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# Moving in Circles: Space and Place in Media Archaeology and the Art of Jop Horst

## Abstract

This article is a media-archaeological investigation of the work by Dutch artist and experimental filmmaker Jop Horst (1961–2014). He was interested in the defining principles and features of moving image media: stillness/movement, on/off, light/dark, present/absent. He built his own zoetropes and produced Super 8 and 16mm trick films. Old appliances, such as ventilators, toasters, and washing machines, were turned into media machines, while overhead projectors showed truly moving images of larvae. The *dispositif* of his installations collided with the exhibition spaces, such as an old mill, a former school, or an aviary, often in his hometown, Hengelo. This article examines the spatial implications of Horst's work to understand the spatial equivalent of non-linear time as a premise of media archaeology. To that end, the dual concept of *sur place* (the state of being in motion yet going nowhere) and the “circular trace” (a physical inscription or pathway that links space and time) is proposed.

## Keywords

*sur place*, media archaeology, expanded cinema, Jop Horst

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## Prologue

A Dutch windmill. Stripped of its wings. It has lost both its iconic form and function. In Hengelo, a town in the Netherlands, such a mill housed the artist-run gallery De Molen (The Mill), operated by Art Foundation Ag from 1989 to 1997.<sup>1)</sup> One of its first exhibitions was dedicated to video art, which included an installation by the Dutch artist Jop Horst,

1) “De Molen,” *Stichting beeldende Kunst Ag*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.kunstag.eu/de-molen](http://www.kunstag.eu/de-molen).

called *Grote Random Zoëtrop* (Large Random-Around Zoetrope, 1989).<sup>2)</sup> Although not a piece of video art per se, it revived the moving image principle of the zoetrope (1833–1834). Hanging from the ceiling, it looked like an ancient image-producing apparatus. Inside the cylinder appeared (the illusion of) a little girl acting as a Creator, animating the world through images. Half a year later, Horst participated again in an exhibition at De Molen (*De Reuzendoders*, The Giant Killers, March 1990).<sup>3)</sup> He then transformed an entire floor into a kind of zoetrope. This installation, *Neushoorn* (Rhinoceros, 1990), consisted of a projector mounted on a record player. It projected a loop of a rhinoceros walking across the mill's circular wall.

This flour windmill was built in 1861,<sup>4)</sup> before Hengelo's industrialization. But already in 1886, a steam engine was installed here, and the wings were removed. By converting the structure into a bioscopic device and introducing animal locomotion — hinting at the studies by Muybridge and Marey, likewise from the 1880s — Horst highlighted motion-picture technology as an ongoing effort to capture bodily movement. Yet the animal's motion also enveloped the viewer, positioned inside the work. Like a treadmill (which also existed in Hengelo<sup>5)</sup>), De Molen resumed activity in a world fed by images, which in this case also reference Horst's own past. Jop Horst (Rome, 1961 — Hengelo, 2014) spent his early youth in Tanzania, where he was impressed by the animals he saw, like the rhinoceros.<sup>6)</sup>

Besides media installations, Horst produced experimental films, staged film and music performances, and made drawings and paintings, extending the traditions of expanded cinema, site-specific art, and Fluxus. His work echoes artists such as Stan VanDerBeek, Marie Menken, and filmmakers linked to Electric Cinema in the Netherlands.<sup>7)</sup> As part of the next generation within this lineage, he participated in several Dutch artistic circles, including Art Foundation Ag and the magic-lantern collective Diascoop.<sup>8)</sup> Working with both old and new media, he manipulated the cinematic principle of motion through stillness, often in specific environments. In this way, Horst acted as a media-archaeological artist who traced and situated media within the world around him.

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- 2) "Videokunst," *Stichting beeldende Kunst Ag*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.kunstag.eu/video-september-1989](http://www.kunstag.eu/video-september-1989).
- 3) "Reuzendoders," *Stichting beeldende Kunst Ag*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.kunstag.eu/reuzendoders](http://www.kunstag.eu/reuzendoders).
- 4) "Molen van Trip / Molen van Weggeman," *De Nederlandsche Molendatabase*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.molendatabase.nl/molens/ten-bruggencate-nr-16719?page=142&paging=true](http://www.molendatabase.nl/molens/ten-bruggencate-nr-16719?page=142&paging=true).
- 5) "Grutterij van Berend ter Marsch," *De Nederlandsche Molendatabase*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.molendatabase.nl/molens/ten-bruggencate-nr-16719?page=142&paging=true](http://www.molendatabase.nl/molens/ten-bruggencate-nr-16719?page=142&paging=true).
- 6) Notes by Jop Horst, 2002, Archive Jop Horst, and information provided by Diana de Vries, May 2025, Hengelo, the Netherlands.
- 7) Meike Bartlema, "Monumenten voor vluchtigheid: De films van Barbara Meter," *Eye Filmmuseum Magazine* November 9, 2023, accessed October 16, 2025, <https://www.eyefilm.nl/magazine/monumenten-voor-vluchtigheid-de-films-van-barbara-meter/1158664>.
- 8) Stijntje Blankendaal, "De ongrijpbare magie van de toverlantaarn," *Trouw*, December 23, 1999, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.trouw.nl/voorpagina/de-ongrijpbare-magie-van-de-toverlantaarn-b3163898](http://www.trouw.nl/voorpagina/de-ongrijpbare-magie-van-de-toverlantaarn-b3163898); "Diascoop presenteert: Nieuw werk," *theatercollectie.uva*, 2000, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.theatercollectie.uva.nl/Details/audioVisuals/300135742](http://www.theatercollectie.uva.nl/Details/audioVisuals/300135742).

## Introduction

By linking 19th-century media technology to the mechanics of a mill, Jop Horst anticipated approaches later common in media archaeology, which situates media as technological and material artifacts within broader historical contexts. Scholars and artists alike, explicitly since the 1990s, have traced media genealogies and examined the affordances of old and new media in relation to each other.<sup>9)</sup> This is evident in the work of William Kentridge, whose “rich body of animation, graphic art, installation, and performance work draws from a wide array of media-archaeological sources.”<sup>10)</sup> In contrast, Wineke Gartz focuses on combining old and new projection methods and using screens as spatial, physical objects to create layered imagery.<sup>11)</sup> The art of Jop Horst shares features of both, yet remains distinct in its heuristic, deliberately unpolished character.

Theoretically, media archaeology contends that there is no linear historical progress; media-archaeological theory rejects the teleological idea that history works toward a single, unifying goal. Instead, as Erkki Huhtamo notes, media phenomena often recur as *topoi*. Something appears, disappears, and reappears, albeit in different contexts and with different purposes.<sup>12)</sup> Old technologies can be rediscovered as viable alternatives, but the opposite happens as well: “the facade of innovation may mask tradition...”<sup>13)</sup> While this thinking primarily concerns time, the question arises how this may also apply to space and place. How does it inform an understanding of the place of media in the world?

The spatial counterpart to non-linear temporality seems to be the “network.” As Thomas Elsaesser notes, media archaeology “set the notions of networks and nodes against ‘vertical’ causality and ‘linear’ chronology.”<sup>14)</sup> The concept of network refers to a decentralized structure of hubs and clusters with distinct identities, and sometimes opposing movements. Jussi Parikka adds that networks take many forms and evolve over time: “Networks are processual and not just a stable diagram of nodes connected.”<sup>15)</sup> Yet networks also serve systems — e.g. the nervous system, a traffic system, or an information system — that pursue specific outcomes through feedback loops, steered by attractors and implied goals.<sup>16)</sup> Kristoffer Gansing therefore argues that networks are still teleological, a point already emphasized and instrumentalized in 1940s cybernetics.<sup>17)</sup> Through networks, “old media

9) Huhtamo, “Art in the Rear-View Mirror,” 85.

