Metaphysics and the Moving Image

Trevor Mowchun

A Thesis

In the Humanities Program

For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Humanities (Fine Arts)) at

Concordia University

July 2018

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Trevor Mowchun

Entitled: Metaphysics and the Moving Image

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor Of Philosophy (Humanities (Fine Arts))

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Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Kristina Huneault

_____ External Examiner
Dr. George Toles

_____ External to Program
Dr. Nathan Brown

_____ Examiner
Dr. Andre Furlani

_____ Examiner
Dr. Justin E. H. Smith

_____ Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Martin Lefebvre

Approved by _____
            Dr. Erin Manning, Graduate Program Director

December 10, 2018   _____
                          Dr. Rebecca Taylor Duclos, Dean
                          Faculty of Fine Arts

ABSTRACT

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Trevor Mowchun, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2018

The various forms of cross-pollination and encounter between film and philosophy have generated thought experiments which make it possible to think beyond what the two fields can do *for* each other to what they can do *together*. My guiding intuition in this thesis is that the distinct historical evolutions of film and philosophy intersect in the speculative domain of the Western metaphysical paradigm, as the film medium technologically and aesthetically reestablishes conditions for "truth" within a contemporary intellectual climate which is often described as politically "post-truth." As the long age of metaphysics comes to a close at the turn of the 19th century, ushered in by Nietzsche's bold declaration "God is dead" and subjected thereafter to standardized modes of critique from both continental and analytical philosophic traditions, I explore how the emergence of film at this time and its representation of what André Bazin calls "the world in its own image" marks a migration of metaphysics from rational speculation through concepts to mechanical revelation through images and sounds. The rebirth of the world in its own image in the wake of the death of God is the self-affirmation of life and marks the first principle of a new *cine-metaphysics*. I take seriously what appears as a mere historical coincidence (claiming that it is *not* a coincidence) and seek to analyze its implications for film-philosophy. With the birth of film following the death of God, I suggest that the world's radical exposure and dramatic appearance onscreen and on its own terms, as it were, constitutes the basis not just for a continuation or return but rather a *transformation* of the philosophical tradition of metaphysics, rendering metaphysics "physical" and yielding a series of ontologically perspicuous figures of cinematic space-time brought to light by various aesthetic incarnations of the world in its own image. Through both theoretical and hermeneutic investigations into the metaphysical legacy of the moving image, one of my main conclusions is that in philosophy metaphysical thinking tends to result in conceptual abstraction or confusion, or is at least accused of such results, whereas cinema, conceived of as enacting the very object of metaphysical thought, can bring about the audiovisual clarity of the everyday.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my good fortune in *not* having had my way eight years ago; that my bold yet poorly conceived plan, upon finishing a Masters in film studies, to switch into philosophy for my Ph.D., failed to materialize; that I found a program where I could study film and philosophy together (and literature, for my love of art did, I seem to recall, begin with books); that everything worked out as it did; that I find myself, here and now, after so many years, giving thanks to those who had to hear all about it, bear it too, intermittently or incessantly, wondering or worrying what will become of me. And while thinking of the heavenly support of others, I also pause over the good fortune of my own physical and mental health along the way, for I do tend to keep much to myself and regularly rely on the top part of my head for perspectival advice.

First to my parents and their support from a distance: like the lamp humming softly in the winter, the fan gently whirling in the summer, as it is right now as I write and think of them. Such unconditional and routine support, I realize, takes great persistence and is hard work unsung. To my mother in particular for insisting on watering me like a plant during the most precarious of times, which helped calm the nerves associated with that silly sense of pride—its delusion of complete and utter self-sufficiency, the folly in one's need to prove oneself at the worst possible time, where even if one succeeds one may not be much stronger for it.

To my best friends from school, Shaun Gamboa and Julio Valdez Jover, whom I met at Concordia University, Montreal back in 2010. These friendships are unique in that they were forged in the fires of Ph.D. passion and peril, the difficulties of which make friendship not only desirable but absolutely vital to one's survival. While the years seemed to sail by uncontrollably one after the other, they also rose high above us like mountains, edging out the previous year's trials and tribulations—and the harder it got the more our specially formulated laughter concoction proved effective in the face of what sometimes struck us as an absurd life path. For this reason and others too private to mention, I feel that we are forever bonded and that nothing more than a spirited glance, today or ten years from now, is required to reignite the meaning behind our meeting each other in the first place.

Students in the Humanities interdisciplinary program are blessed with not one but *three* advisors. Allow me to introduce my team: Martin Lefebvre, Andre Furlani, and Justin E. H. Smith. Remarkably, all of them trusted me to find my own way through the vastness and thickness of

metaphysics, this being the *only* way to breathe life into an extremely old albeit renewable subject. When I hit one of the many walls lurking about, I imagined how the three of them—a film scholar, a literary scholar, and a philosopher—might combine their critical tools, powers of insight and constellation of exemplars in finding a way forward by passing in-between, rather than exclusively within, the boundaries of their respective fields of knowledge. Today we are pressed to specialize, to master a set of objects or texts or questions and address those who are or seek to become masters too, but my experience has shown that no one at work in the Humanities—that is, no one in the throes of their most committed expression of thought, feeling and action—effectively satisfies the profile of a specialist, and that is a good thing. The comments and good counsel I received from my advisors almost always displayed the mark of those fit to dwell at the borders of their respective "countries" where ideas could be freely exchanged rather than patrolled. There were times, I admit, when I moved forward too swiftly and barged somewhat recklessly through these walls, failing to appreciate the fine masonry and brutal legwork of the mind's pragmatic accrual of what I despise in calling "common sense." I am grateful to Martin who took it upon himself, with a patience and tactfulness all too rare, to put a hand on my shoulder, a mirror to my face, and interject with the tone of the concerned father: "Let's back up a bit, shall we? Have a look around and collect your bearings. Be sure to assert what is relatable, to believe what is actually believable." In this way he taught me a great deal, and nothing more important than that self-criticism is not to be feared, certainly not more than praise.

Now to my partner, Cecile Cristobal, who I am now honored to call my wife—thank you for your undying support. A thesis tests oneself, hence one's life, hence everyone with whom one lives. It tests it the way any "project" risks justifying an unbridled commitment to—ultimately, regrettably—oneself, what we call "our work." While I do not have any deep regrets about my occasionally uncompromising work ethic, I am not proud of it either. I ought to wake up every morning and thank everyone who *stayed*. At the same time, writing a thesis has the power to exude a sumptuous warmth from a kitchen of ideas, the aroma of quiet and steady thinking from a corner of the house which may, for some, harbor an air of familiarity. I for one find such an atmosphere intoxicating, and throughout the writing of this thesis I relished the sudden shifts from metaphysics to everyday domestic matters, from completing an abstract thought to preparing the evening meal, sometimes using the concreteness of the latter to escape my fate to think from what may be too great a height. For those times when I did stumble over such shifts, I confess to having

overestimated the importance of this work: no labor of love should ever come in between one's ability or desire to love! This is precisely the sort of nonsense and hypocrisy we scholars are expected to quickly diagnose and treat, routinely and with ease, shelving it along with the other childish toys of yesteryear.

To professors John Hunting, Brian Price, and George Toles, and my dear friends Daniel Gerson, Mustafa Uzuner and Mijeong Lee, for commenting on written drafts, conference presentations and more improvised conversations in which I sought to distill the main philosophical motives and aesthetic currents of the thesis. To Luca Caminati and his graduate seminar on realism where I took the first major step towards a metaphysical sense of the cinema through my love of nature. But the pinpointing of an origin remains, as always, a mere fantasy—story at the expense of history. If I am honest with myself, this thesis is the maturation of ideas and beliefs long-held; and in what is a perfectly bittersweet event, for the first time in my life I am now free to let it go, to watch this work live or die, giving it my full support should I be asked, in plain speech, to account for it.

Lastly, I would like to extend a special thanks to Denis Wong for his friendship and support over the years. I am certain that our optimistic, pessimistic, yet always passionate conversations about cinema and art could only have taken place out of school and after hours. (I must now thank in the same breath the late Stanley Cavell for this phrase "out of school"—along with a handful of others which seem to speak through me consensually—and for inspiring me to wrestle with the paradox of working and living in and out of school—along with many other paradoxes which, by their power or collision of powers, knock down signposts and temper the commands.)

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

The Death of God, the Birth of Film, and the New Metaphysics

> The important thing is to tie one's shoelaces, sew back the parted button, and look the world in the eye. — Guy Davenport, *A Field of Snow on a Slope of the Rosenberg*

The branch (or base, or body, or being) of philosophy known as "metaphysics" (sometimes referred to as "first philosophy") is the oldest and most enduring mode of inquiry into the nature of things. Questions regarding substrates of being, the nature of time and space, elemental harmony and entropy, the soul, good and evil, immortality and the existence of God, and basically any attempt to know something "in itself" (including what knowledge is and the condition of possibility for new knowledge to emerge as a renewable existential resource), characterize metaphysics as the idealistic and often systematic pursuit of essences or absolutes, the knowledge of which gives us "truth" and this sense or feeling gives our lives "just cause," as it were, promising in turn a permanent state of rest or wisdom and the possibility of redeeming the limits of human finitude through something like a transcendental telos. With a pure love of knowledge tested by daring acts of skepticism, metaphysics harbors a blind faith in its ability to wrest the absolute from the flow and flux of primordial life. And yet, throughout the past 2500 years or so of Western philosophy, no metaphysical claim, argument, inspiration or monumental system of thought has been successfully able to grasp or posit any absolute once and for all. It's as if the concreteness of the absolute, once touched, bears the slipperiness of the possible and the erratic contingency of the historical. It strikes me as one of the great ironies of Western philosophy that the truth claims of theology, the discipline most wrought by dogma, can be the most intensely debated, divisive, and in many cases hostile to the naïveté of belief. From where we currently stand, lacking the familiar foundations of certainty—in the "wake" of metaphysics, where the theological and psychological poles of the metaphysical enterprise are thrown into sharp relief, where we see ourselves reaching for absolutes outwardly in matter or inwardly in mind and sometimes unto a point where the human reach can tread no further—here, even the most rigorous arguments, luminous insights and airtight cartographies of human understanding of the world as a whole have proved over time to cripple

under the weight of philosophical critique or simply lose their power to satisfy the bottomless temptation for truth. For this temptation turns out in the history of ideas to be ultimately insatiable, like a biological need returning daily, breeding distortions of common sense when deprived and revealing more about the agony and ambition of the human condition than that of the world we strive to know.

The long age of metaphysics comes to a close, entering its "twilight" phase, with Friedrich Nietzsche's provocative and perhaps unfathomable conclusion "God is dead." Declared with a strange combination of irony and fervor in the aphoristic parable entitled "The Madman" from *The Gay Science*, "God is dead" is the philosophical prize for an incendiary critique of the metaphysical truth claims or dogmatisms abounding primarily within the discourses of Christian morality.[1] Nietzsche's paradigm shift from the 1880's heralds an end to the old world of religious beliefs, ending the world as shaped by the metaphysical inclinations and valuations of our knowledge, and ushers in a new world of life-affirming values, posited by "overmen" in a festive spirit of freedom and empowerment. This monumental shift collides with another anomalous wave of change which philosophy does not see coming: for the death of God is both contemporaneous with and contradicted by the arrival of cinema as the rebirth of the world in its own image. While cinema's first glimpse in time and space is colorless and without sound, I see the camera in particular less as a device which captures the world than as a means by which our consciousness is taken hostage by the world, a luminous flooding of the absolute from without and of the repressed "God instinct" from within. While the world as the image of God fades away, cinema as the world in its own image intercedes, reenchanting the world by appealing not to a creator but rather to the creativity inherent within life itself. Cinema in its infancy harbors its own radical gesture of what Nietzsche calls the re-evaluation of all values, one which is not manmade but machine-made, not intentional but automatic, shifting the terms of belief from an afterworld to *this* world and positing the "the self-affirmation of life" as the first principle of a new *cine-metaphysics*. I find great significance and even a sense of destiny in this moment of contact between two parallel and competing histories

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[1] The sheer force of this conclusion can be felt in the *fact* that God is dead (i.e. the discovery that all facts are contingent upon values) rather than in the *moral* that we ought to live without God because such a metaphysical conception or faith entails a resentful avoidance of earthliness and a flight from the earth's flood of freedom, unsupervised by anchors or higher powers. To interpret the death of God moralistically also marks the subtle yet significant shift in consciousness from nihilism to atheism. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 181-182.

and seek in what follows to analyze its implications for both film *and* philosophy, or to be more precise, for the subfields of "film-philosophy" and what philosophy now refers to as "metametaphysics."[2]

This curious piece of history ties together, perhaps into a knot, the discrete paths of cinema and philosophy. If the cinema is born, or if the cinema as we know it today comes of age, at around the time when the philosopher who launched the most mercilessly rug-pulling and virtually indiscriminate attack on metaphysical truth—exposing it as nothing more than an army of metaphors, deployed in a spirit of insecurity and weakness, the tactics of the weak to offset the strong—lost his mind and passed away, then the inauguration—though hardly the idealized fruition—of the cinematic manifestation of the metaphysical at the end of the 19th century roughly coincides with philosophy's first comprehensive if not catastrophic critique of metaphysics, a critique which necessitates the triumphant yet intimidating declaration of the death of God. Surely, you say, this is a mere coincidence, and by no stretch of the imagination a comprehensible one, that Nietzsche's death, the death of the man who pronounced the death of God and left our sea of idols in ruins, is followed by the birth of cinema, the re-birth of the world in its own image rather than in our image—this idol of idols, this stone upon which all idols are set: "The World" (not as will or idea or image but *self-image*). In light of this coincidence there dawns the possibility that the end of metaphysics as philosophized by Nietzsche is in fact not the end of metaphysics at all, for what philosophy calls "the end of metaphysics," sometimes with pride and sometimes with regret, is actually thoroughly metaphysical and for two reasons. First, it is itself a metaphysical claim, one that Nietzsche never quite brings himself to utter (the death of God is preached in the third person by a madman, after all). Second, the claim that metaphysics has ended does not refer to a new beginning or the beginning of nothing, as it were, but seems to me to stand in response to the lifting of an impenetrable fog of disinterest and disappointment brought on by the disconnect between our immediate gratifications and endlessly delayed fantasies or unreachable ideals, a bold

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[2] "Film-philosophy" regards film as capable of illustrating philosophical ideas, contributing to philosophical debates and, in its most radical form, functioning in the mode of philosophy itself (sometimes with *anti-philosophical* results). "Metametaphysics" is as an absurd "hall of mirrors" term, referring to a kind of post-metaphysical reassessment and renewal of the spirit of metaphysics, one which proceeds with heightened self-awareness by asking questions about metaphysics and about what metaphysics can (still) do. Its urgency is epitomized in Allan Hazlett's eloquent remark by way of introducing a collection of essays on the subject: "It is an embarrassment to the critics of metaphysics that, having been declared dead a thousand times, it keeps showing up alive." *New Waves in Metaphysics*, ed. Allan Hazlett (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 7.

clearing up right in the midst of the throbbing physicality of life itself (freeing philosophy to think within its own limits and making it possible for something seemingly "thoughtless" like the ontology of cinema to slip by undetected, gazing at us from the other side). The idea that the physicality of life itself has been eclipsed by metaphysics is best described as a corrective, not or at least not yet as an overcoming, which means that unless we can correct our way of thinking in these terms (what Ludwig Wittgenstein dismisses as the senseless language game of truth) and in this tone of voice (what Nietzsche derides as the ascetic ideal), we will not be able to "join the life" that we believe our philosophical logic, intellectual progress, critical vigilance and self-discipline to have actualized, albeit through a variety of means and in small steps. Our philosophical ideas might harbor some degree of truth, and all truths might be false or at least fallible, but what becomes of these ideas—what are they ultimately capable of—if we end up *believing them* (rather than *in* them)? For Nietzsche, and I suppose for me as well, the overcoming of metaphysics depends on an entirely *different* way of thinking, starting with the thought that there will be many ways to think "truthlessly"; and should these ways contradict one another, which is to be expected, philosophy should be the last to raise its arm. As for this radical difference in thinking, it will depend at least in part on breaking deep-seated habits of mind, body and expression, those habits which are common to both philosophical critique and systematization (the *same* habits won't do) and that are as old as philosophy itself. Philosophy must look *outside itself* if it wants metaphysics to end, rather than simply *call* an end to it, and the philosopher must to a certain extent cease to be a philosopher. He or she must *change*, the hardest thing to do, and it's the job of philosophy to report it, which is actually quite easy. This is the moment where philosophy becomes autobiography without becoming the least bit personal or even historical, that is, unless multiple histories are told, one for every evolutionary phase of the self on the precarious path to freedom.

When philosophy looks outside itself by crossing paths with cinema, and if the moving image can be imagined as revealing or bearing witness to the compromised aftermath of Nietzsche's infinitely demanding critique of metaphysics, then the "death of God," which either falls on deaf ears or is paradoxically believed in, can take the following form, meaning that the death of God on film means: "What you perceive onscreen is all there is—there is nothing *beyond*, there is nothing *below*; this is because everything to be seen and heard is indifferent to philosophy's 'either-or' and 'all-or-nothing.' Life projected or displayed onscreen is catapulted into a

rambunctious play of light and shadow rather than a reductive tug of war between good and evil." What does Nietzsche's verdict—what Heidegger calls Nietzsche's word—"the death of God" entail as a picture? The world *as* world is supported by its own appearances, which is to say by nothing absolute underlying the possibility of all things (the criteria for the possible as contingent upon the actual)—nothing external to earth and sky, wind and water and fire, sun and moon and all the resonant metaphors which honor the heavenly bodies as seen from the earth, from an all-too-human perspective that the sciences have sought to sterilize with a monstrous, deforming objectivity. Yet cinema's light on the world as world—the world in its own image—has only recently been kindled; it's as if the sun rises for the first time of its own volition and is about to wax towards the future, but it can also be seen to wane back towards the past, drawing a perfect circle in the sky as the shining beacon of Nietzsche's most daring philosophical ambition: the eternal recurrence. Cinema, let us imagine, partakes of this service and splendor of light without origin or destination, tapping an illumination that emanates from the freedom of all things to dwell, persist, and participate in themselves: the freedom of space to expand and contract, the freedom of time to recur or spiral, to dance and be free of the logic of progress, marking the rebirth of metaphysics as described by technology instead of philosophy—tools (i.e. cameras) created by humans to capture and record the world in its own image through the world in our image, and in so doing "prove," through the power of the accident, the existence of a world without God. This post-human (not necessarily non-human) dimension of "world capture" is the foundation for creating a world buttressed by the *absence* of God, a world where the only proof for existence is existence itself, an existence at one with its essence or an image at one with its referent—a sublime autonomy. It is a world free for the first time to *perform*, to act out its being; the world as a ball of clay to be molded and shaped by the life it supports, the forcefulness and no longer the fixity of life.

I believe some of these "film-philosophical" implications were first hinted at by Siegfried Kracauer in the conclusion of his book *Theory of Film* where the new medium is cast as a decisive spiritual antidote to the mounting abstractions of modern scientific reason.[3] From my point of view, however, the coincidence also behaves as a rather poor trade off, a regression or diabolical compromise, for indeed what is the value of a *return* of metaphysics, and what's more a return

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[3] See Siegfried Kracauer, "Epilogue: Film in Our Time," in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 285-311.

originating from outside the domain of philosophy proper? Perhaps there is no obvious value, or no sense in seeking out explanatory value, from an experience in which what is perceived to be a return is nothing more than a reminder of what has never ceased to be the case. In terms one could call mythological, death followed by birth constitutes not necessarily a smooth cycle but an arresting if not jarring situation whereby the history of ideas as told by philosophy—particularly the postmodern narrative about the transformation of truth from metaphysical speculation to analytical critique, or from something "out there" to something "created"; this human will towards intellectual and moral progress (what Nietzsche might call the overcoming of morality)—goes partially unanswered or un-digested by the arrival of film because, put simply, film posits an "out there" that is *a priori* to whatever we might create with it, in other words the *a priori* comes to us *a posteriori*, and thus reconstitutes the quest of metaphysics in a different form. I also like to imagine the cultural inheritors of this grand narrative as questioning the practical capacity of our will to live—not to mention flourish—within the aftermath of the death of God, for such a will is not immediately or automatically in stride with alternative movements of thought and concurrent counter-movements, is always potentially undermined or held in check by those who live out this very story. Another way to put this is to say that what we want to call "progress" is not necessarily *made* by the human beings who profess it; for every part of ourselves that overcomes there are parts left behind; different forms of knowledge have different criteria for what counts as progress, and sometimes these criteria are blatantly and bewilderingly at odds with each other. Nietzsche the "professor" is also the "anticipator" of this ironic situation in his casting the voice of madness as opposed to reason in the role of declaring the death of God, a philosophically decisive literary device deployed throughout *The Gay Science* which psychologizes the deed, suggesting that we have killed God without realizing what it means to have committed such an act or, what amounts to the same thing, without being able to bear the burden of this unbearable knowledge—out of sheer gravity or shame—and thus repressing it in various ways, resulting in strange and often degenerate sublimations like "the cult of atheism," which the parable of "The Madman" satirizes by addressing a group of what I will call *believing disbelievers*. With the world in ruins, with philosophical metaphysics exposed as the "devaluation" rather than the revelation of the world, as the systematic courtship of various after- or under- or possible worlds, the dawn of cinema occurs in a distant part of the intellectual horizon and, as a kind of mythic or even platonic idea, figuratively marks what I am calling the "re-birth of the world in its own image rather than in our

image." On the one hand, this idea of the world in its own image, ontologically superseding the activities of the image makers themselves, is a purely metaphysical idea, a primal glimpse back into the "old world" of metaphysics, the world-as-such which metaphysics seeks to conceptually reify and deify by turns. But on the other hand, the idea of the world in its own image is in this case not *just* an idea, for the world's appearance this time around is not pre-constituted by consciousness, precedes human consciousness, and operates, I want to say, on its own terms—providing the terms through which cinema will be aesthetically spoken, as it were. What is of fundamental philosophical importance is that this cinematic image of "world" constitutes both a continuation and transformation of the age-old and seemingly exhausted tradition of metaphysics. Fueled by the revelatory conditions of cinema's audiovisual recording technologies, these cinematic terms, which I will be exploring in detail, introduce or inaugurate a uniquely "non-human" mode of valuing the world, a revelatory ontology prior to discourse—or constituting a kind of automatic discourse—which measures the value of things by the value which things *give themselves*, thus reflecting manmade values back upon their makers, or at least throwing such discursive values into sharp relief. The desire to ascribe meaning onto things and generalize according to absolutes is shown to backfire, and should we catch our own reflection in the process, such a desire may appear to stand at the root of contemporary nihilism. This reversal or substitution between metaphysics and the moving image has many implications, perhaps of a paradigmatic nature, and one of the most far-reaching, it seems to me, and which I will describe in a somewhat tonal manner, is that the history of ideas as perceived in an interdisciplinary light is the relinquishment of the two-dimensional, unidirectional and conveniently efficacious line of flight or narrative of cultural ascension. When the end of metaphysics faces the prospect of its untimely return from outside the confines of philosophy's various and often competing self-definitions (resulting in philosophy being forced out of its institutional confinement), these "lines" which create the impression of present propulsion and the lighting up of our uncertain tomorrows can become—particularly in the context of a spontaneous interdisciplinary dialogue—striated, circular, and thus potentially recurrent, such that progress in one area of thought (philosophy) can give way to contingent resistance or compensation in another area (film). And if progress can take the form of *regress*, as it seems to do here, perhaps *ironically* in the Nietzschean manner, and if the end of an era begins *in memorium*, with the vantage points of reflection and retrospect as essential to truly bringing that lost era to light… then all of a sudden we are given a window of

opportunity, however brief, to rethink the value of progress itself, to assess its hidden costs and expose its hidden agendas, something which philosophy in general is committed to doing despite the scientific impetus to continually build on itself rather than examine or question the integrity of *other buildings*.

This thesis considers the possibility and significance of cinema's grounded image-reply to Nietzsche's lofty word of madness, a reply which can be expressed in the following way: "When God was declared dead, something else took its place—not quite a new God and more than a mere idol. The world in its own image is like an unmasked absolute staring at us in the face, falling from the sky and *finding us* just when philosophy called off its futile and costly search for metaphysical abstractions which banish the world and enslave us to after-worlds." Fundamental aspects of the nature, history and aesthetics of cinema, particularly the steady movement towards greater intensities of audiovisual totalization and routine upholding of various depictions and distortions of reality (i.e. the act of world-bearing implied by the art of world-making), signal to philosophy, perhaps as this aforementioned reminder, that the end of metaphysics is actually "never-ending." Such a reminder to philosophy pricks its conscience over something which it has repressed: that philosophy cannot forego the impulse towards metaphysics—in the way, for example, of science, which builds on itself in its search for truth, systematically eliminating any trace of the supernatural in its explanations of empirically observable nature—without irrevocably cutting ties with theology, adopting a heedless and naïve attitude towards progress, and ultimately denying its own human finitude. It is a duty of philosophy, always, to question progress, hence to self-question in a manner which strengthens its ability to work. In the humble and accepting eyes of philosophy, therefore, cinema's raw material or ontology (i.e. the world in its own image, experienced in terms of dispossession[4]) appears as the "physicalization" of metaphysics; and it is through this "world material" that film theorists and filmmakers, sensitive to the implications and possibilities of this cultural product, can succeed to do what metaphysics never could: to speculate about the world by withholding speculation, that is, until the world has first disclosed itself, and then to give voice

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[4] This phenomenology of cinematic dispossession is evoked by Stanley Cavell throughout *The World Viewed* as a kind of proof of the world being mind-independent, in other words "complete without me," in need of acknowledgment as opposed to knowledge. He also finds it enacted in the experience of the "total thereness" and "candidness" of modern abstract painting. See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 111 and pp. 159-60.

only to those truths which seem to speak for themselves (any truth, as it were, whose fictional nature takes the form and feel of something factual). However, once spoken as cinema, in a language which plucks these roots of the real and thinks the radically un-thought, "truth" as a measure of our world quickly if not simultaneously gives way to a worldview, which means a seemingly objective view of the world is coterminous with a worldview that is also fundamentally subjective. Hence when interpreted through the moving image, metaphysics appears as a tradition that strives in vain to "see through" or otherwise bypass its own inevitable worldview, a tradition which strives to represent the world, or think it, in a way that the ontology of film seems to do *automatically*. For film, to represent the world is to record it in its own image, recordings which then become the basis for cinematic discourse or inspiration for cinematic revelation, what I call a metaphysical film style—but the precision of these recordings hinge, interestingly enough, on the absence rather than the presence of thought as we know it, as if the essence of thought were an outside atmosphere untethered to a subject, free to wander amongst an expanding multitude of objects with the power to "speak" the world in its own image.

Naturally "the moving image" is itself a mobile concept. As a technical description of cinema's raw material in the digital age, and with its scientifically strategic yet psychologically shy avoidance of history, artistry, and the individual movies which characterize and exemplify the medium, we welcome the most recent attempt from film studies to disown film and replace it with a virtual blank.[5] We see the vast and expansive field of inquiry behaving like a discipline and moderating itself: a discipline eager to catch up to, so as to stay on top of, to anticipate, the historical movement of the "movie-medium" from material to immaterial objecthood, from expressions of light to constellations of digits, from the otherworldly offerings of elusive specialists to the everyday fragments of a routine image-making consciousness. Scholars and spectators alike—and scholars who, one hopes, are themselves as dedicated to watching as to writing—suspect that this change means that *more changes* are on the way and that it's best not to become overly accustomed to a term of reference that will make its way into essays, books, programs of study and the resonant conversations about particular movies, many of which celebrate precisely the immediacy and versatility of the great "mobile medium." By emphasizing

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[5] See, in particular, Noel Carroll, "Forget the Medium!" in *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 1-9; and D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

the "constant" rather than the "substance" of movies, in other words the persistence and proliferation of movies of various kinds despite the mutable immateriality of the digital medium (or lack thereof), it is unclear if by the moving image we are even talking about movies at all anymore or if this resurgence of the concept of animation over the photographic is just one of many manifestations of an underlying absolute or metaphysical ontology that is rigged, as it were, to stand the test of time, with the help of micro-reconfigurations based on technological change and, in the case of the digital, revolution. Perhaps by avoiding the essentialism of the medium we embrace the essentialism of a discipline. In any case, the pragmatic inclusiveness and flexibility of the term "moving image" cannot find favor without also carrying the price of saying next to nothing about what it refers to, because its quest is ultimately a metaphysical quest that seeks to refer to *everything* within the ever-expanding range of cinema in the 21st century. When a discipline is in crisis over the fate of its object and the fear of its irrevocable loss, the instinct— perhaps more biological than logical or methodological, more survivalist than strategic, let's say— is usually to overcompensate or repress the problem altogether, to cure it rather than cope with it, succumbing to the fantasy of a "cure." And this desire to cure uncertainty, instability and contingency, rather than cope with what history—not to mention biology—proves to be inevitable phenomena, is also the greatness and weakness of metaphysics in all its forms. Just when the concept of the moving image manages to liberate the medium from ties to a particular material base, it confines itself to a watchtower where its own ability to think is lured by totalization and thus risks dematerialization.

Our overall impression of the moving images within movies remains, however, as immaterial as ever: splayed throughout the senses (starting with what we see and hear), molded with memories and personal associations, shifting back and forth or hovering in between conscious and unconscious states. And yet, this phenomenological entanglement appears to be less of a concern, or perhaps less graspable, than coming to terms with the ontological state of the object, concealed behind the curtain, as it were, empowered by its own inaccessibility. In the digital age of what Rodowick calls film's "virtual life,"[6] the object often takes precedence over our subjectivity despite the original equation of the word "aesthetics" with a specific kind of heightened or suspended experience, an experience that much phenomenological film theory has sought to recover and render primary. But the idea of the moving image as a way of talking about

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[6] See Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, pp. 89-120.

movies generated digitally, viewed outside the theater, perhaps in fragments, and at the whim of viewers emancipated albeit also alienated by the automatic search engines of the internet, is still at bottom a conceptual net—the largest and most impenetrable to date, after terms like "spectacle," "phantasmagoria," "film," "video," "cinephilia" and even "cinema," all of which gesture towards a cultural phenomena or idiosyncrasy rather than an everyday banality. Even today the term continues to favor the ontological over the phenomenological: beginning with the photographic and branching out into the cinematic, and from the cinematic nomadically dispersing into the digital realm of data and dots—like a gas spreading throughout the atmosphere of culture, occupying distant corners and infiltrating the cracks of human consciousness once home to a sense of privacy and solitude, now under siege due to cinema's migration from the (unconscious) cave of the theater. The moving image, I suggest, can be seen as keeping pace with a moving world more than with a changing discipline. The discipline of film studies cannot in fact adequately *discipline* its object (a source of its popularity and methodological plurality, no doubt), for this particular "object" is such that it both moves and images movement—a double movement worthy of the world from which it grows and returns to as a representation, a world it has never been able to successfully capture once and for all for the simple reason that when changes occur at the level of "the world" they are inevitably if inconspicuously reflected in the moving image, and this is so regardless of how they are used to represent it and even if those representations are flagrant distortions. The history of film is perceivable as a moving image of history itself, an avant garde dream narrative fraught with resonant tensions, non-sequiturs and contingencies galore. The moving image is thus in principle radically open, filling our tight frames and lingering beyond our sharp cuts and moving beyond itself into the off-screen; in this sense it is hospitable to what is visible as light, light being one of philosophy's oldest and most recurrent metaphors for what can be apprehended and ultimately known, be it through the senses or through reason or at last their embodied interlocking. And so, in studying such images and the movies they move, we have the opportunity to free them from our stultifying grasp in order to learn from them, pay attention, open up to an openness. Projects of mastery, it seems to me, are out of the question here, for scholars and practitioners alike. In fact, moving images and the movies they constitute are still slaves to the mastery of *machines*, cameras and projectors and now computers, but these machines are commonplace today as vehicles of aesthetic experience and a new kind of "image-utterance"— they are more human or we are less human—and no longer merely as factory-oriented tools hidden

away or even locked up by institutions like the Hollywood dream machine (the studio era movies which conceal the process of their own making, addressed to viewers who are generally assumed to have no inkling of how movies come to be).

Since the very beginning of cinema, fledgling and more experienced theorists, some tending towards mysticism and others to science, have been quick to point out, or report, that cinematic representation boasts a form of resemblance to reality that is essentially uncanny in the literal sense of the term, whereby the familiar is experienced as unfamiliar because it is radically displaced such that it can be seen for what it is, say as dream-like, and not taken for granted as merely "real." A parable of the cinematic uncanny might run as follows: "This is my home but I no longer live here; I can live anywhere now and call it home, in the name of the home I once had and in honor of the world whose name I never knew." The uncanniness also resides in the smoothness of the paradoxes it puts before us: the "truth of the illusion," for example, and the sense that films *represent* worlds yet *present* them as existent, found, contingent upon themselves, doing so in large measure by constructing a reality, a sense of the world, against the background of *this* world. Representation taking the form of presence, presence deriving its power from a necessary absence, absence throwing into relief the importance of *our presence* before the world as a measure for the latter to have pull over us and meaning in itself, these are some of the primary paradoxes of the moving image that invite metaphysical thinking and set the stage for what I like to refer to as cinema's "great metaphysical show."

Despite the many technological transformations and aesthetic revolutions across a relatively brief history, the moving image and the movies which image reality hither and thither (whether they resemble our reality or conjure completely new realities, perhaps even imperceptible realities known only to the mind's eye) have been in varying degrees at the mercy of *exteriority*—an eventful combination of separateness and the incoming, casting a world whose claim to self-sufficiency and indifference to our practical motives entangles human expressivity and complicates the realization of our *own* world, whether that world be a product of a single imagination or that of a collective political orientation. The moving image has steadily borne up the world in this way, bearing it on its shoulders with the fateful levity of an Atlas—the ancient Greek titan responsible for holding up the sky in isolation and without reprieve, providing unconditional shelter for ungrateful mortals. But we are grateful whether we like it or not; we show our support by receiving support. When I gaze upon the landscape of cinema and juxtapose the

earliest films side by side with the most recent ones, notwithstanding all the technological and stylistic changes throughout history and the sheer diversity of artistic achievements, I notice a similar interest in, or commitment to, or gesture towards, what is often called "world-making."[7] While it may be the ancient powers of narrative which ultimately make a world, what continues to distinguish "film worlds" is that they can appear to us *unmade* or better yet *readymade*, not unlike the way in which we take up our world by taking it for granted, first existentially and then ideologically. Filmmakers can transform ideas into realities through the logistics of believability, in a word *architecturally*, and they can tell stories not through oral or written expression but through a process of *actualization*, showing them or filming them as if the world opened by a narrative is a fact and not a fiction, staging them off-stage, as it were, adjacent to the theater where the city bustles on the "stage" of the everyday. Basking in the light of a film world, I register what there is to see and hear onscreen, and notice that the only way to "read" these images and sounds— rather than be carried away by them without a second thought—is to think aloud, perhaps against the grain of my experiential silence, the embodied intuition that movies use reality itself to construct a view of reality, or can create worlds inhabitable for their characters or penetrable by viewers only insofar as they belong to the world itself (i.e. *this* world). And whether the result is a worldview or a new world, the reigning sense of cinematic universality is based upon the impossibility of fully representing the presences "represented," which means there is something fundamentally inconclusive or unfinished about cinematic representation that keeps presence alive and exteriority flowing. In the midst of this reflective gazing I also notice, assuredly yet not without dismay, my own preoccupation with attending to the cinematic acknowledgment of exteriority, an acknowledgment that Stanley Cavell has shown is often foreclosed by our preference for knowledge and its ironic ignorance of the acknowledgment underlying its strivings.

Knowing/acknowledging cinema's 100 plus years of world-bearing (as the basis of world-making) is also timely considering the 20th century's mosaic of maneuvers towards solipsistic interiority, on the one hand, and a politics of truth on the other—a politics in which critique as a method rather than an action can lose track of the very thing it is criticizing. Picking out a common, perhaps "golden" thread, a background singularity despite a foreground plurality, is not necessarily to "essentialize" the medium (though that is always a risk, the concept of the moving image *is* such

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[7] See Daniel Yacavone, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

a risk); rather it is, above all, to remember something which most films make us forget (just as consciousness makes us forget something as vital as blinking or breathing): light in the dark, the betrothal of time and space, a dramatic realism to challenge the autonomy of art, defying the spirit of the preceding arts and confounding the philosophers of art to no end. This approach registers my unwavering sense over the years that while movies are fictions or at least constructions, they have the tendency to borrow or better yet participate in the mysterious rhetoric of the everyday in proportion to their so-called flights of fancy, for when these fictions depart from what is possible and turn their back on the everyday, they have in a sense discovered that which makes dreams credible to skeptics in the sobriety of their waking life. So our experience of these particular fictions is also one of fact, the rather crude fact of more or less trusting what we are experiencing, because *what* we are experiencing onscreen strikes us, so very often, as similar to or reminiscent of *how* we experience the everyday: a sublime fit of aesthetics, technology and the human sensorium that allows something completely fabricated to constitute real experience and be a factor in our formation as individuals. When I watched movies when I came of age, I was affected by them rather than influenced by them, and I dreamt about them rather than spoke about them—and it has been one of my callings since then to read the skin of my consciousness as exposed by *two* worlds whose affinity and friction, in Cavell's words, "leave room for thought."[8]

The cinematic representation of the world is the basis of film worlds (i.e. narratives or discourses infused with the light of being or their own sense of being-in-the-world), and yet this preliminary representation of the world, which resembles our experience of the world while originating from a kind of mechanical consciousness of it, is my starting point for an investigation into cinema's metaphysical character within our so-called post-metaphysical condition. Understood in this way, the moving image will be cast in this thesis as a cold or even clinical romanticism: the unconditional and heroic, sacrificing and suffering mimesis, in other words as a mechanical undergoing of the burdens of totality, burdens too great for mere mortals, preserved and relinquished in the same breath. The fruits of the mechanical mimesis can be seen to function philosophically insofar as the generated representations and our perceptual deliverance in the face of them stage the possibility for metaphysical thinking—provoking our curiosity, speculation, and sense of wonder at the heart of what is called philosophy. This is the old sense of wonder over the world in which we live, the form and feel of it, being here and now and knowing it for what it is,

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[8] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 24.

a wonder that greets the philosopher when thoughtful experience crescendos into an epiphany—what Heidegger calls "being-in-the-world"—and when he is ready at last to become the child he fantasizes about, overcoming the false fantasy known as nostalgia where child-consciousness is locked away and idealized because it is misremembered and relegated to memory alone. On the other hand, to experience the world in this way requires that we pay the price of metaphysical abstraction by turning the world into an idea, separating dweller from dwelling, and following feelings of awe with thoughts of truth or ambitions of a comprehensive and exhaustive worldview. However, I wish to claim that while philosophical reflection on the world can partake in an act of gross objectification and perhaps establish conditions for the tyranny of knowledge, philosophical reflection upon film's world order—on those luminous moving images and sounds of the world—tends to be satisfied with the sensation of surfaces. A reflection of twilight skies in water or on glass can lead us directly to the ripe qualities of the atmosphere itself, for as a direct experience the sky surrounds us, runs in circles, and is nothing in itself as a place out of reach; and when we turn away to resume our course in life we leave it to those who would harvest its space. And so it is here, at the crossroads between moving images of the world and the return of the world as the original mobilization of philosophical thought, where philosophy confronts—let us say as image rather than idea—its most ancient love, foe and fantasy, illusion and delusion and source of endless speculative drama: truth as external world (outside the world of man) and myth of the given (indifferent to our most manmade worlds).

In this thesis I explore the idea, or rather the possibility, that cinema's moving images of the world trigger peculiar or uncanny experiences of the world, for these images at the level of their ontology and/or our phenomenological reception (cognitive and corporeal), are ultimately *of* the world rather than complete worlds unto themselves.[9] To speak of them as worlds unto themselves, as we may be tempted to do with fantasy films or films with an overbearing sense of style, is to disregard or at least significantly diminish the fact that these alternative worlds are still made, let's say, of the rawest "world-material"—light and dark, time and space, sights and sounds,

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[9] This sense of film being "of" the world might hold, albeit to a lesser degree, for animated films where no photographic trace or digital capture of the world is in effect. What I find interesting is that films which are not beholden to the world, free to form themselves in accordance with their own aesthetic principles, in many cases adopt mimetic operations and conventions of representation no different than films whose mechanical recording functions ontologically mandate, as it were, a foundation of verisimilitude, be it to the world as we know it or the world as we can only dream it.

and the cinematic frame which opens up beyond itself, never blinking. Now this material may combine into autonomous worlds and we may refer to such worlds as "movies," but my suggestion is that this status is not possible without the prior condition of the moving image's being-in-the-world or world-dependence. This prior condition is a historical fact about movies which shapes equally how they are made and how we view them: movies are like elaborate tapestries woven out of organic fibres harvested from the brute physicality of life, and even if filmmakers today can artificially create life through digital means—in unison with the ambitions of modern science and genetics—the tapestry must hold together and the mosaic, for viewers, must open up and crystallize, a phenomenon that works best when the diffuse experience of cinema sits atop a foundation of elemental truth. While this condition may be a mere truism that holds in various degrees for all representations—insofar as all representations are intentional and reference the world in some way (as a concrete existent or pure possibility)—most films use actual photographic exposures or digital captures of the world as a given, and it is noteworthy that those which forgo the world almost always end up creating what we call a "possible world," a mere riff on our own. This is to say that the world is relied upon or better yet leaned upon even when it is being manipulated or dismissed or altogether forgotten. As long as a recording or an idea of a recording holds sway onscreen, and as long as images are brought together to signify a world greater than the sum of its parts such that it can *stand apart*, this condition of dependency almost always results in a pictorial indebtedness to a sense of how the world looks and sounds when the photographic basis of an art instills a certain measure of perceptual realism at its core, to be embraced or denied or redistributed by various types of cinematic convention and acts of cinematic expression.[10] As for the replacement of the photographic by digital technologies, in most cases this has not succeeded to displace the perceptual criteria of the photographic as an aesthetic precedent for cinematic discourse. The camera, whether analogue or digital, retains its photographic spirit onscreen as a kind of "world-opening" narrator; and even if no camera had been used in the making of a film, most viewers—and perhaps a part of every viewer—tend to perceive or perceptually "read" in the passage of audiovisual events what William Rothman calls the "'I' of the camera."[11]

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[10] See Rodowick's chapter "Paradoxes of Perceptual Realism" in *The Virtual Life of Film*, pp. 99-110.
[11] See William Rothman, *The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

In principle (not necessarily in appearance) such images of the world as I understand them will lie beyond our everyday experience of the world, at least insofar as what philosophy calls "the everyday" for the most part excludes, even prohibits, the more disembodied and ultimately inauthentic (i.e. textbook) "armchair" experiences of what we call "the world" and what philosophy calls "metaphysics" and what theology calls, say, "eternity" or "transcendence." The discipline of philosophy, in gradually working towards an overcoming of the "childish toys" of metaphysics (through the analytical procedures of logic or the phenomenological pouring of description or the existential escapades of inward liberation), is confronted by the cinema with a vision, if you will, of one of its original callings: the question, temptation, and life-long pursuit of truth, visualized onscreen as a representational correspondence rhetorically strengthened, or neutralized, by the lurking possibility of non-representational world-dependence. In other words, cinema's world-dependence enacts our intimacy with the world, a primordial intimacy deeper than the proximity of photography to the real and our false sense of proximity to digital instantaneity. This vision of truth, I suggest, is also a reminder to philosophy that it typically gets underway—after which it remains, in the words of Heidegger, forever on the way—when systems of understanding of one form or another are shown to derive their truth value from the organic flexibility of the system itself rather than its functioning correspondences called "results," for it is always the behavior of the philosopher and not his or her philosophy in particular that leaves no room for revision. I wager that cinema became the tool of an art rather than a science—despite obvious parallels between camera and microscope, between exposures of surfaces and x-rays of what lies beneath—because its mechanical or systematic openness discloses "the truth" to be excessively open-ended and ambiguous, a let down for the enterprise of knowledge and a starting point for the enterprise of creating fiction in the name of fact; hence the hot pursuit of the scientist gave way to the spry creation of the artist as a method in its own right (a methodology premised upon materiality) and for its own singular ends (poetry in place of pragmatism). The creativity inherent within discovery, epitomized by the courage of self-discovery, is something that philosophy, or at least certain modes or moods of philosophizing, has perhaps always learned from art in general—for one cannot hope to arrive at new knowledge without forging new paths, new ways of knowing, breaking old habits. The difference here is that philosophy learns this invaluable lesson, or is provided with evidence for it, from the very nature of an artistic medium, one which had to *earn* its place amongst the arts. And perhaps the films that attain greatness or at least strive

for it are those compelled to prove themselves worthy from scratch through the grand gesture of reciprocity, to give back the given world in pieces or under a new pose, wielding the power of art to transform (the world could be otherwise than it is) or redeem (the world could be better than it is) or leave open (the value of the world is never settled, is infinite, which means we need not hold onto old values for the world to have meaning—in fact the need for new values is proof enough that the world means on its own). I will be performing both fragmentary and comprehensive readings of such films throughout the thesis, especially in the latter half, focussing my attention on "world establishing" gestures of cinematic thought, as it were, coupled with digressive film moments which narrate the world beyond the fiction, in effect expanding it by anchoring it to the world. And in the case of whole films, I am interested in narratives which pursue what I call a "metaphysical film style," using film not so much to pose metaphysical questions as broach the metaphysical itself, asking questions from *within* the body of particular concepts, in the process often molding preconceived notions of the world out of shape, questioning the ways that movies make sense and offering new horizons of intelligibility by, let's say, allowing a particular cinematic horizon to escape into infinity, where following it is incumbent upon the imagination as much as the perception of viewers.

It is worth stressing that throughout *Metaphysics and the Moving Image* I am indeed "experimenting," above all with the thought that the medium of the moving image—its audiovisual recordings of the world and projections of the form of the world as representations in time-space, all by way of a machine and through a process that is often referred to as one which escapes the intervention of the human mind—realizes for all to see, clear as day for the searching philosopher, the dream of metaphysics to know the world beyond the senses, beyond the categories of human understanding (exemplified by Kant's noumenon or thing-in-itself), the world as not reducible to our knowledge of it and its limits, the world as somehow "pre-worded," as if the camera eye were directly privy to philosophy's logical, sometimes mythical *a priori*—a hypothetical glimpse through closed eyes such that the world in its own image becomes *possible*. This thought marks a decisive moment of encounter between film and philosophy, a moment which is not a philosophical approach to the understanding of film per se, nor a summoning of film to render concrete, dramatic or otherwise shine a light on philosophical concepts which tend to evade a more quotidian or everyday expression. Rather this is a moment when the philosophical tradition of metaphysics—a discourse about the nature of things, the epistemological enterprise of reason, the

filtering out of the clamor of historical and experiential contingency, a relentless search for timeless and eternal truths stationed in an ultimate reality, a private or institutional longing to prove or disprove the existence of God, etc.—comes into contact with a material enactment of some of its most enduring ideals and, at the very moment this tradition comes under a death-dealing scrutiny known as the linguistic turn in philosophy, compensates for the radical critique of those ideals by taking a variety of forms throughout the history of film theory, specifically the realist mantras of classical film theory and aspects of the contemporary branch of film theory known as "film-philosophy." This new metaphysics is at work in André Bazin's bold theory that the photographic image "shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model"; or in Kracauer's revelatory vision whereby "in recording and exploring physical reality, film exposes to view a world never seen before, a world as elusive as Poe's purloined letter, which cannot be found because it is within everybody's reach"; or in Epstein's provocation that "the cinema is true, a story is false," or Christian Metz's insight that "the cinema combines the raw presence of the world and the subtleties and refinements of human speech"; or in Cavell's Heidegerrean epiphany, while watching *Days of Heaven* (Malick, USA, 1978), that "objects participate in the photographic presence of themselves; they participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearances."[12] In more contemporary theory, we see it in the revival of interest in the photographic index as an act—Martin Lefebvre calls it an "art"—of pointing with the capacity to bear witness to the world and perhaps "re-enchant" the photograph's increasingly squandered powers of documentation in the digital age (i.e. Philip Rosen, Mary Ann Doane, Amit Pinchevski). And we also find it historicized in what Malcolm Turvey has called the revelationist tradition of classical film theory where the cinematic apparatus is endowed with the power to reveal that which exceeds the finite range of human perception, functioning as a response to or reprieve from the Western philosophical tradition of skepticism (which also manages to taunt the human condemnation to

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[12] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?*, Volume 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 14; Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 299; Jean Epstein, "The Senses 1 (b)," in *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology 1907-1939*, Volume 1: 1907-1929, trans. Tom Milne, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 242; Christian Metz (unpublished manuscript); Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. xvi.

skepticism).[13] Indexicality as a re-enchantment of the referent, the relocation of the philosophical concept of "essence" from beneath reality (where it is static) to the surface of reality (where it becomes dynamic), the technological underpinnings of a revelatory aesthetics of automatism, the self-manifestation of life as the ubiquity of the mystical or of mystical experiences in film—these are some of the fundamental events and implications of a "new metaphysics." Newness in this case is a product of negotiation as much as evolution, because it seems to me that metaphysics is not something that can be *completely* overturned as long as we stay human, one foot in the clouds. And one reason I call this metaphysics "new" is because realists in general tend to theorize the ontology of cinema *psychologically*, as if cinematic representation were some sort of proof, not that metaphysics is physical, whatever that means, but that one of the essential meanings of being human is the desire to *escape* meaning (and perhaps this is why the cinema is described so often as an escape, though the description need not be a negative one), or when the escape proves futile, to relish the relativity, contingency and ephemerality of meaning, the human condition as predisposed—blessed and cursed, fated—towards transcendence. And so we watch metaphysics migrate from the word to the image, from reason to experience, from human consciousness to mechanical unconsciousness, resurfacing under a new guise: cinema's moving image of the world and those classical and contemporary film theorists who are the proponents of a new metaphysics "post-metaphysics" even if they are unaware of it, and perhaps *because* they are unaware of it— for metaphysical thinking is a largely unconscious human activity.

Philosophy's grand attempts to realize its metaphysical dream have brought nightmares in equal measure, sliding into religious dogma in Nietzsche's critique and into conceptual confusion or grammatical nonsense in Wittgenstein's (nonsense which befalls philosophy when it decides to make truth claims instead of solve problems or tend to the errors associated with them), in any case parallel nightmares of self-imposed enslavement to absolutes empowered by a reckless critical resiliency. However, for this dream to be realized mechanically and from the outside, that is, from outside of human consciousness and outside the domain of philosophy, comes as a surprise if not something of a shock, and the results are both interesting and free of abstraction. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when philosophers like Nietzsche and Wittgenstein were practicing

[13] See Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); see Mary Ann Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction," *Differences* (May 1, 2007), 18 (1): 1–6; see Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

their critiques of metaphysics (for criticism is nothing if it's not *practiced*), early film theorists whom we now categorize as representatives of classical film theory, specifically its realist aspect, conceived of cinema's raw material in what Turvey calls the "revelationist spirit," praising with renewed zeal cinema's capacity to deliver an image of the world precisely in its own image and the achievements of filmmakers who create films with that image in mind and in hand—a metaphysics transformed when photographed and projected and viewed passively by humans who have finally found a way to unite consciousness and unconsciousness within the concept of the camera-eye. While there are as many, perhaps far more theorists who remain steadfastly anti-metaphysical in their approach to cinema (i.e. formalist theorists who claim that cinema cannot become an art if it unconditionally accepts what the camera gives it, or critics of the apparatus who claim that to trust the camera is to be taken in by a capitalist mode of production and seduced by the ideology of Western perspective), classical film theory and its timely resurgence in the digital age can nevertheless be thematized as a heated debate surrounding the nature, purpose and potential of this strange finding—what the camera finds (the world) and what the majority of filmmakers do with this finding (make a world by connecting these "shot dots"), a finding made all the stranger for being easily overlooked, redundant or banal in the extreme. This twofold banality, this easily overlooked strangeness, this sudden presence and "upfrontness" of a world as seen by no one, as it were (a world undergone yet amenable to creative cultivation, hospitable to the worldview), is a compromise that the new metaphysics must learn to accept, substituting immanence for transcendence and aesthetics for ontology in its thinking and as its first principles. One way of understanding the compromise and its various consequences is as follows: when the "cinematic world" exemplifies both the metaphysical concept of world and the metaphysical quest to know the world (not *as* we know it but as we *can't* know it), exemplifying it as a luminously concrete image rather than as an immaterial idea at the mercy of our language, there is the possibility for great disappointment in this, an almost unacceptable disappointment for the philosophical imagination when the final teleology of reason and redemption of our epistemological finitude must be set aside—and we too must be beside ourselves when humanity is found thinking through the eye/"I" of a machine.

Another cost of this remarkable record of the real, which of course only approximates the look of reality yet ironically sates our senses sometimes better than reality itself, is that through it we are given the means to experience the revelation only from the outside as a view. This allows

us to look *at* the world naked, that is, at a representation of the world adequate to the phenomenological reduction of the world to its appearances; whereas before, when we looked at it, or tried to, we did not know what to look at, where to stop, for how long, to what end, and whether or not to accept or deny the act of looking itself as necessary to the contemplation of the world as an "object." While the phenomenological reduction of the world eventually—or sometimes rather quickly—gets carried away along the lines of a gaseous expansion of consciousness, the advantage of an *image* of this reduction is that it expands, so to speak, the world's consciousness. But to be sure, the world is not conscious—it merely *is*, and goes on being so. I understand these disappointments as a profound disillusionment via illusion, primarily because the cinematic realization or demonstration of the most fundamental concept of metaphysics—what Heidegger simply calls "world"—is so satisfying onscreen, be it on the level of individual shots or sequences of montage: our senses are thoroughly and unquestionably satisfied by the rough or refined appearance of the world, yet in a way that is markedly uneventful and ordinary, the sort of ordinariness to which we become habituated and eventually all but blind. We can be forgiven for overlooking what is in front of us, for what is in front of us needn't necessarily be seen, or perhaps is too close to see, and with barely an urge to touch except by grabbing hold and willing our way through the world like one of those unstoppable rampaging monsters. Because the world in the moving image, which is no doubt equally if not dramatically in front of us, *fronts us* with an embodiment of the concept of world, what Bazin refers to as "the world in its own image,"[14] an embodiment that the history of cinematic technology continues to ramp up in a vain attempt—even with 3-D—to leap out of the screen. In this sense it is important that our everyday or at least perceptual experience of the world and the cinematic representation of the world align in this way, so the point where they must part ways can be plotted. Our ability to inhabit such a world onscreen will all of a sudden become dependent on whether or not we can see it and re-enter it via sight and sound from a place impossibly "outside." This place outside the world from which we must re-enter it through an image of all things (Cavell might have called it the phenomenology of cinematic ontology) is a strange place indeed—it is one of the things about photographic representation that Cavell actually describes as making us "ontologically restless"[15]—and it is where we find ourselves when the quest of metaphysics has been undertaken

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[14] Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What is Cinema?*, p. 21.
[15] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 17.

technologically rather than philosophically, or when the aesthetic product of a technology is the embodied principle of a philosophy.

A metaphysics in the moving image will be found to be philosophically satisfying in ways that most metaphysical systems leave us wanting, as the desire for certainty in the latter case is as elusive as it is never-ending, setting up the age-old conditions for the split-second slide into skepticism. But this new metaphysics—which for the sake of argument can be thought of as radically inverting Plato's parable of the cave, insofar as the world in its own image can give us back the world as such, as if a reverse route to the eternal forms passed through contingency, finitude and even the unconscious—is still, despite everything, invariably disappointing, bewildering, and perhaps also ironically otherworldly. This is because, 1) at stake is merely an image of the world, analogous to how we see it and limited in most cases to its surfaces, an image whose experience distracts us from actually thinking the world (hence Plato's decision to exclude the poets from his version of the ideal city), 2) this image which makes a claim on the real is unconditionally granted an authenticity in excess of consciousness and a referential capacity more solid and let us say instantaneous than language, and 3) what is logically determined in this context to deliver—I want to say "charm"—the metaphysical through philosophy's "back door" (the non-human representation of the world by way of the mechanical capture and projection of a particular film world), can only come in the form of what Cavell calls "the world as things" as opposed to "the world as facts," the latter of which, according to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, does away with things altogether by positing the logical relations *between* things while encompassing the context of our specific relation to those relations.[16] In this sense the world as things—also one of the fundamental principles of the new metaphysics—marks the unhinging of things from facts; the "things of the world," stripped of the logical relations that endow them with inherent, perhaps *a priori* meanings, are therefore revealed onscreen to be naked or stranded, objects of an alien world or perhaps building materials for a new world. This leads to the realignment of facts with things—fact on film being the empirical connections *between* things and the logical continuity between on- and off-screen environments. If a photographic or mimetic image can only be said to tell us something about the world and make a claim on it if it is ultimately

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[16] See Stanley Cavell, "The World as Things: Collecting Thoughts on Collecting," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 241-79; and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

interpreted that way, then such an interpretation must proceed by teasing out the facts from the things which embody them, responding and perhaps relishing the "fact free" character of cinematic thinghood. Lastly, a world of things is also a fate from which we cannot escape, for we are things too within this picture—everything in the world reduced to the same level of significance or insignificance, a level perpetually on the verge of being tipped in accordance with what a claim *upon* the real compels us to say *about* the real. Waiting to be spared the harsh fate of passive nihilism or ready to redeem it, to activate it, the indiscriminate and "meaningfully meaningless" world of things can come into its own by looking back at the camera and posing the question of being in terms of value. It is only from the position of subject that the object stares back.

The philosophy of film, a subfield or inter-discipline within which this and other like-minded projects will invariably be categorized or fed through in some way, has attempted to make the case that film can do philosophy or even be philosophy, a claim that for all its bravado cannot account to my mind for why film would want to imitate or propagate philosophy in the first place. My take on film-philosophy in this thesis is that if there *is* a philosophy to film or of film—if there is a way for film, or some aspect of it, to contribute to the various traditions and turnings of philosophy, say by adding new concepts or transforming the form of old concepts—then it is because film, or film-experience, is one of philosophy's many *others*. Literature is also such an other, and so we have philosophies of literature; painting is another one of these others, and with it philosophies of painting exist too. This is true of all the arts and the sciences, each with philosophies or potential philosophies of their own, in fragments or as wholes, from the spotlights of fashion to the deepest depths of the underground. Cinema is not philosophically privileged, not by any means, it just so happens that a certain group of film scholars care about philosophy, and care about certain filmmakers who also care about philosophy and use it for inspiration, adapting philosophical ideas and thought experiments without giving their creators any credit. As for why these scholars and filmmakers care as much about philosophy as they do for film, my only hunch is that film, as an "other" to philosophy, is also conceived as an "other" to art. Film is not a pure or singular art with only one medium at its disposal, rather it consists of multiple mediums and is cut with the influence or inheritance of the other arts; the other arts helped to justify it artistically and economically, protecting it from a mechanized mimesis also known as automatism. However, this automatism will always root one of film's two feet, as it were, into the earth of the world in its own image, a readymade yet aestheticized image with no equal in language or thought and

which the tradition of metaphysics has been coveting like the holy grail. For all these reasons the medium of the moving image can be seen to stand outside both philosophy and art, and in this way spans as a possible bridge between them, in this case between the end of metaphysics and the ontology of the work of art as the virtual site of truth in the modern world.

While I place great stock in the ontology of the moving image as the decisive meeting place for metaphysics and aesthetics, a place which I perceive as positioned just outside the boundaries of philosophy and film proper, I am nevertheless aware of the limitations of such a perspective from within each discipline and will seek throughout the dissertation to show where and how the discourses of metaphysics and cinema are put into play by the interdisciplinary methodology. I have already suggested that the realist strains of classical film theory mark the migration or exile of metaphysical concepts and propositions, however this perspective is not without its shortcomings, reducing as it does both metaphysics and moving images to different systems of representing the real. But since I am ultimately interested in how the moving image has taken over and transformed the metaphysical quest of Western philosophy, it is important to re-inscribe the abstract concept of the moving image back into what film actually is: a complex, ambiguous, language-like form of expression within which the moving image and its photographic basis—or, in the case of the digital, its recording capability and resemblance to our experience of the world— functions as a fundamental yet equally partial element. I will also be asking how cinema's metaphysical import is expressed by the medium's recurrent characteristics and still uncharted possibilities, that is to say by its technical and aesthetic physicalities which give meaning to the world in its own image and justify our heightened attraction to this extraordinarily ordinary "world." The characteristics, qualities and possibilities of film worlds are not those of metaphysics, rather the subsistence of each film world signals that metaphysics has migrated from philosophy to film, with the result being that metaphysics is precisely what survives human intervention and critique, lingering despite us. And perhaps the more apocalyptic the critique the greater the resurgence, albeit on new terms which may entail a paradigm shift. Cinema's criterion for the new metaphysics is that all film worlds, regardless of how outlandish or impossible, regardless how permeated with individual or societal concerns, become an acceptance, an embrace, of *this* world—a world the knowledge of which is inexhaustible and, furthermore, depends on lived experience of a vast spectrum of "alterities." The films, figures, moments and gestures that uphold this criterion—some of which will be explored in detail—cast the world as a whole as the main

character lacking rhyme or reason, irresolvable and godless, filled with things whose image has been returned to them and yet overrun by things called "human beings" with tendencies to play god, creating the world in their own image despite the fact that the world is all but immune to the will and that a cinematic hierarchy of significance or power relations is nowhere to be found to justify the privilege of the Anthropocene. The theoretical indiscriminateness of the camera-eye is the unsuspected "pen" for a poetics of presence to be writ large, such a poetics being the condition of possibility for an ontological democracy and perhaps utopian intimacy onscreen.[17]

An exploration of the relationship between metaphysics and moving images must bring into conceptual alignment philosophy's active pursuit of essences and cinema's passive or automatic exposure of the underlying essences of reality through its surfaces, a feat which is ultimately dependent upon the aesthetic activation of passivity or exposedness, a discursivity of revelation.[18] This surface reality is fittingly a projected reality, not a staged one, a reality humanly intended before being mechanically relinquished and which originates behind us (in the case of cinema) or in front of us (in the case of television or digital screens), in any case a projected reality that precedes the projecting mind. The form of projection is therefore often described as "coming to us" and "imposing itself": making an appearance onscreen which is analogous to the impression made on film, relaying the primal exposure of the cinematic substrate—be it through celluloid or code—like a delicate wind before being transfigured into pure light, light being the condition of possibility for a world to appear as a world apart, separateness being a criterion for the presence of what-is insofar as what goes by the name "world" is precisely what exists, as Cavell never tired of saying, *without me*. Unbidden and under the radar of knowledge, film worlds appear pre-known as manmade worlds yet knowable—or to a certain extent unknown—as mechanically generated, the materials of which are unmade and those of the world itself, in truth or in appearance—all this without the need for philosophy's methodological procedures of epistemology to reach out and grasp "the truth" amidst swaths of appearances cut down like thorny weeds. One can also express

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[17] Consider the following speculation from Alain Badiou as a deferral to cinema's natural weaving together of ontology and democracy, art and politics, politics and powerlessness: "Cinema is the great repose of art: you can go to the movies on Saturday night to relax. Bad painting is bad painting: there is very little hope of its turning into good painting. It is a fallen aristocracy, whereas at the cinema, you are always a democrat hoping to attain an absolute. Alain Badiou, "Cinema as Philosophical Experimentation," in *Cinema*, ed. Antoine de Baecque, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 211.

[18] Such a discourse can also be interpreted in theological terms as the representation of the unrepresentable, and more specifically in Bazinian terms where the world onscreen is allowed/crafted to "reveal itself," thus enabling a certain variety of religious experience of the Jamesian sort.

this relation between the experience of film worlds and the quest of metaphysics more candidly, albeit formulaically, in the following way: what philosophy strives to know, cinema takes on faith; philosophy is human striving, cinema is mechanical revealing; and so on. No doubt philosophy and cinema exceed or even oppose these characterizations or caricatures—in fact both have arguably outgrown or left behind, depending on your outlook, their respective metaphysical and revelatory phases—yet what concerns me as a theoretical preliminary and foundation for the analyses to follow is this point of intersection between philosophical and cinematic metaphysics, which approaches the concept of world in different ways and with different results. With philosophy and the moving image, we have before us two radically distinct modes of "inquiry," describable through the following series of binary oppositions which we may still find to be of some use: knowledge and faith, the desire to know and the desire to be known, explanations and descriptions of events, words and images… And if we continue to follow these modes further along their respective paths and unto the opposing poles of the human mind, philosophy can be imagined as a discourse driven forward by metaphysics and cinema as a process made receptive by what we call ethics—a new metaphysics therefore involves a transformation of metaphysics *into* ethics—and I borrow Cavell's elegant terminology when I say that the business of philosophy is to *know* the world and the business of film is to *acknowledge* it, or at least to acknowledge a particular way of knowing the world through contact (keeping in mind that openness to the world and others doesn't guarantee meaningful dialogue—that's where the *art* of film comes in). This double movement of the resonating worlds of philosophical and cinematic representation is its own dialogical discourse, commonly referred to today as an interdisciplinary discourse, and excluding the conventions which have come to narrow and harden such a discourse, it is ultimately indebted to those occasions of intersection where a pattern-tracing thinker believes, rightly or wrongly, that the two competing voices passionately echo each other even when they deny each other and therefore under no circumstances ought to be separated in our minds.

The terms and conditions of such a reconciliation will serve, in part, therapeutic ends, for beneath each of philosophy's attempts at knowledge there lurks secret attempts—longings—to overcome the authority and prestige of knowledge itself. In other words, these attempts are not merely attempts to know but also *to be*, and lacking the right sort of self-consciousness they are too often at odds. At the same time, these resonant points of intersection between philosophy's logical and empirical investigations of reality and film's mechanical registration and projection of

the world in its own image—a fact of film that is ultimately dependent upon being amplified (i.e. valued) by fiction's discourse of revelation—are not always or necessarily productive or even instructive when it comes to reading film and philosophy one through the other. The reason for this is that it's not always clear from the outset which field or audience they are meant to address. Indeed, it's not even clear if the philosophy perceived through art or the art perceived through philosophy can yield propositions that will be recognizable to any "specialist." Perhaps the reader in the best position to grasp them will be a member of a so-called general audience—specialists, as it were, who have strayed from their familiar domains and traditions and intellectual habits, ready to be taken by surprise by an open-mindedness difficult to achieve when one's bearings are too securely intact and a consciousness of one's limitations is drowned out by excessive expertise, the ever-presumptuous claims to authority.

Chapter 1

Image Breakthrough: Perspectives on the Revelatory Power of the Visual Arts

The philosophy of film is ostensibly tied to the philosophy of art, occupying one of the latter's many branches of investigation; and philosophers have been writing on art for centuries, a tradition that goes back (all the way back) to the ancient Greeks, particularly with Plato's *Republic* in which the infamous critique or suspicion of the gross artifice of art is decisively delivered (a skepticism that may, at least in retrospect, and at least in part, be driven by a kind of secret envy towards the power of art to skyrocket the soul into a state that philosophy must earn, slowly and gradually, through the lifelong ardors of reason and sensibility we call "education"). I would say this makes the philosophy of art into a tradition as old as philosophy itself, and indeed nothing in philosophy or art would be anywhere without the art of thought in all its intellectual and corporeal expressions. Perhaps due to the compelling legacy of Plato's skepticism towards the enchantments of art, which for him indulged in a grotesque doubling of an apparent reality that is already itself nothing more than a poor imitation of the eternal forms, philosophy has been widely concerned with the intentional, formal, phenomenological, ontological and altogether otherworldly aspects of art, the latter of which is arguably epitomized by theories of the sublime tending towards the mystical and perhaps above all by Immanuel Kant's emphasis on the remarkable ability for an artwork, particularly a beautiful one, to unleash the faculties of sense and understanding into a suspended and democratic state of pleasurable free play he calls "disinterestedness."[1] But it wasn't until much later, amidst philosophy's more marginal moments of introspection and experimentation, where art was approached as something else or "other," something greater than the crystallization of past times and places or the expression of intention and an ensuing hermeneutic encounter. In the modern period, art could appear as something whose essence is as irreducible as it is undecidable, open and active, in a word, the work of art as the very site of its own *working*. "The work of art," as we call it now for what seems like centuries, despite its relatively recent appearance in the field of aesthetics, is a term whose meaning—like so many— evaporates with every casual or histrionic utterance and all hierarchical classifications based on

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[1] See the First and Second Moments in the judgment of taste according to quality and quantity, from the First Book on the Analytic of the Beautiful in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. John H. Bernard (New York: Cosimo, 2007), pp. 27-40.

vacant criteria of reverential value. Such terms do, however, grant the artwork a singular autonomy that cannot be fully reclaimed or mastered by the human beings—artists and spectators—standing on either side, and this is what I wish to emphasize here. A work of art *as a thing* may point to *something else* beyond itself, something otherworldly in comparison with itself, and upon being experienced in this way, it reaches out and grabs hold and commands our attention towards specific ends which are irreconcilable, it would seem, with the material means. In this sense the artwork's ontology is akin to a ritualistic materialization or enactment of the mode of *allegory*, a literal launch-pad of experience, a phenomenological catapult stationed within endless plateaus of habituation and utilitarian orientations of mind and body. But whatever the work puts to work, so to speak, it is ultimately its own entity, its own being—a thing which reveals things, a world which makes room for itself and only itself, throwing a light on being (I hesitate to say the Being of beings) by virtue of showing beings as creations and only then as revelations.

As a reader of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, especially the late philosophy, I have always found it interesting, if not slightly ironic, that some of his most penetrating and impassioned analyses of metaphysical concepts can be found in the context of an investigation of the ontology of the work of art. In fact, by way of a thoroughly "grand theoretical" ontology of the artwork as laid out in his probing if vexing essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger sets out to formulate not only the truth value of the work of art but the work of art as truth.[2] After the dust of our affinities and disagreements over the question of art have settled, and after all our historical and theoretical models start to wear thin or entangle in a cacophony of pleas for a model of understanding to rise above, for Heidegger it is the artwork's absolute ontology or origin, prior to and prompting of any particular artistic manifestation, that is declared through reason and in faith to protect the concept of truth—or some vital part of it, for Heidegger the very *possibility* of it—

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[2] Whether this is done convincingly or not, successfully or not, through the logic of philosophy or that of poetry, is impossible to say one way or the other, for that is precisely what makes this work so provocative and imaginative. Heidegger's argument is also a vision, and his project here seems to be the invention of a way of thinking oriented or calibrated towards whatever it is that makes art art—the Being of art—which ultimately leads to the invention of a new philosophical discourse. As for the tendency to criticize or even dismiss such discourses as intentionally rarified, averse to common sense and perhaps even reluctant to communicate clearly, I stand by Heidegger and say that what has no obvious philosophical precedent is quite absolved from the strict, largely institutional obligation to acknowledge reigning standards of philosophical analysis or to prioritize the systematic persuasion of the reader regarding the validity or soundness of the perspective being offered. See Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 17-86.

from all the contingencies of the history of ideas, cultural contexts of human discourse, and notions regarding best available logic. The work of art (not art per se, but art as the powerful and inimitable *work* of art, art as non-utilitarian "work") is held by Heidegger to manifest the actual structure of truth, the non-propositional *form* of truth, because it is a thing the function of which is pure manifestation, pure purposelessness. Our various and competing ideas *about* the truth must therefore come after the fact of truth's concrete set-up and disclosure. Truth's disclosure within this context is a complex mixture of fact and value whose propositional form and rhetorical tenor belong to its own conditions of possibility, conditions most hospitable to what is possible in art. In somewhat simple terms (though this is always an oxymoron when discussing Heidegger, especially Heidegger on art), art lights "the truth" because it lights and nothing more; it is a lighting up; it *shows* what we would normally have no choice but to *say*, if only we could say it in such a way that our words could show it. And even if art's metaphysical show does *say something* in the end, it is the task of philosophy to show its showing by saying it (and failing), this and nothing more.

As unlikely a candidate an artistic image may be as a vehicle for truth, Heidegger suggests—and in terms that become increasingly suggestive, to put it mildly, as the essay goes on—that art is the setting up of truth, the happening of truth, truth put to work, as it were.[3] He develops the entire essay around this formulation without being the least bit swayed or encumbered by the fact that philosophy has a lengthy history of skepticism towards the truth value of images. For the most part, philosophy finds the force of the grammatical proposition and the rigorously tested rudiments of logic to be more concrete and pragmatically adept for the assurances and aspirations of progress, the fund of knowledge and its occasional translation into responsible human action, the technical welding of thought upon thought into systems we can trust—because to embark upon thought is already a sign of trust or show of respect to what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls "a form of life." But it is precisely the nature of this form of life that Heidegger seeks to analyze on its own terms, whereas Wittgenstein's analyses only imply that the form of life is at work all the time, in what we say and in what we do, and we cannot access its inner or autonomous workings for the simple reason that they are precisely what lies out of reach for those who are inescapably bound by them, like hinges on a door or scaffolding, to borrow images Wittgenstein

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[3] Ibid., p. 38.

uses in the posthumous collection *On Certainty*.[4] If Heidegger's abstract methodology seems immodest or tactless or perhaps reckless in comparison with Wittgenstein's, then all we have to do to save his philosophy from the wrath of cutthroat anti-essentialists is to remain sensitive to a method of thinking that appeals to and proceeds by *listening*, receptive to what he calls "the call," one which becomes sharply interrupted and therefore nonsensical when thought reaches out for it in a manner that Western thinking is trained to do and takes prides in doing well given an admirable record of results—but "results" they remain.

Heidegger's primary and solitary example in this essay is a painting of a pair of peasant shoes by Van Gogh. The painting is characteristically expressive, exuberant yet down to earth, and the tactile, frenzied, close-up rendering of the shoes is vintage Van Gogh. There are places in the relatively modest work that seem to dissolve into an abstraction of wear and tear, especially along the folded cuff of one of the boots which can no longer remain upright, drooping like a dog ear or wilting like a dying rose—the pathology of the poor thing is actually quite moving—and yet Heidegger will not be content in his analysis until what is being moved here occurs at the level of Being itself and opens up a world unto itself. What is interesting is that for Heidegger the expressionistically painted and strangely unrecognizable shoes or work boats *are there*—not underneath the formal breakdown but in plain view, broken in, viewed from the angle of human feet. And they are there—that is, present and alive, presencing and enlivening—in a manner paradoxically denied to the shoes themselves (if they could be held up for the sake of comparison), as if only a thoughtfully painted image from a human being's embodied imagining of

Figure 1. Heidegger discovers the truth of Being in a painting of a pair of shoes: *A Pair of Shoes* (Vincent Van Gogh, 1888).

the real can express what these shoes embody metaphysically: the gravity-bound burden of feet, the old soul of the wearer, harsh life in the fields or on the streets, the sense of armor hearkening

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[4] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977).

back to Medieval times—the "equipmental" character and temporality of the shoes which is palpable, it would appear, only if the shoes themselves are left out of the picture. For a "picture" is what we need in order for the shoes and the world they imply to resonate: the painter has captured them unawares and gestured them into being through all phases of their being; the pair of shoes, eccentric in their old age, hardly make a proper pair any longer; here where the shoes dwell long after the people (the real workers) have turned their backs or gone to sleep—this is that moment when the world is and shines because we are not tunneling through it or breaking the waves as our indefatigable mode of routine survival. But if Van Gogh has let the shoes "be," it must be their use, that is to say their life, which he paints, and in painting lives; he lives, in other words, that which makes life on earth so much more bearable—*shoes*, which take a beating, beaten by the only cure for being on this earth which is to cope with the help of bits and pieces of protection, extra manmade layers of skin. From this we may conclude that our equipment or technology is less progressive than protective. Van Gogh's painting can therefore be said to reveal the shoes not because they clearly resemble a pair of shoes but rather because they are what we call "true to life," in other words, true to how such shoes are lived by the wearer. A film could be made about them in this respect. To achieve this kind of realism, a photograph would have to capture the lived-in aspect, that is, the "usedness" which makes them loved by the wearer and shunned by others. A photograph emphasizing this usedness or oldness brings out details extraneous and perhaps antithetical to utility, and not coincidentally sets itself apart from an advertisement featuring brand new shoes awaiting an owner—"you" or "me"—whose face in this context also shows little sign of worldly experience.

I am equally concerned with the possibility that to take an image for the real thing—or for an image to *overtake* the real thing—is to assume, quite rightly I think, that it is precisely the realness of things which fail, or have failed far too often, to make an impression on us. Falling within our immediate range of experience, useful if needed yet otherwise cumbersome or altogether invisible, things in themselves tend to fall away, hide, go to sleep despite their inner life. Things have been made for a purpose and so exist for our use—to perceive things as "things-in-themselves" is actually to miss their point; letting them be does less of a service to their being than becoming a part of their being by using them in accordance with their equipmental structure. In the end, according to Heidegger, only the work of art can excise a thing from the flux and roar of functionality, pluck it from a transient world and inscribe it within a permanent world, some

refer to it as an image world, where its presence will be readable against the horizon of truth. The "thingliness" of the artwork as a whole is what the artist activates only to abandon it to an autonomy without utility (a form of work without a means-ends agreement, let's say), an autonomy not unlike the artist's own existential constitution and predicament (perpetual self-definition and, as I've heard it said, self-justification).

In his book *Art's Claim to Truth*, Gianni Vattimo extends Heidegger's investigation into a comprehensive account of the ontology of the work of art amidst what he and many contemporary philosophers obscurely, and perhaps prematurely, call "the wake of metaphysics." According to Vattimo, after the end of metaphysics—i.e. in the aftermath of the great epoch of Western thought, an epoch defined by the possibility of objective certainty; or after the collapse of the organic tenability and socio-historical purchase of systematic narratives with the finality of absolute truth as their governing telos—the goal of art changes internally and irrevocably, in a word ontologically, not just historically or ideologically but *in its very essence*.[5] As a consequence of irreversible movements of thought, or rather critically self-conscious counter-movements of thought, propelled by us yet controlled by none, art's new essence will also encompass, first of all, every individual's actual experience of an actual artwork, which means that the essence of the human is imbricated from the beginning and therefore simultaneously at stake in the restated question of the ontology of art.[6] With instruction and inspiration from Hans Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, Vattimo's idea of an end to metaphysics (think of it also as the end of our trust in philosophy's trust in the accessibility, objectivity, and bedrock stability of "discovered" as opposed to "created" truths) implies that the ontological bearing of art now grounds a fundamental *hermeneutics*. More specifically, the *a priori* command to interpret and the haunting caveat that truth must be perpetually formed and deformed by human hands—the self-consciousness of the moment, in other words, where the hermeneutic encounter is shown to be inescapably ripe at every turn. The artwork's truth-value is now expressed as the activation of a new perspective on truth:

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[5] See Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, ed. Santiago Zabala, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[6] However, our essence is no longer of the "glassy" sort, as Richard Rorty named it in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, for our post-essentialist "essence" has become, at least since the postmodern readings of Nietzsche, so adept at depriving things of any essence, perhaps as a way of reflecting upon or coping with the demanding post-metaphysical outcome—a vertiginous wake—that whatever we wanted to call "essence" has proven to inevitably and contradictorily change over time, sometimes unrecognizably so. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

truth as value. Whatever strikes us as "true" is now secondary to the condition of possibility for truth to emerge, forged as if out of the fires. And the work of art throws this condition of possibility into relief, throws a light on this lighting or clearing as Heidegger would say, making consciousness self-conscious (calibrating consciousness) and into an accomplice in the creation of meaning, creation being the necessary if paradoxical condition for meaning's revelation or discovery in the world.

Now my own self-consciousness in this matter restrains me from debating or attempting to settle debates regarding the end of metaphysics and the beginning of "something else." Throughout the course of my own reading and thinking on the so-called philosophical "turns" (all of which seem to want to *turn away* from metaphysics, in part or in full), one can nonetheless sense that when a longstanding tradition underlying even the most radical historical change is felt to come to an end, it usually means that the period after the end commences a scrupulous, sometimes heartfelt recollection of what it is that has been lost, only to discover that in picking up the pieces the logic of their assemblage becomes vividly apparent as they are pieced together for the last time as if for the first time. Suddenly metaphysics in the wake of metaphysics *makes sense*; how metaphysics served (still serves?) our greatest sense-making aspirations; and when the end of metaphysics makes the search for certainty logically or even technically impossible rather than less desirable or even shameful (in fact the impossibility of it is likely for some to increase the desire and absolve the perversity), the big question stares us in the face: is this the end or the *beginning* of metaphysics? With the slightest degree of separation from tradition (a separation that is all too often ascetically self-imposed) and a waft or whisper of nostalgia over the death of God by way of a philosophical-political murder (when the question was how or whether God existed and not the fact, today, that we killed in the name of truth rather than in spirit and that our existence stands in the way of a possible transcendence), the tradition of metaphysics is neither completely restored or resumed relatively unchanged but, let us say, is documented and photographed, monumentalized and honored and even mourned. And just because our knowledge has turned out to be psychologically limited and historically contingent, our self-consciousness as knowers may not guarantee the overcoming of the metaphysical aspirations intrinsic to knowledge itself. I look into the mirror and look at myself looking and say to myself by way of conclusion, "There I am." To add the qualification, "There I go, I come and go with every glance," or perhaps the famous Shakespearean confession "I am not who I am," is not a logical step, not by any means—taking it

takes courage, experience, and is a private affair unfolding within the gap between thought and feeling, between ideas and their ideals, the self's right of passage where an immense uphill of will and testing suffering accompanies various projects of realization, passages worthy of what we call "life's work."

To return to Vattimo's argument, his response to life in the wake of metaphysics is generally an aesthetic one and a specifically Heideggerian one (capitalizing on a specific and exceptional aesthetic moment in the latter's thought): "After metaphysics, a work of art is beautiful if its wholeness is rigorously dominated by its own internal law."[7] When our thinking in general ceases to be governed by immutable external laws and overarching absolutes posited within the world as a whole or in the form of a fixed "world picture," then some form of compensation or victorious respite can be found within the ontology of the work of art as a world unto itself constituted by human creation. At the same time, such compensation may not be our first response or priority, even on a purely subconscious level where the death of the absolute compels deeper, perhaps more desperate forms of attachment entirely unmotivated by reason. For it is a possibility worth considering that the end of metaphysics is precisely demarcated or made philosophically public by the emergence of the work of art's radical self-definition, what Vattimo calls its own internal law, as if a work of art worthy of the name is a creation of something completely natural, something reminiscent of a living ecosystem of thought and feeling, significance and speculation, a world within the world when the latter no longer presides above us or takes care of us as a site of truth, a manmade microcosm that is the result of a process or multiple processes affecting and sustaining each other. When it becomes clear—or semi-clear—to us that our pursuits of truth have routinely met with criticism (often hypocritically systematic criticisms of systematization), hence with shadows of futility in response to truth's fundamental nonexistence or relativity (depending on the needs of disciplinary contexts and divergent cultures), then what has happened—at least for those who continue to believe in truth or insist that we simply cannot live without some version or salvaging of it (thinking without it does not entail living without it)—can also be interpreted as a monumental shift in the nature of truth from something factual or propositional that corresponds to or even touches its object to something "evental" (no thing, in fact): an act by which nothing is claimed and where the content of a truth is literally handed over to the form of an artwork where truth *happens*, is put to work or gets underway, as Heidegger never tired of expressing the

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[7] Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, p. xvi.

autonomous working of truth amidst hardworking human hands. The appearance of beauty for Vattimo, then, is not an impression of harmony so much as the experience of conditions of possibility for art to impress itself as *work*; and in the process it demonstrates that the most certain or at least enduring of truths have always been the most creative ones, emancipatory rather than dogmatic in their various aims and influences, fit to build with and live by insofar as they let us strive.

