



## Waking/Examined-After/Lives: Later-Links and (Re)Rendering the Rem[AI]ns of Film-Philosophy

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Hyphenating a global corpus of films featuring real philosophers, "Waking/Examined-After/Life" film-philosophically (*de*)monstrates how media determine philosophy's condition. Symptomatically situating itself within an intensifying turn in the AI imaging revolution, its "fractalactic" media archaeology of the present perceptively uncovers recursive entanglements of image, technology, and philosophical expression.

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### Creator's Statement

Building on notions of film as a technological mode of perception (Vertov 1985), thought (Deleuze 2014), and memory (Deleuze 2005), “Waking/Examined-After/Lives” (“W/E-A/L” hereafter) invites viewers to film-philosophically share in a form of “material thinking” (Fleming 2025b; Grant 2014; Carter 2004) with screen images. As a found footage work, it formally and stylistically puts into practice a double or oscillating movement of thought, to encourage viewers to “prehend” (Whitehead 1955; Fleming 2017, p. 18) how “*media determine philosophy’s situation*” (Fleming 2025a, p. 85). Rather than treating philosophy as mere film content, form and style are here deployed to show how media mould and deform, condition and delimit, afford or discommode the very possibilities of thought/thinking. The film essay experiment thus aims to critically expose the grounds of the screen image-imaginary as a grotesque and “monstrous” agent of perception-thought. In this instance, by curatorially reappropriating and aesthetically hyphenating a series of films by philosophically attuned filmmakers (such as Li Yuesheng, Astra Taylor, Mike Cahill, Amy Ziering & Kirby Dick, Richard Linklater, Woody Allen, and Jean-Luc Godard) that feature real and re-imagined philosophers—including Confucius, Karl Marx, Jacques Derrida, Marshall McLuhan, Gilles Deleuze, and Slavoj Žižek.

Embracing the idea that philosophy and humour cohere, or condition comparable perceptive effects (Morreall 2024; Critchley 2002), this “no budget” pirate film initially harnesses a digitally rotoscoped film philosophical dialogue from Richard Linklater’s *Waking Life* as its spiralling terminus point—here drawn up between a dynamically

animated Caveh Zahedi unloading his take on Andre Bazin's "photographic ontology" of cinema with the poet David Jewell. Thereafter, "W/E-A/L" leans into freely available digital effects and AI-imaging techniques to expressively de/reform an associatively interlinked series of dialogue scenes featuring real global philosophers—that either explicitly or implicitly probe film's relationships with philosophy and thought. By exclusively using films about or featuring real philosophers as its raw material, "W/E-A/L" emerges as an illustrative example of a *fractalactic film-philosophy* method (see Fleming 2025b). Fractals are repeating geometrical patterns derived from mathematical sets which exhibit self-similarity at different scales. The term "fractalactic" meanwhile was coined by Adam Bryx and Bryan Reynolds in their engagement with the trippy transversal poetics and polyphonic aspects of subjectivity woven into Félix Guattari's thought models (2012). It is in relation to complex nonlinear exploding-imploding vectors opened by conceptualising group-subjects, part-whole relations, and singular-multiplicity dynamics that I detour the term "fractalactic" for "W/E-A/L"'s methodological film philosophy practice.

"W/E-A/L" takes its part in a wider *Film-Philos-Orama* series that now includes *Danse Macabre: Of the Dying and Death of Philosophers on Film* (and film as an [archival] afterlife of philosophy) (2025) and *JLG: Two or Three 'Threes' We Know About His Film-Philosophers'* (forthcoming). In difference to these, the main theme brought to the fore in this video essay surrounds the notion of making "monstrous children" (Deleuze 1973), or grotesque posthuman/posthumous figures of once living philosophers. However, contra Deleuze and Guattari's arguments surrounding the production of monstrous "philosophical personae" (2004, p. 64), rather than having these bastard offspring say what I, as essayistic author, want them to say, "W/E-A/L" employs collaging, remediation, and convergence to magnify and amplify already extant intermedial slippages, cracks, and secret emissions. Thus, to reboot a line of thinking offered by Jean-Luc Nancy (2005), "W/E-A/L" exposes how today's digital forms and AI techniques surface as forms of *monstration*, or *monstrance*. That is, acts of showing rather than telling that become synonymous with decentring acts of violence, interference, deception, and transformation. Notions perhaps best grasped by the incorporation of posthumous "Deepfake" techniques to reanimate and render Karl Marx in the Chinese "theory film" *When Marx Met Confucius* (Li Yuesheng, 2023), if not the science-fictional projections of the Chinese "hyperphilosopher" Confucius in the same, or comparable posthuman AI image-imaginings of Žižek presented in *Bliss* (Mike Cahill, 2021).

