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Toward a Geographically Specific Understanding of Filmic and Media Matter: An Introduction to a Special Issue

Abstract
It can be difficult to articulate a substantive materialism in film and media studies, owing to the slipperiness of that term and its cognates. Changes in media and their technology can even bring out the materialist elements of supposedly idealist views in past film theory, thus raising the question of whether there is any meaningful contrast with "materialism." We proffer the hypothesis that these difficulties lose their force as we move away from the global center and toward sites shaped by material scarcity and colonial extraction. Consequently, a materialism thought through to its full implications must be a geographically grounded one. An example is the *sololoy* cinema articulated by Peruvian filmmaker and programmer Aroldo Murguia: an idea of cinema as materially continuous with cellulose nitrate dolls and related practices of reappropriation in Mexican popular art. We also explore the idea that the more a film is geographically situated away from colonial standardization, the more likely it is to be diegetically transparent to the resources making that very film possible, from its manufacturing to screening to preservation. These hypotheses are presented in the spirit of introducing a set of six written essays and three hybrid audiovisual/written essays, all of them concerned with geographically situated film materials. The essays are organized according to the topics "Infrastructures and Ecologies," "Archives and Historicity," and "Concepts and Metaphors." Ultimately, this Introduction to the special issue "Filmic Matter and Geographic Specificity" frames these essays as models of a vision of geographic specificity's material survival, as well as of how speaking about the survival of matter is indissolubly linked to place.

Keywords
materialism, film theory, philosophy, geographic specificity

Is calling oneself a "materialist" in film and media studies just too easy a gesture? The self-label "does not necessarily by itself mean much," as Jussi Parikka says in his treatment of the geology of media.[1] If anything, the rejection of materialism would seem to be the more provocative gesture — and yet is such provocation even desirable? Instead, we might find questions of matter and materiality deemphasized for reasons of context, as when film theory aims to revivify the other principal term of Aristotle's metaphysics, *form*, while also recognizing that these are still two sides of a distinction; we cannot speak of one without speaking of another.[2] There exist cases, more common in analytic philosophy of film, where a theory really does embrace the picture of mediumless or quasi-mediumless viewing (where being situated "face-to-face" toward a scene becomes an operative notion).[3] But excavating those views' anti-materialism (and then articulating that feature as an objection to them) is more difficult than it might seem — certainly requiring more work than reading a surface label of "idealist" or "anti-materialist." Much more common is to evoke something of Karl Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach: previously existing materialisms have been defective as materialisms.[4] That is a very venerable lineage for a thought, but does that lineage always provide the rhetorical maneuver (*more materialist than thou*) a release from its air of emptiness? It would be understandable, then, if film historians and archivists — not to mention filmmakers — felt that the term had no real bearing on their practices.

Much of classical film theory can indeed be read as a debate among materialisms and idealisms, with a sense of "materialism" that can seem utterly refreshing in its specificity: the historical materialism of Marx that was invoked, for example, by Walter Benjamin at the beginning of his "Work of Art" essay in noting the slow transformation of the ideological superstructure following the technological invention of photography.[5] That is, it was understood in early film theory that "materialism" turned on the question of how much of the medium's incipient history could be explained by technology and infrastructure rather than ideas. But we should have no illusions that these debates were somehow simpler than our own. André Bazin's "Myth of Total Cinema" is often invoked as a paradigm of an idealist form of historical explanation: cinema had to be invented in order to satisfy a longstanding fantasy of reproducing reality.[6] Nevertheless, history has a way of

1) Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 1.
2) Jordan Schonig, *The Shape of Motion: Cinema and the Aesthetics of Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Byron Davies, "Formalism Expanded," *NECSUS:_European Journal of Media Studies* 13, no. 1 (2024), 308–315.
3) George M. Wilson, *Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Byron Davies, "Surface, Material Bodies, and the Avant-Garde in Philosophy of Film," *October*, no. 191 (2025), 97–118.
4) Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 171; Sebastian Rödl, *Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 105–131.
5) Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 19–20.
6) André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009), 13–20; Jonathan Walley, "The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film," *October*, no. 103 (2003), 15–30.

revealing the materialism underlying even supposedly idealist arguments: digital photography, by offering a contrast, has allowed us to understand how much Bazin's idea of photography as a mold or visual impression was rooted in the specific matter of light's impression on emulsion.[7] Moreover, an assumption often emerging from apparatus theory is that a resolutely materialist perspective should counter the impulses lying behind photographic realism.[8] But in other contexts, realism can appear to work intricately with materialism, including when it comes to a close analysis of photographic "noise" and "interference."[9] When even paradigms of idealism in film theory turn out to be implicitly materialist, have our terms not become intolerably slippery?

