuited to its purpose, then that appears very soon through its uselessness, and it will be abandoned for lack of success. . . .³

A few years later, Edmund Husserl considered mathematical theory to be a “technical work of art”.⁴ He later remarked in a critical impulse: “It has always been overlooked that this universe of determinacies in itself, in which exact science grasps the universe of that which is, is nothing but a garment of ideas thrown over the world of immediate perception and experience, over the life-world. . . .”⁵ And it is clear that this “Ideenkleid” can be changed. The temporal movement, which in the epochs of metaphysics was bound under an overarching roof of timeless forms, is unleashed and captures the scientific nets of concepts themselves, as one system of determination can be replaced by the next one at any time, in an open series of paradigm shifts. From the beginning of modernity into the present, the sciences have shown ever more clearly that they do not describe how things are, but that they produce models for how things can be determined and shaped.

In this condition, arts and sciences converge, as both explore and unfold the motif of a time. Roman Jakobson, for example, pointed out that Einstein and Picasso both expressed and developed the main motif of their time, namely dynamisation, but that they did this, of course, in different fields; while Einstein built a physics in which space itself is in motion, Picasso mobilised the pictorial space in which we see the world. The theory of

³ Georg Cantor, “Foundations of a General Theory of Manifolds: A Mathematico-Philosophical Investigation into the Theory of the Infinite,” in *Kant to Hilbert: A Source Book in the Foundations of Mathematics*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. William Ewald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1886] 1996), 896.

⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge, [1900] 1970), 159.

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, trans. James Spencer Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press [1919–20] 1973), 44–45.

relativity and the technique of cubist painting thus both answer to the same question.⁶

And as arts and sciences are both ways of interpreting and shaping the world, they also meet in a common productivity where they can learn from each other. Neurophysiologist Wolf Singer has emphasised this point of convergence: “The creative process in science is the same as in art . . . The artist creates new realities and new interpretations, which is also what the scientist does when he creates a model of what can be experienced”.⁷

In this convergence, however, it is precisely the differences that are exciting and that are precious in a cooperation at eye level. AR is not illustrating scientific research results or communicating advanced technologies—this is left to science communication—but is able to discuss and situate the presuppositions, approaches, and limits of the scientific culture.

CRP: I think this convergence between art and science reflects the very genesis of AR, and, moreover, it characterises its relationship with philosophy. There are, in my opinion, broad areas of convergence between AR and philosophy, and they differ from the relationship between art and philosophy as well as from philosophy of art and philosophical aesthetics. Many thinkers and theorists distinguish philosophy from science. They argue for philosophy as a discipline that raises questions science cannot ask and is thus situated where the grasp of science ends. There is a famous quote by Heidegger that “science does not think”,⁸ but what he meant is that science cannot reflect on its own methods and tools. For Heidegger, “thinking” has a very specific meaning—it is something we are not doing yet. Consequently, Heidegger calls for a new beginning of thinking, together with an “end of philosophy”,⁹ and he examines art and poetry in this context as well. Despite the ongoing discussions about the relationship between AR and science, there rarely is a reflection on how AR and philosophy may be entangled. I find it extremely fruitful to raise the subject in the context of asking about the kind of epistemic knowledge that we gain

⁶ Roman Jakobson, “Futurism”, in *Selected Writings Vol III*, ed. Stephen Rudy (The Hague: De Gruyter, [1919] 1981), 717–723.

⁷ Wolf Singer, “Wahrnehmen ist das Verifizieren von vorausgeträumten Hypothesen”. *Kunstforum International*, Vol. 124 (Nov./Dec. 1993): 128; *Ein neues Menschenbild? Gespräche über Hirnforschung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 80. Translation mine.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper, 1968), 8.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”, in *On Time and Being*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper, 1972).

through AR. For me, arguing from a philosophy background, and in addition to what I have already said, epistemic knowledge is directly related to epistemology, a branch of philosophy. So, I propose to take a closer look at this complex and multilayered convergence between philosophy and AR, which does not mean a permanent coincidence, but rather a merging in which both become indistinguishable.