10) Ibid., 97. Exemplary are his animation short, *Ubu Tells the Truth* (1997), and his cinematic shadow play, *Shadow Procession* (1999).

11) Annette Balkema, “Desire for the Screen,” in *Screen-Based Art*, eds. Annette Balkema and Henk Slager (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), 21–28 [24]. Exemplary is Gartz’s installation *Gold Hurts* (1998).

12) Erkki Huhtamo, “Dismantling the Fairy Engine: Media Archaeology as Topos Study,” *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, eds. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 27–47.

13) Huhtamo, “Dismantling the Fairy Engine,” 28.

14) Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 43.

15) Braxton Soderman and Nicole Starosielski, “Circulating Concepts: Networks and Media Archaeology: An Interview with Jussi Parikka,” *Ammodern*, no. 2 (2013), accessed October 16, 2025, <https://ammodern.net/article/jussi-parikka-interview>.

16) J. Stephen Lansing, “Complex Adaptive Systems,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32, (2003), 183–204 [189].

17) Kristoffer Gansing, “The Transversal Generic: Media-Archaeology and Network Culture,” *The Fibreculture Journal* 123, no. 18 (2011), 92–117 [94].

content is constantly repurposed for new consumption.”<sup>18)</sup> Old media fuel today’s data-base-driven logic. Moreover, old media forms and technologies are absorbed into larger systems, causing historical specificities and local operations to dissolve into generic hybridity. This contradicts media archaeology, although it cultivates a special interest in “oxymoronic entities.”<sup>19)</sup> According to Elsaesser, media archaeology may even contribute to the developments it seeks to deconstruct.<sup>20)</sup> Can it still offer a critical perspective on the place of media in the world?

Regarding the current state of affairs in media archaeology, Erkki Huhtamo and Doron Galili have identified five commonly shared attributes: non-linear history; engagement with material, technical, and operational properties of media; focus on intermedial relations; interest in forgotten, obsolete, failed, and imagined media technologies; and meta-criticism of media historiography.<sup>21)</sup> As prospects, they argue for more cross-cultural research, the inclusion of perspectives on gender and race, and a self-reflexive engagement with the goals of media archaeology.<sup>22)</sup> Surprisingly, no “spatial support” is mentioned for any of the issues. The same applies to the book *New Media Archaeologies*.<sup>23)</sup> Alternatively, the spatial dimension is addressed by Tim van der Heijden and Aleksander Kolkowski in their book *Doing Experimental Media Archaeology: Practice*. They write that media-archaeological experiments can “bring about more awareness of the spatial and topographical information inscribed in media practices, the role of space and location for the production and consumption of media technologies, as well as the social dynamics involved in past media usages.”<sup>24)</sup> This, however, remains a possibility yet to be explored. Some concepts in media archaeology could nevertheless offer starting points for developing a media-archaeological theory of space and place, which this article pursues through the art of Jop Horst. His works often deal with particular objects and movements, and things found locally, while at the same time addressing larger existential questions. Before analyzing his works, in order to illuminate different spatial dimensions of media, I outline existing media-archaeological ideas related to space and place, presented here as four successive calls: the sites of media production; the spatial arrangements of media and how they implicate the viewer; the places where media manifest across different moments in time; and the broader environments and ecologies in which media-historical developments unfold.

18) Ibid., 98.

19) Jussi Parikka, *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 3.

20) Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 351.

21) Erkki Huhtamo and Doron Galili, “The Pasts and Prospects of Media Archaeology,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 18, no. 4 (2020), 333–339 [334].

22) Ibid., 335.

23) Ben Roberts and Mark Goodall, eds., *New Media Archaeologies* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

24) Tim van der Heijden and Aleksander Kolkowski, *Doing Experimental Media Archaeology: Practice* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2023), 2.

## Space and Place: Four Calls

**1. Sites of production.** As a companion volume to van der Heijden and Kolkowski's book, Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever have written *Doing Experimental Media Archaeology: Theory*, in which they aim "to describe the overlapping and interfering 'spaces' of knowledge production: the space of experiment, the space of protocols and documentation, and the space of ex-post rationalisation or interpretation, eventually leading to the production of some format of scientific output."<sup>25)</sup> This echoes Graziele Lautenschlaeger's media-archaeological approach to the production of media art, through her concept of "translation" as a move from one "discrete" field to another, such as observations made in a certain place that are rendered as a mental image.<sup>26)</sup> In order to make sense of the world, sensorial experiences are translated into forms of knowledge, which in turn are translated into, for example, film plans and scripts — whether produced by Hollywood's studio system, or by the *munshi* in India.<sup>27)</sup> Eventually, films are also "documents" in a chain of translations. Each translation takes place in another space, including academic spaces and "the archive as laboratory."<sup>28)</sup> This applies when "documentation" has indeed been preserved, but this is not always the case, as Rakesh Sengupta explains in regard to *munshi* scripts.<sup>29)</sup> The same applies to expanded cinema.<sup>30)</sup>

The spaces of translation, and the problem of preservation, can already be observed in Horst's site-specific installation of *Neushoorn* (Rhinoceros). The first space of translation is Tanzania, which gave rise to an idea. Bridging many years and connecting different spaces, various translations followed. Eventually, the old mill in Hengelo linked spaces of production and exhibition. Due to its nature, as a site-specific artwork, it has not been preserved, except for its "translations" in the form of documentation, including this text.

**2. Spatial arrangements of media.** Considering the space of exhibition, the concept of the *cinematic dispositif* comes to the fore. Conventionally, within film studies, this concept describes the arrangement of a theatrical space with a projector showing images on a screen watched by the audience seated in front of it.<sup>31)</sup> Familiar from Jean-Louis Baudry's writings from the 1970s, which used the concept to explain the ideological and psychological implications of cinema, this *dispositif* has been considered historically contingent by Thomas Elsaesser. In doing so, Elsaesser takes into account that film history has been more of an

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25) Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever, *Doing Experimental Media Archaeology: Theory* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2022), 15.

26) Graziele Lautenschlaeger, *Sensing and Making Sense: Photosensitivity and Light-to-sound Translations in Media Art* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021), 165.

27) Rakesh Sengupta, "Towards a Decolonial Media Archaeology: The Absent Archive of Screenwriting History and the Obsolete *Munshi*," *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2021), 3–26 [13].

28) Fickers and van den Oever, *Doing Experimental Media Archaeology*, 41.

29) Sengupta, "Towards a Decolonial Media Archaeology," 5.

30) Julian Ross, "Preserving and Exhibiting 1960–70s Japanese Expanded Cinema" (Presentation for the Research Group Moving Images: Preservation, Curation, Exhibition [University of Amsterdam], Eye Film Museum, Amsterdam, March 11, 2022).

31) Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 101.

experimental, exploratory, and pragmatic process: “There was little in this history confirming the determinism underpinning Baudry’s ideological critique of cinema’s illusionism.”<sup>32)</sup> Baudry’s view implies an essentialism and a teleology that Elsaesser rejects.

While acknowledging a dominant *cinematic dispositif*, Frank Kessler also argues that there is not one transhistorical *dispositif*. Instead, there are multiple *dispositifs*, characterized by their own “spaces of communication.”<sup>33)</sup> For example, one can find, juxtaposed to Hollywood’s illusionism, the audience-activating California Newsreel that constituted a “parallel cinema,”<sup>34)</sup> while in Japan expanded cinema emerged prior to most other countries, with site-specific shows,<sup>35)</sup> in contradistinction to mainstream media culture.<sup>36)</sup> Kessler concludes that, in the end, the concept of the *dispositif* best serves as an analytical tool for describing how people physically engage with moving images rather than as a theoretical tool to define cinema.<sup>37)</sup> As such, the concept of the *dispositif* will enable an analysis of Horst’s works, most of them having distinct manifestations, which imply different (spatial) relations and the way viewers are positioned (see, e.g., *Floor for the Blind*, discussed below on pages 187–188).