I will now turn my attention to recent attempts by two experienced art historians with philosophical ambitions who explore—or perhaps the right word is "entertain"—the metaphysical possibilities of painting and photography in a post-metaphysical age where the work of art, as we have seen, enjoys the status of "worldhood." In this context one of the unique possibilities of the post-metaphysical is not only a discovery of the metaphysical within the image—a place traditionally off limits to it, a tradition which goes all the way back to the ancient Platonic philosophy which dismisses the image as a poor yet seductive imitation of truth, and more recently in theories of mimesis where truth is rendered redundant—but also a provocative phrasing of metaphysical issues in terms of pictorial questions. In a post-metaphysical age, philosophical systems are replaced with philosophical worldviews which may or may not operate in accordance with their own internal logic; and worldviews in this sense are not just views *of* the world but *worlds unto themselves* which question our own or force us to awaken to our own consciousness as one of the integral if not foundational constituents of being-in-the-world. Therefore, what a painting or photograph shows as a representation is not to be taken for granted as a representation of anything guaranteed to be objective or held in common, for "to show" is no longer a systematic and richly codified process of visual communication through what art history has termed "the natural attitude,"[8] but rather the wagering of a worldview whose experience requires consent or critique and where the possibility of community hangs in the balance.

In *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* by T. J. Clark, the metaphysical configurations and possibilities of modernist painting (i.e. the seismic relocation of truth from the security of the external world to the suspension of worldviews, or quite simply from the noumenal realm to the phenomenal realm, call it a creative realm) are brought down to the micro-level of pictorial details, the deep depths and inner workings of that thinly painted surface, right into the

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[8] See Norman Bryson, "The Natural Attitude," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 23-32.

heart of Picasso's pictorial thought, fleshed out in the form of spontaneous colour, speculative line, spatial (dis)orientation and the radical disfiguring of the ideological everyday.[9] By the latter I take Clark to mean (he does not exactly spell it out): the formless monstrosities and material simultaneities of our being-in-the-world, that is, when these beings who refer to themselves as "human beings" specialize in crafting partitions between beings whom they call "others," and where the world as a result becomes an archipelago of exclusions—burrows of isolation, second skins. The political abstractions of reality, which may or may not wield the technique of abstracting reality, picture a chaos routinely filed down and occasionally dismissed as mere certainty or as "the way things are" (the acceptance of which sanctions the objectification of all humanity; the human body exposed as an unstable entity whose parts drift out of orbit by the black hole pull of neighboring bodies), giving rise to an epic normalcy despite all socio-political tumult. In Picasso, when the sense of disfiguration and destruction feels completely natural or solid, the picture becomes an embodiment of life as we live it such that no other form of life except the most wretched givens is imaginable to us. Here is Sisyphus, again, but sound asleep atop the great rock.

Clark's first major point or step in rising above Picasso the star to the living breathing worldview of his work is to state that the painter's persistent exploration of the interiors we inhabit (a kind of gestural cartography of the second body of modern interiority) constitutes a rejection of landscape, hence of nature, as the default casting of "world." For Picasso there is nature now *in* culture, and our private abodes have become public spaces that mirror, first and foremost, the tenuous patchwork of the modern world and the nagging instabilities of the day, aesthetic as well as political instabilities which have finally infringed upon the excruciatingly refined decorum of bourgeois consciousness. A pervasive, portentous and contingent sense of exteriority is now being pursued and established through *interiority*, which amounts to saying (pictorially) that our private abodes are material externalizations of the ruptured psychological interior. And a sense of the world in Picasso—Clark places the greater emphasis on late Picasso—emerges through the worlds created, destroyed, and wrestled with on a daily basis. So if we can be said to inhabit a world at all, it is none other than the finite scaling and largely symptomatic microcosm of *the room*: the valve of a door, the merging of floor and ceiling, the window as eye and the anatomy of objects, resulting in an atmosphere which sticks to our bodies like a foreign scent—and the more we

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[9] See T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

become a product of this atmosphere the more profusely and, for Picasso, grotesquely will we secrete ideology. (Only the man without a room to call his own is able to reach the world "outside." But to call this world a view to behold and site of truth is to forgo the fact that rooms exist because the world is deemed in various ways to be inhospitable, an unyielding enemy to the wanderer whose "room" is at best the butterfly's cocoon.)

What is meant by the monstrousness of the everyday in Picasso, according to Clark, is a radical "outsideness" to existence that gusts through the life we take to be ours. We are like children in an arduous game of chasing the wind, catching only our breath. This comes to a head in his reading of *Guernica*, a monumental painting that reconfigures the interior in terms of "proximity but not intimacy," a place "neither outside nor in, exactly, but the floor of a world as it might be the very instant 'world' was destroyed."[10] That "the world" can gain a dimension of support in the wake of its destruction, that a loss of totality and sizing down can act as a domestication of "worldhood" (affording a provisional and revisable sense of stability into the future and whatever it may bring), suggests amongst other things that metaphysics harbors a primal or perhaps primordial resonance and cannot simply go away when we please. When an idol is destroyed we are both freed and afraid, and when we frolic in the shards who among us will not be tempted to take one back home as a token? I feel like saying that there's always a primitive placeholder in effect as long as we seek to philosophically *stay somewhere*—stones become touchstones and sharp points become reference points. Are we ready to be completely on our own? Absolute truth, horizons of intelligibility, the historical resonance of humanity's most nourishing deifications, these cannot be logically refuted until the conclusion is borne out in the hearts of men—vitally "gay" hearts in Nietzsche's imagination, the golden symptom being that of beating laughter rather than stone-cold seriousness. The wake of metaphysics delivers truth as ruins, remainders, life boats, the earth as earth and the sky as sky, or earth-as-floor and sky-as-ceiling and world-as-things: life as a relentless streaming messy everydayness that few can endure without putting at least a thing or two in its so-called "right place." Just like that.

Clark's unembarrassed "search for truth" in Picasso's late work also draws on decisive yet conflicting moments in the thought of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, less as a case of influence on Picasso than as a way of making sense of what he did in his paintings. (Picasso may or may not have read Nietzsche and he certainly could not have anticipated Wittgenstein's ideas on

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[10] Ibid., p. 282.

perspicuous representation and acts of picturing.) Looking at the paintings (and I mean looking *through them to what* they show by looking *at them to how* they show it) leads to the insightful experience of Picasso's pictorial thought, by which I mean thinking-as-picturing, understandable for example as the painted line's transmission of the artist's embodied perception or the gestural interrupting/rupturing of Western perspective's reduction of visual communication to mimetic operations. Such an approach to Picasso's achievement gives way to the aforementioned philosophical ideas which open up the metaphysical dimensions and possibilities of certain paintings, not surprisingly those of great ambition and experimentation. These so-called metaphysical aspects are not blank slates or stable immutabilities or bland conditions of possibility at the expense of actuality; they are not the truths of the paintings, are not to be extracted and translated and upheld as laws of discourse; rather they are the finished work's conflicted reconciliation with its own making, resulting in a form of representation shot through with abstraction, with internal self-criticism, the very thing which will emancipate a picture from ocular lines of reference and perhaps keep a truth claim from infringing on the truth itself, as it were. Drawn into the depths of difficult passages from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, lured all the way by Picasso's demanding pictorial thought, a thought both assertive and iconoclastic, Clark is brought to consider two very different visions of truth, of equal value yet apparently incommensurable. On the one hand, there is Wittgenstein's insistence that the power of the image belongs to a representational reaching out towards reality, a reaching guided by a friction with forces external to our own mind and action (Clark refers to this as Picasso's extreme exactitude). And then, off to the side, there is Nietzsche's adamancy that the noble project of a will to truth typically (and tragically) results in life-denying deformities of spirit, hypocritical and head-shaking "results" which indulge various grand illusions/delusions of progress and bring Nietzsche the iconoclast a whole lot of grief—for that which free spirits claim to be the bottomless fuel of their will to power is actually antithetical to life and an enslavement to an inescapable *belief* in truth (the truth that there is no truth, *this* truth being so invincible that it can ironically repress or even reverse the death of God, etc.). Standing naked in between these two philosophical visions—let's call the former "representational" and the latter "non-representational"—Picasso's late paintings not only accommodate but also warrant, call for and require, both perspectives on truth: Wittgenstein's perspicuous *reaching out* via the logic of propositions and Nietzsche's iconoclastic *holding back* via sanctions either to stutter or sing. The inherent availability or

amenability of Picasso to the remote peaks of the analytic and continental philosophical traditions in their most critical moments is exemplified by the paradox, perfectly logical in painted pictures and perhaps in all forms of picturing, of an extreme pictorial exactitude *without* a known—and perhaps unknowable—visual referent, be it for the eyes that see or the mind's eye that otherwise senses. Clark seems to want to suggest that Picasso simply thinks in paint, rethinking or better yet questioning reigning representational conventions through the hand rather than the mind, the mindful or autonomous or truly emancipated hand, the hand as the "mind" of the body, with the result that the pictorial thoughts (and feelings) are shown rather than told, as if transmitted *in* rather than through this gestural "language." However, a possible problem or limitation of Picasso's experimentation in this regard is that the virtuosity and sometimes showmanship of the painter's affective articulations do not necessarily turn viewers into readers—in fact it may even promote passive gawking and misplaced idolization of the artist's originality. But for those who care and know how to follow pictorial thoughts, perhaps by beginning with taking a certain pleasure in the thoughts prompted by certain pictures (thoughts made possible only by way of the pictorial— philosophy will not be able to prompt *these* particular thoughts, if only because they transpire by looking at that which disorients—puzzles—rote perception), the difference between a rigorous pictorial thought and a reckless one, or at least between experimental acts of criticism and compromised conformities to convention, can be measured by the productive tension between seeing and thinking as opposed to the naïve harmony between seeing and believing—tensions out of which the painter might show what has yet to be seen, what is *to come* for those brave enough to face *what is*. Compared to other painters working within specific traditions or genres, Picasso's bravery is bold in the extreme, stationing himself within the "war zone" between figuration and abstraction in an almost systematic way, creating a dialectics of destruction which, at its most pictorially precise, covers the entire canvas, consuming it in a blaze of possibilities.

Regarding the metaphysical dimensions and possibilities—the great technical and aesthetic *outreach*—of the medium of photography, and keeping in mind photography as the precursor of cinema (not to mention the currency of cinema's photographic basis still in wide—and widening— circulation), I turn to Michael Fried's philosophical analyses of the photographic art of Jeff Wall. Wall is perhaps best known for staging elaborate large-scale photographs reminiscent of monumental history paintings and exhibits them using rear-lit lightboxes which punch them into a vibrant glow before the viewer. As a modernist alternative to the immortalization of politically

charged (i.e. proudly partisan) historical moments, Wall turns towards everyday life in all its banality, intensity, marginality and corporeal absorption in the world of things.[11] Fried, with Heidegger's *Being and Time* in one hand and Wall's most philosophically resonant photography in the other, develops his reading without completely abandoning his skepticism over the appropriate fit between the ideas and the images despite some obvious parallels—and I am as interested in this skepticism over comparison, so refreshing in an enthusiastically interdisciplinary context, as I am in the logic and inspirational spark of the comparison itself. Are the apparent disclosures of the medium of photography to be taken seriously anymore? How far are we prepared to follow the photographic or indexical referent *into the world*, and to what extent can viewers of photographs remain attuned simply to the openness of the photographic itself, an openness whose sheer endurance constitutes an occasion to which viewers must rise? Are we justified in saying that photographs are documents, proofs, witnesses, as a description of an object that enters our consciousness prior to any particular aim or use we might have in mind for it? Does saying so, if we do say so, mean thinking so—do we actually *believe* what we know about photographs, that they are "records of the real"? Is it a matter of *using* photographs in accordance with the terms of their disclosure to think the call of Being, or should we rather *let them be* in accordance with how an aspect of the world was allowed to come to presence in the light of its own image? And if neither of these possibilities seem tenable, if photographs stand dumb before us and point outward only in the most superficial and haphazard of ways, thus pointing at us pointlessly one could say, then perhaps we can follow the referent back to its condition of possibility and ask what to make of a machine that "sees"? Is it not possible for a photographic disclosure to be construed the other way around, say as a gross imposition, the repeating of a perception that went unanalyzed in the first place? And if we are so bold as to adduce the unconcealing powers of *alethia* from the word "disclosure," is it not ultimately the province of consciousness—what we do with the phenomena of which we are conscious, how we give voice to the most integral and world-giving words of our language—that will play host to the disclosure of what we call "world," or what, for Heidegger, philosophers used to comprehend by the word "Being"?

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[11] See Michael Fried, "Jeff Wall and Absorption: Heidegger on Worldhood and Technology" and "Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday," in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 37-93.

Such questions belong to a mode or mood of *questioning* that the medium of photography has the power—and burden—of setting or spurring within our minds, modern minds which have clouded over from an increasing lack of concern with what concerns us most—Being—for to a large extent we have opted to master it instead (perhaps because our minds are formed in the cauldron of such mastery known as "power relations," one of the most powerful being knowledge itself). On Fried's reading of Heidegger, this photographic disclosure is first and foremost a product of absorbed practical activity on the part of the photographer, and so any attempt at aesthetic neutrality based on the premise of the medium's mechanical indifference is a form of withdrawal and loss of control, symbolizing anxiety and not clarity as an increased consciousness of being-in-the-world. If you think about it, a painting, says Fried, is a more accurate document of this disclosure because it "photographs" the painter's "sustained absorption over time in the act of painting."[12] It is a living as opposed to a dead trace of the past. That being said, a photograph's inherent lack of tactile or better yet temporal expressiveness can be read as disclosing even the drama of human absorption as fundamentally banal, whether this banality be mechanically routine (a bad everyday) or domestically intimate (a good everyday). Both possibilities are at work in Wall's *A View from an Apartment* (2004-5), a photograph of two women immersed in the everyday, agents of the automatism of domestic routines which are also a form of life known only to them. One of the women is shown reading a magazine on the couch, the other folds laundry while apparently doing or at least thinking of something else (daydreaming). This is a choreography if not a topography of the excruciatingly solitary and multitasking nature of modern life, whereas if we still lived "in nature" the task would probably always be the one *at hand*, distractible by urgency alone. Each woman is absorbed in her respective activity (pastime and chore), an absorption which presents itself in the context of

Figure 2. Social solitude in a world of things: *A View from an Apartment (Jeff Wall, 2004-5).*

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[12] Ibid., p. 50.

togetherness as self-absorption. However, at the same time both cocoons of consciousness strike me as warmed by the presence of the other person who is somehow felt, sanctioning the withdrawal into silence, although there is no evidence that they accept or acknowledge each other, a case where the act of acknowledgment is on autopilot, for better and for worse. Indeed, this strikes me as a photograph about social solitude—the hearth as opposed to the problem of the Other. Stanley Cavell, a generous reader of Fried's art criticism, might say that such a photograph helps us to see that the coldness of knowledge dwells side by side with the warmth of acknowledgment. If we follow the referent all the way through to the fly on the wall of this shared life, imagining the life beyond the referent before us, a referent as highly suggestive as it is depictive, there are actual "moments of truth" to be had—moments made possible, perhaps, by the absence of the momentous—where friends become strangers amidst the thickets of a nervous silence. And there are similar moments—perhaps the very same moments—where mere coexistence dawns as the sturdy foundation of years of "friendship labor" and hence as the condition or "insulation" for a cozy domestic solitude with the capacity to complete the stray individual for a time.

Our practical absorption *in* the world may be the primary mode of world disclosure, and yet with this criterion in place the world so disclosed can easily assume the form of things—the world itself, the being of things, is entirely missed: how does this relate to the photography of the everyday, for example in the photographs of Jeff Wall? Fried struggles to apply the pristine Heideggerian redemption of the everyday where Being is encountered through a reflective (sometimes poetic) engagement with particular beings—the world's readiness-to-hand and equipmental character standing at a distance, calling us, and waiting for our acknowledgment while we persist in trying to know it all the time and at all costs. Wall's everyday in the Heideggerian reading can slide towards a "bad" everyday because the human absorption in things makes humans into things and is therefore more sociological than ontological. For Fried this reading most likely jeopardizes Wall's intention (always separate from the created result) to use photography to unify the sociological and the ontological (not unlike Picasso's pictorial thought), as if to say that our living spaces are the flesh of those who dwell there. Indeed, sharing these spaces with others favors the social over the solitary way of life where ontology is perhaps best described as a kind of revenge against the levelling pressures and conformities of the social. But for every artistic intention there is a technical limitation, a medium specificity or idiosyncrasy that must turn its key,

in this case a camera consciousness responsible for capturing the "between space" that only human beings can charge with their presence, that is, with their consciousness of each other.

Fried also invokes Wittgenstein's analysis of the everyday as demonstrated in a speculative thought experiment from *Culture and Value* where a seemingly unbridgeable rift is described as lying in between an absorbed participant in the world and a reflective observer who has taken a step back and participates only as a voyeur.[13] In Wall's photographs of the everyday such as *A View from an Apartment*, the subjects are presented as necessarily unaware of their own form of life, for this sense of unawareness is vital to the photograph's anti-theatrical transparency (albeit heavily orchestrated and controlled, the absence of which typically yields self-consciousness on all aesthetic fronts) and our capacity as viewers to assume a form of absorption in the very drama of absorption itself. If the photograph is constructed to represent events in a manner identical to how those events would appear had they not been photographed, then the photograph becomes a hinge between two views on the world, one immersive and the other contemplative, views so opposed that they are describable as worlds unto themselves—worlds apart, not unlike the ontological differences between happiness and sadness as mutually exclusive life-paradigms. In the end, regardless of what they show, such photographs allow us to see life *as* a show, the most perfectly natural, subtle, and dramatic of "performances" which Wittgenstein occasionally calls "the everyday." The poetry of the candid is everywhere abundant, the extraordinariness of the everyday races about, beauty and terror in the midst of those who seek it out in the wrong places— and it is quite mysterious to say the least why photography so often fails to capture this poetry, this insight, given its privileged access to the candid (be it a moment of candidness or an idea of such a moment), and equally mysterious that cinema is so often obsessed with foregoing it in favor of this or that embellishment and all manner of fantasy.

I will now think through three important ontologies of the photographic arts, focusing what will inevitably be a non-systematic and far from exhaustive review of the metaphysical ontology of art with respect to cinema. As we know, or as the record states, photography has a history of being subject to scrutiny by aestheticians for not being adequately artistic and also by cultural critics for lulling viewers into a passive acceptance of what is deemed to be ultimately just an *idea* of reality and not the real thing, as it were; and even though cinema received its fair share of skepticism in turn, it was photography upon its arrival in the mid-19th century that bore the brunt

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[13] Ibid., p. 76-7.

of this widespread assault. André Bazin described the situation well by turning the tables on photography's various critics, stating that photography is the only medium to derive a decisive advantage from the absence of man, in other words the absence of any noteworthy technical or imaginative artistry in the representation of reality, thus allowing aspects of reality—presumably reality "itself"—to be partially unveiled in a way that artists sometimes call "chance" and that the human ego is typically blind to in its efforts at control, usually in opposition to the whims of chance.[14] Bazin's perspective ultimately puts forth a metaphysical claim about photographic artlessness as the basis for a new revelatory aesthetics. In "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and to a lesser extent "The Myth of Total Cinema," two highly influential essays, the existence of photography introduces a new image-making possibility whose automatism gives form to the metaphysical unknown, staging it outside the domain of philosophical thinking and in the realm of the aesthetic enactment. The arrival of photography, and before that the camera obscura, suddenly meant that we could hold in our hands the capacity to create an image with our hands tied, a point which Bazin crystallizes when he writes, quite famously, "photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature."[15] But of course it can only affect us this way as an *effect*: the power of photography's unbridled automatism must be harnessed, directed, ultimately utilized, or else the absence of human intervention—i.e. the artistic possibilities derived from a medium's preliminary usurping of the duties of artistic agency—will be completely meaningless to us, justifiably dismissible by us as a mere theoretical curiosity with no real ramifications, and perhaps also ideologically harmful if the reality reproduced by photography and film turns out, as later *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics like Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni suggested in the 60's, to be the *same reality* portrayed by the dominant narrative-stylistic conventions so elegantly masked by the rhetoric of transparency.[16]

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[14] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?*, Volume 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 13.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Their critique of the apparatus is also guilty of taking an extreme position on the other side of the spectrum as the naïve realists, or at least this is what seems to occur when "ideology" rather than "reality" is posited without being excavated and interrogated. The claim that reality is nothing more than ideology is applicable to films which consciously/unconsciously participate in the ideology of the day, but to say that this is due to an apparatus left to its own devices is to sidestep the problem of how the absence of human intervention yields ideal conditions for human self-deception. See Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/ Criticism/Ideology," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, fifth edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 752-759.

The sense I get from Bazin as well as much classical film theory is that photographic and cinematic ontologies have their respective *psychologies*, and these psychologies are not the ones we are familiar with from our everyday lives. They are not exactly branches or extensions of consciousness but instead seem to lie closer to the roots of consciousness (i.e. the unconscious), and if we still want to say that they branch outwards or extend the senses, it will be in view of the possibility of the absence or transcendence of consciousness (i.e. metaphysics). For many of these theorists, especially the advocates and even the antagonists of realism, the instantaneity of the photograph and the temporality of the moving image both have a provisional and problematic access to the external world and, to a lesser extent, other minds. They both represent reality in totally different ways that simultaneously respect and disrespect exteriority and otherness—yet they do so, I want to say, on their own terms and not the terms imposed by theory. Classical theorizations of automatism focused on the nature of these new uncertain art forms, debating whether or not the criteria of art could be satisfied, or ideally elevated, in light of the medium's fundamental mimesis. But once philosophy gets a hold of the terms and conditions of photographic representation, it will realize that the logic of the autonomy of automatism is one way of solving the ancient problem of metaphysics, albeit the grey contingency and plain-view modesty of the solution may disappoint the happily searching metaphysician for reasons already mentioned. Bazin's idea of the world in its own image is meant to be a description of a world which has imaged itself, given birth to itself, and in the case of a moving image, a world which also passes away, slipping from the hands of our eyes. Of course neither photography nor film can offer exhaustive representations of the world—in fact they show far less than they conceal and sometimes their finitude is what is most on display. And yet, neither one seems able to escape the promise, for some, of representational perfection and exhaustion. For Bazin "total cinema" is not a foreseeable possibility so much as a myth about cinema's Platonic origins in which image and world are one. But each instance of cinema is finite whereas the world or life is infinite. Each instance of cinema is technically and aesthetically and historically *evolutionary*, progressing incrementally towards an unrepresentable totality of the real. However, because representational totalization is a conceptual fantasy of the greatest amount and depth of reality, the ontology of these finite instances is always leaning in the direction of the infinite, reaching towards infinity in a manner analogous, perhaps, to prayer (and Bazin was in fact a religious man).

Roland Barthes, in his ontology of photography *Camera Lucida,* is irresistibly drawn to the silence and distance of the photographic experience, one he was able to fill with a confident braid of thought and feeling, theory and personal reflection, allowing the photograph—or certain photographs—to burrow deep inside his consciousness, blocking predictable paths of perception and interrupting certain habits of being-in-relation with the starkness and stubbornness of their permanence.[17] His concept of the punctum is significant here, referring to the part of the photograph that wounds the spectator and which refers the photograph as a whole back to the world which has wounded it in order to give it life. The punctum is not necessarily the property of the photograph itself: it is precisely the point in the phenomenology of photography where spectator and photograph converge or collide, and where personal associations may take over as a result not only of seeing the referent but of being directly affected by it. It is almost as if the experience of the punctum, whatever it is and wherever it leads in any actual instance, eclipses the entirety of the photograph as photograph. Film, it seems to me, not by nature so much as in particular cases, can be said to afford similar experiences of being pricked or jolted by an event onscreen, but the question is whether the stasis of the photograph is somehow essential to the emergence and pressure of the punctum and whether cinema's movement as conditioned by mechanized time and expressed by various patterns of narrative is fundamentally at odds with it. Also, and perhaps more to the point, does the temporality of consciousness require or benefit from the *absence* of temporality in order to be genuinely interrupted by the photograph's inevitable breach of human finitude?

There is definitely a dramatic friction between the stasis of the photograph and the movement of human consciousness that can sow the seeds of patience, enabling us to see differently and inviting our reflection upon moments of time suspended in amber, as if the world had a memory and this memory constitutes a kind of materialistic and mind-independent "history." It is my sense that the photograph provides a viewer with ample time either to open or close the spaces of consciousness, to undergo its display of otherness or reduce it to an image of what is no longer other, depending on the photograph and depending on the viewer and perhaps above all upon the unique occasion of their encounter. The moving image, on the other hand, is routinely cut with other images, or at least implies them, reaching out beyond themselves, and is almost

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[17] See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981).

always organized according to a particular discourse of literary, theatrical or poetic substance, of which the cinema willingly inherits, inviting the possession of its so-called essence like a body miraculously immune to disease. The moving image is the basic building block out of which films are made, whereas the photograph is the realization of the medium of photography even within the context of a serial group configuration. A significant psychological difference can then be discerned between still images and moving images, one which turns on the proximity and urgency of the image *to follow*. In the first case the viewer abandons the still image, while in the second case the moving image abandons the viewer. The presence of *other* moving images, as it were, and the attempt, through continuity editing and the stylistic grammar of much narrative cinema, to construct the illusion of a single giant moving image that flows like a river, participates in a process of montage which in varying degrees absorbs or "processes" the discrete images, rendering them fleeting or ungraspable and amenable to shock. The parts of what I will call the "mass image" that stand out, punctuate, and strike us viscerally or intellectually are often referred to in conversation as "moments," and the resonance of certain moments from a film can follow us out of the theater and dissipate in their own time and sometimes take the form of a specter. The more I think about it, the frozenness of the photograph is one of the uncanniest things, but only if we stop to look and alter our outlook on the ubiquity of images in the 21st century. Is it the case—given an increasing alienation from the great movie of the mind called introspection, exacerbated in part by the seductiveness of the cinematic mass image's extroversion of consciousness—that fewer people nowadays (myself included) are willing or simply able to stop to look at photographs for any length of time? I wonder if we devote as little time and energy to photographs as we do to the interrogation of our own mirror image in the age of the self-portrait or "selfie." Perhaps the act of stopping before a static image of the world requires too much patience; the stare-down ends with the agitations of boredom rather than with the decisive blink as a consequence of excessive strain at the limits of mental and physical concentration. Another possibility is that photographs are viewed cinematically: the knowledge question "*what* is happening?" overrides the assertive exclamation "this is happening *now*—this *was*." And if this is the case then the photograph's metaphysical provocations are being avoided—its connection to the past, testament to our mortality, echoing mockery of the primordial longing to stop time. The recent interest in the "banality of photography," formerly known as the "artlessness of photography," can be read as the abandonment of the ancient wish to be outside of time.

I do not regard it as an exaggeration that the twentieth century and its voracious appetite for photographs and films (especially films) saw a more natural way with images of the world than with the world itself, as if the state of our everyday experience in modernity, ready and eager to flee the grit and grime of everydayness under the guide of culture and the arts, were in need of extra support or buffering, conditioning or even education as a means of coping with a world fragmented and contested with "worldviews." Today we may be forced to admit that our experience of moving images constitutes a way of life, perhaps a form of life whose content is constantly changing and whose forms we now know to be changeable, such that an image representing what we already know, or believe we know, for example the everyday, is no longer satisfying to the senses, hence no longer desirable. What we have, what many of us know in our everyday lives, is a way of being in the world that, in facing the image, has left the world behind once again. So, the ontological question of how the world appears in photographs, films, television and in some cases the internet, becomes as much a psychological reminder or testament to the fact that the power of these images is nothing without the power of the bond, however unstable or precarious, between image and world. Far from glue-like, the bond is reminiscent of a betrothal that we find ourselves witnessing rather than experiencing for ourselves in what I'm tempted to call the apathy of consciousness, a consciousness which finds it easier to take the image for the real thing.

For evidence of this power let us look for a moment not at the moving image itself—whose spatio-temporal depiction of the world is arguably the more robust of pictorial representations—but rather firstly at *how we look at these things*, especially when coordinated in the context of a movie: the intensity and absorption of the look, how the act of looking *at* can be experienced as one of looking *through*, refocuses the great paradox that most images onscreen are for all intents and purposes what they appear to be, in other words they are transparent because we look at them that way, that is, through them despite all surfaces. Even the most conceptually or dramatically self-reflexive image, for example, has the immense challenge of making the denial of its world-dependence (a kind of techno-solipsism) look believable as a worldview, instead of desirable or terrifying as a permanent withdrawal into the cave of consciousness where all thought is the product of projection rather than reception. I am convinced, however, that as soon as we start to speak in this way, affirming or denying the photographic basis or worldly semblance of moving images, we are speaking against or opposite our sensory experience of photographs or movies or

what have you; and in doing so we risk wedging ourselves, for better and for worse, in between sensation and intelligence, between experience and how we rationally make sense of our experience of these objects. I am drawn to the fact that we are drawn to make such ontological claims in the first place, where the context of such assertions (for example a reflection, a conversation, or even these very assertions) is always too close and too far to the object in question—harking back to an experience whose conditions cannot be completely recovered, or are recovered at the expense of their abstraction from the founding experience. This is how I perceive the significance of Stanley Cavell's confession of self-consciousness in his book on the ontology of film, *The World Viewed*, to the effect that a tidal change in his experience of film broke what he calls his "natural relation to movies."[18] Since *The World Viewed* is not a work of autobiography but rather philosophy, or philosophy as autobiography (a distinct and deeper matter altogether), Cavell does not explicitly narrate the twists and turns of his awakening to the philosophical importance of film as such. However, I think this change can be explained as the emergence or dawning of nothing other than the idea of movies themselves, a modernist idea of the purity or purification of artistic mediums that, for Cavell writing in the 70's, reverses the relationship between screen and projector such that the movie becomes what moves on the screen as the dance of light, and what moves on the screen becomes the film itself, the celluloid running through the projector, a repeat run of its passage through the camera, the machine that produced the images up there on the screen.[19] Before long an awareness of the camera itself starts to make an appearance within the individual images, which are now called "shots." The very concept of the shot projects the camera itself back onto the projected image, and so on. The medium itself can be systematically

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[18] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*: *Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. xiv.

[19] Though I do not wish to give undue weight to frivolous terminology, perhaps this situation can illuminate the difference between (our use of) the more casual term "movie" and the more formal term "film." The other meaning of the word "film"—a thin layer, a surface growth—turns out to be coincidentally applicable for what happens to objects when recorded and projected onscreen with varying degrees of artistry. This other meaning of film is the *metaphor*, which belongs to the soul of a word and in this case is all but eclipsed by the materiality of the medium (perhaps a soon to be forgotten one as the digital era reigns supreme). For the word "film" leads us to what is "filmable" and resonantly implies "peeling the film from off the surfaces of the world," making it appear as if the world's appearance consists in a removable, reproducible and verisimilar topsoil of being. These exportable and indeed exploitable surfaces, once pried and projected as light, will turn out to have an impossible depth of miniscule thickness. Here, even the material of the medium is riddled with ontological romance and contradiction, whereas the immateriality of the digital seems to spiritualize its own substance, hiding itself from view and wishing its problems away.

foregrounded within, and to a certain extent at the expense of, its actual manifestations which become simultaneously expressive of both meaning and being.

Now it's not as if we had never thought about what we had seen and heard onscreen when our natural relation was intact, but rather that we had yet to think past a *particular* instance to a set of conditions underlying *all* instances. This breach in the natural relation has opened up a new "unnatural relation," exemplified by philosophy's love of questions or the cinephile's voyeuristic degree of separation, loving without the possibility of reciprocity, also known as obsession. The effects of an unnatural relation are as numerous and varied, healthy and unhealthy, dramatic and comical, as any committed relationship to a beloved artform. The shift from faith to knowledge and from pleasure to the pain of love is the decisive moment of this or any ontological quest. As a search for a permanent or absolute set of conditions we know it to be misguided, perhaps doomed. We know cinema keeps changing, that there is no such thing as a single global cinema, that ontology is forever haunted by ideology. But what if we angle the search to the search itself, as it were, and recall that this search is not linear, not safe, but inextricably relational, in other words a way of relating to *an* object that takes it to be *the* object, and in so doing takes it to heart. (In the age after innocence, happiness requires pursuit.) It seems to me that for Cavell, what grounds the ontological quest is precisely his reflection on the film medium as inherently reflective of the world. As a series of worldviews, film reflects reality that much more sharply and brightly in the context of a reflection that has broke away from its object by turning it into an object of study. It's almost as if the experience of film has a kind of Lacanian mirror stage in which, one day, amidst the twilight of innocence, we see not so much ourselves reflected in the image as the image itself supporting our deepest fantasies—the image wrested from its everyday usage and thrown into uncanny relief, as if the act of viewing became the mirror through which the medium of film recognizes itself for the first time. The only clue Cavell provides for this turning point can be found, quite fittingly, out in the open of the book's very first sentence in the preface where he states the following: "Memories of movies are strand over strand with memories of my life."[20] Memories of movies are such that they can weave themselves into the fabric of his own memories; and if movies can produce real memories, and if those memories have the power to define us, then our experience of them must be similar enough to human experience as such for the two to blur in this remarkable way.

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[20] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. xix.

Questioning the ontology of film leads Cavell further along the digressive if not divergent course of philosophical contemplation and discovery primarily because of the peculiar way in which film, as "a succession of automatic world projections,"[21] denies or withholds the very world that it makes appear onscreen.[22] On film a view of the world can be shown indiscriminately and in full, "as it is," but always at the price of its absence from viewers. Responses to the prospect of the presence of the world onscreen through cinematic representation tend to take the form of a skeptical denial or deflation of the power of the index, often through the claim that in the digital age the index has been severed, repudiations of one form or another that strike me as no less paradoxical and extreme than the gross naivete of blind affirmation. And one can—and nowadays perhaps one does—express such denials with the same degree of conviction and depth of despair or elation regarding the concrete existence of, say, the divine. It might be said that the divine dwells in things by lurking *behind* things, just as the world appears in a moving image on the condition that it not appear, that it remain absent. Absence can be the source of tremendous power, for believers and skeptics alike. The death of a loved one and of course the death of God are obvious examples, but consider also the solution to a riddle, the back of a house, the silence of nature, ghosts, homesickness or nostalgia, authors, and something as seemingly routine as tardy arrivals, which are often (too often) described as fashionable—absence is, as it were, ontologically in vogue. It is actually similar or analogous to the price of knowledge: the more you try to know something the more distant you become from the thing itself, and from this position a natural everyday relation to things is threatened. For Cavell the presence/absence paradox of the moving image is tragically provocative: we have a greater desire to see the image rather than that to which it refers—our desires take over, in the theater, and the real is left wanting. However, it may also be the case that we are trying to retrace our steps, that the image is the modern gate—a trapdoor or loophole—back to the world, as if we lost our way back home and didn't realize it until we suddenly longed to step inside while sitting back, heedlessly and disarmed. The way back to a world we no longer know how to believe in—because belief, as Gilles Deleuze suggests near the

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[21] Ibid., p. 72.
[22] See Cavell, "More of *The World Viewed*," in *The World Viewed*, pp. 162-230.

end of his cinema books, still takes the form of a bodiless knowledge in the modern era[23]—goes through the "back door" of the cinema screen.[24]

The dynamic concept of "enactment," which has already made an appearance in those perspectives on art which seek to undo or transform the conceptual upon contact with a corresponding event in excess of mere exemplification, is very instrumental for Cavell's ontology of the moving image and for all his philosophical readings of artistic mediums, movements, genres, and individual works. Near the end of *The World Viewed* (the best is often saved for last because there it is earned) the moving image is described boldly and arguably without precedent as a "moving image of skepticism"[25] because, to put it simply, the strong sense of presence onscreen is contingent on the very absence of that which is represented. The philosophical implications of this paradox can be translated in the following way: knowledge of the world comes with the price of the knower's absolute separation from that which is known, or the desire for certainty is forever shadowed by the fear of uncertainty—knowledge appears to be chasing the truth but in doing so it also runs away from this truth *about* the truth, namely that in the form of absolute certainty it is a philosophical fantasy tough to outgrow. Cavell's conception of the mechanical automatism of the cinematic medium as "world projection" at our own expense suggests that the cinema does not make us skeptical so much as offer a picture of what skepticism *looks like*, what he describes as the self-sufficiency of the world, hence our obsolescence as "horizonal" beings. Therefore, cinema is a moving image of skepticism not because that is what moving images actually are, but rather because in Cavell's idiosyncratic understanding of film the philosophical concept of skepticism is

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[23] Gilles Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 171-3 and 201.

[24] This metaphor of a backdoor passage into the world figures prominently in my discussion of automatism in Chapter 4.

[25] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 189. Even though Cavell was writing in the predigital era, it seems to me that the claim that cinema is a moving image of skepticism is not indebted, at least not in any obvious way, to the question of whether an image was produced photo-chemically or digitally or through intricate combinations thereof. When approaching movies *philosophically*, whether one's ultimate motives and interests are primarily epistemological, like Cavell's, or metaphysical, like my own (although with *phenomenology* serving as a frame for both enterprises), it doesn't really matter how movies are made as long as they open a world and represent it to us as paradoxically present, which is what most movies do and what we do with movies—there is nothing at all paralyzing about this paradox unless one reflects on the reflection, which is what philosophy tends to do at the risk of alienating itself for the sake of conceptual closure. Although it is certainly worth thinking how the opening of the world has changed in the digital age and, perhaps most importantly, to what extent viewers are no longer content or perhaps capable of bearing witness to a representation of the world the presence of which is known in an almost a priori sense to be a forged recording of the "nonexistent."

what the moving image enacts, or stages, or dramatizes, rather than merely conceptualizes. It does so for many reasons, some of which exceed the scope of this project where I gravitate towards an emphasis on the presence as opposed to the absence of what appears onscreen. However, one significant example of Cavell's extraordinary and unnerving encounter with the workings of skepticism comes through in his interpretation of the cinema screen: a moving image of the world is projected on a screen that functions in the end to "screen" us from it, thus the world we view is a view from behind the screen of our consciousness of the world.[26] Regardless of the potential accuracy and underlying autobiography of the elaborate philosophical interpretation, I take Cavell's project as a shining example of how an artistic medium—especially in its infancy, and when regulated by automatisms which modernism strived to extract from the older and more mature artforms—changes the discourse in which philosophical concepts are embedded by seeming to escape discourse altogether (through an act of showing rather than one of saying) and bringing the philosopher outside the parameters in which his thought "normally" functions. When we go to see something and are shown something that we did not expect would speak so clearly a language external to its own (i.e. cinema enacting skepticism), perhaps it is here where we come to appreciate the universality of our concerns, in the case of skepticism that it is a fundamentally human horizon rather than a mere philosophical problem. There is the chance to better understand what we know—what we thought we knew—more affectively rather than conceptually or intellectually, and in that moment which we did not expect would be so pregnant with meaning, we may be prompted to consider an idea that suddenly appears more alive than it ever did as words on a page. The artistic enactment of philosophical ideas also shows that such ideas are not confined to philosophy alone, demonstrating to philosophy that its acts of self-definition ought to be in the service of its availability or hospitality, ideally as support or sustenance for self-creation; and by tracing them throughout the arts where human life is represented in all its glory and terror, technical philosophy is expanded beyond itself to where its spirit ultimately resides: *the practical*, i.e. the decisive moment where philosophical results are either practiced or preached.

What do we *do* with aesthetic experiences that are important precisely as a consequence of their irresolvable, irreducible and overwhelming nature, even if we have forgotten how to be at home "in the dark" and must now suffice with occasional reminders of a non-threatening liminal place—a secret garden space—in between states of consciousness? With respect to photography

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[26] Ibid., p. 41.

and film there is, on the face of it, the simultaneous presence and absence of what we see and the problem of representation converted into a teasing paradox that, upon honest reflection, will make us "ontologically restless" as Cavell has so aptly phrased it.[27] Ontological restlessness is a phenomenological experience of an inscrutable "encryptedness" of an object in plain view, and so what we have here are paradoxes and anomalies that to my mind qualify, now in the apt words of Cora Diamond, as "difficulties of reality,"[28] difficulties the burden of which it is the job of philosophy to take on, to explore while simultaneously accepting or resigning to, without treating as mere problems to be solved—problems which give us grief only in a rudimentary "textbook" manner. And when Cavell calmly states that we do not know what a photograph is, we can hear him stress that we *still do not know*, as if knowledge here is unsuccessful or incommensurable with our experience of photographs and films, that the photographic basis is in practice—during experience—unknowable.[29] Perhaps a sign or symptom of having given up on knowledge in this case is when the photographic no longer enchants us with its mystery but rather disenchants us with its banality, as if ontological restlessness became the norm. Is this what has happened? If so then the experience of representational "recording" imagery has itself become the norm. One wonders if such imagery, in all its forms and throughout history, has always provided a better, more meaningful fit with human consciousness than the objects represented. And if that is the case perhaps it is because the representational aspect of consciousness is calibrated, so to speak, to receive the world through representations of the world, as if the only "thing in itself" that consciousness could lay claim to is an image, hence the tendency for human consciousness to doubt the veracity of its own perceptual images of reality.

As I already mentioned, ontological restlessness has deep philosophical consequences— and origins—for Cavell as an enactment of the skeptical problematic (skepticism being no mere problem as *the* problem which conjures, as if by blackest magic, many fundamental problems of

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[27] Ibid., p. 17.

[28] See Cora Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 43-90.

[29] It is interesting how a philosophical investigation can get underway not just with a declaration of ignorance but with a confession of intellectual limitations, without which there can be no philosophy but with which, ironically, there can also be no philosophy. Our explanations of the nature of photographs and films warrant constant repeating, a situation which only serves to add fuel to the fire of ontological restlessness. And this might explain the widespread inclination to leave them be, to cognitively let go of that to which we sensorially hold fast—one of a multitude of acts of intellectual self-preservation that we might call the bliss of *informed* ignorance.

metaphysical philosophy): the world is there *and* not there when we doubt it for no empirical reason but rather because we *can* doubt its existence and *do* in fact doubt it when we find ourselves shunning or altogether repudiating the everyday. And this possibility of human thought and feeling, this fatality of the human propensity for looking away, withdrawing, white lying or playacting with matters of great importance, is for him the blessing and curse and perhaps alien idiosyncrasy of the human condition. Cartesian skepticism harbors no immanent threat over our lives, over our daily interactions and decisions by undermining them as potentially unreal, unless we mount the perch of philosophy and then embark upon that peculiar metaphysical detour— breaking our natural relation with people, things and the world as a whole for the sake of the all-too-human desire for absolute certainty. Hence Cavell doesn't make much use of the concept of photographic exposure as a psychological event of proximity and contact; in fact, he prefers the word "exhibition" to describe the way in which the world is revealed onscreen despite its absence, exhibited in a manner that enacts the look of the world when "viewing it is all it takes" and when viewing it occurs as if "from behind the self."[30] For him the world appearing as a result of its absence is a rehearsal of skepticism: the skeptic wants absolute certainty of the world and in the process loses touch with the world he strives to know by turning it into an object of knowledge and being perpetually dissatisfied with its value as knowledge.

Cavell is imbricated here in one of the oldest and most persistent themes of philosophy that he discovers reenacted in film, and it takes him almost the entire length of *The World Viewed* not merely to make a *case* for a cinematic skepticism but rather to make this *discovery*, to stumble upon something he had been seeking all along or which he had known but could not bring himself to acknowledge right away. The first half or so of the short book (short because non-systematic, zealous yet cautiously pioneering) consists of theoretical speculations into the ontology, technology, history and aesthetics of film, framed or fueled by autobiographical investments which have accrued over a life of movie watching; and anyone interested in how the medium works, or what it is, and what it can be for you, will benefit from his thought- and heart-filled analyses. By taking seriously the possibility that the moving image of the world is the world in its own image, or what he calls the world viewed, the theoretical opening of metaphysical truth within the image is simultaneously closed by the image's presence of absence, its re-presentation. And that is how it has always been with the tradition of metaphysics: to know what cannot be known is to dream,

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[30] Ibid., p. 189.

and to awaken believing in the truth of the dream—like Dorothy at the end of *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, USA, 1939)—is to be partially (not fully) deluded. What made sense as art will not always make sense as philosophy—compromises are always in order, especially when fantasy and reality are never completely separable (human nature confuses them ever so naturally). Perhaps Cavell's semi-rhetorical question at the end of *The Claim of Reason* should be slightly rephrased and tonally neutralized from "Can philosophy become literature and still know itself?" to "Can philosophy become art and still know the world?"[31] The answer, which we all must work out for ourselves, might ultimately depend on beginning rather than ending with such a question, or by being prompted to begin a quest for knowledge in a new light—without questions.

As a response to Cavell, I would like to suggest the idea that the viewer's presence *to* the representation of the world is a factor in the prevailing of presence over absence *within* such representations, meaning a viewer's psychology can activate an artwork's ontology. I concede that the existential basis of this or that movie, video, photograph, is equally if not primarily intentional, aesthetic, cultural, etc. In fact, these two bases are inextricably and intricately intertwined; and while the latter might be more meaningful, the former, the existential, is full of potential, and has the power to touch us—to make *us* present. But what makes us present? What are the conditions of possibility for a spectator to become not just active or passive but *present* to the image? Cinema may have mythically begun with the world in its own image as seen in the actuality films of the Lumière brothers, but how did it present this image and what was our response? The world in its own image is an ontological breakthrough with metaphysical ramifications which must, after all, be aesthetically articulated and phenomenologically received. And it turns out that at least in this respect the cinema begins *twice*, two beginnings of which accompany a gesture of consciousness from "us," yet only one of which can dominate and pave the way into the future—the other remaining hidden underground, ironically from whence film came.

The cinema does not begin in the heavens but on earth, and what's more an increasingly industrial earth—the dawn of the twentieth century. There is no platonic inauguration of cinema, or any art form for that matter. Cavell tells us that the cinema comes from *below* the world, that is, from magic and the occult.[32] However, it's as if two distinct spells are cast by the Lumière films,

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[31] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 496.
[32] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 39.

one inducing trance or absence of mind and the other a sense of transcendence or contemplation. The former refers to a primal scene which we are all overly familiar: a train moving from the background to the foreground, towards us, a movement which moves beyond the finite parameters

Figure 3. Cinema's primal myth of shock: *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, Lumière brothers, France, 1896).

Figure 4. Cinema's primal myth of poetry: *Le repas de bébé* (*Baby's Dinner*, Lumière brothers, France, 1895).

of the image, receding not into the distant horizon which figures the infinite but opting instead to crash into theater's ancient fourth wall. The latter refers to the lesser known and easily overlooked poetic scene with which the medium can also be said to begin: the leaves of a tree gently rustling in the wind in a remote corner of the background, all but hidden by a domestic table scene occupying the foreground, drawing us into the depths of the image's world dependence, perhaps out of boredom, perhaps a few cinephiles insearch of poetry or contingency. Here we have two Lumière creation myths in direct competition with each other: shock versus insight, distraction versus contemplation, the waxing of the world versus the waning of the world. Both endure to this day, resonating in the optical unconscious, guiding cinema into the future, forking its fate in two directions even before a certain magician by the name of Georges Méliès took the medium to the moon, as it were. Yet only one

myth can hold the seat of an origin, the origin being the greater myth or meta-myth. And so, in our imagination, or at least the popular imagination, cinema begins with an image of the world that *rejects* the world, an image in which the arrival of a train from the distance constitutes in fact a departure of distance itself, the very distance upon which a sense of presence—of the world and of ourselves—depends. In Walter Benjamin's terms, such a shock speeds up the decay of the aura

of art or throws a lid on it for good, perhaps in one fell swoop.[33] From background to foreground, from distance to nearness, from the screen to the seats, from presence to absence, from the world to ourselves, the moving image moves away from the world by opting instead to *move us who view it*. The poetry of presence, on the other hand, will move us by invitation, to each his own, and often by accident—on the outskirts, as it were, of what is intended and what, as viewers, we tend to look for when following a film in more rudimentary ways of narrative and stylistic apprehension. From the very beginning the cinema is dissatisfied with itself, with its capacity to record, reveal the world, represent presence—with its status as an ontological breakthrough which need not break us to make us present in turn. For cinema, the world after all is a given, and with the world as given what does the cinema do?... It gives the world the ultimate makeover of the spectacle. But the quiet poetic myth, that tree blowing in the wind, reminds us that the world in its own image can steal the show at any moment and without warning, and with nothing more than the gesture of its presence.

The train arriving at the station poses the standard narrative question "What is happening?", while the leaves rustling in the background declare, or perhaps whisper, the poetic fact "It happens" or "This *is*." These remarkably illustrative terms are offered by Jean-François Lyotard in his essay on the sublime,[34] and I will be returning to his ideas in more depth in Chapter 5 when I discuss the figure of nature in film and trace its metaphysical thematization through the war epic *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998). For now, I mention the distinction as a platform for the following set of fragmentary demonstrations from films where the "What is happening?" is briefly yet pointedly interrupted by the "It happens"—interrupted in such a way that the latter usurps the forcefulness of the former. This diverse collection of "film moments," excised from an array of genres and narrative fiction contexts, each in its own way orchestrates an aesthetic set-up for presence and a possible sentience of world-dependence to strike, moments which deliberately yet spontaneously digress from the narrative and invite the world of/beyond the film to impose itself, allowing the narrative to come off its rails, to breathe in the world, and ultimately be caught off

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[33] See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility: Second Version" in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Rodney Livingstone, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 19-55.

[34] See Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," trans. Lisa Liebmann, with Geoff Bennington and Marian Hobson, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 453-64.

guard by a contingent and often sublime intrusion with the power to heighten the consciousness of the characters, the spectator, and perhaps even the film itself. Such moments suggest not only that there is a tradition of presence in cinematic representation, a tradition in which presence itself is paradoxically represented, but also that the dominant regime of representation, especially in the form of "the train" of narrative progression, is absolutely essential for filmmakers committed to aestheticizing the index, preserving a sense of the photographic contemplation of the world within cinematic time, and moving from the engine room to the seats, as it were, to gaze out the window as passengers and inherit the subterranean myth of the Lumière leaf.

Stalker (Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1979). Near the end of what many critics describe as a metaphysical film, set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland or "zone" believed to possess supernatural powers stemming from a mysterious "room" capable of realizing the innermost wish of all who enter, a telephone call interrupts a crucial conversation between one of the cynical seekers and the guide or Stalker over the methods used by the latter to reach their final destination. The telephone interruption on the threshold of the room, though briskly handled by the cynic-seeker who doesn't think twice to answer it, extends all the way into the narrative and echoes throughout the world of the film, suspending if not breaking the ominous mood fixed from the beginning and piquing at this very juncture of moral confrontation. Such a sense of eerie foreboding in the presence of what might be a supernatural force—albeit one intertwined with the human psychology of religious belief—is to a large extent established by the science fiction genre of which the film is perhaps a reluctant member, despite its insistence upon stylistic contemplativeness, a moral sense of the unknown, and spiritual concerns related to one's specific "calling" in life. Amidst the rich greenery and rusted ruins of the zone where the only human presence is that of the three main characters, the ringing of the telephone at the threshold of the elusive room gestures if not points to a world beyond the film, a world free of the concerns of the film and the genre which addresses them in a specific way and to a specific audience. The question which undoubtedly enters the minds of the characters and, without being able to give voice to it in the same way, can be said, I think, to cross the mind of the spectator absorbed in the mounting tension of an immanent and long-awaited revelation, is the following: Who on earth could be calling this abandoned building within the cordoned off zone? And how on earth—this particular earth of widespread decay and desolation, silence and sinister beauty—is a telephone still in working order? The seeker, by profession a writer of fiction, picks it up, says hello, says to the person on the other end that they have not

reached anything like a clinic, and quickly hangs up to resume the cumbersome conversation, the spiritual quest, the film itself, as do we. But do we? Do they? Is everything as it was? It's the sort of moment where we find ourselves as viewers questioning our cinematic sense data and asking ourselves "Did that just happen?" "Did the outside world come calling?" Before long the three characters onscreen acknowledge the uncanny event through a silent exchange of knowing glances. Then the scientist character quickly reaches out for the phone despite the urgent protests of the stalker. It is, after all, a way of contacting the outside world where normalcy prevails, where the struggles of the soul are checked at the door. And there is always an outside world, beyond the here and now, concealed by the here and now, somewhere else that may as well not exist. It is too much to keep in mind, this "outsideness," and reminders of its existence are therefore necessary, and in a certain sense vital, to its existence. Through the dynamic force of sound, the world in its own image haunts our manmade images of the world.

Figures 5 and 6. Did that just happen?... The call of the outside world: *Stalker* (Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1979).

Sideways (Alexander Payne, USA, 2004). Two middle-aged men on a trip through the California wine country have pulled over to the side of the road next to an orchard. Jack, celebrating his final week of bachelor freedom, has just broke the news to his best friend—and best man—Myles that the latter's ex-wife, for whom he still has romantic feelings and hopes one day to reconcile with, has just recently remarried. Outraged that Jack has kept this a secret for so long, that the revelation comes mere days before they are to meet again at the wedding, and heartbroken over the final nail sealing the fate of his failed marriage, Myles impulsively grabs a bottle of wine from the backseat, pulls out the cork with his teeth, and darts down into the orchard in a frenzy. Jack runs after him with whatever words of wisdom and comfort as the hysterical Myles continues to chug the wine while racing through endless rows of grapevines, eventually losing the strength to be angry and stopping in the middle of the orchard to catch his breath. Holding the now half-empty bottle of red

wine, which seems not to have affected him, Myles notices two bundles of red grapes baking in the sun in front of him and reaches out to touch them. While gripping the wine bottle tightly by the neck, he very gently cradles a grape bundle in the palm of his free hand and wipes a thin layer of dust off the surface of the few grapes by his thumb. Still breathing heavily yet no longer panting, the expression on his face looks to be one of unprecedented calm, but it's hard to tell, he may just be physically spent or intoxicated. The scene here comes to an abrupt end, leaving us stranded without any psychological or symbolic resolution. And Jack seems to have disappeared. The shift in Myles from rage and despair to something like tranquility or even awe, from being absorbed in himself and overwhelmed by his emotions to being completely captivated by the glistening grapes which make the wine he loves possible—which grow from the earth and sit quietly in the sun, gathering nourishment from the surrounding elements—is in the extreme. As a result of this dangling epiphany left uninterpreted, it's as if the film departs from its narrative trajectory and confronts the raw essence of its main theme of wine, coming to a standstill when faced with it. Before these grapes are fermented and transformed into this drink called wine, bottled and corked and labeled with the method and memory of the vineyard, they epitomize the purity and potential of innocence. Who am I? What might I become? What is possible in this world? I am the fruits of this earth… The knowledge required for growing grapes just right and realizing their potential calls less for hard facts and figures than for loving hands.

Figures 7 and 8. Therapeutic grapes: *Sideways* (Alexander Payne, USA, 2004).

In the Bedroom (Todd Field, USA, 2001). Two men are digging a grave in the woods at the crack of dawn. One of them has just killed the man who killed his son. The other, a friend, is assisting in the execution of this absolute form of revenge. It is obvious from their tormented demeanor that neither one has ever been the cause of or an accomplice to a murder; as gravediggers they are also out of their element; but regardless of the degree of professionalism in such matters, the shocked

or possessed state of the vengeful murderer's guilty conscience, having passed the point of no return, is always liable to open the way for costly error. While digging in anxious silence, a soft rustling in the woods alarms both men, causing them to jerk up in the direction of the sound, frightened at the thought of having been spotted. However, instead of confronting a witness to the concealment of such a deed, they find a deer standing behind a row of trees, grazing on some grass or shrubs (it's hard to see it's so dark). They ought to be relieved by the sight of the deer. But the deer, sensing the presence of the humans, lifts its head to face them and stares at them through a narrow gap in the trees. The two men, exposed by the wild stare of the deer in the night, cease to dig for a moment that seems to drag on endlessly. The deer does not relent—animals are known to be either extremely shy or extremely bold during these rare face-to-face encounters—and the men, knowing they have not been in any way caught in the act, are forced to cut themselves loose from the deer's singular stare in order to resume the time-sensitive labor of murder perfection. The film also picks up from where it left off and everything goes on as if nothing had happened, even though something did in fact happen—exactly what no one knows. The killers manage to cover up their tracks well and escape the "eye" of the law, which acts against the sometimes irrepressible urge to steal an eye for an eye. Avenging the murder of one's grown-up child makes one into a very committed yet reluctant killer with a conscience, wrestling with the paradox that one must commit the ultimate injustice in order to restore justice, in the full awareness that the world is simply not just. But after this incident with the deer, the two friends, forever bonded by another man's blood, cannot claim to each other, nor to themselves, that their misguided attempt to right a wrong was not, let us say, cosmically noted, that they were not directly observed in the act of hiding the once living piece of evidence which will haunt them for the rest of their days; nor can they heedlessly go to sleep and carry out their lives and their friendship—or what is left of it—without acknowledging that they had also been in some powerful way, known only to themselves, meaningfully judged.

Figures 9 and 10. A deer witnesses the dark side of human nature: *In the Bedroom* (Todd Field, USA, 2001).

The Thin Red Line (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998). This example comes from *The Thin Red Line*, which I will be discussing in detail in Chapter 5 in relation to the metaphysical figure of nature in film. The moment I wish to draw attention to here is significantly not one of the film's many instances of natural beauty, ugliness, nearness, remoteness, fleetingness and pervasiveness. The company of American soldiers (Charlie company) has just landed on the island of Guadalcanal where the film takes place and they are making their way along the edge of the jungle towards the Japanese position on the top of a series of hills. They march quietly and with dread of what's to come—it does not appear that any of them as of yet have been exposed to the real horrors of war— and all within surroundings one could hardly fail to describe as the embodiment of peace. From the distance, a figure walking towards them comes into view. None of the soldiers suspect any danger and no one shouts out or reaches for their weapons. The short, bearded, and half-naked figure turns out to be a native from the islands. The soldiers—tall, strong, fully clothed and laden with artillery, but so very young and afraid—witness the man as he passes them by in the opposite direction. Aside from a quick glance from the villager, there is no exchange of looks, voices, gestures, not even a half-hearted indication of a common humanity of which, to be sure, there's barely the faintest trace. Where this man has come from and where he is going is a mystery because he, at this moment, is a mystery; his world is not that of the soldiers, and yet it is his world, or turf, on which they find themselves at war. His is not the world of the film either, even though the film does indeed begin with scenes of AWOL American soldiers living in the sort of tribal village that one would expect this man to come from. If we as spectators identify with the soldiers here it is because we have identified ourselves as trespassers. Through the coming and going of this villager on foot, both the soldiers in the film and the viewers of the film have a palpable albeit inscrutable sense—or are in a position to have such a paradoxical impression—of "the other world" that

Private Witt, the most spiritual and contemplative of the platoon, at one time thought resided only in his imagination. The "What is happening" question implied by the war genre, by the inevitable collision between the Americans and Japanese, is interrupted by the "This is happening" reality of an even greater collision between first-world soldiers in pursuit of property or glory and a jungle man out for a stroll in paradise—paradise *lost* for each of the characters in the film. Interestingly, the jungle man does in fact approach the soldiers in the foreground and us, the viewers, just like the Lumière train arriving at the station, but if we look more closely and think about what is happening here more deeply we will discover that the perspective of the jungle man needs accounting for. From his perspective, the soldiers are a speeding train, fueled by the engine of the camera in the rear, and while his presence spurs wonder and doubt in their faces, giving them pause, it is not strong enough to stop them or compel them to vacate this hidden nook of the world unspoiled by commercial warfare, the latter being one of the logical conclusions of the ideology of capitalism.

Figures 11 and 12. The clash of ideological worlds: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

The Straight Story (David Lynch, USA/UK/France, 1999). Alvin Straight, a man in his 70's, decides on a whim deeper than any debated plan to drive a lawnmower across the country to visit his estranged brother in Wisconsin who has just suffered a stroke. Early in the journey, having hit only a couple bumps in the road so to speak (obstacles which are actually signposts to the real obstacles to come), storm clouds gather to the sound of thunder boasting immanent rain. Alvin notices an old barn off to the side of the road which appears to be abandoned and steers up the path towards it for shelter. The barn seems tailormade for him and his mower to rest, consisting of nothing more than a vacant driveway open at both ends. He drives inside the shell of this barn at the precise moment the rain starts falling in sheets, with lightning flashing up the gloomy interior, giving it a kind of electric decor. To make a good thing even better, a soft moment that much

sweeter, Alvin grabs a cigar from his pocket, lights it, and starts to smoke, watching the storm from this ideal vantage and cozy protection inside the shelter. With the next panning shot his perspective is visualized as a fixed point around which the camera glides over the fine contours of the barren rain-soaked landscape. He looks very comfortable, calm and at ease, despite the difficulty of the journey, the great majority of which still lies ahead, a journey he begins so close (perhaps too close) to the end of the journey of his life as a whole. The lawnmower as vehicle of the road allows Alvin to experience the landscape directly, without the mediation of a window and the stuffy enclosure of a car, and slowly too, for even the best mowers move like turtles compared to almost any other transportation imaginable. And yet, this moment of respite, parked and sheltered in complete and utter solitude, is one of the few moments along the way to his estranged brother where he is shown appreciating the natural surroundings so abundant in the American Midwest—and it serves to meaningfully pivot the "What is happening?" aspect of the quest for reconciliation to the "It happens" aspect of Alvin's moment-by-moment experience of the non-linear journey of self-discovery. As long as Alvin is on the road, perched atop his John Deer lawnmower, his gaze is a sharp, forward projection towards his sick brother and the possibility of a much belated reunion. When nature turns ugly he wastes no time escaping it, and once he is safe and sound under the cover of the barn where nature can no longer touch him, he turns back to devour it as ideal nourishment for the soul. The appreciation *of* nature here implies protection *from* nature. Such a reversal is subtly expressed when Alvin cinches the opening of his plaid coat around his chest and neck before finally sitting back to watch the storm unfold. Seated spectators primed for the long haul seem to do something similar, quieting down the body before the film or play or performance begins, and it is hardly a coincidence that most heavy shifting and fidgeting and stabilizing of the body fade out in tandem with the lights. It is also worth mentioning an earlier scene prior to the journey that this particular scene explicitly echoes, calling to mind the moment when Alvin learns of his brother's stroke from his daughter while watching a storm rage at night from the comfort of his home. While I concede to the fact that the scenes are linked and in light of this we may indeed choose to perceive the second through the lens of the first, the pre-journey storm is more clearly intended to be a premonition, indulging in a strong version of the pathetic fallacy where the news of Alvin's brother's illness is presented as a spiritual crisis in need of immediate rectification; whereas the second storm appears by chance or autonomously, existing for itself rather than for strictly narrative or thematic ends, and is connected to Alvin's being only

in a literal phenomenological sense as a perceptual event bracketed from his monumental mission, which in the physical decline of old age is nothing short of a mortal mission.

Figures 13 and 14. Alvin suspends his journey by taking shelter from the rain: *The Straight Story* (David Lynch, USA/UK/France, 1999).

Snow Angels (David Gordon Greene, USA, 2007). This is a film in which a child dies, in which, therefore, what we might call the unrepresentable comes to presence. The child's name is Tara and she is at that age where she is still learning how to speak and, what is perhaps a more challenging rite of passage, why speaking is a necessary effort in a world of adults. Her mother, Annie, is at home nursing a routine yet debilitating flu, and she is found awakening from an involuntary nap to the piercing alarm of silence in the house (further amplified by the soft hiss of television static streaming from an off-air channel). Her daughter is nowhere to be found. Search teams are sent out within this small, well-acquainted community, among them an adolescent boy who catches a glimpse of a pink mitten that seems to point towards a small patch of winter clothing locked beneath a membrane of ice. Tara's drowning was not pictured onscreen, but its absence does not belong to the species of invisibility that functions so well to provoke the imagination. Despite the excruciating lucidity of the aftermath offered to us as the least amount of visual information necessary to register the tragedy, it seems to me one cannot imagine the unfolding of it, the undergoing of it, for the innocence of a child. What force obstructs the language of the imagination to speak for itself that which has been undisclosed in silence? There are some things, perhaps, that we cannot imagine—because we dare not imagine them. We do not have it within us to know that which we will be unable to emotionally or experientially support, having coveted it for the sake of curiosity. I know, also, rather with certainty, that I cannot speak for everyone—dare not to. Nevertheless, the "blank" of the death of a child at the hands of nature or the madness of contingency is irresolvable within the realm of representation. It's as though the mind's eye and the heart's mind cannot be reconciled, as though there's an awareness of a "truth of the matter"

that is accepted but not believed in. Such a paradox is, in fact, an apt description of the mother's reaction upon learning the truth of her daughter's death. Acknowledged, accepted, understood, but *disbelieved*. And what is disbelieved, not so much out of denial as necessity, is the child lifeless beneath the surface of the river or lake where her body is discovered—her body. My sense of the image, when it appeared onscreen for what felt like a flash, is that it was filmed reluctantly but unavoidably. What are the cues that betray such a reluctance, perhaps even a resentment, to gaze upon the difficulty of what stands before us? In what way can an image register, or better yet "experience," the need for the unrepresentable to be imaged? By way of an attempt to answer such questions, standing in light of a certain inexpressible tactfulness of representation, the undeniable presence of the lifeless water-filled child is shown in the image as a sense or impression as opposed to the object *of* a sense or impression. The distinction is a crucial one, not only as it applies to the adolescent in whose perception we gain this unbearable glimpse of reality, but as grounds for a display of responsibility towards the limits of representation. The image, I want to say, is not shown but filmed. That is to say it is in the process of being shown, unlike a more stable image grounded in convention or exposition; it is not exactly presented to us as left suspended in the form of the presence of an absence. The image, therefore, is closer to a view or an impression that is a movement without beginning or end; a horizontal rip across two vertical cuts, as it were, makes an incision into the body of the consciousness of the witnessing adolescent. Trauma, we see, is an instantaneous penetration of mind and body whose resonance—like a flash of light between two mirrors—amplifies and quickens over time, and with great speed without opposition. The first thing the boy's mother says to him when, at last, they find themselves alone, away from the clamor and chaos of the emergency, is to take precautions against repression and speak about what has happened, to put into as many words as necessary what he has seen and felt and must live with. Avoiding the pain of therapy, thus paving the way for a life of suffering, is precisely the risk she admits to having undertaken throughout her troubled life. "That's what I do," she confesses with resignation, the flight instinct woven into her very identity. What is to be avoided is the mere undergoing of difficult experiences without being able to *have* such experiences, leaving one only with the means—as opposed to the right—to pass them on.

Figures 15 and 16. Traces of a dead child as respect for the unrepresentable: *Snow Angels* (David Gordon Greene, USA, 2007).

Afterthought. There is reality outside the mind, undoubtedly. But there is also reality inside the mind, a constructed and constructing process through which we view our surroundings and within which we view, above all, ourselves. This is the reality that causes us to doubt reality, take leave from reality, or disregard the face of reality altogether. It is also the reality that develops in concert with the realities of others, taking priority over the world, appropriating the world as, say, a common shelter in which to negotiate through language the sort of world we want to live in when the shelter no longer seems capable of weathering the storms of disagreement. The reality within minds and between minds supersedes reality itself, concrete objective reality, and assumes the form of reality by virtue of various forms of interlocking consensus, which can be said to lack the "hardness" of reality or for that matter any immediate sense of the world in which we live as real, present, there, whole, despite ourselves. We take reality for granted, but it is inevitable that all living things do just that, and not just human beings, because no being that lives on this earth merely lives. We are all, as Wittgenstein tells us, forms of life, and forms of life survive on their own terms regardless of their dependency. Human beings are unique in this respect because our survival is not automatic but chosen. To live as a human being is a choice, and to choose to live is to live with all the choices which make up what we call "a life." Over time these choices reinforce each other and solidify into habits, which are choices in disguise, repressed and forgotten as the choices they are. They form into a complex reality of the mind fit with a sense of self, beliefs, memories, projections, everything we know but do not necessarily acknowledge. For some, the reality outside the mind may as well be locked outside because habit dictates that we take it for granted, habitualizing it, without granting it much power. Habit dictates that the reality inside the mind and between minds is the only one we need concern ourselves with because it is the only one that concerns us, and concerns us directly. Reality itself is blocked, the reflections we surround

ourselves with are impervious, unliftable, and objects as a result do not stare back. But once and a while reality comes crashing in (as it does in the above examples) in a way that reminds the characters and, if we are with them in their experience, us as well, that there's a great big world out there, so to speak, and that what we thought was the world turned out to be nothing more than a thought—"the world"—which now and then would cross our minds without anything truly meaningful attached to it, as if the reality within the mind were impersonating the reality outside the mind and all minds. Perhaps the world as a whole is felt when we lose our footing.

All the above examples or demonstrations are accounts of an *experience* of an "It happens" moment where the ontology of art—not just the ontology of cinema—stages the condition of possibility for truth as unconcealment and thus the return of metaphysics within the general domain of the aesthetic. In this chapter I have emphasized the visual arts with respect to metaphysics, a move which situates cinema in a wider discourse of art's unique claim to truth. There are five reasons behind the proposition that the persistence of metaphysics is aesthetic and therefore not exclusive to film: 1. The world cannot appear in its own image without an image external to ourselves, and the image with the sharpest degree of "externality" is the visual image, framed or projected, 2. The metaphysical ontology of art is a property/possibility of aesthetics and not just technologies of representation, 3. The idea of the world in its own image made possible by technologies of representation, primarily photographic/cinematic technologies, can be brought to light in various ways, according to various styles, by artists who can be said to do metaphysics non-philosophically, 4. The mechanical automatism so vital to the return of metaphysics in art is not solely based on the absence of human intervention but also on the prioritization of the presence of the medium in various acts of human creation, and 5. While the visual arts are of course representational, the artist can always steer representation in the direction of presence, albeit not without great difficulty.

Now what I suggest we take from these brief readings of "image breakthroughs" is that even if there is *no such thing* as a living connection, obvious overdetermination, or tenable metaphysical ontology of cinema (and the visual arts more generally), there is still the inescapable matter of *our connection* to that connection, in other words our connection to the *question* of connection, better known in our current theoretical milieu as the return of the index. I regard the index as the primary sign, as it were, of a metaphysical orientation and aspiration at work in both art and its experience. When an image is said to point at something, what it shows must be unlike

anything a human being could point out in his/her understanding of the world; and when the pointing capabilities of the image take on a renewed interest, are we not pointing at the possibility of pointing as such? And is the possibility of pointing as such not a properly metaphysical possibility?... Beyond the value or lack of value of our connection to the presence or absence of the world and its appearances within the image, I do not understand the disproportionately high stakes surrounding the question of indexicality, which has shifted from a specific branch of C. S. Pierce's taxonomy of signs to the very root of the sign as a whole, a sign which points just as we do when we wish to show someone what our language can only picture arbitrarily and from a distance.[35] Since in these debates the index either roots the sign to the earth of the world or totally and irrevocably uproots it into the air of associations, it seems to me that the remarkable importance attached to this relation or gap between sign and referent, image and world, can be understood as itself a kind of index, or meta-index if you will, of the status and strength of our own viewing of images. The concept can and perhaps ought to orient our thinking in the opposite direction: towards the action and angle of our perception, followed by an assessment of our performance, with or without the active participation—the metaphysical stylistic, so to speak—of whatever artistic performance we may be witnessing. When looking at photographs or watching movies, the answer to the question of whether an appearance is present or absent, eventful or uneventful, significant or insignificant, whether the world in its own image is in some way aesthetically realized, will then depend equally on our own presence or absence, of mind and body, of eyes which gaze openly and with belief.

The idea of an "image breakthrough" also hinges on our capacity to be affected and the conditions under which such an influence is likely to be positive and empowering. I would therefore like to conclude with an ethical perspective on the metaphysical ontology of art. In the work of Emmanuel Levinas, human consciousness is a closed system of meaning, a highly organized and routinized cage which needs to be rattled to take the full measure of itself.[36] Here it

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[35] For a succinct explanation of the index and its relevancy for the photographic arts, see Mary Ann Doane, *Indexicality: Trace and Sign*: Introduction," *Differences* (May 1, 2007), 18 (1): 1–6. For a more detailed account of the Peircean legacy of this complex, contested, and often misunderstood concept, see Martin Lefebvre, "The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images" in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 220-244.

[36] This view of human consciousness and subjectivity can be found almost anywhere in Levinas' writings, albeit in piecemeal and often highly convoluted forms of expression obsessed with undermining how Western philosophy tends to think about thought. I refer the reader to an attempt made by Levinas in a series of lectures to narrate "the story of consciousness" from nothingness to inception to encounters with

is the other person which has the power, unbeknownst to him, to upset the tendency for an individual consciousness to reduce the world and others to extensions of itself. While such an ethics is powered by a radical indebtedness to "the other" to break through the walls of consciousness (this is what Levinas calls "alterity"), at the same time consciousness is conceptualized as impervious to such a breaking: consciousness contains the germ of alterity within it, however as soon as this alterity is brought to the surface of consciousness it seems to deny it or repress it, drowning it for the sake of its own self-preservation. I believe this is why Levinas looks for examples of this phenomenological reversing and unnerving through artworks— for him it is literature which does it best, particularly Shakespeare's tragedies—because ethical consciousness will always struggle to implement the criteria of openness, passivity and vulnerability, criteria embodied by the ontology of art. The knowledge that consciousness must be broken does little to break it, perhaps even keeps it intact; the face of the other is bright like the sun and we look away at the very instant of the other's intrusion. We need help in this, help *out* of this ethical "rock and a hard place," in order for the self to be dismantled under less threatening conditions which may placate the instinct of self-preservation to retreat from the world (a world of others and otherness). Such conditions are provided, I believe, by the metaphysical ontology of art, analogous in this case to a mind without consciousness as it were, because when the world breaks through the image what results is a breakthrough as opposed to a breakdown. A given artistic work may trade in clichés and spout generic ideology or poisonous propaganda, but on the level of its ontology it is constituted not by images of itself but by images of the world, that is to say, images of breakthrough. The meaning of an artwork is coterminous with the happening of the world, what I referred to at the beginning, after Heidegger, as the artwork's *work*; and to experience this phenomenon is to expose consciousness to the fact that its rote reductions of the world to various kinds of object functions on the same register as a love of the world as a site of patience and respect.

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alterity, a digestibly sequential account which the bulk of his philosophy systematically picks apart and inverts in an effort to do ethics metaphysically. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987).

Chapter 2

The World from Philosophy to Film: Views, Worldviews, and the Viewless

The world—how grand, how monumental, grave and deadly, that word is: the world, my house and poetry.
— William Gass, "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country"

Thus am I and will I ever remain a writer of "worthless samples" and the finished product never appears. I'm just a kind of little pocket mirror, powder mirror, no world-mirror.
— Peter Altenberg, "A Letter to Arthur Schnitzler," July 1894

On the earth, all over it, a darkening of the world is happening. The essential happenings in this darkening are: the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the pre-eminence of the mediocre. What does 'world' mean, when we speak of the darkening of the world? World is always *spiritual* world.
— Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*

Part 1: The World in the Hands of Philosophy

The words of our everyday language, particularly the standalone nouns from which the major philosophical concepts have been cut, are spoken out of context and written in the manner of law. The mode of expression accompanying such words is tied more to the fact of their existence as terms of reference, over and above what they appear to refer to and what we actually call "the facts." Words of heavy gait, resistant to grammar and occasionally recalcitrant to common sense, express the sort of fact that is difficult to check without dismantling an edifice of associations and biting the tongue as far back as possible. Crossing them out is a minor protest which usually ends up with a mere synonym for thought. Law-like, such words are difficult to rewrite or rethink or restrain, for they give us something to write and think and talk about in the first place. (One writes on the *page* of these "words.") Certain words in our language, words in which much thought and usage has accrued over time, frame the speech acts in which they function, choreographing thought into performances praised for their capacity to communicate rather than question or criticize. The words we believe to select with care, express ourselves, and acknowledge a shared world, are

metaphysically inclined insofar as they tend to posit the same world over time. They are edifices in and of themselves, entire philosophies can be composed in their key; and when we use them towards various ends we will just as often find ourselves acting as their means—the law of language upheld in our struggle to decipher it and in this way kept mysterious. The mystery of facts which we no longer know to be either true or false, of beliefs that cannot be so held because they have a hold on us first, of ideas carried along the winds of our words and imparted like secrets to those who search always for the right words... If the beginning is the word it is because language is always already speaking, shouting in the case of big words like "world." For this reason, the act of thinking can feel like the interruption or silencing of thought itself.

Philosophical concepts are words which resemble monoliths dotting the history of ideas: objects of both worship and desecration, social gathering places for intellectuals in search of community as much as truth. "World" is one such word which philosophy has at its disposal as a term of reference for the location, orientation and limit of all things pertinent to life as we know it, and throughout its history philosophy has been known to philosophize the world as a whole as if it were alive and twitching in the palm of its hand. This piece of conceptual bravado alone says as much or more about the nature of philosophy as it does about the nature of nature (the latter of which philosophy now accepts as being unknowable). When historically examined and traced back to its origins, and if entitled the full and complete expansion into the trans-historical and transcendentally timeless, such an epic and all-encompassing term could turn out to be as old or "ancient" as philosophy itself. In fact, philosophy, or one of philosophy's defining personalities in the West, may date back to this great realist dream (some skeptics might prefer to call it a delusional nightmare) to know the world-as-such, that is to say, *everything* there is to be known, where even the unknown is but a temporary obscurity waiting to be lifted. The most obvious precedent of this myth is Plato's unenlightened "cave of consciousness" which reduces the world to images of it, holding the mind in an immature and antiquated state of being, unless consciousness can bring itself—with the help of philosophy—to face the blinding truth of the light outside, of that which exceeds mere appearance via the five misbegotten senses. Of course, no notion of "world" can entirely predate the brilliant object in space, flat or round, centered or decentered, special or trivial, arbitrary or fated in the grand scheme of the cosmos; and we may take pleasure or reassurance from the fact that the world is older than us and thus predates the human condition, housing this condition, calibrating what we call our "being-in-the-world." But if

philosophy can be said to begin with the experience of the "thinkability" of the world, with an experience of the world as an "object-event" amenable to various philosophical orientations, then the concept of "world" is not only as old as philosophy but also, perhaps, sparks philosophy into action and the activities of metaphysics into systematization. The spark is created by what I will call the friction of consciousness, in other words the self-consciousness that we exist, and that our existence, while shared, is both solitary and capable of further separation from the world into which we are, so to speak, thrown. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine philosophy's interest in the world as a whole without taking into account the wounds incurred from this fall into knowledge, which awaken us to the implications of our "thrownness" and where we respond by trying to fully dust ourselves off. The philosopher's perhaps lifelong passion is to piece himself back into a more natural relation with the world: the primal, blissful, and infinitely intimate "garden relation."

Since philosophy's great, monumental, "grand theoretical" object of study (the world, or the world as thinkable) may be taken to ground or even *found* the philosophical enterprise itself (at least as defined and undertaken in the West), I feel pressed to approach the history of this concept, which philosophy strives to repeatedly palm, as a series of attempts—some solid, others flimsy; some possessive, others responsive—to grasp the ungraspable. I also like to think of this series of views of the world laid out as a multilayered history of worldview transformations. In other words, just when we thought we grasped something significant about the world that we did not hitherto know, the tides of history demonstrate—in a way no historical being can properly imagine without the luxurious leverage of retrospect—that only the "worldview" changes along with the way of life it secretly promotes or enforces. Our ideas about the world—including scientific ideas and the idea of the world itself, so vital yet deadly according to Gass—are always dependent (and in a sense historically contingent) on how it is being viewed, from where the view occurs, who is doing the viewing and the degree of detaching, and above all on the inescapability of occupying a view of some kind despite common misunderstandings of objectivity, or more specifically the scientific method, as a species of neutral "viewlessness." A view of the world amounts to a worldview, but what does this entail? A view of the world is a picture drawn with the assumptions of epistemological striving; it is an angle, let's say, whose pointedness elucidates (lights up, brings to the fore, foregrounds) while simultaneously excluding—the psychology of philosophy would say "repressing"—other points of view no less tenable or hospitable to the various demands of human understanding. I would also stress that this particular perspective—the

view that only the worldviews themselves are viewable—is a specifically modern perspective in Western philosophy that bends the past to its will of self-consciousness, a newfound will fueled by the criticism or skepticism of philosophical egoism (the "I think" is diagnosed as pure "ivory tower"). Today such philosophical self-consciousness can be found at work in virtually any history or science or analytical critique or continental encyclopaedism of ideas claiming to operate under the authoritative banner of philosophy; however, when it comes to the makeup of the meta-perspective itself—how it emerged, why it has taken root, what it reveals about humanity and the times—I find it exemplified in Martin Heidegger's provocative and unnerving essay "The Age of the World Picture," an essay whose title speaks for itself, welcoming us to the "darkening of the world" where to see is already to speak and ideology is default.[1]

World—or what Heidegger sometimes calls "worldhood"—as both a figure of everyday speech and a metaphysical concept, spans a vast continuum where human perception, reason, and linguistic expression plot the terrain of the philosophical landscape. The world is often described as visible to us, thinkable by us, and infinitely communicable and negotiable amongst us—and we are bound by the knowledge of this boundary and containment which throws the self into an absurd disproportion and houses our current cosmic isolation. For everything that has been said and unsaid in its name and honor, everything from the source of inner worlds to the stepping stone to after-worlds, one thing is for certain: the world is the omnipresent scene and sometimes primary agent—blocking or yielding paths to knowledge—in the great metaphysical show of Western philosophy. For centuries the world was portrayed as the grueling gauntlet and shining gateway to so many after-worlds, whereas today it functions (dysfunctions?) in a godless age where such a concept can be made self-aware, plural or exponential, and without promise of a world to come, thus raising the stakes of philosophy in an instant—especially in opposition to theology—by providing infinite stores of fuel for our wildest ambitions of world-making and un-making. The autonomy, efficacy, transparency and mobility of philosophy's "world," indeed all these qualities woven into the fabric of a single thought or spark of consciousness, is measured by the degree to which it epitomizes "the general," perhaps to such an extent that what philosophy receives in return for its indiscriminate claim upon the world is a radical (and seemingly impossible) *particularization of the general*. Like the concentric ripples spreading out from a drop of water, this global sense of

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[1] See Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 115-54.

particularization is without built-in bounds and seeps into what philosophy calls "substrates," thus subsisting in a fundamentally metaphysical way where the most general is concretized in terms of the absolute or posited as an *a priori* (i.e. the world is that *into which* man is born, dwells, and dies).