Furthermore, and analogous to your way of argumentation, I propose the hypothesis to regard philosophy as a practice that may be based on fictive principles. For example, in my book *Being and Film*,¹⁰ I delineated the so-called solaristic system, a philosophical system based on the movie *Solaris* by Andrei Tarkovsky. The idea was to draft philosophical principles in dialogue with that fictional movie. The solaristic system is based on fictive principles, fictional in their origin. As I have argued hereby,¹¹ my idea to associate philosophy with fictive principles is inspired by Paul Ricoeur, who has shown that reality adapts to our models of explanation; that is, concerning reality, the models of science would function like metaphors in poetry. By “re-describing” what is called “reality”, they modify what they refer to. Ricoeur grounds his theory on the work of Mary Hesse, a philosopher of science who argues that the way we grasp reality in the form of knowledge depends on a construction, shaped by an applied model of analysis. Hesse delineates an open concept of reality oscillating between inside and outside, interceding at the gap between subject and object, complementing a predefined model of explanation. And Paul Ricoeur, based on Hesse, asserts that we actually shape reality by metaphorical models of explanation. Yet such an idea implies that we do make up these explanations, which seem to fit reality as they shape reality, in a metaphorical way. We create reality by the way we think about it.

I therefore distinguish the word “fictional” from “fictive”; In English fictional refers to literature or the film genre, whereas fictive designates a relationship that is imaginative yet anchored in reality. For example, I call the best friend of my mother my “aunt”, although she has no biological kinship with me. It is a fictive family relation. This means that fictive principles of thought, although they are imagined, relate in a way to reality that projects and shapes reality.

Often ignored in the debate among German scholars of the humanities are the French currents of philosophical reflection from the second half of the twentieth century—Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, and so on. Here we find numerous and very different approaches in which art

¹⁰ Christine Reeh-Peters, *Being and Film—A Fictive Ontology of Film in Tarkovsky’s Solaris* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123–124, 159–160.

and philosophy enter a productive dialog with each other. Hereby art becomes an enriching partner for further philosophical reflection. Deleuze and Guattari, for example, have this idea that there are three creative practices: science, art, and philosophy. They explicitly distinguish them in their nature. Philosophy as a creative practice means for them the invention of concepts, science the invention of prospects and functions, whereas art means the invention of sensory blocks of percepts and affects.

Deleuze says in *Cinema 2* that there are zones of interference between the creative practices and that in these zones of interference “things happen, beings, images, concepts, all the kinds of events”.¹² It is thereby important to acknowledge about Deleuze that his philosophy is an open system. Of course, many scholars underline that Deleuze, by speaking about “zones of interference”, still separates art from science from philosophy. But as well, it is possible to acknowledge that he closes the cinema books with an open question. And this question refers to the very deep point of the methodology of philosophy itself. Deleuze proposes that maybe we should not try to define what cinema is by philosophical means, but that we should try to define what philosophy is,¹³ precisely due of the richness of concepts that we can create in dialogue with cinema. And this is why I prefer to speak about convergence rather than Deleuzian interference when it comes to AR in film and its relation to philosophy; the transversal side of AR can transform the established discourse about what philosophy is and what film is.

Deleuze was very interested in art, especially in cinema. One reason lies in cinema’s essential foundation on technology, a nonhuman contribution, a mechanical automatism in the creation of images, as I have mentioned before. In other words, and Walter Benjamin as well as André Bazin have stressed this point repeatedly, without the technological development, the photographic image and cinema would not have emerged, and art would not have changed. What differs with cinema, and I have referred to this above already, is its relationship towards the masses—cinema is the first moving image mass medium, followed by television and finally by contemporary social media channels like Instagram or TikTok.

Pier Luigi Sacco said at the SAR conference in 2023 that the times of the isolated artist individuum designing pieces for a white and closed cube, for an exclusive elite public, are over. According to Sacco, the fact that nowadays everyone uses creative means in everyday life points to a collective artistic agency outside the Western art system and raises the

¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 280.

¹³ *Ibid.*

question of the role of art and its relation to society by learning from the Global South.¹⁴ Somehow, cinema became an elite art compared with the online streaming of series and the use of moving images in social media. The new screen for the masses is vertical, the mobile smart phone.

SW: When television came up as a new mass medium, the Situationists were opening a critical discussion about the figure of the star. The figure serves as an “ego ideal”, as a template not for the reproduction, but for the production of lifeworld reality—a template used by people to orient and organise their lives. Instead of actively projecting their own existential ways and possibilities, people passively consume figures of identification and images of ways to live, how to be with the other, as Guy Debord pointed out in his *Society of the Spectacle*. Instead of living the isolated and frozen time that this dispositive engenders, you need to activate the imagination, to actively project how you want to be in the world, and to create “situations”, temporary settings for a shared, vividly flowing time—this was the Situationist credo, inspired by Heidegger’s push for an authentic Dasein, an authentic existence.

