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# Inventory of cinematic spaces. A fictional library

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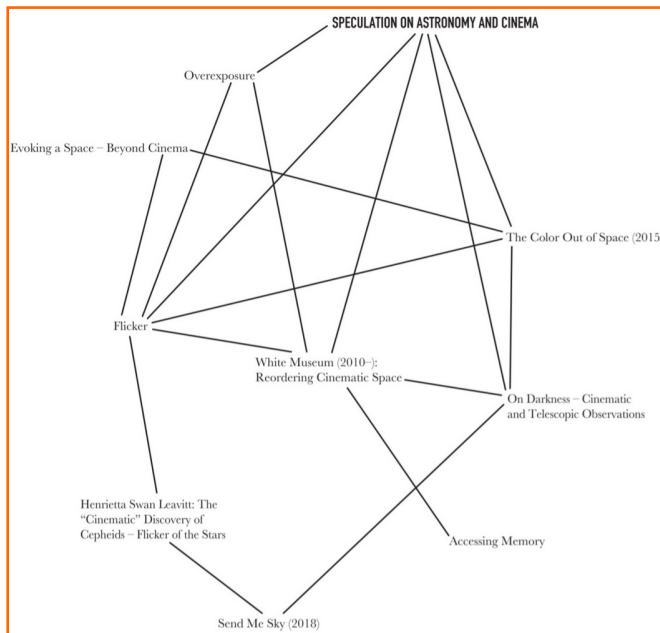


Figure 1. A diagram of the Fictional Library. Source: own creation

When I refer to speculation, I mean a zone of reflection and discussion where hypotheses can be built up. A speculation zone exists to bridge real gaps in knowledge through imagining and inventing possible explanations for baffling phenomena. One notable scholar who leaned on the idea of mixing fact, confirmed knowledge and speculation was philosopher and mathematician Imre Lakatos. His text *Proofs and Refutations* is written as a dialogue between fictional students and a teacher as a way to prove and disprove mathematical formulas. Lakatos argues that mathematics is a dynamic process and that proofs and discoveries are not final and immutable.

### 1. Overexposure

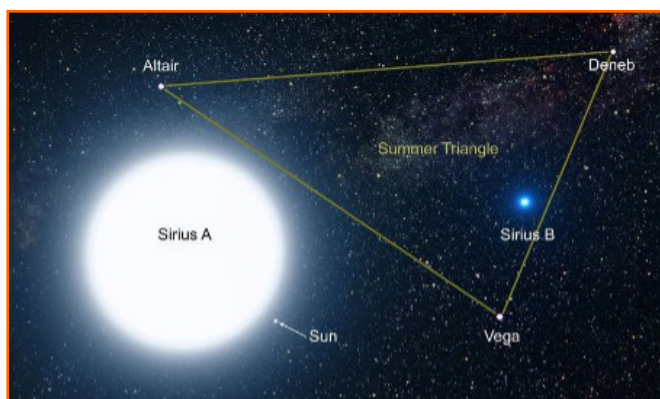


Figure 2. Hubble Space Telescope image showing Sirius A, the brightest star in our night sky, along with its faint, tiny stellar companion, Sirius B. Astronomers manipulate images using cinematic techniques; in this case, overexposure was applied to the image of Sirius A to better reveal the presence of Sirius B.

Source: Hubble Space Telescope, [www.spacetelescope.org/images/heic0516g](http://www.spacetelescope.org/images/heic0516g). Release date: 13 December 2005. Image credit: NASA, ESA, and G. Bacon (STScI)

Positioning the speculative and the uncertain as the essential elements of cinema presupposes a completely different approach to film and a different understanding of the medium.

By contrast, the certain and non-speculative character of cinema involves the given, normal functions of each component in a cinematic setup, such as the sound as an enforcement of the visual narrative, the visual information as the build-up to a structured narrative and the architecture of a frontal screen in a darkened space with hidden machinery.

**Overexposure:** too much light, blinking.

**1 overexposure** – the act of exposing film to too much light or for too long a time. **exposure** – the act of exposing film to light. **2 overexposure** – the act of exposing someone excessively to an influencing experience.

**Speculation:** a zone of reflection and discussion where hypotheses can be built up and where a search for an unclassifiable fluidity in the connection between components of cinema can be undertaken.