**3. Places where media manifest.** While Huhtamo and Galili do not refer to spatial considerations in their survey of media archaeology, Huhtamo’s own concept of *topoi* may actually be understood in spatial terms. He explicitly hints at a spatial dimension when he writes: “Identifying topoi, analyzing their trajectories and transformations, and explaining the cultural logics that condition their ‘wanderings’ across time and space is one possible goal for media archaeology.”<sup>38)</sup> The wanderings, like those of the zoetropes featuring in Horst’s oeuvre, imply actual locales, which is no surprise, as *topos* in Greek literally means place. Nevertheless, Huhtamo has taken the concept of *topos/topoi* from literary scholar Ernst Robert Curtius, for whom it denotes something anonymous and omnipresent,<sup>39)</sup> thereby rendering it a generic spatial concept. Huhtamo, however, has approached *topoi* differently: “When a *topos* emerges, it should be treated as a node in a complex network of references and determinants. *Topos* study is steeped in the issue of cultural contextualization, no matter how difficult and elusive it may be.”<sup>40)</sup> This means that, diverging from Curtius, Huhtamo argues for specificity, and proposes a network-based approach to trace connections. Of interest here is the way particular media manifestations are seen in a

32) Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 107.

33) Frank Kessler, “The Multiple Dispositifs of (Early) Cinema,” *Cinémas* 29, no. 1 (2018), 51–66 [54].

34) Michael Renov, “Newsreel: Old and New: Towards An Historical Profile,” *Film Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1987), 20–33; Paul Douglas Grant, *Cinéma Militant: Political Filmmaking and May 1968* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 26.

35) Julian Ross, “Beyond the Frame: Intermedia and Expanded Cinema in 1960–1970s Japan” (Unpublished PhD dissertation, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Leeds, 2014).

36) Examples of other *dispositifs* and their histories are discussed in the books by Wanda Strauven, *Touchscreen Archaeology: Tracing Histories of Hands-On Media Practices* (Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2021), and Steve Gibson, Stefan Arisona, Donna Leishman, and Atau Tanaka, eds., *Live Visuals: History, Theory, Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023).

37) Kessler, “The Multiple Dispositifs of (Early) Cinema,” 63.

38) Huhtamo, “Dismantling the Fairy Engine,” 28.

39) *Ibid.*, 31.

40) *Ibid.*, 33.

broader context through their connections, constituting larger structures. The small and the big define each other. However, a network approach might not be enough to fathom the complexities at stake. Beyond mapping connections, the dynamics and spatial features that enable them must be analyzed.

**4. Environment and ecology.** An alternative to the network metaphor is the concept of ecology, proposed already by Gene Youngblood in his book *Expanded Cinema* (1970).<sup>41)</sup> In the chapter “The Artist as Ecologist,” he discusses “the burgeoning of intermedia art,” noting that he chose the term *intermedia* over *mixed media* because “an environment in which the organisms are merely mixed is not the same as an environment whose elements are suffused in meta-morphosis.”<sup>42)</sup> Intermedia art follows ecological interconnections rather than network logic. As Sean Cubitt writes: “Ecologies are not networks connecting previously separate things: Every element of an ecology mediates every other.”<sup>43)</sup> Environmental conditions enable media to emerge and operate, which in turn affect their environments.<sup>44)</sup> Such environments can nest within one another — as in Horst’s case, from the local setting of Hengelo, to the broader Dutch art scene, to international circuits.

Interdependence in ecology means that small and large elements can directly affect one another. In media archaeology, such relations — pertaining to scale and spatial valences — are not sufficiently theorized. Although Huhtamo and Galili emphasize interrelated media developments and thus argue for “the rejection of medium-specific historiographies,”<sup>45)</sup> an intermedia perspective does not have any such implication. Regarding the history of expanded cinema, Jonathan Walley argues that it “neither abandoned the project of specifying cinema and distinguishing it from other art forms, nor cast off cinema’s historical traditions, formal conventions, or familiar materials.”<sup>46)</sup> His disciplinary approach contrasts with Youngblood’s outward perspective — and by implication Marshall McLuhan’s view, which has significantly informed media archaeology. Yet Walley’s argument may prompt media archaeologists to account for human agency: how people create categories, which have real effects, and how artists use media to reflect on media. This latter point also reintroduces media content, which Huhtamo and Galili do not consider a concern in media archaeology. An ecological approach can thus employ methodological triangulation, examining conditions, material manifestations, and content.

In self-reflexive media art, such as Horst’s *Grid*, a conceptually dense installation (see: § Light), we can thus see the artist’s positionality, and his environment, and through the artwork’s “space of communication;” we can situate the viewer as well. Something similar applies to media archaeology as a field, with Huhtamo and Galili proposing a reflection on its own goals, which invites the reader to take a critical stance. It raises the question of how

41) Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970), 346.

42) Ibid., 347.

43) Sean Cubitt, *Finite Media Environmental Implications of Digital Technologies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 4.

44) Michael Goddard, “Opening up the Black Boxes: Media Archaeology, ‘Anarchaeology’ and Media Materiality,” *New Media & Society* 17, no. 11 (2015), 1761–1776 [1762].

45) Huhtamo and Galili, “The Pasts and Prospects of Media Archaeology,” 334.

46) Jonathan Walley, *Cinema Expanded: Avant-garde Film in the Age of Intermedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 15.

one can understand an evolutionary development of which one is a part, or, alternatively, what it means when a balance is being maintained.

Environmental theory has long focused on “equilibrium dynamics,” which allegedly create a stable balance within an ecosystem. Over the last few decades, this has been questioned, highlighting instability instead.<sup>47)</sup> Such an understanding has also informed Elsaesser’s media archaeology. It situates media in the context of “precarious equilibrium,” which implies “constructive instability”<sup>48)</sup> A subtle change may open up new possibilities, but it has its downside too: an existential balancing act. Yet, Elsaesser’s formulation still assumes productivity and a direction: *construction* means giving shape to interests, purposes, and ideals, mediated by (cinematic) narratives and visions of how to inhabit the world. In other words: this view might still be teleological. What if the concept of equilibrium does not imply any direction? Can it still explain how audiovisual media exist in the world, give shape to it, and position us within it?

### ***Sur Place and the Circular Trace***

Translating the notion of “precarious equilibrium” into spatial terms, I propose the dual concept of *sur place* and the “circular trace.” In track cycling, *sur place* is a situation during a race in which the two cyclists stand still for tactical reasons, challenging each other to find the right moment to move away, with the other being slightly too late.<sup>49)</sup> In academic literature, *sur place* has been mentioned in economic game theory,<sup>50)</sup> when competitors stand still, waiting for the other to move first. However, irrespective of tactical aims, I propose this concept to understand an existentialist engagement with place in relation to audiovisual media.<sup>51)</sup> In fact, *sur place* implies a double “going nowhere.” As in track cycling, like in other track races, the purpose is not to reach a destination: the same spot is crossed several times.

*Sur place* sets specific constraints, which requires skills, sensibility, and understanding of the conditions in order to be in control. Mastering such capacities leads to inward complexity: what cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls “cultural involution.”<sup>52)</sup> This is the opposite of cultural evolution. The latter implies progress, but may lack depth, as one is continuously moving ahead. Involution may suffer from the reverse, being an inward, spiral-like movement. But the spiral could also move outward. In either case, *sur place* can be described by circular patterns. To follow them, I propose the concept of the “circular

47) Sian Sullivan, “Towards a Non-equilibrium Ecology: Perspectives from an Arid Land,” *Journal of Biogeography* 23, no. 1 (1996), 1–5.

48) Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology*, 213.

49) Bill Mallon and Jeroen Heijmans, “Sur Place,” in *Historical Dictionary of Cycling* (Lanham, Toronto, and Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011).

