# The Analog Revisited

## Questioning the Technical Image in a Digital Age

Edited by
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Cover art work @ Cynthia Greig

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# List of Contributors

**Alina Cherry** is Associate Professor of French and Associate Director of the Humanities Center at Wayne State University. Prof. Cherry's scholarship focuses on modern and contemporary French and Francophone literatures and cultures, with particular attention to war and memory, space and place, sound studies, and representations of catastrophe in life writing. Her first book, *Claude Simon: Fashioning the Past by Writing the Present* (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016) considered how key stylistic innovations developed by Claude Simon open new ways of understanding the impact of some of the most traumatic conflicts of the twentieth century: the two World Wars and the Spanish Civil War. Her work has appeared in leading journals, including *French Forum*, *Modern Language Notes*, *Nouvelles francographies*, *Symposium*, *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies: SITES*, *The French Review*, and *Modern & Contemporary France*, among others. She is currently working on a book project that examines the function of memory in memoirist narratives written in response to four catastrophes that have profoundly marked the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the Holocaust in *La douleur* by Marguerite Duras, the Rwandan genocide in *L'ombre d'Imana* by Véronique Tadjo, the 2010 Haiti earthquake in *Failles* by Yanick Lahens, and the 2011 triple disaster in Japan in *Fukushima: Récit d'un désastre* by Michaël Ferrier.

**Colin Gardner** is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Critical Theory and Integrative Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he taught in the departments of Art, Film & Media Studies, the History of Art and Architecture and the Comparative Literature program. His most recent monograph is *Chaoid Cinema: Deleuze and Guattari and the Topological Vector of Silence* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), which explores the use of sonic drop-outs in sound films in order to explore different organizations of chaos (Chaoids) that underlie the surface plane of narrative. This builds upon his previous book, *Beckett, Deleuze and the Televisual Event: Peephole Art* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), a critical study of Samuel Beckett's experimental work for film and television and two books for Manchester University Press's 'British Film Makers' series: *Joseph Losey* (2004) and *Karel Reisz* (2006). He has also co-edited two anthologies with Patricia MacCormack (Anglia Ruskin University): *Deleuze and the Animal* (2017, for Edinburgh University Press) and *Ecosophical Aesthetics: Art Ethics and Ecology with Guattari* (2018, Bloomsbury Academic).

**Ted Hiebert** is an interdisciplinary artist and theorist. His work examines the relationships between art, performance, and technology with a particular focus

on the absurd, the paradoxical and the imaginary. He is the author and editor of several books including, most recently, *Photographing Ambiguity* (University of Toronto Press, 2025), *Postrational Visuality* and *More Postrational Visuality* (co-edited with Duncan MacKenzie, Noxious Sector Press 2025 and 2026). Hiebert is Professor and Chair of the School of Image Arts at Toronto Metropolitan University. www.tedhiebert.net.

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**Elena Past** is Interim Dean of the Irvin D. Reid Honors College and Professor of Italian at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. In 2022, she was a Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome (2021-22) and a Fulbright U.S. Scholar (2022). Her books include *Italian Ecocinema Beyond the Human* (2019), winner of the Modern Language Association's Howard R. Marraro Prize; *Methods of Murder: Beccarian Introspection and Lombrosian Vivisection in*

*Italian Crime Fiction* (2012); and the co-edited collections *Landscapes, Natures, Ecologies: Italy and the Environmental Humanities* (with Serenella Iovino and Enrico Cesaretti, 2018) and *Thinking Italian Animals: Human and Posthuman in Modern Italian Literature and Film* (with Deborah Amberson, 2014). With Marco Armiero and Roberta Biasillo, she co-edits EditPress's new book series in Environmental Humanities. Her research interests and publications include work on environmental media studies, critical animal and critical plant studies, posthumanism, and Italian film studies.