Debates among artists themselves are not far from these difficulties. In the history of expanded cinema, a reductive, "structural" emphasis on the materiality of the film strip was often understood as a reaction against the openness of the cybernetic, McLuhan-influenced happenings pioneered by Stan VanDerBeek and celebrated by Gene Youngblood.[10] But this appears to be less a debate about materialism than one about different materials: or rather, any debate about materialism seems downstream from the more basic question of whether an artist is working with, say, celluloid or circuits. Meanwhile, even though Peter Gidal came to coin the term "structural/materialist" film in opposition to some main currents of structural film in the U.S. back in the 1960s and 1970s,[11] we might now, in the distance and perspective afforded by cinema's digital turns, see the "materialist" in "structural/materialist" as constituting a pleonasm: structural film was already materialist, with the term only serving to mark an explicit endorsement of Marxist and Althusserian theory.

Within film scholarship, it might be more substantive to speak about an ethos of materialism. This appears to be the purpose, for example, in Hannah Frank's opening her "materialist aesthetics of animated cartoons" with poet Susan Howe's invocation of "the portrait of history in so-called insignificant visual and verbal textualities and textiles." Thus, Frank quotes Howe's mention of "twill fabrics, bead-work pieces, pricked patterns, four-ringed knots, tiny spangles, sharp-toothed stencil wheels; […] quotations, thought-fragments, rhymes, syllables, anagrams, graphemes, endangered phonemes, in soils and cross-outs."[12] It is worth pointing out, though, that invocations of a materialist ethos can just as frequently associate it with standardization and the very opposite of Howe's variegated attention to miniature detail. Thus, in his recent study of experimental film and queer materiality, Juan A. Suárez quotes Henry Miller's rebuke of the "insidious materialism of the times" in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945): "Our world is a world of things […] cluttered with useless objects which men and women, in order to be exploited and

7) André Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, 3–12.
8) Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus," *Camera Obscura* 1, no. 1 (1976), 104–126.
9) Hannah Frank, *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons*, ed. Daniel Morgan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).
10) Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970); Jonathan Walley, *Cinema Expanded: Avant-Garde Film in the Age of Intermedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
11) Peter Gidal, "Theory and Definition of Structural/Material Film," in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Peter Gidal (London: BFI, 1978), 1–21.
12) Frank, *Frame by Frame*, 1.

degraded, are taught to regard as useful."[13] These "useless objects," then, on Suárez's reading, become sites for queering by artists like the Kuchar Brothers and their reuse of plastics. Nevertheless, it is difficult to navigate oneself within an ethos of materialism when Howe's "pricked patterns, four-ringed knots" always stand the risk of being submerged among just more consumerist clutter.

Is there any way out of these difficulties while intelligibly staking ourselves out as "materialists"? It is extremely important to note that Miller's discourse of clutter with "useless objects" emerges from a specific experience of the U.S. at the end of World War II: in other words, the emergence and solidification of a neocolonial center. Let us, then, consider a different kind of experience. In a recent text, Peruvian filmmaker and programmer Aroldo Murguia talks about his apprenticeship in Mexico in a workshop of "Judas dolls," or dolls in the form of devils, that are widely burnt in Mexico every Holy Saturday and that, in days prior, fill streets on rolling carts. Most interestingly, he learned from this workshop's master about the use of cellulose nitrate — the same material used in earlier film, before the change to acetate — in dolls of Western complexion that arrived in Latin America from the North, and that, following the translation of "celluloid" into popular Mexican discourse, became known as *sololoy* dolls. *Sololoy* dolls are film dolls (celluloid dolls, after all), and they were maintained by a kind of found-footage filmmaking: Murguia says, "people with limited resources collected broken *sololoy* dolls that had been discarded and repaired them with paper or cardboard for their children. They replaced the nitrate cellulose with cellulose from paper, which was more common and accessible." Meanwhile, Murguia likens the materials of his own training in doll-making (the glue, the paint, the scissors, the tiny instruments) to those used in camera-less film. He thus believes in the possibility of a *sololoy* cinema: a cinema "that collects and appropriates waste, that is sustained by popular materials, that burns amid celebrations and is damnationably different from Western cinema."[14]

Sololoy cinema is a cinema from below. Its theory has yet to be written.[15] It emerges from a finite but continuously replaceable set of materials, where the materials determine what counts as cinema. Doll-making and doll-repairing are asserted as the same activities as film-making and repairing; doll-burning and film-viewing are the very same spectacle. The attitude is: let the burden be on those who say that these categorizations are in error. The clutter of *sololoy* cinema is at times miniature — this is a cinema of detritus — but it is manifestly apart from amorphous consumer waste. The sense of Miller's "our world is a world of things" (an art emerging from festive and playful detritus or art-destroying standardization) depends entirely on who is uttering that phrase, and from where.