50) Fabien Gensbittel, Stefano Lovo, Jérôme Renault, and Tristan Tomala, “Zero-sum Revision Games,” *Games and Economic Behaviour* 108, (2018), 504–522.

51) The idea of *sur place*, where something *can* happen, in the context of urban design, was first mentioned by designer Arno van der Mark, director of DRFTWD, in 2003 — personal communication with the author.

52) Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

trace.” Any trace, as physical inscription or pathway, links time and space.<sup>53)</sup> As a dual concept, *sur place* is the spatial anchor, while “circular trace” implies the temporal dimension and a layering of movements.

In order to develop this proposal, I will analyze the art of Jop Horst. To that end, I was granted access to Horst’s collection by its curator Diana de Vries, who has also provided background information. In addition, I have made use of the book *Jop Horst: Werk*, the website *jophorst.nl*, and my recollections of a retrospective exhibition in 2018.<sup>54)</sup> After an initial survey of Horst’s work, I recognized four major strands in it, which are basically four dimensions that define the physical manifestation of audiovisual media: Matter, Movement, Sound, and Light. For the analysis of each strand, I have subsequently selected works in which the respective strand comes to the fore most explicitly.

I will examine Matter, Movement, Sound, and Light through the proposed dual concept in order to elaborate it. I will first consider how matter delineates *sur place* and defines its oxymoronic characteristics. Circular movement is a *motif* in Horst’s work that visualizes *sur place*, while it also displays the circular trace. Sound and light play on presence and absence, and inform the existentialist nature of the dual concept. As sound implies both matter and movement, it has an indexical relation to them, while the imprint of light on film is literally a trace, through which the medium of light manifests itself. By following traces, locales are identified, whose features help to articulate the dual concept spatially. In doing so, I apply the concepts of *dispositif* and *topoi*, as introduced earlier.

## Matter

Jop Horst was interested in matter as an expression of existence, but also in its negation: ephemerality and disappearance. Horst was similarly interested in the materiality of media and how it generates imagery. In a catalog published by X-Pact, an organization to foster collaborations between art and technology, Horst’s practice is described as follows:

All of his works, including the pieces he is still going to make, are present in his studio, as parts in a big pile. In the simplest way, and therefore the most efficient, works are being assembled, with rope, scotch, cardboard, and iron wire. When a work has been exhibited, it subsequently disappears again, as parts in the big pile. Assimilation, dissimilation. [translated by the author]<sup>55)</sup>

53) Verne Harris, “Genres of the Trace: Memory, Archives and Trouble,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 3 (2012), 147–157.

54) Book: Diana de Vries, ed., *Jop Horst: Werk* (Hengelo: Werkgroep Jop Horst, 2018); Website: “Jop Horst,” *jophorst.nl*, accessed October 16, 2025, <https://jophorst.nl>; Exhibition: “Jop Horst,” Zaal Zuid, Hengelo, and Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, 2018, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.rijksmuseumtwenthe.nl/contents/2129/en/jop-horst](http://www.rijksmuseumtwenthe.nl/contents/2129/en/jop-horst). The films made by Jop Horst are preserved by the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

55) X-Pact, “Centenar: Jop Horst,” *X-Pact: Art, Business, Technology, Science* (Enschede: X-Pact, 1999).

Horst's studio was also his home. Fickers and van den Oever, in their theory of doing experimental media archaeology, call the former a space of "complex interaction," and the latter a "socio-technical topography," where the biographies of objects and their users are intertwined.<sup>56)</sup> It is here where Horst's works originated, and where they would return, as a manifestation of *sur place*. Moreover, the pile of things already contained his future works, which adds a prospective dimension to the circular trace.

The pile also included photochemical films. The Super 8 film *Het gele bakje is rode draad* (The Yellow Cup Is Red Thread; Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1989) shows how an ordinary object, a plastic cup, starts to live a life of its own through the technique of stop motion animation: a manipulation of film as matter. The cup serves as a container to pick something from, or as a shell to hide something; it turns itself, or it makes its surroundings turn; it is an object of joy, or an object of frustration. It seems to fit certain settings, for example, when a chicken eats from it, which it dislikes, while it seems to be a mismatch



Fig. 1: Still from the film *Het gele bakje is rode draad* (Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1989)

in other settings, for instance, when it climbs a ladder, which it enjoys (Fig. 1). The "red thread" that the yellow cup spins strings all oppositions together. Although it suggests linearity, the cup does not arrive at any destination. Only its willfulness counts, as a *topos* in film history<sup>57)</sup>

56) Fickers and van den Oever, *Doing Experimental Media Archaeology*, 46.

57) It recalls such practices from the silent era, see: Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinema, Motion, Energy, and Entropy," in *New Media Archaeologies*, eds. Ben Roberts and Mark Goodall (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 107–134 [119].

Horst also engaged in making actual objects willful, as in *Traffic Light* (shown in the exhibition *De Afwijking*, Kunstenlab, Deventer, 2005).<sup>58)</sup> He made its green and red lights blink, quickly alternating between the signals “go” and “no-go.” This typifies *sur place*. The red light indexes “here” and “standstill,” and the green light indexes “elsewhere” and “movement.” A normal traffic light thus creates discrete units of space and time. According to Lautenschlaeger, such a “discretization” stands in contrast to “human space-time perception, providing an idea of reality as a continuous entity.”<sup>59)</sup> Horst’s installation shows this mismatch. However, discretization also shapes human perception and cognition.<sup>60)</sup> Through discrete units of stimuli, humans perceive things. In order to make sense of something, small or big, the human mind synthesizes different impressions. These are acts of translation: from material shapes to cognitive data, to any idea and subsequent form of expression. The tension between discretization and the understanding of things in a space-time continuum causes a gap. This may cause loss of information, but it can also create a space for ideas to emerge.<sup>61)</sup>

Using the gap between perception and understanding, and working through contradiction, likewise characterize Horst’s artistic methodology. In this way, he activated objects beyond their intended function.<sup>62)</sup> Exemplary are his experiments with a toaster, resulting in his *Broodroostertekeningen* (Toaster Drawings, 2003–2004). He inserted bands of thermal fax paper into a toaster. Dark shapes appeared on the paper, like light leaving traces on photographic material (Fig. 2). Had temperature historically been a factor in filmmaking, it might have shaped another ontology of film. Echoing surrealist automatic drawing, the toaster drawings highlight, through contradistinction, the idea that cinema’s photographic realism is also historically contingent, just like the conventional *cinematic dispositif*. Alternatively, “thermal recording” is still an unfulfilled potential. The toaster drawings are therefore conceptual cinematic artifacts that belong to a counterfactual media history. And yet they also address Elsaesser’s view that cinema is, beyond photographic recording, a matter of energy conversion, as part of larger chains of work and motion.<sup>63)</sup> The toaster drawings are cinema’s placeholder, and serve as a conceptual map.

Analog film recordings were affected by the specificities of film stock and cameras, leaving certain marks and traces, especially when imperfections occurred. They may reveal particular historical conditions, as Jiří Anger has argued.<sup>64)</sup> The same would apply to the toaster drawings, being the result of the paper type and toaster brand, as well as the environments from which they originated. They contain the traces of a production chain. As conceptual maps, the drawings invite us on a hypothetical journey to picture their ontology.

58) Herman Haverkate, “September is niet meer wat het was,” *Twentsche Courant Tubantia*, September 2005 [Archive Jop Horst, Hengelo, the Netherlands].

59) Lautenschlaeger, *Sensing and Making Sense*, 165.

60) Ibid.

61) Lautenschlaeger, *Sensing and Making Sense*, 205.

62) Joris Baudoin, “Zwaar oké,” in *Jop Horst: Werk*, ed. Diana de Vries (Hengelo: Werkgroep Jop Horst, 2018).

63) Elsaesser, “Cinema, Motion, Energy, and Entropy,” 125.