### 2- Henrietta Swan Leavitt: the “cinematic” discovery of Cepheids – the flicker of the stars – a digression

A Cepheid variable is a specific type of star that pulsates at a defined and regular rate, in a manner that allows its actual brightness to be calculated. By comparing this measurement to the star’s brightness as seen from Earth, we can calculate the distance between our own solar system and other stars. Cepheids have, thus, become a useful and accurate measuring stick for astronomical distances.

The discovery of Cepheid variables was made by chance by the American astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt (1868-1921), who worked at the Harvard College Observatory as a so-called human computer – one of many women who carried out the time-consuming and repetitive task of studying photographic plates of stars as part of a search for the fundamental properties of stars.

Another Harvard computer, Anna Draper, worked with and assisted her husband, Henry Draper, in his achievements in stellar photography for fifteen years until 1882, when he suddenly died at the age of forty-five, just after he had left his teaching position at New York University to dedicate his full attention to astronomy.

After her husband’s death, Anna Draper took some glass photographic plates that he had produced with his handcrafted telescopes to Cambridge, to show them to Edward Pickering, the director of the Harvard College Observatory and an admirer of Henry Draper’s research. Draper’s hundred or so photographs of the brightest stars were taken through a prism that split the starlight into its spectrum of component colours. Although the photographic process reduced the rainbow colours to black and white, the images preserved telltale patterns of lines within each spectrum that hinted at the stars’ constituent elements.

**flic·ker** (obj) / 'fli·kə',

/ v to burn, shine or (cause to) move with small quick shaking movements • Candles flickered on all the tables in the restaurant.

[I] • He'd been in a coma for weeks, when all of a sudden he flickered an eyelid. [T] • She tried not to laugh at what he said, but she couldn't stop a smile flickering across her face. [I] • (fig.) The thought flickered into my head (=I had the sudden thought) that I'd met him before. [I]

*Cambridge International Dictionary of English.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Pickering offered to help decipher the spectral patterns by measuring them with specialized equipment at Harvard. Pickering's chosen research focus, photometry, or the measurement of the brightness of individual stars, was neglected at most other observatories at the time, but he was able to pursue it at Harvard. Photometry was based on the contrasts in brightness that challenged astronomers to explain why some stars outshone others. Just as they range in colour, it was observed that stars apparently come in a variety of sizes and exist at different distances from Earth.

Ancient astronomers classified stars along a continuum, from the brightest first magnitude down to the faintest sixth magnitude at the limit of perception of the naked eye. In 1610,

Galileo Galilei's telescope revealed a host of stars never seen before, which extended the brightness scale down to the tenth magnitude. By the middle of the 19th century, large telescopes like Harvard's Great Refractor could detect stars as faint as the fourteenth magnitude. (The sky in Cambridge is no longer dark enough to make such astronomical discoveries.)

While telescopes could pick up increasingly faint stars, in the absence of uniform scales or standards, all estimates of magnitude fell to the subjective judgment of individual astronomers. Brightness, like beauty, was defined by the eye of the beholder.



Figure 3. The Great Refractor, Harvard College Observatory, 2018

Source: photo by Rosa Barba

## References

Barba, Rosa. *On the Anarchic Organisation of Cinematic Spaces: Evoking Spaces beyond Cinema* (22 ed.) Malmö: Malmö Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, Lund University, 2018.

## CV



Rosa Barba. Photo: Saskia Uppenkamp  
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**Rosa Barba**

Artist

Born in Agrigento, Italy. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Rosa Barba's artistic practice navigates between various dichotomies, exploring themes of permanence versus impermanence, reality versus fiction and the interplay of language and time. Through films, sculptures, installations, publications and performances, she investigates how space is shaped by temporal and linguistic constructs, challenging linear narratives and traditional semiotics. Barba deconstructs cinematic elements to examine the intersections of physical materials like projectors and celluloid with abstract concepts like time, space and sound. Her work often focuses on natural landscapes and human interventions, blurring the lines between historical record, personal narrative and artistic representation. Her work is part of numerous international collections and her forthcoming and recent solo exhibitions include: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (2026), MoMA, New York, (2024, 2025), MAXXI, Rome, (2025), Boijmans Museum, Rotterdam (2024), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2023), Tate Modern, London (2023), PICA, Perth Australia (2023), Villa Medici, Rome (2022), Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2021-2022), and at Biennials such as the 53rd and 56th Venice Biennale, Sao Paulo (2016), Sydney (2014) and Performa (2013). She was awarded the Calder Prize in 2020 and the International Prize for Contemporary Art, of the Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco (2015).