From this perspective, we can begin to articulate some hypotheses. Evoking an ethos of materialism is not at all empty — so long as we are speaking from *place*. Moreover, a substantive materialism can begin to flourish away from colonial and neocolonial centers

13) Juan A. Suárez, *Experimental Film and Queer Materiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 27.

14) Translated from Aroldo Murguia, "El cine es una serpiente que constantemente cambia de piel," in *Umbrales 4.0*, eds. Salvador Amores and Maximiliano Cruz (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2025), 88–100.

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

and their characteristic standardization. In fact, the hypothesis that the only substantive filmic materialism is a located one would have radical consequences for already-existing filmic materialisms emanating from the Global North. At one point in her materialist analysis of animation, Hannah Frank asks regarding a 1941 Warner Brothers cartoon, "Do I really wish to argue […] that *Sniffles Bells the Cat* is about paint, paper, cellulose acetate, and glass?"[16] Expanding this scheme of question to another region — Is *The Blood of the Condor / Yawar Mallku* (Jorge Sanjinés, 1969) really about the silver making up its print? Is *El gran movimiento* (Kiro Russo, 2021) really about the lithium of the monitor screening it? — might find that addressing these questions depends entirely on the proximity of those films' production to the silver and lithium mines of Bolivia. For films produced by geopolitical metropoles, away from actual sites of extraction of the resources serving capital accumulation in those metropoles, that schema of question is less pressing. Thus, the consequence of a radical geographic specificity in our materialism might be that some films are diegetically transparent to their resources.

The topic of geographically specific film materials forces the question, "Why now?" The significance of geographic specificity in film has always waxed and waned, corresponding to technological shifts (perhaps above all, the differentiation afforded by sound film) and the vicissitudes of different national film industries. But it has always been with us, so long as people have been making and viewing films in different places. Is the theme thus motivated by yet another colonial hunger for new topics emanating from the periphery, once those scholarly topics recognized in metropoles have begun to feel tired and exhausted? Another, almost opposite worry, is that geographically specific materials have become theory because the topic is already being exhausted. Thomas Elsaesser asked, "Will it come to be said of film history that it is the (retroactive) resurrection of collapsed distinctions? We care about the indexicality of the photograph because we miss it in the post-photographic pixel."[17] Is our topic a symptom of increased globalization and standardization, where geographic specificity can be theorized — but only as elegy?

We share some of these worries, but we recur to our previous hypothesis: a substantive materialism in film scholarship must be a geographically grounded one. While the authors of this special issue might not themselves agree with the letter of this hypothesis (that is for them to say), their own research into a variety of geographically specific film materials gives it weight. The conversation that emerges between three audiovisual essays and six written essays demonstrates how thinking about specific archives from specific places especially facilitates a parallel dialectic: the sort of dialectic between concrete attention to matter and an abstract term like "materialism" that can constitute not just scholarship, but also art. Together, they offer a model of both theoretical and practice-based film scholarship that does not just elegize the specificity of place, but (again, speaking only as editors) foments a vision of that specificity's survival.

16) Frank, *Frame by Frame*, 146. For discussion of this question, see Byron Davies, "*Historia pluriversal*: Ernesto Baca's *Samoa* (2005)," *En la otra isla: Revista de audiovisual latinoamericano*, no. 12 (2025), 83–101.

17) Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology," *Cinémas: revue d'études cinématographiques / Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies* 14, no. 2/3 (2004), 92.