64) Jiří Anger, *Towards a Film Theory from Below: Archival Film and the Aesthetics of the Crack-Up* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2024), 98.



Fig. 2: Curator Diana de Vries holds a “Toaster Drawing” (Jop Horst, 2003–2004).

Photo by the author, 2018

The fax paper has no clear markers that reveal its provenance. However, its (now forbidden) chemical compound Bisphenol A was probably produced in Germany. The paper itself might have come from woods in Scandinavia (just like the cellulose acetate used for film), although most paper in the Netherlands is made from recycled paper. This circular trace implies the “re-placement” of matter, which nuances singular provenance.<sup>65)</sup>

The toaster, in its turn, bears the label “Reactor,” a 1970s–1980s brand from the Dutch department store HEMA.<sup>66)</sup> Most Reactor appliances were reportedly made by AKA Electric in Eastern Germany (GDR), though sources are scarce.<sup>67)</sup> Inversely, the Stork machine factory in Hengelo exported products to many countries, among them the GDR, including machines for the manufacturing of home appliances.<sup>68)</sup> It is thus possible that the

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65) Joanne Bernardi, Paolo Cherchi Usai, Tami Williams, and Joshua Yumibe, eds., *Provenance and Early Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

66) “Huismarken: Reactor,” *HEMA B.V.*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.hema.nl/geschiedenis/huismarken](http://www.hema.nl/geschiedenis/huismarken).

67) “Hema,” *Wikipedia*, last update January 4, 2025, accessed June 12, 2025, <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hema>. Many newspaper articles (from 2014) report that HEMA sourced products from the GDR. AKA Electric produced for Western countries under different labels; “AKA Electric: Household Gadgets From the GDR,” *DDR Museum* (Berlin), accessed October 16, 2025, [www.ddr-museum.de/en/blog/2016/aka-electric-household-gadgets-from-the-gdr](http://www.ddr-museum.de/en/blog/2016/aka-electric-household-gadgets-from-the-gdr).

68) Stork collaborated with trading company PEJA, which had a branch in the GDR (PEJA Holding N.V. Berlin, GDR). “History,” *PEJA Vietnam*, accessed October 16, 2025, <https://pejavietnam.com/peja-sea-bv>.

toaster was fabricated using Stork machines. If this is the case, we have found a long circular trace: the toaster drawings, made in Hengelo, show traces of interactions between energy and matter, through the specific features of the toaster, which was manufactured by a specific type of machine in the GDR, which in its turn was produced by a machine in Hengelo. As conceptual maps, the toaster drawings ultimately lead back to their point of departure.

In the 1920s, Stork built for its workers the garden village 't Lansink in Hengelo. At its center is a pond. On one bank stands Horst's metal sculpture, *Blik* (2011), made from black-coated metal plate. It resembles a ghostlike guard watching the pond. Its eyes have become a film frame, or the gate of a cinemascope projector. The Dutch title, *Blik*, means both "gaze" and "tin-plate," linking viewpoint to materiality. A visitor can stand behind the metal figure and look through the frame in order to see plants and trees growing on the bank as well as the reflection of light in the pond. Above all, one sees a perfect manifestation of *sur place*: the subtle movement of the water, with the potential of intense movement, as the pond is also a swimming pool. This aligns with Sean Cubitt when he writes: "Mediation implicates us not only in the doings of other humans but with the local and cosmic environment. Sunlight and rock, water and plants are media implicating us in the world. All the media we are implicated in implicate themselves in us."<sup>69)</sup> This double implication is also manifest in the possibility to walk around the sculpture and watch through its "eyes" from the other side. From there, one sees the houses, built on sand dug from what is now the pond. By walking around the sculpture, and looking through it, one follows the circular trace of matter, industry, labor, and perception.

## Movement

The animals that Horst saw in his youth — besides rhinoceroses there were giraffes, elephants, and monkeys — opened up a mental spectrum of (im)possible forms of life and animated movement.<sup>70)</sup> Engaging with moving images, Horst became fascinated by the paradox that motion emerges from still images. It motivated him to make films and installations in which he animates objects. Central to his work is the *motif* of circular movement.

In *Ei, ei, ei* (Egg, Egg, Egg, 1987–1988), a Super 8 film lasting seven minutes, an egg is just turning around — made possible by an invisible record player, with only some changes in speed, camera distance, and lighting. The image of a revolving egg is minimalist, playing on the phenomenon of stationary movement. After all, an egg is not moving itself, but as latent life it has this future potential. In his attempt to "animate the egg," Horst also copied *Ei, ei, ei* to video, and modified it multiple times. Moreover, a similar artwork was made from plywood mounted on a record player (3-5-15, 1994), of which he made a computer simulation that looks like a digital version of *Ei, ei, ei*. Each is a translation from one

69) Sean Cubitt, "Against Connectivity" (Paper presented at in/Between: Cultures of Connectivity, NECS Conference, Potsdam, July 28–30, 2016), 11.

70) Notes by Jop Horst, 2002, Archive Jop Horst, and information provided by Diana de Vries, May 2025, Hengelo, the Netherlands.



Fig. 3: Still from video documentation of *Spullentheater* (Jop Horst, 1991), De Bank, 1991

mode of perception and coding to another, opening up space for imagination and reflection, or, as Lautenschlaeger writes: “Analogously to poetry translation, the translation of materialities in media artworks is essentially sustained by the role of imagination. Especially because they aim to animate matter, translation-based media artworks become alive like new poems.”<sup>71)</sup>

Movement is both a device and a subject in Horst’s performances, such as *Spullentheater* (Theater of Things, 1991 — “Videodagen Enschede,” in: De Bank, Enschede).<sup>72)</sup> In the first five minutes of this show, of twenty minutes in total, the audience — positioned in a theatrical *dispositif* — watched a cloth with a shadow play of abstract shapes, while mechanical sounds and noises were to be heard in a darkened space. The cloth was then suddenly taken away by a machine, while the space lit up, revealing a kind of *ballet mécanique*.<sup>73)</sup> Its characters were a revolving slide projector, two Super 8 film projectors, five video monitors, modified drums and a guitar, zoetrope-like carousels and boxes mounted on record players, amplifiers and other sound equipment, and a part of a washing machine (Fig. 3).

71) Lautenschlaeger, *Sensing and Making Sense*, 222.

72) Diana de Vries, “Performance van Jop Horst ‘Spullentheater’ in De Bank in Enschede 1991,” YouTube, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aGLAQaNjO0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aGLAQaNjO0).

73) “Fernand Léger: *Ballet mécanique*, 1924,” MoMA, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.moma.org/collection/works/303856](https://www.moma.org/collection/works/303856).

A video camera recorded a ventilator, its six wings painted in red, greenish yellow, and blue. The image was streamed to five monitors, which looked like the propellers of the installation.<sup>74)</sup> With the ventilator moving at different speeds, the image got distorted, due to interferences with the RGB color technology of the monitors. With this image, the limits of the video technology became visible, as it generated imagery that did not exist in the ventilator. Horst thus showed the functioning of the medium itself, with his theatrical “space craft” being a vehicle to trace the inner, generative space of media. Something similar applied to other parts of the installation, such as a revolving Super 8 projector. Its light projected a sinusoidal pattern, as an amplification of what light is. It moved along the walls of the entire room, opening up the *dispositif* and positioning the viewers inside it.

