

# Being and Film



# Being and Film:

## *A Fictive Ontology of Film in Tarkovsky's Solaris*

By

Christine Reeh-Peters

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**PART 1:**

**EARTH –**

**THE EMERGENCE OF THE SOLARISTIC**

**SYSTEM**



# I. THE PROPOSAL OF THE SOLARISTIC SYSTEM

Film and real-image-based media in general are ubiquitous constitutive elements of our globalized world in which reality appears as contingent, mobile, and multiple. Our reliance on reality-grounded media in entertainment, culture, art, communication, science, and even our social lives has transformed everyday life into a technological phenomenon of global proportions. However, the ontological consequences of these posthuman techno-capacities have not thus far been grasped to their full extent in the context of philosophy. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, photography and, in particular, film have pioneered the rise of complex questions about real-image-based media by inquiring into the ontological nature of both film and reality. Yet, the nature of the reproduction of reality through these media constitutes an ontological puzzle. As Stanley Cavell famously claims about the photographic image, “[w]e do not know what a photograph is; we do not know how to place it ontologically.”<sup>1</sup> Cavell thus regards the photographic image as the basis of the film image and applies the ontological features of one to the other. In this book, I propose an ontological-epistemological analysis on the nature of the film image and its relation to being, reality, and the real. In this context, I understand film as a placeholder for real-image-based media in general, a claim which I hope will become clear in what follows. What aspects of reality and being are exactly reproduced by film? This question cannot be phrased without presenting a more radical, ontological inquiry into reality and being: If reality is reproducible, what then is its ontological nature?

Being and reality are two different terms, which are usually distinguished because they stand for different ideas in the history of philosophy: “ontology” and “metaphysics.” Yet in the context of film and the photographic image as its smallest unit, André Bazin famously mentions a “transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.”<sup>2</sup> He thereby presupposes an interdependency of being and reality when he argues that by this transference of reality “the photographic image is the object itself.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, I will refer throughout this analysis to both reality and being as

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<sup>1</sup> Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 17–18.

<sup>2</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

entangled, encompassing categories.

By inquiring into the fundamental nature of the being and reality in film, I will not stress what has changed as film has evolved from using analog, photographic technology to exploring new digital possibilities. The difference seems striking at first sight: while a photographic image is necessarily reality-based, a digital image can easily transform or completely create what is depicted. Yet, we need to step back in order to understand that both digital as well as the photographic film deal with the very nature of the same reality and being, and that we depend on an underlying definition of these terms when we regard digital and photographic film.

What is the ontological nature of reality if it is reproducible or even producible in image and sound? As German filmmaker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg claims, film is the “continuation of life with other means”<sup>4</sup>; or, as Pier Paolo Pasolini argues, the spectator can be “right inside reality.”<sup>5</sup> Neither the continuation of being nor the inwardness into reality is different in digital or nondigital films, because the common denominator of computational and photographic elements lies in “the instrumentality of a non-living agent”; that is, since “an image of the world is formed automatically,”<sup>6</sup> both the photographic and the numerical image are *technical images*,<sup>7</sup> as Vilém Flusser suggests. Furthermore, this “production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image,” because “we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object . . . set before us.”<sup>8</sup> Even films that are composed of entirely computer-generated sequences still try to imitate the photographic image to prove its continuity with reality and being in the worlds they create: the “reality effect” of the film image relies on its origin in photography. Or, as D. N. Rodowick emphasizes, digital media “emerge from similar genealogical roots with photography and film.”<sup>9</sup> Conversely, “for the moment, [cinema] remains the baseline for comprehending the varieties of new media.”<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, in the scope of this analysis, I understand film as a placeholder for real-image-based media in general. Following Rodowick

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<sup>4</sup> Syberberg, “Film als Musik der Zukunft,” 12 (translation mine – C.R.P.).

<sup>5</sup> Pasolini, *Pasolini on Pasolini*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 13–14.

<sup>7</sup> See Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*; Flusser’s concept of the technical image constitutes this image as relying on science and as the substitute of the traditional handmade image; he furthermore emphasizes its invention as a revolution as incisive as the invention of writing.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 85.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

and Flusser, I will further argue that in film we face images that are presented by a technological apparatus, a term which goes back to Walter Benjamin. This apparatus does not integrate with but, in its own way, penetrates into that which has been the subject of natural human perception; it *re-produces* reality and being of the object “freed by the conditions of time and space that govern it”<sup>11</sup>: the apparatus selects and records fragments in image and sound and shapes them into a web of assembled pieces of being, producing a visible and audible fabric of reality. Such a fabric of assembled pieces does not mean we are all submitted to an illusory appearance, but, as Alain Badiou suggests, it means we are building a new relationship to the real: “Cinema is a new relationship to the Real itself. . . . It is the absence of the Real but as a new form of knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> What could this new form of knowledge be?