On the psychological register of the philosophical disposition, what I am referring to as the particularization of the general seems to ground or license the act of philosophical systematization at its most sweeping, robust, and perhaps self-serving (i.e. political)—and in this sense the acts of word-building which echo throughout the history of worldhood attest to what Stanley Cavell has recently called "the arrogation of philosophy."[2] Speaking of voice rather than speech, of the unreasonably authoritative tone of the philosopher regardless of the rationality of his or her train of thought, we can imagine this unconditionally self-believing voice as growing from an indulgence in the abstractions of reason and the loftiest ivory-tower philosophy to speculate ex nihilo or fantasize the ultimate utopia. This embrace, perhaps to a certain extent unavoidable, of philosophical arrogance (stemming equally, it seems to me, from too much knowledge and too little knowledge, or the obsolescence of wisdom) may even warrant the accusation of greed, the near insatiable thirst of the rational instinct which forgoes the flesh and its immediate experience— as opposed to the external imposition—of the laws of finitude. The great "systematizers" of philosophy have had grounds to be the greediest in thought, which may explain why so many show no need for or interest in "bio-greed," the cooling of the passions in philosophical discourse taken as the triumph and not the downfall of reason. The works/tomes betray a type, enterprising and arguably masculine, one who indulges in a hunger without depths and for the sake of a collective will to truth; and we find a temptation to assume the form of stoic labor, a kind of maniacal grasping and eloquent arranging of knowledge components and constituents. Now such acts are indeed remarkable and sometimes inspiring for those who have yet to *taste* knowledge, but what it shows time and again is that to be a great thinker of the world one must be a skilled architect of a worldview in which thought and world harmonize across time and space. They have come together before and in fact have never stood apart, yet one of the telltale tropes of the systematic

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[2] The word "arrogation" seems to be deployed more as a description rather than a criticism, or perhaps what is being described by it is a *self-criticism* which philosophy has begun to productively internalize by psychoanalyzing itself. See Stanley Cavell, "Philosophy and the Arrogation of Voice," in *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 1-51.

is that the philosopher's "I think" presumes, if only rhetorically, that this is happening as if for the first time. Systematic philosophy, as exemplified in the work of Descartes and Locke and Leibniz and Kant and Hegel etc., aspire in various and often competing ways to encompass the world in its totality and have each of its claims pertain to the world as a whole, the world we hold in common, the world as it has been with us since the beginning, and who knows, perhaps before the beginning. Philosophy as the emancipated "bird's-eye" discipline, in flight over the world and seemingly un-beholden to a given object of study (even what philosophy calls "the given" can be dropped at will and exchanged for other metaphysical concepts), in response to this awesome yet ultimately burdensome pride one could have cause to say that philosophy does indeed have an object and that it is called "world." Its object, in other words, is *to reach out and objectify*, perhaps as a means of balancing what I described earlier as the thrown or flailing state of the human condition, which philosophy objectifies, hence empowers, as "subject."

With the world as philosophy's eternal, beloved, and often criticized object of knowledge—posited as "out there" (for realists) and "in here" or as a mental projection (for idealists) but in either case *to be reckoned with*—I have proposed a view of modern philosophy in particular and the history leading up to it as the inexhaustible enterprise of forming views of the world, many of which desperately vie for the dominant view (sometimes viewing it from as many angles as possible), while others are content not to hold a view at all (sometimes breaking its view into shards of thought called "fragments" or "aphorisms," beginning with pre-Socratic philosophy and exemplified in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, in addition to philosophy's fascination with literature and poetry, again exemplified, I think, by Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). While the former approach strives to build a view of the world worthy of its complexity, plurality, beauty, cruelty, instability, habitability, and hospitality to our fundamental human situatedness, the latter seeks to destroy such logical scaffolding, acts of totality, rhetorical maneuvering, or repressed longings for transcendence—a handy term for such a practice is "decreation"—by challenging philosophies that present their particular view(s) of the world for the world as it actually *is* or *ought to be*. Authoring a worldview at the expense of others is a temptation of metaphysics no doubt, but it's also one that is active or implicit in the desire to think for ourselves and in the process self-discover, even if in thinking for ourselves we find ourselves adopting the thoughts of others. By building a philosophy so as not to have to do philosophy forever, the possibility of reaching a place of satiation and rest for one's mind—call it the "well-adjustedness" of being-in-the-world—can

be as pressing as the necessity that knowledge of the world is an organically evolving and historically contingent process.[3] And so with these two tendencies in mind, across this vast continuum of creation and destruction, metaphysics is exposed as a process of valuing and devaluing the world while at the same time the concept of "world," as the history of philosophy has understood it, is streamlined into the steadiness of a preoccupation that begins in metaphysics, passes through epistemology, and ends, well, with the end of metaphysics as the closure of the Platonic or supersensory or noumenal realms (pick your poison). In the end, if we regard philosophy not just as a field or discipline but as the adopting of a certain type of *personality* (for Nietzsche a perpetually all-too-human personality where the cache of knowledge dwarfs or altogether usurps the place of wisdom), we will see that this personality is fundamentally split by the concept of world, and perhaps has been that way throughout its disciplinary or more professional quest to achieve better knowledge of the world.[4]

The philosophical "personality" is therefore pulled in two opposite directions with respect to the construction of views of the world: the pursuit of greater objective accuracy and transparency on the one hand, and the equally pressing push towards more elaborate forms of subjective utility and creativity on the other. The history of philosophy can be seen as progressing along a straight line from the former to the latter, but the personality of philosophy represents *both hands* interlocked and at odds with each other. As for the radical transformations of the concept of world throughout Western philosophy, from Descartes to Kant to Nietzsche to Heidegger and unto the rug-pulling antics of the analytical philosophers who would expunge the concept altogether if they

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[3] However, reaching such a place of philosophical peace—a place where a worldview supersedes the world, or where a system of thought is maintained rather than critiqued—is a kind of "philosophical death drive" and may be forced to proceed *theologically*, that is, if faith rather than knowledge is what is being secretly longed for, idealized, coveted like a mathematical proof. The wanderer's exhaustion over excessive adventure, restlessness, and the sly fallibility of belief may convert to the following extreme but also calm conclusion: instead of always *pursuing* knowledge, one simply *has* faith that knowledge is not always the answer to the question of being a conscious being. The possessions of knowledge (i.e. beliefs well-earned and revisable) are felt in this case to be as fleeting and addictive as, say, those of capitalism. And as for the paradoxical *possession* of what we call "faith," to have it would be, I suppose, to hold onto nothingness (different from nothing), or to perceive one's own blindness. The theologian "knows" this, and perhaps *only* this ultimate "non-knowledge."

[4] In much contemporary philosophy, especially analytical philosophy, the epistemological quest is to achieve the undoing of bad knowledge (i.e. nonsense), defined as knowledge of the world (representation) rather than how we speak about it (grammar); and in some cases the quest aims, or wishes, for the overcoming of knowledge as such (wisdom, silence, survival of the soul, the refusal to persuade others to accept your brand of survival).

could, such transformations at the conceptual level can be viewed as operating in stride with concrete social, political and ideological revolutions. I take this to be the main point of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* where changes in worldview, what he calls paradigm shifts, amount to or are identical with changes in the world itself.[5] Here the world matters only insofar as it *means*, and insofar as it already has meaning independently of what we ascribe or renounce, what we are then talking about is the world as we know it, which is typically the world as we inherit it (the epistemological givens of our day, entrenched in tradition, ideologically airborne). But the risk in seeing philosophy's transformations of the concept of world in light of transformations of the world we live, along with the further suggestion or leap that philosophy's conceptual transformations are put into practice by our collective realizations, is that what philosophy calls "world" is what the philosopher, in his or her everyday life, calls "today"—the world is what he or she wakes up to, wrestles with, endures, thrives, lives and dies, like everyone else; and this temporal and finite experience of the world can become, if one is not careful, a sterilized catalyst, an alienated intimacy, foreign to or at least largely unaccounted for in philosophy's largescale accounts, assessments, and reconfigurations of this, so to speak, object of objects. It is in these terms that Ludwig Wittgenstein can remark in the *Philosophical Investigations*, casually and almost in passing: to destroy a philosophical worldview is not a cause for distress or tears, for that which is destroyed is in his words nothing more than "houses of cards."[6] Their power over us lies not in their sturdiness or resiliency but rather, on the contrary, in their seductive grandeur, their need for protection against threats from all sides and, for Wittgenstein, the extent to which they obscure the ground of language on which they stand.

The history of philosophy's descriptions of the world and transformative worldviews throughout the birth and death of metaphysics prompts a parable with a possible moral (life is full of them) about what philosophy calls "world," indeed about the world "as it is," but only on the condition that it shall hold *for* philosophy alone and in its aloneness—a fact which isolates it from

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[5] See Thomas Kuhn, "Revolutions as Changes of Worldview," in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 111-34. This radical view of worldview is more pronounced and unabashed in the 1st edition. Kuhn tempered the sweeping nature and decisive dynamism of the paradigm shift thesis in later editions, a recanting which could not quite undo the major impact it had on American intellectual culture. I am indebted to Martin Lefebvre for this important piece of historical background. History books naturally have their own histories as well, largely untold.

[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), §118.

the lived world, embalming it in an uncanny timelessness. The parable runs like this: "The world is what eludes the great totalizing efforts towards complete comprehension and intelligibility, even piecemeal efforts should they prove to harbor similar motives of exhaustion. What you the philosopher seek to know, or un-know, is in the palm of your hand, or so you believe, for in truth *you are in the palm of the world's hand*; philosopher or not, you are a part of what you seek to know—that is why you have been toiling in the desert for so long, going around in circles, duped by the horizon and its empty promise of an end not in sight." The moral of the parable as I see it is that when all the metaphysical results of philosophy have been tallied and logged, when Descartes' methodology for clarity and distinctness through reason is juxtaposed alongside Kant's criteria for the categorical inaccessibility of the thing-in-itself, and when these two paradigms, one empowering and the other disempowering, are brought to bear in light of Heidegger's suggestion (not quite method or criteria) that our concern with "world" or "being" or "truth" is also a symptom of our growing estrangement from that which is most near—at the end of the day, perhaps when the call to philosophy has waned and died out, the temptation exists, I think, to say that the world is "just there" while pointing in just about any direction for proofs or invitations to participate. Who would deny it and what reason is there to expect anything *more* from a world whose existence precedes and outlasts our own? Skepticism's denial of the world can be conceived ultimately as a repressed *acknowledgment* of its sheer power of presence, a sometimes reluctant or resentful acknowledgment of a brute indifference of monstrous proportions that torments the skeptic with empty promises of complete and perfect knowledge (i.e. control) of the world and other minds. But why even make a fuss, with or without the help of modern skepticism, over the only thing whose truth depends on its existence alone and not on the meaning of its existence?

To avoid generalizing a concept guilty of being one of the most general and lording of them all, and to avoid reducing the meaning or "meaningful meaninglessness" of the concept of world to a bland and, if I may be so bold, totalitarian metaphysics bent on controlling the world-picture from deep inside the discourses of philosophy, I would like to consider an insight from a particular mode of philosophy that regards itself as having awakened from the "bad dream" of metaphysics and into the world as *lived*, from the ground as opposed to the rafters of philosophy—I mean the scientific, problem-solving nature, and highly logical orientation of analytical philosophy and the philosophy of language. The idea I wish to borrow is an extrapolation of this mode of philosophy's emphasis on the interrelation of language and logic within contexts of the everyday and criticisms

of Western philosophy's avoidance of the everyday: the notion of "picturing"—mental or visual or linguistic pictures—is itself only a picture, a meta-picture as it were whose basis or point of reference lies not in the world "out there" or the mind "in here" but in/through/as our language. Language is being rethought from a one-way street correspondence with the world to a complex and unstable network of streets, extending into a vast city or world in its own right. For many philosophers of language, specifically those who associate themselves with ordinary language philosophy, it is a linguistic and culturally relative process of picturing that delimits for speakers the world to be pictured. The linguistic world-picture is thrown into sharp relief when speakers of a language use language to picture what is *outside* of language—philosophers are particularly adept at this—the result being not only bumps on the head as per Wittgenstein's dramatization of the understanding running up against the limits of language (imagine the *low ceiling* of language), but also what I will call the "picturer's self-portrait of the world."[7]

I will return to the perspective of the philosophy of language or ordinary language philosophy in more detail later on, but for now I would like to propose the following thought experiment as a way of continuing to explore the complex resonance between "world" and "worldview." What if we were to describe the history of Western philosophy in different terms, not as a chronological series of pictures of the world but rather as a multifarious nexus of subconscious self-portraits of the metaphysician in action? What can be glimpsed straight away is that such a description will be forced to pass over, or in the very least double-check, the basic terms of reference in which philosophy has been understood since the time of the Greeks: philosophy as a community of individual thinkers, historical arch of ideas, stratified continuum of paradigmatic shifts, canonical and marginal texts—all revolving in one way or another around the moorings of metaphysics, questions of epistemology and methods of representation, an inherited and perhaps instinctive system of thought patterns congealing into what Richard Rorty describes as "the mirror of nature."[8] To better understand the value placed by us on the mirror of nature— the pristine transcendence of the world reflected in our perfectly calibrated consciousness and

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[7] For Wittgenstein's metaphor, see *Philosophical Investigations*, §119.

[8] What Rorty has in mind is a metaphor for the mind's perceptual orientation, tendency towards binary opposition, and pursuit of knowledge of that which is external to it—the external world posited as something fundamentally foreign or "other" which the mind can reflect through various picture-making practices. These pictures "point" and so are often presented as accurate reflections of the real, but "the reality" is that they are only acts of sense-making which rarely take their own procedures into account. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

sensorium—I will suggest that we begin with a picture of philosophy not as way of picturing the world with greater accuracy and permanence (the clarity-and-distinctness criterion of Cartesian absolutes), but rather as picturing the eclipsed path of picturing itself, and therefore ourselves as "picturers." The logic here is that if our goal in gaining an accurate representation of the world is ultimately an epistemological one, that is, to better understand the world in which we live and share with others and from which we will eventually pass away (leaving all others behind), then perhaps an emphasis on "style" or "self-portraiture" will foreground the thrust of the quest for knowledge to be not only never-ending but also self-fulfilling. I like to think of this quest, foreseen in advance to be precisely and passionately and liberatingly without end, as philosophy's "psychological a priori": the accumulation of knowledge throughout every aspect of human life is, upon closer inspection, a mosaic of agreements and disagreements; the world is riddled with possible worlds, which are also *necessary*; and you may discover this world best when you realize your own, finding your truth not out there in the world but rather, let's say, amongst friends. I believe this is what Nietzsche means when his Zarathustra declares to his followers and to the human instinct to follow: "This is *my* way; where is yours?"[9] The question is not exactly a rhetorical challenge from Zarathustra to his faithful disciples to become, like him, a way to the overman, but rather a perfectly genuine curiosity into the will to power governing fledgling or even weak souls. "Where is yours?" is a question whose answer is a way of life that Nietzsche interprets simply as "dancing"; it is a request from Zarathustra for compensation, for his generosity of knowledge and intensity of spirit—all heights and depths in one of the most dramatic showcases of the will to power that would send many crumbling to their knees in slavish discipleship. He asks to be spared his wretched solitude by being, at last, on the receiving end of the will to power, reciprocated by his friends, the favor returned so that Zarathustra himself may be overcome. For every friend who shares your way lies an enemy who parts ways—for each *has a way*, indeed is *on the way*, although they might not yet know it or have the proper tools to show it, it is their *secret*. They are ready to betray you for *their* world. What stops them, aside from the difficulties of self-realization, is a sense of responsibility for *the* world as the great leveller and equalizer of

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9 This demanding yet nourishing question is followed by Nietzsche's characteristically cutting interpretation of its rhetorical charge: "—thus I answered those who asked me 'the way.' For *the* way—that does not exist." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 307 (italics in original).

existence, as democracy and justice, as recalcitrant to privatization and therefore ontologically *public*.

Zarathustra's knowledge of the will to power, while undoubtedly a self-knowledge and a vital source of existential style, is also importantly a metaphysical knowledge about the world—an apparently counterintuitive claim that Heidegger makes with remarkable force in his essay "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead'."[10] In this essay Nietzsche's great contradiction—that the experience of one's will is not, in fact, in one's sole possession; that to sit on the seat of one's will is to strip the will of all its power—is given its fair share of logic, I suppose the very logic of contradiction, and thus perfectly validated within its own terms without smoothing out the crucial conflict of terms. This peculiar "inverse" metaphysics as explored by Heidegger has astounding implications for the philosophical concept of world and can be expressed as follows: the power of will, a presumably psychological feat, derives its power from the will to power of Being itself. Only then can a particular being, for example a human being, experience the power of his own will and use it for his own betterment and elation (and hopefully for the sake of others as well, say by bringing out the overman in us all). As a result, Zarathustra can be said to know—which for him is to live by—these two contradictory aspects of the will to power. First, the will to power holds for all beings because it is germane to Being itself. Second, the human being is the being most capable of harnessing the will to power and affirming life in all its forms and also turning this will against itself (the will to powerlessness and death of spirit). What happens in Nietzsche that is pertinent here is the beginning of a view of the world that is not mind approaching matter but rather the endowment of mind *to* matter, a move which accomplishes the following transformation: it removes the distinction between mind and matter.[11] This would seem to leave behind only matter (Nietzsche's word is "earth"), and when the death of God is on the verge of unleashing an unprecedented wave of disenchantment and nihilism ("the darkening of the world"), we can call matter mind (Nietzsche's word is "spirit"), and laugh where we would have previously managed only tears.

After Nietzsche and Heidegger, the desire to *know* the world slips, consciously or unconsciously, into the human capacity—what must be one of our greatest capacities—to create

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[10] See Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead'," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 53-112.
[11] Schopenhauer's conception of the will is also a part of this transformative moment, as is Peirce's objective idealism which posits matter in terms of effete mind.

the world (Nietzsche) and dwell in the world poetically (Heidegger). As distinct precursors of what Rorty calls "philosophies of edification," I think we are all quite familiar with—and perhaps have even grown weary of—the infinitely demanding utopian platitudes of post-modern emancipation and philosophical self-consciousness as tools for self-fashioning and world-building. These philosophies of edification are undoubtedly potent and have the power to put wind in our sails, inspiring us with the possibility that philosophy can be lived and breathed, pressing us on the following points which are not to be memorized but rather kept as promises are kept: in order to discover something about the world one must change it or contest it; to declare a proposition a fact one must express that proposition as a value; instead of grasping the world as a whole one may release, abandoning oneself to the material of concrete particulars and subsisting on the wholeness of those particulars alone; and so on. Rising to the occasion of such a philosophy calls for ingenuity, or what I am calling "style" (admittedly with a deliberate degree of counter-intuitiveness and provocation), for as a day-to-day affair it cannot necessarily be achieved, realized or displayed in the manner to which the concept has trained us—as a private, performative or rhetorical "one-off" of engineered energies. Reaching a point within oneself where there is no longer any need to *remind* oneself what one believes, this calls for style too, perhaps "lifestyle" is the more appropriate term (drained, of course, of all trace of superfluity and self-absorption)—whatever the word, an *embodiment of one's knowledge* is what I mean, what I *hear* in the body of a word whose moral center has been almost entirely lost to the aesthetic, in the same way as the latter had been severed from the human sensorium, perhaps because we stopped believing we could live artistically in this world. While on the one hand the concept of style in this sense may undermine the epistemic achievements of philosophy by reducing them to self-conscious expressions with artistic rather than philosophic value; but on the other hand, what goes by the name style may have the power to grasp the sheer breadth and diversity of intellectual activity without linking such actions in progressive or teleological ways that risk reducing philosophy as a whole to a one-dimensional and linear quest for a truth that continues to elude or change shape. Since style is a dynamic concept that does not correspond to or concretely identify anything in the world apart from its aspect, it permits us, when thinking through a discipline the size and scope and depth of philosophy, to acknowledge within ourselves what it is we aspire to know about knowledge: that it yields not a series or system of facts to be collected and cashed in for certainty so much as the creation of a mode of understanding, a kinetic fusion of thought and action, a way of life (lifestyle)

in which the path is ploughed with every step, every breath—a mindful, expressive and above all self-critical gait whose integrity is measured in being equal to one's deepest beliefs and nourishing those beliefs by admitting experiences which may overturn them (and *admitting* when that happens, without fear or dread, or at least free of their debilitations, because change is in the air). If philosophy can be art then the only eligible work of art in this respect would have to be a life's work; and this, for me, is where the ethics of aesthetics truly resides—*in* the world, where art also lives (or dies, if it cannot *live on*).

This idea or hypothesis—that style be taken as responding to our need to understand *how* we as individuals are shaped or calibrated for understanding, and the extent of that understanding within the history of philosophy as the epic history of systematic and destructive attempts at understanding ourselves and the world at large—I think what I am suggesting can be whittled down to the fact that a style is not at all a fact but a *form*. Immediately this point finds a certain irresistible resonance with Wittgenstein's notion of "form of life" as experimented with and sporadically developed in his *Philosophical Investigations*.[12] What Wittgenstein means by "form of life" is not easy to untangle despite its apparent trap-like simplicity, and hasty interpretations and over-simplifications lie in wait around the depths of what it has to offer as a conceptual tool. The complexity of the concept is enhanced and sometimes even mystified through Wittgenstein's sensitive appreciation for the specificity of a familiar context of meaning, one that philosophical reflection and analysis may render ironically unfamiliar, as if the only thing of which philosophy is capable when attempting to understand how we make sense of the world is drawing the edges of sense, guided by the avoidance of nonsense and the pitfalls of conceptual formlessness. But perhaps we can gently prod the affinity between form and style as a condition of possibility or infrastructure of a worldview by asking: Is style the form (the living form) under which facts, i.e. the perception and discernment of reality, become possible in the first place? In other words, can we understand style as the subjective molding or shaping of what philosophy calls "the condition of possibility," such that there dawns a certain *way* of thinking, speaking and behaving that cultivates the ground, in Heidegger's sense of the term, upon which Being comes to pass under the light of subjectivity, manifesting not so much in *the* world but rather in his or her—*this* form of life's—world? If style is a mode of understanding that in some sense, perhaps an *a priori* sense,

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[12] See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §19, §23, §241, p. 148 and 192.

precedes our rational or cognitive understanding, then the question before us, framed by the metaphysical vastness of the Heideggerian frame of reference, is whether or not the concept of style can encompass mind, body and action into an expressiveness that "thinks."

We have reached a point in our thinking where style is not something one develops in order to possess as signature, but rather functions as a more accurate description of the labor and above all the aspiration of embodied thinking, which is of course its own signature—no need to sign afterwards. The idea is that philosophy, striving for thousands of years to understand the world and our existence in it, proceeds down a path it calls "method," and returns from the quest weighted with the bounty of this or that discovery, to be entered into conversation with other "seekers." However, in the wake of the adventure, long after the dust of danger and disagreement has settled, the seeker gazes as if into a fire and dreams the swarm of memories, the bitter along with the sweet, here in this strange aftermath of philosophy where the world is inhabited with the same effortlessness and naiveté as when it was departed. And in this peaceful reverie of the present's distance from the past, there is another discovery that does not wait to be discovered, I mean the dawning realization that the way *to* understanding is, was, and will be, a way *of* understanding, that one has discovered nothing more or less than the manner in which one is inclined to understand, the cultivation of the taste and tone of one's being-in-the-world. Finally, this discovery of the style at work in one's view of the world is in fact the *creation* of one's style and constitutes an act—the decisive act—of self-knowledge and self-creation. All insight into the logic of one's worldview as opposed to the fanciful (and often wishful) creation of new logics shall fall under the banner of "styles of picturing"; and the degree to which such styles are attuned to the world, rather than imposed upon it, endows a vital sense of plasticity to the picture, for one thing which is true of any style is that it inevitably changes *over* time as long as it is permitted to change *with* the times, lest it become obsolete. When something falls completely out of use its beauty also fades; it may be "interesting" or "curious" but rarely holds us captive.

Now in other—more general, less poetic, more traditionally philosophic—words, our physical, intellectual and emotional *inclinations* are the perspicuous expressions of a way of being in the world, or if you prefer a form of life, and the point I wish to stress is that our being-in-the-world entails that our ways of thinking and speaking the world take place from *inside* it, from a rooted condition of immanent habitation, from a paradoxical condition of boundless confinement in a form of life capable of *forming its own life*. As denizens of this world we are, as it were,

"enworlded"—our form of life has been *formed*, in space and over time, by external forces of which our expression constitutes both their continuation and transformation. This is obvious enough and few would take issue with so obvious a fact of our finitude, but if we take a moment to reflect on the consequences of this claim on philosophy's most fundamental metaphysical concepts, we will be forced to the conclusion, or perhaps the recognition, that traditional metaphysics is an observational rather than a proximal practice and that the concept of "world" (the primary concept in Heidegger's lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*) is based paradoxically *within* the world (or in the midst of this thing we call "world"—how could it be otherwise?), which means that it cannot reach out to the world as it exists independently of our reach because the reach is performed, as it were, telescopically—in other words metaphysics is performed by intellectually ambitious physical beings gazing deep into the firmament of reason. The act of "reaching out" can never reach far enough, can never escape "being-in" the world towards the securing of a clear and distinct notion of the "world-as-such." The separation or better yet bifurcation of sight is vital to its sense, and a reach that fails to touch is merely sight in disguise—what we have is an Ouroboros concept. The use of one's specific idiosyncratic inclinations to know the world is quite simply unable to achieve the necessary objective distance *from* the world—for this distance is, logically speaking, the criterion for knowing the world as separate from us, separateness being the price of knowledge manifesting as "world." It is to fly in the face of one's limitations when an inhabitant of the world fancies him or herself as a privileged observer of the world. Therefore, a logical and physical sense of separation, it seems to me, is absolutely key for understanding the history of the meanings ascribed to "world"; and perhaps the meaning that is common to all of them is that the world, while we may (do, must) live in it, can be known by us *as if we did not live in it*, that is, as if the world could be completely mind-independent and as a result, I am tempted to say, life-independent. This possibility, which is a habit of Western philosophy, of placing thought *in us* when it would be more accurate to say that *we are in thought* raises the difficult question of whether or not, or to what extent, worldviews can be *lived* by their subjects.

For Descartes, the inaugurator of modern philosophy, this sense of separation (subject from object, mind from body, reason from perception, even skepticism from certainty) is the seal of the victory of the mind, through an unprecedented clarity and distinctness of reason, to know what is perceived to be real or "out there" in the world—a victory over the threat of skepticism that,

according to Cavell, is simultaneously a discovery or an unleashing of skepticism in light of both the futility of absolute certainty of our knowledge and the undesirability of the potential pain of such knowledge. For Heidegger, the critic of modern philosophy, this separation from the world as the key to our knowledge of the world is built into the very fabric of Western thinking (a fabric woven, in large measure, by Cartesian pictures), such that the underlying meaning of the word "Being" is precisely our estrangement from "it"—the very "thing" which truly ought to go without saying. But since human reason—and what is unreasonable about reason—is so compelled to say what goes without saying and know what is fundamentally unknowable (because foreign to the discourse of knowledge), it is for this reason that Heidegger can say in his essay on language that "language speaks […] mortals live in the speaking of language,"[13] leaving it up to philosophy to turn the tables on language, as it were, by preventing the habitual recurrence of a language un-checked by thought and un-endangered by criticisms of the thought of language as it has been handed down to us. At the same time, to speak *with* rather than *against* the grain of language (to be spoken *by* one's language through and through) is to efface our estrangement from Being, evinced by the sheer presence and prominence of the word in our routine wording of the world. In this sense the word "world" is charged with the loss of the world and records the history of the steps (or missteps) of this loss. And that, I believe, is why Wittgenstein can declare at the opening of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* "the world is all that is the case,"[14] albeit with the all-important condition that this world is to be viewed as the sum total of facts and not things, suggesting that the only world we can know is the world as we actually know it (epistemologically—drawn by the limits of our language), and not as we *dream* of knowing it (metaphysically—in defiance of such limits, speaking where we ought to remain silent). For that dream, as we now know, became the nightmare of metaphysics where truth was won at the expense of human finitude and our words, estranged from their propositional logic and everyday usage, no longer bore the ring of truth (i.e. meaning in a given context and for a particular purpose). Since for Wittgenstein and the analytical philosophers our knowledge is inseparable from the logic of our language, such as it is, the word "world" as a representation of a sum total of facts in which objects are related in the proposition could also be interpreted to mean "thing of things," that is, if

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[13] Heidegger, "Language," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 207.

[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 5.

such a word manages to find its way meaningfully into our everyday speech and conversation with others, "world" becomes what circumscribes facts which are the case for us against a horizon of intelligibility. But if that is what we mean by world, if that is what we expect from our relationship to the world, if that is how we buffer abstraction and cope with uncertainty and console ourselves with fantasies of persistence and permanence, then we too risk becoming "thing-like"—objects rather than subjects of meaning, disillusioned with the narrative of the autonomous self, and horrifically disposable.

By the time philosophy reaches the linguistic turn of the analytical philosophy movement of the early 20th century, metaphysics as the pursuit or positing of "unshakable foundations" was forced to reflect on the modes of behavior of its various "pursuings" and "positings." For some the self-consciousness of metaphysics was enough to bring metaphysics to an end. But it is worth our further reflection on the basic methods, assumptions and underlying motivations of the sweeping attacks of analytical philosophy, if for no other reason than as a safeguard against any over-eagerness or outright desperation to make philosophical progress by discarding all metaphysical propositions—which turn out, according to logical analysis, to be the great majority of philosophical propositions and philosophical greatness—as inherently nonsensical on the grounds that they exceed the limits of language and bend grammar out of shape. A.J. Ayer in his *Language, Truth and Logic*, a work that functions almost as a textbook for this relatively recent movement or counter-movement of thought, writes the following as an account of the methodological aims of what seems to me accurately described as anti-metaphysical philosophy: "[T]he validity of the analytic method is not dependent on any empirical, much less any metaphysical, presupposition about the nature of things. For the philosopher, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. He is concerned only with the way in which we speak about them."[15] This distinction comes from a philosopher who believes his contemporary method has so completely transcended the ancient traditions of metaphysics and epistemology that he is no longer willing to even call himself a philosopher unless it is to quickly qualify his practice as one of pure "analysis," the kind with scientific objectivity and perhaps a sense of psychoanalytic scrutiny or suspicion on its side, keeping a watchful eye over what one may be tempted to say about the nature of things. Under the harsh lamp of analysis which opts to listen rather than speak, to speak in

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[15] A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 27.

response to what we are inclined to say and on high alert for any slips of the tongue into the dark depths of philosophical nonsense, the only claims to be made are claims about what we claim and cannot claim as speakers of a language. The latter criterion—speakers of a language—is also taken to be the most complete definition of the human being, for all other and competing definitions of what it means to be human are necessarily bound by the possible meanings of a given language.

It is clear, however, that Ayer is not denying that there are things in the world, or a world of things; rather he is insisting that it can no longer be the business of philosophy to do metaphysics of any kind when philosophy is dependent on a language the use of which is directed towards other propositions (rather than, say, the hypothetical referents of our words) and the meaning of which is contingent upon everyday contexts (rather than, say, the ivory tower of epistemological inquiry and metaphysical abstraction). But I still want to ask, and for now only ask: What, at bottom, is responsible for this drastic, perhaps unrecognizably transformative shift in philosophy from metaphysical to linguistic questions which claim to have little to no connection to the traditions and commonplace intuitions of philosophical questioning? What motivates this shift—it is the trigger and not the intention I seek here—from "contemplating the world" to "analysing our wording of the world"? Is it true that the history of philosophy, or one of its history's vital arteries, follows a path—far from a clear-cut path but a path nevertheless—from contemplation of the Platonic forms in a metaphysical or supersensory world to descriptions of linguistic forms in everyday life and a kind of clinical diagnostics of sense—how we as speakers of a language make sense of the world, i.e. how language *speaks us*—through pragmatic applications of logical criteria largely derived from a select group of contemporary philosophers?

The seismic shift of philosophical habit, while not without precedent and influence, seems to occur rather abruptly and hastily, swerving off the primary paths of metaphysics and epistemology in an act of dissent and perhaps even in a state of emergency which philosophy calls the death of God (a death out of which the philosophy of film is born). The movement says the time is now—an impulsive now, a better-late-than-never and future-looking *now*—where philosophy must summon the courage to look at itself in the mirror, a mirror tarnished with the faded dreams of philosophy to discover truth in all its forms and absolutize it under a divine authority. And what it sees in the light of its greatest disillusionment is perhaps also its greatest discovery. In the mirror of its self-criticism and intellectual conscience it accepts the truth that it, philosophy, is not what it thought it was—a mirror for the objective representation of immutable

truth. It stares at itself and all it has achieved and sees only words and their accompanying actions, a world of words and a universe of contexts for the evolving and embodied life of words. What it sees is *language*, the *reality* of language whose signs kneed human existence and make possible all claims to truth and falsity, an anti-ocular vision of the world which posits a public self immune to solipsism, a vision which exposes the fallacy that our propositions operate on the same page as our perceptions and the general misconception that what we say about the world works in the same way as how we see the world as something which fronts us. As a mode of language that can gain an objective foothold on its own uses and abuses of language, the first insight of logical analysis is that if language is the last vestige of a mirror of nature then it cannot reflect the way a mirror reflects, that is, outwardly, outward to what-is—a truth prior to all meaning, grounding all meaning, conditioning the possibility of all meaning.

Rorty crystallizes Ayer's position, thereby shattering philosophy as the mirroring of nature, with the following claim: "Once conversation replaces confrontation, the notion of the mind as Mirror of nature can be discarded. Then the notion of philosophy as the discipline which looks for privileged representations among those constituting the Mirror becomes unintelligible."[16] While I agree with much of Rorty's criticisms and take to heart his emancipatory projections, his acknowledgment of a lingering urge towards metaphysical thinking may carry more weight than the mere scratching of an insatiable itch. He writes, "The urge to say that assertions and actions must not only cohere with other assertions and actions but 'correspond' to something apart from what people are saying and doing has some claim to be called *the* philosophical urge."[17] What I wish to suggest as a response, not as an objection so much as a view from the other side, and as a provisional conclusion in need of patience, is that the urge to correspond—the great philosophical urge, as it is called, to face the otherness of the world and know what cannot be known once and for all—can be thought of as in itself a response to the address of the world, to our being affected by the world, which is to say by "something" for which there may be no words, or at least not yet. Wittgenstein famously concludes the *Tractatus* with the proposition, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,"[18] but that conclusion, firm as it may be, opens a new horizon where silence precedes speech, as if silence too can pass through the spirit of what we say. From this

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[16] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 170.
[17] Ibid., p. 179.
[18] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 89.

follows the even greater urge to speak from within the world rather than from outside it, and thus have our language be a part of the world—a highly dynamic and influential part—rather than correspond to it as if it suffered from a deep-seated lack. The passing over into silence when language reaches its limit is also the *return* of silence as the limitedness or letdown aspect of language for human experience as a whole. For silence is not just the absence of speech; it is—sounds like, resonates as—the presence of the world, the friction of being-in-the-world, the atmosphere in which speech sparks.

Philosophy's various and competing quests for knowledge of the world and foundational constancies of truth—whether it be in the guise of absolute certainty or absolute chaos or God or even nihilism, truth takes many forms even when it is being resisted—have all been waged, in one way or another, in discourses of language, logic, reason, sometimes poetry. For philosophy, the discipline blessed and cursed without a reigning object of study which I am simply calling "world" (the term indicates the absence as much as the presence of a so-called object), the discovery or creation of a knowledge fit for claims to "truth" opens a path untrodden and dangerous, demanding as a prerequisite the fierce courage of the hero, as it were, to think through (as in unmasking or exposing) the many threats of delusion and deception which fraught the path to clarity and distinctness of reason (criteria fetishized most forcefully by Descartes, among others). This can be done, for example, by criticizing false truths as tempting invitations of respite or permanent rest along the way to conclusions which must always be subject to repeated testing, hence revision in light of the new. But as all philosophers know (or dread knowing), there is no such thing as complete and utter *rest* for philosophy, at least for philosophy defined or endured as the labor of revision. The "quest for truth" is in principle endless as long as we are prepared to question the assumptions to which our knowledge entitles us (backfiring upon us), a process which involves accepting knowledge as partly belief-based (i.e. when one set of justified beliefs inform a new range of experience in need of significant elaboration or outright revision), and to rid ourselves of the contaminating conveniences of self-deception and social conformity afoot in our consciousness despite our best intentions to look the world in the eye. The truth that there is no end to the quest for truth is one of the great horrors of Western philosophy;[19] and as a response to this horror,

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[19] Eastern thought in general seems to be more at ease with philosophical endlessness. Ancient thought in this area has an air of modesty, non-didactic utility (what I would call "wisdom"), and a resounding sense of peace (clearing rather than clarifying), where it is possible—with practice of course—to let go of metaphysical questions before they burn at the hour of bewilderment.

perhaps one of the great unconscious defenses of our being-in-the-world, the history of philosophy is no stranger to avoiding or altogether abandoning the harsh realities of any such quest, by using logic and language and speculative reasoning to reach beyond the limits of thought as a way of putting an *end* to thought. What philosophers tend to embrace as "horizon" or "ground" or "noumena" or "mind" or "enworldedness" or "logic," depending of course on the nature and historical context of the philosophy underway, are all examples of philosophical endings. But this act of using a thought for the well-hidden purpose of ending thought leads, I suggest, to what philosophy terms "metaphysics." The irony or tragedy of this all-too-human phenomenon is that the desire to permanently satiate thought with, say, logical descriptions of reality or systematic accounts of experience or abstract generalizations whose power resides in our inability to actually verify them, has been shown by the history of philosophy to be destined for a disappointment not unlike the renewal of hunger. The belief in knowledge entails a loss of faith in the power of knowledge to pose eternally as truth; and so, with a permanent appetite in place, the true philosopher is subject to the pleasure and pain of the flesh of thought, far removed from the religious extremes of being satisfied with knowing too much or nothing at all.

Part 2: Film in the Hands of the World, or the World in its Own Image

In the introduction and first chapter I proposed that cinema's moving image of the world and the idea of the world in its own image realizes one of the dreams of metaphysics to know the world beyond the senses by escaping the intervention of the human and bypassing both the possibilities and limitations of knowledge. Human consciousness represents the world through knowledge whereas cinema's mechanical consciousness in principle allows the world to represent itself, bringing forth appearances which do not abide by the conditions of how the world appears *to us*. Therefore, the cinema imagines what the world would look like if a conscious gaze were not required to give it familiar form. Following this I have suggested that the world in its own image gives us the means to experience it only from the outside, that is, as a view which we cannot directly access or identify with in light of the fact that our views have "points" and these points, charged with consciousness, frame the view from the inside out. The human point of view is such that it projects, at least partially, the very view that in this mode of consciousness seems so pristine and impartial, yet of course it is anything but. The cinematic realization of the most fundamental concept of metaphysics, what Heidegger calls "world" and what André Bazin calls with deceiving

simplicity "the world in its own image," is ultimately the complete realization of the principle of a mechanical automatism that no other means of representation has managed to secure at the ontological level of a given artform. So, a metaphysics in the moving image is found to be philosophically satisfying in a way that most metaphysical systems leave us wanting, because the latter's epistemological quest to "know the world" is interrupted by the former's ontological act of "letting the world be" as a prior datum of cinematic discourse (as to whether filmmakers let this "letting-be" be is another matter altogether).

In the first part of this chapter I tackled the admittedly monolithic and perhaps insurmountable task of asking the question of what constitutes a world from the perspective of philosophy, questioning how philosophy asks the question; and I will seek now in this second part to pose the question with respect to the medium of film and the discourse of film-philosophy, which represents the by no means arbitrary coming together of the two fields on this very question. I made my way by tracing the concept of "world" throughout key moments and turning points in the history of Western philosophy, guided by the thought that a fundamental drive of metaphysics is to know the world "as it is" or a mind-independent world (the world as a knowable object). Now just as philosophy is learning how to substitute "worldview" for "world" (by making the rather difficult discovery that the value attributed to "world" implies a cut-off category of consciousness called "modern"), photographic and cinematic images of the world reassert the concept in the form of what classical film theory calls "the world in its own image."[20] For a metaphysician and phenomenologist like Heidegger, the world is something that is thought and must be thought responsibly, whereas for a metaphysician and phenomenologist of the image like Bazin, or more recently Cavell, it is the medium of cinema which "thinks" the world and prompts us into a rethinking of our place in it. While human consciousness is predisposed to constitute the world in its own image, mastering it through images of its own, cinema affords or at least promises an

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[20] While I tend to reach for Bazin's dictum as representative of the perspective of classical film theory within this conversation with metaphysics (primarily because the idea as stated is realist in a radically ontological rather than a technically representational sense), it is important to note that the term "classical" was first used by Christian Metz to discuss film theory before the turn to semiology, suggesting that the interpretation of cinema in terms of a language grows from a perspective on language invariably at odds with its grammar, in other words a language of images rooted in reality will always lack a grammar and be eccentrically nonhuman. I also understand "classical film theory" in somewhat ironic terms as the discourse which sets out to theorize the most *contemporary* of all art forms. In this sense the designation "classical" is a product or projection of contemporary movements of thought which are in large measure *disillusioned* with the medium's illusory qualities, conditions and modes of expression.

experience of the world as a whole only in our viewing it passively and therefore powerlessly; and if nothing else, we are given a *reminder* of how open consciousness can be when unframed by the will (the cinematic frame, unlike painting, is in principle pure porousness). Reflecting on the intuitions governing this metaphysical perspective on film, Cavell writes: "I have spoken of film as satisfying the wish for the magical reproduction of the world by enabling us to view it unseen. What we wish to see in this way is the world itself—that is to say, everything. Nothing less than that is what modern philosophy has told us (whether for Kant's reasons, or for Locke's, or Hume's) is metaphysically beyond our reach or (as Hegel or Marx or Kierkegaard or Nietzsche might put it) beyond our reach metaphysically."[21] Film realizes the ancient dream of metaphysics to know the world itself by, as Cavell might put it, taking the project out of our hands, and I would add that it reminds us that we still harbor this wish even though we claim to have outgrown it. The wish is satisfied most dramatically, first in the wake of philosophy's awakening from the metaphysical dream, and second as an acceptance of the dream's disappointment as a monumental and bare reality, the bold resignation of modernist self-consciousness to the unsurpassable nature of its own reach regardless of extent. The timing of this compensatory substitution or ironic reversal seems to be more important for me than it is for Cavell: when modern philosophy discovers that views of the world are in fact worldviews—in other words, that only worldviews are viewable—cinematic representation presents a worldview of the world in its own image, which means the cinematic worldview is a conceptual embodiment of the "viewless" aspirations of metaphysics. This shift is as much a feat of historical contingency as medium specificity: the death of God and the birth of film, the end of metaphysics and the rise of ontological realism in classical film theory, are decisively and inextricably linked; the coincidence has causal properties in retrospect, as do all coincidences of a certain magnitude. I am pressed to say that cinema's "viewless view" is the world's and not ours; it is a description of how the world views itself through film—everything in excess of the concept of view as a measure of the human reach. This is my reading of the resonance of grandiosity and greed in Cavell's application of this word "everything" to the tradition of metaphysics. To give sole autonomy to the world in this respect is not to elevate the cinematic apparatus or deflate human consciousness but to mark a moment where such a view at such a time embodies this lingering possibility of viewlessness, triggers this reminder that man is in the

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[21] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 101-2.

cinematic machine not to absolutize himself but rather to dethrone himself from the stature of a god, to sit down, to take responsibility for the death of God without taking the place of one.

What are the implications and provocations of this radical substitution and reversal, and is the discovery here timely or perhaps untimely, symptomatic or merely contingent? Well, as far as analytical philosophy's critique of metaphysics is concerned, cinema's "response" or "counterargument" to the linguistic turn of the 20th century might be that the world in its own image is less a reiteration of the world than a *recreation* of it, one which encompasses the terms of our dwelling in the world when the very idea of world is, in the most radical forms of analytical philosophy, reduced to that of pure logic.

The paradoxical peculiarity of a mimetic reiteration which gives way to, or functions as the basis for, an ontological recreation is also Bazin's way of inflecting his notion of the world in its own image as a description of cinema's revolutionary, mythical and thus ultimately unrealizable form of absolute realism. To fully appreciate the sense of the unprecedented here—let's call it cinema's being-in-the-world—one must be open to the idea of realism as an ontological condition and not just an aesthetic possibility, and furthermore as a mechanical condition with roots in the human psyche. What follows is Bazin's account from "The Myth of Total Cinema" of the medium's participatory relationship with the world and some of the implications of this unique relation:

> The guiding myth, then, inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of that which dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time. If cinema in its cradle lacked all the attributes of the cinema to come, it was with reluctance and because its fairy guardians were unable to provide them however much they would have liked to.[22]

Cinematic realism, which is being developed in the historical context of the alternative and competing realisms of the preceding arts (painting, literature, theater, etc.), is described in this

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[22] André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What is Cinema?*, Volume 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 21.

passage as being both specific to the photographic aspect of the medium of cinema and, somewhat paradoxically, as specific to the visible aspect of reality, if not a sense of reality "itself." Cinema's innate propensity towards realism is such that reality can be construed the other way around as representing or calling forth the cinema. In other words, the object of reality has agency, putting cinema on the receiving end of its initial act or active passivity, guiding the cinema towards more adequate and exemplary representations which will always purposefully fall short of a mythical totality that cinema glimpses as if into the land of plenty and promise. Cinema's nature is conceived as belonging to, sharing, or participating in nature itself, which it can do only insofar as its nature is the recording and undergoing of nature. But if that is the case then it has no nature of its own, an example in art (as opposed to artists) of what John Keats called "negative capability."[23] In the process of its radical undergoing cinema loses the essential clarity and distinctness of its medium specificity, for the medium cannot be conceived independently of the world it mediates and mythologizes. In this sense we can better understand Bazin's poetic and provocative claim that photography, and by extension the photographic basis of cinema, affects us like a phenomenon in nature on the grounds that it, too, is so affected.[24]

Bazin also allows us to think of cinema's integral or absolute brand of realism in purely mythical terms, as a bold episode in a manmade movement towards the eradication of the manmade within the realm of the aesthetic, a realm in which art and life are at last pardoned from the mutual burden of imitation and competition not unlike polar personalities strengthened yet tempered in matrimony. This is significant for the concept of the world in its own image because in reality this image will always be partially *ours* (though it attests to that part of ourselves, perhaps unconscious,

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[23] John Keats, *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats* (Cambridge, UK: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), p. 277.

[24] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?*, p. 13. In light of all the ideological critiques of cinema since the writings of Bazin, the romanticism of the realist perspective can be seen to have a political corollary as well. Theorists of this persuasion, suspicious of cinema's— particularly Hollywood cinema's—persuasiveness as a transmitter of ideology, typically operate by emphasizing the *culture* as opposed to the nature of cinema as that which affects us like a natural phenomenon, digesting ideology into a breathable air. The innocence and indeterminacy of cinematic nature makes it exploitable and an effective vehicle for mass enculturation. But what is often lacking in these critiques are *alternatives* to critique, to the progressive tenets of didacticism or the self-reflexive jostling of cinematic pleasure, in other words insight into films which respect the viewer by respecting a medium whose fundamental responsiveness may promote in the viewer a sense—some might call it an affect—of responsibility. Films justifiably described as open to interpretation will open the viewer, teach by example the mechanics of openness, reach closure organically, or prod it, even if such films are, as we say, ideologically problematic.

which values precisely what cannot be *had*). Cinematic representation, whether in its cradle or in full bloom, *symbolizes* the culmination of realism (i.e. a total image of the world in the form of the world in its own image) such that the ontology of the moving image is always looking ahead to the day when the medium no longer matters because its matter, as it were, will be the realization of the myth. What such a perspective on cinematic realism does is epitomize realism by bringing the discourse and aesthetic of realism to its logical conclusion, cinema's open-ended invitation to reality resulting in a consequent over-determination by reality itself. But from the filmmaker's and spectator's point of view—a practical rather than historical point of view—this may amount to nothing more than each instantiation of cinema beginning with an inexhaustible and maximum sense of the real (what Cavell calls the world as a whole), one which turns out to be finite, invariably filtered and framed through technological conditions, and may or may not be at the core of an artistic elaboration. In theory, cinema is the world in its own image, but *in practice* it is an image of the world, or a series of images, that must be articulated, and the articulations which circulate today become property of the medium tomorrow and thus an extension of the world's self-image and self-imaging capabilities.

One of the things I find most intriguing about Bazin is the sense in which a creative quality or principle is attributed to cinema's mechanical mimesis of reality. Why does Bazin speak of the world in its own image as a "recreation" instead of a "representation" in this case? Because his "model" resonates with the theological idea of *incarnation*: the photographic/cinematic image of the object is akin to its rebirth. The image of the world made by the world, the world's self-portrait, is obviously not a mere mimetic representation of it, or what we call mimesis does far more than represent, which is certainly true of the act of miming as one that entails an act of becoming, transformation being the criterion for delivering what we call a good performance (not just an accurate one). In fact, the concept of creation implies that the world's self-portrait is perhaps fundamentally painterly and not photographic—the representation's condition of possibility is non-human, like a fossil, yet at same time human beings have set up the conditions for an image to come to be by powers beyond their control and right to sole ownership, as if by virtue of the medium of film we confessed to our capacity for control impeding or altogether paralyzing our capacity to create in a manner that is intrinsically satisfying or therapeutic. This emphasis on creation—representation interpreted in terms of recreation—also cannot but stir to mind thoughts of *creationism* which may underlie Bazin's Catholicism. Whether or not the world is the work of

a deity or transcendental powers, and even if beings come to be through evolution as opposed to creation as our evidence suggests, what cinema does by fashioning the world in its own image is sidestep the temptation to fashion false idols depicting forces fundamentally alien to the earthly. The idea of the world in its own image puts forth the belief that human beings create not just through acts of will but also through acts of faith; the cinematic recreation of the world as world—*this* world, in all its beauty and terror—exemplifies faith because it embodies the human will to keep our hands tied. This is what philosophy might call the ethical impulse. To make a film is to free our hands of course, yet it is possible to make a film—and read a film—by handling the medium with care and without "manhandling" its messaging capabilities, say through a creative/critical process guided by an acknowledgment of the world's "recreatedness" on film.

Bazin's dramatic expression "the world in its own image" is linked with Cavell's more rigorous definition "a succession of automatic world projections," the latter of which is slowly developed and earned throughout the opening sections of *The World Viewed*.[25] This affinity is an indebtedness, for in the preface Cavell sites Bazin's seminal essays, collected in the two volumes of *What Is Cinema?*, as among his few inspirations for the ensuing reflections on the ontology of film. The sign of inspiration as opposed to overt instruction or allegiance comes in rarely referring to Bazin's ideas directly, instead expanding upon and deepening that which lies at the heart of Bazin's own inspiration, embarking from the French critic's pioneering and still compelling investigations into the philosophical question of what film *is*. This is a question which has much to offer the philosophy of art and, for me, the field of metaphysics, over and above the aesthetic question of what film can *do*; and contemplating what the "is" *does* is perhaps what philosophers do best.[26] In any case, both definitions of cinema are working hypotheses based on the assumption that the medium to be specified is, for reasons discussed above, "medium (non)specific," and can

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[25] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 72, 105, and 201.

[26] More recently Daniel Yacavone in his exploration of "film worlds" makes a fundamental distinction between the fictional world *in* a cinematic work and the more than fictional and narrative world *of* it. The world *of* a particular film is a movement towards the Bazinian idea of the world in its own image and the Cavellian idea of world projection. The distinction between the "in" and the "of," analogous to the distinction between what cinema "is" and what it can "do," is contingent upon both the representational and presentational dimensions of film. And it is the presentational dimension in particular—undergirding the representational and making cinema's dimensionality possible—which functions as the gateway into the philosophical dimension of film, a dimension apparent to those who seek an essence—knowing that they shall not necessarily find it, for experience teaches that to seek is also to find. See Daniel Yacavone, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. xxii.

be read together in the following way: cinema makes the world in its own image *make images*, and a world which makes images of itself *projects itself*, thus cinematic projection is a world projection. I am suggesting that we read the succession of automatic world projections as composed not just in but *by* the world's light, which is to say that the light of the projector or digital screen is carried over and thus relayed, and furthermore that the world in its own image is an image of light that is unimpeded by the opacity of human consciousness. As autonomous self-manifestation under technological conditions, the world in its own image is describable as the manifestation of spirit in the age of disenchantment and thus is analogous to an unconscious deity.

But how do we know in the first place that the philosophy of cinematic technology is ontologically revelatory of the two decisive aspects of "world," the world as it appears to us and the world as it escapes appearances because of our perceptual, cognitive and linguistic limitations? On what grounds can we say that the world viewed by photographic or photo-digital technologies constitutes a worldview in which the world exceeds or transcends the view, or where the world, as it were, views itself? Dealing with such questions calls for a reading of two thinkers in dialogue with technologies of representation and in dialogue with each other on the conditions of possibility for a "techno-poetics" (to be elaborated in more detail later on): Heidegger's meditations on the nature of technology as such in his essay "The Question Concerning Technology," and returning again to Cavell's reflections on cinematic ontology in *The World Viewed*. Part of the reason for reading them together is that Cavell's elaborate philosophical interpretations of film (i.e. "film is a moving image of skepticism") cannot yield the proper insight without being explicitly or implicitly answerable at all times to the very technologies—always evolving yet always "cinematic"—which avail the world in its own image and make possible the art, history and industry of the medium. The title of Cavell's book by his own admission also consciously resonates with Heidegger's essay "The Age of the World Picture" (which just so happens to appear in the same collection as the technology essay), an important and deeply perturbing essay in which, as I had cause to mention earlier, the bold thesis is put forth that the world in the modern age is experienced only through, as, in the form of, worldviews.

In the technology essay, Heidegger cautions us—we moderns—against trusting even the slightest action or twitch of the will towards the manifestation of the being of the world, a manifestation whose purity or ideality or, as Walter Benjamin put it, "auratic" resonance, is ultimately destined to concealment by the reign of representation within the age of the world

picture and the revelatory conditions of knowledge as a utilitarian and sometimes totalitarian mode of ordering. Heidegger's word or name for this phenomenon—indeed he has special names for practically everything he cares about—is "enframing":

> [E]nframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing that is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, Enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of poiesis, lets what presences come forth into appearance. As compared with that other revealing, the setting-upon that challenges forth thrusts man into a relation to that which is, that is at once antithetical and rigorously ordered. Where Enframing holds sway, regulating and searching of the standing-reserve mark all revealing. They no longer even let their own fundamental characteristic appear, namely, this revealing as such.[27]

Enframing is described here as a process of revealing whose technological ordering conceals the revelation of the world as presence. Its greatest limitation and danger is its own entrapment, hence perpetuation. The revealing of enframing is a concealing above all of itself, such that to be engaged in the mode of enframing, which happens whenever we objectify the world, is to be absent in this mode of engagement, an absence to which we give our consent by referring to ourselves agreeably as "subjects" and staying oblivious to the fact that to enframe is still to reveal. That being said, even though the essay is a meditation on the pros and cons, progresses and regresses, openings and closings, of technology as such, Heidegger remains characteristically abstract or opaque on the exact nature and workings of a revelation that is internal to concealment and a concealment that is internal to revelation. While the ancient Greek word *poiesis* is, according to Heidegger's translation, a "letting what presences come forth into appearance,"[28] it would seem that it can hardly accomplish this "letting"—indeed such an *accomplishment* is a contradiction in terms—without the aid of *techne*. Technology, in other words, becomes the necessary appendage for poetry; and poetry, in order for there to be an allowance or admittance or gathering of what is called revelation, must frame, enframe, order. In the seemingly paradoxical pursuit of truth as

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[27] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 27.
[28] Ibid., p. 27.

letting-happen (again, to call it a *pursuit* is to set upon and enforce the letting-happen), the poet, condemned as it were to the enframing relation of the modern "world picture" condition, must try to reveal rather than profess or prove. This may mean searching without looking for (longing for) results, or revealing without leaving tracks inside the revelation. He or she is equipped with a medium, an instrument, a machine, albeit as an extension of the medium he or she already *is*—a conscious entity set up to set forth into the world and grab hold. Self as subject is something of a tool, a medium which reveals by way of ordering and orders by way of revelation, and it can be said to enact subjectivity as the modern medium/machine of representation par excellence. If, however, the medium external to the self is being used as a means to an end, specifically "to reveal" and with the overt *intention* of revealing, my sense of what Heidegger is saying in the abstract— and which I would like to make concrete in relation to photographic or digital technologies of representing the world—is that it must conceal the very revealing it sets out to honor and acknowledge. But is this the destiny of technology in all cases? Is this ontological double-standard, backfiring, and Midas touch of modernity an absolute of entrapment from which there is no hope of escape and to which philosophy either succumbs, suffers, or sacrifices itself to the pure language of poetry?

To take a slight step back unto the bigger picture of Heidegger's thinking, according to him modern man sets himself up as the sole setting for Being and in advance of Being. Now what Heidegger calls Dasein is still an inextricable and necessary part of Being, but this being who is *in* the world and *knows* it seems culturally conditioned and perhaps biologically calibrated as well to present himself before it, to view it, use it, and occasionally to admire it, but primarily and above all to master it in some large or small way, proportionate to one's measure of power. Can this multidirectional predisposition towards control, extraction, mastery and self-service ever hope to assume the form of openness, receptivity, carefulness and respect? One of Heidegger's main concerns, in this essay and perhaps throughout the steady course of his philosophical enterprise, is that Dasein finds itself in a world—that is, a world of worldviews—which can no longer support beings in the world, beings in the midst of Being, but rather only positions, coordinates of consciousness, if you will, thus confining Dasein to protective corners of planning and privacy from which the world is set into place and emerges as a representation, a product of what the will projects, the world as product. It is worth noting here that the world can take many forms; it can be order or chaos, war or peace, communism or romanticism, brute matter or shimmering mystery,

and it can also tend towards an extreme while undergoing resistance—the world makes itself available to various forms of life, and yet, if the forms of life which hold fast and are passed on are those which dominate, then the world is not what we make it to be so much as what is *makeable*. For Heidegger the representation of the world, this "world picture," is not an actual representation or picture but rather a way of being defined as a mode of consciousness, the setting-upon shapeliness of subjectivity, fundamentally and therefore seamlessly alienated from the standing-reserve. Since we are positioned inside ourselves and hence outside the world, the world appears "framed up" by the self; the self is like a sense—the sense of self-sufficiency. "That the world becomes picture," writes Heidegger, "is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming subject [subiectum] in the midst of that which is."[29] With the concept of the subject understood as, say, the technologizing of consciousness into the mode of representation, Heidegger in the technology essay can define or rather find the essence of technology to be that of enframing, "which is nothing technological, nothing on the order of a machine. It is the way in which the real reveals itself as standing-reserve."[30]

Heidegger's most cherished philosophical objective here is to make us think more deeply about technology by suggesting that the anthropological or default way in which reality/world appears to us is in its essence technological, that is, at our complete and utter disposal, ready and waiting for our encroachment as subjects and its appropriation into the status of object, revealing itself in the context of the inadequacy or irrelevancy or invisibility of autonomous revelation in the modern age of rapid industrialization and globalization of means. But what if we were to reverse the terms of this analysis and say just the opposite: that enframing has *everything* to do with technology, particularly with technologies of representation, that it belongs to the order of the machine, for example the camera machine. How does reality reveal itself as standing-reserve to a machine modelled after man? Would reality still present itself *in this way* to a machine designed to represent it "in-itself" rather than "for-itself"? Perhaps the camera-machine circumvents representation, contrary to how it's routinely conceived of and put to use. The camera *breaks down*.

Let us consider the example of the motion picture camera more closely and intimately—these mechanical "eyes" with sensitive "bodies" and impeccable "memories." I own a camera, as

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[29] Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 132.

[30] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 23.

you probably do, perhaps more than one, and not infrequently I use it to record what I see (and hear, depending on the camera, but seeing comes first); and not infrequently it records what I did not see, want to see again, refuse to see ever again, depending on *what has been* recorded, a feature which turns out to have very little to do with what was seen or unseen in the first place. Anyways, how does it work? One day I take my camera into the street, or if I am not in the city, perhaps I venture out into the countryside. I watch the traffic go by or study the receding lines of the horizon or watch the trees sprout their branches in all directions. I use the frame and focus to select, concentrate, think the visible and hold the rest of the world away; and when I like what I see, when I believe to have seen "something," when what I see exceeds what I would normally see with my two naked eyes un-synchronized by any heightened awareness, I press the record button. Whether it was during those moments leading up to the capturing of a photograph, or those moments during the recording of the motion picture, I hang onto what I see and the camera, for now, sees for me, sees and remembers without subjective distortion (technical malfunctions and aging processes notwithstanding). I know what I am seeing is stripped of a dimension—one of my eyes is shut after all—and will be lacking this dimension as a mere two-dimensional image on paper or screen. Perhaps this lack will come at the expense of the world's dimensionality, just as music when recorded might be said to lose its unique timbre. (Many other things are lost as well, aspects of color for instance, not to mention the lived experience, but the greatness of the gain is distracting.) Even though I am free to move the camera, I have settled upon a frame and keep it there; I do this, I tell myself, not for the sake of order and control but out of respect for the particulars—they are entitled to their duration, their being is a breathing, and the world beyond the frame seems to resonate in them: the world in a grain of sand, as they say (poets). Eventually I stop recording and point the camera in a different direction—I got enough of that, I am satisfied, or I had enough of that, I got bored; or perhaps I have finished what I set out to do or had my fill of this strange little pastime and head home; or maybe I turn my back on the machine with senses sharpened, primed to experience the world through my own senses, such as they are, anew. "But what exactly have I done? What exactly do I hold in my hands?"

Later that day, in the evening, I view the image for myself to see how it turned out, to see what I saw, to see what the camera "thought" I saw. Should anyone enter, perhaps a child, and mistake it for the real thing, I should say that what we have here is an *image*—nothing more, but nothing less either. The world is framed and ordered, but only mildly and relatively ineffectually.

Does the world, or this aspect of it, have a "say" in its framing and ordering? Perhaps that fact introduces an element of chaos into an otherwise uninteresting and forgettable image, rendering mysterious its source and authorship. "What does it *mean*?" Well, I am tempted to say, given the circumstances of its casually improvised making, that it doesn't mean *anything*, or at least *not yet* (what you see is what you get). Its meaning is pending or suspended, awaiting the accompaniment of other images or text, or after-the-fact interpretations. In its raw infancy, may we call such an image accurately mysterious, a pristine opaqueness, a plain view abstracted by a picture? These things you see, in all their particularity, exist *now* as they did *then* when I saw them and no one else was around. They are present, again, these things of the world, this world of things—but does this photographic/cinematic image that you took with your camera show or reveal that presence? If Heidegger were in the room, he might say that it conceals it by bringing it forth technologically, and that the strength of the concealment may very well be proportionate to the strength of what we take to be a genuine and meaningful revelation. But does it conceal it philosophically or technologically, that is, in principle or on formal grounds? Well, what does the picture look like, what are we looking *at* when we have occasion to look *through*? And that's the problem, that's the giveaway: it *looks like* what it looks like, it appears to our eyes to be what it is. Cavell was right: objects unlike sounds are simply too close to their appearances (he calls them "sights") to give them up for mechanical reproduction.[31] But on the other hand he may be wrong to assume that what the camera-projector system does is posit objects in the first place, whereas our viewing them—in the modern condition of viewing—may turn out to harbor the greater power and practice of objectification. As for what it *is*—an image of the world, the world in its own image—shall we try closing our eyes and opening our minds? Perhaps the ideal approach would be to *think with our eyes*.

These paradoxes of representation in which we find ourselves hopelessly entangled—where "being" and "seeing" are conflated yet in conflict with each other—belong to a distinction or limitation that philosophy has maintained in various ways throughout the ages, perhaps as a way of sorting different domains or dispositions of representation and tempering the ocularcentrism of the West. I am referring primarily to the distinction between "correctness" and "truth" which can be used to come to terms and even assess the concept of mechanical reproduction as adequate to

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[31] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 20.

the world or as facilitator of the world in its own image. For Heidegger it is possible for something to come to presence correctly but not necessarily truthfully; presence expressed in terms of correctness may amount to nothing more than what philosophers call "reality" and artists or aestheticians call "likeness." But if it's our plan and passion to summon Being itself to its rightful place within our midst, resonant in our thoughts and actions, then correctness may have nothing whatsoever to do with the condition of possibility for something *actually being* as opposed to merely being or seeming real. To what extent, I wonder, is this predicament or endangerment at work in the ontology of the moving photographic image of the world? Is it the case not only that these representations of the world are correct in terms of their likeness to the world (true *of* the world), but also that this correctness may come at the expense of their truthfulness (truth *as* the world)? What would account for either the disclosure or withdrawal of truth as correctness and correctness as realism? And if it's true that truth is easily eclipsed by sight and transformed into the crudeness of fact, what might counter the withdrawal of the object of representation from its pride of place as material anchor and immaterial radiance of the presence of—not just in—representation as such? But first, what constitutes the truth of the image as correctness, for this correctness is convincing enough, powerful enough, dramatic enough on its own, to beg the word "truth."[32]

All photographic images of the world, whether they are static or moving (but the moving world is, I will say, privileged insofar as it takes space and adds time), are often correct in a technical sense but not necessarily truthful in a poetic sense.[33] In other words, the correctness itself can be deliberately or carelessly concealed from view, undermined and flat out rejected, in which case such images are not even permitted to be *true to themselves*. The objects represented, the

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[32] But the word has many meanings, and the one I want here is not the most self-evident or quotidian. There are as many definitions of truth as there are wholesale dismissals of dogmatic conceptions lacking any conditions or contingencies. The sense of truth I have in mind is shaped by sense or affect and specific to the moving image of the world, hence not exactly of *this* world, low on content yet high on form. A more detailed definition and demonstration can be found in Chapter 1 of this thesis, in the passages on Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art."

[33] The distinction becomes clearer if the veracity of the photographic document is compared with the expressive capabilities of other artistic images. The photograph may offer a better likeness of my father, while the caricature offers a better (truer?) sense of who he is—his temperament, his worldly disposition, even a certain life code. Perhaps this is also the difference between mere photography and photographic art: the ability to use the photographic record to make a great and revealing portrait equal in that regard to a painting. I am indebted to Martin Lefebvre for this constructive analogy in wrestling with the slippery distinction between veracity and revelation.

people and places and things, have been gathered into an order whose logic the objects themselves have no knowledge. The result is the world's indifference to itself onscreen, an indifference for which the French filmmaker Robert Bresson offers the following enigmatic aspiration and seemingly impractical rule of thumb, declared "manifesto-style" in his *Notes on Cinematography*: "Make the objects look as if they want to be there."[34] For screen objects to exude a sense of presence, will, and interior life characteristic of human consciousness is for the camera machine to be able to see, apprehend, and perhaps even think. Bresson's wish for objects to harbor the same attachment to existence as his human characters walking along circuitous lines of fate suggests that the condition for creating a fictional world through images of the world is first to create the world in its own image, and in such a way that the world—the unity of animate and inanimate life, the finitude of infinite variation—will also *want to be there*, that is, *elsewhere*, affirming itself in a realm completely foreign to itself: onscreen, in the dark, before an audience. The subsistence of the world in the house of the image is as remarkable as it is seamless or transparent; and the cinematic appropriation or transposition of a great power—Being for Heidegger, will to power for Nietzsche—travels or transgresses from the realm of metaphysics into the realm of appearances. Whereas concepts like "Being" or "will to power" are unconditional and virtually beyond exemplification, in the context of the ontology of film they can only thrive, if at all, in the flickering shadows of the image; and for this to occur the filmmakers and viewers together must make the world believe that the shadows, too, are full of light.

In the forward to the enlarged edition of *The World Viewed*, Cavell remarks almost in passing—yet strangely enough as part of one of the book's very few analyses of actual films—that his experience of *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978) brought to mind certain key passages from Heidegger's sustained meditation on the nature of Being, exemplified in a series of lectures entitled *What Is Called Thinking?* A film set in nature (the wheat fields of the Texas Panhandle), in the past (early 20th century, the age of early cinema), featuring a love triangle that ends in tragedy (Shakespearean), and narrated by a young girl intelligently impressionable to her surroundings (let's say Blakean). But it is the film's sublime realization of its images and sounds, realized in accordance with what Cavell describes as "the casual rounds of earth and sky,"[35] which

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[34] Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematography*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), p. 56.
[35] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. xiv.

sets the stage for this dynamic comparison, one that many philosophers and film studies scholars perhaps overly set in their ways would no doubt see as a stretch, assuming such a comparison even makes sense (Cavell worries) to specialists and representatives of established fields of inquiry. After watching the film (presumably only once, given Cavell's stated interest in memory over textuality, philosophy as autobiography, what he refers to as "metaphysical memoir"),[36] his conviction is that Malick has enacted the Heideggerean "heeding of the call of Being," which again calls to mind the Bressonian declaration quoted above as a potentially unattainable goal for cinema: "Make the objects appear as if they want to be there." In Cavell's experience, the natural world in *Days of Heaven* has been made to appear in this unique way: its power of presence—its desire to be—is marked by beauty in the extreme, unbearable beauty.

Perhaps only someone who reads and writes philosophy could have such a spontaneous reaction to a film that is, after all, quite non-philosophical (and in a sense anti-intellectual). Cavell does well to remind us that Malick, many years ago, studied philosophy at Harvard, and even translated into English Heidegger's book *The Essence of Reason*. But Malick's departure from philosophy into filmmaking should not be construed as an attempt to do philosophy through film in particular and through art in general.[37] Cavell's elaborate and challenging multi-reference to Heidegger in this atypical context—an introductory forward to a work of film theory—is based on an intuition that a significant and unexpected affinity prevails between the philosophy of Heidegger and the cinema of Malick in light of what he perceives to be a mutual interest in, and subservience to, the question of Being. A principle of Cavell's method—an interdisciplinary leap as far as I'm concerned—is that no philosophical question that is worthy of being called

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[36] Ibid., p. xix.

[37] In light of the directions (or directionless drift) of Malick's recent work, would it be fair to say that he has returned from filmmaking back to philosophy? If so, the turning point occurs with *The Tree of Life* (USA, 2011) which is able, it seems to me, to strike an extremely difficult balance between cosmic speculation and autobiographical narration. My understanding of the controversial evolution of Malick's oeuvre is as follows: Malick is a compelling, brooding, nearly flawless filmmaker in the pre-digital era of cinema, however the digital medium—and its corresponding digital consciousness—leads him in films such as *To the Wonder* (USA, 2012) and *Knight of Cups* (USA, 2015) to either "overthink" the world or dissolve it into a muddy stream of impressions, many of which eddy into monotonous loops. With storytelling and characterization devalued, the lives onscreen shift from thoughtfulness to detachment—a typically depressed sense of discolored or disinterested observation. The divine now becomes a character in its own right rather than an inner struggle or implicit presence. But what right do artists have in representing the divine, even when there is a concerted effort at religious neutrality? The divine is fundamentally unrepresentable, no matter how close an artist feels to it or—god forbid—like it.

"philosophy" ought to be exclusive to it alone, and furthermore that part of the "art" of philosophy is to perceive patterns throughout the landscape of human inquiry and resist the complete withdrawal into the reigning standards of abstract thought. Such habituation can stall philosophy right in its tracks, rendering it grossly technical and fixated on what it perceives to be its own problems, the solution of which only professional philosophers—and perhaps only those of a certain school of thought—would be interested in.

Cavell's sudden yet retrospective plunge into the extreme audiovisual splendor and "worldhood aesthetics" of *Days of Heaven*, and the ensuing inspiration (not without scholarly reservation or self-consciousness before a film studies audience) to deploy a signature series of remarks from Heidegger on the original Greek understanding/experience of Being, remarks which are deemed to have an ideal and perhaps unprecedented realization on film, is worth sharing here in full. The block quote begins with Cavell's set-up of the Malick-Heidegger comparison and ends with an interpretation that never ceases to ignite my philosophical interest in film.

> The particular mode of beauty of these [*Days of Heaven's*] images somehow invokes a formal radiance which strikes me as a realization of some sentences from Heidegger's *What Is Called Thinking?* (Harper Torchback, 1972).

> > When we say "Being," it means "Being of beings." When we say "beings," it means "beings in respect of Being.". . . The duality is always a prior datum, for Parmenides as much as for Plato, Kant as much as for Nietzsche. . . . An interpretation decisive for Western thought is that given by Plato. . . . Plato means to say: beings and Being are in different places. Particular beings and Being are differently located. (p. 227)

> > According to Plato, the idea constitutes the Being of a being. The idea is the face whereby a given something shows its form, looks at us, and thus appears, for instance, as this table. In this form, the thing looks at us. . . . Now Plato designates the relation of a given being to its idea as participation. (p. 222)

> > The first service man can render is to give thought to the Being of beings. . . . The word [being] says: presence of what is present. (p. 235)

> > The presence we described gathers itself in the continuance which causes a mountain, a sea, a house to endure and, by that duration, to lie before us among

other things that are present. . . . The Greeks experience such duration as a luminous appearance in the sense of illumined, radiant self-manifestation. (p. 237)

If Malick has indeed found a way to transpose such thoughts for our meditation, he can have done it only, it seems to me, by having discovered, or discovered how to acknowledge, a fundamental fact of film's photographic basis: that objects participate in the photographic presence of themselves; they participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearances. 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. Then if in relation to objects capable of such self-manifestation human beings are reduced in significance, or crushed by the fact of beauty left vacant, perhaps this is because in trying to take dominion over the world, or in aestheticizing it (temptations inherent in the making of film, or of any art), they are refusing their participation with it.[38]

Cavell's return to Heidegger through Malick is no longer the improbable, esoteric gesture it once was in the early 70's when Cavell was led outside of philosophy—by film, into film—as a way of reconsidering or reformatting old metaphysical questions and skeptical problematics as an ordinary language philosopher. Today the philosophical perspective on Being, whose resonance in language grows faint yet finds itself rejuvenated in the language of the image, strikes me as timeless and increasingly pressing in our technological age. And the capacity for movies—for poetic artistry but also the modernist acknowledgment of ontology—to expose beings through the light of the world and invoke the Being of beings in the form, say, of formless overexposure and beauty, remains in constant conflict with the equal capacity to offer a seemingly inexhaustible mode of escape from what concerns us most as earthbound beings. This tension in our experience of film between contemplation and escapism, between the world in its own image and the world in our image (as I am so fond of saying), between the world *of* a film and the world *in* a film (again very fond), between the participatory equality of beings and the human beings who substitute dominion for participation (this makes me slightly uncomfortable…), is at work in the creation and reception of practically *all* films accepted as such, though of course the degree of palpability will vary immensely and is sometimes nil.

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[38] Ibid., pp. xv–xvi.

In an attempt to recover ancient Greek thinking on the experience of Being, Heidegger suggests that Being is "the illumined radiant self-manifestation of beings."[39] Being, then, is intrinsic to beings, constituting the ground of beings—the dwelling of beings—rather than presiding over the realm of beings from above and beyond as in the concept of the Platonic form. Thinking through the uncanny familiarity of Being, Heidegger engages in many different modes of conceptual formulation, but the tone or mood is always the same: nostalgia for a past age that is lost or no longer ours to remember—we must relearn how to be in the world by listening for the call of Being. Presumably the call of Being is constant and imperishable, hence the "muffledness" or "murkiness" or "inaudibleness" ought to be the result of our remoteness and foreignness to Being rather than the other way around. So it is a matter of listening, of retraining ourselves to become the beings we are as opposed to the selves or subjects we think we are. The difference between the concepts of "Dasein" and "subject" is perhaps analogous to the difference between being and non-being, or between presence and absence. And since Being for Heidegger is a question and not a fact, a problem as opposed to a possibility, our estrangement from Being has made a mystery of the facts.

Now for Cavell, introducing *The World Viewed* to a new generation of readers, it is possible for a film to stir these sorts of thoughts, to scare up the fundamental question of Being in Heidegger's unparalleled understanding of it, along with our mystification towards Being in our growing inability to think our existence in terms of the nature of existence itself. Apparently a particular film, a so-called narrative film directed towards a so-called general audience, not only brings all this philosophy to mind but does so in such a way that it brings it *to life*, raising its stakes, finding its forms, *enacting* it. Cavell does with *Days of Heaven* what Heidegger does with Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes*. For Cavell the Heideggerean aspect of Malick's aesthetics is apparent *for him*, of course, as a philosopher reawakened in the realm of film studies where one of the fundamental concepts of metaphysics is no mere concept, devoid of the dust which accrues over the ancient forms of philosophy and makes so much discourse hostile to the touch and immune to renewed appropriations. But to set this methodological idiosyncrasy aside and honor the force of Cavell's brief yet powerfully pointed demonstration, the film in question through what he calls its

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[39] This definition is useful only as a way of learning about the history of Being, something fit for a philosophy lecture, for in reality Being can't be defined independently of a live encounter. A live encounter *with "it"*? Again, our words fall short or stand too tall.

"formal radiance" can be seen to function as a realization of what Heidegger believed was confined primarily if not solely to the province of language. The film does so precisely because Malick, despite knowing some philosophy (perhaps Heidegger above all else), does not construct formal radiance or undertake the complex task of aesthetic realization *as* a philosopher nor in the *name* of philosophy. It cannot even be said that he does these things—assuming he does indeed do them the way Cavell believes he has done so; only criticism, not speculation, will tell—in the name of *film*, for Cavell's inspiration here (the experience upon which his recollections of Heidegger's rarified meditations strike him out of the blue, or in the majestic dark of the movie theater) is not directed towards anything particular in the film—that is why he calls his reading a "fragmentary reading of a whole film, […] a prescription of such a reading."[40] Rather it is, I think, the *particularity of the medium of film itself*, put to work within this particular film called *Days of Heaven*, that Cavell understands Malick to have enabled, as if effortlessly (I mean, by virtue of an automatism for which the aesthetic constitutes an act of acknowledgment). And by enabling or activating such a fundamental and vital aspect of the medium (its capacity to view the world in its own image, to let beings be, to participate in the self-manifestation of beings without discriminating against those human beings who prefer to watch), Cavell's "Malick" discovers within the ontology of film a metaphysical orientation towards Being by way of the particular beings whose singular appearance the medium of film makes possible. The appearance of effortlessness, derived from the empowerment of cinematic automatism, is also crucial to the experience of images and sounds that show what moving images of the world do, in fact, that is ontologically, *show*: the persisting presence of things and a presencing leached into "faciality"—Heidegger calls the object-as-face "illumined radiant self-manifestation"—around which our words, our poetry and philosophy, can merely dance and all too rarely stop in deference. Of course, I should not say that our words *merely* dance and defer, for it is the fact of things, the Being of beings, whose dance is merely a dance. Things merely are—so why create an image of that? How can an image recreate and not just capture? But this line of questioning may miss the point entirely, and I do not believe that this is what Cavell says is going on. Let's try again: What is the value of *images of* "the world in its own image"? What is the purpose of an *art* generated (by an artist, naturally, though an artist whose interest in the medium could almost be called "scientific") out of

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[40] Ibid., p. xiv.

pure "artless" automatism, an art featuring fictional worlds in a form that is presumably the very antithesis to fiction?

Here is my reading of Cavell on Heidegger on Malick, a reading of what I will call Cavell's original yet unfinished "intuition" (for which the tuition in this case may not actually be demonstrable or amenable to logical argumentation). In *Days of Heaven*—but also in *Badlands* or *The Thin Red Line* (more on this later) or other "metaphysical films" by other filmmakers (well-versed or not in philosophy), all depending on how the film as a whole, or perhaps only in part, strikes the viewer as constellating the ontology of film, the world in its own image, and the metaphysics of Being—Malick sets the stage, theatrically speaking, while at the same time putting on the play and as part of what the play is about: *setting* (noun and verb). His authorship carries a significant degree of servility, as is the case with modernist aesthetics more generally.[41] It's as if the film never ceases to set itself up and so set itself to work, as in Heidegger's understanding of the origin of the work of art discussed in the previous chapter.

Heidegger's metaphor for such a gesture, which I see as marking the difference between internal self-reflexivity and authorial self-consciousness, is "the clearing" and the acts of "clearing up" or "clearing away." In the end there is always a recognizable and absorbing "play" whose events hold our attention, but this play onscreen known as the screenplay does not appear staged so much as set in the world through contemplative yet at the same time ephemeral combinations of long, medium and close shots. More importantly, the narrative does not undermine or overpower the world-stage itself—in this case the luminous radiant self-manifestation of the cinematic screen—rather it is fundamentally inextricable from a profound sense of time and space; it reveals the world like a bridge joining remote land masses or a river flowing through various communities of life (human affairs are perfectly natural if seen from a distance and through a perspective of indifference). In theater, a stage is described as being set *for* a play. Even if the play is just the empty stage (imagine a theater inspired by the music of John Cage), the stage is still set for that purpose, for that particular—and no doubt peculiar—play. But in film there is no stage; the world is, or can be, the stage, and it is always set—never a dull moment. To activate the medium and

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[41] See Cavell's excursus chapter "Some Modernist Painting," in *The World Viewed*, pp. 108-18. It turns out that what film does automatically is not unique to film but rather to modernism, though film may be unique insofar as it is *born modern*. The method of this excursus has a touch of madness in it, but if ever a digression from one's main line of thought, or "argument," were justified and, in retrospect, proved vital to a course reaching its end (for in philosophy, the shortest distance between two points is often a shortcut), this is it.

perhaps even trigger the development of his art (artful artlessness), the filmmaker swayed by this modernist impulse may opt to *do nothing*, that is, to set the stage of the world through the medium of film by engaging the medium's revelatory automatisms, a method in defiance of using the medium on terms established by another (more established) artform (i.e. theater or literature). And so, this "doing nothing" may require doing *everything*.[42] In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger insists "[T]his 'letting' is nothing passive but a doing in the highest degree in the sense of *thesis*, a 'working' and 'willing' which . . . is characterized as the 'existing human being's entrance into and compliance with the unconcealedness of Being.'"[43] And in Heidegger's discussions of the poetry of Rilke and Hölderlin, in order for the poet to heed the call of Being and in the process repair or redeem our estranged relationship with Being, he or she will find a way, every time anew, to bring out the being of language, language being the very house of Being. But as for the filmmaker with poetic aspirations in this sense, I am tempted to say that his language must be fundamentally a *non-language* of sorts, the non-language of cinema: "physical reality as such" (Panofsky), "the world as a whole" (Cavell), "the world in its own image" (Bazin), "the presence of an absence" (Cavell again), "the unconcealedness of Being" (Heidegger), etc.[44] Cavell's (Heideggerian) philosophical interest in Malick's (Heideggerian) aesthetic investment in the ontology of film marks a mutual concern for the question of Being that is felt to be restated, at long last, by light itself (perhaps the form and material of Being); and this hermeneutic constellation can yield the discovery that every shot in a film, not just initial shots or "once upon a time" shots, can be cultivated into an *establishing shot*. A film whose images, each in their own way and under a different aspect, are permitted to establish or re-establish the world along the

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[42] Malick, for example, filmed only during the twilight "magic hour" moments, setting the film in this brief, special and evasive light-interval, even though the script rarely indicates a time more specific than the conventional "day" or "night" scenario. See Terrence Malick, *Days of Heaven: An Original Screenplay* (Hollywood: Script City, 1976).