As an “experience machine,” *Spullentheater* is akin to Stan VanDerBeek’s *Movie-Drome* (1964–1965).<sup>75)</sup> In Horst’s theater of things, all media-objects are connected. However, VanDerBeek envisioned “expanded cinema” to become something like what the internet would become.<sup>76)</sup> “VanDerBeek’s interest in communication technology’s ability to accelerate ‘human sensitivities’ and ‘expand sense organs’ through integrated circuits, computers, and satellite networks is constituent of the period’s heady rhetoric, which is most closely associated with Marshall McLuhan’s writings.”<sup>77)</sup> Walley classifies McLuhan’s work as “utopian, quasi-scientific theories,”<sup>78)</sup> and together with Youngblood’s view of “expanded consciousness,”<sup>79)</sup> he considers this way of thinking typical for the first phase of expanded cinema (mid 1960s–early 1970s).<sup>80)</sup> While VanDerBeek’s work is outward-oriented, in the spirit of this “techno-utopian period,”<sup>81)</sup> *Spullentheater* is more like a mechanical orchestra, creating a sculptural *dispositif* that shows its own workings. Unpolished and grounded, it is a deconstruction of media while fostering a sense of wonder through simplicity. In *Spullentheater*, moreover, each part is not just an element that performs a function in a system, hence fulfilling a purpose outside itself, but a thing that has its own agency.

While Horst demonstrated the agency of moving images, he also engaged with their *anima*. Liveness was most explicit in a work with larvae in a glass box, projected onto a wall via an overhead projector at an art exhibition in a former school building (Wemenschool, Hengelo, 1992 — a later version of the work was called *Muggenhoofd* [Mosquito Head]). Upon entering the space, visitors were confronted with crawling larvae around them and projected upon them, participating in what Steve Gibson calls “a symbiotic encounter in which both the visuals and the participants are alive.”<sup>82)</sup> This temporal *dispositif*

74) This is a variant of a work made by Jop Horst and Victor Elberse, exhibited at Stichting AIR, Amsterdam; Renée Steenbergen. “AIR,” *NRC Handelsblad*, March 1, 1992, Cultureel Supplement, 4.

75) Gloria Sutton, *The Experience Machine: Stan VanDerBeek’s Movie-Drome and Expanded Cinema* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015).

76) Explanatory text “Stan VanderBeek,” accompanying the work “Movie Mural,” in the exhibition “Underground: American Avant-Garde Film in the 1960s” (2024–2025), Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.eyefilm.nl/en/programme/underground/1321900](http://www.eyefilm.nl/en/programme/underground/1321900). See also: Sutton, *The Experience Machine*, 196–197.

77) Sutton, *The Experience Machine*, 45.

78) Walley, *Cinema Expanded*, 72.

79) Ibid., 236.

80) Ibid., 12, 109.

81) Sutton, *The Experience Machine*, 7.

82) Steve Gibson, “Introduction: The Long History of Moving Images Becoming Alive,” *Live Visuals: History*,

is based on the encounter between forms of life. To this we can add iterations of the circular trace: overhead projectors, originally classroom tools, “were repurposed by live visual artists in the 1960s to mix coloured oils live at music concerts” (the so-called liquid light shows).<sup>83)</sup> By using one in a former school, Horst brought the device full circle, showing larvae as if in a biology lesson. But the actual subject of the lesson was something else. In contrast with film images, based on intermittent motion, this work showed actual movement. Humans have not (yet) been able to develop a technology to record actual movement, something that Étienne-Jules Marey was looking for in his studies of birds in the 1880s.<sup>84)</sup> Recalling Marey, Horst’s work implies a circular trace spanning a hundred years, a *topos* according to Huhtamo, which suggests an alternative path for motion pictures. Here, the materiality of moving images is life itself — both subject and technology.

## Sound

Sound emerges when things move and cause friction. Sound implies both matter and movement, and thus has an indexical relation to them. However, recorded sound causes an ontological rupture, more so than recorded images, since images can quickly be assessed as representations. Recorded sound instead comes across as truthful, while it can in fact be easily manipulated. Alternatively, recorded sound can add a reality effect to fictional work, and create indexical confusion. To that end, Horst often used animal sounds, which fascinated him just like animal locomotion. A case in point is his sculpture of a giant dog made from paper (*Hond* [Dog], in: Villa De Bank, Enschede, 1992), accompanied by its growling, played from tape. But Horst, who was also a drummer in a band, IQ-loze Mietjes, mostly experimented with acoustic sounds, produced by musical instruments, machines and ordinary objects, the latter often set in motion through record players as mechanical devices.

While the record player was Horst’s favorite device for building installations, in *Floatje droaje* (Play a Record; Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1993), a 16mm trick film of 10 minutes, the player becomes the main focus. The film shows Horst inside a house trying records on old players, but unexpected events occur. For example, the player itself spins instead of the record — an effect achieved with stop-motion animation. And when the music plays, Horst and the record player suddenly appear in a field among cows (Fig. 4) until the music stops — an effect created through montage. Mostly silent, the film comes alive with the music, suggesting that the player brings a different reality into being. But there is also the confusion of sonic ontology, through the suggestion of liveness. In the film, playing records literally produces living beings: cows and a dog.

While *Floatje droaje* explicitly addresses the ontology of recorded sound, most of Horst’s Super 8 films are silent. Instead, he used sound as a medium in and of itself, in

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*Theory, Practice*, eds. Steve Gibson, Stefan Arisona, Donna Leishman, and Atau Tanaka (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), 1–5 [4].

83) Gibson, “Introduction,” 3.

84) Étienne-Jules Marey, *Le Vol des Oiseaux* (Paris: G. Masson, 1890).



Fig. 4: Still from the film *Ploatje droaje* (Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1993)

soundscapes, radio talks, and sound installations. An example of the latter is *Klop klop — Ja* (Knock Knock — Yes, in: GHL, Middelburg, 2000). There is a sound of knocking on a door, and a voice responding: “Yes.” There is no one present, and there is no movement. There is only sound, emphasizing a voice without a physical body, an *acousmêtre*.<sup>85)</sup> The work is absurdist: something that does not have a physical body can neither exist outside nor come inside, while the impossible being that is supposedly inside can similarly never become a host. The sonic figures have no physical bodies and no spatial dimensions, and yet they try to be somewhere. This *sur place* highlights a presence that is an absence, without being here or there.

Nevertheless, sound has its own *dispositif*. In Horst’s sound sculpture *Soldaatjes* (Toy Soldiers, 1998), a loudspeaker produces a noise that sounds like echoes of rattling guns. Its vibration moves two toy soldiers on top of the speaker, randomly moving and fighting with each other. There is no direction or purpose in their movement. There is just that vibration that characterizes *sur place*, which has a destructive connotation in this case. Yet the vibration, as a trace leading back to the apparatus itself, is the echo of an alternative future. The sonic apparatus holds a haptic potential still to be recognized.

The relation between sound, apparatus, hapticity, and space also informed the installation *Floor for the Blind* (Joris Baudoin and Jop Horst, 1990). In an exhibition for blind people, *Aanraken geboden IV* (Touching Required IV, in: Oude Kerkje, Regional Ecumenical

85) Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Community, Kortenhoef, 1990), Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin built a floor in a little old church, which produced various sounds when walking on it. This particular *dispositif*, and how it positions the visitor, provides an additional perspective on what Wanda Strauven has called “touchscreen archaeology,” which is focused on touch by hands.<sup>86</sup> In a darkened space of about eight square meters, the floor consisted of sixteen tiles and a gangplank. Baudoin has recounted how they constructed it, with all kinds of equipment, objects, and materials installed under the tiles, creating the sounds. Stepping on one tile would start, for example, a cassette tape with the sound of a growling dog; another would blow a cowbell, or let marbles roll in a film can. “The sighted walked carefully and groped in the dark, afraid of every unexpected sound or feeling because there were also tiles that vibrated. The blind ran around enthusiastically.”<sup>87</sup>

Baudoin has published a list with all the tiles, their sounds, and explanations of how they were made.<sup>88</sup> For example: “C4) An elastic string is connected to a propellor [sic] of a toy airplane. Very fast it rotates and hits a number of strings of an old acoustic musical instrument. A floaty howling is the result.” Various other devices created a combined sonic-haptic effect. “D1) A vibrator puts the tile in motion and under a deep roar your feet get a massage.” Of particular interest is how sounds caused surprise. “D3) A computer sample. Someone shouts behind you: ‘Hey, catch.’ Then you hear a whistle from behind, it crosses the room, and then, in front of you, it falls like a shattering rubbish heap. The blind people were highly appreciative of this tile.” Horst and Baudoin used sound spatially, to create an illusory presence. As a self-contained space (*sur place*), the installation was layered — a potential to be playfully discovered by identifying and tracing the sounds.