These are the kind of reflections I explore in this book through what I call “the solaristic system.” My proposition consists developing a specific ontology of film dedicated to an inquiry on the nature of film, being, and reality. The neologism “solaristic system” designates the development of an ontological system which appropriates the aesthetic ideas and principles of thought present in the 1972 sci-fi movie *Solaris* by Andrei Tarkovsky. I have chosen this movie as the center of analysis because it is highly symptomatic of the medium’s philosophical self-reflexivity and its intriguing correlation with reality and being. The word “solaristic” is deduced from the term “solaristic science” or “solaristics,” a fictional science introduced in the movie’s diegesis. This science is dedicated to the investigation of the planet Solaris,<sup>13</sup> which constitutes an unattainable challenge for human knowledge in the film. The solaristic system is the philosophical attempt to complement this solaristic science and to confront the enigma of the planet Solaris with philosophical tools. The system constitutes a complex allegory for what I will call the “real of reality” or “being without being”—one of the book’s key concepts that will be gradually developed throughout.

Furthermore, the planet Solaris is reminiscent of an apparatus comparable to the cinematograph, but as an organic device; that is, it is suspected to be a giant brain, which (re)produces fragments of reality in the form of objects and beings. To better understand this allegory, I will briefly introduce some elements of the movie’s storyline.

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<sup>11</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, “Cinema and Philosophy.”

<sup>13</sup> The film *Solaris* differs from the fictive planet Solaris, which gives the film its name. I distinguish the one from the other by using italics when referring to the movie, and no italics when referring to the planet.

After some decades of nonconclusive investigation on and of the enigmatic planet *Solaris*, the solaristic science has fallen into crisis. Disturbing reports have arrived from the last three scientists remaining there, so the main character, psychologist Kris Kelvin, is sent from Earth to the decaying space station orbiting *Solaris*. The film then centers on the so-called “visitors,” who are present on the space station and the cause for the disturbing reports: their existence is inexplicable. They appear as copies of humans whom the protagonists (Kelvin and the other scientists) know from Earth. Like ghosts, the visitors simply “are there”; they emerge out of nowhere, referred to as a mysterious “stabilization of neutrinos.” They are the somehow materialized energy of human thought processing, an interface for communication between humans and the planet, which is a transformer: an organic apparatus able to materialize cognitive processes.

### Solaristic Self-Reflexivity

Hopefully, the aforementioned claim that the choice of *Solaris* as the main object of analysis as based on its outstanding potential of philosophical self-reflexivity on the nature of film as a medium, as well as on reality and its reproducible being, has become clear by regarding the film’s diegesis. Stephen Mulhall has observed such a self-reflexivity in some of the movies he has investigated, a self-reflexivity that establishes these films as a form of philosophy of film, since they reflect upon the cinematic medium:

These questions, about the nature of the cinematic medium, are perhaps those which we might expect any philosophical book on film to address—they are what is typically referred to when philosophers refer to ‘the philosophy of film’; . . . these films . . . themselves address such questions—because . . . in their reflections on human embodiment, they find themselves reflecting upon what makes it possible for them to engage in such reflections, upon the conditions for the possibility of film. In other words, a fundamental part of the philosophical work of these films is best understood as philosophy of film.<sup>14</sup>

A closer look reveals the self-reflexivity of *Solaris* as philosophy of film in a triple sense.

First, *Solaris* is self-reflexive insofar as it reflects upon the essential features of any given example of a film; film in general is hereby

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<sup>14</sup> Mulhall, *On Film*, 5.

understood as a medium that has raised discussion as to its ontological and epistemological conditions ever since its emergence. The solaristic system attempts to give this reflection a new shift. It works closely on a definition of the nature of film by analyzing one specific film within a delineated context. The solaristic system thereby claims that this analysis leads us to new philosophical insight, in particular, an insight into the very nature of reality and being.

This brings us to the second aspect of the self-reflexivity in *Solaris*. Its aesthetic principles, mise-en-scène, dramaturgy, and diegesis work as an allegory for the apprehension of the real of reality and the confrontation with its reproduction by nonhuman intervention. To preview two examples: *Solaris* holds as a main aesthetic principle a form of existence we shall call “being without being,” which refers to the form of the existence of the visitors. This concept reminds us of the principle of “presence of absence,” often referred to as one of the main principles of film regarding its self-reflexivity.<sup>15</sup> As I mention above, the planet Solaris is reminiscent of an apparatus comparable to the cinematograph, although it is not a technological but, rather, an organic device. Solaris is the reproducer of beings who resemble humans, but who are puzzling in their material as well as ontological status, similar to photographed people or film characters.

Building on that, the third aspect of self-reflexivity from the movie is based on the idea of self-reflexive characters, which I will call throughout “conceptual personae.” This neologism is a term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari: they directly refer to “conceptual personae,”<sup>16</sup> the English translation of “personnages conceptuels,” designating subjects in philosophy who convey movement of thought: “The conceptual persona is the becoming or the subject of a philosophy. . . .”<sup>17</sup> In the context of the solaristic system, the concept derives from the term “dramatis personae” in film and theater studies as well. Dramatis personae encompass all the characters involved in the dramatic conflict of a piece. The conceptual personae (CPs) in the solaristic system encompass all the characters of the movie *Solaris*. In any case, these characters will not only function as archetypes and dramatis personae, but during the philosophical analysis of the film, they disclose themselves as nodes of a network of conceptual philosophical questions, tenets, and principles of thought. I hope to show that their inner and outer dramatic conflicts, tensions, and relations process

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<sup>15</sup> “Objects projected on a screen are inherently reflexive, they occur as self-referential, reflecting upon their physical origins. Their presence refers to their absence, their location in another place” (cf. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, xv–xvi).