Infrastructures and Ecologies

To provide some modest orientation points on the ever-incomplete map of practices involving filmic matter, we divided the submissions into three groups: "Infrastructures and Ecologies," "Archives and Histories," and "Concepts and Metaphors." Articles and audiovisual essays included in the first group illuminate the fact that behind processes of film manufacturing, production, distribution, spectatorship, and archiving lie distinctive material worlds. Worlds that do connect to film but were not designed specifically for it, and may even be inert to it. Worlds that, no matter how deeply into the geological substrate they reach, still refrain from monolithic homogeneity. As the pioneer of inhuman geography Kathryn Yusoff argues, geology itself is far from neutral or universal. The discipline established its system of categorizing the Earth by distinguishing between active and inert matter, mirroring the distinction between humans and slaves, and thus in many ways underpinned the extractive colonial regime that distributes elements of nature, land, and labor to this day.[18] The differences that arise from entanglements of physical matter with socio-cultural and economic forces, as well as from the variety of geographically situated matter(s) themselves, may influence "our" cinematic experience as gravely as, or even more than, formal and stylistic choices undertaken by artists. Before a film of any kind can be made, and before we can binge-watch a TV series or generate an AI video, a specific country or region must first have access to natural resources — which is, *surprise surprise*, unevenly distributed. As the global chain of raw materials is in many ways a zero-sum game structured by (neo)colonial economic relations, a center's abundance is intrinsically tied to the extraction of resources from the peripheries. Sometimes, however, scarcity may catalyze innovation, as in the case of Nigeria in the 1980s, where the rising cost and unreliable availability of imported celluloid film stock, chemicals, and processing facilities — exacerbated by currency devaluation and economic crisis — pushed filmmakers to adopt video (and later digital) technologies earlier than many other regions, ultimately contributing to the emergence of one of the world's most productive film industries.[19]

This section opens with an article that unravels the geological and chemical grounding of cinema in a historically and geographically fine-grained manner. In a study titled "**Cinema's Atmospheric A Priori: How Weather and Environment Shaped Celluloid Film Manufacturing and Raw Material Supply at Fujifilm, Daicel, and Agfa**," Marek Jancovic situates filmic matter in the era of nitrate film production (focusing specifically on the years 1920 to 1945), within the supply chain of raw materials between East Asia and Europe, and in an intense connection with natural elements (earth, wood, air, and water). Jancovic's notion of the "atmospheric a priori" is a quintessential expression of filmic matter as globally circulating yet always locally situated. For instance, opening a nitrate film factory in Japan was challenging, given the country's warm and humid climate, and when the celluloid company Daicel decided to build a plant in Gotemba, they discovered that

18) Kathryn Yusoff, *Geologic Life: Inhuman Intimacies and the Geophysics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024).

19) Vinzenz Hediger, Didi Cheeka, and Sonia Campanini, "Reconfiguring the Audiovisual Heritage: Lessons from Nigeria," *The Moving Image* 21, no. 1–2 (2021), 55–76; Benoît Turquety, *Medium, Format, Configuration: The Displacements of Film* (Lüneburg: meson press, 2019).

Mount Fuji nearby created a "watashiame" microclimate of frequent local rain, even when nearby Numazu stayed sunny. Air is thereby revealed as an active agent that preconditions where film can or cannot exist. The natural environment also in many ways dictates film aesthetics: "Gelatin must not be too cloudy. Camphor must resist yellowing." Shifting our attention to global supply chains, individual elements and natural resources, local factories, and microclimates leads to a media history capable of accounting for the many ways in which filmic matter structures what we see in cinemas or on our phones.[20)]

In recent years, natural elements and raw resources have become a core focus across various spheres of art, inspiring a rethinking of how works are materially composed, how they circulate, and how these processes translate into form and aesthetics. We can discern several intertwined, often indistinguishable "turns" that touch upon these issues — the materialist turn, the nonhuman turn, the environmental turn, even the geological turn.[21)] What they share is an orientation toward matter as a spatial and temporal phenomenon, which also means that matter is always tied to distinctive places and/or cultures centered around it. In experimental cinema, this tendency has led, for example, to incorporating native plants directly into the filmmaking process, as in Mexican artist Azucena Losana's work exploring the curative properties of Argentinian trees in chemical film development.[22)] However, many examples of these geographically grounded filmmaking practices can be found in the Global North as well. Jennifer Nightingale's audiovisual essay "**Knitting on Location: The *Norfolk Knitting Pattern* Film Series**" reflects on her own process of translating the knitting patterns traditionally used in the Norfolk fishing villages of Sheringham and Cromer in the UK. The affinity between filmmaking and knitting as handmade, craft-oriented practices — which has recently gained considerable attention[23)] — is made literal, creating a structural relationship between a knitted stitch and a film frame. What used to be a cornerstone of structural filmmaking and its explorations of cinematic ontology (Nightingale highlights the influences of Kurt Kren and Rose Lowder)[24)] is now "stitched" to another like-minded material practice, one that carries ties to local landscape, culture, history, and industry.