[43] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 82-3.

[44] Panofsky's metaphysical figuration of the cinema is noteworthy as a visitor from the field of art history where medium is traditionally conceived as "message" over "machine," with reality appearing no longer as a model to be adhered to, expressed, or altogether abandoned, but the very *substance* out of which art is to be made. His critique of films which "prestylize" reality implies that artistic expression will function best through a dialogue with cinema's ontological grammar of the real. For an art historian, the "canvas" of film is the very room in which the painter works—canvas, model, paints, studio disarray, phone calls, food, the orderly view of the street or countryside humming through the window. Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," in *Three Essays on Style*, ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.), pp. 122-3.

montage edge of the cut, perhaps these successive acts of world-bearing can function as a whole to create a world in the Bazinian sense, transforming the grave and deadly noun into the butterfly verb—yet another Heideggerian coinage—"worlding."[45]

In *Days of Heaven* (I continue to speak of the film, as Cavell does, in a somewhat absolute and fragmentary way), through many of the images and sounds in the film and with the film itself as a solid if luminous work of art, Malick attempts the rescue of things from mere "objectness." A thing in the world which does not come to presence as an object, in part because there is no subject to reduce it to a thing, a thing which has been rescued from the routine regime of objectification, could be said to have a face: we may see it as having foreground importance, if we so choose. What may be tools or signs or banalities or toys for the characters remain and radiate onscreen as real presences for the spectators. As we have seen, Cavell expresses this phenomenon tactfully and with imagination, in a manner that captures the deep subtleties of the great albeit inconspicuous cinematic rescue when he writes of the look—the looking-back quality—of such objects: "[they] participate in the photographic presence of themselves; they participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearances."[46] All forms of life, human and non-human, and all things, animate and inanimate, are seen as being approached directly yet with a sense of care reminiscent of caution, not too close and not too far, within an ideal range and never lingering. Letting things be involves letting them go, and so no shot feels *held*. (The attempt, more important than the successful or unsuccessful result, to "let things be" is also mirrored in the attempt to let the images be: they wash over us, bathe the soul, and drain away.) Like birdwatching, to rescue "thingliness" from "objectness" avoids scaring the thing back into its "object shell." For example, to single out an object via close-up is akin to bordering up the shot—both yield fragmentation and a sense of isolation from the whole. The hollow "object shell" would be a projection of the pointed "subject source" for whom such objects are governed solely by use and are thus in a sense interchangeable (and Descartes shall be credited or accused with

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[45] See "The Worldhood of the World" (Section 3, Division 1) in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 91-148. But my favorite transformation of the word "world" from noun to verb occurs in Heidegger's essay on language where he analyzes the summoned presence of things in Georg Trakl's poem "A Winter Evening," slowly building (thinking) from the poetic animation of things to that of the world: "Thinging, things are things. Thinging, they gesture—gestate—world." Heidegger, "Language," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 197.

[46] I find it interesting that Cavell, in one of his most ambitious expressions of the ontology of film, reaches out for, while also appearing to inherit, Bazin's commitment to the term "recreation" at the very moment when cinematic representation could be dismissed as nothing more than a mere copy of reality.

being the first to turn the subject into an object for the sake of epistemological certainty). The sense of a thing appearing in the form of an object, that is, on display and therefore dead, while perhaps giving us the edge over the world in terms of maintaining mastery over it, is also a disease and disenchantment of our living connection to the world and others and ourselves—a blighting and perhaps even a paralyzing of our will, a spoiling of the emancipated earth alive for the first time after the death of God. So to rescue the thing from mere "objectness" is to rescue the self from mere "subjectness"—from the crippling weight of the self-sufficient self. (Why, after all, do we shake our heads instead of help those who come of age after the death of God and who end up naturally worshiping themselves?) For the filmmaker, the first and most important step in poetically rescuing, in the Heideggerian sense, the time and space of the world from the time and space of man-made action and event, is to rescue the camera from a machine that records the world to a medium that creates the world by revealing it. The terms of this creation-revelation may ultimately feed into an act of *decreation*, the poetry of clearing, an aesthetics of establishment. I then want to describe the camera—the mimetic machine which became a creative instrument— metaphorically as the "fresh start" of consciousness. The world is *there* before we begin to gaze upon it, a fact which the camera helps us to recall, training us to meet the world halfway; and that world, the world that is already and always there, becomes the *felt world* in the "mind's eye of camera consciousness."[47]

To conclude this chapter, I use Cavell's brief encounter with *Days of Heaven* as inspiration for my own reading of the remarkable way in which the world comes to presence onscreen in the fullness of its otherness, as if eyes are being laid upon it for the first time. I pay close attention to how the film is deeply immersed in its own setting—set in the world like a precious stone—and how the storyline is rendered cyclical. The figures which tell the film's metaphysical story are as follows: earth and sky, horizon and house, horizontality and verticality, the face-like presence of things. Cavell's is an admittedly fragmentary reading which I undertake to expand through an analysis or "translation" of the film's metaphysical style with respect to the concept of world, the world in its own image, and cinematic world-dependence.

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[47] When I refer to the camera as "conscious" I am giving credence to its automatism, of course, but I am also projecting the camera's automatism *into* the images I experience onscreen. I know these images are the work of conscious beings and yet my experience of the recreation of the world in its own image transforms human consciousness into mechanical consciousness.

In *Days of Heaven* migrant workers arrive at a farm designated by a house at the center of an ocean of wheat. It is summer time and harvest time in the Texas Panhandle. The poor workers work, play and sleep outside; the rich farmer looks on from his house—he is both lucky and lonely for that. But the film is not interested in exploring these differences and inequalities; in fact, it seems largely indifferent to them. Rich or poor, protected from the elements or directly exposed to them, the film's sense of the world remains, in a word,

Figure 17. Migrant workers arrive at a farm designated by a house at the center of an ocean of wheat: *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978).

"beautiful," regardless of the perspectives of the characters or the narrative circumstances in which they live and die. This project of beautification is not only aesthetic but also ontological: the sights and sounds which strike us as beautiful—formally radiant in Cavell's terms—are the result or "fruit" of the world recreated in its own image, the principle of which I have already expressed as an aesthetic concentration upon the world *of* the film in addition to the world *in* the film. This concentration separates these two worlds and shows the former to belong to the medium of film rather than the discourse of fiction. But the world in its own image will appear beautiful when it is shown to shatter the illusion of separateness, that is, the illusion of the world in *our* image, an illusion out of which metaphysical films light the way.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the world of *Days of Heaven* does not *begin* beautiful. It opens on an urban atmosphere defined by industry, competition, poverty and environmental disaster; dingy, noisy, almost back and white. A tall smokestack asserts the vertical demeanor of human civilization and conquest; it resembles a derrick sucking out the life from the ground below, which looks almost swampy and certainly poisoned. After a heated altercation between Bill (Richard Gere) and the foreman of the steel mill, ironically drowned out by the brutal bangs and clangs of the mill in relentless action, a burst of violence from Bill causes him to flee in panic towards a white light diffused by thick smoke. As he sprints for the nearest exit we hear the voiceover of his young sister Linda (Linda Manz), speaking in the past tense—yet as if it were all still so present to her—about a romantic yet arduous life of wandering, looking and searching for things unnamed, for possibilities for the poor and disenfranchised classes of society. The next shot

dramatically establishes the film's horizontal configuration with a train gliding across a bridge, perfectly suspended against the clear blue sky with the land on either side invisible, releasing charming wisps of smoke that seem to adorn nature in fine drapery. The striking beauty of this particular image is also enhanced through counterpoint with what has come before (the suffocating ruin of extraction and exploitation) and anticipation of what lies ahead—a promising, dream-filled gateway to what will become the film's spontaneous and ecstatic retreat into nature, that is, into a world which seems to be in order even if human relations remain fraught with deceit and injustice.

Figures 18, 19 and 20. The film shifts from a vertical urbanity to a horizontal passage into nature: Days of Heaven (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978).

One of Heidegger's many teachings is that to dwell in the world *makes* a world. How does the presence of people onscreen turn an image into a world? There is a chemistry between earth and sky that the act of human dwelling itself orchestrates, a chemistry which goes by the name "horizon" where earth and sky touch at infinity, the touch being the *finite* apprehension of the infinite. In *Days of Heaven*—days which refer to time spent on the farm, deep in the Panhandle, in a nature rendered habitable by the ancient practice of agriculture—the world in its own image delivers "image-buildings" comprised of earth and sky, enclosed by the horizon, housing people and animals and insects. Out here, images are built from the bottom up, earth before sky, horizontality giving way to verticality, most vividly in the figure of the farmer's house; and if we examine closely the base of some of these frames, a thin and airy foreground of tousled wheat rises quietly up from the earth, gently scratching the very footing of the image's standing, suggesting that the firm ground of the earth has something sky-like or watery about it, that the home base of Being is rife with the activity of Becoming. But as a metaphysical rule, as it were, earth precedes sky and thus gives way to it, receding away *and* extending above, because human dwelling stands rather than crawls on the earth, and this standing is a movement between body and mind, feet on the ground and head in the clouds, that is, until we lay to rest—in sleep or in death. The cinematic order of the gaze, the falling-rising procession and horizon-based calibration, is an architecture of

generalized awareness, a series of measurements which recreate the world in its own image, tailoring the elements each time into a sense of the world as a whole.

Almost every image in the film provides room for the relationship between earth and sky through the camera's positioning relative to, and persistent following of, the horizon. Rarely do we find an image of all earth or all sky. Rather, Malick and his team of cinematographers[48] rely on the horizon to determine where the two planes should meet, that is, where earth and sky should give way to each other in a temporary—and also illusory—reconciliation of their permanent staying apart. We look down and see the earth, we look up and see the sky, we stare straight ahead and follow both receding away in an image depicting their mythical betrothal, an endless movement towards a unity amidst the heavenly embrace of the infinite.

I notice an image where the earth touches the sky very close to the top of the frame. Bill and Abby (Brooke Adams), the lovers disguised as siblings, are together in a field after a long day's work. In the fading twilight, Bill is lying down watching Abby perform cartwheels. The camera follows her movements by panning to the left. While panning, the visibility of the earth's exchange into sky at the top of the frame, near its edge, is carefully maintained. Thus the camera movement resembles an act of *tracing*—panning as tracing. We can attribute this panning action to the flat form of the earth's presence on the prairie plains where space is spread out across the

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[48] In any privileging of the auteur, be it methodological or habitual or adulatory, it seems to me necessary, at least where the art of cinematic realization is concerned, that both filmmaker and cinematographer be simultaneously acknowledged. Where the logistics of production history are left out or remain unknown, the idea of the "auteur" ought to refer to both parties in such instances. However, with respect to aesthetic continuities which span instances, unless collaborations remain identical, the filmmaker him or herself shall take the primary credit. I also pause here to further complicate the singularity and stability of the filmmaker as auteur. *Days of Heaven*, ground-breaking and somewhat notorious in its subliming of the natural world, was filmed by two cinematographers in succession, in circumstances that cannot be described as part of the plan. The older and more traditional Néstor Almendros was relieved by the younger vérité-inspired Haskell Wexler due to scheduling as opposed to artistic conflicts and in the absence of any "master plan" on the part of Malick to merge the two distinct sensibilities. On the contrary, Wexler claims to have pursued aesthetic consistency at all costs by successfully mimicking Almendros' cinematographic work. Where Malick stood in all this is completely unknown and almost beyond speculation, an issue that is not just due to his persistent silence. In my own experience as a filmmaker, directors are involved in the cinematography and cinematographers can do a lot of directing, sometimes more than the director when the realization of the image is reduced to a routine set of technicalities. Detailed accounts of directing experiences—from directors *and* cinematographers—are always welcome. On matters of artistic intent and overall procedure, Malick has remained stubbornly silent, as if he gave up his "talk the walk" tongue when he gave up philosophy for art. Since he refuses to defend himself I shall speculate that he was not, or knew himself not to be, a sound fit for philosophy, or at least for the dominant modes of philosophy as practiced in the United States at the time.

horizontality of its opened expanse. In adherence to the shape of space, the camera receives the fullness of the world's horizontal character by tracing-out, in a taking-of-measure, the topographical dimensions of the environment. If for instance Malick had chosen to frame the image *below* the horizon, thus *upon* the earth, we would not be mistaken in identifying Abby's right to left movement to be the reference point for the corresponding movement of the camera. In any case, even with the horizon deliberately framed, the almost indiscernible thinness relative to the imposing bulk of the earth makes the image appear as if the motions of the camera were conceived entirely with respect to Abby and not the horizon. Yet if we examine the relational structure of this image more closely and carefully, we may find ourselves wanting to ask the question of why the filmmakers visually insist on preserving the frame of the horizon so close to the upper limit of the film frame, thus creating a kind of rhyme between horizon line and frame line. Let's see what happens by keeping our attention firmly fixed on the outer limits of the diegesis, moving quietly with the camera along the rails of this erratic sliver of depicted horizon at the top of the frame.[49]

During the course of Abby's first pair of cartwheels, the camera can be seen tracing a line across the horizon while following the acrobatic movements of the vertically oriented being. This is, again, significant because horizontality along with verticality constitute the film's most fundamental metaphysical motifs: together they are architectural harmony, as in post and lintel or the bridge over water, and primordial strife, say between participation and domination, going with

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[49] We may also want to ask to what extent the frame of a moving image of the world constitutes its *own* horizon where the on and off-screen, pictorial and aural, synchronous and asynchronous soundtracks are negotiated. What this points to is the specificity and selectivity of the frame itself, a physical decisiveness which balances a series of shifts of expansion and retraction. The cinematic frame, belonging neither to picture or sound, contains within its coming and going, holding and hiding, and also seeing and hearing, an image's method of allocation in "perceiving" the world. The pure decision and resolve of an image horizon can lead us to consider what the picture is doing to itself in order not to be swayed by sound, and conversely, the precautions of sound against a noisy seepage into picture. In a way that illuminates the relationship between earth and sky, image horizon can foreground secret exchanges between the visible and invisible, audible and inaudible, exchanges which constitute the "habitability" of such images.

the flow and against the grain of life—the human being as a pointy rock jutting out of the stream of life, or the stream of life swelling into a plague of locusts.

Figures 21, 22 and 23. A visual rhyme between the horizon line and the film's frame line; the camera follows Abbey by tracing the movement of the horizon: *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978).

At this point it's still safe to assume that Abby's centered position in the shot, determined by her central character subjectivity in the story and vertical prowess, is in control of the camera. However, in the midst of her third and final cartwheel, the camera while following her reaches a slight shift in the landscape's horizontal and "horizonal" flow—the gradual beginnings of a slight drop in the horizon's linear trajectory. Now, interestingly (to me), it is near this exact "spatial moment" where Abby suddenly veers from her path of play, away from the camera and further into the depths of image. Both shifts in line—human and horizon, vertical and horizontal—make subtle yet separate claims on camera consciousness, which means an act of *re-framing* (rethinking?) is likely to occur in response to one of these claims. So far and without surprise, it is the character of Abby who presents the more persuasive pictorial case, and if Malick were to be successfully convinced we would see the image of her movements adjust to her adjustment and remain more or less bound to the pivotal line of human affairs commanding the stage of the world. In other words, with Abby's slight swerving action we could expect a quick counter-adjustment from the camera, a reframing and refocusing, a reaction of following and adherence, a storytelling (i.e. human) response to persons, perhaps in the form of a sharp upward tilt of the camera. However, this camera response does not commence and Abby, therefore, is not *adhered to* the way human agents typically direct camera movement in the movies. To lessen her pictorial status even more we see the very opposite occur—a sharp *downward* tilt seemingly without motivation. Of what, we may ask, is the camera conscious in this case? To the horizonal line of the world in its own image, to the soft claim of the lowering land, to the succession of vanishing points in the distance which mark the retreat of earth and sky while measuring the contours of the world's elemental enclosure. During Abby's third and final cartwheel the horizon spills down, opening the sky and challenging the earth. The lip of sky above the land is the minimum amount needed to

constitute the upper-half of the horizon's straight line. Therefore, it is not the sky per se that is filmed, but the sky-in-horizon, that is, *sky-in-transition*, the air structure of the sky itself. This subtle, almost unnoticeable downward camera move is by no means trivial: such a micro-gesture returns the role of the horizon in the image to one of maintaining perceptual guidance, enclosure outdoors, and a sense of cosmic homeostasis or a holding together of the elements. In adhering to the horizon rather than the human, Malick acknowledges a fundamental fact of film's photographic basis: earth and sky are object-planes or discrete fields that, as part of the story of their self-manifestation, recede to a point in the distance which cannot be objectified—the vanishing point where a sense of the infinite pervades—meeting in the presence of a disappearance which also thematizes the presence of absences onscreen. And without the verticality of human beings, the self-manifesting story of the horizon babbles on about infinity and teases us with the possibility of there being a comprehensible end in sight.

As mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, in the midst of nature, at the center of the film's recreation of the world in its own image, stands in complete and utter solitude the farmer's grand and impeccable house. Once Bill, Abby and Linda leave Chicago and reach the open fields of the Texas Panhandle by train (an expressive figure for the horizontal world they are about to enter), it seems to me that without the house as *vertical* structure—this sprout of civilization, symbol of cultivation, eye of the storm of human suffering—the primary and peripheral characters would remain in a nomadic state, forever meandering along wide ranges of horizonal flatness, and perhaps the film itself would dissolve into a stream of impressions and wander about aimlessly in search of its subject matter. Without the *Days of Heaven* house, the mammoth dwelling of nature would remain unchecked and frictionless; the horizon's perfectly even tug-of-war between earth and sky would have nothing to enclose; and without such enclosures—such vertical breaks or buoys in the swell of space—human beings tend to scatter and the social fabric misses a vital stitch.

Figure 24. The metaphysical anchor of the house: *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978).

There would also be no wheat without the house, for the wheat has been grown just as the house has been built—again, vertically. Politically, the house (and the equally solitary and presiding gate, symbolic of property limits without insisting on them through the use of a fence) turns this piece of land into something that is owned, into a territory, an industrial operation, a protective if alienating home for the rich and *plein air* barracks for the poor. Ontologically, as if holding the world in/of the film in place, the house strikes me as a footbridge between humans and nature, a primary coordinate of culture. Aesthetically, it also functions as an axis for the camera to orient itself in space, setting up the film's metaphysical perspective and providing the characters, not to mention the filmmakers and viewers, with *a logic of position*, quite literally a "home base" by which to frame and venture into life. Time and again we see it looming in the depths of the background as a reminder of how these people, mostly strangers to each other, have gathered together in the house of nature, and why the house of nature, for humans, cannot go completely astray from what we call civilization. The togetherness of house and nature is so symbiotic that if you removed *that* house the film would go dark, and so I am tempted to say the house makes possible the making of images, illuminates the world of the film like a blaze burning in the middle of nowhere. In the following example, to remove *this* house would be to remove *this* image. As in the previous examples of earth, sky and horizon—all figures of cinematic world-dependence—I

ask you to consider the significance of a completely minor detail, crucial yet bound to be overlooked when our experience of the world *in* the film eclipses the metaphysical register of the world *of* the film. The inclusion of the house, which is no doubt part of the *mise en scène*, is not reducible to this concept of meaningful pictorial organization, for the inclusion constitutes a dependency on this figure, say for the sake of fact as opposed to effect. Let us watch how *mise en scène* recreates by being answerable to, rather than speaking for, the world in its own image: a camera-consciousness that seeks out the house like the north star, leans toward it with hands outstretched to what is most familiar, and grounds the background rather than leaving it up to chance.

First, we see Linda splashing water onto a man in black who leans hunched over in front of a piled arrangement of barrels, a place for the workers to strip off the dirt and dust of the day's work. There are barrels flanking the right side of the frame and some slant inwards, obscuring the landscape save for a patch of clear blue sky in the top-left corner. As a chuckling Linda rapidly departs the cleaning station, the camera follows her or leaves with her, moving with her into the open field, thus opening the field and with it an intense swarm of people young and old tiring out in the piercing yet fading rays of the sun. This place of rest in the open plains is ruled by the unspoken fellowship of human beings, and the sense of togetherness is perfectly synchronized and insulated from the cool draft of solitude. Meeting Linda in this outside gathering is Abby who asks if her hands are clean. Behind them a man without a shirt towels his body dry. An off-white trailer tinged yellow by the hot sunset has its front door wide open. Children run after each other within a vague circle of adults. Two men, side by side, get to know one another. Open umbrellas stand in the ground and emerge out of the tall golden grass like giant mushrooms. Abby leads Linda into the sedated swarm of hungry workers who surround an ochre-colored trailer. They enter as Bill exits, and while crossing paths Bill gestures off-screen towards some place quiet to eat their supper. Moving now with Bill, from behind the trailer appears the farmer's house, alone in the distance, cut off from the melodious clamor, looking on, a non-mythological Xanadu which holds up its guard with sheer distance as opposed to iron gates. From this perspective it appears so small that one could pick it up and hold it, and yet its unassuming presence has the command and charge of a lighthouse. It enters the background of this tracking shot as if by accident, however as soon as it states its presence it seems to justify—if not possess—the image as a whole. There stirs a strange sense onscreen of a fundamental yet tangential source to all we see and hear, the house as the "sun"

of the film's global topography that the latter cannot afford to lose track of. The presence of the house on the horizon turns out to be a necessary condition for this dense and gently rippling scene of quiet human ordeal and temporary reprieve to emerge as it does. The filmmakers are aware of the importance of the house as a measure of the land, imposing arbitrary lines of property and symbolizing a higher power on earth: the power of the rich over the poor. Nucleic and seemingly sentient in the distance (the open eyes and persistent stare of a house), the realm stretched out between the house and our view is a *quilt of discernibility* over a natural world previously untutored, anonymous, and unmapped.

Figures 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30. A tracking shot finds its bearings when the house appears in the background: *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978).

The steady vigil of the manmade structure within unmade nature also brings to mind similar occasions in the film where the house *bears witness* to many essential happenings and most of the events of the narrative. The house makes a strict background appearance starting with the couple's arrival on the farm when Abby asks the foreman who lives in the house, and again quite strikingly when Bill and Abby rest by a haystack gently carpeted with snow, licking their wounds after an excruciatingly hard day's work. However, the house in these instances is more deliberately composed in the background, lodged to one side and illuminated from within in warm tungsten tones, looking ever so inviting and therefore amplifying the hardships of the homeless, whereas here the figure of the house *slips into the image*, bare or as it is, stripped of its customary pictorial gravity and grandeur. What looks to be a chance encounter, a kind of *mise en scène*

Figure 31. Bill and Abby rest by a haystack, the house looking on: *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1978).

stumbling, is then realized by Malick, or rather the camera operator, as a necessary intrusion on the frame, calling for spontaneous *reframing*. For once the film's style looks a bit taxed instead of calm as the tracking shot is occupied with the dual task of following both the human and metaphysical narratives of the film.

The specific unfolding of this moving image is now subject to the guardianship of the onlooking house. The casual persistence of Bill's forward movement keeps the house in the distance scrolling along comfortably. To let it slip off the frame-edge at this point would be the equivalent of bringing it down, and along with it the image as house. Consciously or unconsciously, the filmmakers respond to the sudden confrontation between Bill and another worker with a caution that infects the composition. Moments before the heated argument ensues, the camera "notices" Bill's walk increase in intensity—he looks down and quickens his pace. The camera responds accordingly, keeping the house on the far-right side of the image background as if anticipating the reaction delay such a spontaneous collision may impose. When the man finally delivers his snooping insult regarding the suspicious closeness of Bill and Abby, an incensed Bill stops abruptly, causing the camera to acknowledge his action while simultaneously keeping visible—keeping in mind—the house without which, to put it strongly, there is no film. During the confrontation, the house, which moments before stood far to the right, now stands on the far-left side, teetering on the edge of the frame, half erased. By slowing down the image at this point one can notice Bill continue his aggressive stretch towards the man, coaxing the camera to stretch with him, yet we also see the camera's "apprehension" through the encroaching disappearance of the house into the void offscreen (the house has a diegetic but no ontological existence outside the image, and excluding a weathervane the house makes no sound by which it may be imagined standing offscreen). The closest the house comes to being cut off by the narrative framing and disappearing completely is about one-quarter, at which point the filmmakers, in a sure act of intuitive or magnetic allegiance, nudge the camera ever so slightly to the left, thus reestablishing the house in full and making practical use of the sky as a strip of insulation to hold it in place. As a storyteller committed to the dramatic logic of the scene, yet as a filmmaker equally committed to the metaphysical logic of the world in its own image and thus to profilmic gestures of making, Malick all the while keeps the house in the background and in so doing *keeps the force of keeping*, reconciling the house *in* the image with the house *of* the image and perhaps also the people in the film with the people watching it.

The relatively lengthy tracking shot comes to a rest only when the presence of the house is rendered permanent. I have said that without the house the scene occurs without a place, that is, hypothetically and solely in terms of the narrative, with the audience forced to immerse themselves in the fictional space in order to give it the feeling of fact. There are established conventions—some so strong and binding as to function almost as aesthetic algorithms, for example continuity editing—by which screen space is legitimated in the absence of adequate buttressing from the real, so to speak. We sometimes say that works of art should be built to last, but a criterion of their lasting is their ability *to stand*, to display architectural integrity along with artistic quality. Films which honor their own conditions of possibility are in good structural condition, allowing fictions to rest on foundations and the foundations to permeate the fictions with facts.

What I hope to have illustrated by these examples of cinematic world-dependence is that the specific power of moving images of the world featuring "the world in its own image" lies in the banality and bareness, separateness and radical sense of reserve, of the depictions encountered onscreen, for these qualities represent what the world is like (so we imagine, so the myth goes) independently of our ideas about it. Perhaps this bareness in its beauty can bear the rich fruit of Being. Thus we can entertain the philosophical thought that the world-dependence of cinematic representation means that this medium can vividly attest to the mind-independence of the world as such. And while this independence or autonomy of the world is always relative to what we might think at any given time, the complete and utter deliverance or "thoughtlessness" of the cinematic referent functions as a reminder that the world is what *holds up*—and holds *us* up—regardless of our thoughts and actions (i.e. the thoughtfulness of framing or *mise en scène* or story worlds indebted to the world in its own image whether or not they acknowledge such a debt). Regarding this "holding up," the collision or battle of worldviews can yield the end of a way of life, but as for the end of "life itself" politics must yield to religious theories or sentiments of apocalypse, no fervency of which can do the work of bringing the world to an end. Again, the world holds up and cinema holds it up for all to see.

With our minds constantly projecting, thought as the light by which we sense our way about; and being brought up in a certain culture, speaking certain languages, thinking and feeling and remembering and dreaming—our lives are themselves projections of the past which fill the screen of the present while forcing consciousness to filter out most of the light; and because of how complex we are, a complexity which consciousness whittles down to the "Here and Now" or

"I and Thou," we are bound to forget what the moving image embodies as its own unique metaphysics: the world exists independently of us, it has existed before we were born and it will outlive us, and even though we can never completely escape ourselves that doesn't mean "the self" is self-sufficient.

Chapter Three

Viral Metaphysics, Language Therapy, and the Antidotes of Art

Ludwig Wittgenstein's demonstrative or "hands on" critique of metaphysics is at its core fundamentally conscience based. His non-systematic, "felt" critiques in the *Philosophical Investigations* hinge on the suspicion, or perhaps even the paranoia, that human beings are susceptible to nonsense at every turn of phrase, and that this chronic susceptibility is the result of a gross misunderstanding (i.e. abuse, violence, perversion) of the grammatical integrity or "homeostasis" of meaning within our very own language. In this view language is more than a means of communicating or, in the case of different languages opposed to each other, more than an obstacle to communication—it is our essential home, our form of life as Wittgenstein says, from which philosophy has a tendency to run away in search of a dream. Even after the philosophical consequences of the Nietzschean epiphany of the death of God and our gradual acceptance of the fact that all values are manmade including the facts, which for Wittgenstein are the only "things" in the so-called "world," our language is such that it can be used—and is all too often routinely misused—to outstretch its own grammatical logic and boundaries of sense for what amounts to metaphysical ends. This is a picture of metaphysics as the loosening of language's ends, so to speak. Though we may have earned the right to declare "God is dead" or "truths are tainted" or "essences enslave," in intellectual contexts and increasingly now in more quotidian contexts, the grammatical form of our propositions may not follow suit, and we may still write/speak more often than not as if nothing revolutionary has happened. What we know remains steeped in belief unless we can see knowledge through in our actions, starting with speech-acts, which for Wittgenstein have significant implications for what one might call the morality of meaning.

The exemplary non-discursive critiques of the *Investigations* are motivated by concern for the health of our linguistic form of life. As the observations and insights mount, the book paints a highly variegated, precise yet impressionistic portrait of human beings who live on this earth, speak various languages, and thrive amidst a constant stream of casualties, while factoring in the human tendency to take and keep positions as habits of thought, the inescapable strain of maintaining equilibrium in our immediate actions and long-term plans (Aristotle called it the difficulty of striking the bull's eye of the good), and a sense in which the human form of life as defined by language wants so much to live elsewhere, always fighting with the limitations of

grammar and repudiating the fundamental sociality imbued in what seem like the most private introspections. In other words, our speech, especially when philosophically inclined as a search for "truth" or for foundations to support our convictions, is a frantic reaching for words rather than a casual resting upon them; and when we manage to speak with great conviction, that is, when our speech is not the mere rehearsal of thought, which is a rarity, there lurks the wish to speak the very things which make us go silent. Perhaps above all we find ourselves wishing we knew more, that our mouths could open on their own when the right words send an irrepressible shockwave, for a way to transcend the finitude of our humanity without having to cross the threshold of our daily life, an infinite threshold as it turns out.

Wittgenstein offers for us the following prescription: that language be brought back from its metaphysical to its everyday grammatical and contextual use, this and only this if we are to understand one another and ourselves, achieve a sense of community and a self-consciousness that is not defined in opposition to community. The indictment of the field most responsible for the spread of nonsense—philosophy and its lust for totalities of power in what it calls "metaphysics"—has vast implications for the humanistic fields of inquiry in general, implications which are unconditionally accepted and virtually delivered as dogma by Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey in their recent "prophylaxis against theory."[1] They take the view that to build a theory in the service of explaining humanistic phenomena partakes of the intellectual disease of metaphysical thinking. While I endorse this reading of Wittgenstein's linguistic turn as a method for overturning metaphysics within the everyday, I suggest a counter-reading to the effect that the human tendency to turn away from language (i.e. to explain rather than describe, to stretch common sense and thus flirt with nonsense) can be justifiably precipitated, even warranted, by the equally human turn towards the experience of art and its capacity to give form to the linguistically or conceptually formless. Art gives form, that is to say, art establishes the possibility for meaning (i.e. intention, expression, interpretation), by drawing a line between itself and the world, interjecting the everyday consciousness of world, opening a concrete sense of world-within-world—in the case of film, by means of, in reference to, or as inspired by, the world as such—an expressive and humanized "world" that cannot be spoken but can certainly (albeit not necessarily *with* certainty)

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[1] See Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey, "Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy: A Prophylaxis against Theory," in *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, ed. Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-34.

be shown, a "world formation" the appearance of which is not destined to be understood with clarity as encountered with intensity and, as is often the case, silently. In the end the linguistic turn of analytical philosophy cannot escape the presence of non-linguistic "languages," in other words artworks which communicate non-conceptually, "monologically," and often according to rules of their own making/unmaking. They harbor the power to inspire, stifle, and perhaps dispossess what is ordinary, full proof and fluent about language in context, in part because we grant them this power over us and seek out an experience of meaning that is non-habitual and more finely attuned to intuition, which also likes to make its own rules, finding itself unruled by reason in the practical spheres of everyday life.

My primary example for this argument is Gilles Deleuze's discovery of the material activation of metaphysical concepts within the ontology of film as laid out in his two-part study of cinema: *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*.[2] For Deleuze the medium of film is not a cold mediation of nature, nor a purely crystalline revelation of nature, but rather an artform whose practitioners can phrase their creations *in terms of nature*: light, shadow and movement, the primal conditions of space and time: to film nature or the world in its natural state and explore contemporary conditions of life, assemble these recordings into a logic of sense (and in the pre-digital age in which Deleuze was writing, to occasionally alter the records after the fact), resulting in a continuous projection of images and sounds which bear the traces of their own nature as spatio-temporal recordings of creations. The medium in this sense is characterized by Deleuze as a kind of "spiritual automaton"[3] which processes nature by virtue of being constituted *by nature itself*, artificially transmitting or transferring images which are not the direct result of the autonomy of human consciousness and biology (though such a de-anthropomorphism may only serve to expand rather than altogether escape the realm of the human, to diversify rather than solidify cinema's "essence"). It is as if the cinema, for Deleuze, hence for philosophy (in the Cinema books, Deleuze is and remains a philosopher), could demonstrate to and perhaps stun philosophy with the possibility that a concept of nature exists independently of the concept and which need not be activated by the aims of culture (culture defined as a properly "human" affair). While Deleuze must have been familiar with the history of film theory, or of film theories, and recognized cinema

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[2] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986); *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
[3] See Chapters 7 and 10 in Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, pp. 156-88 and pp. 262-80.

to be a discourse in the structuralist sense, his interest in cinema is motivated primarily by Henri Bergson's metaphysics (i.e. time courses through the vessels of space, breathing new life into human consciousness with every beat of time) and André Bazin's "cine-metaphysics" (i.e. the photographic basis of cinema shepherds the presence of the world safely into its own image, negotiating a sublime transfer of Bergsonian *durée*).[4] In any case, such a perspective on the moving image makes possible the human entrapment and courting of metaphysics, albeit a metaphysics alien to the terms and conditions of our language and therefore philosophically crude or dumb—a metaphysics or metaphysical thinking that interprets cinema as an art rooted in nature, a culture of nature so to speak. I then go on to consider and evaluate the integrity of Jacques Rancière's critique of Deleuze, a critique embraced by many of Deleuze's critics and which evokes, at least to my mind, Wittgenstein's radical anti-essentialism in all walks of human intellectual life. But the efficacy of Rancière's critique of Deleuze's film-philosophy is itself a sign of conflicting language games, as it were, rather than conflicting philosophical perspectives over the possibility of a metaphysics at work in the medium of film. Of course, Deleuze's will be an immanent as opposed to a transcendental metaphysics where phenomena deemed unreachable through human understanding are reached on the basis that they are allowed to appear on their own terms, by a medium which exposes exteriority precisely through *being exposed* and yielding a picture of its own exposure. In this respect I conceptualize the ontology of cinema as the human licensing of non-knowledge, which appeals to certain minds that seek radical if untenable alternatives to knowledge, even if it means resorting to primitive and impractical models of truth.

I conclude this chapter with the admittedly peculiar suggestion that philosophy cannot exactly *do* philosophy, rather it can only talk about it. At least this is what I think Wittgenstein meant when he said that philosophy has no specific problems of its own; instead its problems are specifically grammatical and ultimately reducible to describing the workings of our language and clarifying various conceptual confusions, be they quite glaring or barely noticeable without doubling back on habits which may be centuries old—these are the problems philosophers create for themselves when they try to solve problems outside the grammatical and hence, for Wittgenstein, epistemological limits of what philosophy can hope to achieve. So, in order for philosophy to make meaningful and lasting claims it must overcome its own tendency towards

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[4] For the significance of Bergson on time see Section 2, Chapter 4 in *The Time-Image*, pp. 78-83; for important references to Bazin see *The Time-Image*, p. 1 and pp. 201-2.

metaphysical abstraction and ground itself in particulars, out of which a generalization or theory may emerge as a "language game" whose rules are eternally revisable in light of new evidence. This might mean telling a story or parable; setting up a dialogue between disparate perspectives normally content with the safeties of mutual exclusion; referring to one's everyday experiences without autobiographical motives; or engaging the arts in conversation and finding ideas at work or exchangeable into different forms, created and destroyed by artistic enactments that restore the lost complexities to the simplifications of our theories. Martha Nussbaum and Cora Diamond have attempted this type of philosophical dialogue in their bold decision to hand over the aspirations and commitments of moral philosophy to certain works of literature, particularly those whose narratives do not presume to teach us how to act so much as to make us think about why people act the way they do given their so-called moral principles on paper. It can also be found in Wittgenstein's hypothesis, or confession, that philosophy is perhaps best done through/as poetry, and in Nietzsche's suggestion, in a rather moody and self-critical aphorism from *The Gay Science*, that the joyful philosophy of adventure, dance, freedom and overall good health comes from ignorantly plunging into the freezing cold depths of the most difficult problems and emerging easily misunderstood.[5] The traps of metaphysics are like blind spots in our thinking—they occur by thinking without seeing, thinking without reference to the things thought, thinking the world as thinking the world *away*.

But the logic of one of the most decisive and destructive critiques of metaphysics based on attempts to speak that which is unspeakable cannot encompass the view of the non-language of film as a vehicle for the creation of metaphysical concepts. The juxtaposition suggests that when philosophy overcomes metaphysics by bringing language back to its everyday usage, film stages a return/transformation of metaphysics in audiovisual terms, outside of language proper, showing the very things which would otherwise exceed the limits of language. My contention is that when it comes to film or "film language" (to use a dramatic metaphor for the sake of putting film and philosophy into "philosophical dialogue") metaphysics does not yield nonsense but rather clarity; and when it comes to literature and its claim on the particulars of human action, morality is clearer for being vague or ambiguous or even misleading. In the former case film provides an antidote to

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[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. Von Wright (in collaboration with Heikki Nyman), trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 24e; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §381.

the virus of metaphysical thinking, and in the latter case literature has an antidote to the schematic and unlivable abstractions of a metaphysics of morals.

Doctor Wittgenstein and the Virus of Metaphysics

The following span of reflections, arguments, and what I hope to be openings of thought come out of some preliminary responses and tempered reactions to the sprawling introduction on Wittgenstein's later philosophy by Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey in their collection of essays entitled *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*. While the great majority of introductions to edited collections tend to function as explanatory passageways, knitting together points of contact between otherwise disparate voices and scene-painting in broad yet detailed strokes, this one in marked contrast feels more like a guarded gate or perhaps a courtroom of mandatory consensus, for the impression I have as we are being prepared for the essays to follow is that we may "pass" only on the condition that we accept what Allen and Turvey call the "prophylactic diagnosis" of prevailing habits of method and mind—relatively poor or unhealthy in their opinion—widespread throughout the disciplines of the humanities and taking to task what is—now in my opinion—characteristically if not vitally "undisciplined" about humanistic inquiry in general.

The subtitle of the editors' introduction on the methodological implications of the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein is, at least for scholars of the humanities, an early cause for alarm, bewilderment or trepidation: "A Prophylaxis Against Theory." The thick technical term and somewhat intimidating piece of medical jargon is borrowed from the depths of the health sciences where it is used in conjunction with the diagnosing of diseases, here presiding over the word "theory" (a concept so commonplace in our universities and conferences and bookshelves and intellectual disputes), as if what the "doctor ordered" in this case is nothing less than a redemptive dose of lethal injection. The intolerant tone comes through in the vindictive manifesto word "against" and is directed towards that part of us compelled to develop explanatory accounts worthy of the finest aesthetic experiences which have succeeded, somehow, to move us to the bone and render us speechless. What, may we ask—and we do, I believe, have a right to question the "scientistic" exoticism of the introduction's first foot forward as a work of humanities scholarship—is such a word as "prophylaxis" doing here? This pill prescription to calm our "theory nerves," this judge's gavel to expose our "theory guilt," presiding at the head of a book written out of a deep concern for the plight of the humanities scholar in today's mosaic-world of

competing paradigms of thought, hybrid methodologies, and architectural acts of criticism—do we take this pill, do we heed this declaration of law? Should scholars of the humanities and the arts consent by the authority vested in philosophy, specifically the linguistic rationality and conscientious self-consciousness of analytical philosophy, to be regulated by the objective standards of the sciences, or any standard for that matter?

From the start the authoritative disposition of Allen and Turvey's enterprise, along with the surprisingly sober rhetoric which they borrow from both logic and the sciences, strikes me as replete with those so-called "best intentions" offered in the service of our so-called "best interests." The prophylactic banner wields a therapeutic agenda by which to decisively placate the urge towards grand theorization in the humanities, especially the arts, and stands as a sticky sort of label for an intellectual aberration or defect allegedly unbeknownst to us. The implication is that a sure course of treatment is in order for those tempted to construct theories equal to the highest, deepest, most universal aesthetic experiences, and the hope is that such treatments of self-criticism will be taken without question, for they promise to help us overcome the tendency to bastardize the spirit of philosophical rigor which operates as surveillance for grammatical sense in what we do with our words. If we agree to abide by the therapy of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, then the metaphysical machinations of even the most ambitious, idealistic, and paradigm-shifting theorization will cease to sway us. The path to good health, transparency and balance in our intellectual endeavors and conversations and ways of life—i.e. the verifiability and communicability of our hard-earned ideas and truth claims—depends on being able to "mean what we say," as ordinary language philosophers are so fond of saying, such that our meaning will not presume a prior unspoken understanding on the part of anyone with the capacity to understand. Meaning what we say also means accepting what we *can* say by listening to what we *do* actually say about art, that is, *to others* participating in the same conversation, this rather than saying what we cannot even dream to mean because the rules of our language forbid it.

Now as readers, writers and thinkers in the humanities—the intended or imagined audience of Allen and Turvey's edited collection, an audience presumably in desperate need of Wittgenstein's radical critique of the all-too-human tendency to flee ordinary language in favor of totalizing theories and metaphysical abstractions—these accusations are levelled less at methodological procedure than at what Nietzsche called "intellectual conscience," which intellectual self-interest can ironically repress when our sense of conviction tempts us into

believing what we *want* to be the case rather than what is or more likely to be the case. A vague confession of guilt and its bitter taste regarding the intellectual outsmarting of conscience is practically begged from our lips. The charge is a provocative one and perhaps strategically so: this outright rejection of the desire to reductively theorize complex objects, especially as performed according to the "verificational" or external world testing of the natural sciences; this crude wake-up call for disciplines which seem quite lively and adventurous in their modes of analysis, naturally prone to missteps and bad habits and the occasional swerve of alienating nonsense, but by no means "sick." So again, what is such a term ("prophylaxis") and tone of voice ("you are sick, asleep, hopelessly lost—take this pill, my hand, and follow me…") doing here on the threshold of the current state and future of humanistic inquiry? And why are they targeting something called "theory" as opposed to "philosophy," as if theory were a disease threatening the spirit of philosophy which many (perhaps even doctors) believe is vital to human health and in need of constant purification and self-criticism lest a form of deification take hold of it?[6] These two theorists representing film studies and their vertiginous brand of meta-theorization in this expansive introduction (and as it happens, perhaps contradictorily, with only a word or two in reference to film), are basically claiming over and over again that theory in all its forms is a disease or trap of the mind's ability, reckless and thus reprehensible, to overstep the logic of its very own linguistic form of life. "Theory itself," they write, "is in most cases a logically inappropriate form of explanation for humanistic subject matter."[7] The danger for them lies in its tendency towards scientism and capacity to sanction mystification (one step away from mysticism), in other words to tempt the dignity of reason and its representation of what is best in us to go astray into grandiose and convenient abstractions, paving the way towards a discourse of generalization which forges, either carelessly or painstakingly, a slew of "master keys" to the sunken treasures of truth (typically a truth rhetorically capitalized as "Truth"). To be left sleepless at night by a philosophical question and embark the next morning on a quest for an eternal answer that, when found, is fit for mounting, with pride, and passed down through the generations… this is also part of what it means to *theorize*.

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[6] D. N. Rodowick also shares this concern for the inadequacy of a scientific orientation of theory to the spirit of humanistic inquiry and goes so far as to rigidly distinguish theory from philosophy, reserving for the latter a conversational openness surrounding aesthetic experiences, be they artistic or quotidian, experiences which call more for an encounter than an explanation. See *Philosophy's Artful Conversation* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[7] Allen and Turvey, *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, p. 2.

Abandoned is the Wittgensteinian cartography of the everyday world where the answer to our questions can be found—*must* be found, according to this reading of Wittgenstein—not through empirical investigations of the world but rather through an examination of the logic of our language. The logic in need of attention is not abstract or principled or at all difficult to grasp: it is *at work* in what we say and do with words *before* we start using them in ways we never actually use them in our everyday lives. Who but a philosopher gripped by the fantasy of absolute truth would remark in all seriousness: "Today I am going to discover the essence of *x*," when *x* on closer inspection stands before him, through the senses or by way of reason, in plain view albeit distributed in many diverse forms or singularities and proliferating as a result of the *absence* of anything we might call "essence." But some of us—or some part of all of us—would rather dig for treasure than build a fire where *x* marks the spot.

What I am calling the master key of theory is understood by Allen and Turvey to have a decisive appeal for scholars of the humanities and the arts who sometimes envy their counterparts in the sciences, as the empirical nature of the latter discipline lays claim to objectivity, licenses the power of explanation, and imposes the regulatory restraints of processes of verification and falsification.[8] As if lured by the powers of theoretical explication to resist all opposition and silence its own compunction, the overarching generalizations and grinding reductions required by grand theory's metaphysical aspirations seem to dehumanize the voice of reason and its inner voice of conscience. For the sake of winning the battle for "truth" and becoming a pervasive authority to all concerned, this "master key mentality" (modelled after the scientific method of exposing material substrates of the world) is cut almost solely in the service of *explanations* geared towards rock-hard foundations, which turn out with any probing to be as soft or insubstantial as a mirage (Wittgenstein's metaphor is the ever precarious house of cards). The priority here is towards totalizing explanations at the expense of detailed and perspicuous *descriptions* of a given phenomenon, and the more artistic the phenomenon is the more readily will our theories reach for an explanation as a way of coping with the complexity of aesthetic objects and easing the flood of descriptions in store for us. I recall Nietzsche expressing or exclaiming a similar suspicion somewhere in *The Gay Science* (I will rehearse it in my own words since it is a fond philosophical memory of mine): "Our 'explanations'—what do they pretend to explain? They are nothing more than descriptions, and poor ones at that—so greedy and without imagination. Naturally we want

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[8] Ibid., p. 20.

and just as naturally we discover we cannot have 'truth everlasting'; and all this explanatory truth-talk—for that is what truth amounts to, *big talk*—paints models and schemas and diagrams in an effort to pinpoint a world beneath appearances, yet the fact that they are flat, colorless and quite banal as pictures of the world makes me suspicious of their accuracy and overall value. The 'world beneath appearances' is a contemptuous description of the world; and all explanations in one way or another hold the world as we know it in contempt."

If the best descriptions are in fact the best explanations, then, as in painting or literature, there is always *more* to describe, the task of description is inexhaustible, and as in science the world is not something which will sit still long enough for a sound explanatory portrait to be taken and trusted as a veracious representation of it. The methodological "drive" to explain basic or complex phenomena—the pursuit of underlying principles, the conditions of possibility coveted by philosophy throughout its history, the linear and sometimes obsessive tracking of given phenomena back to a mysteriously ungiven origin (i.e. the tree's roots which run below the ground and so beckon us to dig it up, thus killing the tree)—is one of extracting hidden causes remote from our reach, foreign to the everyday, and presenting them such that all effects are not only dependent on causes but also implicitly lesser than them. Whereas description, the act and attitude of describing phenomena rather than explaining them, will proceed by way of an epistemological modesty or quietism (of which metaphysics, as we have seen, knows nothing about) and will manage, according to Wittgenstein, to "leave everything as it is."[9] Indeed such an extreme form of quietism is perhaps too "hands off," has vague connotations and could regarded as a somewhat suspicious ambition for philosophy, but if perceived as a moral rather than a method it can be opposed to the intuitively held judgment of explanation as succumbing to what we sometimes ridicule as an act of "explaining something away"—draining a sense of mystery or contingency from truths which the mind in its weaker moments longs to be static, etched, lining the bedrock of all beings. If description "leaves everything as it is" and explanation "explains everything away," then morally speaking the former accepts existence while the latter finds it wanting and denies it.

In the prophylactic diagnosis the concept of theory is explicitly contrasted with and implicitly subordinated to that of philosophy, a hierarchical opposition which is difficult to defend and perhaps not worth the trouble. From what I can gather the former refers to contemporary cross-

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[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), §124.

disciplinary permutations of metaphysics within the humanities at large and the latter to a contemporary phase of philosophy called "analytical" which seeks to distance itself from metaphysics at all costs, thus from its own history (largely European) and methodological traditions (largely metaphysical, if not in content then in form) designated by the name "continental."[10] Specifically this is philosophy as defined by the later Wittgenstein who, according to Allen and Turvey, equates philosophy with investigations of the inner workings of our language in an effort to detect inadvertent albeit advantageous (i.e. self-serving or wishful) lapses or slippages into nonsense. Wittgenstein's investigations yield what they call prophylactic diagnoses, language being the primordial form of philosophy (upon which the content of thought depends) and the perpetual restraint on the totalizing or "greedy" nature of the more elaborate metaphysical systems of thought. While a gross oversimplification of Wittgenstein's "picture" of philosophy (for his picture is in fact a superimposition of many paths and voices and temperaments, from the stringently analytical to the romantically continental to the informally conversational, associated with the aphoristic, diaristic, deeply dialogical and often self-critical forms of his philosophical writing), I believe the view is responsibly guided by one of the more provocative remarks from the *Investigations* that I already referred to above: "Philosophy leaves everything as it is." The implied criticism from Allen and Turvey, directed squarely at the theoretical patterns and paradigms of the humanities and rendered explicit more than once throughout their lengthy introduction, is that theory reduces everything to practically nothing. While such claims and accusations are bound to agitate scholars of the humanities and the sciences alike (for abusing

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[10] Philosophy's well-known and widely embraced "continental-analytical" distinction or divide may actually be in itself a properly *analytical* prejudice against philosophical practices which it deems antiquated, counterproductive and logically indefensible regardless of how captivating. Many analytical philosophers see it as their job not to solve problems but rather to *correct* the problems themselves, which they see philosophy as having created over thousands of years of metaphysics taking various forms and persisting in the face of genius. The rift between the two traditions must run rather deep if the same content is accepted as philosophy in one context (if not philosophy at its best) and dismissed as nonsense in another context (the very enemy of philosophy). A test for determining where one stands on the spectrum can be ascertained from the following questions: Do you see philosophy as the expression of ideas or the recording of propositions? Is it the task of philosophy above all to think or to criticize, to ask questions or to self-question? I suspect many will want to answer these questions with the word "both," the reason being that what is perhaps special about philosophy is that different parts of us can stand in different places simultaneously, and that it's acceptable—because inevitable—to openly contradict ourselves. We cannot be in two places at once, that we know, but we can certainly *think in this way*—yet of course not without great difficulty and much imagination, and unfortunately no straightforward results by which to live and work.

theory and fearing it respectively), especially when coming from film scholars who are not immune to their own critique, presenting themselves less as film scholars here than philosophers specializing in a figure like Wittgenstein (a figure to whom many philosophers with no professional interest in film whatsoever have devoted their entire careers), I would still like to remain open to Allen and Turvey's nonetheless inspired motivations for presenting the later Wittgenstein in terms of a prophylactic counsel with our best intellectual interests in mind. What do Wittgenstein's anti-methodologies and confessional critiques of the human propensity towards fleeing ordinary language and unraveling the very fabric of the everyday have to offer the discipline—and now the interdisciplinarity—of the humanities, a discipline whose objects are of a complexity that they can render us, as I have already suggested above, justifiably undisciplined?

Wittgenstein develops the pointed yet enigmatic remark so characteristic of his prose style—"philosophy leaves everything as it is"—by discovering a therapeutic dimension to philosophy proper, a dimension I too believe to be estranged from that of theory. Here is the full passage where the preceding claim appears as a conclusion: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is."[11] The therapeutic moment of philosophy occurs when it is first restricted to the actual use of language and then transformed into a corrective for an ancient tradition of indifference and abuse, correcting itself by describing the workings of our language and thus leaving everything as it is, because in a sense all things are linguistically pre-constituted as facts. The wounds of metaphysics, created in this case by suspicious sanctioning of nonsense and improbably smooth abstractions of thought, start to heal when the medium of philosophy is switched from operator to protector of language, from the possibilities of thought (which are expressed or translated into the language of philosophy) to the limitations of language (the actual use of which thought must first acknowledge, lest philosophy corrupt the fragile bonds of common sense). Once this switch is made it becomes apparent that philosophical seeking is fueled yet foiled by patterns of human wishing, which means that for every text or speech which lays claim to philosophy there is a corresponding psychology that undermines the claim. But the only "knowledge wish" of which philosophy is capable of granting is the knowledge already bound up in what we say (and don't say) and do (and don't do) within the discourses and conversations and conventions—Wittgenstein calls them the "language games"—surrounding our so-called

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[11] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §124.

objects of study. Furthermore, when the acknowledgement of the knowledge of language is shown to be limited to descriptions of how we use language as opposed to explanations of anything like the essence of language, this moment of realization which some boil down to the notion of a "linguistic turn" in philosophy does indeed turn us around to face the mirror of nature with all its cracks and contours, but this turn is not just a turn *away* from the hidden nature of the represented object unto the grammatical structures that govern our human experience of it. Rather the so-called linguistic turn, intimated in the act of leaving everything as it is as a consignment to the everyday, turns us *back*, that is, therapeutically sends us *home*.[12] In the case of film studies and the people interested in thinking and writing about film, we can interpret this turn as leading us back to our everyday experience with film, and some may take such a turn as permission to retrace old steps and first loves by returning to experiences and ways of life—perhaps childhood encounters with movies—that helped precipitate the initial call "to know," for the enterprise of knowledge often begins when one dismisses a natural or wide-eyed relation as fundamentally naïve or in need of "education." This intellectual therapy in the end has very little to do, it seems to me, with intellectual progress, and if education is at stake here I can see it functioning more as an inverse directive with a sense of *unlearning* as its essential mandate, in other words a type of learning based on expunging institutional preconceptions and allowing ourselves to be taught by what we have come to take for granted about ourselves (i.e. our past, our experience, our present tastes and moods of consciousness). This is the rarely acknowledged moment where the bar of knowledge prevents us from going on, gives us excessive satisfaction, confines all discovery to the classroom, and thickens the skin of experience into an all but impenetrable shield.

What Wittgenstein might mean—I mean, what his philosophical motive might be for undermining the great metaphysical achievements of Western philosophy—comes through in the following wager: the solution to a philosophical problem is nothing more or less than the problem's disappearance and the solution's inconsequence in light of what we already know, because our language, as it were, "knows it" (albeit cannot show us the way or tell us how it comes by such knowledge). The problems emerge in the first place, he suggests, from a neglectful misunderstanding of our own language, with consequences as dire as bodily or spiritual neglect.

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[12] Perhaps the closest philosophy can take us to "home" is the frosted windowpane where we may observe how human beings behave inside the house of language. But if it does manage to get us through the door then we have the burden of bearing witness to the devastation which befell the house of language during philosophy's long-term absence in the form of flights from the everyday.

And once one has learned what one already knows by a process that Wittgenstein describes in the *Investigations* (again enigmatically) as "assembling reminders for a particular purpose,"[13] then one will have accepted that what there is to know about something is what lies in plain view, standing before us and not hiding from us, hence all too easily overlooked and forgettable (what hides is seductive yet turns out to be of little interest, relatively speaking). What lies in plain view is then rendered complex by being constantly put to work in what we say about it and through the occasions in which it enters our conversation with others, thus spreading out the view across an infinity of contexts to be assembled or collected rather than unified. The so-called plain view is to be viewed from as many perspectives as possible rather than all at once, and at this point philosophy cannot end with the discovery of an essence but rather only with the feeling of exhaustion.[14] Allen and Turvey, our unembarrassed and at times dogmatic proponents of Wittgenstein's critical voice of quietism (a voice routinely disturbed, hence sharpened, by the voice of skepticism which they, especially Turvey in his contribution to the volume, hesitate to acknowledge as part of the fabric of the *Investigations* in its entirety), phrase the argument this way, transforming Wittgenstein's restless quietism into an alarming "beware" for humanities scholars around the world: "[T]here are no concealed, underlying principles of meaning to postulate, and no 'essence' to reduce meaning to, to unify it."[15] Theorists are pictured as relentless treasure hunters or eternal seekers of the grail, and in a sense they are being treated as credulous children whose beliefs about the beyond must be dispelled if they are to separate what is real from what is a product of an overactive imagination. It is not the intellectual but the moral spirit of philosophy's deepest self-consciousness which is summoned as an antidote to theory's proclivity towards hiding the truth outside our view. Having felt this pressure before to "seek beyond sense" and with it the occasional pang of having gone astray in the lands of language, philosophy emerges

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[13] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §127.

[14] The shift from methodology to therapy occurs when Wittgenstein writes that "the real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to." On the one hand this is a plea for controlling the metaphysical motor of philosophy, to become free of a single problem for the sake of particular problems as they appear and disappear using a variety of methods and exemplifications. But on the other hand, with this method turned therapy one can also sense a longing to stop the daily practice of philosophy on his own terms and retire before the point of exhaustion is reached in working out a philosophy without any trace of metaphysics. (There is also the exhaustion that comes from not being able to completely eliminate this trace, to fully make this discovery—not being able *to become capable* of silencing the voice of skepticism once and for all.) Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §133.

[15] Allen and Turvey, *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, p. 10.

proud and with helping hand as the hawk-eye surveillance or guardianship of the mind's quest for knowledge and the precarious susceptibility to old and new myths of certainty that such quests entail.

Now I assume that those unfamiliar with or altogether oblivious to the dangers awaiting the search for underlying principles of meaning, for a foundational and generalizable unity to disparate phenomenon, are few are far between—for who is completely free of the temptation to generalize, to extrapolate from a single observable pattern an absolute pattern or even a pattern maker? To borrow the famous concluding line from the film *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, USA, 1942), as thinkers or dreamers we have all at one time or another wanted the moon when we could have been content with the stars. The capacity to draw and present "a theory" as a completely trustworthy map for navigating great complexities and difficulties of reality, maps by means of which one copes with unceasing ambiguity and variation, is perhaps at bottom an expression of the human survival instinct itself seeking timely reassurance that reason can indeed stay in control of the vagaries of experience and the unexpected twists of contingency. Underlying every theory creator and applicator is the belief that one can indeed grasp the whole of a phenomenon. On some unwanted level, most theorists may suspect that theories of choice function in order to yield a robust generalization despite their own partialness and piecemeal constitution, especially when the theoretical apparatus itself takes the place of the phenomena it is meant to explain and the priorities of the theorist shift towards maximum efficiency (gluing up the house of cards). If the sterility of abstraction or perhaps the fantasy of deification can be seen for what it is, and if we are prepared to cross-reference theoretical objects with everyday ones, the metaphysical logic of a particular theory will strike us problematically as originating from somewhere outside our common view, the problem being that our experience is reduced to evidence or mere illustration. Such a logic may even derive its rhetorical power of abstraction and leverage of deification from its very *impossibility* within the field of intelligibility, which is to say that the logic is overly indebted to its own motives and machinations. And perhaps, upon making this discovery about its own worst tendencies, philosophy in the guise of theory can become critical of its impulse towards generalization and abstraction and makeshift metaphysical structures by resisting truths derived from permanent explanations of phenomena in the external world and instead *settling* for "truths" derived contingently from descriptions of the everyday logic of our grammar—a logic which turns out in the end not to have a clear-cut referential or mirror-like relation to empirical states of affairs

which flirt with mind-independence. While I have made matters more complex than they actually are, and while I have, perhaps hypocritically, generalized the concept of theory in an effort to trace the pattern of a ubiquitous instinct of reason at odds with reason's "conscience," I always find myself moved by Wittgenstein's simple grade-school counsel in the *Investigations* to "look and see" before you board the train of thought, as it were. Even as early as "A Lecture on Ethics," Wittgenstein emphasizes the role of seeing the quotidian manifestations of a concept as essential to understanding its overall sense and keeping an open mind to the variability of limit cases: "[I]f you look through the row of synonyms which I will put before you, you will, I hope, be able to see the characteristic features they all have in common and these are the characteristic features of Ethics."[16] When gripped by the impulse to know what something *is*, since there is no pure platonic representation of the thing in itself and any search will end in error or disappointment, we are advised to simply look and see—to metaphorically *listen*—before jumping to conclusions or starting with a premise that cannot be verified or falsified one way or the other. Wittgenstein wants to say that everything we *need* to know is perfectly knowable, look and see and honor what is said; it is what we *want* to know that leads us down a dark path. Can we be trusted to remember what we already know, for example how experience, if allowed, calibrates and ultimately *restricts* knowledge to specific cases?[17] When it comes to the limits of knowledge we need constant reminding in a register *other* than knowledge. By looking and seeing, with strain and sincerity, our conclusion-jumping instincts will be thoroughly calmed by observation, examples, the power of insight, and the minutia of sheer differences. With any luck one's intellectual hubris may also be humbled, if not shot down, by the wild brunt of contradictions brewing about and encountered live in the street.

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[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 (January 1965): 5.

[17] Wittgenstein's *Brown Book*, as part of the set of preparatory notes for the *Philosophical Investigations*, is recognized as a bold attempt to do philosophy solely through "bottom up" analytical casework and exemplification. It seems to me to resemble in method, if not in spirit, the philosopher's desire, unrealized as far as we know, to write a work of philosophy comprised entirely of jokes. The latter is dramatized as a moving deathbed regret in the final scene from the film on the great philosopher's life entitled *Wittgenstein* (Derek Jarman, Japan/UK, 1993). When asked by the character of John Maynard Keynes why he didn't manage to produce such a work of (not on) jokes, Wittgenstein responds with his signature self-deprecating sincerity—a trait, of course, of the director's and actor's interpretation—that quite simply he lacked the necessary sense of humor (i.e. thought too much during his life, took life too seriously). Ironically, this is funny and perhaps intended as a joke: his sense of humor shines when he needs it most.

What Allen and Turvey do succeed in expressing with great vividness, despite the repeating tones of frustration and impatience and occasional self-congratulatory grandeur, is that the hermetic abstractions and rote calcifications of much theory use (and abuse) in the humanities— more specifically the application of old theoretical paradigms to texts or simply the pressure, when faced with the mystifications of certain texts, to arm oneself with ideas from various fields of knowledge and galvanize them onto a register of hermeneutic power much higher or mightier than they were intended to possess—is due to a deficiency, Nietzsche might call it a cowardice, in intellectual conscience: a deficiency marked by an ironic excess of, let's say, *intelligence*, perhaps of the self-fulfilling or "foxy" sort. Spurred by the opportunity for severe self-criticism within the laboratory of one's own mind, I too might wager that philosophers preach difference while so few can or care to actually practice it or at least elaborate what such a practice might entail for methods and lifestyles alike. It seems to me the form of this practice would have to be daily or even routine, carried out and lived in the most unromantic of ways. In the evening one ought to have something to show for one's efforts, something that speaks for itself such that one need not show off the new wears. Naturally one remains hopeful that the world will take notice of "the small steps," yet there is a principled refusal to cater to the marketplace of ideas or silence the clamor with promises and plans of revolution. In a philosophy guided by intellectual conscience, what we call difference or complexity or alterity are not concepts but *encounters* requiring deeds; convincing someone of their worth passes the torch, failing the test; and I suspect that some of the encounters themselves where such words don't even occur to us are so small and seemingly insignificant that they may slip by completely undetected. These are the small-scale and radically non-theological "redemptions" of the everyday, missed as a result of our various flights of fancy or lapses of depression or plateaus of indifference where the self is prompted to outrun a false sense of isolation. We would not be wrong or overly melodramatic to speak of the "missable" nature or poignant "losability" of the everyday as a kind of lubricity of the human form of life which performs the most vital tasks and social interactions so automatically that to become conscious of them is to risk interrupting the flow of life. Eating, sleeping, conversing, laughing, getting dressed, gift giving and taking, boredom and the irrepressible urge to be busy, staring through windows and averting our gaze to the floor—the list is infinite and far more idiosyncratic than I have indicated, I say leave it to the novelists and poets—are events which we so rarely consciously experience short of losing our heads by being in two places at once: ourselves and outside ourselves watching

ourselves as if on a stage and from the point of view of god-like omniscience. I say this as a way of honing my suspicion that the only tenable difference between theory and philosophy, at least as Allen and Turvey understand it, is that the former can only do philosophy with its eyes closed. This would seem to go against their charge that the "turning-back" orientation of ordinary language philosophy—returning us to the knowledge active in the workings of our grammar and from which the "turning-away" orientation of theory has taken flight—can have no basis whatsoever in empirical inquiry: on the contrary and according to the later Wittgenstein, it is imperative that we look and see, literally open our eyes and ears (our minds), as a way (if not the best way) of entering the light cast by what Allen and Turvey call "the autonomy of linguistic meaning."[18] The philosopher most tempted by the fabulous illusions and empty promises of metaphysics will construct theories to explain phenomena the details of which he cannot or will not directly face, because what is being secretly valued is a "sightless insight," a truth that will not fade, one that will be good for all time. Rather it is preferable to value what already *has* value, to acknowledge that genuine insight into things must take into account the intersection of sight and speech where the "thing-in-itself" cannot thrive, and that truths *grow* so you best take care of them as you would a child, adjusting your methods along the way and knowing how to let go when your role, by no means absolute, has exhausted its own aspect and is ready to be surpassed.[19]

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[18] Allen and Turvey, *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, p. 11.

[19] It is worth acknowledging the sense in which Allen and Turvey in their Wittgensteinian critiques of theory may be grasping at mere straws, as it were. In other words, there may be no obvious cases of a film or literary theorist working as, say, a theorist does in the natural sciences; and if we think about it there may even be no obvious case of a scientist using theory to progress comfortably from the particular to the general. As far as film theory is concerned, there may be no linear and unambiguous demonstrations of suture theory, or photogénie, or the male gaze, or the claim that cinema resembles a language, etc. David Bordwell in his book on film interpretation does seem to "cast" the theorist as a mechanical generator of interpretations without considering more deeply the various maneuvers, adjustments and criticisms most if not all theorists make while doing their work on a given text or set of texts. That being said, I remain in firm agreement with Susan Sontag's utopian plea for "an erotics of art" as described in her book on the practice and politics of interpretation called *Against Interpretation*, a book which I regard as the more piecemeal and decisively personal counterpart to Bordwell's ultimately dismissive study. What Sontag famously describes as an erotics of art is to be performed by the critic only in close proximity (intimacy) with the live details, moments, and aporias of a work of art as experienced phenomenologically (in the deepest sense of this old philosophical concept, albeit one which always carries the promise of a renewal of human experience and the creation, as a result, of new concepts growing out of us like fresh leaves). See David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986).

When Wittgenstein advises us in his famous critique of the metaphysical instinct—most compellingly executed, I think, through the concept of family resemblances—to "look and see," the task becomes one of picking out living breathing instances of a concept, which can be mistakenly posited as underlying resemblances and driving them towards a necessary familiarity with each other. To look and see also means *to see for ourselves* what the similarities and differences *actually are* before reaching for unifying commonalities across disparate phenomena. By doing so he is suggesting that we replace what we otherwise conceive of as abstract philosophical thought and agree to compromise, that is, to face (i.e. accept, concede, acknowledge) our concrete everyday experiences and utterances and ways of being, "forms of life" as they are sometimes called. My sense is that Wittgenstein wants us, by the force of his own example in the *Investigations*, to go directly to the object of our inquiry, in fact go right up to it, so close that the very term "object" dissolves under the lamp of experience and loses all meaning in the discovery that it never had much meaning in the first place independently of what we say and do with it, for objects which appear to belong to the world are invariably *made by us*. And as for the word "inquiry" within this scenario, the incremental steps of detection shall resemble the sporadic and expressive movements of a dance. The reader feels it might do him some good to pry loose from the snug armchair of philosophy (or any profession which can sit back on itself), to perform the scientific gesture of moving from the desk to the lab, however choreographed by theory such a gesture may be, when the time has come to draw up an experiment and observe the integrity of a hypothesis or watch it fail. A philosopher having abandoned his "armchair" will take to the streets, the laboratory of the everyday, the ground floor of the ivory tower. This philosopher—or this part of the theorist which doesn't want yet another theory advanced—is not seeking to prove what he already knows or believes can be proven; instead what he knows in going into the street where life abounds in all its simultaneity and anonymity is that his appetite for knowledge cannot be satisfied with solutions to problems but only, as Wittgenstein remarked, with the disappearance of the problems themselves.[20] The very concept of "problem" may also be a poor condition for a philosophical investigation if what is promised is a solution that will hold for all cases. Of course no such solution exists, which is only a problem for metaphysics and its search for first principles. Is "hunger" a problem and "food" a solution? If so then what a poor excuse for a solution food is, hunger being the sort of thing that continually returns, over and over again until the end of days.

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[20] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §133.

Perhaps this is how, through the metaphor of the recurrent need for sustenance, some philosophers eventually come to reject their theories and draw up new ones, or refine their theories in light of new evidence and experience, in some cases perceiving limitations and biases which reveal themselves only in time, or in other cases simply outgrowing convictions which are no longer satisfying and wearable as ways of life (your life has changed, you know you are no longer who you once were, no longer a reflection of how you used to see yourself). And perhaps this is why Wittgenstein seems to me to entertain the sentiment, without ever sanctioning it, that no abstract theories divorced from experience be drawn up in the first place—for what better way, therapeutically speaking, to avoid the disappointments of philosophy and the looming threat of a clandestine religiosity of thought? Wittgenstein's suggestion surprises us with the possibility that thought in the absence of experience (in this case the neglected sense of sight and its window to the world, all too easily shut for the sake of intellectual shelter and security) is not only misleading or prone to error but also subject to fantasy and self-deception and philosophical stasis (i.e. dogma). For Allen and Turvey these fantasies/prisons of the mind yield "conceptual confusions to which scholars of the arts succumb"[21]—errors and distortions of sense which the desperate passion or sometimes the fanaticism of sense-making is often completely unaware, in part because language itself is perceived as a veil to be pierced rather than a clearing to be cultivated. But the consequence of conceptual confusion, what Wittgenstein vividly and for philosophy quite comically describes as bumping our heads on the limits of language, can be seen to run deeper than epistemological aberration or airlessness, calling for a corrective more grueling than a prescribed modesty or quietism that leaves a discourse "a priori open" for verification and change. For palpable errors in the sense of meaning—if not completely irrational then perhaps simply unworthy of committed rational consideration—along with the resulting rifts in public discourse can be outweighed by, let's say, errors in the sense of self: a manifest issue of intellectual conscience that is not necessarily reducible to criteria of reason, good sense, and scholarly rigor, which Allen and Turvey seem to conflate more and more as the introduction unfolds.

We all know from experience that opening our eyes and seeing are not one and the same. Moving from one to the other takes *listening*. We will see more or less what we want to see when thought "runs wild," when consultations with the objects of thought are cut off or altogether devalued. These "unseeing eyes" fail to draw any inspiration whatsoever from the ears. Looking,

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[21] Allen and Turvey, *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, p. 1.

seeing, listening, touching and being touched—do these sensorial acts function as essential tools for life in the humanities and beyond, and are they the means by which theory and practice are wired into dialogue, the vehicle of intellectual conscience whereby conscience keeps intelligence in check through heightened attentiveness and self-awareness? Is it a priority of philosophy—and is philosophy actually qualified—to teach the place of the senses within the nexus of thought, in other words to teach thought as a kind of organic and dynamic synesthesia involving the entirety of one's being, say from the sharp peaks of reason to the lush valleys of affect? Perhaps philosophy has an interruptive as opposed to a running sub-history of stopping the train of thought and heading for the streets as I said before, testing ideas against experience as Stanley Cavell once put it in his reading of Ralph Waldo Emerson, or recall Nietzsche leaping into classic philosophical problems like cold baths and writing only of what he has managed to physically and emotionally overcome.[22] And perhaps we can say that a way or habit of thought which proceeds hermetically and unselfconsciously projects rather than participates in reality, opening the door to a life of fantasy, this instead of empirically negotiating its perceptions through friction with the external world and others, experience being the name for a successful negotiation between, say, mind and matter, a tactfulness capable of exposing a projected reality which may feel—due to its power or our weakness—like a gradual uncovering of the essence of reality (the mirage of metaphysics). As a test of the integrity of the projection and grounding of the metaphysical fantasy, we could ask this person, this theorist, for concrete examples, examples being what a "look and see" type philosopher like Wittgenstein not only offers but often begins with in an almost diaristic fashion throughout the *Investigations*. But let's not be too hasty, for aren't examples often the secret servants of hypotheses? In certain hands what we call evidence can be rhetorical artillery. Is it possible, I wonder, to tell the difference between a rhetorical or self-serving example directed by the various motives of thought and a genuinely investigative one that itself takes the form of thought, a look-and-see form of thought, perhaps a viscerally felt thought which does not yet know itself? Is that what Allen and Turvey believe the theorist of the humanities (metaphysician disguised as theorist) is missing to the detriment of reason? Organically ripe examples, let's call them, picked like fruit from the burgeoning orchard of the everyday, examples from which one begins rather than ends an investigation, self-evident rather than evidence based, examples which

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[22] See Stanley Cavell, "Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's 'Experience'," in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 110-40.

point to more examples based on open-ended patterns of resemblance… If this is the kind of example which theories must be answerable to at all times, then only a picture of language that helps us *to see* can sprout the necessary insight, trigger the imagination, and yield visions otherwise unavailable to the mind at bay or the senses in solitude. By way of the very words which we routinely use, uncritically or without curiosity, only such a phenomenological picture of language can guide the theorist into a rediscovery of the mysteries of the ordinary, mysteries overlooked or perhaps altogether dismissed as symptoms of the merely normative.

If Allen and Turvey are to be taken seriously in their adamance that theory, especially as defined by the natural sciences, is to be rejected wholesale as a viable research tool and way of life in the humanities, how then are the totalizing and occasionally mystifying tendencies of the various theoretical "regimes" of thought to be resisted and ultimately replaced without jeopardizing the rational integrity and inquisitive spirit of humanities scholarship and philosophical thought in general? Would Wittgenstein want to say—and is he being *told* to say?—that the theories constructed in the humanities to investigate culture or interpret works of art (i.e. psychoanalysis, deconstruction, Marxism, feminism, cognitivism, all the "-isms") are essentially "language games" played by people who take them too seriously or not seriously enough, who do not see it as a game and so fail to respect the rules, or who fail to realize that various forms of word play, linguistic conventions, and normative ecosystems are at work in their very hands, and that perhaps the workings of language are working out the decisive conclusions ahead of time?

Wittgenstein's extreme emphasis on language games and our everyday use of language (language the use of which is often alien to the way language tends to be used in philosophy or fields influenced by philosophy) provides a "plain view" opening for an assessment of the complex interplay between theory-talk and theory-truth. It seems to me that the notion of a language game is often misunderstood or simplified as the relative, playful, open-ended set of conditions of various discourses, interlocking and sometimes competing, where any stable object of reference "in the world" is completely nullified and exposed as a source of conceptual confusion. However, the playing of a language game is not an explanation but a description of how we speak, what we do with words, and in this sense I think Wittgenstein was trying to point out a rather different set of consequences which I will summarize in the following way: our words are our life, what we say with words is what we do with them, and all the possibilities of meaning are at work (in play) in how we use language in an everyday sense. Or put it this way: the so-called linguistic turn is not

just another intellectual movement filled with progressive or revolutionary promise; rather it is intended as the return of the human itself, the being who speaks, *these words* as the basis of my being in a world of others, a sharable and historically contingent world that lies open to view yet requires multiple—perhaps endless—viewings. A conclusion worth drawing is that the significance of a particular concept depends on how we actually use it or fail to use it, the criteria being the contexts in which it functions and from which it derives its meanings. These everyday ways of using a word are in themselves the language games that pertain to it; and if a concept is phrased or deployed in such a way that it is alien to our everyday linguistic practices, then Wittgenstein would want to say that at that point it is "nonsense." In this view language is our essential home, and our ignorance of how it stands has thrown it into disrepair. Regarding the question of theory, Wittgenstein wants to say that theories claim they can explain a phenomenon only by assuming or insisting that the truth of the matter and explanatory ground is hidden from view, conveniently beyond the reach of language and in some cases warranting those suspect representations of the un-representable. But for Wittgenstein if something like the nature of an artistic medium (i.e. the ontological ground of art as explored by Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art") or the inner and innate workings of human consciousness (i.e. the animal spirits posited by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* or the *a priori* categories mapped out by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason*), if such "things" are in principle hidden from us, at odds with the words we use to talk about these things and in need of a revelation or emancipation of truth from the hold of appearances, then we would have no sense whatsoever of what these concepts mean, the very ways in which we talk about them would be misleading—and if we have no sense of what they mean it is because we are confused rather than ignorant, or perhaps I should say we have succeeded in confusing ourselves by misinterpreting ignorance as a lack of knowledge rather than a confusion of our concepts.

Since I am partial to some of Wittgenstein's notions, directives and attitudes as expressed (in pieces, like pictures) throughout the *Investigations*, I too would be hesitant about offering any "theory" of cinema or art or whatever my "object of inquiry" may be. (Are these real objects? Do we talk about objects this way? Can we inquire *into* an object? Perhaps my *objective* is my object…) While I do not align myself wholeheartedly with Wittgenstein's later philosophy and its exemplification of the linguistic turn (mostly because I do not believe that human experience begins and ends entirely with our linguistic nature and behavior, human nature has as many

condemnations as it has freedoms, even though there is no question that all our experiences as human beings are informed by language, especially that of our mother tongue), perhaps I can clarify what Wittgenstein is suggesting—the sort of recommendation he makes for how theorists or philosophers under the influence of metaphysics should "behave" and conduct their research "hygienically"—by pointing out that his emphasis on language is also and perhaps primarily an emphasis on behavior, what might be called the behavior of our language (for Heidegger it is "language speaking us"), understood as the spirit of grammar and the unique form of life (epically public) it constitutes. To properly share this vision we must try to imagine language less as words spoken than actions performed—"performative actions" (an instructive move developed with impeccable skill by J. L. Austin in his book *How To Do Things With Words*[23]); and these linguistic actions, when examined case by case or context by context and perhaps also culture by culture and the historical strata within one's own culture, will turn out to have a range and perspicacity and density of mindfulness well beyond mere reflex or habit. To take Wittgenstein and the linguistic turn solely in terms of words uttered or language acquired and then used for the sake of communication—and of course why wouldn't we, it seems obvious enough!—will overlook the sense in which Wittgenstein is suspicious of any propositional truth claim whose words and grammatical structuring are not in some way verifiable or amenable to everyday usage and the specific contexts in which we have learned such words and where they are most sharable with others. While one may be right or totally justified to say that there are many, perhaps an infinite number, experiences that are not reducible to language, I think we ought to concede that the experience of what we call "love" is at the mercy of how it manifests, be it clearly or painfully or with great uncertainty, where even the sense of failing to do the emotion justice is encompassed by the very meaning of the word. And in the end perhaps that is the most accurate description of the experience of love: an overwhelming experience that dwarfs our best efforts to express it. So there is a kind of behaviorism at work in Wittgenstein's thought, one through which he attempts to frame language precisely as a series of context-dependent utterances expressed as actions, a language that Heidegger rightly suggested "speaks us."[24] The image that most readily comes to mind is that we do not speak words in a vacuum; there is a context that informs them and always

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[23] See J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, Second Edition, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).
[24] Martin Heidegger, "Language," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 207.

gestures accompanying our words. A theory can be accused of speaking in a vacuum if it points to contexts which transcend the everyday, in other words contexts at odds with actual contexts; and these might not be contexts at all but rather abstractions or conditions of possibility or thought experiments without variables, "meta-contexts" for which we have the strange word "metaphysics."

If Allen and Turvey are to be sound practitioners of the philosophy they espouse and urge us to adopt in our own philosophic and hermeneutic practices, it is still of equal if not greater importance *not to find ourselves beholden* to a Wittgensteinian picture of the world even if such a picture aspires to undermine its "picture status" at every turn (in the case of Wittgenstein, quite possibly with each and every aphoristic remark comprising the *Investigations*). To speak for myself now, regarding my own work as a scholar of film where words and images are in constant strife, subject to mutual possessions and oppressions, I am (or I try to be) attentive to the peculiar, resonant and often enlightening friction of this strife and not linear in my approach to film and the works of art I care about. Fueled by an interest in the nature of film that one might call "theoretical," I aim to stay cognizant of the reductions and abstractions and shortcuts endemic to the ontological enterprise so as to maximize the power of theory to *express* and perhaps *testify* (not necessarily explain) to an extraordinary encounter with an image of reality that is crafted, as it were, by reality itself: the world in its own image which may be passively or even unconsciously perceived yet can be understood above all through acts of undergoing or witnessing.[25] Naturally the goal is not to end up merely simplifying the nature of film or imposing my own way of understanding onto my readers. I want to stay true to my experience without generalizing my experience, and I want to address the pertinent philosophical questions raised by the medium (as demonstrated by specific works whose conditions of possibility shape those works, indebting them to the medium) without bracketing film from its wide popularity, incomparable accessibility across cultures, and universal invitation to see the world anew, in part by undermining the very linguistic barriers which analytical philosophy regards as a logical necessity.

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[25] There are senses of theory which need not wrestle with the paradoxes of visual representation, particularly the thorny and inevitably phenomenological paradoxes of photographic/cinematic imagery. Theoretical models unencumbered by the aesthetic can be less expressive and may seek out—not with ease by any means—explanatory accounts of events in the world, particularly regarding the correlation of events, for example the Covering-law hypothesis or the Deductive-Nomological Model as developed and utilized by Hempel and Popper.

On the one hand my interest in movies is an interest in movies themselves, the medium which underlies them and is common to them, the "essence" which I know doesn't exist—or which exists only "in theory," or which exists only as an evolution or "becoming" of the world in its own image at the mercy of the images we produce out of this metaphysical block of space-time. In this sense I approach cinema as a complex and overlapping series of expressive approximations, formalist celebrations, narrative foreclosures and digital "dealings" of the world in its own image. On the other hand, I mean simultaneously, only particular movies—and particular sections, scenes, or moments from movies which may otherwise fall short—have the ability to put me in touch with a sense of the nature, potential and inexhaustible power of movies and what they have meant to me over the years (and throughout my formative years). The medium itself affects me most strongly when filmmakers affect the medium, touching it and shining a light on aspects of it which had hitherto remained undisclosed or insufficiently tapped (at least in my experience, or from what I have been able to experience vicariously through film history and theory); and at that point it's as if the medium discovered something new yet indispensable about itself which reanimates the logic of motion, carrying it into the future where we can continue to be internally moved by the external movements flickering or "pixeling" onscreen.

