

EDITORIAL CINEMATIC MINDS BEHIND THE SCREENS

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At the heart of our everyday social life lies intersubjective communication: the shared stories, films, and audiovisual narratives that enable us to understand the lives of others. Narratives do more than entertain—they open windows into ethical, political, and cultural complexities, allowing us to learn from fictional protagonists' triumphs and failures alike (Hjort and Nannicelli, 2022). Over the past two decades, cinema has evolved from being studied merely as a cultural artifact to becoming an active methodological tool in scientific inquiry. Within the paradigm of neurocinematics (Hasson et al., 2008), researchers have used neuroimaging to explore how watching films can synchronize brain activity across viewers, uncovering patterns of shared neural engagement (Jaaskeläinen et al., 2021). Yet it has become increasingly clear that neurophysiological data alone cannot fully capture the richness of cinematic experience: it must be complemented by first-person accounts of what viewers feel and perceive, as well as careful description of the unfolding narrative content itself (Tikka et al., 2023).

Moreover, while neurocinematic research has largely concentrated on audiences, the embodied and cognitive processes of filmmakers themselves remain relatively underexplored. This special issue seeks to rebalance that focus by examining filmmaking not just as a conceptual and intellectual task, but as an embodied, enactive, and socially distributed creative process grounded in complex cognitive-perceptual skills.

By weaving together insights from philosophy, psychology, artistic research, cognitive film studies and film practice, the issue proposes a richer, multidisciplinary understanding of cinema: not merely as a collection of finished works, but as a dynamic interplay of bodily, affective and imaginative processes connecting filmmakers and audiences.

Karen Pearlman's contribution sets the tone by challenging the notion of the director's "vision" as a fixed mental blueprint. Instead, she reframes vision as an emergent, embodied and relational process that unfolds through participatory sense-making with collaborators.

This understanding of creativity as dynamically co-constructed resonates across the issue and directly connects to **Saara Tuusa's** ethnographic study of European independent film productions. Tuusa similarly shows that authorship is never fully individual but belongs to a "body of filmmakers," where creative control emerges through negotiation within specific material and social contexts.

This distributed view of creativity echoes in **Annika Boholm and Kersti Grunditz Brennan's** artistic research project *The Sisters B.*, where biography, history and ecology are layered through collaborative montage. Their method becomes an act of collective sense-making, showing how embodied

cognition and shared creative agency intertwine to produce nuanced narrative textures.

The process of learning to “see cinematically” as an embodied and collaborative practice is picked up by **Maarten Coëgnarts** and **Elen Lotman**, who study how film students develop expressive skills. Their semi-longitudinal research suggests that artistic growth is rooted in the development of perceptual-cognitive capacities shaped by iterative, socially situated practice—underscoring that creativity is cultivated rather than merely inspired.

Sound design, too, emerges as a form of embodied and metaphorical sense-making in **Tarun Madupu** and **Coëgnarts’** analysis of how practitioners use the dynamics of loudness and silence in narrative meaningful ways. Their work resonates with Lotman’s focus on experiential heuristics: intuitive, bodily grounded strategies refined through practice and collaboration to guide creative decisions (Lotman, 2021).

Jakob Boer’s micro-phenomenological study of slow cinema further bridges the creative process and audience experience, exploring how filmmakers’ intuitive heuristics can be reflected, tested and deepened by empirical insights into viewers’ embodied, affective responses. Boer’s work thus closes the loop between the embodied processes behind the screen and the lived experience in front of it.

Other contributions broaden this embodied perspective into new domains. **Patrycja Chuszcz** examines how filmmakers evoke empathy for animal characters, revealing both the power and ethical risks of anthropomorphic strategies in representing non-human subjects.

Larissa Curi’s study of horror film dialogues draws attention to speech and narration—often overshadowed by visual analysis—as powerful tools shaping the audience’s affective engagement.

Finally, **Dan Leberg** and **Anika Falkenberg** explore performance as distributed cognition in performance-capture (“pecap”) acting for videogames, showing how an actor’s embodied creativity is shaped by technological constraints, designers and fellow performers—mirroring the collaborative sense-making processes described by Pearlman and Tuusa in film production.

What ties these diverse contributions together is a shared commitment to understanding filmmaking and film experience as profoundly embodied, relational and distributed processes. Across directing, editing, acting, sound design and spectatorship, the issue shows that creativity and perception emerge not in isolation, but through dialogue between makers and audiences, minds and bodies, technologies and cultural contexts. The editors of this special issue also want to demonstrate the potential of artistic and practice-based research as an approach that can push an entire scientific field towards new horizons. It opens space for practitioners to enter the field of research and to drive questions along unexplored pathways. Almost all of the articles in this edition have been authored by film practitioners, or in a fruitful dialogue between practitioners and theorists. We hope this demonstrates the potential for explosive growth in the future of film studies—through the insights of filmmakers themselves. By bridging cognitive science, phenomenology, film theory and artistic research, this special issue invites us to see cinema as an evolving conversation of embodied minds—both behind and in front of the screen.

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