**Judith Roof** retired from Rice University as the William Shakespeare Chair in English. She is the author of eight monographs and essays on topics including narrative theory, sexuality, Hollywood cinema, DNA, the shift from analogue to digital, psychoanalysis, gender, film theory, hoaxes, *The Big Lebowski*, nerds, viagra, James Bond, feminist criticism, protozoa, systems theory, critical legal studies (she is an attorney), and the work of such authors as Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Marguerite Duras, Virginia Woolf, Percival Everett, Richard Powers, Nicole Brossard, David Hare, Simon Gray, Tom Stoppard, and Rabelais. She has also edited or co-edited collections of essays on dramatic criticism, the "oddball archive," feminist criticism, and psychoanalysis. Monographs include *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory, Come As You Are: Narrative and Sexuality, Reproductions of Reproduction: Imaging Symbolic Change, All About Thelma and Eve: Sidekicks and Third Wheels, The Poetics of DNA, What Gender Is, What Gender Does, The Comic Event,* and *Tone: Writing the Sound of Feeling.*

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# Introduction

In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983), Vilém Flusser defines images as "significant surfaces" that "make comprehensible" something "out there" in the four dimensions of space and time; images paradoxically make the world comprehensible by reducing it to a two-dimensional abstraction. As such, images operate in the realm of magic, mediating between humans and a world in which we merely "ex-ist."[1] Yet, the rise of what Flusser terms the "technical image," in its endless reproducibility and ubiquity, threatens to transform images from "maps" into "screens" that we no longer "decode" but simply accept, so that our lives become a "function of their own different own images" and "imagination turns into hallucination."[2] Flusser died in 1991, before the digital revolution would irreversibly overwhelm the domain of images, but, like Jean Baudrillard in "The Precession of Simulacra" (1981), he anticipates an increasingly visualizing culture in which digital technologies fundamentally change the image and its function, as humans no longer distinguish between "reality" and representations of reality.

In contrast, Jacques Rancière, in *The Future of the Image* (2003), rejects the idea that contemporary reality is "devoured" by media and synthetic images, such that there is nothing but images. Refusing to conflate a "certain idea of fate" with a "certain idea of the image"—a conflation that defines our current cultural climate in decidedly "apocalyptic" terms—he instead asks: "[A]re we in fact referring to a simple, univocal reality? Does not the term 'image' contain several functions whose problematic alignment precisely constitutes the labour of art?"[3] Rather than regarding technical images as "screens" that turn imagination into hallucination, Rancière posits that images, as "aesthetic acts," are "configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception."[4]

This collection of essays aims to explore the complexities of the technical image in the wake of the digital turn. While the digital image has, in effect, effaced the necessity for a pre-existing "reality," the presumed indexical function of the photographic image has by no means disappeared—technical images continue to organize, if not generate, our shifting modes of perception. How do we reconsider analog photographs, given that they can and are likely

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[1] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaction Books, 1983) 8.

[2] Ibid. 10.

[3] Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2009) 1.

[4] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2006) 9.

to show up on a variety of digital platforms? How do we re-view technical images that make the invisible visible, given that current imaging technologies generate new visualities as such? How does the digital force us to reconceptualize analog photography?

Individual chapters engage with a range of technical images—past and present—approached from widely different critical and/or theoretical perspectives. Topics include visibility versus visuality; object-orientation; human-nonhuman relations; and the affective, haptic, and other sensorial aspects of technical images in their aesthetic and political dimensions.

When all the photographs have been taken, as Jean Baudrillard prophesized, what will remain is the experience of taking a picture, the guarantee of an incommensurable moment that will forever defy representation because it is itself the condition for representation in the first place. The ubiquitously realized technical image is thus both the marker of immersive hyperreality and an exit through which to explore the embodied condition of post-representational experience. In "Exercises for seeing the image differently," Ted Hiebert takes up the challenges of engagement and performance as possible ways to rethink what cameras can do, staging playful experiments to create moments specifically for the image. His participants wear chairs on their heads, cross their eyes for a picture, and shine laser pointers at the camera—in each case challenging the directionality of the digital gaze and insisting on the (analog) presence of subjects, bodies, and experiential moments as foundational to the operation of the photograph.