A similar autobiographical argument has been rehearsed by Cavell in *The World Viewed*, a book which begins with a unique and puzzling declaration: the hidden and unstable essence of film beckons the philosopher via the memory, not the metaphysics, of watching films in his intellectually formative years. While the ostensible subject of the book is the ontology of film, which Cavell interestingly claims dawns as a result of a decisive break in what he calls his natural relation to movies, he begins strangely enough with an acknowledgment that his memories of films are strand over strand with memories of his life.[26] What this suggests within the theoretical context developed here is that the objective essence or what he prefers to call the ontology of film (hidden from view and alien to our words), and the subjective impression film makes on his consciousness along with its evolving resonance over time as memory (inextricable from this particular human being's "form of life"), are all remarkably intertwined in a way that Allen and Turvey may not be prepared to acknowledge as a possibility or precondition of theoretical speculation. Even though philosophy and science play different language games around the word "theory," running the risk

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[26] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. xix.

of confusing one language game with another, for them theory is sufficiently expansive or interdisciplinary and, in keeping with their medical terminology, quite "contagious" as a convenient and rhetorically potent form of thought, such that it invariably results in conceptual confusions for which the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein is diagnostics or mere whistle-blowing. But Wittgenstein is not only a whistleblower of nonsense, healer of the human connection to language, iconoclastic destroyer the likes of Nietzsche; he is also a mystic, albeit a hyper-conservative one, ready to acknowledge that there are things in the world of which we cannot speak yet refusing to waste any philosophical time on them. Indeed, sometimes theory is guilty of speaking in this forbidden space (just as metaphysics is guilty of opening such spaces in the first place where no human being can actually set foot), but in doing so another language is born—a new language game played at the limits of language. Is such a language transgressive and therefore in all likelihood nonsensical? That all theories are susceptible to or stricken with nonsense is itself a theory. And to dismiss new ways of speaking as fatal breaches in the logic of speech itself is to miss out on the grandeur of theory.

The Antidotes of Art (first experimental treatment)

Film theory—the myriad discourses and language games of this type of thinking—has never been more grand (i.e. comprehensive, metaphysically inclined, above all *creative*) than in the two interrelated or continuous cinema books from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. This remarkably elaborate film-philosophy as laid out—or perhaps the more apt phrase is mapped out—in *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image* may strike the reader on the first or even second attempt as a grand theoretical system of classification of the art of film throughout its short yet highly eventful, evolving, and turbulent history.[27] The author makes no secret of this dispassionate, perhaps pseudoscientific form of cinephilia, describing his project in the preface as a taxonomy of the concepts which underlie, determine and revolutionize the cinema.[28] But it would be just as accurate, I think, to call it a piece of systematic philosophy in good company with, say, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, at least insofar as it stands as a late and highly rarified work of metaphysics which speculates on the world in its own image,

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[27] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
[28] Deleuze, *The Movement-Image*, p. xiv.

discovering many stratified layers and tectonic shifts, as it were, within the deceivingly unitary "world image" onscreen. As a non-traditional, radically anti-platonic search for absolutes within the aesthetic of all places, and participating in what I will refer to as daring leaps towards "object comprehensiveness" by means of small, precise, almost surgical incisions of thought (albeit a certain kind of thought which makes as many distinctions as possible between parts—clearly and distinctly in the manner of Descartes—so as to grasp a vision of the whole by attempting to exhaust it), Deleuze's cinema books are both exemplary of Western metaphysics and experimental in their approach to metaphysics "in the wake of it." The metaphysical trajectory and tone of systematic philosophy is an unusual approach to take towards the study of film, or any artform for that matter, partly because metaphysics as the development of a world beneath/beyond the realm of appearances would seem to be thwarted by art as a secondary, self-sustaining and image-based "world." Film in particular because the philosopher, in selecting the photographic recording, projecting and restructuring of reality as the basis for an inquiry into the nature of reality itself, turns metaphysics against itself by avoiding the world as it appears to us (in space and time), taking instead the moving image of cinema (spatio-temporal inscriptions in light) as an appearance whose autonomy and substance, however immaterial and counterfeit, unhinges space and time from the edifice of human consciousness, presenting these conditions through a mechanically constituted representation—(re)presenting them "as they are" or "as they are without us"—and re-inscribing them back into the traditionally anthropocentric conception of cinema as a human technology and artform, produced and consumed by humans.

Deleuze's monolithic taxonomy of cinema is therefore really a special kind of metaphysics buoyed by the belief that what the camera sees—what the eyes and ears of cinema make possible—is precisely what consciousness marginalizes or filters out or streams for its own purposes: movement and time. For Deleuze as much as for the classical film theorists (though Deleuze is writing at the end of the so-called classical period, almost ten years after Cavell), movement and time (i.e. movement through time and time as movement) are the material processes constituting both the medium of cinema and the primacy of consciousness; they are the conceptual conditions of possibility raised into material actuality, conditions which normally evade our concepts, sit at the core of human experience, and lurk beneath the surface of consciousness like the rocks responsible for generating the stronger currents. As in all metaphysical systems of thought, taxonomies and constellations and sharp distinctions between concepts are used as steps towards

elusive foundations, the point beyond which thought stutters and stops, and in the cinema books this point is time itself, what Deleuze calls "a direct time-image," elaborating upon it as that which "gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced."[29] Despite the fact that all images are fundamentally *indirect* and that time in itself cannot be captured without a concept of time already built into the image, nevertheless the medium of film makes thinkable the following: the only way to know time and solve an ancient philosophical riddle is to leave behind philosophy as the act of "thinking matter" and reorient it through the idea of "matter which thinks," an idea that in practice involves many ways of defining or apprehending or imagining the essence of time.

This bold and somewhat bewildering move has now become a film-philosophy cliché I suppose, but as far as I know Deleuze was one of the first to grant cinema this special power which is also the power of metaphysics, perceiving in cinematic representations of the world fundamental properties of the world itself, the world as we have never seen it before: in the light of its own image, as analyzed in the previous chapter. Perhaps Deleuze was the very first to develop a detailed *aesthetics* out of André Bazin's ontological claim, the first to think through the "language" of this autonomous and sentient world-projection, one which Bazin in his earlier essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" theoretically discovered yet left unsupported from lack of examples. Bazin let the idea of the world in its own image dangle cryptically as a result of an eschatological perspective that Deleuze, with the guidance of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, would manage to overcome through a monumental shift in both method and mentality from transcendence to immanence.[30] In general, for Deleuze the moving image does not represent an absent presence

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[29] Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, p. 17.

[30] Bazin famously concludes this particular essay with the coy acknowledgment "On the other hand, of course, cinema is also a language." However, upon reaching this "to be continued" conclusion as a reader, I am always disappointed to find that the ontological and aesthetic dimensions of film are once again deemed too opposed from each other or adrift on remote registers in order to be explored at the same time, or at least in sequence. There is no second part to this essay and Bazin does not even indicate which of his essays will take up the task of showing how cinema speaks itself, as if the languages of cinema proceed at the expense of the perennial question "What is cinema?" Thus for me Bazin's claim is an equally infamous copout. What sounds like a profundity and catalyst for further work strikes me as the legendary critic's last gasp at wit's end, fully resigned to a kind of "mind-body split" in the cinema. I also notice a similar limitation with Cavell's *The World Viewed* whose methods of analysis can become complacently ontological, revolving around film memories and fragmentary readings of films. Although at the same time I fully recognize how this comes to be and why this must be the case, one reason being that to think the medium is to be hit with the great paradoxes of representation which have little to do with representation's perspicacity, paradoxes which filmmakers can certainly point to and play with but must ultimately *accept*

(Bazin), nor does it represent a presence that is absent and in terms of absence (Cavell); rather it *presents* the manmade images of movement and time as they occur in nature, presenting representations as creations as opposed to copies. And in this sense Deleuze is a naturalist only when it comes to the un-naturalism of cinema's technological mediation of the world, albeit an un-naturalism that is far from being indifferent to it (in fact Sergei Eisenstein described it precisely yet enigmatically as "non-indifferent") and which Deleuze in my reading attributes to what he calls "the powers of the false."[31]

The vast secondary literature on Deleuze's cinema books is on the whole supportive of the philosopher's twilight sojourn into cinema, and many film theorists who may otherwise reject philosophical systematization and metaphysical perspectives or propositions regard Deleuze as having made indispensable yet nonetheless debatable discoveries about the nature of the relation between the ontology of cinema, the medium's historical evolution, and the aesthetics of various influential auteurs and schools of filmmaking. My sense is that the discourse of film-philosophy concerned with Deleuze is largely based on the belief that the theoretical structures of the movement-image and time-image describe dynamic actualities or events and function as conditions of possibility that certain key auteurs, depending on the historical period in which they work, *direct* through various modes of cinematic thinking which activate these vital materialisms, as it were, in different ways and to different ends. This process of directing the movement and time dimensions of the medium is distinct from the theatrical sense of directing people in front or behind the camera and can be taken as literally as the rest of Deleuze's conceptual schemes in the cinema books. Directors—if they are attuned to the medium, if they have a style and are generally good at what they do—direct the form and shape of images like currents of water or air; the expressive elements are not created or imposed so much as channeled, diverted, redistributed. What I am calling the activation of vital materialisms is premised on the medium's mechanical sterilization of modernist automatisms, which are objectified by the cinematic apparatus (specifically the camera and its unit of measure called "the shot") and rendered plastic by the surprising revelation that the extraneous combination of shots transcends mere serialization, forming the possibility of a language (specifically through editing and its palate of expression called "montage"). It is also

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if they are to represent anything at all. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?* Volume 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 16.

[31] See Chapter 6 in Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, pp. 126-55.

worth pointing out that Deleuze's metaphysical fantasy of a camera-eye amenable to thought in the hands of certain directors (not thinkers per se but directors of thought in its material form) was already proposed by Cavell almost ten years prior and to my mind with greater philosophical rigor and temperance. In *The World Viewed* Cavell's emphasis on automatisms, which for Deleuze are latent in the vitalist image systems of the medium itself, is attributed to the property or province of the medium only when humanly activated and where the act of activation is nothing short of an art, constituting discoveries of the medium (new mediums, as it were) with the power to usher in a new genre or even a new aesthetic. As much as Cavell might like to think that film "thinks," it seems to me that he knows that the camera-eye is intrinsically blind and that any automatism of movement or time derives its expressive power not from some sort of modernist purity or historical paradigm shift (for Deleuze the ruptures of World War II), but rather from the multiple inheritance of the traditional artforms which together make the art of film a bastard art and one stronger for it. (The more a body is exposed to foreign bodies the better chance it will have of surviving, and if cinema *thrives* in this way it is because it was born "diseased.")

As an immanent rather than transcendental metaphysics that somewhat misleadingly presents itself as a systematic taxonomy of signs, there are many points of contention both productive and dismissive which one can raise against Deleuze's cinema books. Regarding the self-sustaining intricacies of such systems, as soon as its methods and assumptions are subject to even the most basic criticism the foundational rug is as if pulled from under its feet and the entire edifice—for Wittgenstein nothing more than a house of cards—may come tumbling down. Monological systems of thought which surpass common sense are like delicate organisms, and it really doesn't take much for an act of criticism to pass judgment and become one of total destruction. But again, Deleuze's cinema books exemplify the power of metaphysical systems of thought to invite readers (I hesitate to say seduce them) into an encounter with a worldview that cinema itself opens up for consideration, one which refracts a deeply historical situation or predicament that regards itself as perpetually postwar. For anyone with the courage and patience to follow the complex architecture and feats of strength of totalizing philosophical systems, the reward is all too often a kind of emancipatory indoctrination. It can be very difficult to criticize or undermine a project whose truth claims strike us as secondary to the capacity of those claims to cohere into a clearing in which our own thoughts can start to take form and even shine. It is for this reason that the most abundant and diverse secondary literatures are cultivations of

philosophical *potential*, not necessarily that of philosophical perspicuity or persuasiveness. Critiques also become rare and anomalous, not only because they risk threatening a deeply valued and utilized philosophical system, but also because the language of criticism takes the language of metaphysics *at its word* and in so doing speaks a foreign tongue, one which the proponents of the system know that the system as such cannot properly converse with. Texts amenable to criticism usually contain the seeds of self-criticism, a concern for truth instead of a love of art. But metaphysics has trouble seeing that its truths are made, struggles to assess its own reflection in the mirror. Self-love in place of self-criticism inspires the belief that truth has been overcome, ironically, by the discipline of philosophy itself.

I will now turn my attention towards what is perhaps the most defiant critique of Deleuze's film-philosophy from Jacques Rancière, a contemporary French philosopher with little to no tolerance for the swirling battery of categories, sharp distinctions, binary oppositions and conceptual inventions which most metaphysically inspired systems like Deleuze's require for the machine of speculative thought to run as smoothly—and spectacularly—as possible.

In a chapter entitled "From One Image to Another? Deleuze and the Ages of Cinema" from his book *Film Fables*, Rancière begins with a concise summary of the Deleuzian film-philosophical project which catalogues the history of film neatly into what Rancière describes as two distinct "ages" of the image.[32] The movement-image, where narrative continuity heedlessly unfolds and sensory motor schema remain intact in a kind of paradisiacal innocence of cinematic language, and the post-World War II time-image, where a pervasive sense of social disorientation and a growing disenchantment with accepted modes of understanding and being-in-the-world are subject to catastrophic ruptures in the sensory motor chain of narrative sense, causing images to be cut out of the chain, cut off from each other, thrown out into the ether of their referents, only to emerge excessively concrete and ultimately self-referential abstractions. However, Rancière's fascination quickly turns to skepticism over Deleuze's efficacious account of cinema and the presumed novelty of a decisive point of intersection with the collective and spiritual crises brought on by the war. "First of all," he writes, "how are we to think the relationship between a break internal to the art of images and the ruptures that affect history in general? And secondly, how are we to recognize, in concrete works, the traces left by this break between two ages of the image and

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[32] See Jacques Rancière, "From One Image to Another? Deleuze and the Ages of Cinema" in *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), pp. 107-24.

between two types of image?"[33] In questioning Deleuze's most fundamental assumptions regarding the intimate relation between cinema and history, the possibility that the nature of film is ontologically double, and the aesthetic susceptibility of particular film works to the metaphysical transformation from movement to time on the register of immanence, Rancière embarks upon a critique which targets the form as much as the content of the cinema books, questioning also the literary dimension or what he might call the "fabula" of the theoretical enterprise as a whole.

Rancière's response to questions he knows the cinema books are intrinsically incapable of answering with appropriate satisfaction is to say that cinema's historical condition of newfound autonomy (i.e. the break with classical cinema's sensory-motor causality and the descent into what Deleuze calls "pure optical and sound situations") was already anticipated by the ruptures of modernism rampant around the turn of the century.[34] For various aesthetic, philosophical and political reasons which fracture the unitary banner of a so-called modernist movement, these ruptures of convention and dismissals of tradition drove artistic mediums towards an encounter with the question of their own essence, pitting artists against the labor of self-definition in light of an unprecedented anti-mimetic mandate which sought to emancipate the message of the medium itself. As for the medium of cinema, because its advent coincides with the modernist reevaluations, it actually enters the condition of modernism or embodies best this condition at the turn of the century, with or without its most pioneering practitioners. Hence the decisive historical factors behind cinematic modernism precede and even exceed those precipitated by the second world war of 1939-45, factors which Deleuze insists inaugurate cinema's modernist phase of disorientation and arrest. Rancière sums up this general critique and demystification of the primary hinge of the Deleuzian theoretical apparatus, fixating as it does on a tardy and for Rancière a completely fictional rupture: "Deleuze's distinction between a movement-image and a time-image doesn't escape the general circularity of modernist theory."[35]

Rancière's second concern appears to revolve around the appeal, by way of a logic and rigor reminiscent of analytical philosophy, for a set of criteria by which to prove, or at least gauge, the presence and resonance of traces left by history on individual works of art belonging to a specific medium and its publics. Now depending on one's position and patience, one may choose

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[33] Ibid., p. 108.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

to respond here with a rhetorical backlash: "Proof? What proof? Deleuze's perspective is too extreme to be subject to proof—it is too marred and warped by the pain of politics to establish criteria for the evidence of aesthetics. The proof is in the pudding…" But if evidentiary proof is too demanding in this case, constituting a criticism for which there is no practical defense, then Deleuze's theory should at least be able to account for its radical subordination of cinema to the history of politics (the cataclysms of World War II), an interdisciplinary account which Rancière questions not through its strategic undoing but through what is a rather dull alternative: a chronological and somewhat commonsensical understanding of the history of art, specifically cinema's coming of age in the period of high modernism amidst a vertiginous swoon of vanguards casting shadows over the youngest child in the family of the arts. Perhaps Deleuze, for political or personal reasons, believes that the very idea of a "world war" affects the world itself—rends the vital materiality of a psycho-geological core of being, stalling or scrambling basic life-forces, unhinging time and space, making the continuity of everyday life impossible or uninhabitable. Solely on the level of grammar, a world war's effect on the world as a whole holds the world as we know it in the balance—now we see it for what it really is, ephemeral and precarious and indifferent to our lives, because we have nearly lost it; and so the way we look at the world must also change irrevocably. If cinema looks at the world in terms of the world, then the concept of a "world war" can be seen to transform the cinema through an event similar to what we call a paradigm shift. The temptation (and I stress this word) is to say that wars have causes and consequences beyond the social and sometimes bring about palpable revolutions in the very air we breathe. As an art theorist Deleuze is ultimately searching for an explanation behind cinema's aesthetic evolution by insisting upon a primal source, as it were, for this shift from the priority of linear causal movement towards a more reflective stance on human action and its hesitations. For him, if the "devolution" of war is not a significant cause or factor in the paralysis of movement and crystallization of time, then it would be quite a coincidence given the radical artistic and ontological transformations which occur in its wake.[36] And so to return to the issue of whether

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[36] There are of course other forces at play in cinema's entry into modernism, such as the recognition of cinema as a bona fide artform, the rise of television and the pressure on cinema to assert its aesthetic uniqueness, the rise of phenomenology and structuralism, the development of new, cost-effective and more portable production technologies, economic factors, etc. But what makes the "war hypothesis" attractive and illuminating for a metaphysics of film is how a global event, an event historically understood to have worldwide ramifications, becomes the fulcrum for a change of aspect in the concept of the world in its own

cinema is born modern or becomes modern after World War II, we may choose to question, like Cavell does, why the cinema remained traditional for so long, especially at a time when tradition was subject to such scrutiny.[37] My response is that artforms, like people, must develop and reach a state of maturity before they can deconstruct, and that a life abroad is often indispensable to the unconditional acceptance of a birthright.

Heeding Deleuze's disclaimer that he is not writing a history of cinema but rather attempting a comprehensive classification of the historical evolution of its signs, Rancière reminds us of Deleuze's conviction that the signs of cinema are comprised of images which are properly speaking not *of* anything but rather the things themselves, the set of what appears, completely autonomous phenomena with attributes of reference or world-dependency. Therefore, one of Deleuze's achievements according to Rancière—who, I will remind you, is at bottom a thinker of simultaneity and a critic of dualistic conceptual artillery designed to tease out the entangled elements of a weave—is to "abolish the opposition between the physical world of movement and the psychological world of the image."[38] "It follows logically from this," he continues, "that cinema is not the name of an art: it is the name of the world. The 'classification of signs' is a theory of the elements, a natural history of the combination of beings."[39] Rancière suggests that we have good reason to believe that Deleuze's view of cinema is a metaphysical view of the organic signatures of nature, and we may go on to see the cinema books themselves less as a series of investigations into the art of film than a philosophy of nature which treats cinematic images as events of luminous matter, a metaphysics of appearances or metaphysics materialized, if you like. However, as we consider this prospect of cinema functioning as a natural history of the combination of beings, it might occur to us (to film scholars above all, but maybe some philosophers too) that this is still a medium specific claim, albeit a radical and esoteric one, but nevertheless a claim about cinema that Deleuze was surely not the first to make even if he was the first to offer a kind of systematic treatment of the naturalization of its signs over time. The speculative and occasionally eschatological realisms of Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer in the 50's and 60's already considered the possibility that the nature of cinema had roots in nature itself,

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image. When humanity reminds itself that it has the power to dominate and destroy the world, the presence of the latter can no longer be taken for granted.

[37] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 104.

[38] Ibid., p. 109.

[39] Ibid.

including the crucial implication that these roots are meaningful, perhaps redemptive, and not just technical.[40]

But Rancière criticizes the metaphysical pretense of the cinema books on logical rather than historical grounds, flagging what for him amounts to a series of self-destructive contradictions (call them conceptual confusions). There is no interest in tracking or cross-referencing a legible lineage with other cinematic metaphysicians whose contributions to film theory, while at times excessively generalizing and grandiose, are not to be underestimated or devalued on the grounds that theory thrives in flight, as it were. Nevertheless, it is important to note how contradictions can readily befall theories of film which tend to anthropomorphize the medium when all they really want to do is determine to what extent and under what conditions its autonomy can be represented prior to acts of artistry or as extensions of those acts. For if the existence of film precedes its essence, as it were, then the question of essence in the case of film—a unique case, after all—is shot through with existence: "What is film if film is life?" But film can only live if *brought to life*, right? No medium is pure matter just as no artist is pure mind.

One of Deleuze's key metaphysical claims about film—that cinematic imagery places perception *in* things—is according to Rancière subverted by the fact that Deleuze is also forever insisting that the power of montage and the virtuosity of filmmakers who use it to their full advantage are always seeking to re-inscribe perception *back* into things, as if the very things which cinema automatically animates were devoid of the conditions of image expressivity that Deleuze seems to want to grant them. Rancière is also quick to remind us that Deleuze's "plane of immanence" (an elaborate piece of theoretical architecture to be sure) is designed to delineate a space of pure potentiality in things, bodies and movements, a virtual field of potentiality that filmmakers must actualize in various ways to reveal the perception within things rather than or at least in addition to their own way of perceiving and projecting upon them. At least in principle, filmmakers are able to use narrative structures and sensory motor passages to grab hold of the spatio-temporal passages themselves, the actual moments and events in their purity which

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[40] Their theories seem to penetrate most deeply into the medium when the images and sounds are borne up in light and movement yet extracted from the physicalities and contingencies of the external world, for as formless forms with no single tie to art or nature they open a secret passage marked "return to nature" or "return to what is left of nature." Nature, that is, in the wake of its destruction and disenchantment at the hands of intellectual abstraction, political oppression, technological domination, and last but not least the hermetic elitism of the avant garde whose various attempts to substitute presence for representation went against all odds.

constitute the substance of the storytelling dialectics. When filmmakers succeed in transcending their own project narratives by literally finding themes, ideas and concepts in the world of light, shadow and matter, they have tracked and graphed what Deleuze calls the plane of immanence (or what I would call the return of metaphysics). In this way perception is given back to things despite already possessing some sediment or spark of it in the first place. So when Rancière claims that Deleuze's perception-in-things and poetic enlivening of the plane of immanence are at odds with an equal if not greater emphasis upon the subjectivity and aesthetic practices of individual filmmakers, a contradiction is discovered that may for all its confusion play right into the hands of Deleuze who is trying to show that the creative dialogue between artist and medium, especially in the case of cinema's vital materialisms, is anything but logically straightforward or predictable with respect to authorship. As we have already seen, an original and enlightening worldview in the cinema is as much a product of how the world is made to "view itself" when filmed, edited and projected; and sometimes the most inspired strokes of artistic activity are simply keeping an open mind (much harder than it seems) and not hiding or forgetting the world's animate "self-disclosure," whether while filming it in pieces or piecing it back together again through the principles of montage. It is therefore no accident that Deleuze often privileges filmmakers who use montage to respect the shot, cultivating images from within and in terms of the world's ontological signatures of self-disclosure, rather than exemplars of the more traditional "pre-war" approach of conferring fixed unitary values upon images, studding them within a causal chain of predetermined movements and teleological meanings.

Rancière's reading of Deleuze's complex and at times bewildering negotiation of cinematic ontology and aesthetics continues to be enlightening for our purposes insofar as it yields a diagnosis of a hidden messianism running throughout the cinema books:

> Montage has to put perception back in things because its operation is one of restitution. Intentional artistic activity renders unto the events of sensible matter the potentialities the human brain had deprived them of in order to constitute a sensory motor universe adapted to its needs and subject to its mastery… [T]his history of the art of cinema is just as much a history of redemption.[41]

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[41] Rancière, *Film Fables*, p. 111.

Rancière's emphasis on redemption, which as far as I know Deleuze does not dwell on, is indebted to Kracauer's glorified picture of cinema as the redemption of physical reality. What's interesting about this is that Kracauer called for such a redemption immediately after the Second World War when the ruins of human thought were still smouldering, and looked to cinema less as an occasion for artistic interventions (perhaps because so many of these interventions had become thoroughly political during fascism) than as a kind of phenomenological interruption in the routine dominations of human beings and their various technologies over everyday experience. Yet what needs to be pointed out regarding this cinematic aesthetics of redemption, a fact which seems to escape Rancière's astute interpretation of the psychology of doing metaphysics through art, is that the opportunity afforded by the art of cinema to undercut the daily needs and wants and tyrannical mastery of the human brain over its horizons of intelligibility is entirely contingent upon an artistic medium with a grossly non-artistic image-making machine at its center (or one of its centers): a child-like camera-eye which the acculturated human eye may use to undo itself and see as if through fresh eyes or mindless eyes. Of course, the latter can always impose itself and exploit the former for its own ends, the recording properties of film becoming a means of preserving and projecting precisely what a mind sees or wants to see and sometimes wishes or even forces an audience to see (i.e. the ideological toxicity of propaganda films). But when a history of redemption is experienced through the lens of mechanical reproduction, in a way the possibility of redemption remains embedded and protected within what Rodowick calls the virtual life of film or what Deleuze calls the plane of immanence: the act of putting perception back into things, which human perception did so well to dissolve and ultimately disenchant, is a strategically contradictory automatism in the surrealist sense of the term where artistic intention must to some extent *lose* consciousness of itself, putting perception back into things by perceiving how these things perceive on their own, perceiving them in the light of their own image. Rancière might instantly dismiss such a notion as wild, illogical and perhaps indefensible, whereas Deleuze, it seems to me, would just call it *practical*—in other words you have to do it to know it, trusting that the filmmakers will figure it out for themselves and precisely without the aid of philosophical reason. This is why nearly all of Deleuze's readings of films are readings of *filmmakers* whose vision of the world is calibrated to what the camera "sees and hears" and to what montage "thinks" in a world enchanted, albeit faintly or cryptically, with resonant perceptual life.

To better understand Rancière's tone throughout the critical chapter, as one which harbors an air of accusation towards theoretical arbitrariness and the stubborn un-verifiability of the theoretical edifice as a whole, we must remember that when it comes to discussions of cinema he unconditionally prioritizes the history of *art* over world history, if for no other reason than the fact that cinema for all its philosophical potential and aesthetic hybridity is ultimately an artform that responds to changes within its own discourses and institutions, first and foremost. As a result, the cinema can only transform in its own way and in its own time, which means that for Rancière it is not subject to circumstantial ruptures but rather evolutions or at most revolutions within its own conditions of possibility. For him the cinema cannot be subject to pre/post war demarcations nor held at the mercy of grand historical narratives. As a basis for this perspective he suggests that throughout film history, which no doubt engages with human history, there are numerous instances of overlap between movement and time images, particularly that of temporal disruption and optical/aural purification in affection images which Deleuze still wants to classify—or is obligated to by his argument—as aspects of the movement-image.[42] The ontology of cinema is born with two sets of genes, as it were, genes for both continuity and discontinuity, sensory motor orientation and optical/aural dislocation, etc., and whatever shift may be perceived to occur from movement to time at a certain time in history (call it war time) is less a consequence of historical crises like wars and civil wars and genocides and the political catastrophes which befall civilizations disillusioned with the utopias of art. From the very beginning there is always the possibility for the medium rather than the message of an art to be transmitted *as* message, and there will always be filmmakers, motivated by various cultural conditions and internal inspirations, who unbeknownst to them operate under the influence of Bazin's myth of total cinema in which movement and time are joined at the hip in a manner that is perhaps easy to imagine yet impossible to realize without alternating or redistributing the emphasis between movement and time.[43] If we were to read Deleuze through Bazin, the great Deleuzian rupture is apocalyptic and the pure optical/sound situations which emerge in its wake usher in a cinematic "night of judgment" where postwar film characters lose their agency by becoming agents of their own guilty conscience. But

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[42] Ibid., p. 112.

[43] Before wrestling with the duck-rabbit illusion and losing, at first glance it appears we might be able to perceive both figures simultaneously, only to discover in practice that this is where our perceptual limits lie.

of course these events are always *to come,* and the ruptures are the precarious steps along the way, placed far apart such that one must leap, perhaps with faith.

The provocative crux of Rancière's critique of Deleuze's cinema books is rooted in his suspicion of the rigid historically determined binary maintained between the two types of images, movement and time, and elaborated in an almost literary manner with World War II fulfilling the role of climax and crisis. For reasons extraneous to the history, aesthetics and ontology of cinema, the split into two discrete ages also comes at the expense of the spatio-temporal entwinement of the medium. But for Rancière the rupture of the sensory motor link at the hands of the war cannot be an historical or even an aesthetic rupture precisely identifiable and locatable in time; at best it amounts to a description or endurance of what he vaguely calls the chaos of matter and thought ordering themselves through the two ages or regimes. In other words, the rupture of the sensory motor link is reduced by Rancière to a mere hermeneutic, stripping Deleuze of the historical hinge and theoretical boldness of the claim that the cinema is an evolving artform and, as such, can equally devolve in tandem with the events of human history. Rancière, in depriving the rupture of its historical application and potential on logical grounds, also deprives the cinema of an intimacy with the everyday for which Deleuze finds fleeting glimpses of testimony in movies that continue to move him, the everyday being not the field where wars are fought but perhaps the site where their ramifications are most deeply felt. For all Rancière's common sense quietism we may question his courage, just as Wittgenstein questions the demystifications of logical analysis by remarking how effectively they manage to destroy "everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important."[44] And so if a rupture is never anything more than a way of seeing, or if a rupture is barred from occurring within the body of the image itself regardless of the cause, then what sort of weight can such a concept possess and why would Deleuze be driven to call upon it in the way that he does? Are ruptures theoretical fictions that totalize historical change, or are they rather the traumatic wounds of human experience of which it is the responsibility of theory to help elucidate? If not the aftermath of a world war with its wave of cultural rebuilding and critical questioning, what will make us want to take seriously the moment when cinema shows clear modernist signs of deep self-consciousness, and without such "epiphanies" how might we perceive, for example,

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[44] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §118.

cinema and politics in light of each other?[45] Perhaps the critical smoothing out of the rupture of the sensory motor link—a levelling down of this particular house of cards—constitutes an erasure of cinema's radical embodiment of art and politics. And indeed it's hard to believe that a political aesthetician like Rancière would miss out on the possibility of a concrete point of intersection between the two conceptual regimes fatefully pitted as polar opposites. Of course this point of intersection is germane to neither one and so cannot be predicted or planned, and perhaps it cannot be properly studied either without having a flexible, open-ended, ultimately *creative* conception of the nature of one's object of analysis.

It is by now almost a film theory cliché that the rupture of the sensory motor link along with the irreparable crack in the movement-image is based on the coming apart of action/reaction schemes of cinematic legibility and the resulting lapse of the image into the void separating images across a continuum, revealing pure optical and sound situations through narrative drift and the subtle, sometimes minimalist dramatization of psychological paralysis and alienation in the modern world. The rupture of the sensory motor link is actually theorized by Deleuze, forcefully and without compromise, as a stoppage of the movement image itself: literally the movement specific to cinema and constitutive of its primal ontology has come to a full stop; these images no longer move forward, no longer follow each other down a path of narrative causality fueled by the coherency of psychological motivation and the uninhibited ability to act rather than think about actions done in the past or yet to be done. Now I am inclined to believe that what is convincing about this argument is also what is most seductive or convenient about it; the core upholding the vision of the cinema books is indeed a compelling mix of showmanship and salvation. It is on this point that Rancière's common sense approach, exposing fictions at the basis of facts, puts the right sort of pressure on Deleuze's fable of the two ages of cinema, pressuring him to come clean about the limits of theory's explanatory powers: "[I]f Deleuze has to allegorize this rupture by means of emblems taken from the stories [i.e. exemplary post-war films], isn't it because it cannot be identified as an actual difference between types of images? Isn't it because the theoretician of the

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[45] With respect to film culture, the post-war scenario in France is defined above all by *criticism*, for example by François Truffaut's rejection of a "scriptwriter" cinema in favor of a personal approach marked by a clear and compelling stylistic signature. The modernism of the New Wave grows out of the manifesto pleas and tones of such criticism, suggesting that the link between cinema and war is made through the terms of a practice-oriented film criticism and an auteur theory privileging audiovisual authorship.

cinema must find a visible incarnation for a purely ideal rupture? The movement-image is 'in crisis' because the thinker needs it to be."[46]

Two points are in order. First, while the claim that Deleuze's emphasis on purely narrative events comes at the expense of their cinematic form is hardly to be taken for granted, there is no doubt that the concept of rupture or paralysis through which the time-image comes to the fore requires the foundation of cinematic movement in the examples Deleuze uses to articulate the break of the sensory motor link. And the suggestion is that in narrative film or perhaps film in general, rupture and its ensuing paralysis, when expressed on the level of form and regardless how terrible or totalizing the impact, is *impossible* given the mobile nature of film itself, for all films must maintain or at least declare their status as acts of movement in order for stasis to become a possibility (just as silence becomes audible in cinema only in the era of sound, before which silence is either a fact of cinematic life or a resplendent backdrop for the live musical score). Furthermore, any dramatic illustration of stasis, in the form of contemplation or epiphany or tranquility, must ultimately hinge to some extent on the conventions and figurations of narrative film which embrace motion as a matter of course. Second, the weighty accusation that Deleuze "needs" the movement image to be in crisis enacts a prophylactic diagnosis informed by the belief that the theoretical enterprise has a negative impact on the philosopher's integrity and perspicacity of expression: the impossibility of a complete stoppage in cinematic movement is akin to nonsense in Wittgenstein's sense of the term. At the close of his investigation and assessment of Deleuze's film-philosophy, Rancière's decision to psychologize the theorist takes the matter to court, as it were, arguing that the theoretical disposition is notoriously susceptible not just to abstraction but, let us say, delusion. I am slightly off-put by the fact that the judgment seems to be leveled against the philosopher *himself* rather than the words he uses and the conjuring of contexts which may strike us as alien to our everyday encounters with the art of film. At the same time, the claim that a kind of hinge is needed between the two sequential and perhaps binary books—the crisis of movement as the path towards a direct image of time—strikes me as an accurate response to contemporary cinema's use of movement in the service of time, particularly regarding a growing disillusionment with progress and closure, a disillusionment we could say with its very own artifice of illusion.

I will conclude this section with the suggestion that what Rancière describes as Deleuze's need for the crisis of action runs deeper than a mere theoretical machination. Deleuze's motivation

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[46] Rancière, *Film Fables*, p. 116.

in this case implies a fundamentally different way of looking at the historical evolution of cinema, that is, as a movement towards redemption. Rancière undoubtedly understands this movement, explaining it to us with characteristic succinctness and sensitivity, but it is clear that he does not see cinema in this way and in these terms. And a way of seeing gives way, as always, to a way of speaking—for Deleuze a way of *theorizing* guided by the unshakeable intuition that the culture of film is less of an achievement than an attestation to an inhospitable or apocalyptic state of affairs in need of redemption. Theories of redemption can also be understood as the voice of skepticism clouding the voice of reason and making a plea for faith to take the place of knowledge (this is the voice that Cavell finds active in the later Wittgenstein and which Allen and Turvey have no ear for). It is only through such a trembling and desperate voice that Deleuze can compose these final words on the cinema: "The reaction of which man has been dispossessed can be replaced only by belief. Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears. The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link."[47]

Belief must precede sight for sight to reconnect, only then can seeing become a condition for believing in the world. Belief, however, is blind, and no knowledge exists for how to see and hear in the blindness of belief. Hence the idea that the camera-eye "believes" in the world—even false worlds, there is no capacity whatsoever to discriminate—whereas human eyes hungry for anthropocentric mastery disassemble and falsify the belief. This potentially irresolvable conflict appears to hold as much for Cavell's film-philosophy as it does for Deleuze: cinema's ontological "belief in the world" throws into relief the human condemnation to skepticism because belief is conceptualized—inescapably, it would appear—as a category of knowledge, that is, as something which filmmakers must consciously perform (Deleuze) or as something which spectators recognize, perhaps unconsciously, must fundamentally exclude the modern autonomous subject, the self behind which the world as a whole can be seen but not touched (Cavell). That cinema can redeem our relationship to the world, or show that our relationship to the world is such that redemption becomes a quotidian affair, is also in keeping with the Bazinian idea that cinema is always yet to be invented, always progressing paradoxically or asymptotically towards its origins as a "perfect" representation of the world. If you believe that cinema begins around 1895, the moving image gazing through the threshold of the 20th century, then no amount of historical contingency can alter the fact that movement and time are together at last. But if you believe that

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[47] Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, pp. 171-2.

there is something cinematic at work in nature itself and that the history of cinema proper is at the mercy of culture, then cinema begins when history comes to an end and life on earth is at last redeemed. There is no question that the former position is practically default while the latter, echoed by the cinema books, is deeply esoteric and fraught with subjective impressions (perhaps more conducive to an actual film than a theory of film). But as positions on the cinema as a whole they are mutually exclusive, moving in opposite directions and speaking different languages—and should one call the other to task a response may not be forthcoming. For such a response would break the silence necessary for cinema to rouse belief over skepticism and clarity over confusion, dual features of a new metaphysics whose form resides in the image over the word.

The Antidotes of Art (second experimental treatment)

This question of whether the medium of film precedes or grounds its history, thus taking the temperature of world history, is inseparable from the question of how or to what extent film can function metaphysically, that is, in the metaphysical terms which philosophy (be it of the iconoclastic or pragmatic variety) has deemed to be deceptively wishful or grossly false or altogether nonsensical. Such a question sets the stage in turn for whether art can do philosophy in this sense; and while it may be unanswerable and ultimately dependent upon the perspective one brings and the motives which drive it along, it attempts to draw the limits of philosophy's hold on knowledge in the humanities, harboring the hope that art can begin where philosophy must end. Philosophy as the discipline where everything seems possible, armed with nothing except the courage to question and conclude, is now skeptical of its freedom, stares down the integrity of its achievements, and returns to the game of knowledge as law-bound as a hard science. In what I have been calling the wake of metaphysics (or in this chapter, let it be known as Wittgenstein's wake), philosophy can be generally described as the undoing of problems caused by solutions to unsolvable metaphysical questions, in place of what philosophy normally does, which is to engage, according to the helpful if reductive definitions of Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in something like "concept creation."[48] But when philosophy becomes skeptical or self-conscious about the metaphysical deviations of concept creation, it doesn't necessarily have to inhibit its creative impulse in favor of pure criticism or tests of misguided reason or a guarded if dignified quietism.

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[48] See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London and New York: Verso, 2003).

Instead it can pursue "antidotes" rather than diagnostics or therapies; it can find its own metaphysical aspirations, which I am suggesting persist unabated in the human condition, at work in a context outside ordinary language and the everyday where concept creation is not forever bound by the criteria of conceptual confusion.[49]

So the idea that art can do philosophy is also, perhaps, a declaration that philosophy—or something about a certain way philosophy is done, an ancient way, an unbreakably habitual way— has come to an end, specifically philosophy as the asking of unanswerable questions or the presenting of unlivable forms of life.[50] Cinema intervenes here on the ontological level, but other artforms have something to say—or do—in this respect as well and not only where the stakes of metaphysics are concerned. Before proceeding with this line of thought, it ought to be said that art does philosophy differently only when philosophers are dissatisfied with their discipline—due to lack of discipline or excessive discipline—and look to art, aesthetic experience, and hermeneutics as an antidote for philosophy's metaphysical viruses of thought.

Cora Diamond, in her thought-provoking and relentlessly open-minded essay "Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is," on the relation (and sometimes friction) between poetry and philosophy, more specifically between literature and moral philosophy, asks plainly and with force whether it matters one way or another if we say that literature in particular, or art in general, can do philosophy, and vice versa, whether philosophy can act as literature.[51] I take her question to block as much as invite the ancient yet still pertinent debate between philosophy and

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[49] This is what I meant when I spoke of the metaphysical aspirations of film in Deleuze's theory as yielding clarity as opposed to confusion. The rupture of the sensory-motor link and the consequent crystallization of time are, it seems to me, clear as images yet indefensible as words. The impact of World War II leaves material traces on film which would otherwise impress us too deeply, scarring us, leaving us speechless and disoriented. The shift from action to perception and from continuity to discontinuity in the cinema books are both outcomes of sensory-motor paralysis, yet they yield not the blurry illegibility of the post-traumatic but rather images with a higher indexical charge and resonant sense of place, in other words images more properly "cinematic," representing pure optical and sound situations which Deleuze classifies as direct images of time. For example, the confused speechlessness of these postwar characters and the sheer randomness of their new wandering existences manifest onscreen not in the untold distortions and eclipsing expressionisms of damaged minds, but rather in the steely silence, dwarfing expansiveness, and unchangeable presence of the world in its own image—a world that is often unbearable for these characters because all they are capable of is bearing witness to it.

[50] Of course, this doesn't actually mean that philosophy *has* reached an end, just because certain post-war philosophers have great difficulty imagining, let's say, the moral afterlife of reason's consummation in techniques of mass destruction. The end is perhaps better described as a "limit point" drawn from centuries of overuse.

[51] See Cora Diamond, "Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 367-82.

poetry beginning with Plato's famous (or infamous, depending on where you stand) banishment of the poets from the ideal city in *Republic*. Asking it also risks cultivating an incurable nostalgia for poets and philosophers alike, that is, if a time is imagined—a paradisiacal time of innocent unities—where both are seen to approach the same complex questions of how to live but from different angles, staging philosophy as workshop dialogues and tragedy as enactments or acknowledgments of contingent circumstances, the great forces of fate, which are always bound to get in the way of our best-laid plans. Such plans for life are philosophical in nature, representing our best intentions for how to live before life itself, as it were, enters the stage with designs of its own, right on cue.

I begin with Diamond's skepticism over the very question of whether art can do the work of philosophy, that is, whether art can work out what philosophy can only talk about and whether philosophy can retain its identity despite a transformation of venue. It seems to me that the structure of this question is itself an expression of a certain type (the common "institutional" type) of philosophy as determined by concepts whose generality not only frames the particular but simultaneously abandons the particular to the elusive middle zone of the binary opposition. I'm inclined to say that the art-philosophy or poetry-philosophy distinction is a binary opposition of this sort produced by metaphysics, a product of philosophy's temptation towards systematic thinking and conceptual mastery over other, often neighboring, disciplines. Diamond in this essay and Martha Nussbaum throughout her book of essays *Love's Knowledge* are both drawn to literature's capacity to positively contribute to moral philosophy in particular, but not because certain literary works can be appreciated as adding to moral knowledge, such as it is.[52] Rather they are interested in the way certain novels—or certain passages from novels, along with the reader's passing through *changed* in some way—escape the conceptual grids and frictionless abstractions of philosophy through what they occasionally refer to as "the texture of being."[53] The implication is that moral philosophy is generally devoid of the so-called texture that complicates moral action

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[52] See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Now I don't mean to conflate moral philosophy with philosophy as a whole, and I do appreciate the difficulty if not impossibility for artworks to contribute to other philosophical domains such as logic or the philosophy of language. Yet I do take the proposition seriously: throughout this thesis I have been trying to make a case for cinema's contribution to metaphysics, and my continued interest in art undoubtedly turns on the latter's power, through modernist self-definition and postmodern playfulness, to expand and sometimes undermine our aesthetic theories.

[53] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, p. 238.

in the real world and which might prompt skeptics of moral philosophy (call them ethical realists) to honor singularity by asking "What do we *actually* do in these circumstances?" as a replacement for the normative idealist's "What *ought* we to do?" While moral philosophy concerns itself with responsible human action towards the barrage of predicaments allegedly facing us every day, literature, through the power of its particulars and what Andre Furlani, in his Wittgensteinian reading of the fiction of Samuel Beckett, calls its corrective ordinariness,[54] can render clear without clarifying that which confounds philosophical analysis—crystalizing the commonplaceness of contradiction, as it were, without the need to resolve it or even pose it as logically doomed—and in so doing expand regions of human experience prior to and proceeding our most decisive actions, which moralists tend to keep rooted to the domain of reason alone. The texture of being thus aims to be a radically open-ended concept; it cries for particulars and the ambiguities surrounding them, the very textures of consciousness that the concept itself can only point to, instructing us to *read* instead of philosophize. The concept says, "It's really best not to talk about it at all and instead see how human beings fare in the world." And so, the only "moral" way of assessing the philosophical potential of literature is, in the end, to avoid philosophical abstraction and inhabit the particulars which are felt (not just thought) to be swollen with what Michael Wood calls "the taste of knowledge."[55] Curating particulars and constellating them into a recipe for insight does require a movement beyond their limited scope, though I hesitate to describe such a movement as one of mere generalization. If well-performed, the particular is what guides the general and keeps it open, hospitable, *instructive*—and not merely efficacious and doctrinaire.

For the remainder of this brief concluding section, I try to put myself in the position where I must face the very particulars (call them the antidotes) which in my experience of literature feel like rather than resemble philosophy, bearing the taste as opposed to the mere mass of knowledge, harboring ethical import by inhabiting the gray shadows cast by our morals. Yet the key to this maneuver, while undoubtedly cut by philosophical methodology, is that it cannot proceed with

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[54] Andre Furlani, *Beckett after Wittgenstein* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), p. 16.

[55] Wood borrows yet tames the phrase from Roland Barthes who describes the taste of knowledge as "salty." Not bitter, not sweet—this is important, for me, because the taste of salt is our very own taste, the one we have forgotten how to taste, and are reminded of it, if ever, when we taste it on someone else, the other person that philosophy is obsessively courting yet is rarely able to meet face to face. Michael Wood, *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Stephen Mulhall, "Film as Philosophy: The Priority of the Particular," in *On Film*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 129-60.

philosophy in hand, that is, armed with various concepts (i.e. skepticism, alterity, phenomenology, solipsism, responsibility, etc.) that seek illustration or reification in the texts themselves. The only way to bear this out is to try it myself, and so I would like to offer, somewhat in a spirit of risk, a couple examples from literature that are not to be taken as exemplifications of philosophical ideas or clarifications of philosophy's conceptual confusions or profound demonstrations of model moral actions. If the following "examples" manage to do some philosophical "work" it is because, as literature, words are in the service of situations and these situations feature characters struggling to make sense of their own lives. Often in literature the struggle for knowledge is a part of knowledge, a significant part which philosophy tends to write out of its own history. Literature becomes philosophy when philosophy has just cause to migrate and metamorphose into everyday human beings free yet forced to think as a mode of survival rather than a privilege.

The following literary examples are inseparable from the aesthetic experiences which I believe I underwent without the philosophical frameworks I would later bring to bear on them due to the singularity and gravity of those experiences. The first one comes from the conclusion of Henry James' novella "The Beast in the Jungle."[56] The story tracks main character John Marcher's deeply rooted, imperishable, almost primordial conviction that he is destined for a life of such epic proportions that all he can do (no, must do) is simply wait for the great event to transpire, to unveil itself before him like a visiting spirit, the knowing wink of destiny's justifiably tardy arrival. He relates his secret, his beast in the jungle, to a woman who takes up his strange cause and agrees to wait by his side—to wait for life to happen to this man in whom she believes so deeply, seemingly hypnotized by a form of self-belief which knows no bounds. Time passes. More time passes. The woman eventually dies, leaving Marcher alone by her graveside. As he faces the passing of his loyal life companion, avoiding the ugliness and sting of death by taking in the everyday minutia of his surroundings (from what I recall—and adhering to recollection is a testament, I believe, to the taste of knowledge—the tasks of a laborer in the cemetery act as a soundboard for his spiking consciousness regarding the great event for which he was not prepared), he begins to have a realization, a first glimpse through the veneer of his own well-protected or self-polished soul and into the depths of his shallowness, the out of body self-awareness known as an "epiphany." The reader, who has probably found Marcher's egotism and grandiosity to be utterly irredeemable, may

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[56] Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle," in *The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Novels* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1995), pp. 404-51.

feel an unexpected sense of sympathy at this point, for the reader knows the knowledge that Marcher is about to enter, senses the violent surge of regret and the tragedy awaiting the masculine ego in love with itself and childish in its inability to separate fantasy from reality. But as readers we must face exactly *how* Marcher comes into this knowledge and then, if we so dare, pose its question to our own lives which star—who else?—ourselves.

James writes, in effect, that Marcher's sudden wakefulness to the great event—dawning as the woman's eternal belief in him, despite his abuse of her, where the end of her belief in him means the end of his belief in himself—opens the floodgates of knowledge; and when the waters have reached their peak with the blinding realization of squandered life, of displaced love from the other to oneself alone, James refuses to conceptualize the event—setting aside the encyclopedic thesaurus flowing throughout his writerly veins—and instead electrifies its nearness in the following way: "This horror of waking—*this* was knowledge, knowledge under the breath of which the very tears in his eyes seemed to freeze."[57] While this expression does mark a shift from the particularity of Marcher's plight to a generalization informed by empathy and reason, the knowledge is described here not in intellectual but in corporeal terms which, as it turns out, cannot actually describe it. The "it" is a "this"—not a thing but rather everything—squeezing through his parted lips and freezing the very tears in his eyes. This "this" cannot be stopped; this knowledge which Marcher has concealed from himself for so many years—his whole adult life—has arisen and will not abide: this too is a beast. Marcher's awareness that the great event of his life lies dead before him, and so his forced acceptance of the fact that the beast in the jungle has turned out to be a wasted life, beyond redemption, making him the man for whom *nothing at all is to happen*, James describes this (and perhaps only this) as "knowledge." This side of knowledge—this self-knowledge after a life of self-centeredness—hurts, and for Marcher it is safe to say that it will also destroy. There will be no moving on from this; learning this lesson is eternal damnation for the rest of one's life; it is the very point beyond which there is no return, no recovery, no second chance. And this point is marked, etched, by an excruciating and perhaps unwanted awareness that what Marcher thought was his deepest self-knowledge ("I am destined for something great") was in fact nothing more than a denial of knowledge, what Cavell has referred to as the avoidance of the everyday: an attack on the very texture of life linking us with other lives, despite that part of ourselves which longs to become elevated like a god or withdrawn like a ghost.

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[57] Ibid., p. 450 (italics in original).

For my second example I will shift gears twice, to the medium of theater as practiced by Samuel Beckett's theater of the absurd. While Beckett's work has been shown by many to invite philosophical interpretation as much as deny it or even ridicule it—perhaps for the simple reason that meaning in Beckett is found to coincide with meaninglessness, or that meaninglessness is discovered to be the very trial of meaning (where the verdict is that humans are condemned to meaning in Jean Paul Sartre's sense of being condemned to freedom)—once again there is a temptation to look either for philosophical reinforcements of nihilism or critiques of philosophy's tendency to drain nihilism of all its "meaning," a double path admirably taken by Simon Critchley in his book *Very Little… Almost Nothing*, though without, it seems to me, venturing much into the deeper woods of nihilism where the devaluation of value thrives in all its human complexity and contradiction.[58] While I wish to take nothing away from readings of Beckett that seek simultaneously to illustrate and discredit some of the great continental or existentialist narratives of philosophy, especially the apocalyptic narrative of the deeply impoverished yet ontologically liberated condition of post-metaphysical being or life after the death of God, I would like to single out a brief exchange in *Endgame* between its two main characters, Hamm and Clov, one which strikes me as almost too modest, comical, complacently bewildered and flesh bound for philosophy to gain a proper foothold or mouthpiece. Again I am interested in philosophy's interest in places in art that bear its burdens, burdens lightened or altogether suspended by abstraction and conceptualization; and by zooming in on the details perhaps I can prevent an overly conceptual or generalizing reading of Beckett on the question of meaning and the plight of the human as it wrestles with its own precarious existence between consciousness and self-consciousness. In the play, as in life, perhaps, the moment of questioning comes as if randomly. A familiar yet by no means friendly silence or pause has descended, words have come to a full stop, it's as if language itself is catching its breath, and anyone may say anything next. Hamm could tell a story, cryptic and comedic, or Clov could declare his commitment to leave Hamm, again, or the play could just end—game over. But in this static silence Hamm asks a question, on the face of it a philosophical question if it were not sprung by a mere mortal who cares not for such things. The question, while unnatural, occurs naturally: it is prompted by an uncertain situation or a situation personifying an inherent uncertainty, is directed towards another human being as a thought which is acted upon,

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[58] See Lecture 3 on Beckett in Simon Critchley, *Very Little… Almost Nothing*, Revised Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 165-212.

and posed out of a sense of urgency and concern without any trace of philosophical "posturing." The question is, simply, "What's happening?" The (seemingly) simple question, which recurs sporadically throughout the play and takes different forms, is also repeated by Hamm on one occasion like an echo, as a response to the feeling that every human day, regardless of newness, ends in the same way, comes to an end like yesterday did and tomorrow will.[59] Plays vary, have meaning, communicate and accomplish; *this* performance is unique and different; we are being *led somewhere*, etc.—but when the curtain closes we are reminded that we have just participated in an ancient ritual the meaning of which is inseparable from the repetition of it.

Since Hamm's ultra-literal question to Clov is partly rhetorical, given that nothing is happening or everything is repeating, it is actually not so simple. Philosophy by comparison seems to simplify it, and not because simplicity is what it seeks. In philosophical terms the question lacks a context and thus could be phrased as "Why is there something rather than nothing?", or what's more fitting for Beckett, "Why is there nothing rather than something?" This is philosophy's abstract retort and non-situated point of departure because it lacks the concrete, intensely material events to genuinely ask *what* is happening rather than *why*. Beckett's phrasing seems to me a significant literary occasion, and one with a philosophical gravity that, like the example from "The Beast in the Jungle," is fraught with terror and poignancy. Clov responds to the practically impossible question with an insight that is as much a sign (sigh) of resignation: "Something is taking its course."[60] *What* is taking its course? What *course*, where is this ship headed, and why do I not know the itinerary, not to mention the destination? These potential follow-up questions are also the property of philosophical procedure to a certain extent, and they are not asked by Hamm because he knows all too well that the course is without logic, without destination. It is a disease, and it may be spreading uncontrollably. Thus it is not a matter of where we are going but that we are dying, and this takes life in full bloom. Hamm accepts Clov's "answer" not because it is correct, but rather because it *serves* the situation, it is good enough to continue enduring it and good enough to justify the next word, the next breath. There is also the fact that in this audacious moment in *Endgame* Hamm's question—"What is happening?"—is prompted by the silence which

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[59] Samuel Beckett, *Endgame and Act Without Words* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 20 and 40. The echo-like repetition of Hamm's question occurs on p. 20.

[60] Ibid. Clov responds in this way to both occasions of the question from Hamm—a very good answer (i.e. short, precise yet vague, correct on the face of it) to a very difficult if not unanswerable (i.e. metaphysical) question.

descends and envelops these beings, and only these beings, who speak language insofar as they are spoken by language. Language creatures. This is not an ordinary silence; silence is, fundamentally, extraordinary for humans, and when it prevails to the breaking point of what we can withstand, it's as if the world crystallizes into the full measure of its materiality, albeit a materiality without metaphysical anchors.[61] Hamm's question is a response, a shock, and a reaching out for support in the void. His question to Clov is as close as he gets, while sitting on a chair, to leaning on his friend's shoulder.

Now to bring this discussion back to philosophy and the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, the odd remark from the *Investigations* that one really should only write philosophy as poetry may be seen as directing our interest in philosophy outside of philosophy proper, to poetry or literature or film, encouraging us to question what is proper here and experiment.[62] But the remark also begs the question of the sort of philosophy Wittgenstein actually did write in the end, and whether or not he actually saw his later work as proper to philosophy or if his idea/practice of philosophical therapy is more appropriately categorized as poetry. Wittgenstein's use of the word "should" may suggest that he felt that he did not quite reach the poetic within the philosophic after all, a subtle confession that he could not do philosophy completely outside the metaphysical traditions of philosophy, perhaps because such an aim must compose in a new key and so leave philosophy as we know it behind. But regardless of what one takes philosophy or poetry to be, and whether one ought to imitate or become the other, in Wittgenstein's case I would like to propose two concrete senses in which the poetic can be understood as vital for philosophy's realization, or therapeutic annihilation, of some of its highest ambitions, without having to lose what we call philosophy. For as Cavell wonders at the end of *The Claim of Reason*, if philosophy becomes

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[61] Furlani also makes a compelling case for Beckett beginning within the very silence which philosophy, according to Wittgenstein, must respect lest it slip irretrievably into nonsense. See Furlani, *Beckett after Wittgenstein*, pp. 19-28. Now if this is true enough, it occurs to me that for the writer to succeed at failing to speak the unspeakable—for Beckett, to "say" what human beings *are*, what human life is *made of*, the *formlessness* of our form of life—constitutes a literary metaphysics, and hence the subject for another book.

[62] Is this idea at odds with Wittgenstein's fondness for the poetry of his fellow countryman Georg Trakl? "I do not understand them [Trakl's poems]," Wittgenstein said, "but their *tone* makes me happy. It is the tone of true genius." Good poetry *shows*; it works on a level higher (or lower) than understanding. Whatever the case may be, Wittgenstein showed his support for this power/powerlessness of poetry by funding Trakl, along with a small group of poets, painters and writers, among them Rainer Maria Rilke, with a piece of the family wealth from which he felt it necessary to disinherit himself. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London, UK: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 108 (biographical reference) and 110 (quote from Wittgenstein).

literature it may no longer know itself, which is to say that philosophy as literature will be unrecognizable to philosophers and the general audience of philosophy, the majority of which is still made up of professional philosophers.[63]

First there is Wittgenstein's call to return language from its metaphysical to its everyday use, which is quite useless as a claim unless its support takes the form of therapy. It's the monumental task of the *Investigations* as a whole to lead language back to us and renew our lease on it, or not. Since the results of these investigations are "rehabilitations," their success will vary from session to session and from reader to reader, depending also on the reader's willingness to be treated as a patient. The second sense of the poetic belongs to the fragmented or aphoristic nature of Wittgenstein's philosophical style, which he does not present as a method or justify in any of the remarks as far as I'm aware. Attention to form "poeticizes" the philosophy and almost entirely banishes discursivity. The form of this unusual style is such that it introduces a certain degree of formlessness into a philosophy trying to undo the metaphysical formations which have *deformed* our concepts and alienated us from language. Returning language from its metaphysical to its everyday use, and writing philosophy as fragments rather than as a systematic whole, these practices affecting both the form and content of the *Investigations* can be seen as amounting to something like a poetic vision. Cavell describes this—and sometimes the whole of philosophy, or our guarded reaction to philosophy's aspiration to make us whole—with the carefully chosen and to my mind appropriate word "esoteric."[64] This term has many implications, the most obvious being that the *Investigations* cries for categorization because it cannot be so easily categorized; it is not a work of philosophy *or* poetry. Perhaps this is why Wittgenstein refers to it in the preface as an "album,"[65] which I understand—the author breaks off at this point—as an anonymous collection of thoughts recorded over time and organized chronologically or categorically or even randomly, the ordering principle remaining internal to a sense of *evolution*. The paradoxical combination of anonymity and idiosyncrasy is also a feature of poetry which serves the word, and if Wittgenstein writes what language "says" then we may have a formula for style without personal

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[63] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 496.

[64] See Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Updated Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 44-72. See also Cavell's reference to his own continued albeit (self)contested interest in esotericism in the preface to the updated edition, pp. xxiii-iv

[65] Wittgenstein, Preface of *Philosophical Investigations* (unpaginated).

expression. Perhaps writing/thinking in this way leads him to discover that had philosophy been written as poetry all along our language would not have been compromised for thousands of years. Had this been the case then metaphysics would be art and not knowledge. But this is just another way of interpreting what Wittgenstein might mean by insisting somewhat mysteriously that philosophy be written as poetry. What is clear is that the courageously conscionable rigor of philosophical questioning, regardless of the content of the questions, results in self-questioning. As poets are so fond of saying, you don't know life unless you know death—live dangerously.

Wittgenstein's acknowledgment of language in all its forms—as our fundamental form of life—also crosses paths with Heidegger's claim to the effect that humans do not speak language, but rather it is language that speaks us. If we follow Heidegger further on this point, a crucial link between philosophy and poetry can be ascertained. For if Wittgenstein is suggesting that we acknowledge language as our form of life, and if Heidegger stresses in his meditations on Hölderlin's poetry that it is language that speaks through the poet, then both philosophers may be advocating for a form of listening *as* thinking. To this I will add Cavell's suggestion, in response to Wittgenstein's philosophical (anti)methodology, that it is the duty of the philosopher not to speak first, for to speak first is to commence thought hermetically sealed in abstraction, in avoidance or fear of the vulgar vagaries of the everyday. Bringing language home, speaking by listening to the "language" of language, facing up to the relentless ambiguity and excruciating commonness of our everyday lives in which generalities are exposed as the fantasies of truth, such practices constitute what I will call philosophy's poetic epiphany or therapy. It flashes in Wittgenstein's philosophy when he expresses his desire—or is it a dream?—to be able to stop doing philosophy when he wants to, one whose realization depends on the disappearance or overcoming of philosophical problems, along with the deep colonization of the vacuum of everyday consciousness where answers to questions are of little to no help.

As for Wittgenstein's aphoristic writing, which some choose to read strictly as poetry rather than philosophy (a misguided decision in my opinion, especially for the *Tractatus* which concludes with the very silence mandate that draws the line between philosophy and poetry),[66] I call upon

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[66] D. N. Rodowick offers an insightful reading of Wittgenstein's decisive silence over what we cannot speak and how that silence is remarkably overturned in the philosopher's later work: "Often taken as an admonition to remain silent in the face of what propositional logic cannot express or contain, Wittgenstein's later philosophical investigations give evidence of the importance to philosophy of those domains of experience that are *unsinnlich*—non-sensical, or perhaps, contrary to ordinary or common sense—where

Cavell's surprisingly metaphysical remarks in his essay "The *Investigations'* Everyday Aesthetics of Itself" where he explicitly takes up the question of the aphoristic.[67] Rather than regard the aphoristic as a stylistic stance against philosophical systematization, Cavell instead looks to the materiality of these fragments as constituting the flesh and blood of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations (the physical and largely laborious investigations that comprise the book). He also suggests—and merely suggests—that these aphorisms as we have them, fraught with multiple voices competing within the single voice, a voice simultaneously adopting and resisting the finitude of the language and available means of understanding, these aphorisms come to us, the reader, as if *from beyond*. Cavell is uncharacteristically reserved or shy on this point, intimating a paradoxical sense in which the piece-like nature of Wittgenstein's aphorisms render them that much more *whole*. Pardon the pun, but there is also a sense of *peace* to these wholes, as if the aphorism were hatched rather than built, testifying to an experience for which there are, in principle, no words—so the words eloquently stop short. Perhaps the use of words here is not a wholesale deferral to them or absolute reduction to them. And if the right words are found, that is, the words that we would actually use when trying to say what language "says," then the aphorism, regardless of its philosophical or poetic content, radiates the light of language, for Heidegger the very light of the house of Being. It's the great task of philosophy-as-poetry to rekindle this light, and of course there is no single setting, no set way, and god forbid no formula, by which to do so.

The Antidotes of Art (final assessment)

In this chapter I have elaborated what I will call the "analytical face" of philosophy's critique of metaphysics: Wittgenstein's logical silencing or cornering of the human temptation to speak the unspeakable, a critique which can be seen as a continuation or evolution of the "continental face" exemplified by Nietzsche's value-based interpretation of human knowledge, exposures ranging from the inner workings of Platonism to Christianity to Buddhism to natural

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no final consensus can be achieved nor one single standard of rationality apply; these domains are "super-natural" (though not irrational) in the sense that naturalizing epistemologies can account neither for their conditions of sense nor their value to us. Most prominently, these are domains of aesthetic or ethical experience where understanding is grasped, intuited, or brought close to intelligibility through insight or intuition before it can be clearly expressed, much less linguistically encapsulated." See Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation*, p. 96.

[67] Stanley Cavell, "The *Investigations'* Everyday Aesthetics of Itself", in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, ed. John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 29.

science, finding time and again the force of devaluation or nihilism propelling the will to power against others and against itself. I am suggesting that the blanket destructiveness of both of these critiques is checked non-philosophically, by gestural themes which I perceive as "laughter" or sometimes "madness" in Nietzsche and as "therapy," "rest," "silence" or "the mystical" in Wittgenstein. Their capacity to philosophize without the guidance of metaphysics is limited, challenged by their very humanity, suggesting that metaphysics need not be abandoned so much as rethought. Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, for all their strengths, do not manage this rethinking. Such a project lies beyond them because it lies beyond the medium of philosophy. It is not a project at all, but a fate untouched by further philosophical critique or resistance from fields of knowledge traditionally indifferent to the workings of human value and ordinary language. This is why I am struck by the ontology of film and philosophies of film which view the medium as a vehicle for the (re)creation of metaphysical concepts. As I have already explained, Nietzsche's "death of god," not to mention his own death, coincides with the birth of cinema, and it is well known that Wittgenstein loved going to the movies, not to think but to escape thought by bathing in the warm light of moving pictures. I have tried to show that when philosophy overcomes metaphysics by bringing language back to its everyday usage, film stages a return/transformation of metaphysics in audiovisual terms, outside of language proper, showing the very things which would otherwise exceed the limits of language. This act of showing automates, as it were, the artistic emphasis on singularity, revelation and human finitude; and I suggest such an act can also be seen at work in the language-based mediums of literature and poetry. (Film and literature join hands in their deferral to the power of the particular.) To be carried to the conclusion that when it comes to the audiovisual language of film, metaphysics does not yield nonsense but rather *clarity*—because reality on film is always a unique set of specificities and circumstances—I am saying, in effect, that film makes it possible for metaphysics to continue in the wake of metaphysics because it provides us with a picture—a moving picture—of its historical evolution, inescapable world-dependence, and immunity to the philosophical fantasy or myth of a permanent end to the absolute. It is through these terms that I read Alain Badiou's claim from his essay "Cinema as Philosophical Experimentation": "Cinema is the great repose of art: you can go to the movies on Saturday night to relax. Bad painting is bad painting: there is very little hope of its turning into good painting. It

is a fallen aristocracy, whereas at the cinema, you are always a democrat hoping to attain an absolute."[68]

The nature of the link between the political worldview of democracy and an openness to a grounded or immanent absolute is a possible condition of a new metaphysics which is not hierarchical in its conceptualization of the world and therefore passive or reposed in its mode of conceptualization. Interestingly, however, Badiou assumes that cinema as the great repose of art renders it anti-metaphysical:

> Metaphysics has often been defined in terms of the use of opposite categories, basically in terms of a dualism, of major oppositions: finite and infinite, substance and accident, soul and body, sensible and intelligible, and so on. Bergson's opposing of the pure duration of consciousness and the external time of action and science is one of these great oppositions, which makes Bergson a metaphysician. So we could perhaps say that there is something anti-metaphysical about cinema, or, more precisely, that cinema is the art of the end of metaphysics. It is basically an art that might have suited Heidegger. I think he regarded cinema as an art of technique, hence as a metaphysical art, ultimately. But, at heart, cinema's new syntheses are not metaphysical syntheses. On the contrary, they run counter to metaphysical dualism. Let me give a very quick example. What is the difference, in cinema, between the sensible and the intelligible? There isn't any, in actual fact. The intelligible, in cinema, is only a heightening of the sensible, a color or a light of the sensible. This is also why the cinema can be an art of the sacred, as it is an art of the miracle. I'm thinking of Rossellini's or Bresson's films. Do Rossellini and Bresson separate the sacred or the intelligible from the sensible? No, they don't, because cinema makes it possible for the sacred or the intelligible to appear as the purely sensible.[69]

I accept, more or less, what is expressed here yet not so much *how* it is expressed; or rather, I am convinced that what Badiou calls "anti-metaphysical" *is* in fact metaphysical—a transformation or revolution of the ancient terms of metaphysics. Cinema's new syntheses, generated from what I would call an infinite set of particulars or intermediate cases, evade the dualisms of metaphysics for the simple reason that they are not solely the product of metaphysical

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[68] Alain Badiou, "Cinema as Philosophical Experimentation," in *Cinema*, ed. Antoine de Baecque, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 211.
[69] Ibid., pp. 213-14.

thinking: their emergence in thought happens as if through another route of thought. If such syntheses are genuinely new it is because dualistic thinking itself undergoes a process of *unthinking*. The tendency to conceptualize and generalize, logically and rhetorically, and avoid what Wittgenstein calls the primeval chaos of thought, need not be resisted and is far more malleable, even breakable, when concepts are permeated by concrete cinematic events, as if on film the concept is a priori concrete. My sense is that filmmakers who strive to "think" with the medium do not resolve the old binaries non-dialectically so much as work in a palette which minimizes their polarization through endless particularization and democratization of value, a palette I have been calling the world in its own image.

Chapter 4

Backdoor to Paradise: On the Spirit of Automatism in Kleist and Bresson

> Kleist wrote somewhere that what the poet would most of all like to be able to do would be to convey thoughts by themselves without words. (What a strange admission.)
> — Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*
>
> I try to be a true attendant upon grace. Perhaps it will come—perhaps it will not come. Perhaps this quiet yet unquiet waiting is the harbinger of grace, or perhaps it is grace itself. I do not know. But that does not disturb me. In the meantime I—have my friends with my ignorance.
> — Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*

We once doubted that photography and film could be legitimate forms of art because they are "mechanical mediums" and as such cannot be artistically generative without being first and foremost mimetically repetitive. How wrong we were: the machines in human hands and automatically rendered "copies of the real" turned out to be almost ideal materials for all types and strides of artistic expression. While the accomplishments of the photographic/mimetic arts are now beyond question, the inherent "machineness" of photography and film, not to mention digital capture technologies, still remains an odd, counterintuitive, and perhaps enduringly problematic candidate for the arts; and regardless of the commonplace ubiquity of photographic and cinematic representation alongside various other technologies which have been admitted into the realm of the aesthetic, it seems to me the following line of questioning does not disappear with our skepticism but rather is begged all the more forcefully: What does it mean to say that photography and film are, were, and perhaps always will be, *mechanical artforms*? What does it mean to say, or to recall, that photography and film were not, for this very reason, always thought of *as* artforms? What does it mean to say, as Stanley Cavell has said, that cinema, for all these reasons, "arise[s] out of magic; from *below* the world," in spiritual opposition to the preceding arts which

came to us as if from above, as if from the heavens, like gifts from the gods?[1] What sort of "soul" can an artform possess if the world in its own image takes possession of it as the prime mover and variable palette for the world in our image? And why on earth, by what psychic principle, would "human beings" care to call upon "machines" in the creation of "artistic works," machines the logic of which automatically produce the very images that constitute a series of photographs or go into the making of a film as the stuff of montage?[2]

Since the middle of the 19th century and perhaps as early as the late 18th century when the phantasmagoria was invented, theorists and practitioners alike have made a strong—and for many a rather surprising—artistic appeal to the mechanical apparatus of the still camera (for photography) and the motion picture camera and audio recorder (for cinema), along with their corresponding laboratory processes (chemical or digital) and projection counterparts.[3] However, what the recording-projecting continuum of the cinematic apparatus in particular embodies as a vehicle for contemplation and the imagination is something far less aesthetic, perhaps existential, something hibernating at the very intersection of mechanical reproduction and artistic creation: an immaculate automatism in the meaningful representation of a reality that appears readymade despite being perpetually formed and deformed by the manmade, a mindless yet mind-dependent, technically sophisticated and remarkably unflappable automatism through which an image of the world is realized independently of us even if the content and formal configuration of this image is invariably an extension of us. The concept of automatism in this context is, therefore, not reducible

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[1] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 39.

[2] A not-so-hidden aspect of these questions and a background against which to begin answering them is tied to my feeling compelled to spotlight these basic terms (humans, machines, art) in quotation marks, isolating them under the scrutiny of an affective form of skepticism. What gives me pause over basic terminology is the thinking which such words do on our behalf, breeding assumptions and drawing distinctions which help make the task of thought more manageable albeit prone to repetition, oversimplification and sometimes error. The asking of a question involves a vocabulary which frames the answer, or already constitutes the beginning of an answer: a normal picture of things is presented when what we wish to do is register the sense in which such a picture has been overturned. Perhaps the true labor of thought commences with the reclaiming of thoughts—the questioning of seemingly unquestionable pictures—which we have started to think *automatically*. And then the act of questioning will be to exert some much-needed friction and in certain cases literally stop our thoughts from determining the parameters of what is thinkable. But it is difficult to begin in a place other than where others have ended; a more worthwhile challenge is to earn the right—perhaps at the end—to make it possible to begin anew.

[3] Two canonical works of classical film theory in this respect, the first to argue that for film to become art it must override or subvert its mimetic basis, are Rudolph Arnheim's *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) and Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay*, in *Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay—A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, ed. Allan Langdale (New York: Routledge, 2002).

to the camera's automatic recording of the world; rather it frames the recording-projecting of the world in its own image as a human valuation of mechanical revelation, hence of the non-human, a valuation which also extends to concrete matters such as creative fluidity and biological homeostasis, and more spiritual matters such as human mediums and what we call "magic." What this image on its own makes manifest, and how a "self-manifesting image" comes into being in the first place, is perhaps less important than our inclination to regard the non-human as "perfect," both in appearance and in principle. Perfect in a perfunctory sense but also, and quite strangely, in a more complex theological sense where classical film theory's ontological notion of "the world in its own image" (as explored in the works of André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer and Cavell, to name a few), enacts the appearance of belief in the world through what I will call the mechanism of innocence, an innocence without longing or nostalgia and which need not be remembered so much as rediscovered, relearned or better yet unlearned.

As a condition for the redemption of the human condition's burden of knowledge, fate of faithlessness and condemnation to consciousness as a relentless self-imaging of the world, another word for the perfection or purity of automatism—this mechanism of innocence, as it were—would be "grace." While I will be analyzing the relationship between grace and cinematic automatism in more detail later on, suffice it to say that an impression or intimation of external conditions for perfection are met without being strived for, a perfection justified not merely in mechanical terms as scientifically sound but also in artistic terms as poetically revelatory (exemplary of the beautiful) and even in these theological terms which disparage the human condition as fundamentally "fallen," as bearing a type of consciousness whose perceptions of the world mirror it and whose memories fade or become fiction. This radically alternative or radically "other" form of representation (i.e. mechanical, automatic, non-human) lacks the representational form that human beings impose as perceivers of value, perceivers of their own passions and prejudices; and because it "believes in the world," it is free of beliefs for how the world ought to be or could be or might be, that is, if the perception of value is coupled with political power. In this sense, human consciousness can be said to appropriate the credulity and hospitality of mechanical consciousness in its ontological "selflessness." I am interested here in the moment in the history of ideas where the disappointments of metaphysics, the disenchantment of the world, and theology's consignment of spirit to the ineffable and otherworldly (as a response to what is deemed most unredeemable in the human condition), finds relief—if not redemption—in the concept of automatism, boldly

exhibited and exemplified (though far from monopolized) by the ontology of cinema and its medium specific aesthetics (specific, that is, to the principle and practice of automatism).

In light of these preliminary and purely speculative remarks on automatism, I will be embarking upon a "double reading" of the concept of cinematic automatism in particular, one that acknowledges the mechanical apparatus of the medium as harbouring significant implications for human consciousness and the assumptions underlying our self-understanding as "human." The first reading concerns the processual conditions of cinematic representation, particularly the automatism of the working camera as the literal or figurative key to the medium's privileged relationship to reality, an impartial and revelatory (though far from undetermined) relationship of world-dependence. The second reading follows a broader philosophical and film theoretical perspective on the general phenomenon of automatism, one that accounts for the aesthetic, religious and sometimes ethical value ascribed to it, most notably by the spiritualist strains of classical film theory's various realisms. I suggest that the conscious interest in or unconscious participation with this form of mechanization—i.e. the presence of the automatic within the autonomy of an art; the conjured, magical sense of reality it exposes onscreen; the sense of something happening by itself; the secret of cinema's universal invitation of art, etc.—constitutes an analogous belief on the part of film culture in the medium's inherent or ontological grace, that sublime quality perhaps best known to cinephiles where the mechanization of the medium is felt to be humanized, or where automatism is spiritualized in the melding together of medium and mind. Cinematic automatism as a subliming of the real makes it possible to accept this reality as an abiding child for whom adult logic is virtually absolute, yet to accept it *imaginatively*. This human investment in the automatic strikes me as moving in two directions at once, or as moving outside by moving inside, for automatism is as much internal to the conditions of human consciousness as external or transcendent, hovering beyond the realm of consciousness.[4]

Enacted by mechanical processes that "see without thinking" or "sense senselessly," the peculiar and paradoxical value of automatism can be described, simply enough, as "that which happens by itself," and those who value it above all else (above formalism *and* realism) are

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[4] In philosophical terms, transcendence as the path to immanence is also a way of describing the psychoanalytic framework of the unconscious, a framework shared not surprisingly by the surrealist conception of automatism. I regard the ability of the concept to reveal and cultivate common ground between philosophy and psychoanalysis, particularly between metaphysics and mind, to be a testament to its peculiarity, elusiveness and resistance to conceptualization.

"seekers of grace." They are believers in the power of cinema to redeem the ills of human consciousness, scrounging about for luminous material fragments which gleam in the wake of the death of God—those for whom the making of the world in its own image is a backdoor to paradise and security measure against human beings licensing their own reckless brand of omnipotence on earth. If cinematic automatism can be said to reveal the world, it does so by displacing the concept of revelation from theology/spirituality to technology/aesthetics, from the miraculous to the mundane, encrypting the revelatory and self-manifesting spirit of the divine, or disseminating the divine and discovering its ashes strewn between earth and sky. Above all, cinema's seekers of grace see the possibility for an innocence of human experience that can somehow come *after* knowledge and, in this way, seek to be sought out, to be found within a modern disenchanted world (post-metaphysical) where the moving photographic image carries the last light (the twilight) of metaphysics.

For human beings, valuing this automatism—its capacity to record and project the world in its own image automatically—is to do so with envy and against the ordinary workings of consciousness, as if the world projections of consciousness were seen to be too heavily influenced by the will or overly ensconced in the reflexivities of human subjectivity. While automatism is briefly explored by classical film theorists enchanted by the realist configuration of the apparatus and epitomized by Cavell's partial definition of the ontology of film in *The World Viewed* as a "succession of automatic world projections,"[5] this lesser known sense of automatism—the psychic sense, or the psychological logic of mechanization—is relatively absent from theories of cinematic ontology, in part because it originates from surrealist discourses that are ultimately suspicious of vision, representation and claims to objectivity. An important task here is not only to rectify this gap but also grasp the reasons behind its persistence and elusiveness. The psychological appeal of

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[5] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 72-3, 104-6, 146-7; see also Chapter 14 on "Automatism," pp. 101-8. According to Cavell, this is the only thing film does automatically, suggesting that it is not enough to make film art, which requires as much manual labor as inspiration and, as is often the case, montage becomes the driving force behind succession even though the spirit of cinematic automatism allows the spectator to experience montage *as* succession. Making a succession of automatic world projections artistically expressive also requires what Cavell calls the discovery of automatisms, mediums within the medium that when activated demand a range of expressions and, if deep enough, an entire genre or tradition. Cavell's analysis of automatism is also twofold, beginning as a description of the ontology of film and evolving into an exploration of the tasks of modernism to create new automatisms at a time when the old ones no longer hold sway. But save for a perceived affinity between automatism and autonomy, between the experience of art as happening by itself and a vital degree of emancipatory separation of the object from both maker and viewer, our analyses part ways.

cinematic automatism as a theory, practice and aesthetic can in some cases also be seen to stem less from overt metaphysical thinking than from the valuing of art that appears *unmade* or better yet *self-made*, art in which the human touch has permanently landed, as it were, manifesting in the form of the precision and transparency unique to the mechanical, or in the efficacy of the passage between intention and expression—a phenomenon which seems to guide an instance of an artistic medium into its purest realization of the artform itself regardless of subjective criteria or personal taste. Therefore, one of the exemplary aspects of automatism will always remain tied to the spirit of artistic modernism itself.

It is important to note that classical film theory's realist proponents, or metaphysicians as I have been calling them, are often guilty of perpetuating an old theoretical habit by which automatism is linked solely to the mechanical recording operations and alleged representational objectivity of the camera, microphone, and overall image-making principles of film, regrettably reducing the automatic to the merely technological and resulting in a rather superficial reading that strips automatism of its various incarnations throughout the arts, particularly automatic writing and drawing, not to mention the theory of psychoanalysis (i.e. those famous Freudian slips) and even the psycho-geography of modernism (i.e. the paradigmatic arrival of the autonomous subject). By granting automatism a more complete range of associations, film theory's interest in and sometimes obsession with automatism is radically deepened and brought to bear on the plight of human consciousness in general: beginning as a neutral description of purely mechanical processes in the audiovisual representation of the world, automatism turns out to be an essentially human or possibly more-human-than-human (a superhuman) activity, that is, once humanity and mechanicity are reconciled. On the one hand, such a description strives to reach beyond the realm of the human altogether—beyond culture, history and ideology, outside our unique and finite form of life, a "beyond" that the camera-eye is pictured as privy to, gazing as if into another world. But on the other hand, this strange form of life, dreamed by humans and in a sense devoid of organic life, is found to reside within the human condition itself and as a positively dehumanizing force insofar as it undoes the consciousness condition of the human.

This line of thinking brings us to the "moral" of automatism, over and above its somewhat irrational logic, as the most modern incarnation (and possible redemption) of the biblical myth of

The Fall.[6] But the difference between The Fall as told by the mechanical arts as opposed to the story of our irrevocable entry into knowledge from the Old Testament is that the former's post-metaphysical rendition of the myth locates the possibility of redemption *on earth* and *from within*—a complete inversion of the properly religious setup for messianic redemption. Yet paradise, regardless of the route, is never as we imagine it to be, for the cinematic redemption of physical reality as described by Kracauer suggests to me, at least at this juncture of a metaphysics of film, that the Garden of Eden still exists but only through a mechanical vision of the world, a vision that lies buried within the human unconscious and which can be cultivated at the intersection between movies and dreams, or perhaps the waking dreams of surrealist experiments with automatic writing and drawing. But the failure, or rather I should say the disappointment, of many of these surrealist experiments attests to the difference between the chaotic monstrosities of the liberated unconscious and the orderly naturalness of the mechanical "non-conscious." The allure of cinematic automatism is indicative of the pressure to perform the correct maneuver of "dehumanization" as a condition of possibility for the return of the primordial state of grace and our capacity to enter the knowledge-produced innocence of what I wish to call "the mechanical garden." The concept of cinematic automatism can be radically deepened to reveal a mechanical eye buried within the human "I"—an unconscious and perhaps paradisiacal efficacy, analogous to an active passivity, hibernating deep within our form of life, that is, when such a life is not being deformed by the will's pursuit for more and more power.