## Light

While following Elsaesser’s argument for an archaeology of film in terms of energy, I argue that light remains important in terms of spatial relay, playing on absence and presence. This is exemplified by the ultra-short Super 8 film *Lichtuit* (Lights Out; Jop Horst, 1983). It shows a room with Horst walking into the frame, seen from the back, pulling out a plug, and then it is all dark. This act is repeated several times. The source of the light cannot be seen, but it is electric light, which enables the camera to record the room, while electric light also transfers the light onto the film screen through projection. Rather than the photographic image, electricity is the actant here.

In his book *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan refers to electric light as the first electronic medium, which historically and conceptually provides a ground for a media-archaeological understanding of space. What is made visible by electric light is not part of the medium. “The electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no ‘content.’”<sup>89</sup> McLuhan argues that it is not the thing made visible that changed the world, but the act of illumination and its effect: nights became like days, fos-

86) Strauven, *Touchscreen Archaeology*.

87) Baudoin, “Zwaar oke,” [translated by the author].

88) “Floor for the Blind,” *Joris Baudoin*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.jorisbeton.nl/page/255](http://www.jorisbeton.nl/page/255).

89) Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 9.

tering a different use of urban environments, as well as interior spaces, with people developing different rhythms of living and working. This is what *Lichtuit* shows: Horst works in his studio, pulling out the plug multiple times, which becomes a rhythm of appearance and disappearance, eventually of himself. At the same time, this self-reflexivity, with the film demonstrating light as medium, is the film's content. After all, what we see is not mere light as the product of electricity, but literally Horst's agency to manipulate it, and hence his own (dis)appearance. This provides a cinematic reflection that elaborates on, but also nuances McLuhan.

The premise of *Lichtuit* came back in Horst's site-specific installation *Stadswacht* (City Guard, in: De Volière, 2001),<sup>90</sup> installed in a former aviary in a park in Hengelo, run by Art Foundation Ag that previously operated De Molen. After investigating the characteristics of the place, and drafting an elaborate work plan, Horst finally just hung a big lamp in the space, visible from outside through the aviary's mesh. The lamp went on and off at irregular times at night, as if a city guard were pointing a torch at people to inspect what they were doing. Rather than itself being visible, the light illuminated something else, by transversing the mesh. It changed the gaze, from the onlooker contemplating art to the artwork watching the viewer. However, being installed inside an aviary, the immaterial guard was caged, while passers-by enjoyed their freedom that the guard could only highlight. Moreover, the opposition between absence and presence of something immaterial was stressed through the absurdity of caging light in an aviary. *City Guard* stressed light as a medium of control, through the effect of illusion. It exemplifies a reversal of positions, as a feature of *sur place*.

McLuhan's remark that the electric light escapes attention as a medium applies to light in general. Light makes something visible, but remains invisible itself. Light is only indirectly visible, when illuminating a surface. The thing made visible becomes a trace of the medium. This is exemplified by Horst's *Grid* (2008), a painting of a warped checkered pattern, illuminated by a big round lamp mounted on a tripod, going on and off (Fig. 5). The lamp's presence draws attention to the light itself, rather than to the images that it illuminates (or not). Between the white squares, reflecting light, and the black squares, retaining light, a tension emerges, creating a virtual movement of the grid, like a wave. It is here that light waves projected onto the painting become image, as coordinates and surfaces through which to locate light *as a medium*, which then elicits meaning: biographically, spatially, and religiously.

*Grid* was first exhibited in 2008 at Het Agterhuis, the third location of Art Foundation Ag, situated in the former information center of the city of Hengelo — an annex to its town hall. In his search for what would become *Grid*, Horst first developed ideas about the city's development plans, as he explained in an interview with Diana de Vries.<sup>91</sup> Horst saw the town hall's tower as a rook from chess. While monumental, it can still move: a paradox that matched Horst's interest in animating objects. Square A1 of the chessboard is occupied by a rook; thinking about movement, Horst associated it with highway A1 that con-

90) "De Volière," *Stichting beeldende Kunst Ag*, accessed October 16, 2025, [www.kunstag.eu/ag-voliere](http://www.kunstag.eu/ag-voliere).

91) Unpublished interview with Jop Horst by Diana de Vries, 2008, Archive Jop Horst, Hengelo, the Netherlands.



Fig. 5: *Grid* (Jop Horst, 2008), Zaal Zuid. Photo by the author, 2018

nects Hengelo with Amsterdam. He then wondered what A0 would mean, outside the grid — or network — and thought of it as God. These thoughts led to an ambitious exhibition plan, but due to personal issues, it was cancelled. Horst identified himself with the rook at square A1; moving away from this prime position in which he felt locked, he called his show “Plan B.”

Horst’s considerations found shape in the black-and-white checkered pattern, inspired by the *saput poleng* he had seen in Bali. In Balinese Hinduism, the combination of light and darkness represents harmony.<sup>92)</sup> It is used to cover a statue in which a spirit resides, in order to keep it and its energy inside. Some types of *saput poleng* contain grey squares too, in order to indicate a transition. In Horst’s exhibition, *Grid* was accompanied by a zoetrope — a *topos*. It also showed a black-and-white checkered pattern, which blurred when turning, resulting in greyness, until one’s eyes adjusted to the movement and recognized the pattern again. The two works show in-betweenness as a condition of *sur place*.

Akin to *Grid* is *Ellipse* (2009), a painting of a black elliptical surface on paper, with a ventilator standing on a projector table in front of it. It is reminiscent of Malevich’s painting

92) I Nengah Agus Tripayana, Prayoga Bestari, Elly Malihah, and Syaifulah Syaifulah, “Maintaining and Shaping Ecological Citizenship of Indigenous Balinese Through Saput Poleng,” *Eduksos* 13, no. 2 (2024), 263–273.

*Black Square* (1915). Utmost abstract, Malevich's work had cosmic connotations, while he anticipated space travel.<sup>93)</sup> *Ellipse* evokes a similar sensation. The biggest galaxies are elliptical in shape. Turning around their own centers — a black hole — they are the sublime *sur place*, surrounded by total darkness. In Horst's work, however, the ellipse has become the darkness, while the ventilator, resembling propellers of an aircraft, merely creates vibration, without moving. The movement is implied but absorbed, as the light is being absorbed by the black surface. The work is an immobilized vehicle deemed to be nothing but itself.

Having examined manifestations of light related to *sur place*, the last work to be discussed will address the circular trace. *Golvenfilm* (A Film of Waves; Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1992), a 16mm film of 9 minutes, was made in Horst's studio in Hengelo. It could be seen as *topos* similar to Marie Menken's canonical avant-garde film *Lights* (1966), for which she recorded Christmas lights as abstract patterns. "Menken's experimentation with light as a medium was informed both by her own fascination of transposing other media (painting, light, sculpture) into filmic contours, and also by the proliferation of art works that took 'light' as both subject and modus operandi."<sup>94)</sup> While similar in look and approach, Baudoin and Horst documented above all their method for capturing the shape of light. They installed multiple record players in vertical position, with lamps mounted on them, while the camera was put on a horizontally placed record player. The camera's gate was left open, with the camera itself slowly running for three hours.<sup>95)</sup> Produced semi-automatically, unsupervised but deliberately arranged, and tested previously, this resulted in recordings of sinusoidal patterns in different colors.