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

the solaristic key concepts as philosophical concepts by evolving their specific conceptual potency. The existence of such CPs evokes an ontological reflection on being, referring to Martin Heidegger's musing on being, which will also be considered as central in my analysis. Since Heidegger is a philosopher reflecting on the presence and absence of being and time, his work conceptually overlaps with some of the most crucial questions for our context: What can we say about the being of and in film? For example, his concept of "being-in-the-world" will become a "being-in-film" of the CPs from *Solaris*.

### Solaristic Groundings

In addition to Heidegger, the solaristic system refers to and is based on a wider range of theoretical positions. Some representatives of classical film theory like Rudolf Arnheim and Hugo Münsterberg hold clearly nonrealist positions.<sup>18</sup> In opposition to them stand the so-called ontological realists like Erwin Panofsky, Siegfried Kracauer, André Bazin, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, who literally claim that film is a reproduction of reality outside any system of representation. For example, Pasolini affirms that in film "there is no symbolic or conventional filter between me and reality, as there is in literature."<sup>19</sup> Both Bazin and Kracauer argue for the photographic basis of film and its privileged position among the arts as it records physical reality. Thereby, Bazin is interested in the ontogenesis of the cinematographic image. Bazin is of decisive importance for our scope of analysis, since he is the first film theorist to expressly refer to an "ontology of the photographic image"<sup>20</sup> as an ontogenesis of the cinematographic image; by doing so, he develops the transition from film theory to ontological questions. Therefore, Stanley Cavell (the first philosopher to inquire into the nature of film) refers to Bazin as a central figure in the context of philosophy. In any case, the solaristic system develops some of its principles of thought based on the realist claim that "film is a reproduction of reality," precisely by analyzing what the idea of the photographic reproduction of reality and its being through film means *ontologically*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Münsterberg was followed by Jean Mitry and finally Christian Metz, who used semiology to analyze film; their positions are too representationalist to be fruitful for the solaristic system, which argues for film beyond symbolism.

<sup>19</sup> Pasolini, *Pasolini on Pasolini*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> I feel the need to point out that also in the context of the digital film image, there is a contemporary "refresh" of Bazinian theories. In addition to D. N. Rodowick, William Brown (*Supercinema*, 2017, and *Non-Cinema*, 2018) and Shane Denson



Walter Benjamin proposes a special claim on film as well as on technology, commenting on film in one single, yet famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction” (1936). According to Benjamin, cinema is the reproduction of reality (which is a realist position), but cinema does so by taking slices of reality from the inside, then assembling those pieces. This “reality montage” of cinema is just a manner of aesthetic perception raised by the emergence of film, which I call “cine-perception”<sup>22</sup>: an assemblage of reality, giving access to what Benjamin calls “immediate reality”<sup>23</sup> composed by the very elements of reality obtained by “permeation of reality with mechanical equipment.”<sup>24</sup> Not only has this cine-perception completely transformed the nature of art, it also has changed our relation toward reality. Reality is in permanent competition with a potential other reality, the filmed one, which pretends to be a reality free of any technical equipment, as Benjamin stresses. As a result, nonfilmed reality loses its “authentic-reality-status.” The consequent virtualization of reality, which anticipates what is later designated by Gilles Deleuze as “the world as meta-cinema” (actually a Bergsonian proposal famously quoted by Deleuze), is another implication of the solaristic system. Thinking in a larger scale, Benjamin’s argumentation supports the idea of a shift in perspective of human thought through cinema: “The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope as much for thinking as for perception.”<sup>25</sup>

However, the aforementioned positions of film theory share a clumsy definition of the word “reality,” which is often reduced to physical reality. What of reality is exactly reproduced by film? Its being? The real? By now we have already received several hints that reality is a key term conditioning our inquiry, and we must establish a more consistent conceptual framework. In the first place, what do we actually understand by “reality”? Its definition is one of the most complex and oldest endeavors of the history of philosophy, and it has been receiving an update by the realist turn in contemporary philosophy.

This recent rise of various forms of realism are grounded on a

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(*Post-Cinema*, 2016, and *Discorrelated Images*, 2020) are examples. Although a detailed discussion of the specificity of the digital image does not fit our scope of analysis, the existence of these positions strengthens an approach which includes Bazin among the central authors in our context of analysis.