The theory of automatism, when elevated and read philosophically or metaphysically, states or at least implies that we must risk this "dehumanization" as a condition of possibility for both the redemption of physical reality and the transformation of the human into "free uncharted territory." This is a condition of possibility for the return of the "innocence of reality," freed from the overdetermining experience of consciousness; for while our innocence may be lost, the machine in us all—the body that Adam and Eve covered up in shame—is as human as the rest of

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[6] I am borrowing my sense of redemption here directly from the subtitle of Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film*—"the redemption of physical reality"—a book in which the stakes are also deeply eschatological but where the approach to film is far more systematic, even taxonomical, a methodology and general attitude of thinking that seems to deflect the spirited project of messianic redemption, or at least until the book's revelatory epilogue disclosing what I believe are its inner motives and most pressing secrets. (One may end by concluding, as we are trained to do, or by *confessing*, which cannot be taught, unless it is possible to teach total honesty with oneself. If you can look at/through yourself in the mirror of conscience, then others will see you as clearly as you can—but to confess by bearing yourself to others is also to risk shame and self-defense.)

us. If we continue to cover up the body, with clothes as a metaphor for self-consciousness, it is perhaps because we cannot find a way to clothe this consciousness of self, as there is in principle no way to conceal the revelation of ourselves to ourselves. This innocence of which I am speaking is to be sure quite experienced or wise; it is marked, for example, by the ability to think without separating our senses into outer extensions of an inner sense known as the sense of self, which is believed to ground all experience on the notion of "prior experience." Radically humanist philosophies throughout the centuries have succeeded mainly in isolating ourselves behind our senses, forcing the core consciousness of humanity to think through them, against the grain of the self's search to become one with itself (a search ideally performed without having to mend parts of the self or presuming that our consciousness is fit only to fracture). Mythologically speaking, what the automatism of cinematic representation makes possible—as a thought removed from the realm of consciousness, as a picture no one remembers taking—is the humanization of dehumanization and a projection of a reality ignorant of The Fall, a reality in which it is still possible for grace to exist without divine authority. Automatism as epitomized by the cinema expounds the myth that the state of the world is still prelapsarian; that the world, when recorded and projected mechanically by humans and to humans (humans who value on some level "that which happens by itself"), is not a basis for absolute knowledge so much as a catapult towards absolute freedom.

In order to carefully mine these depths of automatism, reconcile its two facets or faces, and reach a greater appreciation—and clarity—of its complex value for a metaphysical conception of film, I look towards two very different texts with similar themes and passions: "On the Marionette Theater" by the German writer, poet and playwright Heinrich von Kleist (one of his many prose works), and *Notes on Cinematography* by the French filmmaker Robert Bresson (his only written work as far as I'm aware).[7] The former is written as a casual dialogue which grows in seriousness,

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[7] Heinrich Von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," in *German Romantic Criticism*, trans. Christian-Albrecht Gollub, ed. A. Leslie Willson (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 238-44; Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Books, 1977). While there now exists newer and fancier looking editions of Bresson's book, framed by an introductory text and edited with great care, the translation by Griffin has remained unchanged. The only difference I could find was staring at me in the face: the title. If the new title *Notes on the Cinematographer* is deemed to be a more accurate translation of the French, I find myself preferring the original emphasis on the artform rather than the artist. And if the reasoning behind this change is to quell confusion between Bresson's highly aesthetic conception of cinematography and the more generically technical associations of the term, then it seems to me both terms—"cinematography" and "cinematographer"—remain equally confusing. Only the reading and

whereas the latter is composed in diaristic fragments which evoke a clear sense of solitude and discipline throughout. I am inclined to describe the general tenor and tone of these texts as eccentric or divergent or esoteric or even "homeless": Kleist's spans the divide between literature, philosophy and dance, and Bresson's drifts on the margins of film theory and practice. Both are remarkably unembarrassed and candid in being driven by what strikes me as a mystical inquisitiveness organized or oriented eschatologically. Enigmatic yet highly rigorous at the same time, each offers a philosophy of automatism informed by the biblical myth of man's fall from grace and suggests that a mechanical as opposed to a spiritual perspective on ourselves can reenchant the human condition dimmed by consciousness or paralyzed by self-consciousness, automatism serving as a symbolic backdoor re-entry into Eden.

Kleist and Bresson, artists in philosophical moods, offer ideas about the limitations and general narrowness of human consciousness as it pertains to the arts, speculating on a possible integration into the human condition of that which appears to fall outside the domain of consciousness, say at the point where the metaphysical and the unconscious meet. The speculative journeys, despite their radical differences in form and field, are informed by a belief that human nature, or something about the way humans tend to define their own nature, is *unnatural*, and that any attempt to redeem the human condition from various imperfections, perversions, and cycles of error calls for supreme tact in art, not talent. For both writers, such a belief leads to a skepticism of the artmaking instinct, the classic repertoire which has intention followed in a more or less linear way by expression. Formulas of intention and expression along with various patterns of consciousness can make for interesting and appreciable art, but according to this skepticism they may in the process undermine a feeling of something being "true to life" or, in less verisimilar terms, "true *of* life," which I suppose is also an essential criterion of something "happening by itself." Despite these inescapable limitations or poverties in consciousness, and far from advocating a passive or thoughtless aesthetic, Kleist and Bresson remain committed to finding "loopholes" in consciousness, a term I find relevant but which neither writer explicitly employs. By "loophole" I have in mind a set of practical but also paradoxical techniques for transforming instead of exerting thought and overcoming the pitfalls of adult reason, artistic self-indulgence, and the siege-like temptations of cliché. Here, even the slightest trace or possibility of didacticism

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understanding of the book will renew one's sense of what this word might mean as a literary—and not necessarily exclusively cinematic—form of *image writing*.

and dishonesty raises a red flag in the search for grace through art, grace being analogous to the Holy Grail of the human condition. Through a dialogue between these two writers (representing literature and cinema respectively), and the links between Bresson's theories and films, a metaphysics of automatism becomes an *aesthetics*—for despite a metaphysical surrealism so mistrustful of human agency, both implicitly call for an aesthetics rooted in the mediums they discuss (the marionette theater and the cinematic apparatus), seeking as a priority not "interesting artworks" but some sort of alternative to or ideally a purification of the fact of being human (i.e. the removal of recourse to describe such a fact as a *fate*)—this being the basis, perhaps, of artworks of great and enduring interest for us.[8]

      As preparation for a discussion of these two texts, starting with Kleist's, a metaphysics of automatism as a regeneration of the myth of innocence or prelapsarian state of grace warrants I believe its own extended mythical account, or at least an account of the source of my own belief in its importance and in the logic of its allure. As I have already demonstrated (or struggled to demonstrate), the thought of automatism is esoteric and its grammar elliptic, and rather than introduce a "third text" into the discussion I will attempt to perform their context, to think the spirit in which these texts think and behave conceptually and remain below the surface of rational inquiry.

      What sort of being dreams of being a different being, dreams of being a non-being? Here is someone who says interesting things but cannot bear the sound of his own voice. As a thinker he displays great courage, plunging into the depths and pouring himself out onto the page, writing with great difficulty and strain even though he has the capacity to be carried away by flights of fancy and potent flicks of the wrist—yet what is interesting is what he sees in what he does, and what he sees, now more than ever, is what he has already done, as if it wasn't him who did it. Who then? He speaks in the present yet hears his voice in the past tense, and so he abhors the sound of his own voice. He wants to sound like somebody else or something else, not out of any thirst for conformity or self-hatred, but because he does not know how else to lose the knowledge, the false knowledge, that reduces his self-knowledge into a habit or at best a rhyme. The problem is that he wants to change, but wanting this, unfortunately, is not how change happens; change forces itself

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[8] However, neither Kleist or Bresson can be said to offer instructions, to their readers or to themselves, for such an aesthetic: Kleist appears to denigrate artistic expression altogether and Bresson never frames his remarks as artistic intentions to be read into his films after the fact, for the most part remaining silent about his films.

like a storm, whereas it stands before him as yet another feat of strength, a great boulder that he may very well budge, or even move about with tremendous exertion and pain, only to find that the boulder never takes off of its own accord.

This person I am sketching in broad strokes and who seems frightfully unhappy, let's call this being "fully formed," perhaps a tad "overripe." He knows who he is mainly by being attached to who he is; people recognize him for it and honor him by the simple act of remembering his name. Naturally he is nothing without the trial and error of an experiment no human being can avoid or opt out—the experiment of personality formation and all the contingencies which go into its making; and yet, here he is, staring at his own reflection, struggling to surprise himself, trying in vain to do something that will not represent the image he sees reflected in front of him like the parent he has seamlessly incorporated into the court of his consciousness. Can he open his ears and hear the lost lullaby of his childhood translated into music seeping through the vents above his head? Will he ever open his eyes and see with the eyes of his first love, gold-beaded and serpent-swirling eyes? It's simple, is it not? All you have to do is turn on the tap, like you do every morning and throughout the day. You wouldn't suck the water out of the pipes when you could easily let it flow, so why are you so afraid to let yourself go? But fear is not the issue, or rather, let me put it this way, fear is precisely what is missing from the man who thinks his thoughts and dreads their recurrence. A rephrasing of the question: When was the last time you were afraid of yourself? Your courage is perhaps nothing more than a profound sense of acclimatization. And now you want to open the window and disturb the finely tuned tepidness? If you are still awake, a breath of fresh air may require more courage than you have mustered in a long time. If you are still awake, then you may be forced to the unbearable conclusion that what you call your self-knowledge was the hibernation of the self—the self you have sought to know already exists, predates you, the role reversal of past and future. All phases come to an end, and some phases are such that the only thing that separates this one from the next one is an impenetrable sheet of glass—this phase where the soul craves to be whipped out of its body can do nothing more than entertain such a notion. The will is just too strong, and indeed the will, once discovered, is pure strength. Once discovered it teaches you, the "I", that it has survived all your transformations, and perhaps it insists that you would not have survived without the will to carry you along.

So, you have been carried by your will, and so here you are, the "willer" of your will, you will your will, and with that the will drops you to the floor upon which you land on your feet—your

feet, they willed you along splendidly, but now they are yours to will with. You will them, they move like that; they move like that because you willed them—did you not? You don't remember doing any willing, but if you didn't will them then they wouldn't have moved like that and you would hesitate. Such an expert "willer" you are that you need not will your will anymore; it takes care of itself, happens all by itself, like a machine that works at full capacity as long as we don't stifle it with our thoughts and sticky self-consciousness. Well, that is how it is with our poor seeker of selflessness; the mountain is too high to climb, because the mountain is him. But at night he sleeps and dreams and awakens soaked in dreams he can barely remember and whose recollection, very often, dries them up in a flash. And while he cannot remember his dreams, or if to remember is also to forget, he knows that last night and every night he has dreams that no human being can consciously experience. Dreams are the events that take place when the will is off its watch; then the dreams start and the will, comically, is fair game—tasty bait for the chaos of contingency but, as a consolation, no longer sterilized by the loneliness of consciousness. The point is that he knows that he lets go, at night, in dreams, and that this letting go cannot be known any more than dreams can be recorded by excising the dreamer. The point, if you will, is that he knows that knowing reduces him to a point—from here everything is possible, but from here, also, possibility can eventually lose all its currency and what is longed for is the pure gold of grace. The gold within the mountain, locked in darkness, surrounded by rich wormy earth and completely and utterly raw; the gold that is worth nothing, the gold that retains its secret and whispers its splendor and goes completely unnoticed in the marketplace. Grace will always be in high demand for beings whose nature is one of exile, locked outside their nature in a place called culture, and perhaps the only way to get it back is to "break in." Stealing may be justified in the reclaiming of what was lost, but fortunately there is nothing to steal nor hands and pockets to steal with; rather all articles must be left at the door.

What I am trying to get at in this piece of philosophical narrative, in the winding and tightening circles of paradoxical thinking, is the pressing urge as human beings conditioned by consciousness to act on the strange feeling that we are also conditioned to want to *escape* consciousness, to find loopholes out of it yet by means of it, ways around the total eclipse of grace, even if tearing it apart is in order (and sometimes, perhaps inexcusably, the meaning of our words gets torn in the process). The paradox, familiar to the Surrealists, of using thought as a way out of thought, specifically thought's confounding or paralysis of action, generates a philosophical

wormhole into a dimension of thinking characterized, let's say, by the tragedy of the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am"—a tragedy which hits home all the more forcefully when one has experienced for oneself that thinking does not necessarily precede being or stand in opposition to being. The whole scenario can be expressed more clearly, I think, with the help of Kleist's formulations and demonstrations from his far-reaching yet remarkably focussed essay "On the Marionette Theater" of 1810. Alongside another 19th century German figure, the Nietzsche-type evoked in my parable on automatism, stands Kleist: a purely literary and non-philosophical voice, attuned to philosophy yet untrained in philosophy, reaching all the more deeply into the human condition by not assuming that the darker or more debilitating aspects of this condition can be overcome through diagnostic critique, sheer will power, or wide-eye irony and its routine refusals or mockeries of intellectual attachment. Of course, for Nietzsche, will power is *the* power of life that the individual, in striving along the path of his or her becoming, cannot help but defer to and honor; yet the will to power is *so* powerful, so erratic and untamable, that according to Nietzsche many individuals—perhaps the majority of them, and especially when they herd themselves into a majority—use it against themselves, to the detriment of their connectedness to the powers of life, thus powering the engine of nihilism by protesting the value that life places on itself prior to our various ideological "valuings" and "devaluings." At the same time, the overman in a text like *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is precisely not imaginable by mere men who need either to preach wisdom or receive news that the overman is exemplified best by animals in nature or atoms as nature, that is, by forms of life that do not deform themselves with their powers by trying to turn themselves into magic wands. Kleist, on the contrary, does not arm himself with concepts of this size and scope; and in being a writer of novels and plays first and foremost, he is completely and perhaps strategically unarmed here as a thinker of philosophical ideas—hence it is fitting that Kleist casts himself in this atypical digression piece as an open-minded novice of the art of dance and the marionette theater with no hint of a philosophical agenda, and from what I can ascertain admirably avoids bringing to bear any preconceptions on the subject. Instead of the essay format's customary greeting "this is the case" or "I profess this to be" or "I question he who professes with such dogmatism," instead of beginning and ending with philosophy's self-centered "I think," Kleist questions the integrity of this philosophical muscle perpetually flexed by recounting the details of what appears to be a life-changing conversation with a professional dancer in awe of marionettes, one whose unbridled devotion to the puppet theater leads to an event all too absent from most

philosophical works which we expect to sway us with their claims of truth: the possibility of human reason being fundamentally unfit for the essay's evidence base and conclusions, in other words unfit to grasp its truths without feeling threatened by them, for indeed such truths come at the expense of reason itself. A matter-of-fact, un-romanticized epiphany appears from the fog without the slightest trace of passion or pride or urgency, and consensus in the conversation comes in the form of resigned acceptance of a truth upon which nothing can be built, only cleared away.[9]

Kleist's formally dialogical and thematically devastating essay offers a direct path into a metaphysics of automatism, with pertinent links to cinematic automatism, because it documents a perspectival shift which brings to light the "consciousness" of inanimate non-conscious life. In fact, I would say it is the perspectival shifts rather than the perspective itself, and the tones of exhilaration and despair carried by the ideas rather than the ideas left to their own devices as insights or results of logic and imagination, which offer a more fertile path through the complex terrain of automatism as a human investment in the non-human, as paradoxical foundation for a new kind of autonomy, as one-way ticket (metamorphosis) to grace.

In this brief, almost anecdotal essay Kleist shares a very simple story—deceivingly simple, like his greatest stories—about an encounter with a man passionately advocating the art of the puppet theater, an art which Kleist, a devout man of letters, has never given much thought to until now and perhaps dismissed as mere child's play. The professional dancer surprises Kleist with the conviction that the art of dancing is not only epitomized by the marionette but modelled after the mere models, leaving human dancers to struggle against the immovable obstacles of their wretched, all-too-human proclivities towards overexertion and embellishment, rather than to derive an inimitable advantage from them. Let them struggle, he says, with their desire for a

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[9] In theory, an epiphany is pictured as a festive occasion for the soul, as a long-awaited yet ultimately unexpected reward for intellectual and general life labors that seemed to be going nowhere until one sees that hard work pays off in mysterious ways. We just don't know when we are able to change until change is upon us, and time and again the moral of the story is that patience brings roses. But there is another side to the story of the epiphany, a Romantic and much darker side in which the change of heart is undergone reluctantly because the price of change is as great as, or perhaps greater than, its reward. Much important philosophy, I would say, is the result of such transformations of thought, a monument to the new self writing on the back of the old self, rarely acknowledging the painful struggles of having to relinquish beliefs held to be sacred even if one suspected they were flawed or would eventually falter. The new self sheds tears over the burial of the old self, or the new self is haunted by the ghost of the old self, because the epiphany imposes itself regardless of psychological consent. For philosophy lacking signs of empathy, seeming to make little or no sacrifice at all for its results, its epiphanies are most likely *learned*, not earned. Philosophy textbooks, for example, are erected on top of many little epiphanies, reaping them like a crop of tears.

perfection so alien to their imperfect nature. Why wait for a moment of harmony, and why give credit for it, when we can have a continuous display of grace from "beings" fundamentally incapable of doing otherwise? The dancer not only insists that the grace of movement and an all-around perfection of mind and body—eternally sought after by the art of dance—is actually the province of the puppet on strings, what's more the puppet sets the standard for the poetry of movement, occupying a permanent state of grace without the need of saintly mastery or accidental folly—and all this in spite of the human being who controls and maneuvers the puppet from behind the scenes, bringing life to an otherwise dead object. So even though it's a human being who dances the puppet, and of course some will do it better than others (this is, after all, an entirely distinct artform, a gestural expression based on complex feats of coordination which can appear inscrutably difficult to the untrained eye), the radical claim is put forth that the great puppeteer controls the movements of the marionette and reaches a perfection of the dance not through virtuosities of touch, timing and skill, but rather in a manner analogous to and in the spirit of such everyday acts as turning a faucet or pressing a light switch, setting into motion what turns out to be a completely self-sufficient process. As a technological practice, the guiding principle is describable in terms of the unassuming modesty of the machine in opposition to the presence if not the pride of the artist; and perhaps we can say that the puppeteer's "performance," free of various temptations of personal expression or style and hovering in an anonymous limbo between dancing and directing, activates a different form of life as opposed to the usual form of art.

An awakening wrapped up in a confession, Kleist seems forced by the compelling reasoning of his interlocutor to consider, as an artist, his conscience instead of his craft and give up his previous belief, itself the fruit of morality's labor, that what stands to redeem the human condition as the primordial fall from grace is art as a site of human expression, as a way to reveal truths such that they do not become the property of knowledge, helping us to accept our divided fate between good and evil and thus maintaining human dignity in the face of the tragedy of being human. In the marionette theater, however, it is not the puppeteer who attains grace but rather the puppet itself, the puppet which is in no position to act with intention and pursue any kind of self-expression, not to mention a virtue as supremely pure, beautiful and ineffable as what we call "grace." When human dancers pursue grace and are judged accordingly, they are described by the professional in Kleist's essay as lunging awkwardly into poses where grace is gripped or caged like a bird. Such a tragic correlation between ability and futility is evident in the micro-movements

dotting the line between intention and expression, movements which actually disturb the center of gravity in an effort to relocate it to the next transitional point or stoppage, an unwavering center of gravity being the most vital organ of the artform in question. Mobilized and splayed all too suddenly, hence vulnerably towards various points in the body and all the way to the extremities, the guidance of conscious or learned intention and an overall sense of purpose mixes precariously with the maneuvering of the movements themselves, congealing into knotted muscles full of tension and tenacity, perhaps flexing and risking trembling, whereas effortlessness and even a sense of relaxation is what is called for. Too much mental and physical energy expended, too much effort and strain sweated, years of experience on top of a sound gait and predisposition, all are required to do something which ought to feel and appear completely natural and automatic. The dancer *knows* what he has to do, and does it to a tee, though he also knows that too much knowledge can become a liability; he wants to do it great, and oversteps, for greatness in this case is to come *undone*; the dancer—watch him closely—moves like the wind and is on the verge of bringing a movement full circle, but before he can spiral into the next movement he must let go of the pose, the picture he has made of himself onstage, the period he has struck by taking a deep breath; knowing what he has to do and knowing how to do it are useless in the moment, for he is a product of his knowledge and has no choice except to *execute*; and so on. As for a truly "gifted" dancer who makes the hardest of feats look incredibly easy, the impression I get from the speech of this character in Kleist's essay is that a sublime display of grace onstage may be just that, a *display*, and perhaps the most compelling performers are skilled too at putting on airs for the sake of a good show and in the end to win the respect of an audience. After all, who could blame the dancer for wanting to take a bow? Humans were not born to fly, and masterful or anomalous or altogether freakish moments of levity, while short-lived, are surely worth some heartfelt applause.

Along with the inevitable bodily imbalances and mental lapses brought on by self-consciousness, the other main obstacle to the perspicuous fluidity of movement and the sublime embodiment of grace through dance—that sense of complete and utter naturalness and self-possession, ironically possessed by the unnatural and selfless puppet—is the force of gravity itself. The dancing puppet uses the ground for everything but rest, of which it obviously has no need, gliding about with a fairytale lightness. The decisive moment comes when the puppeteer releases the string, bringing the wooden foot to the floor and discovering each and every time that the puppet lands rather than falls, using and feeling the ground rather than returning to it and belonging

to it, as we do. We belong to the ground the way fatigued adults recline on a park bench with their children beside them who sit on edge, bouncing, their feet unable to touch the very ground that mother and father use to plant themselves like rocks. Or we belong to it in that hilariously pitiable moment where the iconic cartoon coyote, hurtling recklessly through desert expanses in pursuit of his roadrunner kill, plummets to the earth when his face fills with the blinding awareness that his hubris is no substitute for wings. Regarding this beloved reference, it is also significant that when the coyote realizes his transgression—the beginning of his end—he turns to face us, the viewers, as if to tell us, or warn us, that we too will fall and hit the ground if consciousness and its immaterial sense of gravity is permitted to ensnare our wildest flights of fancy at the very moment of their deepest conviction. The moral shared through laughter is that fear of falling comes from the same impulse as the longing to ascend (hence the saying "what goes up, must come down"), and consciousness presides voyeuristically to bless the former and curse the latter. Kleist through his interlocutor seems to be saying something similar about our ties to the earth: the marionette, like the roadrunner, is subject like anything else to the forces of gravity, whereas the human being, in his knowledge or surface awareness of what happens when he jumps, is subjected to these forces *as laws*. The law of gravity can lead to a desire to transgress it, take Icarus, or master it, take aviation and astronautics; but the experience of gravity as "force of law" rather than "force of fact" can bring about a deeper, heavier, more traumatic fall the meaning of which is analogous to the biblical notion of "the fall from grace." A knowledge of gravity, compliance with causality, adherence to patterns of the probable when the possible seems impossible. . ., this *causes* gravity to affect us in the way that it does—by pulling us down rather than keeping us level. A small difference that makes all the difference in the world: beings lodged between earth and sky and disposed towards longings for flight are fueled by the knowledge that they are fated to return to the earth, for that is where they find themselves restless instead of at peace; whereas non-beings made in the image of human beings (Kleist's marionette) can no more covet the heights than fear the depths, and if they seem to float through space and embody grace it is because they are unconsciously *of the earth*—like trees dancing in the wind or clouds rolling by and assuming forms so perfect in the mind's eye that painters gaze aghast.

The marionette's movements are ontologically effortless; they are automatic—automatism is the criterion and seal of their grace. The thoughtlessness of the marionette is not a lack, but rather its truth. Such a phenomenon throws into sharp relief our contrived and exerted *attempts* at

grace, explaining that for us the path to grace is intensely uphill and fraught with peril because grace is a state that no longer comes naturally to the human condition (if it ever did). A stab at grace is a foolhardy performance, backfiring into an illustration or commemoration of The Fall, for what an inanimate yet animated object possesses is precisely the absence of what allows us to perceive grace in something unperceiving (like a puppet) or seemingly unperceiving (like an inspired musician with his or her eyes closed). As beings in the condition of this kind of consciousness, our access to grace must always pass through the knowledge that we are fundamentally at odds with ourselves, for to be at one with ourselves is a unity instantly contradicted by the term "our self." What I "know" is what I cannot "be," for one must be *in* a state of grace, hence know nothing of it; to know *about* grace is to be outside of where we want to be and looking in, gazing onto a land of milk and honey and going no further; and short of a birthright here, no approach or appeal to grace is sufficient that does not make room for the miraculous. Therefore, to acknowledge the presence of grace in the movements of the marionette is to extrapolate the myth of our eating from the tree of knowledge and consequent exile from the Garden of Eden, as this is ultimately a story about leaving nature in order to take possession of nature and in the process losing touch with nature forever. The beauty, sheer simplicity, and inimitable perfection of the puppet theater is, for Kleist, a reminder that paradise does indeed exist albeit *not for us*, at least not as we stand. Here is Kleist on regaining admittance: "[P]aradise is locked and the cherubim behind us; we have to travel around the world to see if it is perhaps open again somewhere at the back."[10]

Recovery from The Fall calls for illogical ingenuity and perhaps great danger: locating a backdoor of the world to paradise lost, a backdoor that could lead straight into hell (i.e. awakening to find oneself changed into a hideously oversized insect).[11] On the possibility of embodying the spirit of the marionette's movement so as to glide gracefully through the world—speaking without

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[10] Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," p. 241.

[11] The obvious reference is to Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." The appearance of Gregor Samsa as a giant bug is revolting and frightening only to those who surround him. And there is reason to believe that Gregor's new bug life is actually a reprieve from the modern chaos of the human condition. By discovering one day that he is unable to speak or work or live with purpose, to lead a meaningful life and thus establish the conditions for meaninglessness as well, Gregor can be described as inhabiting a state of grace so radically foreign to himself and his family, to Kafka and his readers, that all must fail to comprehend it and, in failing so miserably, find its sublime beauty repulsive in the extreme. See Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Complete Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 89-139.

the possibility of stammering and acting without the possibility of hesitating, and re-entering ourselves without, like poor Gregor Samsa, becoming hopelessly alien to ourselves and to others, pure at last but without place—Kleist proposes a partly rhetorical question to the dancer, a Sphinx-type question, in response to the "backdoor criterion" and mixed with confounding quantities of facetiousness and piety, as if he is the one to be convinced by the reality of his own question coming to the fore: "We would have to eat again from the Tree of Knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?"[12] The dancer's reply is equal parts astonishment and assurance: "Quite right. And that's the last chapter in the history of the world."[13] Insofar as the world—*this* and not some *other* world—is a place where the Garden of Eden has been relegated to the shadows (say the shadows cast by our consciousness) and carelessly tossed into permanent after-worlds (say the gardens of our wildest hopes and dreams), the last chapter in its history may turn out to be a never-ending chapter, a malevolent desert circling and generational perishing, until one day a feeling of change pervades the air and humanity simply ceases to seek, compete, compensate, and bring disaster in its wake. At the threshold of a new yet unapproachable beginning, the oldest and most enduring Western myth comes full circle to reverse the spell of original sin by paradoxically repeating it. But what does this mean exactly, eating again from the tree of knowledge as the circuitous, counterintuitive, perhaps altogether superstitious sidle to some form of primordial innocence—grace, perfection, or happiness? Is such a notion not completely senseless—*more* knowledge as the way to cancel or overcome the burden and errancy of knowledge? Or will this bite be different, knowing what we know about the foulness of the first bite? Is there a new knowledge premised on "non-knowledge," a new knowledge that will help us *unlearn* what we know? But what's wrong with our knowledge? Is it the content of our knowledge that is the problem in stories about original sin, or rather a partial way of looking at knowledge that reduces the mind to a mere container or storage system for what is deemed our most precious possession?

To address these questions and prepare ourselves for some sort of answer, let us consider more detailed story-based evidence from Kleist regarding the impoverishment of the human condition compared with conditions organized according to automatism (call these conditions ideal or platonic yet be sure to add the qualification "anti-human" or, if you prefer, potentially "post-human"). Aside from the rather eccentric theories of a dancer who sees his art perfected in the

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[12] Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," p. 244.
[13] Ibid.

mechanical movements of marionettes, what is Kleist's evidence for the human condition's fundamental fallenness and paradoxical proximity to grace via automatism? What *is* the human condition such that the mechanical is perceived as natural and grace the province of the unconscious or preconscious interval of innocence, an interval which consciousness seems destined to overstep and discount? Kleist provides two revealing and somewhat comical anecdotes from outside the inanimate, non-sentient realm of marionettes, one related by the dancer and the other by the stand-in for Kleist himself. Both anecdotes are sufficiently strange that we may doubt whether they actually took place; they seem to signal the fictional turning point of the theoretical essay where the most vivid illustrations are better off devised as thought experiments rather than casually observed (though I do not deny the possibility that Kleist experienced both with his own eyes and returned to these experiences enlightened by the secrets of the marionette theater). Whether real or imagined, the anecdotes are akin to parables the lessons of which are easily grasped yet nevertheless call for constant repetition—the same lesson about the human condition which is open to or at least capable of new knowledge but which cannot, to save its life, *unlearn* anything.

The dancer, who also happens to be an experienced fencer, relates to Kleist a peculiar incident in which he was challenged by a group of friends to test his exceptional skills against a new kind of adversary. After defeating his friends one by one and clearly emerging the best fencer of the bunch, it is proposed that he now face a chained bear, an apparently lopsided duel which would seem to favor not only the unfettered but also the more highly adept and experienced of the two. Indeed, what sort of graduation is this? Wouldn't a novice fare just as well in these circumstances? What's the theory underlying such an odd experiment? The top fencer, heedlessly confident that the bear could never be his equal in fencing, posing no conceivable threat against his strategic maneuvering and precision stabbing, is astonished to learn that the animal, even while chained, possesses a remarkable, inexplicable proficiency. The bear, not knowing how to fence and, what's more, not being capable of such knowledge in the first place, will surely succumb to the brainy being with dexterous hands instead of brutish paws. But the bear proves to be incredibly fast, cunning, and even uncannily prescient in its defenses. The dancer/fencer describes the extraordinary and disorienting feeling of being accurately anticipated by the bear at every turn, outmatched not only in terms of strength, which is a given, but also in terms of rational intelligence and a global sense of dexterity—the bear is able to counter the stealthiest moves not only with

great ease but *automatically*, as if through a fractal-like algorithm of highly evolved instincts, or instinct as habit. The experiment shows that what we call "intelligence" seems to be in reality incredibly advanced and varied in its manifestations, and by no means reducible to the scope of reason. "Reason" is our name for the distinction of human intelligence in particular, an intelligence diagnosed by the experiment as harboring the characteristic of controlling habits of thought and *making distinctions* (and often self-serving ones which turn out to be rather embarrassing). Now great players are always worth challenging at their chosen sport because they *can* be broken and will *eventually* be broken by someone like them with newfound zeal and an uncompromising edge, or by their own inability to remain at the top of their game over long periods of time; they must be present within their performance lest they risk even a split-second loss of concentration. However, when it comes to this bear—and let us not forget that the bear in this story is *chained*—the dancer/fencer quickly realizes that it is useless to continue against such an exemplary master. This force of nature, by virtue of its lack of self-consciousness, or by virtue of its lack of a self about which to be conscious when there are more important things to be conscious of, is at one with itself, or so we say, we who speak in such strange ways. Whatever the case may be, the bear's brilliance—fencing with grace—points to something regrettably foreign to human nature, to beings who must acquire skills to accompany their talent and, if successful, parade the badge of superiority like no other species, inventing sophisticated sports like fencing only to find out that they are, as before, outmatched by nature's infinite power of non-knowledge. In this anecdote, human knowledge is of use only ironically and tragically, that is, for *imprisoning* the bear, but even then nature's "non-knowledge," as it were, finds itself at no disadvantage, adding salt to the surprise and humiliation of the so-called expert fencer.

The second anecdote, related by Kleist himself (and which may be autobiographical), decisively shifts from the animal to the human realm with a scene involving a handsome young man at the baths. With Kleist looking on, the young man unintentionally enters a pose reminiscent of a sublime piece of classical statuary he had been admiring earlier that day with Kleist. The pose, which is slipped into, is reflected in a mirror where the two friends catch a glimpse of its stunning perfection—but only a glimpse, for the perfect pose is fleeting and leaves the young man wanting to own it. Convinced by the bravado of youth and impressed by what he believes to be the great accomplishment of life imitating art, the young man is certain that the gesture can be repeated to supply the necessary proof that it was in fact no accident—that it was indeed *his* reflection, that it

can at will be *struck,* that grace naturally *becomes* him. Kleist is also in awe of the gesture and at first is unopposed to his friend's trial, though at the same time he is not so quick to credit the alleged author, for he believes so graceful a gesture can only be achieved non-consciously and automatically (or accidentally, though here we cannot speak of *achievement*), perhaps in the spirit of an artwork free of the intentions of its maker (and if we know anything about Kleist's highly principled, almost religious approach to literary practice, the work of art cleansed of vanity and born of suffering is the backdoor to paradise).[14] With ferocious obstinacy the young man proceeds to enter and reenter the pose, each time progressing further towards parody, seeing for himself the warped results reflected within the unbiased objectivity of the looking glass and yet too proud to admit defeat, to concede that it is precisely *he* who thwarts the endeavor, like a diabolically vengeful double. Now Kleist can hardly contain his laughter, for what was once a sign of perfection in man has been sullied by the pretense of the very same man who falls into the depths of his vanity and stays down.

What Kleist chooses to relate to the professional dancer as his intimate encounter with the grace of automatism is not only the corruption of consciousness in its attempt to intend what can only come to pass unknowingly or automatically, but also something more astounding, a greater permanent price to be paid: what he knew in the sadness of his laughter was that the young man might never regain that part of himself which enacted the inspiration derived from the statue, whose grace moved him so deeply insofar as it allowed him to slip into a state of grace undetected. The unpayable price is best described as a sacrifice: not only the failure to consciously display the grace which showed itself so powerfully and poetically in his person, but a literal fall from grace in the effort to possess it and parade it in public. When he made that gesture at the baths he was sufficiently unawares, modest, engaged in a task, concentrating on something else and then it

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[14] Along with Chekhov and Kafka who are undoubtedly influenced by him, Kleist is a master of writing short stories the weight of novels, a process of great refinement which I associate with genuine modesty. But when put into practice, whether in art or in life, the measure of modesty is not self-effacement but self-criticism. The repeated distillations which reduce an artwork to its essence have systematically done away with the juicy bits of fat which artists sometimes use to pay themselves in absent praise, or simply to feed on as a reward for their laborious efforts. My experience of Kleist—and Chekhov and Kafka—is that sentences are realized only on the condition that no personal validation is derived from them, and that—if I may be so bold—the prose is approved as if by a higher power. For examples, though of course readers will have to judge for themselves, see Kleist's short stories "The Marquise of O" and "The Earthquake in Chile," and especially his novella *Michael Kohlhaas*, which in the hands of another writer might have been a tome or composed in the tone of a tome.

happened; so logically the gesture is not his, he did not make it but rather—again I am compelled to say—*it happened*, this gesture, inexplicably, and jaws dropped bearing witness. His beauty could occur and speak for itself, a private paradise to be lived and not known, and it helps to be beautiful… but alas, all innocence died the moment he started speaking for his beauty. There is a strange conclusion which Kleist succinctly draws or deduces from these two stories that, if true, delivers an awkward, alarming, defeating yet potentially emancipatory verdict for conscious and rationally enlightened creatures like us: "We see that in the organic world, as reflection grows darker and weaker, grace emerges more brilliantly and commandingly."[15] While this may strike us today as a highly Romantic notion, the snares of reason can nonetheless be observed—and I urge us to consider how acts of brilliance are sometimes the least intended, the most automatic in their unfolding, purity outweighing the profound.

The irrevocable consequences of original sin could not be more plain: we got knowledge in return, the world in the palm of our hand, like the apple we bit into. And this capacity for knowledge, on closer inspection, implies a knower, a being whose relationship to other beings and the world as a whole is one of separateness and isolation, for no amount of knowledge or quality of knowing will permit the self to become one with anything other than itself. Yet how is it that the self as thinker and knower, grasper and discriminator, has come to value modes of being in opposition to knowledge or at least not readily reducible to the register of what we call knowledge, for example grace or faith or love or even the everyday, forms of "non-knowledge" about which nothing can be known in any traditional sense and where the goal is to overcome the condition of knowledge or, perhaps, to become overcome, to *feel* knowledge? Why is it that our knowledge, which we mythologically chose and which it appears we keep on practically choosing, is ironically drawn towards metaphysical "unknowables"? Kant's general response was that we can think these things as much as we want without being able to actually *know* them.[16] Can we say this about grace, though? What are we saying about ourselves as knowers when we posit grace as the redemption of knowledge itself or as the "afterlife" of the whole of knowledge?

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[15] Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," pp. 243-4.

[16] I would like to thank Julio Valdés Jover for mentioning on a walk this simple but profound moment from the philosophy of Kant. Discussing the difficulty yet supreme importance of conceptual precision in epistemological matters, the exemplary Kant rose out of our mutual admiration for the virtuosity and care with which he distinguishes complex and overlapping concepts, refusing the synonym as a lapse in concentration or impoverishment of reason, however slight, for it is often sufficient to undermine the accuracy, durability and composure of our ideas.

Kleist, speaking through the dancer, continues the slippery spiral of thought, entertaining the possibility that the transcendental powers of grace need not necessarily come at the expense of the more rational underpinnings of our thinking, indeed cannot come at our own expense if grace is to be recovered amongst the fallen. He writes, in one of the most precise, compelling, and conceptually paralyzing passages from the essay:

> But just as the section drawn through two lines suddenly appears on the other side of a point after passing through infinity, or just as the image in a concave mirror turns up before us again after having moved off into the endless distance, so too grace itself returns when knowledge has gone through an infinity. Grace appears purest in that human form which has either no consciousness or an infinite one, that is, in a puppet or in a god.[17]

I find it fitting that the puppet and the god are described as potentially human forms, for it suggests that human consciousness is a pure giver of form, thus *lacking* a unique form of life to call its own. In this sense the properly human form of life lies stranded and misshapen between the two automatic purities of grace: "puppet" and "god." The either-or predicament between non-consciousness on the one hand and infinite consciousness on the other, personified by Kleist as the polar positions of puppets and gods, seems to leave the grounded and perhaps mediocre human consciousness out of the equation, such that human consciousness must nullify itself or transform into something altogether new. I am also struck by the fact that the puppet's absence of consciousness and the god's infinite consciousness amount to the same thing, the same power, reaching a fundamentally elusive destination by opposite means: the *transcendence* of consciousness as a receding away, followed by a momentous return to a form which threatens the very logic of consciousness itself. There is a palpable sense in Kleist's dense passage—filled with geometrical metaphors and spatial loopholes, paranormal flights and black-hole type thresholds and eerie points of no return—that human consciousness or intelligence, pursued full force and taken to its limit, can overcome itself without completely undermining itself through esoteric and perhaps regressive appeals to a glorified mindlessness, which is perhaps uncomfortably close to the criticism of what goes by the name "absentminded." For Kleist, knowledge must go through an infinity, then we might cease to know grace and actually *become* graceful. We can think of this

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[17] Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," p. 244.

as knowledge transforming from something that we possess to something that *possesses us*; or knowledge, gone through an infinity, will stop accumulating itself and start "thinking" itself, paring away the nonsense. While the logic of knowledge tells us that grace is something we ought to be able to reach through action as opposed to mere accident, the reality is that you can't have one without the other: an infinity of knowledge proposes that the puppet and the god join hands in the "action of accident," better known as *automatism*. Knowledge by definition cannot enter a state of grace by undoing the fall from grace into a consciousness of the world as a sometimes debilitating self-consciousness; rather it must go through an infinity—the black hole of philosophy—and into a condition of knowledge that is absolute, that is, a condition of knowledge no longer hampered by nostalgia for one's childhood innocence or a collective prelapsarian innocence that is fundamentally beyond our capacity to restore, lest we resort to the theological fantasy of a redemptive messiah that reduces us to a helpless pack of worshippers. Kleist's prescription to eat again from the tree of knowledge as a way of restoring lost innocence is, perhaps, to accept our fallenness, to stand up in our fallenness as it were; but it is also, and I believe above all, to become more human by cultivating and reconciling ourselves with the inherent and repressed "mechanicity" of the human. The human repression of the mechanical blurs the language of bodily habit and gesture, subjects the unconscious to recurrent nightmares of an alien self, and leads the human into the grotesque reflection of a false sense of superiority known as the soul.

With Kleist's meditation on the marionette theater—leading to his reluctant acceptance of a human will whose glory is to be found despite that will, in those beings alone (non-beings) whose power derives from the removal or absence of any conscious willing or thoughtful directing of that power—I am approaching the question of cinematic automatism through the backdoor, finding an admittedly conceptual analogy between the automatist principles behind the movement of the marionette and the world in its own image, one which hinges more on surrealist and theological critiques of consciousness over and above any inherent predestination of a given artistic medium to stage a possible re-entry into the lost paradise known as grace. That the world on film does not resemble the puppet theater is obvious enough, and that this resemblance is most palpable in the art of animation, particularly stop-motion animation, and not the automatic world projections of cinema, is deserving of its own investigation and does not detract from a different kind of resemblance. The resemblance at stake is, rather, ontological: cinematic recordings of the world in its own image and the autonomous dance of the marionette both have the same condition of

possibility and, what's more, this condition of possibility—automatism—can be put into practice through artistic methods best described as avant-garde.

Now I would like to use this backdoor metaphor into a paradise which comes after knowledge as a frame for Robert Bresson's ideas on automatism as laid out in his *Notes on Cinematography* composed between the years 1950 and 1974. What I find in Bresson's writings is a theory of automatism as configured by the artistic possibilities of cinema, couched in rather than strictly overdetermined by cinema's alleged "mechanicity." The highly piecemeal theory revolves around the following three domains of filmmaking (what Bresson prefers to call "cinematography"): the intuitive act of filming the world in a spirit of discovery, the organic and open-ended editing of images and sounds around moments of truth, and the orchestration of screen performances designed less for dramatic effect than their capacity to withstand the penetrating gaze of the camera and microphone. Mechanical acting in Bresson may be the least "cinematic" but, following Bresson's own lead, is the most important as a decisive mediator between a metaphysics and an aesthetics of automatism (augmenting the latter through the former).

Bresson is perhaps best known for formally rigid, eccentric, seriously modernist, existentially tragic yet quietly transcendental, devoutly minimalist narrative films such as *Diary of a Country Priest* (France, 1951), *A Man Escaped* (France, 1956), *Pickpocket* (France, 1959), *Mouchette* (France, 1967), and his last film *L'Argent* (France-Switzerland, 1983): deceptively simple stories expressed through the universally concrete yet discordant material vernacular of everyday life, a vision of humanity as clear as it is cryptic, evenly distributed throughout a mise-en-scène executed according to an irrational or faith-based sense of intuition for various aesthetic necessities regardless of sense. The films feature unassuming and often self-isolating protagonists who undergo identifiable forms of physical and emotional ardor, a gamut of existential gravities from minor (like walking) to immense (like dying), but in doing so seem to lack the basic coordinates of consciousness and certain anthropocentric familiarities in their everyday responses to the harsh demands and occasional reprieves of life. To the best of my knowledge, I don't believe a single Bresson character ever "properly" emotes, laughing or crying the way the average film or theater character releases an emotion from the inside out; though there are certainly moments—a myriad of them if the viewer is sufficiently attentive and has adjusted to the acting style—where positive and negative yet ultimately ambiguous emotions *occur* on the face, rippling across it: the corners of a mouth break into a smile as if a curtain were being drawn, and drops of water run

down from the eyes like a leaky faucet. In the films which Bresson made while writing *Notes on Cinematography*, the thoughts and feelings of characters are gutted and stretched across the face and body like a placid lake stirred by the occasional air pocket or fish-flop.

The trembling monotone, fragile flatness or what I like to call the gnarled woodenness of the performance style begins with *Country Priest*, featuring for the first time in the filmmaker's oeuvre a completely non-professional actor by the name of Claude Laydu. Laydu plays a young priest who writes in his diary at the beginning of the film that he intends to record daily his humble life without justification or embellishment, for the religious life according to him is nevertheless comprised of trivialities lacking the sort of spiritual depth or sense of mystery one might expect from a person of faith. Such a process of "selfless self-examination" can be described as taking stock, or taking notice, without the payoffs of self-interest or self-discovery, a modesty which protects itself from the lurking threat of falsity by virtue of a steady vigil of anonymity. His facial expressions and verbal intonations are stiffened by poor health, physical rather than spiritual pain, and therefore are almost entirely drained of the achingly impassioned and upward gazing demeanor of Joan of Arc as performed by Renée Falconetti in Carl Dreyer's legendary adaptation *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (France, 1928).[18] And unlike Ingmar Bergman's priest character as played by Gunnar Björnstrand in *Winter Light* (Sweden, 1963), Bresson's priest is not faced with a crisis of belief when nihilism suddenly makes perfect sense in a world fraught with evil and unanswered suffering. Instead, such a crisis is exactly what the newly appointed priest expects to wrestle with on a daily basis. Crises of faith and horrible feelings of inadequacy are part of the labor of being a believer and serving God as a mere finite mortal. For Bresson, the ordeal of a life of the spirit is

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[18] In my opinion, Bresson does not manage to *completely* strip down the romanticism of Falconneti and Dreyer's saintly depiction of Joan of Arc. There are moments, few and far between yet dramatic in their sparsity, where the young and inexperienced country priest of Ambricourt appears to use the physical torment of illness as a pass, or perhaps a right of passage, for answering the eternal—and without a doubt eternally difficult—questions of faith and providing spiritual counsel to those in need, most notably a woman still deep in grief over her dead son of many years. These hints of histrionics in a spiritualizing of the true believer's tortured flesh—looking deep into oneself to listen to the excruciating word of God and, burdened with the truth, looking up to impart that word to others, a gesture which comes across as one of *looking down* upon uninspired souls—would be overcome by the time Bresson reached his own adaptation of the Joan of Arc story, *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (France, 1962): a film perhaps motivated in part by Bresson's discovery of Dreyer's lack of discipline with actors, not to mention the latter's obsessive use of close-ups, and the seductive influence it had on him when making *Country Priest*. It is no coincidence that around this time Bresson would start writing his own diary in which he would take to task practically every aesthetic instinct he ever had, training himself into someone who could be trusted not to betray the automatisms of the medium, as yet another backdoor entry into putting his faith completely in the audience.

waged outside rather than inside oneself, that is, by living in a world of spiritless matter, at the mercy of gravity and contingency, the body's incessant demands and whims of buoyancy. And it is precisely "outside the self" where Bresson places his actors in relation to their characters, from a place where an actor cannot play a character in any conventional sense of the term, hence from a place where non-actors can, as it were, "act." This is why Bresson throughout the *Notes* deploys the term "model" instead of "actor," summoning the indexical associations of painting or photography (and of course fashion) and shunning the histrionics of the stage, a term the implications of which I will be unraveling throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Figures 32 and 33. Bresson's priest—spiritual living in a world of spiritless matter: *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (*Diary of a Country Priest*, Robert Bresson, France, 1951).

The radically decentered and somewhat behaviorist construction of film characters in Bresson prevents them from directly eliciting our emotional sympathy if not our basic spectatorial apparatus of identification, thereby preventing us from coming to terms with who they are and what they believe in or refuse to believe, what they live for or are prepared to die for. We are denied this legible sense of interiority by which to navigate and make sense of a world that is, for Bresson, largely dictated by the contingency of events where the muscle of free will is in atrophy or flexes only when oppressed, in a spirit of defiance. The anti-psychological disaffectedness and strangely monosyllabic mechanicalness of the performance style—often criticized through the opposite metaphor of "woodenness" when compared to styles of acting believed to be more psychologically real—blocks in an almost systematic way the great majority of conventional patterns of identification, leaving viewers detached and perhaps disoriented as a result. However, these patterns of identification, insofar as they are governed by rote and riddled with cliché, are themselves blockages to new paths of spectator engagement explored by Bresson; and with time and patience—along with something I'm tempted to describe as aesthetically occult—these virtually unrelatable characters do manage to emerge from the fog of anonymity and, depending

on the viewer, can have the power to win us over with an indefatigable sense of authenticity and presentness. It is difficult to pin down precisely how this happens, if and when it does. Skeptics of Bresson's highly unusual and alienating approach to performance can undergo a kind of aesthetic conversion, as it were, after which a rational account for why a poor or amateurish performance is now preferable to a soundly scripted one becomes impossible or unconvincing, that is, if one becomes *convinced* by the use of a model over an actor as the basis of a character. Bresson writes of the qualitative measure of acting not in terms of good or bad, real or fake, but rather through an intuitive—and perhaps intuitively moral—sense of a model being *right or wrong* in his depiction of a character, that is, in his presentness *as* the character, in addition to functioning within a web of synergies with other characters and, above all, with the presence in his face of the camera and microphone as a comprehensive net within which models must be available and at ease.[19] The lead in *Pickpocket*, for example, at first lacks the hallmark intensity and desperation of the petty thief, but as soon as his hands acquire the necessary suppleness, as he calls it, to pick pockets with diabolical grace, he seems to fill out his oversized suit, walk about as if on a tightrope, and become one with the role without psychologizing his remote and somewhat arrogant disposition.

Figures 34 and 35. The pickpocket's sudden sense of self-belief: *Pickpocket* (Robert Bresson, France, 1959).

It seems to me that the model, played/embodied by Martin LaSalle, becomes convinced of the reality of the character only after his first successful theft, for now his eyes start to swell with the drunken power of those who have permanently turned their backs on morality. The change of aspect (let us say in a Wittgensteinean sense) can be attributed to the fact that, at least in the case

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[19] An example of Bresson's preference for rightness over expressiveness, or even over basic interest, is as follows: "*Right* intonations when your model exercises no control over them." Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p. 40 (italics in original).

of the medium of film, presentness is achievable by characters who behave as if they were asleep, moving through the world like ants on a mission. Perhaps those who believe in the truth of these performances, over and above being compelled or entertained by them, do not know if they are witnessing in these human figures the workings of a puppet or a god, to refer back to Kleist: the agency at work seems inhuman yet far from monstrous, a bizarre (though never grotesque) combination of the mechanical and the spiritual. The micro and macro endurances of daily life, pleasure and ardor being of equal weight, and an existential burden carried with the right kind of dignity, unpitiable and destined to go unnoticed, requires not only a complete lack of performance self-consciousness, which is a given, but also the absence of an actor's particular brand of intentional or aesthetic consciousness, which typically strives to become the character through a process of representation rather than that of presence, or with representation chosen as the path to presence, a path embodied in the concept of "discourse." When phrased in these terms—which the reader will recall from Chapter 1—Bresson can be understood as developing a metaphysical approach to the cinematic representation of personhood, an approach based on adapting the ontological figure of cinematic automatism through the largely surrealist concept of psychic automatism and importing the latter into an aesthetic of nonacting, tethered to the artistic allies of intuition and the unconscious.

So, even if Bresson strives to redeem his characters at the end of their sufferings (be it through a second chance at life, or death as an escape from a world of chance, or through their newly discovered ability to commit to a single moral action regardless of the consequences), their disposition during such threshold moments remains unwaveringly resolute, a vehicle of their fate—perhaps this is their *faith*—as statuesque victims of circumstance in an almost metaphysical sense where free will is transformed into the expressive mouthpiece of necessity. Their lives are as if mechanically regulated by the brute physical laws of a nature from which the divine has retreated from the metaphysical to the physical, squeezed out or left twitching in everyday banalities made all the more enigmatic by their fragmentary relation to each other—as if everyday life with its remarkable recurrences and indissoluble gravities shocks the singularity of the divine, dismembering it into a million moments of a muffled gasping revelation, a smooth sea of microscopic miracles as it were. The death of God giving way to the birth of life is most evident, unsurprisingly, in Bresson's films with overt religious subject matter which I have already mentioned (*Country Priest* and *Joan of Arc*), but it can also be seen at work in all his films, again

starting with *Country Priest* where grace supplants transcendence as the key spiritual value that cannot be consciously aimed for except through death (a phenomenon which I will discuss in some detail later on). Grace becomes possible only when the disheveled greyness and painful injustice of the world is left open for the possibility of redemption, which is not of a moral nature but rather of a metaphysical nature, marked by the throng of life-fragments cohering and crystallizing by chance or of their own volition when a character has, as we say, "accepted their fate." But for characters who have been modelled, it would be more accurate to say that they have *accepted fate* itself through the dissolution of the subject into the necessity embodied by objects (objects on film, as Cavell reminds us, resist the symbolic functions we give them, appear as what they are and not as what they mean, appear displaced or in their own image)[20], a dissolution which holds the secret of emancipation—and possibly redemption—otherwise absent from the idea of fate. Grace in this context is not the product of being graceful, which is why in Bresson moments from a character's life must be left unassimilated by the consciousness of that character, why the human face is equally grafted onto the hands and feet, revealed in tight close-up compositions and sonic amplifications of determined walking and systematic doorknob-turning, such that actions become all but unmotivated by a clear sense of agency in the world of plans, making the everyday life of human existence resemble the propelled dance of marionettes—albeit of flesh and blood and without mask, and quite often destined for untimely deaths of their own self-destructive design, the windblown course of which is as if programmed by material forces so inscrutable and inexplicable that we are pressed to call them "metaphysical." For Bresson, the mechanical musical rhythms of everyday life disperse human consciousness throughout a complex yet fragile web of interactive instances of being-in-the-world, and the attempt by a single consciousness to anchor these instances to a name or a mind or the will as mastermind, to unify these instances or organize them into separate regimes of knowledge (i.e. the mind-body distinction as the valve of private and public worlds), is to poke a hole, as it were, in the fabric of the everyday and upset the dream-like aspects of our so-called waking life. As for grace, it happens, if at all, on the condition that the model is kept void, that he/she is directed step by step such that the temptation of consciousness to awaken to itself for the purpose of power is finally overcome.

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[20] See Stanley Cavell, "What Becomes of Things on Film?", in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 1-9.

One of the more revealing and evocative remarks from *Notes on Cinematography* concerns the decisive intimacy between Bresson's automatist theory of film and analogous philosophy of life: "The people I pass in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées appear to me like marble figures moved forward by springs. But let their eyes meet mine, and at once these walking and gazing statues become human."[21] Despite being anecdotal and analyzed, this note clearly shows that everyday experience for Bresson is at the root of ideas about automatism which are normally associated with the surreal. Here the real and surreal (waking life and dream life) come together in a highly fragile moment of clarity in which humans are perceived with the "humanity" proper to them when they are, 1. perceived as machines or as components in the machine of life, and 2. perceived peripherally, unawares, with no room for reciprocity. We may also experience the marble grace of individuals adhering to the grand scheme of an organic clockwork, but only on the condition that precautions are taken against disturbing the unconscious equilibrium of automatism—for an act of consciousness is paradoxically required to catch it without being caught in the act. To avoid such a "scare of consciousness," like stepping into a flock of birds, those gestures which are performed so innocently, so thoughtfully yet also thoughtlessly, or better yet collectively, cannot be subjected to the impact of observing eyes in search for the old "window to the soul"—not to mention the recording "eyes" of the camera through which the soul may be captured and preserved, another old idea—so penetrating and potentially paralyzing are human/cinematic eyes that self-consciousness can be sparked more quickly and potently than by any other sense, like flint on metal.

This vision of human beings moving about like the marionettes described by Kleist recalls an almost literal cinematic interpretation in what is without a doubt Bresson's most experimental and perhaps stylistically excessive, if not slightly overindulgent, *Lancelot du Lac* (France, 1974). The film interestingly avoids explicitly religious or spiritual content by beginning *after a failed attempt* by Lancelot and his knights to locate the Holy Grail, and what follows instead is an account of the dissolution of allegiance and comradery amongst the knights, a dissolution of spirit which manifests, with uncharacteristic expressionism from Bresson, in the grotesque exaggeration of the sights and sounds of the armor worn by the knights. Such a heightened degree of attention, even obsession, is directed towards the enveloping armor—especially on the soundtrack which registers every chink and chaff—that it is sometimes difficult for the viewer to concentrate on the drama

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[21] Ibid., p. 60.

unfolding beneath the various sheets and joints of metal. It is even difficult to imagine the knights removing their armor for any reason, for example when going to the bathroom or retiring for the night. Perhaps this is why a tournament scene becomes drawn out to the point of parody and rendered so abstract as to become almost incomprehensible. Here Lancelot and the knights compete in a jousting event on horseback where their entire bodies are concealed in armor, preventing us from being able to distinguish the opposing sides, blurring any binary affects of "us" and "them," and thus depriving us as viewers of the pleasurably suspenseful experience of high stakes competition with the plight of the film's main characters hanging in the balance. Bresson goes so far as to construct the sequence in a spirit of mechanicity and anonymity established by the armor and reminiscent, once again, of the marionette theater. It is also noteworthy that Lancelot chooses to compete anonymously, his identity revealed to his fellow knights only by defeating all his opponents with remarkable virtuosity. In this scene of serial and faceless jousting, Bresson is far more interested in tracing the smooth vectors of collision and paralleling the polar oncoming forces through a highly rigid system of symmetrical, almost algorithmic editing. Medium shots just of the galloping legs of horses alternate back and forth, like fur-flesh wheels moving with equal velocity and evoking a collision point which is not shown but heard loudly offscreen, overtop a group shot of the knights in the gallery rotating their heads as if they were watching a tennis match and reacting excitedly to Lancelot's domination. However, the repeated emphasis on the galloping horse legs suggests that the knights are not the ones driving the horses; rather the implication is that they are the ones *being driven*, and, at least according to the structure of Bresson's montage, the fully clad knights *are* (that is, grammatically) the horses—medieval incarnations of the mythical satyrs. While the jousting faceoffs repeat mechanically, always with the same outcome, the close-ups shift from horse legs to lance-tips to shields, but instead of having these details identify the opposing camps and narrate the action of the scene, the speeding lance-tips and wall-like shields become, for Bresson, substitute hands or even second heads—a new appendage rather than an extension of these odd metal-clad figures on horseback who dance their own destruction.

Figures 36, 37, and 38. Horse, lance, and shield appendages: *Lancelot du Lac* (*Lancelot of the Lake*, Robert Bresson, France, 1974).

The automatist articulation of the armored bodies of the knights is further amplified by what occurs *in between* each joust: antiquated flags unreadable to the untrained eye are raised to indicate the battle colors of the players and the nationalist underpinnings of the war known as sport. However, as we might expect by now, Bresson does nothing to enliven the link between individual and group; in fact, he subverts it and parodies it, rendering nonsensical these patterns, colors and symbols of prideful belonging flapping in the wind. And so, in light of this, we may wonder why Bresson, in between each spar, continues to insist on the backgrounding importance of the flags, time and again, holding fast to the diagram of the sequence which promises expositions of identity and continuities of event it absolutely refuses to keep, resulting in an extreme case of narrative abstraction.

I suggest we turn to the soundtrack for a possible answer to the abstract parade of flags in this challenging and curiously prolonged sequence. The individual flags are raised to a musical theme played on the bagpipes, a simple enough announcement of a new tournament participant. But if we listen carefully to what we're looking at, when the buzzy wheezing sound of the instrument being primed is heard against the image of the flags moving up the pole, without a visual sign of a flagpole operator, it appears as if this integral component or "gear" of the tournament machine serves to wind the spring of each joust. When the music subsides and the flag

Figures 39 and 40. Winding the spring-flag of the tournament machine: *Lancelot du Lac* (*Lancelot of the Lake*, Robert Bresson, France, 1974).

reaches its apex, what is indicated is not so much a place of origin for which a particular player competes, but rather a phenomenon entirely indifferent to the politics of sport: the *metaphysics* of sport. The fully torqued spring-flag sets up the variables of play and locks them tightly into position, like a mechanical starting gate holding a field of racing horses in place and fairly aligned at the post. And when the jousters are released upon each other by the "tournament machine," what ensues is a dynamic display of physics in which chance plays a significant role, mediating between the convergence of seemingly identical forces and completely overpowering nationalist sentiments and medieval heroics. While it is counterintuitive to think that Lancelot's presence as a variable is arbitrary and that he wins all his spars by chance, Bresson never indicates that he does so because he is the strongest and most precise; put simply, this is because Bresson abstracts the character of Lancelot, leaving us in the dark about his identity, a darkness shared by his fellow knights. But based on the perfect symmetry of the opposing and converging forces unleashed by the release of the tournament machine's spring-flag, it is conceivable that any of the contests could have resulted in Lancelot being catapulted or impaled. Perhaps the metaphor of the racehorse ought to be taken literally: when a horse crosses the finish line first, it cannot be assumed that the horse understands its victory or cares about it. This is not because the horse can't know, rather it is because it is an element in a game the rules of which have been established from without. If the horse, in its own individual and mysterious way, comes to know of its success, it will most likely be through, or at least dependent upon, the reactions of those in control or implicated in the game; but again, it cannot be assumed that the horse will understand or care about these reactions. I think it's safe to say that no first-place thoroughbred has ever *posed* or *smiled* for any of the photographs taken of it in the winner's box. What matters, then, is not that Lancelot wins the tournament but that the tournament produces Lancelot as a winner, spits him out still standing albeit badly wounded and undoubtedly the best of the bunch; and all I can say is that he's lucky he didn't get slaughtered. Though, of course, those who were slaughtered by his brunt were beaten… by the Lancelot-horse, by fortune, by the breakneck speed of time and collapse of space, by the tradition of the joust— winners walk away as jousters and losers enter the earth as jousters, until all is forgotten.

In the final scene of *Lancelot du Lac* in which the knights are attacked without warning— for them or for us—in a labyrinthine forest, pegged off one by one by a contingent enemy with bow and arrow, Bresson purposely returns to the undifferentiated cloaking of the armor and four-legged horse-bottoms of the knights to hide their faces and avert the eyes of the viewer from

identifying these figures by name or sympathizing with their endangered predicament. This scene recalls the opening of the film *in medias res* where, lacking any trace of context save for a prologue accounting for the failed pursuit of the grail, men in armor fueled by carnage impale each other as if metal became skin. Early on a thoroughly encased knight is decapitated, releasing a thin spurting of blood in the air; however, aside from this blood there is no sense of body inhabiting the metal, and we could just as well call the bright red substance "oil." Because these figures lack faces and, what's more, any hint of sensitive flesh, there is nothing *in this world* to stop the headless knight from crawling on the ground like a ripped segment of worm. The image of "headlessness" is a cue from Bresson for the viewer to expand his or her horizon of observation beyond the face, and the cue is directed equally to himself as a filmmaker to look and listen for gestures and sounds expressive of a metaphysics of automatism based on the idea, or belief, that what we do automatically—without thinking—is also what we do as humans with agency. To return to the final scene, a horse shown speeding through the forest, its rider having been struck down, evokes a sense of anonymity and can also be said to appear headless insofar as a knight-in-armor riding atop a horse constitutes some strange alien fusion of a lifeform, or what I previously described as a medieval satyr-like being. The archers perched in the treetops resemble bows themselves and have no imaginable existence other than the mechanical releasing of arrows. We must be careful in our descriptions of such "exquisite corpse" imagery not to dissect them into component parts and organize them into hierarchies presided over by *us*, for such a response or reaction serves to reinforce a more familiar, protective and ultimately reductive sense of human experience and language whereby a more "heady" version of agency is the sole pilot of human affairs and the turning of the world.

Figures 41, 42, and 43. Headless knight, riderless horse, bow-and-arrow beings: *Lancelot du Lac* (*Lancelot of the Lake*, Robert Bresson, France, 1974).

It is worth considering that Bresson's epiphany while walking along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées harbors a clue as to why the characters in this film are so difficult to identify—not to mention identify *with*—for the filmmaker is constantly attending to the way in which each

and every section and hinge of armor isolates a body part, atomizes it and renders it autonomous; and he attends to the abstract insect-like faces of these parts by emphasizing the peculiar extremities of the body and brewing a sonic stew of metal propelled by the organic electricity of walking, running, and horseback-riding. Even when the knights remove their helmets to engage in conversation, the pervasive sound of their armor, which rarely settles down into complete silence, becomes a part of their discourse, and, what's more, the very manner in which they speak—the disaffected monotony of their speech—comes across as deeply shaped by a lifetime of communicating while masked. Indeed, the armor's metallic and mechanical mold, its rigid and cumbersome segmentation (in opposition to the smooth flow of organic or synthetic fabric whose sounds resemble the perishable softness of the flesh), amplifies the embodied movements of these beings, directing our attention to a unique form of life which we call "human," albeit in doing so we instantly and perhaps unknowingly posit a being *behind* the body—a formless, controlling and explanatory kernel of consciousness. The film's experiment—for this is without a doubt a modernist film—is measured by its commitment to blocking a spell-breaking eye contact between viewers and viewed, an eye contact which posits the *deformation* of the human by way of this kernel of consciousness with the power to turn or align the world around it in self-serving or otherwise advantageous ways. And a point around which the world is made to turn, to conform to the will, exposes, in this case, the "mere humanity" of the knights. With *Lancelot du Lac* Bresson has taken thorough precautions against disturbing this dream called human life—it is called so *consciously*—and the method underlying the results or effects is what is most surreal.[22]

Reading Bresson's notes which rarely exceed a sentence or two—amounting to something of a list of self-disciplinary reminders, say of the *ethics* vital to the integrity of any aesthetics—it becomes apparent that his entire cinematic project revolves around the desire to purify the cinema of any trace of the art of theater and in particular of what we might call the theatrical instinct of expressionism. His unorthodox hypothesis is that a director, if he or she is to succeed in creating genuinely novel and truthful images that expand onto each other and resonate long after they have

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[22] I have borrowed the preceding phrase from the subtitle of *Institute Benjamenta: This Dream People Call Human Life* (Quay Brothers, Germany-Japan-UK, 1996), although the sense of dream in this film is far more psychological and anthropocentric than anything in Bresson. Come to think of it, there are no dream scenes in Bresson's films and the word "dream" is rarely if ever used in *Notes on Cinematography*. I take this conspicuous absence of the dream to be a sign of Bresson's radical or strictly conceptual understanding of surrealism.

left the screen, must learn how to use the great powers of conscious intention and intellectualization above all to *thwart* intention, the micromanagement of ideas, and the tendency towards the reduction and sometimes reckless over-determination of a reality that cinema captures automatically (gracefully). I believe this is how Bresson directs his models, not by, as he puts it, "direct[ing] someone, but [by] direct[ing] oneself"—a philosophical gesture reminiscent of the romanticism of Ralph Waldo Emerson.[23] Since his goal is to direct *the person* and not the actor playing the character, and since this involves telling him or her exactly *what to do* and never why or to what end, directing a film hinges for Bresson on the withholding as much as the imparting of information, from others as well as from himself, keeping secrets while simultaneously remaining open to the secrets withheld by his models by virtue of being present rather than absent in their characters, secrets which can be revealed only without the strategic probing or even gentle prodding of "method acting." Bresson takes seriously the fact that his vision of human bustle as a swarm of figures who move along as if by clockwork is not something that he himself has *intended to perceive* in an otherwise everyday and routine environment. Rather, it is something that he has happened to notice, an experience to be submitted for reflection and perhaps further empirical testing; it has struck him and filled him with wonder, a feeling made fragile by the locking of gazes which, in dreams, so often signals the moment of awakening; and if he were to allow himself to indulge the temptation to know "how" or "why" moving bodies are suddenly appearing to him under this unusual aspect, the fear is that a false or overly weighted sense of intentionality would be posited within the individual members of the Parisian crowd. As individuals they are on their way, from places and towards places like targeted satellites travelling through the vast in-betweenness of space, but as a whole these individuals are just faceless bodies moving about as an organism without head or tail. To search for causes here is to ruin, as it were, the effect: the act of looking into the eyes of members of the crowd as a humanist search for inner life turns out to be misguided, piercing the veil that Walter Benjamin insightfully attributed to crowds in general, for such soul-gazing presumes that the eye is a window to the invisible rooms of interiority where human beings are thought to reside in their purest form.[24]

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[23] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p. 1.
[24] See Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

But the eye, it seems to me, is only ever window-like when another eye positioned in front of it—in the position of the gaze, the magnification and thickening of the eye's liquid glass—struggles to see past it or fears being seen too deeply in return. And if the eye, during these face-to-face encounters of mutual acknowledgment between perceiving subjects—whether these encounters occur between strangers or lovers—spontaneously blinks or skirts aside, thus avoiding what we call *eye contact*, it is perhaps because the eye and the 'I' are too much alike: sight's "one-wayness" is all of a sudden thrust against the oncoming traffic of "the other." The impulse of the 'I' to use the eyes to see "through" or "in" or "behind" the world and others has always been a strictly epistemological one-way preoccupation, investigating and delineating the wild field of the visible and looking for roots which are pulled from life only to discover that they resemble the branches hovering about in plain view. When two pairs of eyes come together for a moment and lock, the potency and reciprocal nudity of that suspended moment creates the feeling that one's interiority or privacy has been raised to the surface and exposed, yet this is only a *myth*, albeit a powerfully unshakable one (even if exposed, myths can continue to have a hold on us). But the exposure of interiority can indeed be exposed as philosophical or even paranoid, for it presumes that the question of *who* we are is the sacred bedrock or precious marrow of our being, this hidden "who" to serve as a basis for exploring and mapping *what* we are, spirit before matter, yet again.

Repeated insistence in the *Notes* on the "moral-aesthetic" dangers of the intelligence in general and intentionality in particular stems, it would seem, from a skepticism towards an excessively rational, intellectualizing, and insufficiently sensitive artistic disposition, a skepticism that is derived from an unlikely mixture of both religious and surrealist influences. Bresson's concern, on my reading, is that one's intelligence may not be the most productive and trustworthy tool for creativity in the cinema; knowing exactly what a scene is supposed to mean or why a character must behave *this way*—understanding one's subject in exclusively intellectual terms which one then proceeds *to implement*—can have a compromising or altogether negating effect on the openness of the senses and one's deeper, perhaps blindfolded sense of intuition for what/why/how things ought to be in the finished film. This must be the reason for why Bresson's suggestion that screenplays are written in order to be destroyed, or transformed, through the shooting and editing phases of the filmmaking process, a process in which the film itself undergoes multiple lives, is so well known, quoted, and embraced by certain filmmakers, for each phase introduces not only new possibilities but new *terminologies* and even *physiologies* of artistic labor.

However, Bresson remains fully cognizant of the paradox of championing intuition over intelligence as a method, for doing so requires thinking his way through and out of thought—an intellectual feat if there ever was one—and we see him coach himself with the following instruction: "Practice the precept: find without seeking."[25] I like to read this, at first, as a commitment to relaxing the rote, intention-bound, and bruising hand of directorial imposition which tends to conform to rules derived from other artistic cultures and buy into the reigning hierarchical myth of cinema that it is power over others that produces poetry. Regarding the inherent capacity of the medium of cinema to aid in the tempering of the negative or ill-suited aspects of the intelligence, Bresson has this to say—or pray—in what is actually the final note of the collection: "DIVINATION—how can one not associate that name with the two sublime machines I use for my work? Camera and tape recorder, carry me far away from the intelligence which complicates everything."[26] For a filmmaker with ties rather than tendencies towards theology and surrealism, an excess and perhaps even the mere presence of, let's say, an uncalibrated creative consciousness, no matter how on point it may be, can succumb to alien influences of which it has no awareness, or which it believes are inspirations and not influences at all. In doing so, for Bresson, the cinema passively inherits the standards by which the camera and microphone have been habitually put to use throughout the short history of film (shorter for Bresson than it is for us today), for example the well-worn styles and recycled conventions of the theater which, along with literature, functions almost like an overbearing authority figure for the relatively adolescent art of cinema, ordering it to live the way it lives rather than find its own way—and at times being so successful that such orders become internalized in the "mind" of cinema, perpetuating old values in new guises.

As for the moral aspect of this aesthetic, in the case of Bresson—which is an extreme case no doubt—any overly conscious act of willful direction from the director becomes an abrasive and largely unthought "directedness" into the eyes of others that risks destroying the finely tuned balance in his models between being awake and being asleep.[27] For it is here, drifting down the stream of consciousness, where we dwell or better yet *how* we dwell as conscious beings—

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[25] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p. 30.
[26] Ibid., p. 72.
[27] Bresson seems to have found a way to preserve this balance *a priori* by casting in a lead role a being that in principle cannot be otherwise than it is, in other words an animal instead of a human being—a donkey in particular—as the exemplary model in *Au Hasard Balthazar* (France-Sweden, 1966).

constantly losing and gaining consciousness, and sometimes gaining when we lose it (revelatory dreams) and losing when we gain it (the uniform gridding of our best laid plans). Our dwelling is precisely in between our ideas about knowing and not knowing, in opposition to the false oppositions between thinking and dreaming, remembering and fantasizing, living as a human being and living as a being with lofty or degenerate notions about what it *means* to be human, as if that were a given or meant something inimitably special. If one were to use Bresson's epiphany in the street as inspiration for a film scene, it would most likely result in the contrived imposition of preconceived ideas and metaphors the meaning of which states *x* rather than reveals something previously unknown. A scene that is *about* human beings appearing mechanized or somnambulistic internally structures the vital ambiguities and contingencies of reality; in a word, such overwrought conceptualizations of form and content will yield the *cliché* of humans "going about their business," pretending to be machines or otherwise costumed as machines, rather than images and sounds approximating the perhaps undramatic truth that it is their behaviour which is mechanical, or the movements of certain parts of the body. The latter is a fragile dream sensation (we all share the same soul when automatisms take hold, that is, when our private holds on life are relinquished) which pops like a bubble when, half-gazing in front of them as they walk, the eyes are ignited and the face is returned to its observational post atop the body. Therefore, the director who has learned how to direct himself will have also mastered the art of strategic self-effacement, and the activation of automatisms becomes less an act of authorial self-expression than a modernist act of cinematic self-discovery (though there may be no firm ground on which to distinguish these two operations). The automatism of the camera (and the audio recorder, which Bresson insists should never be excluded from discussions about the cinematic image), deriving its powers of perception from recording reality scrupulously yet indifferently, is calibrated to represent humans mechanically (not exactly *as* machines)—as forms of life, moving breathing thinking objects, autonomous yet automatic, bound between an erratic self-sufficiency and a complete dependency on rote.[28] Yet on the other hand, the audiovisual camera is also fated—like us—to look these

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[28] This view of the camera resonates with, and is quite possibly indebted to, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau Ponty's view of cinema as a mode of perception and expression which is resolutely exterior, in contradistinction to literature's obsession with inhabiting the psychological interiors of characters (and, to speak on behalf of Bresson, in contradistinction to theater's obsession with *projecting* the psychology of characters across an entire audience). See Merleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 48-59.

spiritualized machines in the eye, for the camera-eye in cinematographic practice is still a surrogate for a human eye. As such it summons consciousness into self-consciousness—the antediluvian self-consciousness that made us all of a sudden completely unfit for life in the Garden of Eden because we knew we were being watched.

The problem of reconciling the human and the mechanical within the cinematic apparatus is approached by Bresson in the following way: "Your camera catches not only physical movements that are inapprehensible by pencil, brush or pen, but also certain states of soul recognizable by indices which it alone can reveal."[29] The camera is presumably privy to these indices of spirit, what I would call metaphysical indices, because its mechanical automatism allows it to catch the gestures of the world unawares and also, as a technological incarnation of the principle of automatism, bring out the automatic nature of these living gestures (a life whose autonomy is based not on consciousness or reason, not to mention moral reason, but rather, again, on automatism). However, it is not obvious at all from Bresson's note—nor the ones which immediately precede and follow, nor those which acknowledge the unique features of the cinematic apparatus—*exactly how* the camera can be made to reveal the world in this way. For a concrete methodology or technique, specifically an aesthetic tailored to the metaphysic of cinematic automatism—because the camera, as we know, is impotent without a human or at least algorithmic operator, and where the framing and projection of an aspect of the world yields only a bare minimum of aesthetic interest—we must turn to the conceptual centerpiece of the book which has already figured in my experience and analysis of Bresson more than once: *the model*. Throughout the course of *Notes on Cinematography*, the cinematic apparatus becomes a source of great revelatory and perhaps redemptive power, in Jean Epstein's sense of "photogénie,"[30] when its automatism is activated above all through the medium of the actor, through the directing of actors into a form of being that Bresson consistently refers to as "models," a form of being not unlike the marionette in Kleist's metaphysical understanding of the puppet theater. A more thorough and nuanced understanding of the meaning of this word, in this context, and as theorized by Bresson (albeit with a brevity and deliberate sense of obscurity which calls out for clarification

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[29] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p. 53.
[30] See Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*," in *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology 1907-1939*, Volume 1: 1907-1929, trans. Tom Milne, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 314-8.

from his films), is essential for completing or at least playing out the movement from a metaphysics to an aesthetics of automatism.

Bresson's use of the term "model" is best understood as an index rather than a text, or as an anthropocentric version of André Bazin's use of the term, in his essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," to describe the radically causal identity which prevails between photograph and referent. While Bresson's models are occasionally as still, stoic and silent as fashion models or people posing for paintings, it would be more accurate to read his concept through Bazin's inescapably metaphysical claim that the photograph not only represents the model but *is* the model.[31] Both theorists appear to advocate for a kind of religious transubstantiation in which the idea of the model, as photograph or actor, *embodies* that which it represents, as in the eucharist ritual where bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ; the only difference being that actors (properly untrained) have tendencies to perform their nature, whereas a photograph, the moment it captures the model, is taken possession of *by the model*—automatically. An aesthetic extrapolation of Bazin's model theory of photographic ontology, one that is specific to the art of performance, can be glimpsed in Bresson's anti-representational approach to indexical embodiment as the principle for a (non)acting style rooted in the metaphysics of film. Two notes, despite being enigmatic and leaving much unsaid, are worth singling out in this context: "Cinematography, the art, with images, of *representing* nothing," and earlier in the text, "To your models: 'One must not act either somebody else or oneself. One must not act *anybody*.'"[32] Like the model of a photograph which becomes the photograph *by virtue of being what it is*, actors in Bresson's aesthetic philosophy must also display this virtue of being. In other words—and in what sounds very simple yet, because of our intellectual nature as "complicators" of being, must be very difficult to do, going through the backdoor…—the actors are not permitted to act, they must not think as actors; they must be, they must think and behave as beings: they are models of the characters, not representations of them. As models, they *are* the characters in the same way as the photographic representation *is* the model.[33] Therefore, the term "model" for both writers points to

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[31] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?*, Volume 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 14.

[32] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p. 59 and 30 (italics in original).

[33] Martin Lefebvre has suggested to me that in painting that model also doesn't act; he just stands there. And in a sense this is what Bresson also seeks, perhaps informed by his experience as a painter: someone who just stands there, instead of acting, with the challenge of developing this sense of "standing" and "thereness"—this "presenteness"—across narrative time. The model, Lefebvre continues, is more like a

the collapse of representation, that is, the collapse of the space of reference, suggesting that the act of representing something in a photographic or performative way, by becoming the object of representation, allows what I described in Chapter 1 as presence overriding representation and entering the realm of signification and perspicuity on its own terms. However, the idea of a "cinematic model" complicates matters significantly for Bresson, because properly photographic/painterly models pose rather than perform, and whether such a pose is true or false has no ontological effect on the integrity of the photograph (nor the beauty of a painting, for painters have the final say here). The same cannot be said of moving images of entirely fictitious representations of the world. While the act of filming is as automatic as that of being, the possibility of filming a being who is acting another being, or even his own being for that matter, is to grant unconscious authenticity to conscious intentionality. It is really to say: The camera as such is a "letting-be" type of technology, so I am set up, as it were, to let be this being who pretends, this most strange and unusual being being otherwise than he is, this being who is quite uneducated about what it means solely to be by giving all being a meaning. A result no doubt of his training as an actor, not to mention his experience as an adult. I must find ways to resist this set-up, such that I let-be only what-is, but for that I must *work*—let nothing be unless it has been so instructed.[34]

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landscape than an actor, almost a found object whose automatisms are sought because they translate the reality of the model—transferring it to the character—without the artifice of acting. If there is something Bazinian at stake here, it may be this "transfer"—from model to character by way of automatism. I am inclined to agree, for this *transfer* strikes me as one of the primary ways in which the moving image upends the logic of representation and reconstitutes the metaphysical in physical terms. I thank Martin for offering these insightful remarks and connections.

[34] The issue of age raises a minor but important question related to Bresson's model methods: Why are all the models, starting with *Country Priest*, young? Why must they embody the beauty and aloofness of youth, like the man at the baths in Kleist's essay? If his goal can be summarized as that of suppressing conscious intention, mechanizing the face, emptying out the mental interior etc., why not restrict casting solely to children or animals with less human experience (or non-human experience)? Mouchette may be the youngest character of about 13-14 years, but interestingly her problems in life exceed those of the average adult: with an invalid mother and negligent father (who molds his son in his own image), Mouchette is the primary caregiver of the household and seems never to have known a real moment of childlike innocence and exuberance. Bresson made only one film about an animal, *Au Hasard Balthazar*, yet despite having the ideal material for a model—a donkey cannot act other than a donkey, and cannot speak dialogue which has been written in advance—Bresson chooses to devote much of the film to the people who surround Balthazar, his owners (albeit he is never owned for very long); and one of the scenes in which Balthazar is not overshadowed by humans is at a circus where he performs with human-like intelligence, answering math questions by tapping his hooves. In the end, the actors which Bresson trusts to model their characters are neither children being children nor animals being animals but youths not being young or enjoying their youth. Actors in the prime of their youth like James Dean, Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift would fit perfectly in a Bresson film if it were not for their luminous star power and fame. Gaunt and lost-looking,

I do believe that Bresson is aspiring to a kind of metaphysics of performance here, insisting that a performance be "true" first and foremost, an undramatic and perhaps non-artistic criterion requiring models instead of actors—people who can and are allowed "to be themselves," so that when they are projected onscreen as images and sounds they will not project beyond their nature or in excess of their actual aura, i.e. in material synchronicity with the inanimate objects in their midst. For an example of how strict Bresson is on this issue, consider the following remark, seemingly addressed to the reader but in fact addressed to himself, as a reminder for what should *not* be done, no matter how difficult or nonsensical it may be, and the layers of activity and concentration required by a thoroughly negative aesthetic methodology: "To your models: 'Don't think what you're saying, don't think what you're doing.' And also: 'Don't think *about* what you say, don't think *about* what you do.'"[35] Bresson's rule to his actors is, basically, not to act, but as conscious beings they of course *will* act unless he can *rid* them of their will, or at least what is unnatural about the will's mode of expressivity. (Kleist's solution, as we have seen, is to get rid of the human being entirely and replace him with a puppet, which may, after all, be a metaphor for the priority of art over life.) "Thinking about" is a clear symptom of practical self-consciousness even when it manages to pull off an effective instance of performance articulation. Indeed, all actors are trained and in varying degrees strive to think before they act, which is why Bresson simply refuses to cast them in his films. It is always for the sake of "being" as opposed to "seeming to be"—even if being is far less interesting than appearance, and according to the narratives of Western philosophy appearance is more dramatic if less "true"—that Bresson declares that filmmakers, at least those committed to a medium specific mode of film performance, should "radically suppress intentions in your models."[36] This is because the concept of intention, when overly valued and aesthetically insisted upon, creates separation between actor and character that, once exploited, can never be mended. For someone like Bresson who believes that most of human behavior—and all authentic behavior—is unintended, hence automatic, the concept of

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solitary and soft-spoken, fragile yet fierce, fully grown yet still growing into themselves, the personalities of Bresson's youths are mapped across their faces and bodies—their gaits—at that special juncture just before a steady base of life experience solidifies, counterbalances intuitive energies, and usurps control over the reins of life. They are cast in such a way as to be *caught*, before the serene archipelago of eyes, nose and mouth becomes socially civilized, ground down into colonized drifts of weary complacency and rote performance, the leveraging status of "official member of society" masquerading as dreamless well-adjustedness.