20) See also Brian R. Jacobson, *The Cinema of Extractions: Film Materials and Their Forms* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2025).

21) See, for example, Sasha Litvintseva, *Geological Filmmaking* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2022); Tiago de Luca and Matilda Mroz, eds., *Elemental World Cinema: Cinematic Entanglements of Earth, Fire, Water and Air* (Leiden: Brill, 2025); Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Andrea Ruthven, eds., *Cinema of/for the Anthropocene: Affect, Ecology, and More-Than-Human Kinship* (London: Routledge, 2025). *Iluminace* recently dedicated a special issue, "(Eco)Traumatic Landscapes in Contemporary Audiovisual Culture," along similar themes. Bori Máté, "(Eco)Traumatic Landscapes in Contemporary Audiovisual Culture," *Iluminace* 35, no. 2 (2023), 5–8.

22) Losana's eco-developing film project *Metarretratos* not only experiments with the chemical and curative properties of native plants, but also depicts the plants/trees used in the developing recipe, foregrounding vegetal worlds as protagonists. Salomé Lopes Coelho, "The Rhythms of More-Than-Human Matter in Azucena Losana's Eco-Developed Film Series *Metarretratos*," *Iluminace* 35, no. 2 (2023), 31–49. See also Karel Doing's phytographic practices: Karel Doing, "Phytograms: Rebuilding Human–Plant Affiliations," *Animation* 15, no. 1 (2020), 22–36.

23) See, for instance, Lola Rémy, "Remediating the Archive: Sabrina Gschwandtner's Film Quilts as Forms of Material Knowledge," *Frames Cinema Journal*, no. 19 (2022), 43–74; Becky Peterson, *Textiles on Film* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

24) Nicky Hamlyn, Simon Payne, and A. L. Rees, eds., *Kurt Kren: Structural Films* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016); Rose Lowder, *Bouquets 11–20: Notebooks* (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 2018).

Local infrastructures and economies can also serve as inspiration for a distinctive creative ethos. As Libertad Gills shows in her audiovisual essay "***Por un cine cachinero*: Reappropriation as a Survival Strategy in Contemporary Experimental Cinema from Guayaquil**," experimental filmmaking in Ecuador often rests on the local economies of second-hand street markets known as *cachinerías*. The lack of structural support for production and preservation in Guayaquil has led many artists to adopt DIY approaches to filmmaking, based on appropriating discarded film materials and obsolete cameras and projectors. Building on a project that sought to rediscover Guayaquil's decaying analog past, Gills recontextualizes *cachinero* films into a videographic manifesto that calls for embracing scarcity and second-hand appropriation as creative strategies for articulating — and ultimately overcoming — the impoverished character of local culture and the desolation of urban space. In a way, Gills's work can also be understood as a locally specific and circumstantially more urgent return to what drove found-footage filmmaking in the first place — after all, one of the defining books on the history of this "genre" was titled *Second-Hand Cinema* (*Kino aus zweiter Hand*).[25]

The focus thus far on photochemical, analog processes should not create the impression that materialism and geographic specificity are unrelated to digital media. Quite the contrary. Today, numerous studies address the materiality of the digital in terms of manufacturing, functioning, labor, preservation, and environmental impact,[26] alongside emerging attempts to foreground its local specificities.[27] The recent acceleration of AI-based models has further intensified attention to their deep entwinement with the material world — in many ways, given the gargantuan costs and human and nonhuman resources required to keep large language models running, AI may be the most materialist medium of all. Maxime Harvey's article "**Language Matters in the Geography of AI: French-Language Uses of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Filmmaking**" addresses this situated materiality of AI in relation to questions of sound and voice in cinema and film theory — problems that remain underexplored[28] — and more specifically in relation to dubbing and synthetic voice practices in French and Québec contexts. Harvey argues that current debates about chatbots and AI tools are ultimately about language *as* matter, embodied in voices, gestures, and accents, and built into technical and economic infrastructures — hence always geographically and geopolitically distinctive. Through topical examples — such as a Québecois artist attempting to replicate Darth Vader's voice or Amazon's effort to "honor" Sylvester Stallone's recently deceased French dubber Alain Dorval by emulat-

25) Christa Blümlinger, *Kino aus zweiter Hand: Zur Ästhetik materieller Aneignung im Film und in der Medienkunst* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2009).