When looking at the development of media technology from the Situationist times onwards, we witness a shift away from the passive consumption and reception of audiovisual media towards an active use and production with them. In cinema, the viewer sees the film that is being screened without any possibility to change the programme. The TV set, and later the remote control, allows the viewer to switch channels, introducing some bit of activity to the reception set-up. The videocassette recorder opens up more activity by allowing users to create their own programme, to pause, fast-forward, and rewind a film, and to repeat scenes or frames. The PC introduces an option of activity in secondary production, as you can download, edit, cut, and paste already produced filmic scenes and images. And finally, the smartphone allows everyone to produce, to download, to edit, and to publish videos as well as images.

In comparison to the Situationist times, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the streams of images have multiplied, potentiated, and everyone can now produce and post them on a website or social media, often advertising themselves as commodities. But creativity in producing everyday images must not be confused with art, as is nevertheless often suggested. If a child crafts a Christmas star or potters a vase, this is certainly creative, but it is not art in the sense of AR. Art as AR is undoubtedly an important factor in

¹⁴ Pier Luigi Sacco, “Keynote”, *Too early, too late: The 14th International SAR Conference 2023* (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, April 19, 2023), video, accessed December 8, 2025, <https://sar2023.no/node/86>.

the shaping of existence, and not just as a surplus when everything else has already been determined, but on a basic level of orienting and deciding. But the flood of images and narratives on the internet and social media also serves as a source of orientation for many, analogous to the earlier figure of the star on television. So, the question is how artistic image and film sequences, which can also work with the newest media, relate to the everyday flood of images.

CRP: Of course, there is a certain kind of aesthetic standardisation being implemented by smart phones. Everybody can just create “perfect” images; however, everybody, if he or she learned to hold a pencil, can also write words. So, for me, that is the point. It is first a change of medium. What is art and what is not is another discussion. Just let me stress that the exclusivity of the art world cannot hold its stance, neither politically, nor from the current movements of artistic thinking, of any question of creative agency. It is a difference if I am educated to write text, or if I am educated to express myself and my thoughts via an accumulation of images. The artist of the future, to justify his or her existence, must come up with a completely different kind of discourse or dissolve into mass media. Especially because art is about ideas, and this tendency is reinforced by the new possibilities to create artworks together with algorithmic AI-based systems.

SW: In history, it has often been an artistic impulse that led to the development of new media techniques and technologies, which in turn opened up new artistic potentialities and changed the way we think about reality and interact with each other. An example is so-called renderings. They look like photographic images, but they are not reproductions at all, instead they are producing “reality”. From the image itself, I cannot distinguish between a photograph taken from a real location and a rendering produced in the computer that does not show any real location.

CRP: We have to distinguish between what Flusser calls the technical images, produced by apparatuses, and the nontechnical or traditional images. Flusser says there is a fundamental change from observation to computation and conceptualization of images; thus, in the future, the technical image will change human thinking through its omnipresence. As well, reality and fiction, science and art, should not be thought of as opponents anymore: “The historical distinction between true and false, between reality and fiction, between science and art must fall”.¹⁵ On the one

¹⁵ Vilém Flusser, “The Power of Images,” *Fotograf 34—The Archaeology of Euphoria*: 1985–1995 (October 2019): 100–102.

hand, we have the photographic reference of truth regarding the reality-based image; our reading of digital or synthetic images refers to a photographic credibility and that is why we cannot distinguish between analogue and digital photographic realism.

And that is precisely the reason why the synthetic image that pretends to be reality-based, works so well: we read the same factual truth and the same objectivity out of it as we do out of the photographic image. On the other hand, no photograph is “the truth.” It is never only a reproduction in the form of image and sound, a raw material; rather, it is always a production of something which is partially fictional, just as human perception of reality is.