In "From Analogue Facialities to Digital Probeheads: Deterritorializing the Photographic Composites of Francis Galton and Nancy Burson," Colin Gardner applies Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's twin axes of faciality – the white wall of *signifiance* and the black hole of subjectification – to the generic and racist analogue composite portraiture of Francis Galton at the turn of the twentieth century, compared to Nancy Burson's digital equivalent, which breaks down the *signifiance*/subjectification structure of the face through a deterritorializing and transforming probehead. Although the latter never fully escapes the dominance of the face in terms of structure and signification, it turns them against themselves as an affective embracing of different temporalities and races (Burson is most famous for her *Time* magazine cover that morphs Trump and Putin). Burson achieves her greatest success in her 1990s androgynous *He/She* series, which are all the more powerful because we expect them to be digital composites (and therefore "artificial") when, in fact, that are purely indexical.

Elena Past, in "Bodies of Work: Ferrania Film's Analog Legacies in the Anthropocene," takes up the Ferrania film manufacturing facility in Liguria, Italy, which was Italy's Kodak. For much of the twentieth century and into the

twenty-first, they made photosensitive analog film stock for movies, photography, and X-rays. In the 1960s, the factory was acquired by Kodak competitor and American giant 3M, and in the early 2000s, like many analog production companies, they turned out the lights. Past's research into the Ferrania factory's history is rooted in the Environmental Humanities and in the material impacts of the production, distribution, and preservation of analog film. This chapter examines the role of the factory's female laborers, the "filmiste," by crossing factory histories with photographic evidence that circulates today on a lively Facebook group where former workers share memories of factory life. Photographs on Facebook allow Past to think bodies across decades and across media. Making photosensitive film stock was a trans-corporeal affair, in which female bodies and more-than-human bodies shared sensitivities, for example, to chemicals, dust, and radiation. Photochemical aging, visible in old photographs posted on Facebook, recalls the aging bodies of a slowly disappearing labor force, and points to some of the industrial exposures that may have shortened laborers' lives. Though the digital in theory stabilizes the photographic aging process, the Facebook page also serves as a site where memories are shared and communities are built. Repetitive factory labor in many cases constituted a space of affective intimacy, an experience that endured long after jobs concluded. The interwoven threads of these stories, written across analog and digital media, create a patchwork view of analog's legacies in the twenty-first century: multiple generations of bodies, materials, and labor woven into the fabric of memory and matter.

Judith Roof's "On Posing" explores the different ways non-professional or "everyday" people who pose for photographs and models who pose professionally may both know (or not) and adjust to the differences they may perceive between analog and digital photographic technologies. Such differences in the technologies as shutter speed and length of pose, lighting, time of development, the alterability of the photographs and the photographs' likely survival contribute both consciously and unconsciously to posing practices depending on the contexts, knowledge, and purposes of the photographs.

In "Compelling Abstraction: Cynthia Greig's Digital Transformations of Art Space," renée c. hoogland addresses the loss of the aura of the artwork, which has been bemoaned since Walter Benjamin announced its disappearance in the age of mechanical reproduction. Decades later, Roland Barthes restored the aura to the analog technical image by endowing it with the power to produce a trace, the co-presence of a subject and a surface reality. The digital image is often assumed to have destroyed this last remnant of an "authentic" reality by throwing representation per se into crisis. hoogland argues against this narrative of loss. Instead, she explores ways in which the digital image actualizes visibility where none was before, in particular in the realm of aesthetic production and

its reception, in the domain of art in its "worlding" functions. The chapter's focus is on the work of Michigan artist Cynthia Greig, especially two sets of digital photographs shot in art galleries and museums across the US and Europe that fundamentally reorganize the relationship between the subject and object of artistic visuality and the field of aesthetic perception as such. "Threshold" comprises a series of large-scale photos of people looking at the walls of museums from which the artworks have been digitally erased. "Gallery Horizons" consists of close-ups of the space where the floor of the gallery meets the wall, typically invisible spaces that are digitally transformed, abstracted to horizon lines, thus actualizing deep landscapes that emerge only in the perceptual encounter, in the event of looking—elsewhere.

Aaron Jaffe's chapter "Connecting Modernism and New Media Theory: Bruno… Pound. Flusser… Joyce" tracks the intersection of modernist studies and new media theory, focusing on Flusser's concept of the technical image. It traces the intellectual lineage of this concept through figures like Giordano Bruno, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce, highlighting their shared interest in a decentered, infinite universe and the role of the metamedium in shaping perception and critical practice. The analysis examines how these modernists, viewed as technologists of the risk-medium, challenged traditional notions of form and meaning, embracing risk and incoherence. The chapter further connects this modernist approach to Flusser's later work, emphasizing the significance of medium orientation in a world saturated with technical images. The chapter uses Samuel Beckett's chapter title, "Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," as a framework to structure this intellectual genealogy.