26) See, for example, Parikka, *A Geology of Media*; Sean Cubitt, *Finite Media: Environmental Implications of Digital Technologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Laura U. Marks, Joseph Clark, Jason Livingston, Denise Oleksijczuk, and Lucas Hilderbrand, "Streaming Media's Environmental Impact," *Media+Environment* 2, no. 1 (2020), accessed October 31, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.17242; Veronika Hanáková, "Configuring Computer Labor in Film and Audiovisual Media: An Introduction to a Special Issue," *Iluminace* 36, no. 2 (2024), 5–22.

27) See, for example, Yanni Alexander Loukissas, *All Data Are Local: Thinking Critically in a Data-Driven Society* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2019).

28) See, for example, Christopher Holliday, "Ghosts in the Celluloid: AI Video Dubbing and TrueSync," *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 64, no. 1 (2024), 75–82.

ing his voice — the article reveals AI as a battleground where seemingly innocent uses of cutting-edge technology can quickly become messy, generating rifts both within society and across its underlying infrastructures.

Archives and Historicity

The second vector of this special issue moves toward examining how the geographic situatedness of filmic (and photographic) matter shapes the capacity of images and sounds to reflect the histories they depict — or are expected to depict; the historicity of the artifacts that carry them; and the methodological possibilities for historiography and archival work grounded more fully in locally specific materiality. In *Bad Film Histories: Ethnography and the Early Archive*, Katherine Groo calls for a "particularist approach to film historiography," one that takes as a crucial methodological coordinate "*particulate* matter, of the artifact itself, its physical condition (in the present), its routes of circulation through an archive, its restoration or reformatting, or indeed the absence of identifying marks or paratexts."[29] In the word *particulate*, we can hear echoes of the sensitivity to individual resources and elements explored in Marek Jancovic's text, as well as the inevitable anchoring of filmic objects within specific spaces and milieus (after all, Groo focuses on a particular corpus of early ethnographic films and the colonial relations within which they were created). Yet how might these notions translate into distinctive practices of doing history and reinventing the archives in ways that remain true to their geographic–material grounding?

Considering the photographic basis of filmic matter — acknowledged most famously through André Bazin's essay "Ontology of the Photographic Image"[30] — we as editors had no hesitation in including an article centered on a photographic archive, especially one conceived through the lens of montage. Aleksei Ziniuk and Margarita Galandina's "**Refiguring the Buryat Photographic Archive: Ethnographic Visuality, Vernacular Montage, and Shamanic Temporality**" resuscitates a corpus of photographs from a region strikingly underexamined in film and media scholarship: Buryatia, a Siberian republic long marginalized by Russian authorities across regimes and largely invisible to the global center. Unsurprisingly, the Buryat photographic archive is unwieldy and conflicted, physically scattered across institutions in Russia, Mongolia, and Europe, and divided among colonial ethnography, Soviet social engineering, and Indigenous memory. The authors identify three historical scopic regimes that shaped how Buryats were seen and classified: colonial (1880s), activist (1900s–1920s), and biometric (1930s). Nevertheless, rather than confining themselves to analyzing the photographic manifestations of these regimes, Ziniuk and Galandina also venture into alternative, non-institutional forms of photographic representation. The family album of journalist Sodnom-Dorzhi Badmaev is read as a vernacular counter-archive that traces fragments of Buryat history from the 1930s to the 1990s through montage, collage, multilingual annotations (Buryat/Russian), and nonlinear layout. Further, one of the authors (Galandina) discusses and contextualizes her own

29) Katherine Groo, *Bad Film Histories: Ethnography and the Early Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 8.

30) Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image."

photographic self-portraiture as a form of performative archival intervention — an attempt to return the gaze shaped by earlier scopic regimes and to find contemporary visual expressions of Buryat shamanic concepts.