<sup>22</sup> The terms “reality montage” and “cine-perception” are my interpretative resumé of Benjamin’s main concepts.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 233.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

debate in which the role of the subject, i.e., the fundament of idealism, has been challenged. Although their individual approaches are rather heterogeneous, the “speculative realists” share the rejection of so-called *correlationism*. This stance was established by Quentin Meillassoux, who designates it as “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other.”<sup>26</sup> What is considered problematic is that the examination of reality itself is given up in favor of the investigation of the mere correlation between subject and object (following the Kantian tradition). However, speculative realism in its attempt to conceptualize reality independently from the subject and subjectivity, or humans all together, has often ignored the field of visual art<sup>27</sup>: the most developed exception is Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology (OOO). Here, “aesthetic reflection and judgment are employed in metaphysical speculation into what a mind-independent reality might be like.”<sup>28</sup> In the second part of this analysis, I will delineate the underlying understanding of reality in the solaristic system by referring to some positions of speculative realism.

In particular, Harman’s approach plays a pivotal role, which is set out in the last part of this book: his development of a “quadruple object” coins our quest for a “solaristic fourfold.” As we will see, the solaristic system actually unfolds a fourfold structure, a disclosure based on Heidegger’s fourfold (gods, sky, mortals, Earth),<sup>29</sup> as well as on Harman’s OOO. The latter provides the idea of transposing “fourfold thinking” into new contexts—an idea that Harman grounds on an unusual reading of Heidegger’s analysis of the tool, by relating it to his late work, namely the fourfold. Such a fourfolding method—to develop a network of relations based on four poles—sparked the structure of the solaristic system as a fourfold. Earth, Planet, Visitors, and Humans are the main groups of CPs—conceptual personae—from the movie *and* they elegantly match the Heideggerian fourfold: Earth, sky, gods, and mortals.

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<sup>26</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> I am aware of the reflections on literature by Meillassoux (*The Number and the Sirene*, 2012, and *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, 2015), as well as the anthology *Aesthetics After Finitude* (edited by Baylee Brits, Prudence Gibson, Amy Ireland, 2016), which includes perspectives of various possibilities for thinking about art from a speculative realist perspective.

<sup>28</sup> Halsall, “Art and Guerrilla Metaphysics,” 383.

<sup>29</sup> See Heidegger, “The Thing.”

## Film as Philosophy

By now, the first premise of building the solaristic system, the most important underlying aspect, becomes quite tangible: the intrinsic relation of film and philosophy. Thus, the two pioneers of philosophy of film who emerge in the field of *philosophy* (and not in the context of *film theory*) must be mentioned.

First of all, Gilles Deleuze: he surprised many of his followers when in the 1980s he came up with a systematic attempt to integrate film into philosophy by investigating how cinema creatively produces concepts, which change our perception and relation to the world and which innovate philosophy itself. He designs an intrinsic relation between film and thought, which is reminiscent of Jean Epstein's position, a filmmaker from the beginning of the twentieth century, with strong theoretical engagement and for whom cinema is a thinking machine. Curiously, both Epstein and Deleuze are influenced by the theory of knowledge of Henri Bergson in which "image equals matter." Deleuze famously reassesses Bergson: "it is the universe as cinema in itself, a metacinema."<sup>30</sup> The solaristic system establishes a set of key epistemic notions of a world like a metacinema, which somehow alludes to Deleuze's central interest in film: the concepts of cinema "which are themselves related to other concepts corresponding to other practices."<sup>31</sup> Philosophy itself is such a practice for Deleuze.

Second, we also have to mention Stanley Cavell. Already in the 1970s he pioneered the issue of film as a philosophical concern, as I have already mentioned, by building on the realist claim of film theory. Some of Cavell's reflections on the ontology of film are crucial for the constitution of the solaristic system. He explicitly argues the following: "Film is made for philosophy; it shifts or puts different light on whatever philosophy has said about appearance and reality, about actors and characters, about skepticism and dogmatism, about presence and absence."<sup>32</sup> His position also evokes Epstein, who argues very early that film will raise a new philosophy:

Animated images bring out the components of a general representation of the universe, which tends to modify thought as a whole in various ways. Hence, very old, perennial problems—antagonisms between matter and mind, continuity and discontinuity, movement and stasis, or the nature of space and time, and the existence and inexistence of any reality—come into view under a brand new light. A philosophy may then emerge from

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<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 280.

<sup>32</sup> Cavell, *Reflections on a Life of Philosophy*, 19.

this play of light and shadow.<sup>33</sup>

This is to show that the link between philosophy and film is so deeply embedded in the nature of film that not only does it change the way we philosophically deal with reality, but also, as Epstein and Cavell independently from one another claim, albeit in different terms, film may be ultimately linked to the complex plane of reality in terms of reproduction. I therefore propose to make a list of these pairs of terms for which film could change thought and even philosophy, fusing the positions of Epstein and Cavell: appearance and reality; presence and absence; actors and characters; matter and mind; continuity and discontinuity; movement and stasis; nature of space and time; the existence and nonexistence of any reality.<sup>34</sup> In the fourth part of this analysis I will explicitly pick up these pairs of antagonisms and develop them to finally lay out the fourfold structure of the solaristic system.