There are so many blurring borders because of the very grammar of filmmaking and because of the contradictory nature of the film image itself. Badiou has shown very nicely that we do not yet have a definition for the film medium: “Cinema is a new relationship to the Real itself. . . . It is the absence of the Real but as a new form of knowledge”. In my words, we have a new relationship to the real through the negation of the real. It is necessary to realize this contradictory and problematic character of the film image—it is a double-sided constellation that constantly eludes intelligible grasp. That is because there is this machinic element that we still cannot grasp at the end of the day, and which ultimately shows the difference between human and nonhuman knowledge. The latter does something to our perception that we cannot experience otherwise. The film camera allows us to reproduce and therefore to know the perceptions of a machine, which differ from our own.

Our own perceptions are processed into memories by our brain, but with a camera, we press the button and we immediately have recorded perception. The resulting moving image shows exactly the audiovisual signals from that angle, at that place, and at that particular moment. And it doesn't matter whether it's a fiction because there was an actor standing there who just quoted Hamlet, or whether it's my son strolling through the kitchen to the microwave. Both times I pressed the machine button to record, and the machine made an image of this reality. It's something mechanical, and we can use it to bring back time and movement. When there was no film yet, only photography, this unbelievable event happened—the moment of the NOW that doesn't really exist, that always slips away, was suddenly captured in the photograph and eternally prolonged. The astonishment in front of such factuality, and of the machine's ability, is different from all other art media. Real-image based film makes this even more complex, because you have a story and you have fiction—even if it's a so-called documentary, you always add a fictional perspective.

Anyhow, these terms like fiction and truth, or subject and object, are not to be read anymore as excluding contradictions. And this is very important, and it changes when we regard the photographic image. We can no longer have this naive approach that people had one hundred years ago. This whole information system is based on the desire of the objectivity of information. But it has never been given through the photographic image, even though it reproduces physical reality. And that is really the paradox: fiction and nonfiction are entangled in the photographic image and in the reality-based film image. If we really want to take this insight seriously and take the mentioned speculative theories a step further in a philosophical way, we need to build on this paradox, which may as well tell us something about the very nature of what we call reality.

This multilayered complexity is the reason why I like to focus on the essence of the basic cinematic shot, on what is actually happening there. If I may come back to my reflection on the solaristic system, which I read out of the movie *Solaris* by Tarkovsky, which for me is a philosophical work, then I have a fictive philosophy, because it was pulled out of a fiction. Of course, I can also write an actual philosophy from the book *Solaris*, but it will never confront me with death and the resurrection from death in the same way that the movie does. Or another example: my mother is already dead, but when I play the videotape on which I recorded her I immediately cry because she suddenly is there, back from death. I can't do that when I've written a book about her. And that for me as well is the core reason to evoke and grasp philosophical questions through a reflection on film's very essence.

Summaries of Contributions

To begin with, **Christine Reeh-Peters** argues for a method of film-philosophy that can be considered as a form of artistic research, introducing both terms from a philosophical perspective. She then proposes that filmmaking should be understood as a dramaturgical process in which, alongside many aesthetic and narrative decisions, philosophical decisions are also made. Through her conceptual films *Kinotel* (short film, 2010) and *Postcards for the Future* (video essay, 2024), Reeh-Peters focuses on how film practice generates philosophical insights: by creating a visual narrative based on conceptual images and by reflecting on the ontology of “being-in-film”. Central to her analysis is the term “conceptual personae” (borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari)—characters that function as vehicles for philosophical enquiry within the films. More concretely, Reeh-Peters enquires into the entanglements between humans, audiovisual media, and

digital processes, that became a common everyday praxis since the COVID-19 pandemic until today's polycrises. By delving deeper into *Postcards for the Future*, Reeh-Peters introduces her artistic concept of the "pandemic image", a post-cinematic "poor" image (referring to Hito Steyerl) that reflects the human self-digitisation and the concomitant blurring of boundaries between filmmaker, character, and spectator. The video essay enquires into current ecological, ethical and social concerns, calling for a new understanding of the human condition that moves beyond anthropocentric narratives. By employing essayistic, fabulative and transversal research methods, her film practice interrelates in an experimental way different philosophical questions and digital aesthetics.