Continuing in the vein of performatively reactivating marginalized archives, Laurence Kent's audiovisual essay "**Hussein Shariffe's Filmic Ruins: Archival Noise and *The Dislocation of Amber* (1975)**" testifies to one of videographic criticism's key affordances: the capacity to show through comparison.[31] Centering on a major work of Sudanese cinema, the essay uses a split-screen structure to stage a dialogue between two degraded digital copies circulating online, and between the "filmic ruin" constituted by the surviving fragments of *The Dislocation of Amber* and the architectural ruin of Suakin — whose desolation Shariffe captured in the 1970s and which persists today. In the spirit of Groo's bad film histories, the noise and imperfections in both copies are treated as meaningful evidence of exile, censorship, violence, and the transnational dispersal of archives. Embracing these "defects" stands in marked contrast to restoration practices that smooth away such traces in the name of accessibility — much like the resistance articulated in Filipa César's work on Guinean cinema.[32] Through a videographic reimagining of Shariffe's film, enriched with textual inserts from the director's poetic notes, Kent renders scratches and tears speculatively and aesthetically generative, attentive to the shifting meanings that ruin can take on and to the sensual-yet-cerebral pleasure of tiny dots and streaks dancing across the film's surface.

Concepts and Metaphors

The question toward which all articles in the special issue's third section implicitly or explicitly gravitate concerns how locally, culturally, and geographically specific figures and metaphors find their material expressions (and vice versa). In the introduction to the edited volume *Concepts: A Travelogue*, Bernd Herzogenrath argues that if philosophy aims to produce new thought through the invention of concepts, then language can be as much an instrument as a barrier. First, concepts never emerge as pure content; they always arrive to us already mediated — "there is always a 'material basis': as Nietzsche had already claimed, our writing equipment takes part in the forming of our thoughts."[33] Second, Herzogenrath asks, "does not the focus on English as a hegemonic language of academic

31) Nicholas Baer and Annie van den Oever, "Split Screens: A Discussion with Catherine Grant, Malte Hagener, and Katharina Loew," in *Technics: Media Technologies in the Digital Age*, eds. Nicholas Baer and Annie van den Oever (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 263–275.

32) See Malini Guha, "Assemblage, Performance, Precarity: Moving through the Archive in Filipa César's *Spell Reel* (2017) and *Conakry* (2013)," *Feminist Media Histories* 7, no. 3 (2021), 82–103. For a more general overview of archiving African cinema, see Jennifer Blaylock, "Audiovisual Artefacts: The African Politics of Moving Image Loss," *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 50, no. 1 (2024), 60–75. Nikolaus Perneczky, "Reanimate, Recuperate, Repair: Post-Independence African Archival Filmmaking and the Question of Restitution," *Sources: Materials & Fieldwork in African Studies*, no. 10–11 (2025), accessed October 31, 2025, https://journals.openedition.org/sources/3603.

33) Bernd Herzogenrath, "Introduction: Concepts," in *Concepts: A Travelogue*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 4.

discourse deny us a plethora of possibilities, of possible *Denkfiguren*, of possible concepts?"[34] To tackle this problem, the editor assembled an international group of scholars and artists to propose words and conceptual constellations that are difficult, even impossible, to translate into English. Yet, as Herzogenrath would undoubtedly affirm,[35] conceptual thinking does not occur solely through language — oftentimes it emerges through images and sounds, through distinctive patterns, forms, and figures bound to particular materials and cultures, and thus resistant to translation. Signs of this dynamic run throughout the issue, from Jennifer Nightingale's exploration of Norfolk knitting patterns to Aleksei Ziniuk and Margarita Galandina's strategies for subverting colonial scopic regimes through Buryat shamanic concepts. This section, however, encompasses texts that hover around the problem of materialized thought / thinking matter in a more systematic fashion.

Bori Máté's article "**Ritualization and *Táltos* Procedures in Péter Lichter's *Nutrition Fugue* (2018)**" can indeed be read as an extension of Herzogenrath's project, taking the difficult-to-translate verb *tált* (roughly "to open wide") as a point of departure for examining how ritualistic, trance-like tendencies in experimental cinema gain a specifically Hungarian spin. Focusing on Péter Lichter's film made from discarded remnants of a socialist-era grocery advertisement (*közért*, literally "for the community") that showcases processed meat dishes, the article demonstrates how decaying food and distressed film stock parallel *táltos* initiation motifs of symbolic dismemberment and reconstitution. The meat and the film strip are destroyed, rotted, and disfigured, yet also exhumed and newly reassembled — resonating with how the film hijacks certain Hungarian historical symbols from the contemporary Hungarian regime and reappropriates them for emancipatory purposes. The article also enters into dialogue with the shamanic materialism of Mexican artistic group Colectivo Los Ingrávidos,[36] highlighting how even an East-Central European context, often assumed to be far more removed from mythic cosmologies than Mexico, can activate ritualistic imagination for distinctly political and aesthetic ends.