The philosophical reliance on a film or any kind of work of art is often underestimated as a device for reasoning; yet, works of art can potentially be a unique tool of thought. By what has been said up to now, I would like to propose solaristic philosophy as a complement to the preexisting framework of philosophy of film. As such, solaristic philosophy is neither set as a philosophical interpretation of film, nor as an exemplification of philosophy through film; it aspires instead to new philosophical insights and consequences for the ontological thinking of both film and reality. Cavell and Deleuze have laid the foundation for philosophy of film and still today their efforts must be mentioned in any further attempt. However, the solaristic system aims to step beyond the projects of these two philosophers, and, like them, it intends to make philosophy of film a project for philosophy. In general, since the beginning of the new millennium, the entanglement of film and philosophy has been growing, and philosophy of film has been established as an academic (sub)discipline in the fields of aesthetics and philosophy of art especially in the United States (relying on Cavell) and as a branch of studies for Deleuzian scholars in France and worldwide.

Yet, in what ways has cinema altered the discipline of philosophy? The solaristic system builds on Deleuze's proposal to engage the concepts of cinema in philosophy. Yet, instead of using a catalog of film examples as Deleuze and many others do, the solaristic approach relies on one special movie alone, which carries out a significant level of self-reflexivity. The solaristic system proposes to appropriate principles of thought and concepts

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<sup>33</sup> Epstein, *The Intelligence of a Machine*, xi.

<sup>34</sup> I have left out the pair "skepticism and dogmatism," because in my consideration it seems too specifically linked to Cavell's project of philosophy.

from this movie and to base a philosophical system on them, metafictional in its expression and philosophical in its character.

Many philosophers today rely on films to illustrate philosophical problems, and film theorists have increasingly searched for a philosophical interpretation of movies, or have been alerted to their philosophical potential. Against this background, the creation of the solaristic system intends to draw a consequence from the claim that films are a form of *doing philosophy*, just as Mulhall proposes: “films are not philosophy’s raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action—film as philosophizing.”<sup>35</sup> Sharing such a position, this book goes beyond the mere repetition of a preformulated thesis and then taking *Solaris* as an example of it. Instead, the solaristic system is to be understood as a contribution to the ongoing philosophical debate on the nature of reality, disclosing new insights only possible through philosophy of film and by treating *Solaris* as a work of philosophy.

Some parts of our analysis will function as a ground to sustain the appropriation of the movie and its fictional principles as an expansion of the philosophical questions I have introduced so far. In this way, I seek to establish philosophy as a form of art. The solaristic system might be understood as an artistic approach, a form of conceptual art, just in the sense that Graham Harman mentions:

For centuries, philosophy has aspired to the conditions of a rigorous science, allying itself at various times with mathematics or descriptive psychology. Yet what if the counter-project of the next four centuries were to turn philosophy into an art?<sup>36</sup>

## Some Remarks on the Terminology

At this point I should give some further remarks clarifying the most important terminology I am using throughout this book. First of all, consider the term “ontology” and its use throughout: What is ontology in general and what is it in our specific context, the proposal to develop an ontology of film? Ontology is generally understood as a branch of philosophy concerned with the fundamental nature of being and the being of everything that may exist. An ontology of film proposes then to analyze the specific nature of film’s being; but such an analysis cannot be separated from the challenge of dealing with reality: the being of film is also of, dependent on, and entangled with that which is called “reality” (recall the “unknown variable”)—because

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<sup>35</sup> Mulhall, *On Film*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Harman, *The Third Table*, 14–15.

the being of reality is that which film reproduces, its raw material. Therefore, an ontology of film is always also an impossible ontology of reality with epistemological and metaphysical features: What is the being of reality—a “real of reality”? What makes the film images real if not their being? A film is somehow a metaphysical unity in which each filmic frame reproduces the same metaphysical domain called reality however we define it, as fluid and multiple, or not.

Furthermore, we need to distinguish the terms “film” and “cinema.” Gilbert Cohen-Séat pioneered this distinction in the 1940s with the following definition:

The filmic fact consists of the expression of life (the life of the world, the spirit, the imagination, of beings and things), through a system of combined images (visual—natural or conventional—and auditory—sounds and words). The cinematic fact, instead, consists of social circulation of sensations, ideas, feelings, and materials that come from life itself and that cinema shapes according to its desires.<sup>37</sup>

It is according to this definition of both filmic fact and cinematic fact that I will use the word film or cinema throughout this book, although with some slight modifications. With “film,” I mean any kind of audiovisual reproduction of being and of reality in general, whether structured in a cinematic form or not, whether recorded digitally, by video, or on celluloid. The singular form of film is “a film,” which designates one specific single piece of audiovisual reproduction to be described in its unique characteristics. With “cinema,” I mean the kind of audiovisual reproduction of reality that is structured through certain characteristics like storytelling, affection, dramaturgy, and *mise-en-scène*, whether fictional or not. Cinema is the general term of which “a movie” is the single form: one piece of audiovisual reproduction of reality structured through the above characteristics. I regard movies as representatives of film, since they present the general audiovisual features that define film, therefore I also use the form “a film,” for example, the film *Solaris*.