The light was directly imprinted onto the film strip, bypassing intermittent recording. The film became like a seismographic record of the earth's trembling at a particular time and place. *Golvenfilm* is therefore a "direct film," but different from most "cameraless" films that manipulate the materiality of film instead of recording light.<sup>96)</sup> *Golvenfilm* pushed indexicality to its extreme in capturing the ontology of light as continuous movement. However, due to the principle of intermittent motion, no projector can properly reenact the continuous movement through which the circular trace could be completed.

## Conclusion

Within media archaeology, the spatial equivalent of non-linear history is often conceived in terms of networks (Elsaesser, Parikka), yet networks remain teleological (Gansing). To locate moving images — how they shape the world and our position within it — I have proposed the dual concept of *sur place* and the circular trace, developed through four physical dimensions of audiovisual media observed in Horst's work.

93) Aleksandra Shatskikh, "The Cosmos and the Canvas: Malevich at Tate Modern," *Tate Etc.*, no. 31 (2014), accessed October 16, 2025, [www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-31-summer-2014/cosmos-and-canvas](http://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-31-summer-2014/cosmos-and-canvas).

94) Melissa Ragona, "Swing and Sway: Marie Menken's Filmic Events," in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 20–44.

95) Joris Baudoin, "Zwaar oké"

96) Esther Schlicht and Max Hollein, eds., *Zelluloid: Film ohne Kamera* (Frankfurt and Bielefeld: Schirn Kunsthalle and Kerbert Verlag, 2010).

Each of Horst's installations creates its own *dispositif*, being an interplay between physical elements of the artwork and the position of the viewer. This relationship between **matter** and living being is mirrored in the works. It is the tension between inanimate matter and the force it has to set something in motion. This is key to Horst's work, along with oppositions such as presence/absence, visibility/invisibility, and motion/stillness. While **movement** in motion pictures is illusory, it also allows for manipulation, as shown by Horst and Baudoin with their trick films. But Horst also explored the projection of continuous motion. In his work, movement often happened in circles, enabled by devices like record players and ventilators, which became part of the circular *motif*.

**Sound** is intangible and temporary, yet physical. It affects the material world. The indexicality of sound, however, is thwarted when recorded; the trace of sound is hard to follow, which creates a play between absence and presence. In Horst's work, haptic sound becomes a trace, which implicates both the maker and the viewer in a playful way. **Light** is similarly intangible, but physical, which Horst has used to reverse positions, between medium and subject, and between artwork and viewer. Light is an invisible medium that becomes manifest only through its traces.

By virtue of their physical dimensions, audiovisual media are connected to various places via traces, which are not leftovers from the past but constituents of the present. This has been exemplified by Horst's studio-home as a *dispositif* that connected the past and future through circular patterns. I have proposed *sur place* as an elaboration of Elsaesser's "precarious equilibrium," as the focus of an ecological approach. It is the interaction between possibility and impossibility. This creates a tension, or vibration, which allows for "go" and "no-go" at the same time. It is expressed in subtle movements, as in the film *Ei, ei, ei* and its "translations," or the warped checker pattern of *Grid*. While *sur place* may seem simple and quiet, there is complexity underneath. This is typical of media, as they operate "inside" our world and draw us — makers and viewers — inward, which leads to "cultural involution" (Geertz).

Spatially, *sur place* is a situation of being somewhere without going in any particular direction. There is neither a singular destination to it nor an ulterior purpose. Responding to local conditions and finds, Horst's works are often place-based but not bound by the place. *Sur place* is not confined to a single place, and is not disconnected from a larger environment. It is an inside without an outside, a sphere without clear boundaries. It can be described by multiple intersecting circles.

By following the **circular trace**, one may come back to one's departure point. By frequenting certain places again and again, as implied in the spatial dimension of *topoi*, there is an overlap between past, present, and future. The reuse of materials, images, and equipment similarly means "re-placement." It does away with the idea of a singular provenance. The circular trace exists at a small scale — when an installation or film shows its own functioning — and at a large scale — when a work consists of multiple elements coming from and referring to various places. *Sur place* changes scope accordingly. Horst's work may simultaneously play on both a small and a large scale.

The art of Jop Horst is characterized by the *motif* or circular movement, which is also a primary *motif* in human life — as seen in ordinary movements of people travelling between home, work, and leisure places, and in their routines within them. At the same time,

circular movement describes the cosmic phenomenon of galaxies. Recalling Cubitt's proposal that "Mediation implicates us not only in the doings of other humans but with the local and cosmic environment,"<sup>97)</sup> we can position ourselves through the mediation of circular movement and by following its trace.

It would be a challenge for a cartographer to include in a map its own ontology, but such is the case in Horst's work, showing its own being. At the same time, it is often elusive. Horst's oeuvre is like a geography of shadows and echoes of possible pasts and futures. It shows many familiar objects that have become willful; as such, they are hard to grasp and ultimately to preserve. Notwithstanding his engagement with materiality, most of Horst's works have disappeared.



Fig. 6: Still from the film *Molenjop* (Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1985)

### Epilogue

A Dutch mill. There is an issue with its wings. The mill is Jop Horst himself, standing in a room, his arms spread, in front of a film camera (Fig. 6). His collaborator, Joris Baudoin, tries to set these "wings" in motion. In vain. The anatomy of the human body simply does not allow it. But after several attempts, things take a different course, and the wings are finally rotating, and so does Jop Horst. In *Molenjop* (Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1985), a

97) Cubitt, "Against Connectivity," 11.

Super 8 stop-motion film of one-and-a-half minute, Horst embodies the very mechanism of the film camera — the butterfly shutter — which is crucial to the creation of intermittent motion. While Horst fails to be a mill at first, stop-motion makes it happen. Horst has eventually turned into a functioning mill himself, moving *sur place*, turning around like his moving images, enabled by the ontology of cinema.

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## List of Artworks

3-5-15 (Jop Horst, 1994) [installation and film]  
*Blik* (Jop Horst, 2011) [sculpture]  
*Broodroostertekeningen* (Toaster Drawings; Jop Horst, 2003–2004) [drawings]  
*Ei, ei, ei* (Egg, Egg, Egg; Jop Horst, 1987–1988) [film]  
*Ellipse* (Jop Horst, 2009) [installation]  
*Floor for the Blind* (Joris Baudoin and Jop Horst, 1990) [sound installation]  
*Gold Hurts* (Wineke Gartz, 1998) [installation]  
*Golvenfilm* (A Film of Waves; Joris Baudoin and Jop Horst, 1992) [film]  
*Grid* (Jop Horst, 2008) [installation + zoetrope]  
*Grote Random Zoötroop* (Large Random-Around Zoetrope; Jop Horst, 1989) [zoetrope]  
*Het gele bakje is rode draad* (The Yellow Cup Is Red Thread; Jop Horst and Joris Baudoin, 1989) [film]  
*Hond* (Dog; Jop Horst, 1992) [installation]  
*Lichtuit* (Lights Out; Jop Horst, 1983) [film]  
*Lights* (Marie Menken, 1966) [film]  
*Molenjop* (Joris Baudoin and Jop Horst, 1985) [film]  
*Movie-Drome* (Stan VanDerBeek, 1964–1965) [film installation]  
*Muggenhoofd* (Mosquito Head; Jop Horst, 1992) [installation]  
*Neushoorn* (Rhinoceros; Jop Horst, 1990) [film installation]  
*Floatje droaje* (Play a Record; Joris Baudoin and Jop Horst, 1993) [film]  
*Shadow Procession* (William Kentridge, 1999) [film]  
*Soldaatjes* (Toy Soldiers; Jop Horst, 1998) [sound sculpture]  
*Spullentheater* (Jop Horst, 1991) [performance]  
*Stadswacht* (City Guard; Jop Horst, 2001) [installation]  
*Ubu Tells the Truth* (William Kentridge, 1997) [film]

## Biography

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