If the question of concepts is also a question of situated materiality, something similar applies to metaphors as well. In fact, for metaphors this connection to material specificity may be even more immediate, since metaphor is, at its core, a relation between two concrete or conceptual things. In Ludo de Roo's article "**Kidlat Tahimik: Metaphorical Journeys in Decolonial Cinema**," materialized metaphors — what the author calls "concrete metaphors" — are shown to be a deliberate stylistic strategy in the Filipino filmmaker's work. The concrete metaphor of the bridge in *Perfumed Nightmare* (1979), for example, is never merely abstract or illustrative; it is anchored in the tangible, filmed reality of the Balian bridge — its stone curvature, riverbanks, tropical environment, colonial construction history, and the jeepneys that traverse it. Through close readings of selected works from Tahimik's oeuvre, de Roo demonstrates how concrete metaphors generate a locally and geographically specific variant of essay filmmaking.

34) Ibid., 6.

35) Bernd Herzogenrath, ed., *Practical Aesthetics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

36) Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, "Shamanic Materialism: 77 Theses on the Audiovisual," in *Expanded Nature: Ecologies of Experimental Cinema*, eds. Elio Della Noce and Lucas Murari (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), 229–240.

The final contribution to the issue responds to the anything-but-automatic nexus between words and matter through a media-archaeological endeavor. In his article "**Moving in Circles: Space and Place in Media Archaeology and the Art of Jop Horst**," Floris Paalman builds his argument around a structure of creative doubling. On the one hand, he interprets and situates the work of Dutch multimedia artist Jop Horst, who can himself be understood as an "experimental media archaeologist"[37] through his many attempts to resurrect obsolete media or "mediatize" ordinary objects (ventilators, toasters, washing machines) in exhibition spaces connected to his home town of Hengelo (an old mill, a former school, an aviary). On the other hand, he devises the dual conceptual framework of *sur place* (borrowed from track cycling) — being in motion yet going nowhere, an existential condition of staying in one place under tension, without clear direction or final goal — and the "circular trace," understood as a physical inscription or pathway that links space to time and implies a temporal dimension and layering of movements. Through this "double doubling" (our phrasing), Paalman calls for a spatial media archaeology in a very concrete sense, tied to locally specific sites of production; spatial arrangements of media exhibition (*dispositifs*); places where media are made manifest (*topoi*); and broader environments and ecologies.

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Altogether, we can only hope that these nine contributions — six articles and three hybrid pieces (audiovisual essays accompanied by written statements) — covering case studies from Budapest (Hungary), Buryatia (Russia), Guayaquil (Ecuador), Hengelo (the Netherlands), Norfolk (the United Kingdom), Québec (Canada), Suakin (Sudan), as well as various factories across Japan and bridges between rural and urban places in the Philippines, will inspire further transnational research into the production and circulation of filmic matter, and help advance a genuinely horizontal[38] theory and history of media materialism. And because *Iluminace* is a Czech journal, we would be especially glad to see future projects incorporate the context of the Czech Republic and East-Central Europe as well.

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

38) Agata Jakubowska and Magdalena Radomska, eds., *Horizontal Art History and Beyond: Revising Peripheral Critical Practices* (London: Routledge, 2022).

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Filmography

El gran movimiento (Kiro Russo, 2021)
Nutrition Fugue (Péter Lichter, 2018)
Perfumed Nightmare (Kidlat Tahimik, 1979)
Sniffles Bells the Cat (Chuck Jones, 1941)
The Blood of the Condor / *Yawar Mallku* (Jorge Sanjinés, 1969)
The Dislocation of Amber (Hussein Shariffe, 1975)

Biographies

Byron Davies is a researcher in philosophy, film programmer, and visual artist originally from the U.S. and a naturalized Mexican citizen. He is currently a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the University of Murcia, Spain, where he is conducting the research project "Materialism and Geographic Specificity in the Philosophy of Film" (2024–2026). From 2018 to 2020, he was a postdoctoral researcher in philosophy at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and just before that, he completed his PhD in the Department of Philosophy at Harvard University. His writings have appeared in *October*, *Screen*, *Millennium Film Journal*, *The Baffler*, *Desistfilm*, *Los Experimentos*, and *NECSUS_European Journal of Media Studies*, among other places, in addition to co-authored pieces in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* and *La Furia Umana*. He is a member of the Oaxaca, Mexico-based film and programming collective Salón de Cines Múltiples (SACIMU).
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