The term “philosophy of film” has become established as the substitute for “philosophy of cinema”: film embodies both cinema and other forms of audiovisual reproduction. This distinctive terminology is of contemporary relevance, as cinema has become expanded, first through video in the 1980s and later through digital media and postcinematic forms in the new millennium. Therefore, as I have previously mentioned, the most

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<sup>37</sup> Cohen-Séat, *Essai sur les principes d'une philosophie du cinéma*, 57 (translation mine – C.R.P.).

correct expression would be “technological-apparatus-based media of real images in movement” in order to include all forms of technological, visual reproduction of reality. It is evident to me that cinema has been the first such medium and is thus a representative for all technological-apparatus-based media of the real image in movement that followed, even those that dominate our perception and relation to reality with much more power today, as McLuhan describes: “Today after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned.”<sup>38</sup> Cinema was the first form of a filmic medium to abolish natural space and time by replacing them technologically.

### **Toward a Solaristic Fourfold**

This book is divided into four parts just like the fourfold structure of the solaristic system, carrying out different layers and stages of reflection. In each layer, I have associated one of the four poles: EARTH to the emergence of the solaristic system, PLANET to the presentation of solaristic twists, VISITORS to reflect on the solaristic implications, and finally HUMANS to come to the solaristic conclusions. These groups of CPs—Earth, Planet, Visitors, and Humans—are conceptually introduced in the last part, yet established in a subliminal way throughout the book.

### **Earth**

The first part, “The Emergence of the Solaristic System” (consisting of chapters I and II), functions as an introduction, the base from which this thought experiment starts. After some preliminary interrogations, the idea of the solaristic system is briefly heralded, and some developing thoughts necessary to justify its methods and emergence are outlined, such as the self-reflexivity of the movie *Solaris*, justifying it as especially apt to be the base for developing a philosophy of film called the solaristic system.

Then, by pointing out the relevance of previous positions of film theory and of philosophy of film, I further justify *Solaris* as a piece of philosophy and sketch its main philosophical interrogations. Moreover, I discuss Gilles Deleuze and Stanley Cavell as the two main philosophers to have introduced philosophical reflection about film, although each with their own scope of approach. The solaristic system is an attempt to go beyond the projects of these two philosophers. Moreover, in chapter II, I

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<sup>38</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 3.

give a detailed description of the plot and mise-en-scène of the film *Solaris* to provide readers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the depth of the movie, which is the main object of analysis.

## Planet

In the second part of the analysis, entitled “Solaristic Twists” (chapters III and IV), we take the first steps toward the solaristic system, projecting its object of thought and collecting the first signals of what this book aims for.

Chapter III, “What Happens to Reality in Film?,” proceeds from Cavell’s statement that a photographic image presents us “with the things themselves”<sup>39</sup> and not with any kind of representation, and therefore concludes that we “do not know” how to “place a photograph” “ontologically.”<sup>40</sup> Our analysis starts with what Cavell refers to as “magic” and “mysteriousness”: What is the being of a photograph? Cutting back to Bazin, we recall that there is “transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction,”<sup>41</sup> from the model to its image. Bazin thus concludes that “the model *is* the image.”<sup>42</sup> I propose a reading of this claim that reaches beyond the indexical.

Although we started with a question about reality, we have now turned to a reflection on being: How can being be shared and how does it do so through the photographic image? Moreover, how can we even pose this question without asking about being in the first place? At this point, the investigation relies on the Heideggerian concern that we do not know what being is. Yet, being is time for Heidegger. Film is often described as time-based art, and, for Tarkovsky, filmmaking is best described as sculpting in time, as film enables the possibility of bringing time back. Film is reproduced being. This kind of time-based “film-being” or “cine-being” (a term that will be introduced as *the presence of something, which is absent*) is characteristic of the being in and on the planet Solaris.

Chapter IV, “Twisted Reality and its Reproduction,” further develops the concept of reality, referring to different models of multifold reality. Starting with Karl R. Popper’s pluralist character of reality as well as Bergson’s theory of the world as an aggregate of images, its main focus lies in the contemporary speculative turn, the comeback of realism and materialism, presenting a new speculative twist concerning the knowledge of reality and the problem of human access. The common aim is to

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<sup>39</sup> Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



overcome “correlationism,” the claim that thought cannot get outside itself, but the positions in materialism and realism differ from each other. Graham Harman (OOO) and Markus Gabriel (new realism) are mentioned as examples. In both cases, we are confronted with complex and multifold models of reality: What of reality is shared and reproduced in film that transmits multifoldness?

## Visitors

The third part, called “Solaristic Implications” (chapters V, VI, and VII), consists in facing the philosophical challenges caused by setting up the solaristic system and, furthermore, giving some of the groups of CPs a corpus, delineating its implications.