In "Scratching the Surface: Irma Vep's Analog and Digital Histories," Paula Massood traces the character's earliest appearance in Louis Feuillade's silent serial, *Les Vampires*, to her later iterations in *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996) and again in the HBO limited series, *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 2022). The character of Irma Vep has functioned not only as a symbol of criminal and sexual transgression—a shape-shifting fugitive from the law—but also as a springboard for examinations of filmic and digital materiality. Beginning in an analog and highly combustible nitrate form, Irma metamorphosed over more than a century's worth of technological shifts and industrial globalization to become a digital and transnational container of the past and present, of history, of representation, and of the very ontology of cinema. In the 1996 film, for example, the role most famously played by Musidora is performed by Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung, Assayas's casting choice thus openly questioning definitions of national cinema while also—in an ending sequence shot in 35mm—referencing film's material base. Likewise, the most recent streaming serialization further expands questions of nationalism and materiality by looking both backwards towards the historical roots of the character and

French cinema and forwards, situating the narrative in a digital and global streaming present dominated by the Marvel Cinematic Universe and starring a Swedish actress most well-known for her work in American film. This chapter argues that such shifts, makeovers, reboots, and remakes provide fertile ground for understanding cinema's shift from the nitrate film strip to the digital stream. The focus is on three related moments featuring Irma Vep—from 1915, 1996, and 2022, respectively—to illustrate early film's persistent presence in a digital world and to argue that the analog is no more "real" than its digital counterpart. Do filmic images, as Vilém Flusser argues, "absorb the whole of history and form a collective memory going endlessly round in circles"?[5] Alternatively, do they suggest more of Roland Barthes argument regarding cinema's "protensity"; its continuity and flow, the latter an apt term as well for serialized television.[6] Finally, do they prove the "death of cinema," as many film historians have feared, or do they suggest an expansion of the visual predicted by André Bazin in his writing on new technologies and television?

In "Making Catastrophe Visible: Photography, Time, and Matter," Alina Cherry explores the multifaceted role of analog photography in the aftermath of Japan's 3/11/2011 disaster, a compound catastrophe consisting of an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. Specifically, she examines how photography engages with the emotional, temporal, and ethical complexities of catastrophe through three interrelated lenses: the recovery and restoration of tsunami-damaged photographs; the challenges of visually representing disaster; and the visualization of radioactive contamination. Drawing on theoretical insights from theorists such as Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and John Berger, as well as the practices of artists like Thierry Girard, Minato Chihiro, Shimpei Takeda, and Yoi Kawakubo, the chapter foregrounds how photography resists oblivion, makes the invisible visible, and fosters collective memory.

Focusing on analog photography, Cherry highlights how the material fragility and persistence of this medium contribute to its ontological weight. Volunteer-led efforts to salvage water-damaged photographs serve not only as acts of remembrance and healing but also as communal affirmations of existence amid loss. At the same time, cameraless practices that use contaminated soil to expose film make visible the unseen and enduring threat of radiation, challenging anthropocentric notions of vision and agency. These autoradiographic images, shaped by nonhuman forces, function as both ecological testimony and aesthetic resistance. Ultimately, the chapter argues that photography's deeper significance lies not merely in documenting destruction, but in revealing what disasters

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[5] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 19–20.

[6] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. (London: Flamingo, 1984), p. 90.

leave behind, erase, or render invisible. By engaging with catastrophe across material, emotional, and philosophical dimensions, photography emerges as a vital medium for confronting the limits of representation and bearing witness to loss, trauma, and environmental devastation.

Individually and collectively, the chapters in this book take up the challenge of the technical image in its various permutations—analog, digital, moving and still—and reach a variety of conclusions about its operations in the digital age. As such, the chapters shed light on the various ways in which the technical image operates, both with regard to specific sets of images per se, and in the ways in which it functions within wider theoretical contexts.