Continuing a similar line of argumentation, namely, to take a conceptual framework as a starting point for experimental film practice, **Matthew Hawkins** develops the concept of "affective tonality". He outlines a method of artistic research in filmmaking that foregrounds affect, sensation, and mood as central elements in narrative cinema. Drawing on affect theory in film-philosophy, particularly the works of Deleuze, Epstein, and Sinnerbrink, Hawkins proposes a cinema that privileges haptic and corporeal engagement over traditional plot-driven storytelling. The tonal component of affect is at the centre of the artistic method developed, and it functions as an alternative to semiotic and linguistic frameworks. Affective tonality is then explored as the film's immersive and emotive atmosphere, produced through the interplay of light, sound, rhythm, and movement. Hawkins details five guiding conditions for this practice, which include rejecting traditional screenplays and storyboards in favour of a process responsive to the environment and rooted in embodied experiences during both shooting (cinematography) and editing. Throughout his text, Hawkins draws on his own artistic practice, namely the creation of one feature film following an aesthetics of affective tonality.

In his text, **Bernd Herzogenrath** elaborates from a theoretical perspective on one of the central claims of media philosophy/film philosophy, namely, that media/films can *do* philosophy. He emphasises the mutual entanglement between artistic research and philosophy, focusing on how film and media can serve as sites of philosophical enquiry. He introduces "practical aesthetics", a framework that shifts from analysing art to thinking *with* art, and points out the creative interplay between philosophy, art, and science. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Herzogenrath argues that artistic research generates knowledge not through representation but through embodied, sensory, and material practices. In particular, film proves to be a medium

that can generate philosophical concepts through images, sounds, and movement. The medium not only illustrates philosophical ideas but actively participates in the creation of novel ways of thinking. Therefore, the question “what is film philosophy?” might better be restated as “where is film philosophy” happening? How exactly do we think *with* works of art?

Delineating a related interrogation, **Elisabeth Brun** proceeds from the question *how* film actually thinks. She explores the interlacings between Jeff Malpas’s concept of philosophical topography and the knowledge strategies of experimental film practice, describing one of her own film experiments in *3xShapes of Home* (2020). Philosophical topography, as developed by Malpas, positions place as central to human thought, arguing that understanding emerges through the spatial structuring of relationships and the materiality of making. Brun argues that the film texture creates cognitive maps, where visual, auditory, and conceptual elements interact. She analyses her own film, which employs artistic research methods such as superimposition, reconfiguration, and disjunction, to investigate how place shapes thought and memory. She claims that cinema, as a medium of material and spatial practice, holds unique potential for philosophical enquiry into the dynamic interplay between place, perception, and cognition.

In her artistic research project “Baigel Nuur—Lake Baikal”, **Alisi Telengut** is exploring and reconceptualising the shamanistic tradition of the Buryat Mongols in Siberia. After Western anthropology had described shamanistic cultures in colonial coordinates by the title of “animism”, the term has taken on a new life in the past two decades with the movements of worldwide indigenous communities for environmental ethics and the rights of nonhuman materialities. Taking up these tendencies, Telengut interacts and aligns with Rosi Braidotti’s philosophical concept of *zoê* that moves beyond an anthropocentric worldview, envisioning a transversal interconnectedness of all forms of life. Countering the commodification of all life in advanced capitalism, Braidotti pleads for a new ethics of appreciation, which finds expression in her *zoê/geo/techno* assemblage—a framework that rhizomatically integrates life forms, geological processes and technological advancements. Telengut explores the sympoietic and dynamic interaction of *zoê*, *geo*, and *techno* elements by hand-painted animation film sequences with audio dubbing that re-imagines the past while engaging with contemporary global challenges.

Gonzalo Hugo Rodríguez enquires into the relationship between extended reality (XR) media and technological waste through his artistic research

project “*Villa Futuro*”. This speculative worldbuilding project employs augmented reality (AR) and audiovisual techniques to create an imagined marginal city constructed from discarded electronics. By combining physical remnants of technology with digital augmentation, Rodríguez critiques the ecological and cultural cycles of technological innovation, obsolescence, and waste. Among other references, he draws on Gilbert Simondon’s concept of “ontogenesis” to redefine imagination as a relational and material process that goes beyond subjective perception to encompass the interconnected networks of humans, technology and the environment. *Villa Futuro* provides insight into how audiovisuality and worldbuilding can disrupt dominant narratives of technological progress, and explores a dynamic framework for understanding XR technologies as tools for engaging with material transformation, ecological entanglement, and speculative futures.