In chapter V, “Asking for the Real of Reality,” I elaborate a definition of what aspect of reality is being reproduced in film, proceeding from Alain Badiou’s claim that “cinema is a new relationship to the Real itself.”<sup>43</sup> What is it of reality that makes film reality be as real as reality? And how can this real of reality be transferred from life to film? In *Being and Event*, Badiou fuses the set theory of mathematician Georg Cantor with Heideggerian ontology. Following Cantor’s set theory, an absolutely infinite multiplicity is designated as inconsistent.<sup>44</sup> This inconsistency refers to a pure nonbeing and represents the idea of the unthinkable, and Badiou therefore names it “the void.”<sup>45</sup> Transferring this concept to the solaristic system, CP Hari is then the embodiment of being as a void. Grounded in Cantor, thinking the Real for Badiou presents a way to think the impossible,<sup>46</sup> and film may be one possible tool for thinking such an “impossible Real” in terms of its of reproduction.

Chapter VI, “The Solaristic Apparatus,” approaches the idea of setting the planet Solaris as a techno-organic device and thereby evokes Walter Benjamin’s cine-apparatus as well as Karen Barad’s intra-actively entangled apparatus. Barad’s theory is transposed into the context of film and the solaristic system, and Benjamin’s cine-apparatus is developed with

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<sup>43</sup> Badiou, “Cinema and Philosophy.”

<sup>44</sup> Badiou quotes Cantor: “On the one hand, a multiplicity may be such that the affirmation according to which all its elements ‘are together’ leads to a contradiction, such that it is impossible to conceive the multiplicity as a unity, as a ‘finite thing’. These multiplicities, I name them absolutely infinite multiplicities, or inconsistent” (ibid., 41–42).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>46</sup> “I think that the impossible is precisely the name of the Real,” (Badiou, “The Critique of Critique”).

a brief look at his conception of technology. According to Barad, mind and world, meaning and matter, are intra-actively entangled by diffraction, a position actually based on Niels Bohr's quantum physics. In *Solaris*, reality is reproduced while a mysterious process is taking place in which the reproduced reality starts to interact in the form of the visitors, who materialize by "intra-action," a neologism introduced by Barad on entangled relations. Benjamin's apparatus is defined as a mechanical device penetrating into reality, further producing "immediate reality,"<sup>47</sup> which is more real for the viewer than the reality it depicts. Benjamin's technological apparatus anticipates a reconciliation between technology and nature, which becomes explicit in the planet-brain *Solaris*, further tending toward the realization of a universal "worldbrain."<sup>48</sup>

Chapter VII, "The Real, the Virtual, and the Subjective Side of Knowledge," departs from Plato's Cave, which insinuates that we are deluded by our perception, and follows the skeptical tradition in philosophy. René Descartes famously questions whether we can distinguish actual reality from dreaming. Descartes's position reflects what I summarize with the term "virtuality of reality," alluding to a dominant postmodern idea, questioning whether we can distinguish at all between reality and fiction and alluding to new computer-generated "virtual realities." For contemporary philosophers like Deleuze, the term "virtual" has a completely different meaning and refuses dualism. Building on his position, Slavoj Žižek reverts the hypothesis of "virtual reality" into the "reality of the virtual," which is, according to Žižek, isomorphic to the Lacanian Real. The chapter further analyzes Nick Bostrom's "simulation hypothesis," which asks if we could be living in a computer simulation, a question we apply here to *Solaris*. This hypothesis would emphasize the emotional and indirect approach between Kelvin and visitor CP Hari, which occurs through love. Anticipating Harman's hypothesis of approaching that which cannot be known, namely the real object, other than indirectly, for example, by love, we can name an allusory principle of solaristic philosophy, relying on a deliberately subjective method to access the real. We then invoke Žižek's claim that the "thickness of objectivity resisting the subject's grasp is precisely the subjective moment"<sup>49</sup> that completes reality.

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<sup>47</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 233.

<sup>48</sup> Degoutin and Wagon, *World Brain*.

<sup>49</sup> Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 807.

## Humans

The fourth part of the analysis, called “Solaristic Conclusions” (consisting of chapters VIII and IX), unfolds the fourfold structure of the solaristic system.

Chapter VIII is titled “Raising a Solaristic Fourfold” and traces the development of such a fourfold model to summarize the solaristic system. I therefore introduce Heidegger’s fourfold and then rely on Harman’s OOO as an example of how to transpose this fourfold thinking into new contexts. Such a fourfold method—to develop a network of relations based on four poles—can then be applied to the solaristic system. Heidegger’s fourfold is thereby not only the point of departure but also the point of arrival in this chapter. Its four poles are especially apt to be applied to the movie *Solaris*: Earth, sky, gods, and mortals become in the solaristic system Earth, Planet, Visitors, and Humans, and the mortality of the latter in fact plays a major role. Harman gives a new reading of Heidegger’s analysis of the tool and develops an object-oriented approach relying on a fourfold structure. The four poles are linked through a network of relations, from which allusion, causation, and allure are of special importance. The last part of the chapter focuses then on the hypothesis that we can transpose Heidegger’s fourfold into the solaristic system by clarifying the concepts of the entities constituting the fourfold.