Formally speaking, "W/E-A/L" foregoes or decentres authorial narration and voiceover to more effectively show and develop its point, using creative re-arrangements

of marked and mis-quoted works to develop and advance its film-philosophical position. One tutor image from the film can help gesture to these reflexive or fractalactic methods here. This being located in and around the re-touched documentary scene from *Derrida* (Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, 2002) that finds the titular philosopher discussing Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus from the Greek myth. Framed afore a mirror, Derrida recounts how Echo, who has "the longest voice," was condemned by the Olympian gods to only ever parrot the final words of anyone addressing her. Her repetition of their final words ultimately denuding her of her own voice, while cruelly condemning her to a voiceless voice. Echo's curse is uniquely defeated however after Narcissus, whom she loves, declares his self-love afore his own reflection. For, as Derrida explains, Echo's repetition of his words gathers new meaning in the context of *her* mouth, introducing difference into her repetition. Derrida's telling of this story in the context of Dick and Ziering's film, Akira Mizuta Lippit argues, helps uncloak a site specific Derridean system of film philosophy (2016, p. 21). Of course, Derrida's reflexive philosophical reading of film, from within the contextualising film, is differently repeated or digitally altered again within the body of "W/E-A/L"—to generate further "tertiary" (to borrow a phenomenological phrase from Stanley Cavell) meanings and hyperreal slippages. Mapping a critical echo chamber of critical film philosophy reflection, upon critical film philosophy reflection, puts into circulation a feedback loop of self-revising film-philosophical thoughts, memories, and perceptions that gesture towards how film form, film content, *and* film style work together in a (dis)harmonising "tritone."

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## Biography

David H. Fleming is Senior Lecturer at the University of Stirling. His research gravitates around the intersectionalities of Screens, Thinking, and Worlds (the name of the Edinburgh University Press book series he is co-founding editor of). His video essays “Hiber-nation” (2024) and “Danse Macabre” (2025) are currently open access via *[In]Transition* and *Screenworks* respectively. Requests for *Film-Philos-Orama: A Head-Trip-Tych* screenings are also warmly welcomed. He is the co-author, with William Brown, of *Infinite Ontologies of the Chthulustream: Posthumanism and Racial Capital in Contemporary Streaming Media* (2025) and *The Squid Cinema From Hell* (2020). He authored *Chinese Urban Shi-nema* (2020) with Simon Harrison and is the author of *Cinematically Rendering Confucius: Chinese Film Philosophy and the Efficacious Screen-Play* (2025) and *Unbecoming Cinema* (2017).

### Review by Miguel Mesquita Duarte, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

In *Ecographies of Television: Filmed Interviews* (2002), Derrida and Stiegler characterise spectrality as the moment when “something becomes almost visible which is visible only insofar as it is not visible in flesh and blood.” Drawing on digital effects and AI-imaging techniques, David H. Fleming conjures a series of philosophers whose presences are marked by absence in advance. In line with Derrida and Stiegler, this invokes a deconstructive logic inseparable from the spectral: a mode of construction that operates through a junction–disjunction of opposites, where visibility depends on invisibility, and presence emerges only in and through its absence.

By the middle of the piece, Fleming turns to Deleuze’s reflections on the creative act. For Deleuze, to have an idea in cinema is to compose blocks of movement–time that are expressed through the cinematic process. In Robert Bresson’s films, for instance, space is invented from disconnected, indeterminate fragments that are joined by the hand. Fleming extends this tactility to the digital: while new technologies decisively transform the analogic relation between body and image, his “fractalactic film–philosophy method” still relies on a gestural interplay of hand and thought. To recall Godard, cinema is at once a thought that forms and a form that thinks.

“W/E–A/L” activates a polyphony of voices through the revived spectres of philosophers and their afterlives. Yet one voice and presence remain unheard and unseen: Fleming’s own, in his role as videographic film–philosopher. He deliberately chooses to forego, or rather “decentre”, authorial narration and voiceover, relying instead on the accompanying statement to articulate the conceptual resonances generated by the circulation and interferences of the compiled film excerpts.