Gusztáv Hámos and **Katja Pratschke** deal with the destructive aspects of the Anthropocene and explore past, current and future forms of living together in urban environments. In their artistic research project “Sample Cities”, that took inspiration from Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* and thus far comprises twenty-nine city spaces, Hámos and Pratschke describe imaginary cities that are documented with photographs in real urban areas. In the fabulative narratives, that offer ways of worlding or worldbuilding, text and images are in a constant dialogue, as that which cannot be photographed is written down, and that which cannot be said is photographed. Sequential photographic works, assuming the character of a photofilm, depict essential situations of urban experience that reveal human and inhuman acts in a compact form. In parallel to the extraction of forced labour within the World War II genocide, the ruthless exploitation of telluric resources is termed “ecocide”. With a view to these two extremes, the project aims to make principled alternatives to the industrial exploitation of people and nature visible in the urban space.

In her contribution “Conjuring Ghosts and Witches. Decolonizing Representations of Gendered and Racialized Bodies in Film Archives”, **Paula Albuquerque** unveils the means that were used in early cinema, from 1911 to 1928, to stereotype the visual representation of exhausted female bodies in work-related contexts to create a character of female frailty. When working with archival materials, Albuquerque collaborated with dancer Suzan Tunca to reinterpret and recreate the film gestures in a framework of freedom, thus rewriting oppressive discourses. In the sequel to this work, Albuquerque analyses by which ways documentaries from former Dutch

colonies constructed stereotypes that subjugate indigenous peoples and make them proto-surveillance objects. In her artistic research approach, Albuquerque draws on practise-based methods developed outside of the Western academic field as a resource to propose fairness in representation. Reflecting on methods and experimentation, she resists the academisation of artistic research and favours an “ecology of practices” (as proposed by Isabelle Stengers), that unpacks the critical potential of research in trans-medial work.

In his delineation of video art from cinema, experimental film, and documentary, **Zen Marie** emphasises the difference of the locations where these moving images are shown as a key distinguishing feature. While the audience usually receives the different types of film in a darkened cinema space, video art engages with the site of its exhibition—Marie presents it as a site-specific practice. Looking at video art’s comprehensive set-up, he discusses Foucault’s concept of “dispositive” and the advantages of Agamben’s translation to the concept of the “apparatus”. In his analysis, Marie shows that advancements in image technology, which reinforce tendencies towards surveillance and control, but also open up new poetic spaces, change the production and presentation of video art. In this framework, Marie developed the critical potential of site-specificity in his artistic research PhD work, which he completed at Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg. By the videos *Île des Serpents* and *Paradise Fallen: Blaxis*, he explored sites in Dakar / Senegal, and in the Drakensburg Mountains and Karoo Desert/South Africa, balancing between the landscape and its meaning inscriptions. The videos were put on display at WITS Art Museum in a way that invited interactions from the audience and contributions by collaborators from other arts, thus presenting an open work that can develop and grow in its reception.

Fee Altmann explores the entanglement of film, artistic research, and philosophy starting from analyses by Kittler and Foucault, which propose that media are in themselves forms of knowledge that contribute to shaping our relationship to the world. In her analysis of Dürer’s *Self-Portrait* from 1500, she points out that the introduction of central perspective in the emergence of panel painting brought about a new relation between the self and the world. In the modern times of instability and general dynamisation, the state between two social orders, but also the empty space between two words or other signifiers, often was experienced in a “horror vacui”. In turn, avant-garde artists such as Duchamp have affirmed and explored the in-between as a productive source of new forms, attitudes and meanings. In

this context, Altmann reveals Moholy-Nagy's "Light-Space Modulator", a turning sculpture that reflects and projects light over time, as an abstraction of the filmic. However, instead of leaving fixed inscriptions, it is staging the performativity of the renewing moment. A counterpart in philosophy is identified in Foucault's "truth-speaking"—the free speech act (historically bound back as *parrhesia*), in which the attitude of the individual to the world is formed time and again from a blank space. In their structural similarity, the visual and the verbal discourse expose themselves to the next moment and thus remain fluid. The relationship between the cinematic and the philosophical in shaping the existence can therefore be articulated from the in-between.