Chapter IX, “Conclusions and Cardinal Tenets of the Solaristic System,” summarizes the solaristic system as a fourfold structure, naming its links and relations between the four poles to be projected into four dimensions. These poles, although relying on Heidegger and Harman, integrate the oppositional pairs defined by Epstein and Cavell (mentioned in this chapter), on which film would automatically philosophically reflect. These pairs are then complemented by additional topics raised during the analysis and divided into four groups. The structural outline of the solaristic system thus consists of a catalogue of 46 theses, an attempt to systematically embody what has been said so far on the solaristic system. The chapter concludes by briefly reflecting on the meaning of the solaristic system as well as on perspectives for further analysis.



## II. THE PLOT OF THE MOVIE *SOLARIS*

With this chapter, I aim to give a detailed description of the narrative plot and diegesis of *Solaris*, as well as some thoughts on the dramaturgy. Although I recommend the reader to have seen the movie before engaging with this analysis, I want to guarantee the accessibility of my writing to those who do not know the movie at all or who have seen it many years ago. Also, it is necessary to clarify my underlying understanding of the narrative meaning of the movie. I will also include, as part of the detailed plot description, some observations on the *mise-en-scène*, the kind of framing and montage Tarkovsky uses, as well as some other relevant aesthetic choices regarding image, sound, framing, and camera movement.

### Part 1

The film opens on Earth. It is summer. Floating seaweed and leaves appear in a stream of water. Lingering on their rhythm smoothly moving in the water, their flow is meditative. As the camera goes up, it passes over reeds, bushes, and very tall grass, and we meet the middle-aged protagonist Kris Kelvin during a walk in this nature. We can almost feel the heat and the smell of green trees and grass, the flowers, and the insects, suggested by zooming in and long panning camera movement, extremely close to the subjects, and a tactile use of sound. A beautiful black horse walks nearby.

Kris Kelvin, now shown in three-quarters scale, is revealed to be immersed in his thoughts; he walks near his father's home (as we understand later), an old-fashioned, big, wooden countryside house, but with a modern country road nearby. Kelvin observes from far away how a visitor (named Berton) accompanied by a child arrives by car and is welcomed by a man we later learn to be Kelvin's father. They wave and call for Kelvin, who doesn't seem willing to speak and would rather be alone.

The father and the visitor are conversing, and we understand that Kelvin is a "solaristic scientist," who now takes daily morning nature walks for at least an hour, because sometimes he works for the whole night. We enter the house. The fact that it is wooden and full of small objects indicates an homage to classical human culture, a balanced harmony between knowledge and nature: old measuring instruments, a cage with birds, white busts of admired people from the past, graphics of hot air balloons, selected

wooden furniture, and flowers and tree branches from the countryside in vases reinforce the peaceful, harmonic ambience. The photo of a woman with long blond hair, looking right into the camera, also receives some attention. Her intense gaze makes her very present.

We further understand from the dialogue that soon Kelvin will have to leave Earth for a mission on a space station and that his first report will be of crucial importance for the continuation of the station. Berton expresses his concern that messages from the station have seemed confusing or even incomprehensible, and if Kelvin confirms this impression, the space station will be taken out of the Solaris orbit. Berton came to speak with Kelvin to convince him to not prematurely rush into a regretful decision. He also admires the house, and Kelvin's father explains that he actually rebuilt his grandfather's home, since he despises modern culture. Rain starts, a heavy, warm summer rain, illuminated by the sun.

Kelvin stands outside on the terrace of the house in a melancholic mood. The rain is soaking his clothes and hair, but he enjoys it, to feel nature. On the table lies apples, the leftovers of a tea session, and bread in a bowl. The tea set is old-fashioned, from the nineteenth century; it is made of traditional white and blue porcelain. The rain soaks everything on the table. For a moment, Kelvin gets cold. The rain stops; the countryside gurgles from the plants absorbing the water. Here, as well, the camera frames details on an extremely close scale making the sound seems tactile.

Back inside, Kelvin's father leaves the scene, saying that he has seen what Berton has brought with him too many times before. In the presence of Anna, who is the father's sister, Kelvin and Berton watch an old black and white video report. The report shows Berton many years ago, visibly younger, while he testified before a kind of military court that also consisted of scientists. Berton had worked on the Solaris space station as a pilot. When he became part of a rescue team in search of a lost aircraft, he got lost himself, swallowed by an odd and uncanny fog. Before the court, Berton claims to have observed how part of the ocean surface of the planet began to change, transmuting into a gardenlike island. The assembled court members seem shocked and unwilling to believe him: a garden millions of miles away from Earth? Berton evokes the evidence of the video recording he made during the flight. Surprisingly, the camera tape only shows clouds and fog, and Berton has no explanation for the discrepancy. His confusion shows. He continues to report the incident as he experienced it, in spite the increasing disbelief of his audience. After the garden, he saw a living being: an oversized, rightfully gigantic child, covered by a slimy skin, swimming naked in the ocean. He had never seen this child before and felt disgusted by the sight of it. All of the specialists who testify, except one, discredit