



# The Space-Time of Infrastructure

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“Lena, you can turn on the camera now.” The view of the space station changes from monitor to film image. The opening scene of Andrei Ujică’s film *Out of the Present* (1997) narrates the arrival of a 35 mm film camera at space station Mir. To the best of our knowledge, this camera is still orbiting Earth (Zielinski 2006: 2). However, Mir, as its original destination and temporary home, is no longer in orbit. The station burst into pieces over the South Pacific Ocean after re-entry into Earth’s atmosphere in 2001. There are other remains of Mir though. The cosmonauts took almost three hundred hours of video footage and sent the tapes back to Earth. Ujică used this footage to tell the story of Sergei Krikalev: the



cosmonaut and flight engineer who started his mission in 1991 from the Soviet Union and landed ten months later in independent Kazakhstan. In this article, I explore the representation of Mir in Ujică's film in order to think through the infrastructure of outer space. I argue that his use of past cinematographic records challenges the understanding of infrastructure as fixed in space-time.

*Archives exert a strong gravitational pull on those caught in their orbits.*

After Ujică got hold of the cosmonauts' video, he shut himself up in his apartment in Moscow. The tapes are most extraordinary, belonging to the rare category of objects that have travelled from Earth into space and back again. Moreover, they hold nothing less than the cinematic record of seeing Earth from space. Ujică's immersion in the images created a peculiar sensation: "I had the feeling I was experiencing the flight myself and arrived at the realization that being in space had something elemental about it" (Ujică and Virilio 2003: 62). The sensation of being in space by force of these images must have been very powerful. Ujică kept this detachment from Earth in check by bringing the emerging *Out of the Present* into conversation with the two most influential science-fiction films of the twentieth century: Stanley Kubrik's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972). Science fiction became his only attachment to the world outside the archive (Ujică and Virilio 2003: 69).