[35] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p. 8 (italics in original).

[36] Ibid (italics in original).

intentionality will therefore govern human action primarily in retrospect, in an attempt to ascertain why someone—or oneself—behaves in a certain way, or to fantasize how we might have behaved in a more heroic—moral or amoral—manner so as to compensate for a bad social aftertaste. We can think of this antitheatrical performance technique as Bresson's attempt to break through the backdoor of cinematic automatism via an exploitation of the actor's paradoxical presence *in the world* as opposed to *on a stage*, along with the refusal to fall into the trap that the world can ever pass for the stage. For Bresson a model is still technically an actor—perhaps only small children and animals can remain partially in the dark about what they have been called upon to do—albeit an actor only in the most rudimentary sense who has resisted every temptation, with the filmmaker's help, to act the character he or she is supposed to be. To this end—and it is much easier said than done, for it can be said and not done *formulaically*—Bresson's direction will consist in setting up the ideal conditions for what is usually a directorial fantasy by rethinking the character in terms of the mind and body of the person who shall not act because they will have no need to act; they simply do what they are told, as if "puppeted," and as long as they comply—and have no reason not to comply with their own nature—they will be present as opposed to representative of a character who is, as a rule, absent onscreen (as far as the camera is concerned, and viewers as well, the actor is the character). In this way and if all goes well, models are made to forget, through a cultivation of their behavioral automatisms, that they are actually acting in front of a camera; they are made to become their character not from the inside out but rather from the outside in, mechanically as it were, which amounts to saying that they have no inside as separate from an outside and an outside which stretches and staggers across their entire person— they are what they are, and *what* they are is also *who* they are. Bresson believes that the material "what" of human identity is the basis for the immaterial "who" of human identity, and furthermore that this basis constitutes a dissemination of identity across the body, like an evaporation of the liquid soul, resulting in a rug-pulling eradication of an *a priori* conception of the human.

I would like to suggest that there is a resonant relation between Kleist's conception of the marionette and Bresson's conception of the model, and it would not be farfetched to say that Bresson models his idea of the model after the automatisms of the marionette in addition to the automatisms of the cinematic apparatus. According to Kleist, the movements of marionettes are deemed to be more expressive and free for being mechanical, strategically cut off from the snares of conscious intention, and altogether devoid of locatable points of mental interiority. The goal

seems to be to cut off the will midstride, liberate the contingency of human gesture and intonation, and minimize further debasement of the human condition in the realm of the arts (redeeming it fully is, well, out of our hands), for according to Kleist and Bresson the human condition is already in some sense debased by our tendency to *think our way* into a natural or graceful relation with the world—an intellectual impulse and enterprise of the will which the artist must resist, for no one is more skilled than him (excluding the representatives of institutionalized religion) at willing redemption, forging a rhetoric of transcendence, or substituting superficial beauty for the mysterious depths of grace. Bresson admits, in a note bearing the tone of a riddle, that the best way to catch the fish is by emptying the pond,[37] a revealing metaphor which strikes me as advocating a labor not of creation but of systematic avoidance of convention and cliché, avoidance of the skillful yet habitual and always strangely dissatisfying blasts of self-satisfied realization—fish on hooks glistening and writhing in the air, dangling in front of us, served up with passion and purpose yet no less with fierce presumption, often before we have a chance to properly assess what is being offered to us in the name of art.

The automatism of the camera is instrumental not only in capturing and recording the automatism of models, but it is also the condition of possibility for a human being freeing himself from the prison-like inauthenticity of self-consciousness and becoming as automatic—and perhaps even as graceful—as a marionette. Two remarks from the *Notes* are worth isolating in this respect, both of which are directed towards the "model theory" of acting as having a cinematic specificity over and above its relevance to the art of performance: "Model. It is his non-rational, non-logical 'I' that your camera records"[38] and "Models mechanized externally, internally free. On their faces nothing wilful. *'The constant, the eternal beneath the accidental.'*"[39] First I want to point out that these definitions of the model strike me as "medium specific"—they are justified on the grounds that they are specific to cinema rather than to performance, hinging upon a sense of metaphysical contingency in the world and anonymity in the beings who dwell in it; and depending on the case, the way such definitions are expressed on film may require acts of photogénie, the creation of which cannot necessarily be scripted or planned. Add to this the fact that Bresson, as we know, is adamant that the fate of cinema as an art depends on completely untethering itself from the

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[37] Ibid, p. 48. The exact phrasing is: "Empty the pond to get the fish."
[38] Ibid., p. 41.
[39] Ibid., p. 25 (italics in original).

influence of the theater, such that even *acting* must discover its own properly cinematic sense. (What becomes an actor when he or she is projected as a feature—a grand figure—of the world in its own image? How they image the world, how the world is *for them*, becomes secondary to the fact that they are *in* the world, and how they fit, or don't fit, is the greater mystery.)

In the first note, Bresson seems to play with a continuity prevailing between the "I" of the model and the camera-eye; the cinematic apparatus, which represents reality non-consciously, will therefore approach human personality as a threshold to the domain of anonymity. Now anonymity does not refer to the absence of an "I" but rather to the mechanization of the "I" as expressed in the second note, an outward mechanization to be precise that in principle frees the "I" from the inside (consciousness) to the outside (the face). This face reveals as much as it conceals, a face whose dispersion of sense organs and contingent, irrational system of gestures—organized according to mechanized habit rather than humanized motivation or intentionality—destroys the illusion of a stable, rational and accessible pinpoint of interiority where consciousness looks out from behind the face. While such a face, unruled by the will and consciously unconscious (for lack of a better phrase), is thrown into an anarchy of the accidental, Bresson insists somewhat paradoxically on the presence of something constant and eternal *beneath* the contingency of the face. But the word "beneath" is also misleading insofar as it draws yet another line between inside and outside and sets the stage for the return of the will and its engine of purposeful consciousness (the engine which propelled the human hand to reach for the apple on account of temptation). Rather, what is needed to overcome these incommensurable binaries—particularly the opposition between outward mechanization and inner freedom—is what I described earlier as a movement from automatism to autonomy, however the autonomy which results from automatism will be metaphysical (constant and eternal) instead of psychological. One way in which Bresson attempts to do this—so that his camera can be trusted to record a model and not an actor, that is, the character him or herself and not a mere representation—is by making his models repeat lines and actions, not for the sake of striving towards an accurate representation of the psychology of their characters, but to repeat them incessantly until they lose all meaning for the model, thus breaking away from the intention behind their meaning and free to take on a life of their own, with or without grace.[40]

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[40] Ibid., p. 12. The note from which this technique is drawn is expressed with Bresson's characteristic combination of martial control and faithful acquiescence: "Models who have become automatic (everything weighed, measured, timed, repeated ten, twenty times) and are then dropped in the middle of the events of

If Bresson were Kleist in the anecdote about the young man's cursed vanity, he would have him repeat the graceful gesture past the point of parody and into sterility—all the way around the world to the backdoor of paradise—a path destined for the uncanny realm of total mechanicalness which may have the power to reenchant the gesture or at least rule out false (acted) gestures. Again, grace manifests in a manner analogous to Kleist's conception of the marionette, but where human beings are concerned, it is important to note that there is no guarantee of grace, that the artist—filmmaker or puppeteer—can only ensure that he does not impede the possibility of it: "If, on the screen, the mechanism disappears and the phrases you have made them say, the gestures you have made them make, have become one with your models, with your film, with you—then a miracle."[41]

At least in my experience, the model theory of acting is most fully realized in *Mouchette*, particularly in two scenes where the young female protagonist, forced prematurely into survivalist adulthood by poverty, unfit parentage and lack of love, engages in awkward and enigmatic acts of what we might call "play." Having been deprived of a childhood phase in life where play is practiced with some regularity and carefreeness, in the case of Mouchette the energies released by play have accumulated to the point of warped calcification in immensely strong if not violent impulses towards sex and death. In the first scene, Mouchette wanders by herself at a carnival, looking characteristically dour and forlorn, unapproachable and bizarrely out of place, bearing a face-mask in a seemingly permanent state of emotional overcast. She makes her way to a bumper car ride and, while standing helplessly in front of it, invites the pity of a woman in the crowd who gives her the necessary coins. Shortly after the ride begins, Mouchette is hit from behind by a man twice her age who seems to be drawn to her stoically concealed vulnerability. In an enclosed environment framed by play, the man pursues Mouchette amidst the clutter and chaos of bumper cars, ramming the back of her car with increasing ferocity. At first Mouchette curls her face into the excitement and anticipation aroused by the competitive game, especially when she manages to land a bumper blow on her pursuer, but as she is struck more forcefully—and passionately— Bresson catches her face in a moment of uncontrollable release, a gaping expression of agony combined with ecstasy.

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your film—their relations with the objects and persons around them will be *right*, because they will not be *thought*." (italics in original)
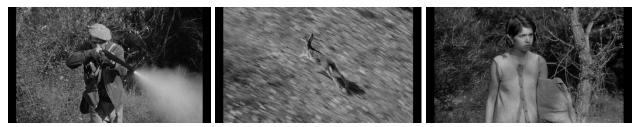
[41] Ibid., p. 18.

Figures 44 and 45. Bresson catches Mouchette's automatic expression of an unrefined pleasure-pain. *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, France, 1967).

I use the word "catch" very deliberately as a description of Bresson's use of the camera when his models manage to deliver the correct gestures without any trace of intention behind their expression, for when this happens it must happen quite unpredictably, yet the filmmaker must, as they say, expect the unexpected by keeping the "net" of the camera open at opportune times. And the potential for a revelatory act of automatism is opportune here because the mechanical and contact-sport nature of the bumper-car ride mechanizes Mouchette externally, setting up ideal conditions for the emergence and capture of gestural automatisms which are not willed but seem to embody the will of her locked-up libidinal energies. As we follow Mouchette and relish her brief reprieve from suffering, and with the automatist possibilities of the ride fully engaged, it might dawn on us that we do not know enough about her inner life to know if she wants or is able to release these energies herself or if she needs someone else to help release them for her. With an increasing sense of thrill-laced frustration, she cannot seem to navigate her car away from the assault and ideally into a position of attack, and with each jerk of the wheel finds herself faced with a wall or further enmired in a car-clump. The nature of the ride prevents us from asking what her intentions are here; the ride sets her body into motion, a body charged with a desire she does not properly understand and perhaps is feeling for the first time in her young—but also old—life. When the ride ends she wakes up as if out of a dream, invitingly reciprocates the stoic gaze of her pursuer, and follows the tide of emotion by approaching the man in a desperate yet intensely desirous way, instigating the courtship to the angry dismay of her father who cruelly brings her back to reality with a slap across the face.

The second related scene also involves a "sublimation game," yet on this occasion a game Mouchette puts into motion herself (though we must keep in mind that what we are accustomed to attribute to "her" is, according to the model theory of acting, already and always *in motion*—

autonomy guided by automatism). At the end of the film, Mouchette is shown walking on a dirt road by an open field, the tranquil setting crystallizing this present moment in time, this clear horizon of possibility and newness, and for a moment wedging a block of distance between her and her relentless troubles and ordeals: bullied by school kids, surrounded by poverty, oppressed by a negligent, unloving father and invalid mother, and most likely raped, resulting in her being scorned by the community. While on the shining surface of the here and now she is still a child exploring the great garden that is the world, however at the same time—the time of the past within the present—she is the product of a suffocating accumulation of rotten experience which leaves her understandably brimming with a generalized resentment, a nihilist anger which she even directs towards rare acts of kindness. For her to inhabit this "garden of life" she too must be nurtured, and yet, scanning the panorama of her everyday existence, there seems to be no imaginable place or person in the world of the film for her to reach out to where she can feel safe, experience emotional fulfilment, ideally love, and have a chance at some shred of happiness. After the death of her mother some of the local townspeople extend a hospitable hand, suggesting that the world is not *all* selfishness and cruelty, but Mouchette turns it aside in bursts of rage—it's a kindness deformed by pity and it's far too late for her to become softened by these or any other gestures of consolation. As she walks alone, holding a parcel of dresses and a funeral shroud given to her by an elderly woman enthralled by the dead, the overcast of Mouchette's face continues to darken and block any access to the beauty of her surroundings. And this beauty, like that of Mouchette, is quickly eclipsed by the sound of gunshots as a series of hunters stationed in the trees prey on wild rabbits racing for their lives. Like the archers in the trees in *Lancelot du Lac*, these hunters fire their guns at the rabbits in automatist fashion, like tall waves crashing on a beach or better yet like lightning strikes. Lacking a personal incentive or any other recognizable motivation, the hunters are as much human as they are mechanical, call them killing machines, firing one after the other, the camera shots of their gunshots appearing in unison. Here Mouchette bears witness to the power of the strong over the weak as a truth of nature installed in the surroundings in which she finds herself, and yet, she does not run for cover, or so much as flinch, at the poor rabbits before moving along, more assured of the logic of her entrapment: "This is my place in the world."

Figures 46, 47, and 48. Mouchette bears witness to a mechanical law of nature: the strong trump the weak: *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, France, 1967).

Now she is near a river, perhaps sensing her absolute aloneness in the world, and lies down on the grass, not to gaze into the heavens but rather to roll down the riverbank after rolling herself up in one of the fine dresses which became torn by the sharp branches of a bush clawing up from the earth. It's like she rolls herself up into a ball, a game ball, perhaps a pinball (I recall the pinball scene from *Pickpocket* where the metal sphere is shown bouncing around at the top of the board, going this way and that, completely at the mercy of chance forces after only one initial release from the so-called "player"). What a strange game for her to be playing, and even stranger timing for play. The object of the game is still a mystery, perhaps because, in childlike fashion, she makes it up as she goes along, but what's clear to me is that she has succeeded to turn herself from "player" to "played," or in other words from an agent in the world to an object in the world governed by the logic of automatism. The first roll down the bank fails, the momentum of her automatism running out due to friction, and she stands up in defeat. She then notices someone driving a tractor and impulsively—mechanically, freely, perhaps

Figures 49 and 50. Mouchette's cryptic call for help: *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, France, 1967).

calling to mind the sweet memory of the bumper cars—raises her arm in a vague half-wave. Considering the fact that the tractor-driver is facing away from her (though he does briefly look over his shoulder), the gesture is a weak visual signal of distress, a voiceless yet spirited squeak in the wind, a final reaching out to others which rises out of her seemingly against her will, like the whiplash gasps of pleasure experienced on the bumper car ride. Nothing save for a loud cry for

help could span the great barrier of communication, but no such cry is forthcoming, for a cry in this moment simply requires too much will, and she is in the process of relinquishing her will. She can only do what she does, not what she wants to do and certainly not what we want her to do. At this point we must again insist that the ineffectual half-wave gesture derives its authenticity, power and properness by not being consciously intended, for if it were so intended then we as viewers would know that Mouchette is calling for help, but Mouchette does not quite "call for help"—instead she does *this*, she does not know what she does, which is why her call for help is made illegible by her uncertainty. (When the world spins around you, you are not exactly present in your actions, yet your actions reveal you, cut to your core.) Not noticeably disappointed by the result, she walks back to the starting position of the game and resets herself as the playball. The second roll hits a bush where the white dress becomes caught in the branches—the symbol of femininity, marriage and social privilege has been exfoliated—and she leaves it there, drained of value, as if it is now considered legally "out of bounds." The third roll is filmed yet not followed, landing in the river water and indicated with a loud splash heard offscreen. Success. Bresson cuts to his preferred view of an event—its aftermath—the rippling surface of the water. After the last physical water-trace of Mouchette's suicide has dissipated, and as the ripples peter out and give way to undulations, if one looks closely you can see the filmmaker attempt to reciprocate Mouchette's supplicating gesture to the tractor driver. Bresson makes these undulations on the surface of the pond retract or implode, not all the way back to Mouchete's entry point in the water but near the moment of her descent to the bottom and final resting place in the small black hole of the pinball game of life. He reaches out and very quietly pulls the strings of redemption, granting a micro miracle intended to go unnoticed by viewers, perhaps the sort of miracle which Bresson claimed can occur when a model becomes one with the film and one with the filmmaker.

Figures 51, 52, and 53. Mouchette plays a game with her life by becoming "the ball": *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, France, 1967).

What I find compelling in these scenes as illuminators of the model theory of acting is that the more Mouchette becomes an object of circumstance and figure of automatism the more expressively "herself" she becomes. Through automatism she experiences overripe sexual desire

and takes her life into her own hands by leaving this world like a puppet on strings. Bresson knows these strings are not controlled by a benevolent deity, and yet, in watching Mouchette give up her will to live and roll down the bank towards the water, as a filmmaker he responds empathically by catching Mouchette, not by saving her, of course, for that would be akin to divine/directorial intervention. Interestingly, the camera, which is often described by Bresson in the notes as harboring net-like capabilities, is not equipped to catch her when she falls; it can only look on and record the event without being able to register the director's passionate sympathy. For that, Bresson requires editing and optical processing techniques to halt the camera's onward indifference and loop a short stretch of film, the visual equivalent of a breath, about six or seven times before fading to black. With the loop, Bresson stops looking and listening from above and starts to *think over* the water's surface and *hold onto* Mouchette, blessing her death with chords of Claudio Monteverdi's *Magnificat* which bear witness to the grace of her mechanical resiliency through unbearable—and unjust—hardship. Her abiding, perspiring persistence through life is matched only by the donkey in *Au Hasard Balthazar* who also perishes at the end by reckless gunshot, and in his final moments finds himself surrounded by a swirling herd of sheep, a cocooning vigil of concentric "sheep ripples."

Many of Bresson's films end with the death of the main character, hence the death of the model, a death undergone in the depths of despair yet expressed in terms of emancipation and hinting at grace.[42] But, indeed, what could be graceful about death? Why must his characters meet

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[42] Those characters who do not perish at the conclusion of a Bresson film will typically face death's counterpart: rebirth. Either way, Bresson's models reach some sort of limit point. By "death of the model" I mean two things: a model's embodiment of a character who perishes at the end of a particular film, and the completion of the model's lifecycle from discovery to death, resulting in the *theoretical removal* of the possibility of the model becoming an actor, playing different characters across different films, in other words the *career* of the actor. Of course, many Bressonian models went on to have substantial careers (Claude Laydu, Marika Green, Anne Wiazemsky), and in the case of Dominique Sanda of *A Gentle Woman* (France, 1969), a rather illustrious one. They were free to do so, but let us remember, they were not free to become actors in the first place when Bresson, as was his way, plucked them out of their everyday lives and dropped them into his films, so to speak, discovering them when they were not necessarily looking to be discovered for the movies, perhaps making it easier to restrain in them the instinct to perform in front of a camera and enter the dimension of fictional make-believe. Leading a model to his/her untimely death or rebirth was perhaps Bresson's way of returning the model as found object back to "its" natural habitat. On the one hand Bresson's characters die with dignity, but on the other hand he deliberately kills them off, taking them by the hand to the end of their life not just in *this* film but *in film* in general. He sets out to do this by casting a non-professional first-time actor, destroying the instinct to act, creating a model which gives birth to the character, and lastly ending his films with the death of the character, a death which must also implicate the model. The realization of the full lifespan—birth and death—of the model within a film is also indicated by the fact that some of the models never performed onscreen again. While I'm sure it was

such an end in order for their often tragic and occasionally sacrificial suffering to be made redeemable? And how is redemption even possible here without the clear promise of an afterlife?... It is the *manner* in which his characters/models perish that is significant as a condition of possibility for the emergence of grace in Kleist's understanding of the term. According to Kleist, what stands in our way to grace is—simply, tragically—ourselves. What better way to enter a state of grace than by losing oneself, shedding layers of consciousness, whittling the ego down to a humble nub, all leading to the moment where one can die with unassuming dignity and a breezy sense of effortlessness. But let us pause here before we get too carried away: if that is what it takes, if the self is conceived as something losable, then how horrible it is to lose oneself, how ungraceful the pain, fear and contempt of death makes us out to be, making cowards of us all in the words of Hamlet. If the self is not prepared to die, it is then that death *comes*, always unannounced and unwelcome in any form but relief, foe of foes against which our struggles for self-preservation are futile. But the self, by nature, is unfit for death and for the same reason that it is unfit for grace. Death amplifies the self at the precise moment where it ought to yield. The artistic impulse also amplifies the self—making the self conscious of itself—at the precise moment where the self ought to be at its most open, channeling, and subservient to greater forces. Bresson's characters, who are often destined to die, are portrayed not through the lens of selfhood but rather through the lens of automatism. Whether they are killed or commit suicide, the self is lost, I want to say, automatically. No one dies—or at least none of the protagonists die—of "natural causes," because the self by the time of death has undergone a process of being dismantled, such that what is still unnatural about it can be more easily given up rather than unwillingly relinquished. I would prefer the phrasing that Bresson's main characters do not "die" so much as "come to an end," that is, when the film ends and, perhaps, *because* the film ends—because the film has no reason or ability to exist without

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Bresson's preference that the models not be viewed through the prism of the recurring or star actor, he could hardly take formal measures to make sure of it save for the radical differences in the way the actors performed "post-death" when asked by directors to act, to put their experience as actors to use, to play rather than model a part. At least we should not be surprised by those models who abstained from acting—given that models are trained not to act and, most importantly, are put to work in such a way that they cannot model a character other than the one to which they have permanently bonded with. These leads shall go by their real *and* character names: François Leterrier/Fontaine from *A Man Escaped* (France, 1956), Nadine Nortier/Mouchette from *Mouchette*, Guillaume des Forêts/Jacques from *Four Nights of a Dreamer* (France, 1971), and Antoine Monnier/Charles from *The Devil Probably* (France, 1977). Come to think of it, the model for all of them—the woman who embodied an iconic historical figure, died in martyrdom, and never acted again, though not without having displayed the full range of her acting abilities—is Renée Jeanne Falconetti/Jeanne d'Arc from *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, a film Bresson was deeply critical of.

the existence of its models, which for Bresson are akin to its soul. (And the same goes for Bazin: without the model there is no photograph whatsoever to speak of: to describe a photograph as merely depicting a model is to deny the ontology of photography, it is, in fact, to describe something else entirely.)

Beginning with *Diary of a Country Priest*, which marks the beginning of Bresson's mature film style insofar as its creation coincides with the beginning of *Notes on Cinematography*, every Bresson film ends in some fashion at a limit or threshold which is death-dealing or transformative, a literal or metaphorical expression of death/re-birth in the form of suicide, sacrifice, captivity, emancipation, redemption, or love. (Only Balthazar the donkey dies meaninglessly, a wretched fate for animals in general.) Of all these variations on the theme of death, it is the suicides in Bresson which I find to be the most interesting and revelatory with respect to the themes of this chapter. While the principle of suicide can be generalized as a conscious act of self-destruction, a self stripping the self away from itself, in Bresson suicides occur in a more peculiar and less decisive way where conscious intention, passion and detailed planning are indiscernible from a sense of anonymity and contingency. We have already seen this at work in Mouchette's death scene where a seemingly innocent act of play results in her drowning. It should be obvious by now that I would hesitate to say that she drowns *herself*, and even on the most literal level of the scene, we do not see her enter the water nor any sign of her body lying at the bottom of the lake. Her death is a departure from the world of the film in a state of selflessness, or grace. The roll-down-the-hill game allows the forces of gravity and chance to carry her away; suicide is set into motion, and then occurs, but it is not exactly *committed*. In retrospect, as we play the scene over in our minds, we cannot quite say that she means to kill herself, nor that she is sufficiently present in herself to actively lose her sense of self. Instead, it's as if she turns herself into a stone and like a stone sinks to the bottom without any conceivable capacity, not to mention will or desire, to rise back up to the surface. She gives up and goes down quietly.

Another ambiguous suicide occurs at the end of *The Devil Probably*. In this film, a deeply disillusioned and troubled young man named Charles, whose nihilism rejects even the anarchy of destruction, contemplates his own death without being able to imagine himself taking his own life. He longs to die, perhaps as the logical conclusion of his extreme form of nihilism, but at the same time his nihilism prohibits the committing of so bold and affirmative an act. While revealing himself to a psychologist, his thoughts are as clear as they are contradictory: he confesses to hating

life only to go on to say that he hates death even more. He describes having conducted some suicidal experiments in his bathtub by keeping his head below water, only to realize that the life coursing through his body wants none of it. From this he concludes that he does not abhor life at all; in fact he is very much attached to the pungent treble of human experience, of seeing, hearing and thinking the world, and can't imagine a world *without* a world as shaped and decorated by the conditions of human consciousness. Desperately enmired in the contradictions of suicide, the psychologist responds to Charles casually but also with hints of frustration when he declares off the record that the solution of the ancient Romans was assisted suicide. What is a mere historical fact for the psychologist, an opportunity to be worthy of the long rows of books on his shelves and to assert his prowess as doctor of the soul, turns out to be deadly for Charles. The sequence of actions performed upon leaving the psychologist's office seems to point to the arrangement of an assisted suicide: Charles steals a handful of bills from the desk of one of his lovers, asks a friend to purchase a gun by the Seine, and awakens his closer friend Valentin in the middle of the night,

promising to give him all the money in exchange for doing what he asks. However, it is important to note that Charles never verbalizes this plan and, in Bressonian fashion, performs each of these tasks in a mechanical way lacking transparent motivations. Given these subtle yet significant circumstances, the grammar of intentionality must be checked at the door of language: Charles *takes* rather than steals money; *gives* his friend some bills who then *returns* with a loaded gun; asks Valentin to do *something* in exchange for handsome compensation, but refuses to say *what*, cannot say what, is still thinking about what.

Like Mouchette, it is not obvious that Charles intends to commit suicide; for one thing, the very idea of assisted suicide, which is also an accurate description, I think, of Mouchette's suicide through play, renders ambiguous and altogether

Figures 54 and 55. Charles exposes (intentionally? inadvertently? half-invitingly?) his back to the armed Valentin: *Le diable probablement* (*The Devil Probably,* Robert Bresson, France, 1977).

unresolved the clear and wilful intention of suicide, contradicting the contradiction that is suicide itself. If Charles can be said to have a motivation or plan in place, it could only be described in contradictory terms, say as the desire to commit suicide by being murdered, framed by the equal desire not to live in this world *and* not to die, for death would be a cancellation of a possible world where life would be worth living, i.e. a mechanically moral world where justice is produced daily like sugar or wine. It is important to him that he not be the one to take his own life; he wishes not to die but simply to cease to exist in the world, or rather in *this* world which he experiences as politically uninhabitable and irrevocably damaged by the powers that be. In this tragic spirit—in which his tousled cloud-head of nihilistic thinking is at war with a virile body and sprightly feet—he leads Valentin to a cemetery, hands him the gun, and walks ahead, leaving open (inadvertently) his back. It is yet another ambiguous gesture, for Charles' walk resembles a casual stroll or contemplative pacing as much as a death march down the green mile. Executing while improvising, still immersed in thinking about letting someone do what he cannot do himself, Charles does not physically brace himself nor provide any sort of cue for Valentin to count down or pull the trigger. The plan for the assisted suicide itself has not been discussed, worked out, or even spoken about. Instead, the plan is encrypted in a series of actions which suggest competing wills towards life and death. Charles remains, strangely enough, partially oblivious to the situation in which his fate is wrapped and regrets not having more sublime thoughts to think and share at such a time. His surprise at lacking more romantically inclined thoughts could be taken as a cue from him that his time has come, that his ability to ascribe value onto things, including death, is dead; but this confession is immediately followed by the spark of a new thought and a reaching out to his friend with what may be a final epiphany: "Do you know what? You know, it just occurred to me…" Perhaps the death walk ironically sows the seeds for new spiritual life. In any case, at this particular moment, *the* moment of his life, the act of suicide may be on his mind but is not in his will, and just as he starts speaking in the unmistakable tones of truth, he is cut off with a gunshot, shot mid-sentence, or mid-life, completely unaware of his decision to die—and in this sense he commits suicide not only indirectly, through Valentin, but unconsciously, with and without his consent. The impact of the shot is as sudden and instantaneous as being accidentally hit by a truck or struck down by lightning. This is also due to the fact that Valentin, after initially holding the gun loosely and timidly, turns out in this moment—also *the* moment of his life—to be empowered by the gun or the promise of the reward, hence to be a murderer when asked to be a

savior, to harbor the destructive impulse of murder regardless of what motivates him. Valentin *can kill*; Charles chose wisely in this respect, but he failed to appreciate that killers are fundamentally impulsive and, lacking a protocol, must act before conscience awakens and intervenes. On the other hand, Valentin may pull the trigger prematurely out of a deep understanding of the task which he has been saddled with, albeit again in encrypted form: by shooting his friend without his knowledge or clear authorization, in the back while walking and talking, he catches Charles in a moment of innocence and incomprehension and relieves him of the burden of contradiction that is suicide—helps him to completely sidestep the exercising of his will at the very moment where the soul seeks simplicity and grace. Perhaps in this way Valentin becomes an enemy in Nietzsche's complex understanding of "the friend."

The Devil Probably begins with two newspaper headlines: "Young man commits suicide in Père Lachaise," followed by another article, "Père Lachaise 'suicide' was murder." The film then jumps back six months into the past and effectively presents itself as a tracing of events leading up to the mysterious death of Charles and a possible resolution of what took place. However, as we have seen from the preceding analysis of the final section, the "full story" only serves to complicate the murky motives of Charles and Valentin.

A Gentle Woman, made eight years earlier in 1969, operates according to a similar structural principle and in this sense is a companion piece. It opens with the immediate aftermath

Figures 56 and 57. Elle cracks a half-smile at her reflection before leaping to her death: *Une femme douce* (*A Gentle Woman*, Robert Bresson, France, 1969).

of the apparent suicide of Elle, presented through a brief series of audiovisual resonances describing a fatal leap from the balcony: the blank stare of a housekeeper, a rocking chair rocking back and forth beside a tipping table on the terrace, a white scarf floating down to the street where the body of the woman is found dead. As in *The Devil Probably*, the death of the main character triggers a shift into the past, yet here the shift occurs strikingly without an explicit demarcation of time, and it is also filtered through a particular subjective perspective, that of her husband Luc, working its way back to Elle's suicide in an attempt to comprehend her unsuspected

motives. When the film comes full circle, returning to the moments before Elle jumps off the balcony, there is no verbal suggestion of suicide between Elle and the maid, Anne. In fact, she tells Anne that she is "happy," a confession which turns out, as we will see, not to be a lie—and like Charles, her actions leading up to the deed are performed mechanically, without emotional inflection. In representations of suicide it is always tempting to look for a line separating inaction from action, fear from courage, saying yes to life from saying no; but as with the previous examples, no such line can be comfortably drawn. Just when Elle seems prepared to willfully cross the line, grabbing the door handles of the terrace and opening them with conviction, she hesitates, almost angrily, shutting the doors and throwing her back against them. She then returns to her seat at a worktable where she had been toying with a figure of the Crucifixion—a far from minor detail but not exactly a master key to her mental state at this juncture—and cracks a half-smile before gazing up at her reflection in a mirror hanging above her head on the wall. A quick shot of her reflection is followed by a cut back to her gaze, now filled with a strong sense of purpose: she stands up from the desk, walks to the window of the balcony, and in an extreme close-up—rare for Bresson—looks through the glass with cold animal-like ferocity before leaping to her death offscreen. But why did she smile? Why did she suddenly gaze at her own reflection? Why did these gestures propel her suicide? These are unanswerable questions, hence poor questions, but I believe we can productively pause over the change which occurs in her—and in the film—when she catches her reflection: it's as if her image of herself in the mirror performs the deed, an image she perhaps does not recognize in the slightest, an image that she has become and, in becoming, can safely commit suicide by lacking the very self which suicide would destroy. It is perhaps for this reason that Bresson does not show her leap off the terrace, focusing instead on the aftermath of object ripples—for an image of her *in the act* would imply that she is fully conscious of her actions, whereas according to the silent exchange with herself through the mirror, she is not necessarily in possession of herself at all. Images of "her" would falsify the "intentionless" automatism of her mirror image self, the paradoxical agency of selflessness, which lends her death a tragic innocence, say the tragedy of a child's death, while elevating it into the transcendent realm of grace, evoked through Bresson's emphasis on the birdlike flapping of Elle's white scarf floating

down to the ground and becoming, in the film's final image, the coffin's white sheet within which she rests and is at peace.[43]

Notes on Cinematography is littered with paradoxical descriptions of the model technique of acting, draining actors of any trace of intention and conscious awareness of acting before the camera so that they may become *models*, a term which I have been understanding as pertaining to actors who have to find their way to the spirit of the character they are playing via an accidental embodiment of their own true nature, made to stumble upon themselves in the process of being someone else or, in being denied the chance to be someone else, having to *find themselves*—and perhaps this finding is what Bresson aspires to document in his fictions. But at some point along the way his models are told, or they realize for themselves, that their so-called "true nature" is measured not by what they know about themselves but rather by what they *don't know* about themselves. This non-knowledge might hinge on the discovery that one's movements and gestures are in fact *signatures*, and furthermore that these signatures constitute what we might call the inimitable poetry of our everyday behaviors—habits which are uniquely ours, which sum us up from the outside. These signatures of self may add up to a sense of self, or imply one, but only after the fact—they are *unsigned*. They are not to be taken as expressions made on behalf of a self which is posited *a priori*. Near the end of the *Notes* Bresson quotes Montaigne's optimistically behaviorist picture of human life before offering his own qualification or correction in automatist terms: "*Every movement reveals us* (Montaigne). But it only reveals us if it is automatic (not commanded, not willed)."[44] This note is especially interesting because it involves a dialogue or rather a miniature debate with Montaigne who, in acknowledging the perspicacity of our everyday gestures and implying that the struggle to know the self will be epic if every movement reveals the

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[43] If one looks closely, and if one keeps in mind Bresson's interest in religion, the cut between the scarf in the air and the scene with Elle lying in the coffin is visually and spiritually matched: the ethereal movement of the white scarf is followed by the subtle and brief billowing of Elle's white burial shroud. These transcendental touches, here and especially in the final image of *Mouchette*, are so inconspicuous that one wonders if Bresson intended for them to be consciously registered by the viewer. If not, it begs the question as to whether Bresson was himself directorially conscious when making such choices. I believe this is less a matter of aesthetics than *belief*, but at the same time, what I mean by belief here is not religious or spiritual but purely aesthetic: with the repetitive loops at the end of *Mouchette* and the cut at the end of *A Gentle Woman*, Bresson forges links with the spiritual world just as the harshness of reality has completed its eclipse of the world of spirit, culminating in death; as if the end of a life, timed with the end of a film, inspires him to give viewers something to *believe in*, in other words something *to see*, as opposed to belief itself which is blind, wishful, and, compared to the power of art, powerless over the weight of the world.

[44] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p. 67 (italics in original).

self, does not quite clarify what for Bresson is the essence of expression: lack of intention or better yet "automatism"—the perpetual motion machine of self-expression. Bresson is thinking as a filmmaker and not a philosopher, however, when he expresses concern that it may be precisely within the realm of art—above all an art such as cinema with photographic ties to the realm of the real—where our movements are at greater risk for being willed to the point of concealment. His skepticism towards the intelligence is based on his experience that the automatism of the camera, whether one is standing in front of it or behind it, cannot distinguish between authentic and inauthentic movements. The camera "assumes," as it were, that the movements it records are revelatory of those who make them, and so movements which suffer the concealments of consciousness will still be treated as candidates for grace. The scrupulously indifferent point of view of the camera-eye—whose mindlessness is the key to the mind's eye—is echoed in the last line of voiceover from Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*: "What does it matter? All is grace."

It is no accident, rather part of the plan, that the more we try to know these characters by humanizing their behavioral machinations, the more their actions will strike us as contradictory or devoid of sense. But if we accept that human behavior is fundamentally automatic and opaque even when it is being wilfully intended, in other words that intentions are inscrutable because inseparable from how they are behaved and modified by that behavior (predictable because habitual and inexplicable because non-original, i.e. stripped of the causes by which effects are perceived as actualizations of subjectivity), then it is possible to understand the automatism of performance in Bresson's films as an evasion of the fallacy that free will determines the body into compliance, submitting the body as it were to the will. It is in this sense that the automatism of performance can be understood as a critique of a certain kind of free will, one which in this case turns the actor against his own body (Bresson) and reduces the dancer into a passionate parading of the body (Kleist). The overall feeling of disbelief, mistrust and even aversion, which many viewers and critics of Bresson have registered towards the mechanized or wooden (i.e. marionette-like) performances, epitomizes this human desire to see ourselves as fully in charge of ourselves, lodged comfortably and confidently within our bodies, ideally positioned to speak through our mouths and act as if every twitch were a conscious choice. Indeed, the Bressonian model is an attempt to make a puppet out of a human being, an attempt to sedate the irrepressible surges of consciousness and spread the will throughout every corner and crevice of the body—the puppeteer being a strangely dictatorial yet collaborative *process* unfolding between the will of the director

(who orders the mechanical, uninflected, or empty delivery of lines, beats, and gestures) and the resistance of the model (who is permitted to move onto the next scene when his/her automatisms have emerged in the most unlikely of places: the film set). Perhaps this is why Bresson creates as many close-ups of hands and feet and backs and backs of the head as he does the face, and also why his close-ups of faces are, in their most realized forms, never split between what we see on the face and what we can't see beneath it but which we know to be lurking (mystery residing in transparency). These characters, as we have seen, lack the requisite degree of identity necessary for us to question whether what they say and do is typical of them or completely uncharacteristic. This is not to say that they "lack any sense of self," rather it is to say that their sense of self is not on display in their actions, and therefore is known only by them as a secret—the secret life of the puppet, or animal, or dreamer, or the deceased.

If we grant credence to the possibility that the mechanically automatic form of life constitutes a purification rather than an eradication of the human spirit, then the seemingly spiritless woodenness of the Bressonian model can be seen as a discovery of the poetics of the marionette theater *within* the cinema. It is well known that Bresson called for a cinema in opposition to the histrionic artifice of the live theater; a significant portion of his notes, which I wasn't able to take up in detail, are spirited attacks against the explicit or residual presence of the theatrical within the cinematic. But perhaps it is the puppet theater and the graceful movements of marionettes which are being subconsciously praised. Perhaps cinema is the only art capable of activating the automatism of *people* as well as things. Cinema's puppet theater has the world itself on strings, and the audiovisual camera, while deaf and dumb relative to human consciousness, is still a key to that world when consciousness defers to its special logic and, in the case of Bresson, is inspired to develop a model theory of acting. Of course, all the cinema can do by itself, as metaphor or machine, is open the door to the world in its own image, to life happening by itself— a door which cannot be entered head first and so, for this reason, must be called a backdoor.

Chapter 5

The Site of Nature: Exteriority and Over-Exposure in The Thin Red Line

> Have mountains, and waves, and skies, no significance but what we consciously give them, when we employ them as emblems of our thoughts? The world is emblematic.
> — Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*

> From time to time I was afraid. That is the fault of a false view of life.
> — Ludwig Wittgenstein, diary entry (from an observational post during World War I)

From early cinema throughout to the present day (which is not as long as it sounds, more dense than long), the philosophical domain of metaphysics continues to find a concrete form and expressive figuration (including, in this case, the inexpressible) in the audiovisual representation of *nature*. Building upon concepts laid out in previous chapters, we can think of the concept of nature as a primary and persisting figure for the return of metaphysics on "physical" terms, with the cinematic representation and thematization of nature as "presence at its most poetic." In films which prominently feature nature, the world of the film has gone on retreat, modern technology packed and sent out, leaving the city or in some cases viewing the city's cracks—the city as a mosaic or montage of earth and cement, trees and buildings, green and gray. Here we find numerous attempts to "narrate" the nature-figure, in dramatic or mythic or symbolic or horrific or sublime or contemplative ways, and even if the artistic goal or sensibility is, as they say, to get back to nature, to take a view of nature is still to dominate it the way humans have always dominated it. As a result, such views are often spellbound or bewitched by the filmmaker as "gazer" who finds himself obsessed with, or seduced by, the ancient dualisms of Good and Evil or God and Devil, interpretations which are implicitly and sometimes explicitly invoked through image systems revolving around the lawfulness (i.e. science) or lawlessness (i.e. irrationality) of nature. Nature's moral ambiguity onscreen is often indicated by a sense of distance from human affairs and neutrality in the face of cinematic narrativization, an inassimilable rocklike recalcitrance secured by the ontological notion of cinema's world-dependence (echoed in various

analogous dependencies, i.e. consciousness on the body, culture upon nature, language upon social context, history upon genealogy, etc.). If most films, especially those constituting the "nature genre," struggle or ultimately avoid making explicit or acknowledging their own world-dependence, be it of an analogue or digital mode of dependence; and if most viewers, even those experiencing an exemplary instance of the so-called nature genre, refrain from attending to the presence of the world onscreen as inseparable from its narrative orchestration, this is often because the poetic presence of nature, despite being the product of automatism and aesthetics (or their convergence), is as if automatically (unconsciously) filtered out into the *background* where it is either ignored, witnessed, or interpreted like a text, at which point it is *foregrounded* in human (i.e cultural) terms—filtered through an anthropomorphic sieve or skewed and appropriated by the ego as its own. (It is worth pointing out that such avoidances can indeed be all too easily reinforced or expressed in the gross romantic embellishment and mythopoeia of the cinematic figure of nature, particularly as a redemptive or destructive force, portraying it as a *character* rather than undergoing it as a presence.)

In light of these aesthetically and culturally routine foreclosures or oversights of the cinematic site of nature, I put forth in this chapter the following question, another set of questions around metaphysics and the moving image: How does nature express itself on film and how/why do filmmakers—as representatives of culture, armed with consciousness, mechanical reproduction and various other oppositions or threats to nature—negotiate and think the metaphysical figure of nature: nature understood not only as the beauty or poetry of the world in its own image (i.e. the world as it is independently of humans), but also, let's say, as the poignancy of the world in its own *past* image, the way the world *was*? How can we speak of the myriad and often competing forms of presence, poetics, linguistic appropriation and audiovisual transformation of the natural world in film, that is, of the contemporaneity of nature from something that "was" to something that still *is* and, perhaps, *still speaks*—as it did when God was still alive, especially the mythic and pagan gods of the earth, linking the physical and metaphysical realms through an inscrutable swathe of metaphorical relations and resonances widening endlessly towards the unity of all things? If narrative film speaks nature and if the ontology of film reveals nature, how might we differentiate between natural and artificial signatures in the world, between the cryptic voices of the gods and our own projecting voices?

I am led to the question "how to speak?" for two reasons. First, there is a sense in which what we call "nature" lies *beyond* language. The looming precipice of contradiction or nonsense in such a claim (the saying of the unsayable, as it were) can be averted, perhaps altogether spanned, by attending to the romantic spirit still singing within the following batch of readymade phrases and expressions with nature as their object: "home of the animal," "primordial soup," "source of wonder and terror," "enemy and victim of culture," "Eden on the horizon or around the bend," "mother nature," and so on. Second, there is equally a sense, and it is also sometimes said, that works of art, their nature as it were, are irreducible to our language, blocking or intimidating reciprocal responses rather than inviting our need to speak and give voice to aesthetic experience. A few testimonial expressions and exclamations coming from philosophers and patrons alike, and which speak to the metaphysical potency of this romantic conception of art, might run like this: "Art is the sensible presentation of the idea," "This doesn't make sense… but I like it all the same," "The work of art works by itself," "Look, don't think!", "Our words tremble and fail… meaningfully," and so on. Here are two romantic frameworks of human finitude that, taken together, may appear to have little to do with each other, minding their own business as they sulk over words too small or weak for some of the more heightened occasions of human experience. And venturing along their respective paths of self-imposed circularity and ivory tower obscurity, the alterity of nature and culture—the metaphysics of world and art, not just physicalized but poeticized—are brought face-to-face and illuminate each other through an unexpected point of convergence in the medium of the moving image: a meeting place, as it were, in which art retains a vital dimension of artlessness, where nature becomes a touch artificial, and the sense of silence surrounding the world's independence from us resonates within all discourse.

One of the main threads I wish to extract as fuel for what follows is that art and nature are united in their conflict with language, which is to say they put up resistance within the realm of humanistic understanding and partly position themselves outside such understanding as demonstrated by our language. In this picture, art and nature are separate processes or vehicles that trigger the entertainments or perhaps attainments of transcendence (the former aesthetically and the latter empirically), turning language on its head or back into silence. So the question, again, is *how to speak* (for we do, after all, speak) to be used as a kind of compass to navigate the silence, otherness, non-humanness, as-it-is resonance of the natural world, as it appears in space and time for all to see and hear, as a fundamental aspect of the work of art, and at the crossroads between

how it appears in representation and its presence as an appearance in excess of representation. I am asking "how" rather than "what" to speak because, at least in this case, while inhabiting this picture, adequate knowledge will be dependent upon the learning of a certain language or bravery of language. I am ultimately searching for a way to speak about this "spoken speechlessness of nature" (inextricably rooted, I believe, to the original silence and mortal clock of cinematic ontology) in order to comprehend this most omnipresent, elemental, photogenic, and occasionally mythic screen "character." The task as I see it involves walking the line between the coarse materiality and metaphysical ineffability of nature, and through the medium of the moving image to untangle the knot of the human sensorium's simultaneous sense of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with its mere presence, a presence which itself seems to be both highly attentive and utterly alien, near and far from the stories it surrounds and underlies, here as an experience of beauty and there as one of terror, by turns a source of clarification and mystification for us.

Of course, as we all know by now, cinema as an art does not imitate nature even if a part of its very own nature is to draw on it directly. However, cinema and nature have, if you will, a *natural affinity*: the core principle of the cinematic apparatus accepts what it "sees" and "hears," allowing the sights and sounds of nature to take root and grow within the aesthetic, in complete indifference to its use-value and unaffected, relatively speaking, by various habits and biases and blindnesses which undermine ecological awareness. In so doing, the ontology of film, in calling out to the nature of things, is as if heeded by nature and brought out of its hiding, for the things whose nature is the most luminous are those which belong to nature itself. (By contrast, only during periods of aesthetic contemplation—or perhaps the rarer moments of supreme lucidity and preternatural calm—can human beings deeply attend to nature's "poetry of the world" and experience nature for what it is—in its own image—rather than for some other purpose, be it exploitative or interpretive, i.e. reading nature as a book of signs to be deciphered in relation to one's own life, which is arguably the intentions behind astrology or ancient divinatory arts/practices.) Now the manifestations of this affinity between cinema and nature in the *art* as opposed to the ontology of film—the former having become the destiny of film, placing it squarely amongst the other veteran art forms—are far from straightforward; for insofar as the natural world, like our own human nature, is simultaneously in the background and at the center of consciousness, at once deeply fundamental and yet somehow totally ungraspable or altogether excised from modern life, it is similarly with respect to the medium of film both mimetically mirrored by the

moving image and yet, with respect to the art of film, more or less subordinated to and thus in the service of the demands of audiovisual mise-en-scène and storytelling convention. These demands, I would like to suggest, are not native to the moving image but nor are they completely alien; rather they emerge in the juxtaposition and organization of images into a form, a whole, that marks in the end a kind of conceptual anthropomorphism of nature which we might call "culture." In this sense I am interested more broadly in an idea of culture that measures its strides in consultation with nature, i.e. an art of film dynamized by the friction between the ontology of the moving image (facticity) and the epistemology of cinematic montage (fiction).

To return to the overshadowed piece of apocrypha from the early history of film that I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, we may recall that spectators of the turn-of-the-century Lumière short, *A Baby's Dinner* (France, 1895), are believed to have responded with a passive or contemplative astonishment towards the accidental, inconspicuous, and virtually meaningless presence of nature: trees blowing in the wind, branches swaying, leaves rustling, nothing more.[1] Deep in the distant background and off to the side of an ordinary domestic scene featuring a couple, a baby, and afternoon tea out on the terrace, this glimpse of nature allegedly stood out and shone like the sun—and we can still imagine it having such an effect, nebulous contingency overpowering straightforward content—in marked contrast to the notorious black train speeding towards the camera in *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895), a film

Figures 58 and 59. Nature trumps narrative: *Le repas de bébé* (*Baby's Dinner*, Lumière brothers, France, 1895); *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, Lumière brothers, France, 1896).

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[1] It could be argued that contingencies of a poetic or even metaphysical nature radically distinguished the Lumière films from the films Edison produced in his Black Maria where a pitch-black, tar-coated backdrop systematically "walled off" the noise of the outside world, as if he sought the sterile and controllable conditions of the experimental laboratory (conditions utterly alien to the theatrical set whose black walls function more like a painter's canvas). The capacity for viewers to freely roam from the foregrounded world of humans to the backgrounded world of nature, and reverse the order of significance, even if just for a flash of consciousness, seems to have played an important role in the success of the Lumière films around the world and the evolution of the cinema into an artform of heightened sensorial and panoramic proportions.

believed by many to set a rigid course for the haptic pleasures of affect and escapism in mainstream cinema. The brand new and spectacular appearance of the much-anticipated moving image, which had declared itself so dramatically, even violently, with the Lumière train, was in all likelihood experienced with a thin-skin intimacy and perhaps more deeply on its own terms, as a kind of natural phenomenon in itself—the natural as rendered by the technological—such that those soft focus trees as captured by the Lumières (or captured by the camera without the filmmakers realizing it) were thrown into sharp relief by the short simple portrait of a young family of three unaccustomed to the "democracy" of the moving image in which the world is nothing like the stage and where there are other things of interest besides them. The end result, perhaps an aesthetic moral, is that nature trumps narrative in the perception of these viewers of early cinema, and it does so despite the fact that the subject of the staged slice of life is practically all-encompassing here. What is it about this equally mundane piece of nature, common and stripped of all colors and sounds, that made it emerge—if only mythically and in retrospect—from the background so strikingly, eclipsing the carefully positioned figures, the subtle family dynamics, the still-life spread of objects, and even the film itself on display for the first time? Nature has a unique double "appeal" in both senses of the word: it is intrinsically and often aesthetically *appealing* (i.e. beautiful to the senses), and makes an appeal *to* the aesthetic, that is, to the intrinsic value of beauty (a moral value in Kantian terms). And indeed, the materiality of nature onscreen embodies both the appearance and autonomy of beauty, tipping the scale of emphasis in its favor and making us question what counts as "subject matter."

To elaborate on the possibility of a technological description of the natural world that is fundamentally nonreductive and secretly spectacular, I am again brought to acknowledge, at least as a prior ontological datum as it were, the seamless and uninhibited representation of nature through the primal automatism of cinema, for in the context of the birth of cinema it is no exaggeration to say that this is an unprecedented (if not miraculous) transposition of the "non-humanness" of nature so craved by human consciousness, captured and preserved paradoxically by human means. We can also say, for viewers both then and now, that a singular awakening to nature accompanies this technological possibility and declaration of what I will call the living-breathing dimensional poetry of the world in its own image—for to experience nature through its mechanical reproduction in time and space is to rediscover a beauty which is *not* in the eye of the beholder. No matter how quietly and daily the overlooking or exploitation of nature is carried out,

cinematic technology is uniquely sensitive and self-monitoring—encouraging its users to question the virtually automatic instinct of appropriation in the name of art—revealing and preserving nature in a place where it can be safely touched without a trace: the moving image as a sanctuary, not for nature per se but rather the consciousness of nature for its own sake. A question for us, over one-hundred years after the birth of cinema, is not whether movies have lost their powers of revelation and preservation (say through a widespread desensitization of pure sensitivity), but rather to what extent these powers are, or can be, purely mechanical (via the analogue trace or digital algorithm), or if, regardless of the technological conditions at play, such powers must be brought to bear on the human condition and its limitations, in such a way that through them we may resist and perhaps overcome the tendency for consciousness to filter out and ultimately instrumentalize nature through reason. My preliminary response is that our encounter with nature onscreen through an *image* of the world as opposed to an experience of the world—a natural world which may rarely appear, if at all, amidst our daily lives—in all likelihood depends on a complex interplay of aesthetics and accident, factoring in whatever skepticism one bears over the rhetorical claims and seductions of images in general. This wind in the trees appears in the image despite the fact that it has no significant bearing on the event taking place and perhaps was not even noticed by the filmmakers. It is the sort of detail that brushes against our more calculated intentions; the sort of thing that gets drowned out by thoughts, higher aims, ambitions. Nevertheless, the camera records it with the same precision—though hardly the same degree of attention or focus—as the more intended or explicit dramatic actions and elements. By appearing in the background, poking through like sunlight, blowing in the wind as if it were waving its hand, it marks the beginning of the world beyond the frame, and it seems to me that it does so more vividly or dramatically than the edges of the frame itself—for there, on the edge, the tree may be cut off or shortened without compromising its roots. It brushes the static frame and in a sense moves it, sends shivers through it, indicating that the world as a whole is moving and changing and aging. One gets the feeling that if one of these leaves were to suddenly fall, perhaps prematurely for this time of year, the Lumières would have the necessary inspiration to awaken to nature more fully and rewrite the actuality by filming just the tree, inventing the close-up right there and then, perhaps a contemplative close-up patiently awaiting the decisive moment in which nature's clock ticks. Human affairs are always of interest; the voyeur after all is fascinated by the evidence of life brewing outside the narrow field

of his own immaculate sense of privacy and containment—but it's the metaphysical affairs, as it were, that have the power to overwhelm perception and catch our consciousness off guard.[2]

Film, like photography, can be said to have a more direct access to the natural world than, say, poetry or painting or even theater whose objects are live, an argument that hinges on the capacity for the camera to record it, as I have been saying, "as it is." However, most photographs of nature—where nature is the obvious subject or theme—participate in some way in the landscape genre specific to painting, a genre with a long and complex history of changing modes of representation and exhibition, succinctly encapsulated by Martin Lefebvre in pictorial *and* spectatorial terms as "[t]he birth of a gaze (that of the painter, the collector, or the critic) by which what was once in the margin has now come to take its place at the centre."[3] But when it comes to the cinema, excluding analogous stylistic tendencies (expressions as opposed to, say, the automatisms of a genre) and anomalous cases from the avant-garde (often driven by the *abstraction* of landscape), the landscape genre as we know it does not seem to have clearly transferred over to the cinema nor continued its development under new temporally mobile conditions, although there are undoubtedly aspects of films which resemble features of the landscape genre.[4] Films for which the name "landscape" would be an appropriate sounding description are few and far between, and even a film like *La Région centrale* (Snow, Canada, 1971), which attempts to unfold the duration of a landscape through the mechanical dance of

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[2] And sometimes, what is overwhelming about metaphysical events onscreen can become shocking or frightening if articulated through aesthetic innovation or rote convention. Consider how the action and horror genres in particular have relied upon the receding and remote depths of the image for their sudden or suspenseful effects. And consider how the ontology of the moving image is particularly well-suited to a world of immanent and unpredictable *danger*, revealing a world beyond the scope of human subjectivity as a perpetual threat to beings who are immersed in it, bound by it, and thus struggle to think beyond it, punished for their closed-mindedness and unchecked complacency in a world whose unimaginable mysteries go to waste. Perhaps this is why monsters and spirits are so easily roused in horror films, and why human characters are, at first, quite ill-prepared to deal with *metaphysical difference*.

[3] Martin Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," in *Landscape and Film*, ed. Martin Lefebvre (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 27.

[4] See the previously cited edited collection *Landscape and Film*. Unique in film scholarship, a major work on a minor field, this collection of essays theorizes and analyses the landscape potential of cinema, drawing on various stylistic conventions from both Western and Eastern cinemas, and mainstream and avant garde traditions, engaging with exemplary case studies which could in principle guide a kind of "landscape genre." But it remains difficult to imagine landscape films in dialogue with each other and where nature is the star, for the problem is that films tend to *use* landscape regardless of its degree of autonomy, be it as expressionistic setting, symbolism, or atmospheric vehicles of transition and change, that is, as material *for* a narrative or as transitional material *between* parts of a narrative. See also Lefebvre's companion piece, "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema," in *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* (20.1: Spring 2011), pp. 61-78.

perspective, is labelled as an "experiment." The so-called "nature film" is also a poor fit for landscape and even nature as I understand it, for it would seem to hold primarily for the scientific documentation and exploratory investigation of the lives of other living creatures—insects and animals and the microcosms of ecosystems—all living rhetorically "below" the species responsible for the capacity and technology to capture them on film in their natural habitats, as if the "master species" were also recalling, beyond the reach of nostalgia, a more peaceful and primitive existence.

There is yet a finer distinction to be made between "landscape" and "nature," where the former refers to an entirely human aesthetic construction and the latter, at least with respect to the arts, to the natural world itself (and all the living things inseparable from it despite their differences). And it seems to me that the nature which prevails as idea, theme, or even character in a whole group of narrative fiction films must fall under a different category than that of "landscape." This is due to the fact that nature is never (or very rarely, and if so very idiosyncratically) the primary focus in films that tell stories or carry messages or practice genres or are geared towards particular audience members. In feature films but also in the great majority of films, perhaps out of necessity or a gamut of embraced pressures and constraints from all sides of the artistic process, the world spanned by nature is far too broad, innocuous, non-committal or altogether indifferent a topic. The filmmaker of today can choose to set the story in nature, or bring some aspect of nature from the background to the foreground of human affairs, or proceed to involve nature in the events of the narrative by expanding the range of narrative beyond its specifically and sometimes exclusively human priority, beyond the focus and privilege of the human. But as long as the story involves flesh and blood people, people no different than the ones doing the telling, there is always a sense in which nature (our tie to flesh and blood) lies on the periphery of the actions produced by human affairs without ever managing to assert itself back on its own terms, into the grandeur of its totality (of which human beings constitute but a single part). There are, of course, the predominantly human terms of sex, violence and survival which tie us to nature, but these traits, interestingly enough, are typically represented as morally debasing, as if the human tie to nature "gives in" to nature and risks unleashing a far from innocent animal.

At least three modes or senses of nature are possible in film when the natural world, less as a sign or figure than *an external presence and force* (bearing beauty or ugliness or tranquility or withdrawal or destructiveness) is deliberately incorporated as a prominent element or

fundamental grounding of the narrative. I will describe them starting from the most basic: 1. The representation of the presence of nature—the range of life between earth and sky, light and dark, life in all its perceptible forms—projected before us as it was before the audiovisual camera, existing in space and transpiring through time, "nature" as that which exists for itself or just *is*. 2. The idea behind the invitation: that the presence of nature constitutes an immemorial and potentially infinite process of rhythmic persistence or flow—eclipsing the brief span of an individual life and even the epic span of human history as a whole—and that such persistence comes to pass suggestively albeit in varying degrees of friction as a neutral or faceless indifference towards the hermetic motives, machinations and disproportionate seriousness of human affairs, especially within cultures conducted in separation from nature or contempt of nature. 3. The hermeneutic appropriation and processing (I like the word "digestion" here) of nature via the expressive vehicles of language, metaphor, myth, insight and tone of voice, all refinements of a mode of aesthetic consciousness that can be understood to historicize nature and in certain cases, if pushed far enough, to ventriloquize or anthropomorphize it.[5]

The epic war film *The Thin Red Line* (Malick, USA, 1998) investigates the metaphysical conditions of nature through the lens of war by asking repeatedly whether the logic of nature supports or rejects the human appetite for destruction. The soldiers in the film question nature's morality in the full awareness that an answer is not forthcoming. Such elliptical questioning draws upon all three of the above modes—and superimposes them—in its cinematically speculative undertaking: luminous presence, indifferent persistence, human nature's teetering anti-naturalism. The outcome of this ambition is provocatively and exasperatingly paradoxical, answering questions with more questions and refusing to speak on behalf of the nature character; yet as a means of organizing this triptych of approaches into a meaningful whole, Malick emphasizes a branch of the third mode—a poetic, confessional and obsessively questioning voiceover monologue—to unify or ground them into the film as we have it, what I firmly believe to be a productively philosophical or at least a genuinely meditative film that, metaphorically speaking, "thinks" its own content. This memorable, moving, and occasionally cryptic order of voices stands

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[5] An "animistic ventriloquism" could theoretically lead to a totalizing anthropomorphism of the nonhuman nature of nature itself. Perhaps traditionally animated or CGI films featuring nature as a living being with big eyes are technological, hence disenchanted, successors of the lost age of animism. Through the art and technology but also the very concept of animation, I would say that nature is made to appear *comprehensible* rather than genuinely and mysteriously "alive."

out, rises and falls, in an unguarded and deeply probing philosophical manner which becomes essential for an understanding of the film's commitment to and convictions about nature or the state of nature at any given time (wartime is deemed timeless in this sense, stepping out of history so as to *make* history). Voices with tenuous and often interchangeable ties to the characters, all members of the American World War II effort during the battle of Guadalcanal, resemble the cacophony of sounds emitted by the life-teeming jungle at the beginning of the film, voices adrift like the wind or pattering like raindrops on water—with no clear point of origin or final destination—echoing within the great and increasingly yawning divide between the remoteness of the outside world or an outside otherness which may be divine (what one voice calls "the war at the heart of nature") and the solitude or solipsism of the inner world whose divine spark flickers and risks being snuffed by catastrophic breaches in the social contract (what another voice describes as "the coal drawn from the fire" of humanity's "one big self"). What may sound like rhetorical questions seeking certainty or consensus are best described as prayers seeking solace, spiritual rather than properly religious in nature and briefly unifying the metaphysical poles of "God" and "Soul" by pulling the farthest reaches of the "outside" into the deepest depths of the "inside," forming a circle of sense which theology calls "faith" and philosophy calls "insight."

Instead of constructing an ambivalently enchanted or merely nostalgic perspective of nature, the film, aided by this chorus of questioning reverie, summons nature into a position where various perspectives on it can emerge. In this sense it does not so much establish nature as a setting so much as rig its snare as a provocation, a snare which I will tentatively call "thought." In other words, the spirit of nature is inextricably twofold: an original source of human thought, the original spark of inspiration, filling us with the desire to question and the even greater desire to find worthy or redemptive answers, and just when we thought our gaze caressed the firmament or reached the depths of night, nature shows its other face—a manmade mirror for what we call *human* nature. This complex and competing series of relationships between the various positions of nature in the film and the photographic or profilmic presence of nature itself weaves an elaborate and often entangled "tapestry"—for lack of a better word—of philosophical reflections based in image and sound, depicting a perpetual strife between the figures of language (i.e. *our* world) and those of nature (i.e. *the* world)—language as used to think the world rather than converse or commune with fellow speakers—and provides the thread for both links and loose ends, for how nature is thought

and what remains unthinkable about it: a strife which is rooted, ultimately, in the nature of the human and thus a fundamental aspect of what we call "the human condition."[6]

If metaphysics returns in film, and if nature is a metaphysical figure of film, then we must specify and elaborate further what nature might be, or what role it might play, within this concept and event of the world in its own image. *The Thin Red Line* is exemplary of what I have been calling the new metaphysics because nature is perceived as alive on the condition that God is dead. Take the film's obsession with the personal pronoun "you" as the soldiers' regular mode of voiceover address to a single god or unifying lifeforce. Their metaphysical questions not only go unanswered but, what's more, seem unanswerable—no answer to the question "What's this war at the heart of nature?" would satisfy its reach or satiate its tonal gravity, rendering such questions into *statements* of a peculiar kind. The absence of an answer does not deter but rather inspires more questions—more questions stated. These questions, without a visible addresser and addressee, and in a sense aware of their own un-answerability, are logically rhetorical, that is to say, they try to persuade us into believing in the truth of their *form*: the existence of God as an open, unanswerable and ultimately secular question, something to search for eternally without finding it, something which one risks *losing* by searching, or perhaps it is one's self and sanity which may be lost in a maze of contradictions and obstacles to spiritual awakening—obstacles which these soldiers place in their own path to redemption. It is for this reason that this "you" is often used as a pronoun for a description of the many—"Who are *you* who lives in all these *many* forms?"—resulting in a grammatical contradiction which the film is committed to enhancing or further knotting rather than attempt to solve or resolve with a single absolute sign amidst a throng of piecemeal and hence inadequate signs. In *The Thin Red Line*, thick rays of light which could be used to represent the divine are so ubiquitous and eventually becomes extraneous, banal and forgettable—they are but a feature of the environment, an enchanting feature in an age of disenchantment. There is also an irony to the fact that these rays of light evoke the divine the more they are filtered through the trees, especially through holes in leaves carved away by voracious worms, perhaps the same worms which decompose the dead and represent "hell" in the minds of the soldiers. There is no image in the film which follows the divine ray of light upward, either through camera movement

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[6] A strife as foundational and inescapable as, say, the back-and-forth of light and dark, for it concerns "light and dark," concerns the existence of such words for such things and for such beings as humans are: susceptible to neat and tidy binary oppositions and eclipsing extremes in our conceptual, linguistic and evaluative dealings with what are, in fact, the interminable grey zones of everyday experience.

or cutting: beyond the light Malick finds only birds, not God or gods, flying in circles, eyeing potential prey or juicy remains. And there is no image that is not filmed from the perspective *of the earth*, even the most skyward. Skyward looking embodies earthbound and finite being-in-the-world and, ironically again, is a much better position from which to gaze up in wonder than the classic bird's-eye view of many war films where the camera is used to levitate only to look down. (If there were a godlike presence in our midst, would it look down upon us? What a strange and presumptuous idea! Such a god is *in our midst*, or nowhere at all. The substitution of the film's gaze for that of a god betrays the earth and closes the sky like thick curtains to keep the morning light at bay.)

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In film, nature is also fundamentally an open question.[7] And when films turn towards nature—looking up, straight, down, close up, around in circles…—we may ask what it is they are asking, what these cinematic gazes are looking for? And what are we as spectators looking for when given the chance to look and listen in this way? What is our aesthetic inclination or orientation towards works of art in which something we want to call "nature," or forces we seek to attribute to nature (perhaps with a capital N), appears to be meaningfully at work? Before turning over completely to a reading of *The Thin Red Line*, it is necessary to employ one of the methodologies of this thesis and rethink metaphysical concepts which I claim, through the ontology of the cinema and its aestheticization, to have returned anew in a manner which may not be self-evident. What follows is an attempt to further dismantle familiar associations which have accrued around this word "nature," exposing the concept *to its image* rather than solely to its discourse.

In art as in life, the ascription of this term to phenomena commonly identified as being natural, under the criteria that such phenomena are not only *of* the world but native to this world

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[7] I borrow this phrase from D. N. Rodowick who is fond of using it—and sometimes forgivably overuses it—to describe the ideal-default state of philosophy. I see the appeal to openness as a source of both power and impotence, the unconditional demand to think—to make one's thoughts sharable and amenable to questioning—and the difficulty of making progress beyond the stoking of such a demand as food for thought. See D. N. Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2015). The phrase is woven throughout the book, and in an interesting stylistic move, it often precedes block quotations as an invitation for another voice to contribute to philosophy's "conversation." Though it's never very clear as to why such a conversation is intrinsically "artful," for it seems to me that art is as susceptible to monologue as theory, and unlike the latter it is not expected to directly and critically converse with its influences.

and preceding our fashioning of the world in our image (beings with worldmaking capabilities), strikes me as belonging to a larger chain of vocabulary conventionally deployed in the face of aesthetic events equally amenable, depending of course on the case, to other types of conceptual or hermeneutic catalysts and aporias. On film, the idea that things have a nature or belong to nature or threaten nature is not adequate to the idea that nature can be a "presence character" or unfold as an "event of extreme liveness" despite being a projection of a past state of affairs. What if we conceive of nature as something for which linear human time is senseless, such that its presence onscreen is powered by the *meaninglessness* of the fact that as a recorded event it is actually past? What if the cinematic recording of nature captures the nature of nature as *change*,[8] yielding images which are not only from the past but pass away, pass us by, grow and perish untragically, enter and exit life always simultaneously? In asking such questions, I mean to address the intuition that what we are likely to have in mind when considering the animated appearance or live eventfulness of nature in film—especially outside of a particular film, and especially in light of the multiple ways the director of *The Thin Red Line* elevates its stature of significance in all his work—is not necessarily adequate to or even characteristic of the aesthetic experiences that provoke within us such desires to comprehend or in some way bring closer these types of aesthetic events (virtually passed over in silence—and often empty silence—with overused words like the "beautiful" and "sublime"). For that which defines the appearance of nature in art, that which affords it artistic rather than merely contingent significance (indiscernible, perhaps, from insignificance—signification's *reprieve*), is not reducible to what routinely or conventionally goes by the name "nature." (This goes without saying as long as we do not seek to know why our words have grown silent in the face of their valued objects; and this is, at least in part, such a search.) Our fear and ecstasy in the struggle for adequate words for nature aestheticized by film art and actualized by film ontology are symptoms of the suddenness and intensity of *an appearance*, pure and simple and par excellence, a present-tense appearance which is designed not to represent nature but expose us to nature. Because the objects of nature are such that they are turned towards the fact of their

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[8] Of all the philosophers who have found reason and inspiration to express nature in terms of change, going all the way back to Heraclitus, I choose Emerson's passage from "The Poet" for its grammatical enactment of changeableness, its struggle to keep up with its own (changing) conception of nature, significantly failing to catch its own breath in the process: "What we call nature is a certain self-regulated motion or change; and nature does all things by her own hands, and does not leave another to baptize her but baptizes herself; and this through the metamorphosis again." Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in *The Portable Emerson*, ed. Carl Bode and Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1981), p. 253.

own existence like nothing else—objects turned towards themselves and which, in a sense, hide within themselves, objects more fully present the more turned away and hidden they become, thus resisting objectification—nature is also, in a way, exposed to itself; and when this "self-exposure" becomes the object of cinematic representation, with the aid of the camera's openness and sensitivity to light, nature may come to presence poetically, as Heidegger might say, and appear more pure than representation typically allows, more attuned to itself and complete in its parts. Cinema can show rather than know nature, or show its knowledge of "that which is" as an exposure to nature, to that which sustains us and whose power compels us to empower ourselves or give thanks to the gods. In movies, nature in the raw—filmed nature—is unable to tell us how to look at it or interpret it, rather only that we look, and I find this to be the case even if filmmakers are looking for something more—their look will be one of many.[9]

Nature as it pertains to the moving image calls to mind the self-exposure of objects, parts within the whole exposed (not expressed) by the whole, and the poetry of the presence of an absence (i.e. revealed in hiding, luminous hiddenness). It also requires that we hold in view the *twin* appearances or faces of the metaphysical that are often mistaken as being identical: "objectivity" and "exteriority."[10] That which is intrinsic to itself may be perceived as extrinsic, in other words as "other." The organic specificity and contingent fluidity of the natural world on the one hand; our distance or alienation from what we call "nature" on the other—this being a spiritual

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[9] Of course, many such "nature appearances" in cinema are artificially rendered through various effects, from artificial lights that simulate the sun to sprinklers that simulate rain, or painted backdrops that simulate the sky, or wind machines that simulate windy conditions, and in our day and age a thousand digital creations imperceptible to the eye. But what do such representations of nature ultimately dramatize? Forces beyond human control. And humans—the filmmakers—value such forces by making rather chasing storms, controlling the uncontrollable not to conquer it but communicate the relative finitude of the human condition. Fabricated storms, while unnatural, may have a natural effect—exposing characters and viewers to the elements. If artificial elements are required for an exposure to be authentic, or logistically possible, then so be it—so it is with nature as that which is out of our hands lest it be changed into something else: a static possession or spoil.

[10] With respect to the landscape genre, which in the context of this chapter is understood more as an aesthetics rather than a metaphysics of nature, Lefebvre offers the following formulation for the categorical autonomy of landscape as a way of seeing and thinking the natural world, for the convergence or circularity of "outside" and "inside" perspectives, or better yet the "outside-in" and the "inside-out" phenomenology of the foregrounded background: "Landscape is a *form of being* of external space in our minds." See "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," in *Landscape and Film*, p. 51 (italics in original). In my analysis it should be obvious by now that this "form of being" cannot bring external space into our minds without *breaking through*, entailing what I would call an exposure to alterity—and, depending on the case, an overexposure—for which the primordial figure of nature provides the necessary sense of mystery, sublimity and precarity.

distance, not necessarily or not yet a corporeal one, that transforms what we perceive into a cypher for what can no longer be touched. Read in this way, nature is that which remains ironically untouched by our own "grasping nature," insofar as we find ourselves out of touch with what binds us to nature. The distance from nature is also phenomenological in that it turns out to be essential for an appearance (foreign yet facing) to mingle with manmade structures of knowing and perhaps break through the self-preserving structure of consciousness, or at least startle this authority of consciousness as an unnatural gap between beings, a filtering lens or diluting liquid against alterity. What the forceful and contingent presence of nature might "mean" in the various organizational structures of narrative film, and how nature can be seen to participate in film as a narrative element of its own, expanding or refracting the narrative, hinges upon the possibility of there being (a sense of) not just a world outside the narrative or within the narrative which the latter cannot account for, is blind to, or is simply disinterested in, but a sense of mystery and otherness in which the narrative world—the film world—is steeped. This is the lost enchantment and possible re-enchantment of nature as primal poetry, a poetry to be undergone and deciphered, translated as opposed to written—or "written on the wind"—and calling for heightened attention, either from a character or the gaze of the film itself, ideally their attunement, as in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* where free-form reveries of nature grow out of the main character's mystical love for "the zone," a place where respect for nature is returned to the links between thought and action. For aesthetics as much as for philosophy, such cinematic instances or "dawnings" of the mysterious otherness of the world in which we live will not always fall squarely into the category of the natural world nor, for that matter, any ready-made conceptual category. And while they may be structurally anomalous or even destructively vertiginous, these events (when they happen, if they happen) are far from reducible to fixed references or cutaways or digressions to a so-called objective, mind-independent or pre-existing reality (a feat made possible by the medium's photographic indexicality and the fragmentary powers of montage to bracket a piece from the symbolic continuity of the whole). As will become clear, nature is not limited or even necessarily tied to the presence of the world, the natural world, or the persistence of things that are present onscreen, though it undoubtedly has its roots in the domain of being which envelops us all. I also believe it is important to acknowledge the aesthetic experience of nature's metaphysical transformation on film, that is, how viewers process (or leave completely unprocessed) affective moments of the world in its own image concealing a mystery in the palm of its hand: the ontological gesture of *a*

presence, in the sense of something being *afoot*. In awakening us from the autopilot stupor of habitual movie consciousness, this film phenomenology of nature radicalizes exteriority such that it may be interiorized and enlivens the world in its own image by the possibility of the world existing in the image of a transcendent being. It is here where the experience of nature onscreen—orchestrated according to tensions between what is most familiar and unfamiliar about the world as a whole—may come into contact with what I will call a "cinematic sublime."

This takes us back to the discussion on Jean-François Lyotard from Chapter 1, and perhaps we can begin to comprehend the mysterious affective quality of this type of encounter by grounding it more deeply within the aesthetic terrain of the sublime. The shift in perspective that I am referring to is also a reorientation of spectatorial posturing via *disorientation*, gaining added clarity in relation to Lyotard's theory as described in his essay "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde." Here a theory is built around an inexplicable aesthetic event or epiphany that, for all its transformative power, is hidden within the cracks of our experience, perhaps ironically concealed by its sheer transparency and obviousness. (It is also problematically restricted to the avant garde, specifically the abstractions of high modernist painting which eschew all forms of representation for the sake of variations of pure form and pure paint.) Lyotard understands the essence of the sublime as an aesthetic event whose occurrence is strange and estranging—"a stranger to consciousness"—for drawing attention to the fact of its own happening in "the now" over and above "the new."[11] Ostensibly struck by one of Ludwig Wittgenstein's razor remarks on the mystical from his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Lyotard writes of this primordial temporality in such a way where everything hangs on the substitution of a single word or breath between words:

> That it happens 'precedes', so to speak, the question pertaining to what happens. Or rather, the question precedes itself, because 'that it happens' is the question relevant as event, and it 'then' pertains to the event that has just happened. The event happens as a question mark 'before' happening as a question. *It happens* is rather 'in the first place', *is it happening, is this is, is it possible*? Only 'then' is any mark determined by the questioning: is this or that happening, is it this or something else, is it possible that this or that?[12]

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[11] Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," trans. Lisa Liebmann, with Geoff Bennington and Marian Hobson, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 453.
[12] Ibid., p. 454 (italics in original).

As I already mentioned, Lyotard's discussion is specific to painting, beginning with an appropriately unfinished essay by the abstract expressionist/minimalist painter Barnett Newman entitled "The Sublime is Now." Informed by the idea that the sublime is always an *experience of* the sublime, an experience defined not by *what happens* but rather by *that it happens*, there is a further line of philosophical reasoning extending from the preliminary sketch of the mystically momentous in film that I wish to follow, less for the sake of justifying its significance than extracting from under it the conditions through which the peculiar force of the sublime breakthrough of "nowness" occurs. What is broken and what causes the breaking? And why, more often than not, is the break, for all its danger and damage, registered as an inexplicable type of relief (for the characters experiencing them and for us experiencing their experience) that is not free from a certain condition of agitation or suspense—the taut entwinement of pleasure and pain, activity and passivity, exposure and withdrawal, that is given the name *sublime*? In my understanding, the great event (call it mystical for the sake of a name, as long as we remember that the "it happens" happens before anything at all can be named) provokes the elusive question, ceaselessly resonating, of the phenomenon of being itself—the nature of nature—privy to those beings for whom Being is a pressing issue and not a learnable fact, the Being of beings as Heidegger calls "it": Did *that* just happen? It *happens*?

The "It happens" of the cinematic as opposed to the painterly sublime is so ephemeral, comes and goes so quickly—like an honest greeting immediately upended by the pressing agendas of ritualized conversation—that it is difficult to register as mattering or even belonging to the film as a whole. A good example of this is the scene from *The Thin Red Line* discussed in Chapter 1 of the American soldiers crossing paths with a local villager, the former going to war and the latter, by the casual looks of him, going home. The flabbergasted expression of a panicky soldier, Private Dale (played by Dash Mihok), cues us or perhaps permits us to undergo our own encounter with the sublime, here in response to a ripple running through the calm of natural beauty, in other words to nature assuming a human form, the holistic and uncorrupted purity of the jungle manifesting in a man who can mind his own business and walk freely against the grain of the military machine of armed men locked up in single file procession. Such events, by virtue of a kind of aesthetic imperfection or incompletion, resist easy identification and assimilation in the first place and, as a consequence of this resistance, initially fail to meet the requisite criteria of narrative or thematic specificity and coherence. In representational as opposed to experimental film, that is, in narrative

fiction film which seems by its very nature to eclipse the revelatory and ecstatic conditions of spatial presentness and temporal nowness, the "It happens" is not necessarily more easily recuperated but has the power potentially to interrupt or shock linear time. The "breakthrough moment" in *The Thin Red Line* is part of a narrative structure that turns on itself and cuts a hole, taking a piece out of itself that is as phenomenologically precarious as it is ontologically indiscriminate—the entire jungle feels echoed in the villager who moves towards the soldiers and us, entering and exiting consciousness "un-constituted"—and this is particularly amplified within a cultural context, specifically that of popular film culture, determined in so many ways (aesthetically, cognitively, hermeneutically, even philosophically) by the "What is happening?" Of great importance for us as a measure for what matters or what *can* matter in the realm of the cinematic sublime—where what matters most is what is most often missed, *just this* and *right now*, understated or left dangling imperfectly—is the capacity for film to suspend or altogether lift its own narrative and thematic projects (in this case, the American war effort and, I would say, the American war genre), and by doing so to simultaneously take the fork of human experience, braiding it, as it were, with characters who undergo the "It happens" even while they are pitted against the question "What is happening?" Stanley Cavell in his work on American or "post-Pollack" abstract painting and Shakespearean tragedy might describe such an inner calibration of consciousness in ethical terms, specifically as a transformative leap from knowledge to acknowledgment, except I would add that such experiences may force one to *begin* in a state of acknowledgment or *become* ethically open without making a conscious decision to do so.[13] Exposed *by* knowledge, let's say, such characters may appear calm or struck or dumbfounded or indifferent or enlightened by what they experience, consumed by a single feeling or splayed across a shifting mood. And yet, within the harsh and sometimes blinding light of an unexpected exposure to some form of alterity, to a shard of beauty with sharp terrorizing edges, they are as children facing what you might call "a first" rather than "a fear."[14]

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[13] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 110; see also "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Updated Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 238-66.

[14] My appreciation of the relatable or easily imagined metaphor of "exposure" as expressive of the various inner endurances—moral, political, spiritual, psychological, etc.—of human life, is indebted to Cora Diamond's remarkable essay "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 43-89.