Many examples in videographic criticism reveal a tendency to frame telling and showing as separate registers. In some cases, this reflects a deliberate commitment to style and form, as seems to be the case in Fleming’s oeuvre; in others, the refusal to perform or directly intervene within the videographic piece appears less a principled choice than a comfortable retreat. In either case, I must admit to having serious reservations about Fleming’s use of the term *video essay*, as this category bears (or should bear) a rigorous and clearly identifiable lineage in both cinematic and literary traditions. A film or video essay typically foregrounds the interplay between images and voiceover alongside the performative presentation of the self, enabling viewers to traverse uncharted paths and to experience the videographic work as a seamless fusion of subjective practice and theory. The dissociative transformation of images and words constitutes, in short, what Deleuze described as “a new analytics of the image,” capable of *constructing* a relation out of the very non–relationship between two heterogeneous systems of signification.

By foregrounding Derrida's reading of the myth of Echo and Narcissus in his statement, Fleming suggests that in repeating/collecting the words of philosophers he admires, he is in fact communicating with them, speaking with them, activating a system of iterative repetition as difference. Yet Derrida's remarks should also make us aware that such repetition carries a threat: By merely echoing pre-existing words and images, we risk making those who speak and those who listen mutually invisible to one another.

### **Review by James Mulvey, University College Cork**

A global decline in readership foreshadows the shift in how theory is consumed, making "Waking/Examined-After/lives: Later-Links and (Re)Rendering the Rem[A]ins of Film-Philosophy" a timely exploration into whether doing film-philosophy in a videographic form maintains academic rigour. This mesmerizing hyphenated media trip certainly offers a critical paradigm for future projects by directing and prompting the viewer to reflect on the history of the image's relation to philosophy as it shifts from being a quasi-religious experience to becoming the conditions for how we experience. Thrillingly, the viewer is plunged into a mediated landscape and immersed in videographic comprehension, while being guided diligently through academic debates on the technological developments of how the image is consumed, theorised, and its projected futures.

Far from being a dystopic slide into the abyss of a technological meltdown, Fleming's hyphenated possibilities reflect critically on how established media platforms provide fertile ground for the new, by forging undetermined and creative links in established patterns of thought, thus deforming the re-conditioning of future thinking. This optimism owes much to Gilles Deleuze's "method of AND" found in *Cinema 2*, through the interstice, the space between, and Félix Guattari's generative modes of fractalactic subjectivity, and, as I suggest, the processes of productive hyphenation.

This compilation immediately asks a question determining the relation between the virtual and the actual through mediation. It forces the viewer to consider their relation to screens and what they choose to view, for example, in frame and hovering menacingly above buildings, columns of Magritte-styled drones await, but the moment of surreality is found through an off-centre screen melded to plastic, shaped hands, drawing the viewer through a virtual door. There is no hierarchy of media, just a proliferation of images further entwining the hyphenation of the actual with the virtual.

This post-human apocalyptic wormhole reassuringly transitions into an animated Linklater theatre. Here, the viewer feels safe, until a rotoscoped Derrida interrupts, echoing a haunting of the image. This "and" or hyphenation is central to this critical essay where the emergence and crystallisation of thought borne out of one regime

haunts successive media. This is brilliantly illustrated through the queue scene from *Annie Hall*, where instead of the original autumnal seventies colour palette, an inky, comic-blue Woody Allen introduces Marshall McLuhan, where the image is distorted by a hyper-realness accompanied by a futuristic hum, emphasising the discordance between image and sound in meaning-making.

The layering of filmic components foretells the embryonic restructuring of materiality and ideas generated through AI. Just as the viewer begins to ponder the medium as message, on the other side of the interstice a heavily saturated colour palate sees Jean-Luc Godard and Allen discuss the impact of television on film through framing.

These heavily distorted figures consider the creative affects of television, likening it to a form of cultural radioactivity causing a mercurial stutter in the shifting structures of visual language. This demonstrates through reiteration the unreliable projections caused by hyphenations and a further layer is introduced by the presence of a translator, mediating the dash between filmmakers in forging the new through a process of unpredictability, transitioning from an Anglo-French encounter to a digitised non-human puppet of Deleuze who is expertly juxtaposed with a pop-art styled figure wearing 3D glasses. While the philosopher notes how the materiality of art lives on after death, the pop-art figure playfully creates shadow puppets linking through hyphenation high and low culture.

This video essay culminates by leaving Deleuze behind, rhizomatically shifting between the actual of the cinematic space to move through time. The Yuelu Academy becomes the staging for an unreal encounter between Karl Marx and Confucious, where models are chosen to create material portraits to house their works, hyphenating the real and the virtual through an artificial intelligence. The final words are left to a hologram of Slavoj Žižek, whose formulation of the Cadaver articulates how the ideas of great philosophers are reborn as surrogate images in material form. This film cleverly disrupts the linking and sequencing of predictive human thought by disordering and deforming patterns through artificial, generative processes which illustrate the relevance of hyphenating non-institutional thought.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