In reference to the work of Terrence Malick, who wrote a dissertation on Heidegger's philosophy in his younger years, then turned to filmmaking in 1969, and returned to his early working field in his 2015 seminar on Sophocles and Plato, **Stefan Winter** explores the relationship between film as artistic research and philosophy. The side of philosophy is presented in three scenes, first remembering how Heidegger develops his existential analysis in a neighbourhood between philosophy, art and religion. The reconstruction shows that in the figure of an initial "fallenness" to the world and its conversion to authentic existence, Heidegger takes up a motif from the Orphic-Gnostic tradition, as mediated by Christian orthodoxy. Scene two outlines how the Situationists translated Heidegger's quest for authentic existence to the framework of post-war media capitalism, and the third scene is dedicated to its transformation in Derrida's "destinerrance". A general reflection on the relation between artistic research and philosophy shows that the difference of their media and of their ways to deal with the individual and the general form arcs of tension that allow sparks to fly precisely in their non-identity. Looking at Malick's take on the Gnostic "Pearl Song" that structures his *Knight of Cups* (2015), Winter highlights that the film deals with the same questions that moved Heidegger's philosophy and its transformations in Situationism and deconstruction.

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CHAPTER I

FILM-PHILOSOPHY AS A PRACTICE OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH: THE PANDEMIC IMAGE

CHRISTINE REEH-PETERS

Introduction

In the context of the polysemous discourses on artistic research (AR), the contemporary interlocking of theory and practice in the arts is repeatedly addressed. Though the generation of knowledge in the arts manifests itself differently in various media, the specificities of the film medium are often undermined in this discussion. With the following text I propose to explore some considerations on the interrelation of film and philosophy in the context of AR. More precisely, I argue for artistic methodologies of film-philosophy that are to be considered possible practices of AR. Such methods not only draw on the numerous entanglements between particular philosophies and film(s), but also emphasise how their theoretical readings are triggered by artistic film practices that, in turn, engage with and enquire into philosophical thinking. In this context, film-philosophy is considered beyond its usual film-theoretical reading and instead is viewed as a field of investigative practices of filmmaking: the term thus involves both the theoretical analysis with film and the artistic production of philosophical knowledge through film practice. Considering film-philosophy as a field of methodologies of AR means, then, to delineate a field in which novel aesthetic insights, philosophical epistemologies, concepts and other forms of generation of philosophical knowledge are produced and addressed by audiovisual and filmic means.

To explore this perspective, I will expose some of my own AR practice as a filmmaker and enquire into its entanglement of philosophical thinking with filmic means. The short films for discussion, *Kinotel* (2010) and *Postcards for the Future* (2024), are two different experimental and self-

reflexive audiovisual narrations composed by what I call conceptual images. The digital post-cinematic aesthetics of *Postcards for the Future*, exploring everyday audiovisual media, was catalysed by the coronavirus pandemics. It enquires into the novel relation that humans share with digital audiovisuality in an increasingly uninhabitable world of growing crises and showdowns. This enquiry has a conceptual framework as its origin, which I call the pandemic image, a concept that emerged under quite specific social and onto-technological circumstances.

However, the aesthetics of “poor images”¹ of *Postcards for the Future* and its essayistic, fragmentary format highly contrasts with the stylized glossy 35mm celluloid style of the cinema of former days used in *Kinotel*. As different as they are in their post-cinematic style and composition, both films emerged in the context of the increasing omnipresence of new digital film formats and AI algorithms in everyday life, and how these change the spectator’s relation with moving images. The phenomenon of what I designate human self-digitisation and the concomitant blurring of film characters and spectators is the common denominator of these two films, as well as the conceptual density of their leading characters. They are considered to be what I call “conceptual personae” (CPs),² a neologism that will be properly introduced later and that designates main characters of film analysed in a novel way. CPs are regarded as embodying and conveying philosophical concepts, acting as vehicles of thought in addition to their dimension as dramatis personae. They are thus not merely characters in a plot but move the philosophical enquiry of a film forward.

In the following few passages, I will comment on the further key terminology of this text, namely to clarify what I understand as “film”, “AR” and “film-philosophy”.

First, the term “film” is used throughout as an umbrella term for the various existing forms of audiovisual media and moving images in narrative and artistic forms and contexts, whether digital, analogue or synthetic. Common formats include cinema, television, online series, vlogs, reels, videos, etc., be they experimental films, art films and videos, fiction, documentaries, essays or music videos, of any duration and genre. Chronologically speaking, the oldest manifestation of film as a narrative art form is cinema, whose 125-year history also extends in my comprehension to contemporary, so-called post-cinematic formats including new virtual settings in the VR and AR sectors and in digital online media. The general

¹ See: Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image”, e-flux journal, No. 10 (November 2009).

² Christine Reeh-Peters, *Being and Film: A Fictive Ontology of Film in Tarkovsky’s Solaris* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), 7.