I am suggesting that in *The Thin Red Line* this experience of exposure is *to nature*: nature from without and from within, the fullest exposure coming from without as if from beyond the limits of human nature (our lot). The "within" and the "without," as it were, of human nature's wrestling reflectiveness towards nature itself, in all its "allness" and "neverthelessness," constitute a *double exposure* that confounds the self, unhinges it, and in some cases completely annihilates it (the self no longer recognizing itself, new yet not necessarily improved). In the film the human tie to nature, which prevails to some degree as long as we are or still call ourselves "human," through the tense and displaced experience of the soldiers is felt to be precarious (in need of reinforcement) or suspect (in need of permanent severing) or absolute (in need of practical realization), depending always on the personality of the man behind the uniform. But all these various and competing "ties" to nature are, above all, direct exposures to *being in* nature, which is tantamount for the Americans to being far away from home, regardless of their disposition or philosophical outlook on the subject of nature versus culture or human nature versus animal nature. To fight a war on behalf of one's country, abroad but perhaps also civilly at home, entails being uprooted from one's culture and displaced into the uncanny existential zone *between* cultures. This too is nature—the unowned and contested field of battle. Nature appears when cultures clash, appears as it were by default, untouched since the moment it was mythically left behind. To retreat to nature, return to it, wake up past its threshold, drenched in its humid heart and liquid interaction of life, is to be overwhelmed by the sublime harshness of nature as yet unmastered. The world-home, supportive earth and sheltering sky, is for the privilege of none (the top of the food chain is not a penthouse), so much so that the creatures who dwell there must *build homes*. Our sense of exposure pertains to the sheer impact of what we call "the elements," personified in cinema by the buttressing beam of light, originating from outside and streaming down—and all beings are at once vulnerable to and dependent upon this incoming light. Human beings, consciousness and all, are no exception here (except for the fact that our sensitivity can be turned completely inward towards ourselves, to the lives we lead and call our own; and we can, if we so choose, turn our backs to face the very mirror of ourselves). So let us imagine, standing on the threshold of the cinematic sublime, the downward velocity and sprinkling nourishment of light, the blood of being flowing between bodies. Picture light streaming in (again from without and from within), flooding the aperture of a small single simple being, and burning a hole or setting aflame rather than forming a perfectly recognizable and manageable impression of the world outside—as though the entire

world were concentrated into a single pointed ray and entered us as its rightful place.[15] Throwing our concepts, squaring us to the earth, bristling the oxygen in our veins, pulling the earth from under our feet like a rug, and scrambling our rote sense of what the everyday world is like, to bypass or perhaps "asphyxiate" the screen-filter of consciousness, rattling the cage of consciousness or playing the musical instrument that is consciousness, a string for every sense.

The word "exposure" when applied to the medium of film is also in need of elaboration and has an appropriate double meaning that shouldn't be overlooked. First, the recording of images on film or by digital means depends on a technical process of exposure, one based upon very specific standards of visibility and perfected by the art of mechanical reproduction. An image can be overexposed or underexposed, made too bright or too dark, but done correctly (that is, in adherence to the optics of visual transcription, be it through celluloid registration or digital encoding) the right amount of light and length will expose the materiality of the medium beyond recognition albeit for the sake of recognition—into an image of the world laid bare, stripped of anthropocentric value, the world as we find it *again* when we find it within ourselves to face our finitude and acknowledge our inescapable "situatedness" here and now.

This is by now a familiar reading of the basic mechanical or automatic aspect of cinematic exposure. Now as for what I would call the "psychology of exposure," analogous to what I described in the previous chapter as the psychic dimension of cinematic automatism, on the one hand it appears to flow naturally from the ontological conditions of the primary level of exposure, as if mirroring or perhaps anthropomorphizing the fragility, sensitivity and metamorphic dependency of the medium of film upon the searing yet sustaining luminousness of a radical exteriority. And yet there is a significant difference between the two types of exposure, one that will prove to be decisive for my understanding of *The Thin Red Line* and its metaphysical

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[15] See Jan Zwicky, *Wisdom and Metaphor* (Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2003), p. 54(left). "As though the weight of the universe were balanced on a single point, and that point entered us." Is such a thing imaginable? I can picture the world balancing on a single point because the world is itself a point in the universe. However, while I admire the infinite scale of Zwicky's "universe" I question its use over the finitude of "world." Oh, the efficacy of our words—do they testify to an experience or are they merely (merely?) longings? Are all concrete particulars map-like microcosms of the universe? I should think not, especially if I refer to such things in my midst as "mine." The universe, then, is a series of self-portraits, myself included? This is one way of dealing with the infinite, especially if the point which enters us is another person in an act of love. There seems to be some consensus, at least among poets and songwriters (some philosophers), that love is the "place" where finite beings transcend and become one with the universe. Can one love pieces of the earth in this way? Perhaps in the face of death anything is possible, everything comes to light.

aesthetics: if the medium itself is intrinsically photosensitive to the world through light and hence in this way mechanically impressionable, then it is also by definition *vulnerable* to breakdown, and in this sense "to be exposed," be it *in* the representation (the human figure, actor or character) or *by* the representation (the filmmaker or spectator), is always to risk the possibility of *overexposure*. Regarding the ontology of so-called fictional film characters, when the human figure is impressed or otherwise captured on film they too become impressionable, are borne out of the actor's exposure, becoming part of a sensitive medium which sensitizes the world wherein a near-infinity of elements interact and influence one another. This idea of "ontological impressionability" is what I understand to be motivating or at least implied by Béla Balázs's theory of micro-physiognomy and his emphasis on the close-up as revelatory not only of the psycho-geography of the human face but *film's face* as well.[16] Doubly exposed and made to inhabit a movingly impressionable film world rather than a static world of impressions, film actors/characters[17] are always—that is to say, ontologically—at the mercy of innumerable degrees of pleasure and pain; the autonomy of subjectivity, however tempting it may be to preserve and maintain, is under constant attack, as it were, by unconscious physiognomic responses or exposures which the face of film registers like a lie detector. What appear to be private mental events are in fact public viscera—there is nowhere to *hide* in a film (especially in the war film as we will soon see), the actor's concealment is still on display. And this is to be held in contrast with the disembodied and lifeless camera whose "eye" is without flesh and blood: its job is not just to record or represent but rather, let's say, to bear witness, that is, to be completely overexposed by a reality the burden of which human consciousness would find unbearable, subject to various ecstasies and traumas of the mind. What this means is that sentient screen beings will be subject to transfiguring and potentially life-threatening (over)exposures from a medium for which the act of exposure is nothing more than a fact, an indifferent mechanical necessity (even though in drawing such a line we may guilty of the anthropocentric bias regarding the "painlessness" of inorganic life). The situation is one where psychological exposures proliferate within a medium

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[16] See "Type and Physiognomy" and "The Close-up," in Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 27-32 and 38-45.

[17] If an actor attempts to hide from the camera's exposure to bring forth his character, it is not always clear within the performance that the successful finding of the character necessitates the successful hiding of the actor, nor which of the two is the greater "success" as far as the viewer's identification and appreciation is concerned.

based solely on the *principle* of exposure, yet the feature that strikes me as common if not identical between these exposures is the reigning core of *passivity* among "camera" and "character" ontologies. As spectators, I suggest that we see characters exposed before they have a chance to expose anything in their own image—for they have been exposed in the light of the world in its own image—and for those who believe they have changed the world, the "moral of the story" in films which conclude with some sense of self-awareness is that it's the world that has changed them. Given the uninhibited intensity of this passivity on both fronts, the moment of supreme contact yields a marked disfiguration that cannot be undone, be it on film or skin: the tattoo is permanent and screen beings are as if born with it and there is no going back on this constitutive overexposure without speculating about a past life.

This event in which a human being as body, as embodied soul, is exposed, is what Cora Diamond refers to, with admirable simplicity, as "a difficulty of reality."[18] In her essay "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," Diamond's concern as a philosopher is that the wounding ordeals and traumas of human experience are often undermined, or "deflected," by the very discourses which aim to respond to them and cope with them. In some profound way such difficulties as we experience in our everyday lives, or the difficulties of failing to bring them inside the realm of our everyday lives, are fundamentally misrepresented or out of touch with the conceptual, argumentative, methodological and rhetorical difficulties of philosophical writing, particularly within the so-called analytical tradition of philosophy. Ontologically speaking, compared with a medium based on the fact of exposure, perhaps philosophical writing itself— particularly in the form of monological language and a dubiously Cartesian abstraction of reason— tends towards "problem-solving" distance and deflection, reductive abstractions which seem to come directly from the way we think. (Thought is limited, of course, but it becomes *limiting* when its limits are not respected or in some way felt as uncomfortable, like walking about with a stone in one's shoe—the philosopher stops on the street to remove it because he or she is trying to think!) At the same time a similar disconnect can also be said to hold for film and art in general, when difficulties of reality are handled through difficulties of technology or technique, deflected through what is generally called "praxis." This may offer some explanation for why the aesthetic praxis of filmic narration, despite being comprised of a succession of photographic exposures, functions as

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[18] Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, pp. 45-6.

a deflection of the very difficulties of reality they present, tending instead to carry on "as if nothing happened," especially when something happens to disarm and de-center the agency of characters. After the American soldiers are exposed by the alterity of the local villager who cuts across the grain of their military project of conquest, throwing this way of life into relief as a precarious and limiting possibility, they and the film carry on as if nothing happened. Tracking shots of bombarded soldiers continue uninterrupted, close-ups of the dead are replaceable by *more dead*, mourning scenes are brief, only heroes are given proper burial, etc. The difficulty of the "It happens" is too easily assimilated by the "What does this mean?" and "What happens next?" questions of narration. Film narratives are like moving trains which struggle to slow down and rarely manage to come to a complete stop—to catch their breath, to console their characters, to truly think about what has happened (that *it* happens)—and rarely look back into the past of which they are the sole author, to travel back in time to experience what they missed the first time around. There are flashes or more sustained periods of exposure which are *undergone*, and there are short- and long-term aftermaths of exposure which are *held*, better or more commonly known as cases of trauma. (A more positive, or less medical, description might be "crises of transformation.") The former may give way to the latter in the world of an individual, but it also may not, the exposure might fade away in time or we might bite down hard enough to blot it out of our consciousness and memory. That which we undergo, the difficulties we undergo in life, may not resonate, whether because, to borrow an all-too-familiar metaphor, the exposure "numbs us" or our cumulative exposure to life has led us into numbness as a default stance against the harshness of life or the sensitiveness of our skin (physically thin but also thick, or intelligent, in its capacity to repair itself and adapt, with time, to new conditions). On the other hand, that which we undergo in life we may in fact *become*, but we would be mistaken to attribute this to an act of will. Rather, such a change will usually occur precisely *against* our will even if it is a moral choice. The alternative here is hardly a matter of choice in the rational sense, for it is as futile to will change as it is to resist it. Perhaps we do not do the changing so much as awaken changed, a metamorphosis that is months or years in the making, the beginnings of which constitute our own ancient history. To become the life we undergo is a reconciliation of mind and body through the permanent trauma/transformation of an experience. Our exposure lets us feel what we know, sometimes to the point of ecstasy and unbearableness, yet perhaps no feeling is more strongly felt than that of our finitude: the knowledge/feeling—the intuition—that the capacity for knowledge is tied to a feeling, that when

it comes to knowledge we can only truly know what we somewhere/somehow *feel*. That is conviction. The stomach is the second and perhaps more primal mind, the mind in which our intuition is rooted. Knowledge without feeling is theoretically endless, like the processing powers of computer brains whose daily increase in speed and size steers knowledge farther and farther away from value, from meaning, from memory, and into the bodiless realm of what we call "information" (the sterilization of intuition).

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The grammar of cinematic exposure to various exteriorities and difficulties—I like to think of them also as *mysteries*—of reality, suggests to me the following two propositions, a hermeneutic method to be taken as a promise for reading—not explaining—the logic of exposure, the spirit of the *It happens*, and the epic culture clash with nature: "A film about war is also *of* war." "A war film set in nature is *at the mercy of* nature."

The Thin Red Line is a film that exposes itself to war, exposes its characters to war, exposes the environment to war, and exposes us to war. As a film about/of war, it is punctuated and rife with such exposures that engrave the materiality of mind and matter alike: men killing men; men witnessing the killing of men by men; men and women in synchronized longing, haunting one another by the brutality of indefinite absences; survivors looking at the world, at their kind and at their others, as if for the first time, finding everything and nothing to live for; and last but not least, fear of the two deaths—the unimaginable death to come (gently rapping) and the all-too-real death itself (barging through the door). The unlucky soldiers on both sides of the struggle—existentially thrown into hell, making their birth seem like heaven—are indiscriminately blinded by the sight of death and unhinged, one by one, by the immanence of their own mortality (mere inches away from the prospect or complete futility of immortality); and depending on the person behind the uniform, they are repulsed or perplexed or enlightened—and sometimes all at once—by the power of nature whose death, a voice tells us, "captures all"—captures *life*, I would add, by knitting the discrete threads and seemingly self-sufficient or island-like forms of life into a sacrificial togetherness, negating the idea that death is a failure or flaw in the fabric of life. Long stretches of the film are composed entirely of these intense successions of psychological exposures, and not just traumatic exposures but revelatory ones as well, resonating most palpably and perhaps poetically in the facial, bodily, and gestural transformation of human identity (a transformation to
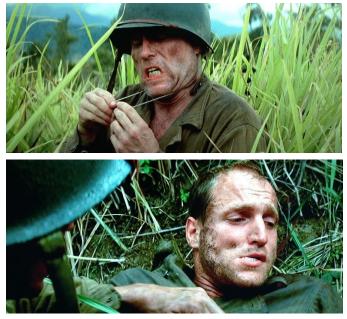
the core, as it were, that has a domino-effect upon everything one says and does thereafter).

Figures 60, 61, 62, and 63. Faces exposed like sensitive celluloid: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

Some exposures in the heat just before, during or after battle reach such feverish boiling points that certain characters are no longer recognizable by the actors who play them, suggesting that these actors have managed to expose themselves to the sufferings of their characters, probably through a complex mixture of technique and intuition, acting and nonacting. And sometimes, given the uncontrollable chaos of war and the levelling effect it has on human agency (not to mention the mass collectivization of military operations), as soon as a character is introduced we are hard-pressed to distinguish him amidst the ferocious pack of fear and trembling known as Charlie Company. We simply cannot easily find markers of difference, the common ground of the soldiers being so precarious that it is reduced to a thin sliver—the beating heart fueling both courage and cowardice. Identifying with these characters is not only difficult but, perhaps, impossible, at least in any conventional way, for what we want to call their "identity" is either in transit or coming apart at the seams. It is as if we come to know these characters at their most *unknowable*, for as infantry or "frontline" soldiers they stand at a critical juncture in which their sense of self dangles on the precipice of one of the most violent experiences of mortality imaginable.[19] One soldier in

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[19] This unrecognizability and perhaps unknowability of characters who stand on the brink of death is related to George Toles' reading of the noir film *Red Light* (Roy Del Ruth, USA, 1949), in which a minor character meets his untimely end mechanically and meaninglessly, without narrative justification. According to Toles, this deprives the viewer of the standard and perhaps reassuring set of hermeneutic comforts by which to make sense of this death scene, to thread it through the aesthetic and moral logic of the film, to *humanize*

particular (Sergeant McCron, played by John Savage), descending into madness after witnessing the deaths of all twelve soldiers under his command, agonizingly scrutinizes the name inscribed on his dog tag in a desperate attempt to recover a self that for all practical purposes no longer

Figures 64 and 65. Consciousness overexposed by trauma and death: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

exists. Together these exposures and overexposures as I have described and catalogued them *expose the film's own gaze*, dislodging its unidirectional fixations and disorienting its hawk-eyed view of the story world, causing it to lose track of its narrative itinerary—legible only from the ledge of omniscience—by forgetting the names of characters, wandering about the jungle in a contemplative and sometimes "pacing" manner, and branching off into the great distances between the human, animal, and natural spheres of existence with a single cut—and going so far as to acknowledge us, the audience, who are exposed in turn (indiscriminately yet under cover, seated and yet in one sitting, for fun and yet for real). Everything meshes into a sonorous and sinewy enactment of the brute entropic chaos of war whose terrors and traumas are steeped in the primordial brew of a higher, perhaps redemptive truth—an order or "currency" to the chaos of war. However, the substance of this "truth" (for lack of words, not better words) is not lying in wait as explanation or reward, discoverable through the trial and error of experience cleansed as it were by the no-nonsense clarity of mortality. Rather this truth, if it's not to become mere compensation for unanswered suffering and injustice, is absorbed or endured over time and made clearer through a collective forfeit of reason verging on faith, making it impossible to track, grasp and report without imposing our own beliefs or breaking down the universe à la Descartes to build buttressing system for such beliefs.

I have suggested that nature be thought of in relation to this film (and also film itself, though I realize this is untenable) as dangerously sublime rather than innocuously beautiful, and

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death. "Film Death and the Failure to Signify: The Curious Case of Warni Hazard," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (15:2, 2017), p. 219.

furthermore that the concept of nature can be productively developed as a mysterious force when faced rather than just a textual figure to be read. To describe streaming light or pouring rain or the wild stares of animals as forces is to say that they have the power to cause breaches in the "culture" of human consciousness. What the film refers to in its metaphysical preface as "the war at the heart of nature" speaks to a situation where human politics plays out within nature as a political arena of sorts, shaped by jarring simultaneities of beauty and terror, peaceful unity and adversarial competition, in which survival is best described as a necessity rather than a victory. How, then, does Malick's emphasis on the beautiful natural environment of Guadalcanal—where the infamous World War II battle between the Americans and Japanese takes place—square with the equal emphasis on the relentless and rather ugly exposure of the soldiers of Charlie Company to the harsh reality of death at every turn? A preliminary answer offered by the film comes through the character of Private Witt (played by Jim Caviezel) who appears to behold everything around him, life and death, order and chaos, good and evil, with adoring eyes, insisting to his superior officer, a nihilist, that there is another reality of death that is not so blindingly harsh as the greatest of human difficulties, and hence another way of looking at death non-cynically and with a redemptive humility. His guide for such redemption, the primary source of his inspiration and courage to meet death with the same calm as his mother did on her deathbed, is the harmonious strife of the natural order of things where life and death are posited as one and the same process. The war at the heart of nature—if it can be called a war at all, perhaps the word "war" can be differently intoned—is an organic war that is both necessary and vital to the persistence of existence. The stakes are that of survival, truly a matter of life and death, and from the power required by survival comes the power to persist, a power which, when wielded, does nothing except power the whole. In this sense death is like the exhaust produced by the "factory" of nature.[20]

The other war being fought in nature between the Americans and Japanese is relatively manmade, though Malick would ask us to consider whether manmade in this case necessarily means "unnatural." Obviously the reasons behind this or any war are complex and many, and perhaps, as the military commanders in the film suggest, there is something natural about the war instinct as a metaphysical condition for the renewal of peace. However, I think the film also asks

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[20] "What is a whole but the sacrifice of parts?"—a question which Witt might ask, though less rhetorically than I have managed. For I am not faced with my own death such that I see that it's not exactly mine, and so my questions on the matter will be by contrast "merely" philosophical.

us to bear in mind that peace as the spoil of war is not world peace, but rather peace for the victor's vision of how the world ought to be. Those who authorize wars do not fight them, equating survival with posterity and posterity with a utopian picture of plenitude beyond the reach of present day sacrifice. Nothing less than the securing of property will guarantee the survival of this hypothetical tomorrow and perpetuate a grotesque myth of human perfection based on preservation rather than diversification. If nature is that which never sleeps, humans on the other hand not only sleep but consciously *go to* sleep, that is, consciously lose consciousness, and we all want to wake up in the morning. Incredible, often reprehensible, and sometimes utterly insane measures are taken, by individuals and nations alike, for the sake of tomorrow and tomorrow's flood towards a vision of the distant future to ensure a sound sleep, for it seems nothing can soothe such a restless state of mind except the ideological lullaby of domination. Human nature and the natural world part ways, at least on the issue of war, over the former's tendency to dominate its own kind and the latter's acquiescence when subject to domination, not because it is weak but rather because it is indifferent, perhaps above all to *negations* of difference.

On Malick's vision of an indifferent natural world in *The Thin Red Line*, Simon Critchley in his essay on the film observes that "[N]ature's indifference to human purposes follows from a broadly naturalistic conception of nature. Things are not enchanted in Malick's universe, they simply *are*, and we are things too. They are remote from us and continue on regardless of our strivings."[21] This poignant yet familiar idea that nature in the film merely is, that the impression we have of its persistent being-for-itself is a sign of its remoteness, making us feel withdrawn from a larger, higher, perhaps enchanted purpose through the relative insignificance of our daily strivings, resonates with Stanley Cavell's more general conception of the ontology of film, particularly as exemplified in his response to Malick's purely cinematographic efforts in *Days of Heaven* discussed in Chapter 2. In fact, Critchley's idea that in Malick's cinema "things merely are" aligns with Cavell's quite clearly as a debt, for as we saw earlier Cavell put forth the idea that Malick discovered how to acknowledge a fundamental fact of film's photographic basis: that

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[21] Simon Critchley, "Calm—On Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*," in *The Thin Red Line*, ed. David Davies (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 26 (italics in original). Ben McCann evokes the concept of contingency which is equally vital to the sense, force or perhaps even the expression of nature's radical indifference: "[N]ature as uncompromising, possessing an arbitrariness with no fixed scheme." See "'Enjoying the Scenery': Landscape and the Fetishization of Nature in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*," in *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, ed. Hannah Patterson (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), p. 80.

objects participate in the photographic presence of themselves onscreen such that the drama of human affairs is reduced in significance the less it participates in affairs external to the world of the human.[22] Cinema facilitates this fundamental participation in such a way that human beings are tempted to withdraw from it, or substitute their own being-in-the-world for various illusions of how things might be or ought to be for them—and perhaps this is a criterion for nature appearing to us as "indifferent" without being completely indifferent to itself, that is, if we can say that the objects of nature are turned towards themselves and, with respect to film, participate in their own aesthetic recreation.

Another key influence which Critchley neglects to mention is the very one which Cavell mentions only once in *The World Viewed* and in passing: André Bazin. There is a particular moment from Bazin that is worth drawing attention to in this conversation: when theorizing cinema as a medium which represents and communicates by way of what is real, Bazin collapses fact and fiction, mimesis and metaphysics, in the stunning phrase "dramaturgy of Nature."[23] I am still quite amazed by the decision to translate the word "nature" in its capitalized form, a stroke of emphasis and concept purification which enacts a similar distinction between the mimetic and metaphysical "natures" which I am in the process of thinking through. Leaving aside the possible and no doubt entangled connections between reality and nature, and furthermore the nuanced methodological movement from the former to the latter rather than the other way, we are invited to ask what cinema's ontological relationship to nature *is*, even though it is not exactly clear what Bazin wants to means (or what his English translator, Hugh Gray, thinks he means) by emphasizing Nature in this manner—an ambiguity enhanced by the metaphysical aspiration of the concept, along with its pervasiveness and age—not to mention a *dramaturgy* of Nature. Nature capitalized does not immediately refer to the natural world or the nature that surrounds us or is in our midst. But it also does not, at least in reference to film, merely carry the connotation of "human nature" either. Specifying the concept as dramaturgical in form suggests that we are not dealing with nature as such—human or natural or their fundamental oneness and separateness—but rather with a technical and aesthetic dramatization of that which remains, or is believed to remain, indifferent to or perhaps beyond the reaches of history, culture, and even human consciousness itself. If

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[22] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. xvi.

[23] André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema (part 2)," in *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 110.

cinema dramatizes nature (whatever that *is*), it must begin by catching it (things, bodies, space-times, sensible noumena?) unawares, which is not to say that it ought to or always does indeed capture that which resists conceptual appropriation in its remoteness and otherness. As long as those who make and view the film in question believe that it *can*, that is, believe that it is possible for a dramaturgy to be based not just on but *in* nature—fictionalization of fact, textualization of truth—such that what the dramaturgy serves and what, in the end, becomes most dramatic is what is philosophic, that which *becomes* on film: the world in its own image, i.e. the images which the word takes of itself through the ontological automatisms of film. While these are quite familiar thoughts by now, the question before us is whether Bazin's/Gray's "dramaturgy of Nature" entails (aesthetically, perhaps even logically) a filmic discourse not only set in nature but beset by nature and its unquenchable system of moral ambiguities, unleashed in human conscience by the appearance of nature's indifference to morality. If you want to examine the complexities and contradictions of human nature, you can start by putting humans in the neutral laboratory of nature: first we notice that they are a bit out of place in surroundings indifferent to their strivings, and then, having been put in their proper place of insignificance in the grand scheme, we may watch the different types of will grow into cultures, born of the same root yet often radically opposed: will to power and will to truth and everything in between.

Bazin's concept suggests to me that the turn towards nature in narrative film can be viewed overall as an attempt to turn towards *the nature of film* in an examination of its mimetically creative possibilities, as if the act, demand, and in some legitimate sense the necessity of organizing moving images in a particular way were a pressure that comes in between film and itself, or conceals film from itself, concealing the world that film by nature reveals, and concealing both—"film" and "world"—from its audience. Deliberate acts of digression from a film's narrative obligations can function to honor, let's say, its *original* pre-digital obligation, film's ontological obligation to the world-as-such—in all its beauty and ugliness, contingency and absurdity, banality and mystery. In that sense, such digressions are like deflections of the inescapable subjectivity of even the most mechanical of reproductions, a subjectivity echoed in the persistence of narrative—as in the persistence of vision—regardless of the attempts to just let appearances be what they are. In/on film, things merely are if the images are so permitted to be what they are, but what it takes to make them so, to appear merely so, is never obvious: if a film digresses to the "mereness" of nature as a metaphor for its own nature, there is no point at which it can be said with certainty that it has found

itself. Digressions by their very definition lack *telos*, which is why they must circle back to the narrative from which they took leave, suggesting that narrative and not nature is primary. Perhaps we can say that a digression to the "mereness" of things through images of nature or images in a more natural cinematic state, free of narrativity, will be ontologically present while epistemologically absent, presence taking a vital degree of precedence over representation: a dramaturgy of Nature, if made too explicit, will constitute an interruption of the drama. A film in which the world has been "allowed to happen" is, for all intents and purposes, a kind of realist fantasy. Indeed, the world does happen; at any given moment the objects in an image of the world merely are. But the use to which those objects are put, and the revelation of the image as a whole within a larger narrative structure such as *The Thin Red Line*, conceals the mere existence of those things, that is, until *one thing*, seemingly from *outside the structure* (the Melanesian villager on a walk during the war—for him *no war*), rends it, lifts it, unconcealing the truth of the image, and with it the light of truth. Such unconcealment seems impossible without a semiotic matrix of narrative concealment and, more often than not, completely insignificant without the truth of the image as a mechanical exposure refracting through a character's experience of truth as a psychological and/or corporeal exposure.

That the poetic and occasionally dramatic presence of nature in films elevating this figure to the level of aesthetic expressiveness is sufficient unto itself, that there is nothing to be said about the contents and qualities of nature woven throughout the fabric of a narrative because nature is that which *says nothing* to the narrative, is without a doubt a legitimate hermeneutic obstacle or fear.[24] Fearful because nature is one of the most central and significant and powerful elements in a film as rich in meaning as *The Thin Red Line*. The film's significance upon reflection seems somehow tied to the remarkable degree in which its depiction of nature renders *insignificant* the very war it labors to accurately reconstruct and, by extension, the conventions of the war genre to which the film, despite breaking with many of these conventions, is nevertheless a member.

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[24] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit conclude their study of *The Thin Red Line* not with the feeling of having reached a deeper understanding through the hermeneutic extractions of film analysis, but rather with what strikes me as a resigned acceptance of the film's representations of presence, the (in)significance of its various individual and interconnected presences which have not been forced into the symbolic register. They describe images of nature as resonating with each other, occasionally touching each other, and meaningful only insofar as they are present onscreen, to us, and to other presences within the film's metaphysical network of being. See Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 175.

Filmmakers like Malick and Andrei Tarkovsky, who obsessively draw on nature almost as a rule or out of love, making it a principle of their aesthetic or in the very least a decisive touchstone, tend to downplay the thematic, symbolic and mythical possibilities of nature, perhaps assuming that these associations are so abundant and cliché that viewers can be counted on to project what is most meaningful to them if provided with sufficient ambiguity in the "nature text." I can also imagine that audiences who respond to this type of approach may have as little interest in forming concrete interpretations of nature as the filmmakers do in offering explanations for the way they use or emphasize or privilege nature above everything else.

Later in his career, Tarkovsky addressed his audiences more frequently and found that many wished to know more about the meaning behind his singular and recurrent motifs of nature woven throughout his oeuvre. While confessing to a degree of frustration over a gross misunderstanding of the art of poetry, Tarkovsky in his book *Sculpting in Time* offers the following explanation for his inability to answer such questions in a way which will be satisfying or useful to viewers and himself:

> Rain, fire, water, snow, dew, the driving ground wind—all are part of the material setting in which we dwell; I would even say of the truth of our lives. I am therefore puzzled when I am told that people cannot simply enjoy watching nature, when it is lovingly reproduced on the screen, but have to look for some hidden meaning they feel it must contain. Of course rain can just be seen as bad weather, whereas I use it to create a particular aesthetic setting in which to steep the action of the film. But that is not at all the same thing as bringing nature into my films as a symbol of something else—Heaven forbid! In commercial cinema nature often does not exist at all; all one has is the most advantageous lighting and interiors for the purpose of quick shooting—everybody follows the plot and no one is bothered by the artificiality of a setting that is more or less right, nor by the disregard for detail and atmosphere. When the screen brings the real world to the audience, the world as it actually is, so that it can be seen in depth and from all sides, evoking its very 'smell', allowing audiences to feel on their skin its moisture or its dryness—it seems that the cinema-goer has so lost the capacity simply to surrender to an immediate, emotional

aesthetic impression, that he instantly has to check himself, and ask: 'Why? What for? What's the point?'[25]

Tarkovsky resists the idea that the persistent presence of nature in his work must mean something *else* by dispelling the idea that meaning is what lies beneath the surface, a meaning concealed by the author as in a game of hide-and-seek. He goes on to accede, with remarkable conviction and quite convincingly, that nature does in fact have meaning, but a meaning of a different kind that is both inseparable from an experience of meaninglessness and, perhaps as a consequence, the complete opposite of a meaningless experience. For him, nature can be seen to function in four interconnected registers that are not the sole property of a given film, but rather are always immanent to the experience of the viewer. They can be summarized as follows: 1. Narrative invitations to nature constitute direct acknowledgment of the fundamental conditions of our dwelling on earth. 2. Natural surroundings infuse the narrative events with a palpable and unified atmosphere. 3. Attention to the unique, complex and sublime details of nature bypasses a utilitarian approach to filmmaking and, consequently, a utilitarian or largely consumptive approach to spectatorship. 4. Poetic attempts to evoke the *feel* of the world as the original house of humanity, the house in which we acquired the language necessary to share our experience of being here, boldly summon the aesthetic sensibility of the viewer to become immersed in the atmosphere in which the film world has been *steeped*, to use Tarkovsky's fine turn of phrase, thus enabling him/her to exercise or if need be to rehabilitate the muscles and tendons of pre-linguistic experience.

Tarkovsky's heaven-forbid hostility towards the hermeneutic temptation for a concrete and universal meaning of the poetic representation of nature in his films is due in large part to the perceived misguidedness, if not the outright emptiness, of the questions by which such an attitude is casually mocked: "Why?", "What for?", "What's the point?" What I wish to take from a filmmaker's signature brand of silence over symbolism before proceeding to a more in-depth investigation of nature in *The Thin Red Line* is that such questions are not questions at all but rather hasty, flailing and defensive *reactions* against a film aesthetic designed to expose us to a cinematic sublime and the mystery of *this* world ("*it happens*"); and I agree with Tarkovsky that as viewers

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[25] Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press Printing, 2000), pp. 212-3.

of works of art we need to overcome the what-is-happening compulsion and have our understanding of the film emerge organically from our deep exposure to its world. Getting over this skepticism of the world in its own image requires not a mastery of film language or history, but first and foremost a "surrendering to an immediate, emotional aesthetic impression." In the grip of the sort of wild abandon made possible by aesthetic experience in general, the right questions regarding the meaning of nature realized for its own sake, and no less for the benefit of the viewer estranged from nature, are *unknown* until those emotional-aesthetic impressions have been realized in the same way, that is, as active thoughts rather than passive reactions.[26] "Rain, fire, water, snow, dew, the driving ground wind…"—one thing leads to another, the elements combine into the familiarity of otherness, and before you know it a purely visceral experience of the natural world gives way to an obsession with what turns out to be the uncontrollable meaningfulness of nature as a malleable material or force of participation in a variety of aesthetic and thematic registers—perhaps as that which most fugitively trespasses between seemingly disconnected or mutually exclusive registers, such as that between form and content or consciousness and the unconscious, creating much-needed movement between these static binary oppositions.[27]

This admittedly tangential understanding of nature in narrative film, especially as it circulates in the multiple, interweaving and highly expressive registers of *The Thin Red Line*, is undoubtedly spurred by the perceptual and affective sense in which it is presented "pro-filmically," that is, precisely in terms of its presence before the camera and prior to, or at least coterminous with, any attempt at its discursive characterization—the profilmic serving as a criterion for the atmospheric in Tarkovksy's use of the term. Before nature can be cast and characterized in a certain way, it must be presented such that it can "present itself," which requires that it be provided with

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[26] The activation of the "thought" of an emotional-aesthetic impression can occur through what David Davies describes in his essay on *The Thin Red Line* as the film's emphasis on the articulation of form, the painterly qualities of things, and texture over shape. However, I believe Davies is mistaken in his binary distinction between "sensation" and "understanding," especially the suggestion that the former must come at the expense of the latter. See David Davies, "Vision, Touch, and Embodiment in *The Thin Red Line*" (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 57.

[27] Something similar happens in the "primordial call" to philosophical inquiry. Mythically speaking, a philosopher is born when he is no longer able to control his thoughts, having been lured out of the cage of consciousness by the intoxicating mystery or "smell" of Being, and condemned to a life of thought by the labyrinthine paradox of his being-in-the-world—being the being for whom Being is an issue, as Heidegger famously put it.

a physical space in which to *appear*—a compositional clearing, as it were, fit to be occupied with an exteriority with the power to expose (and perhaps overexpose). And with such clearings forged and in full effect, nature can indeed make an appearance, a grand appearance, in the narrative structure alongside more conventional or generic elements which can strike us as contrived or even counterfeit by comparison. What I call an appearance on the stage of a clearing is the condition for an act of emergence or interruption from beyond the limits of both character psychology and cultural worldview; and it is something, I believe, that narrative structures in general do not quite know what to do with and hence cannot contain or can *almost* contain. Elements of nature, as I have already suggested, tend to stand in opposition to narrative elements insofar as the appearance, admitted on its own terms and as an "it happens" event, will show no sign of concern or support for "what happens"—what I spoke of earlier as nature's indifference—abiding without ever deferring to what the narrative creates and deems important for its overall sense of internal coherency. So in the event that nature is brought to bear by way of a character's attraction or repulsion or dependency or deflection, or by way of the director's or cinematographer's or screenwriter's or actor's investment in that which *exceeds* the manmade nature of fiction as well as fact, the elements of interest are in theory brought to the narrative from somewhere outside the narrative, as if the narrative structure rested on foundations or conditions of possibility that have not been structured and are fundamentally recalcitrant to the very structure they support (as earth is to concrete). But since there can be nothing physically or literally outside the text proper that is still a property, however inscrutable, of the text itself, these appearances appear, it seems to me, not *from* the outside but rather *as* the outside—as an "outsideness" or radical exteriority by which, for example, the background and foreground planes change position or the implicit is transformed into the explicit without any cost to its atmospheric pervasiveness. A significant metaphysical consequence of an instance of radical exteriority, pictorial or otherwise, is that it leaves an impression of "the given" to reign self-sufficient and dominate like an atmosphere; for the myth of the given is still, according to cinema, a myth with moorings.

Now it has always been a possibility of cinema, perhaps its original possibility from which it has strayed, to "let the world happen." But, as a rule, *nothing* seems to happen, or nothing of significance, we might say, unless it is in some way "staged." One way a filmmaker can let the world happen, or show that the world happens, without merely suggesting it, and by going further than informing or reminding the viewer that the story of the film is indeed *set* in the world, is by

using montage to cut away from the world of the human to the world of the inhuman.[28] In films featuring the metaphysical figure of nature, the shift from a human being to a bird or leaf, like the move from the human body to the human face, requires a cut from one to the other that carries the force, it seems to me, of a *call*. When called, nature is shown at the expense of narrative, linear time enters circular time or timelessness, and if called frequently enough without preventing its retreat, as it were, from whence it came (say by not irreversibly kneading it into the narrative fabric), the persistence of nature can become a substitute for narrative persistence, and the happening of the world is established as the very location of narrative, a metaphysical location if you will. In calling out to nature and letting the world happen, Malick in *The Thin Red Line* establishes a metaphysical dimension through the presence of nature, but of course he is not content with leaving that dimension idling or dormant in the background. What distinguishes Malick's representation of nature, what lifts those concrete images and sounds of nature into a world of their own, a world apart, is his willingness, after Tarkovsky, to draw from the "silent" art of poetry. By bringing the inner voice of the soul into the place conventionally occupied by third-person literary narration, which is analogous to reason, the humanity of the soldiers is consequently emancipated; and through this voice, which shines unbeknownst to their outer identities and uninhibited by military masculinity, they are the ones who engage the cinematic call to nature as the closest thing for them to salvation.

Two lines of voiceover in particular are worth mentioning here, giving forceful expression to the possibility of nature uniting the discrete elements of the world and underlying or grounding human separateness: "Who are you who live in all these many forms?" and "Maybe all men got one big soul that everybody's a part of." Both lines, the first referring to a spirit of nature and the second to a spirit of man, can be seen as metaphysical speculations fueled by a solitary rhetoric of romanticism. Both betray genuine human longings for a condition of being that is no longer possible as a result of what language makes possible: the dividing of the world into many forms and the separation of the self into the form known as an individual. What is longed for, according

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[28] Such cuts can also occur internally within the image as when the frame is emptied of its human occupiers, for example in the films of Michelangelo Antonioni where characters will walk out of the frame while the view is held on the natural or urban environs. I thank Martin Lefebvre for pointing out this subtler possibility to me, one which Malick conspicuously underuses in *The Thin Red Line*, preferring to move around Guadalcanal and film new images of it rather than stand and watch and wait for his characters to lose patience.

to these private interior supplications, is an alternative to, or perhaps even an antidote for, the seemingly irreversible, irrevocable and inescapable experience of separation from the world and a world of others. Two conditions of separateness and two consequences of human consciousness that, according to Witt, leave any hope for salvation in the severed hands of isolation and the dangerous hands of competition and domination. Perhaps the same source or spirit assumes an infinity of different forms and perhaps, as long as human beings can be counted among these forms, all men got one big soul. *The Thin Red Line*, however, does not make a case for the mysterious oneness of all things, but rather through the depiction of nature in all its forms and the characterization of men each with their own soul, it tries to determine to what extent it is possible for humans to perceive animals and trees and rivers and waves and other humans as connecting or conflicting parts in one big moving picture. If "the big picture" is what we can never know, or if it might not even exist, as intimated by General Quintard (played by John Travolta) prior to battle, the film nevertheless strives to know what it would take to see the big picture—more or less knowledge? or faith? or truth? or lies?—which is to say that the film, by asking questions instead of making claims, questions itself as the big moving picture before us by questioning its own privileged point of view and entitlement to knowledge with respect to its subject. Any film that confidently advocates the idea of a natural unity to all things, while itself the product of an artificial unity, is at odds with itself, that is, with the fragmentary and chaotic aspects or wisps inherent in its own nature. Thus, what might appear as a series of metaphysical claims is philosophically weakened yet poetically strengthened into speculative reveries of romantic longing, which are never divorced from a sense of futility on par with the futility of the war reenacted before us.

What then is the significance of this *calling out to nature* in a film about unnatural death at the hands of war? Is the nature perceived by the soldiers and filmmakers *perceived as* "natural"? Can nature be called "natural" as a surround for what I take to be the *unnaturalness* of a species self-destructing? Is nature on some level responsible for such chaos?...[29] In a film where the fighting soldiers encounter nature as frequently and fervently as the film itself seems to do, there

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[29] The questions keep coming because the film is a feat of thinking through questioning. And unlike philosophy, it need not answer its own questions—in fact they ought to be left unanswered if the viewer is to participate in its thought process. Some philosophers may find this enviable, others may find it deplorable; either way, the artwork which refuses to answer its own questions can account for why such questions never disappear, even if philosophy claims to have thoroughly answered them and put them to rest.

is an important distinction to be made (whether or not the film explicitly or even implicitly makes it, and whether or not such distinctions are conceivably clear-cut when it comes to movies) between nature as perceived by men shadowed by their own unfathomable and untimely mortality and nature as it is sought from behind the transparent "shield" of the camera, through the invulnerable and immanent omniscience of the film's protected (though hardly guarded) gaze. Committed to being inside the fiery midst of hell-on-earth battle, the film also summons the necessary composure to fully attend to the plight of the soldiers (a seemingly impossible task) by taking responsibility for the parallel experiences of *both* sides of the conflict. While the war may be narrated from the point of view of the Americans, once the Japanese are revealed behind their weapons and camouflage, the film loses all sense of a victor, as if each item in the rising death-toll bore a soul powerful enough to tip the scale of justice off its legs. In this way the film embodies the constant threat of mortal interruption in a gaze that can be described as "ethically overwhelmed," and here I am reminded of two complementary first-person point of view shots during the second battle scene, a merciless raid from the Americans on the Japanese camp: one advancing upon a Japanese soldier in a state of surrender, and the other stationed behind a Japanese firing position half buried in the ground, jerking in response to the fatal gunshot by an American soldier, as if it, too, were struck down. Here the gaze of the film does more than identify with the opposing side; it *acts out* the gesture of identification, cinematically empathizing in a manner that lets us feel the wrath of the Americans, what it's like to be on the losing side of a battle and the necessary indignity that always accompanies the glory of emerging victorious.

This ethically overwhelmed gaze often bears the mark of being lost and noticeably panicked, and sometimes just does not know where to turn when confronted by excessive pain, monotone shock, inflicted suffering, artillery, and the abrupt descent into death's unknown (what Sergeant Welsh, played by Sean Penn, refers to simply as "madness"). At a loss, lost, and disoriented, the film's gaze deflects these "difficulties of reality" by *turning away* in horror and disgust. And what it finds in its search for relief, redemption, skyward supplication, is "the natural world," which is presented as being what it is, spoken of as dying in order to live, and mythologized as the ineffable irreconcilable saving-power—the principle of its ceaseless persistence—perhaps to the point of ecstatic glorification. And yet, while there appears to be two distinct angles of nature

at work, one connected to the soldiers and the other to the perspective of the film, cutting many of its images in half as it were, nature itself or rather the "character" of nature is always in close proximity to the soldiers (albeit indifferent to their

Figure 66. The camera's skyward supplication: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

struggles and unreachable as redemption or paradise, tainted by those outstretched and pleading sets of hands)—people for whom death is an always lurking and likely possibility. It is through *them*, their shock and longing, peace and distress, love and hate, clarity and compunction, amidst the regrettable yet inimitable grip of war, that the film is able to experience nature up close and as a sight for sore eyes, begging for signs that this war and possibly war itself is in fact absolutely natural and therefore cosmically justified (even if the law which governs it is not for us to know and smacks of lawlessness). On top of that, the uncanny nearness of nature is amplified by the soliloquy-like voiceovers of the soldiers, which taken together filter it through a collective consciousness or unconsciousness and into a cacophony of unanswerable questions and questionable answers, both of which are inescapably stifled or foiled by the metaphysical limits of human language. All this leads me to believe that the gaze of the film is not only unequivocally identified with the soldiers in perceptual solidarity, but shoots images instead of bullets.

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Sunlight through the trees, a crocodile in a swamp, rosy-fingered dawn, a wounded bird, a face in the earth..., nature is *everywhere* in the film—the world of the film is cupped by nature or, as Tarkovsky prefers to say, steeped in nature. Malick begins and ends with images of nature and these images and sounds are woven seamlessly, ceaselessly throughout. Perhaps this is to be expected since the entire film is *set* in nature, and according to the opening and closing lines of voiceover—the rhetorical question "What's this war at the heart of nature?" and the sincere faith-filled declaration "All things shining"—directly *concerns* nature.[30] And sure enough, as the film

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[30] Most of the voiceovers in the film, including these two thematically and tonally resonant lines, are spoken by someone whom we cannot readily identify and is given surprisingly little screen time, altogether omitted from the film's pivotal battle scenes. Malick's decision here has thrown many commentators astray, causing lines of voiceover to be misattributed to the characters they are associated with onscreen. But these are

unfolds in tandem with the military "progress" of the American soldiers, who land on the island of Guadalcanal, advance through the jungle, reach the hill and win the battle against the Japanese, it gradually becomes apparent to everyone that nature, hovering in the background of the linear and calculated military enterprise, is in fact deeply imbricated within the collective horizon of the soldiers rather than romantically or nostalgically cast away beyond such a horizon, i.e. in some sort of transcendental telos like "spirit" or "soul," or material substrate like brute physical law. For these soldiers the fear *of* death becomes a confrontation *with* death, and it is at this point of complete physical and psychological disarmament, what I'm calling the eventfulness of an exposure, that nature *appears*, collapsing the distance from life that comes with the absence of any awareness or acknowledgment of death. The place where soldiers kill and are killed is not referred to as "the frontlines" for nothing. It is there, literally and figuratively as befits imaginary lines, call them borders, where the faces of men (characters and actors) are exposed, sometimes beyond recognition (actors become characters and characters become interchangeable), in light of three-

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honest mistakes, for the character chosen to deliver a significant portion of the film's metaphysical questions is introduced only briefly near the beginning and does not return until after the battle at Guadalcanal. So who is it? Who speaks this omniscient voice which speaks on behalf of the soldiers, representing what Witt calls the "one big soul"? In the first scene in the ship before the American soldiers land on the beach, we are introduced to a young soldier confessing to Welsh his extreme fear of dying, death, the life he may lose, the rest of his long life wasted on war. Welsh, looking unimpressed and quite frustrated with this display of cowardice, asks the soldier his name: "Edward B. Train." Answering the question in full, Private Train (played by John Dee Smith) has a need to state all three parts of his name as it might be etched on a gravestone. Welsh and a group of soldiers are washing up in front of a row of mirrors, composing themselves, deflecting their fear with a comfortably familiar routine, insisting on being clean prior to their encounter with death (the possibility of both killing and being killed). When Corporal Fife (played by Adrien Brody) overhears Train exclaim to Welsh, "We're all probably going to die before we even land," he turns away from his reflection in a mirror where he was brushing his teeth and flits his eyes back and forth, in panic and alarm, about five times. They are all scared, naturally. In fact, the entire scene in the ship is about how the soldiers cope with their fear: some use fear as fuel for hate, others only manage masks of anger; some sit quietly with a calming activity like whittling or a comforting one like reading letters; some try to sleep while others turn their bodies to the wall, walling themselves off from others; an overconfident soldier plots to steal a weapon for added protection, etc. But Train is the only one—and perhaps one of the youngest also—who is brave enough in his fully justified fearfulness to relay out loud what the entire company, including Welsh, is thinking and feeling. We as viewers may also share this widespread fear and find relief in Train's childlike honesty. Perhaps during these brief moments his character earns the right to speak on behalf of everyone who can't or simply won't acknowledge their vulnerability and fear, and it's as though the film nominates him to do just that, to unleash the innocent folly of his tongue. His is a loose tongue, tied more to his heart than to his mind, wise only in its spontaneity and transparency, in the way in which his thoughts and feelings are lived rather than explained by his language. At the end of the film, having spoken on behalf of the one big soul, he addresses, as if for the first time, his own soul, asking it to "let me be in you now, look out through my eyes, look out at the things you made—all things shining."
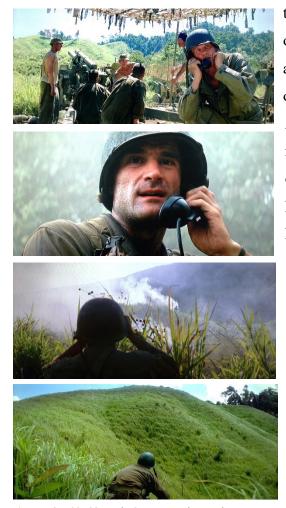
dimensional and overdetermining experiences associated with the words "fear," "pain," "trauma," "hope," "hate," "anxiety" and "compassion." And the nature they see is not the nature we see, for we see (and hear) while they, it seems to me, are *seen* (and *heard*)—analogues of the very images in which they appear (and disappear). In other words they are not in the position, basically our position, to experience nature safely (aesthetically) from behind the barrier of a camera or screen or body or consciousness—a position fundamental to most conceptions of nature, perhaps bearing upon the conditions of the very idea of nature itself. (In a sense the nature concept is proof that we have a certain distance from it, wielding a certain power over it, for better and for worse.) The precarious position of the soldiers is so unlike ours, the viewers, empowered by a distance, however slight, that is undoubtedly peculiar to, if not perfected by, the voyeuristic dimension of film, pointedly analyzed by Cavell in *The World Viewed* as engendering a condition of viewing the world *unseen*.[31]

After the opening section of *The Thin Red Line*, featuring two AWOL American soldiers living in fairytale harmony with Melanesian villagers who are, in fact, naturally attuned to nature,[32] Malick jarringly shifts over to an American warship where we first learn of the "false harmony" from which these soldiers have fled—a rigid chain of command and hierarchy of power that seems to recede endlessly in all directions like one of Kafka's infinite regresses. On the deck Colonel Tall (played by Nick Nolte) is preparing to carry out the obliteration of the Japanese position atop a series of hills, and he is instructed by his commanding officer, General Quintard, to do so "without mercy." After expressing his admiration for Tall, who has chosen to lead a battalion in the war rather than land a cozy chair of political power, the General reminds him that the Admiral (played by nobody—a hopelessly high-up and hence utterly offscreen figure) will be watching the entire battle from afar, intimidating him further with the political and perhaps moral truth "There's

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[31] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 101.

[32] Though this fact—like all facts—can be traced to a perspective whose framing effect may be partial, framing *out* parts of a picture like a postcard in denial of the decay around the corner. As Robert Pippin points out, this Eden adjacent to the war is filtered through Witt's romanticism and impassioned search for a spiritual unity, what Witt calls "the spark," one which is diverted, diffused or altogether eclipsed by ego-driven and materialistic ways of life. Pippin argues that we see what Witt sees, and what Witt sees is ultimately what he *thinks* he sees and *wants* to see, a reflection of his belief system which, as in any system, conveniently edits out contrary evidence. The less insight one has into the logic of one's own beliefs, the easier it is to reinforce them through experience: the edits required to perceive belief are performed, as it were, in one's sleep. See Robert Pippin, "Vernacular Metaphysics: On Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*," in *The Philosophy of War Films*, ed. David LaRocca (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014), pp. 392-4.

always someone watching, like a hawk." With this threat Tall visibly loses his tree-like uprightness, wobbling into a skeptical self-consciousness at the thought of being watched and evaluated every step of the way by an authority eager to replace him if he fails to act in the interest of the war. A strategic and unhesitating sacrifice of the men who will carry out the fighting is deemed the only viable path or acceptable "method" to victory. The analogy of the hawk resonates with the notion that those who have power over others are in the position where they can *see without being seen*, remaining all but invisible, and compared to those whose lives are actually on the line they are perhaps invincible as well.[33] This is one of the many lifts of power operant within hierarchies, and the asymmetry it creates belongs to the very essence of power—what it means to *have* power. But if the Admiral is a hawk then Colonel Tall is certainly no mouse, for he holds his fair—or perhaps unfair—share of authority and control over those directly beneath him. When the fight for the hill ensues, Tall will station himself significantly behind the frontline battalion where the canons are, and from there gains a clear view (a wide shot) of the entire battlefield through a pair of binoculars. Of particular interest to him is the next link in the chain, a Captain Staros (played by Elias Koteas) to whom he delivers his strict military orders by phone once the fighting commences. Admirals observe the progress of colonels and colonels observe the progress of captains and captains observe the progress of privates with whom the chain of command comes to an abrupt end, breaking off like a precipice and opening onto a *frontline frontier* where relations of power and

Figures 67, 68, 69, and 70. From order to chaos, power to powerlessness, illusion to truth: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

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[33] A similar subject position is taken when viewing nature into the image of a landscape. The relation between landscape and war was made by Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984).

perceptual logistics dissolve into a chaos of confrontations beyond the reaches of military organization.

We can already ascertain that the film's gaze is aligned with the soldiers even before the fighting begins through the sense in which the film seems to *hesitate* on the threshold of the bloodshed and death-toll demanded by the war genre itself, delaying the inevitable horror of the soldiers and masochistic pleasure of the viewers who cannot look away from realistic depictions of violence onscreen. When Colonel Tall orders Captain Staros to attack the Japanese position on top of a series of hills by full frontal assault, the platoons begin their slithering advance through the tall grass in broad daylight, stopping at the base of the large hill to receive the Captain's orders, which are, of course, a relay of the Colonel who also acts on behalf of a higher authority, that of the General, and so on. As we will see, the chain of command moves further and further away from the frontlines the more powerful and authoritative the commanding officer. The appointed leader of one of the platoons has his assignment, to locate and eliminate all hidden strongpoints, and with this all members seem to be ready for the attack, a ready-or-not type readiness. However, the aggressive frontal assault is not launched just yet. Without an official order or instruction, there is consensus that the attack will not commence until the next morning. While this may be standard military procedure, or just common sense to begin a difficult and important task first thing in the morning, Malick makes a conscious decision to unfold these idle, calm-before-the-storm moments in great detail. For the rest of the day and a full night, the film "waits," passing the time and holding onto these death-free moments slipping through the waist of the hourglass, with the knowledge that these precious moments are pressing to a point in time after which nothing will be the same— a turning point, as we say, but not so much in the plot of the film as in the lives of its characters who represent, after all, real people many of whom perished in the battle of Guadalcanal. This deliberate act of narrative hesitation at the threshold of war involves a rich juxtaposition between the desperation of prayer to an unnamed deity and the glorified beauty of the Guadalcanal environs depicted during the cinematically "holy" periods of twilight and dawn. The sequence is constructed as follows (and in such a way that it can be easily overlooked if we're not careful, that is, if we're waiting for the war to start): 1. A slow panning shot from behind Staros standing alone in a field, surrounded by tall grass and a perimeter of trees. 2. A telephoto shot of a small distant island awash in a soft blue twilight glow. 3. A mountain backlit by the setting sun, gray-pink clouds dusting the peak. 4. Back to Staros, now shown from the front, as he scans the horizon, looking for danger or

beauty or both (he moves his head at about the pace of Malick's camera in shot #1). 5. Close-up of Staros praying intensely by candlelight in a space too dark to register onscreen (perhaps inside his tent, assuming he has a tent, but it may as well be a void). Staring intently into the flame he asks, "Are you here?", then pleads, "Let me not betray you; let me not betray my men. In you I place my trust." This prayer is intercut with close-ups of the candle's thin flame flickering in the wind or through Staros' whispery breath. 6. A calm river stretching towards a set of hills in the distance. 7. A cacophony of grey-pink clouds (appearing like a river of clouds after the previous shot) juxtaposed with Tall's voiceover describing them in the Greek words of Homer—which he translates into English for the sake of Staros to whom he is speaking—as "rosy-fingered dawn."

During this overnight waiting sequence, Staros and Tall, in their observations and contemplations of nature, be it through poetry or prayer, perceive nature as something innocent, beautiful, mysterious, inviting and completely non-threatening. This is perfectly "natural" because they have yet to be threatened; the plan is still perfect, etched in stone, and uncontaminated by contingency; the commanders have yet to err; not a single drop of blood has been shed (or wasted); and no lives lost. Furthermore, the film's own gaze, which up to this point prefers the poetry of the natural world, has yet to face the war at the heart of nature and bear witness to its many horrendous casualties. In the conclusion of his essay on landscape in film, Lefebvre turns to the concept of nature as territory, suggesting that "The definition [of territoriality] has the advantage of illustrating the 'possessive' character of territory which contrasts with the experience that one can make of space in terms of aesthetic contemplation."[34] Perhaps, then, this is the moment in the film where nature is not yet territorialized and, furthermore, where it is aesthetically perceived and contemplated with the poignant knowledge that nature, once fought over as property and bloodied with sacrifice, will no longer be present, not to mention beautiful, *in and of itself*. But at the same time such an experience of nature appears to result in little more than images *of* nature (rather than, say, nature in its own image), static compositions and postcard beautifications which conceal more than they reveal. For instance, they hide the fact that the point of view of the soldiers is missing from the tense pre-war wait. What are they doing? Are any of them admiring the beauty of their surroundings or gazing up into the heavens? Perhaps, but we have no way of knowing what the soldiers are thinking or doing in what will most likely be their last night on earth, and this is significant. The higher authorities who direct rather than fight the war can look at nature,

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[34] Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," in *Landscape and Film*, p. 53.

appropriate it for military or religious inspiration, whereas the soldiers, whether they view it this way or not, when it comes time to fight in the morning are *forced into nature*, so deep that the distance required to perceive and interpret it collapses. The static picturesque image of grassy hills dissolves or explodes into the experience of the setting's immanent liability and usefulness with respect to survival. The resistance imposed by the steep incline of the hills is menacing, yet the tall grass provides excellent, almost angelic camouflage; the invisibility of the pinnacle from which the Japanese rain down bullets is reminiscent of a volcanic eruption, however the ridge layers are so numerous that one is left unguarded by the Japanese, allowing the American soldiers to take cover and rest.

How else does the film understand what it means to experience nature *from inside* of nature, that is, framed by one's powerlessness and the sudden urgency of one's mortality? Consider a soldier during a fleeting reprieve in the battle for the hill—a soldier whom we haven't seen before and, as far as I recall, do not see again—watch him hiding below the tall grass, perhaps waiting for a signal, and spontaneously reach out towards a single leaf that, when touched by him, with surprising gentleness, folds up like a pair of butterfly wings cruelly pinned together by a drop of glue. It is tempting to read the human touch as poisonous here, or the worlds of nature and man to be fundamentally irreconcilable. But regardless of how we read it, the closure of the leaf seems to me a sign from nature, expressed in its own terms and in a language all its own. The moment echoes a scene after the battle where Witt pours some water over a large leaf only to find, to his surprise and presumably ours as well, that the water effortlessly slides down to the ground as if the leaf rejected the water on which its survival depends. At first glance this turns out to be another instance of nature recoiling from the human touch, but it is unlikely that the soldiers who experience nature up close and from within would describe it this way, or describe it *at all*. Witt is fascinated and delighted by a plant where the leaves let the water slide off its back, leaves no thicker than skin but just as protective. Of course, everything in nature is protected, wears a shield of sorts. Contra Freud, the only thing in nature which lives physically unprotected is what we call "mind." The mind's lack of concrete *skin* in its mechanisms of defense is unnatural and precarious, setting up the human condition's proximity to madness and possible descent if the mind becomes molded by the hands of trauma.

Soldiers with power are described as being *in* power, privileged and protected yet also isolated and hermetically ensconced in their position. In the film they are seen looking on

passively—and ironically quite powerlessly—through binoculars and communicating indirectly through telephone. The price of power is a loss of proximity: Tall and Quintard and the phantom admiral are distanced from exposure, directing the action from afar through vital degrees of separation, perhaps in a manner reminiscent of the film director. To be distanced from the film's site of exposure is to be distanced from the reality of death—the most difficult and elusive of all realities—and into a position of unknowing safety, despite the knowledge allegedly required to access such elite positions. (This position is also structurally similar to the one which we as viewers more or less find ourselves in regarding everything we see and hear.) Captain Staros, however, represents an interesting case in that he genuinely carries the burden of responsibility for the welfare of his men, carries it deep within his soul, as the previous scene suggests, and far away from the codes of morality, rendering his position in the chain of command more precarious— even torturous—than we might expect given his status. For he must witness head-on the very deaths he orders (on behalf of Tall) from just outside the reaches of death, just far enough back from the frontline where he is protected from the brunt of enemy fire. This strategically measured "arm's length" position exposes him less to the possibility of his own death than to the *responsibility* for the lives of others who, upon his command (albeit reluctant command), find themselves, in the words of Kaja Silverman who reads well the film's aesthetic endurances, "cast by an external force into the mouth of a death machine."[35] In this way, overexposed by death without being given the chance to face it, the soldiers are deprived of the very possibility of death, the Heideggerean being-towards-death, exemplified by Witt's existential aspiration, inspired by his mother's deathbed disposition, to be able to meet his fate when the time comes with a deep sense of calm, as soundly and consistently and reflectively as a lake on a windless day. (A practical philosophical definition of war might be the complete *disregard* of the mortal human clock which cannot be forced ahead without damaging the delicate mechanism of time.) In the world of this film, which is above all the world of war (no matter how beautiful the background), the more powerful someone is the less visible they are, the more isolated they become, visible only to themselves, and the more estranged they are from nature—from both the natural world and their own human nature. Those with power exceeding their measure "play roles they never conceived" (confessed by Tall via interior monologue). Humans have power over nature and nature has power

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[35] Kaja Silverman, "All Things Shining," in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), p. 327.

over humans—there is something almost symbiotic about this back-and-forth tugging of power at this vast scale—but in directing the war rather than fighting it, upper rung figures like Tall and to a lesser extent Staros are cut off from the *real* war, the war at the heart of nature, and suffer for it, paying the price of spiritual desolation (Tall) and spiritual desperation (Staros). The admiral is *so*

Figures 71 and 72. Minds outside the war at the heart of nature: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

completely removed from the film's sense of reality that he is not even represented as a human being at all. Mentioned only by title and described as rising up with the dawn, he emerges in our minds as some sort of godlike overseer for the Americans who might appear as tiny chess-size pieces that move within a finite range and smoothly according to plan, toy-like bodies toppling over or drained of battery power and then set aside for "the greater good." The price for such a high degree of alienation is bound to be total, and the irony here is that his power in the war makes him extraneous to the real war and irrelevant to the post-metaphysical stakes of *The Thin Red Line*, especially regarding life after the death of God and the question of whether such a person can harbor what Witt in voiceover calls the "one big soul that everyone is a part of." (I can imagine the admiral perched in a post with an ideal view of the "theater" of war, accompanied by an interior monologue opening with the obscene, vacuous and laughable remark "What a beautiful day for a battle…"—delivered with pride and marked by cold-hearted wit or a counterfeit romanticism, an act of showmanship coming from a spectator.)

But power is not only reserved for the incredibly powerful. Rather it is a fundamental feature of hierarchies that each rung on the chain of command, regardless of how low, is a separate microcosm with its own internal chain of command. And in the chaotic enterprise of war especially, links become severed and forged in the blink of an eye: when the powerful suddenly fall and the relatively powerless rise in a spontaneous burst of bravery, ignited by conscience or madness. According to Paul Virilio, a point which he stresses in his bold cross-examination of war and cinema, "[*T*]*he history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception*. In other words, war consists not so much in scoring territorial, economic or other

material victories as in appropriating the 'immateriality' of perceptual fields."[36] To this I would add that films about and of war, a distinction which I believe worth stressing, are capable not only of dramatizing such appropriations but undergoing the perceptual transformations which are, conceptually speaking, immaterial.

After a maelstrom of consternation and strenuous soul-searching over Colonel Tall's decision to launch a deadly frontal assault on the hill occupied by the Japanese, Charlie Company faces the long-awaited and spitefully dreaded moment of first blood—the living proof that the war, World War II as it is written in the headlines and history books, is *their* war, their *lived experience*. As the troops hesitantly ascend the first hill, lurching through the tall parched grass, Lieutenant Whyte (played by Jared Leto) abruptly signals for everyone in his command to lay low, transforming a hill swarmed with soldiers into an apparently vacant and untrodden landscape. Crouched beneath the grass in seamless camouflage, he impulsively orders two soldiers lying on the ground about ten yards ahead—on the very precipice of the frontline—to blow their cover, so to speak, and venture up the hill and into the unknown (like two space probes sent to explore a foreign and dangerous land, fated never to return, sacrificed for the sake of knowledge; or like two big toes dipped into freezing cold water so the body may gauge the threat of exposure and flee if need be). After exchanging glances of excruciating alarm, the chosen heed the command and begin their doomed ascent. Whyte, a soldier with relatively little or minor power in the grand scheme of the American side (not sufficiently powerful to be underexposed), now finds himself tucked behind the frontline, observing the outcome of his decision with unspeakable intensity and trepidation. And Staros, who finds himself stationed behind the entire battalion directing the attack on behalf of Tall (who is another full position behind), observes the suspenseful scene through binoculars, a device that indicates his inability, from *this* position, to see it with his own eyes. In this sense Staros sees it precisely as a "scene," the one we too are watching as nothing more than a scene; and for both him and us, to be able to monitor, alter focus, and even relish the dynamics of this unfolding horror has the consequence, it seems to me, of limiting any significant transgression of distance (physical and psychological) so well-maintained by the abstraction of sight from the body that bears it. (In this context, to see unseen is to dwell in the sterile world of the autonomous subject, inhabiting a condition of abstraction from the self.) However, such distances and schemes

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[36] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 7 (italics in original).

of surveillance are, like our technologies and systems of belief, never as full-proof as they seem, for the two soldiers dispatched by Whyte are suddenly shot and killed without warning. They are seen perishing from the point of view of Staros looking through these glasses, a view which becomes ours, and almost in that very same moment, as a reflex of his agitated and cumbersome humanity, he quickly removes them from his face in a gesture of disbelief that "the show" is happening and isn't just a movie or nightmare or practice drill—and we too may undergo a similar "reality check." Malick then returns to the close-up of Whyte who witnesses the whole incident, the first blow to bodies and morale, with his two naked eyes; he blinks, rather his eyes blink, and he shakes his head, rather his head shakes—he is like a turtle suddenly deprived of its shell, preferring to be helpless on its back than humiliatingly naked. He can barely sustain the triple impact of the sight of death, the closeness of his own death, and the responsibility he now bears for the two soldiers who died on a whim, his whim. Shocked, he drops his head, absorbing the event, and quickly tries to recompose himself.

With the stable, somewhat scripted viewing positions of Staros and Whyte instantly uprooted, shot through and shattered by the all-too-real sight of death, nature makes its first major appearance in the film, or rather the war, and dramatically influences the course of events.[37] A gust of wind (an evolved and exaggerated version of the background breeze from the Lumière's *A Baby's Dinner*) stirs the tall grass where the two bodies lay dead, and the clouds part releasing a wave of light over the entire area where the American soldiers have attempted to conceal themselves. Revealed indiscriminately by the light, this seemingly sinister interjection of nature affects all the soldiers equally and in one fell swoop, causing a literal explosion of violence and bloodshed from the opposing Japanese forces. It singlehandedly rips the links in the chain of command, exposing everyone to dwell on the same level of extreme vulnerability and mutual flame-fragile mortality. What begins as a sublime event or even a sign of grace or guardianship from above—light breaking through clouds and illuminating a grassy hill—*turns the soldiers in*, as it were, making them asymmetrically visible to the enemy. They are thrown out into the open where there is no longer any place to hide from death: a "thrownness" that repeats the pain and

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[37] The opening meditation on the war at the heart of nature and the previously discussed moment of the Melanesian villager crossing paths with the newly landed American soldiers—crossing the threshold of the representation—do not meet this particular condition of nature appearing in tandem with death. For all their significance the weight these scenes carry is fleeting, out of reach, almost dreamlike, as if the film could simply wake up from them and resume its normal life.

price of being born, an "openness" where human beings are exposed as the mortal creatures they are (dangerous above all to themselves) and measured insignificant in the light of an unfathomable whole (the truth of our fate on this earth, this "rock" as Welsh calls it). The dark side of this light from above, streaming down all golden, exudes heavenly pathos *and* hellish malevolence. One may be tempted to say that Good and Evil are at war and that this war is the very heart of nature whose blood courses through all living beings, but it is not clear which is which, not clear there is a non-interchangeable "either/or" to be had. The light redeems and condemns *simultaneously*—a paradox which blooms into the contingency of nature that gives even godlessness a face, a tear, and a laugh. Nature is that which is out in the open, and although there is no shortage of places to hide in nature (strategy) and ways of blending into the natural environment (camouflage), a war fought *in* nature is fought *on* the earth and *beneath* the sky, where humans and animals and insects dwell. Good and Evil, God and Devil, Heaven and Hell, what great and powerful analogies for the remoteness of Earth and Sky and the predicament of being stranded in between, incurably as Samuel Beckett reminds us, for some the panic of being free and for others the melancholy of being forsaken.[38]

Figures 73 and 74. Nature's interjection: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

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[38] In Beckett's *Endgame*, the character of Hamm spews the following in a fit of rage, having grown frustrated and impatient with his own storytelling antics and suddenly recognizing the delusional human impulse towards distraction: "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" Samuel Beckett, *Endgame and Act Without Words* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 53.

Figure 75. Redeemed and condemned by the sun: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

After Staros bears witness to numerous casualties in his command, Tall orders yet another dangerous frontal attack from far behind the frontlines, so far behind in fact that he is forced to stare through a long pair of binoculars and rely on radio updates just to keep up with what's going on, not to mention who's dying and how (such details are beyond his *professional* comprehension). Over the phone Staros maintains that his men "cannot take such a position," describing it as "suicidal," and refuses to obey Tall's order despite his aggressive adamancy. Staros witnessed many soldiers perish in the first attack, including one of the youngest (no more than a child, as he exclaims to himself in voiceover), and he is not about to betray his men a second time. Refusing to rescind his order, Tall ferociously and contemptuously declares that he will make his way to where Staros is hiding, behind a ridge with what's left of the company, including his intention to take into account any "extenuating circumstances" which he might not have been able to perceive from his insular perch of power behind the line. What interests me here is Tall's solitary walk towards the frontline and how Malick chooses to depict this movement as a stream of consciousness babbling beneath the surface of willful urgency, upward and onward like a tank. The *sheer fact* that Malick and his cinematographer attend to this seemingly trivial action is also significant. Tall and another sidekick soldier are filmed from behind, walking through clouds of smoke issuing from the aftermath of the horrendous battle we have just witnessed. The fresh aftermath, which ought to supply plenty of immediate evidence of the bloody consequences of Tall's merciless military strategy, is almost completely obscured by the smoke, which also obscures his vision as he wades through the wreckage. In vain Tall glances about the white abyss, turning around twice as he walks while moving forward heedlessly, as if he had no need to see to make his way through charred remains. The veiled battlefield with its black blood and guts is a harsh product, a kind of personal aftermath, of his need to see clearly and completely through thick

pieces of glass in order to direct the battle from behind—a process which ends up almost detaching the object of his gaze from his gaze and into "mere objects," virtually unseen. For good measure we hear him say in somber voiceover: "Shut up in a tomb. Can't lift the lid." Sauntering quite casually through the smoke, knowing that nothing will touch him and, as the price for such privileged protection, not being able to touch anything around him, this metaphor of feeling shut in a tomb is indeed quite apt. Tall's passage through the smoke is vividly echoed later on, in a frightening scene leading up to the film's second battle sequence where Charlie Company moves through a thick cloud of fog in the jungle towards the Japanese camp. In this context, however, their inability to see transforms the fog-eclipsed jungle into a monstrous personification of the enemy as bullets emerge from beyond like invincible teeth.

Upon arriving at the frontline to reprimand Staros, Tall embodies a metallic skin-thickness befitting his underexposure to the chaotic climate of war and its random showering of death from above. A shell explodes mere yards from the position of the remaining soldiers, causing everyone including Staros to cower in fear, all except Tall who doesn't so much as flinch. I could accept his refusal to respond to the violent threat as an old school tactic to secure or polish his authority, demonstrating his immaculate courage and sending a message to the soldiers that fear is a counterproductive and debilitating decision. Nevertheless, I find it quite striking, and in a way vexing or frightening, that he is so completely physically unaffected by this brush with death, as if his being is incapable of responding to danger—lacks this all-too-human response—perhaps because, at least on the surface of his character, he is the image of single-minded purpose oblivious to everything else, or because, beneath that surface, he has not been seriously exposed to danger (this being his "first war," as he says), and thus lacks an intimacy with the vulnerability of his own body, which is, after all, whether he likes it or not, the foundation of the mortality of his being. Tall's fearlessness may also have its source in the weakness of an ignorance pointed out by Staros: not knowing what it's like to have someone die in your arms. And without any battle scars or traumatic wounds to his credit, Tall may stand as tall and unflappable as his name suggests. When he does, resting after the second battle, finally "open his eyes," appearing to awaken to the consequences of his actions in the war—the existential poison that is war—it is almost too late, seeing nothing but the tagged bodies of American soldiers and the few remaining undestroyed objects in the Japanese camp before a wave of emotion almost overtakes him. Holding back this unprecedented leak of feeling at the last second, he becomes his own gravedigger, the one who

holds down the lid from inside his spirit tomb. For Tall, distances are configured to be self-deceiving, the path to clarity is opposed by intimacy (a sense of faith he squandered long ago: "All I might have given for love's sake…"), and power is all but blinding. In conversation with Staros, lecturing him on the folly of military softheartedness, Tall carries himself to the conviction that nature is at bottom "cruel," rationalizing war as an extension of this ontological cruelty. And on this note, we are reminded of his voiceover confession presented when we first encounter him on the brig prior to the battle, where he reveals something about himself which he will conceal from all his professional interactions and perhaps, given the metaphysical soul-dimension of the film's voiceovers, from himself as well: that this cruelty of nature has leached into the deep marrow of his soul, that he is, in fact, "dying slow as a tree." As an officer he may stand tall, but as a human being he won't/can't rise above his deep-seated disillusionment stemming from the soul-crushing death-machine of war's politics—the brain as opposed to the mouth of war.

In war "the frontline" is where the opposing sides meet for the first time and for the last time. The soldiers constituting and negotiating this line face each other, facing what philosophy calls "the other." The bitter irony of hands outstretched unto strangers is that here they go for the throat when they're not holding guns and grenades. There seems to me no better dramatization of the horrors of otherness than that of the figure of the enemy. The enemy is the other whose otherness is used to identify him *as* the enemy, is therefore held against him, serving not only as the motivation but the very principle used to destroy him. Perhaps this tragic experience of alterity is more characteristic of face-to-face military encounters, whereas with developments in artillery and especially the advent of guns, the otherness of the enemy retains a degree of inscrutable mystery, the long-range weapon not only extending the face but erasing it, creating separations and comfort zones of annihilation too mutually alienating for a face-to-face encounter to obtain. Lacking a face to see or speak to, the enemy-other assumes an almost mythical monstrousness or uncanny ghostliness in the minds of the soldiers, which is why a soldier may be killed even if he surrenders unconditionally, waving his humanity like a flag for all to see—albeit regrettably illegible from the great distances of the gun, or altogether invisible and abstract from the bomb and its top-secret space of detonation.

Fighting to kill, both the Americans and the Japanese are past the point of no return. Borders are in motion. There is no time or space left for negotiations; kill or be killed, the law of the jungle, becomes the human law once again. In addition to acting as a place or site from which

the call of the other can be heard, I have also suggested that the frontline is where nature makes metaphysical appearances irreducible to conventions of poetic beauty and indifference towards the affairs of the Anthropocene. If the powerful are blind to these appearances, if only because they are nowhere near them, then logically the criterion for their emergence is *powerlessness*, specifically over one's fate. Most of the shots of nature in *The Thin Red Line* are quite fittingly taken near, from, or slightly past this precarious albeit fictional and negotiable "line," a moving border to be more exact. And I believe this explains why the great majority of these images are not wide-angle landscapes but close-ups (of trees, leaves, grass, birds, insects, light, etc.)—fleeting, jagged, out of place or placeless.[39] In the wake of battle where survivors discover that they have become murderers and the moving lines come to a standstill and act as a shroud, the human other on the other side and the otherness of nature abounding everywhere exchange a faint secret of a perhaps ancient compatibility, crystallizing at last in a visual epiphany, what Robert Silberman calls the film's "moral climax."[40] A dead Japanese soldier, half-buried in the dark, dry, bombed-out ground, buried by the cold-hot chaos hands of artillery, his face perfectly flush with the surface of the earth, staring back at us with the peacefulness of a plant, as if putting a face on nature itself as that which binds all living beings. Witt, one of the AWOL soldiers sensitive to even the most discordant patterns of life, stands above the face as if paying his respects to the deceased in an open casket, gazes down stiffly and intently, calmly and with extreme concentration. For such a contemplative soul susceptible to poignant bouts of wonder and reverie, this earth-face of the enemy is the longest he looks at anything (except the Japanese soldier pleading with him to surrender at gunpoint after the film's third and final fighting scene, though perhaps the length of Witt's stare here is turned—or overturned—completely inward by the dawning of his own immanent death). In any case this image, which I am calling the earth-face of the other, *feels like* the longest shot of "nature" in the film, without a doubt the heaviest and most complex. The smoke from battle and trees ablaze, the same smoke that before obscured Tall's perception of the

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[39] The paradisiacal vision with the two AWOL American soldiers participating in the natural ways of the Melanesians contains, by contrast, not a single shot of nature, for the idea is that they are living amongst those who are at one with nature, who still live there, and can now remember how great it used to be. The reality of this fantasy of "being at one" constitutes a kind of collective nostalgia for the lost childhood of the West *in the East*, as it were, and in Malick's arguably naïve imagination its recovery appears to have no obstacles or side effects whatsoever, either of a practical or moral nature.

[40] Robert Silberman, "Terrence Malick, Landscape and 'This War at the Heart of Nature'," in *The Cinema of Terrence Malick*, p. 167

battlefield, wafts in and out in spurts, concealing and revealing the face by turns—a moving expression of the young Japanese soldier's half-shut or vaguely open eyes. Not an image of the natural world nor a close-up of a dead person's face, this sublime and dreamlike aberration combines both in a deeply haunting and profound, puzzling way. It's as if the figures of "nonhuman nature" and "human nature" were two rivers flowing in opposite directions on a collision course— received at the last second by the film image into which both empty and become one. I'm inclined to say that this image enacts the "discordia concors" of metaphysical poetry, a concept which bears upon the partial undoing and re-braiding of the military's chain of command and, in the bigger picture of the film as a whole, philosophy's Great Chain of Being without beginning or end. When Malick follows this image with a stark low-angle close-up of Witt's probing gaze, looking like he is trying to peer beneath the stony lids of the soldier's infinitely inward eyes, we can comprehend if not share his paralyzing obsession with the face and the futility of turning away satisfied with having properly seen it. I think many of us viewers (and Witt, too, is a viewer with aesthetic consciousness) find ourselves staring just as hard, restlessly, and inconclusively. The Japanese soldier's earth-face is hard "to see" as in hard "to accept," let alone to decipher a viable meaning from it—the difficulty of seeing matched by the impossibility of not being able to look away.

Figures 76 and 77. Witt studies the earth-face of the other: *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, USA, 1998).

This is what we and Witt see and can't see, but since seeing may point to the world without describing anything beyond the surface, and act as a stabilizing or securing of subject-object relations casting shadows over the other senses, let us shift sensorial registers and ask what all of us can *hear* here. Of equal importance and perhaps the more challenging in significance is the emergence of voiceover at this profuse juncture, adding additional layers to an already overburdened image. This voice without body, like Witt's body without voice and the Japanese soldier's "face without face," injects another gaze—not so much from the offscreen as, let's say, from "inscreen"—a "soul-gaze" with provisional ties to the metaphysical interiors of the two present figures: the dead yet spirited soldier from beyond the world and Witt, still alive in this world, standing over the edge of an abyss, gazing into the limits of the world as described and delimited by language. Now if we listen carefully to the voice without ascribing it solely to what we see, we will "see" that it does not belong to either face (the soldier's spirit interrupted or Witt's awe of conscience) but rather to Staros' questioning mode of prayer—Staros the softhearted captain who arguably has the hardest time coping with the war, crumbling under the weight of lives lost for the greater good of victory, so much so that he accepts his irrational dismissal from Tall as the only safe road back to civilized justice. As a spiritual surrogate for the dead solider he pours out judgment day type questions overtop—on the behalf—of the stoic earth-face image: "Are you righteous? Kind? Does your confidence lie in this?" With this voiceover Malick singles Staros out, calls upon him, summons him from a literal army of ambitious voice poets throughout the film whose medium is the excruciating silence of the living and the dead intertwined. The absolute silence of the dead and the living's thinking of the dead—the dead's silencing of the clamor of the living—manifest as the language and timbre of Staros as its ghostly representative, as if only a man banished from the war on the grounds that "nature is cruel" is eligible to pronounce judgment on human nature's share in that cruelty. And as for Witt's role in all of this, since he is the only one in this image-braid who lives and breathes yet cannot speak, perhaps Staros who serves as the ghostly representative of the earth-face can be read as demonstrating Witt's grand metaphysical hypothesis of humanity's "one big soul," at a time when that hypothesis is confronted with its greatest test: the enemy, the dead, the disappearance of the (potentially divine) spark. But there may be a way to pass this hard test, for the barriers riddling this scene have become passageways. Because the enemy *and* death are no longer a threat, the earth-face represents a return to the earth where man and nature are perceived as having a family resemblance, whereas a burial

beneath the earth in a box keeps man tied to the soul of *his* as opposed to *all* people… Normally Witt is more than capable of thinking about what he experiences and expressing himself in philosophical poetry, and throughout the film his character is quick to find patterns of meaning within all manner of diversity and discord—but now he appears too overwhelmed by the harsh realization that the Tower of Babel is home only to the graveyard. Like a baobab devil tree, the vision of a common unilingual humanity retreats below/into the earth where, as another voice puts it over an earlier image of a dying bird, "Death's got the final word, it's laughing at him."

Staros' voiceover inflecting the earth-face, filling the gap or perhaps diffusing the tension between Witt's reflective face and the dead soldier's recalcitrant facelessness and unbridled return to nature, ends with the poignant, burdensome and reluctantly rhetorical question: "Do you imagine your sufferings will be less because you loved goodness? Truth?" The object of his address here (and it's doubtful there's only *one* at stake) is fraught with much ambiguity, for this "you" and its unrequited love of the truth seems to perfectly fit the film's tragic search for beauty in terror, order in chaos, peace in war. But even if we were to restrict our focus to this scene alone, both Staros and Witt in their "unconditional love" are strong candidates for *receiving* rather than posing such a question. The skeptical on-the-fence nihilism of Sgt. Welsh, who asks Witt in person "What difference do you think you can make, one single man in all this madness?", could be aimed squarely at the logic of these two men and their thought process as nothing more than mere wish-fulfillment, for example on the point that the good life entitles one to positive compensations or in the very least the absence of punishment. So I want to consider the possibility, however farfetched, that the dead soldier, who suffers no more, may be the only one in a position to *truly* ask this rhetorical question about the potentially self-serving nature of the good life, and that the Staros-Witt amalgam *knows this*. In representing their human fate that only fortune can keep death at bay and that goodness will always be an uphill battle against a world of wildly uneven terrain, the dead soldier—(non)human, ghostlike, not of this world—becomes in this respect a representative of (transcendental) justice granted to the victims of injustice; for to kill another human being, as everybody knows, even when on the defense, is to break the social contract at every joint even if the motivation and ultimate goal is to protect one's country and idea of humanity. Another possibility which strikes me as pressing is that Staros, in asking these questions, manifests the skeptical side or undercurrent of Witt's fervent romanticism: the counter-voice that Witt might hear as his own quiet yet irrepressible self-questioning—perhaps a processing of Welsh's voice

and the secret magnetizing the animosity of their intellectual friendship. While engrossed in the bottomless, vertiginous, inscrutable depths of nature, the other, and death—the three faces of the earth-face—Witt's face is thus exposed into a blank page of consciousness capable, at last, of experiencing "nature" uncolored by beliefs about its undividedness or gracefulness or deification, an experience in full color which returns his head from the smooth ivory clouds of ideas and back to the earth where, as expressed in the film's final line of voiceover (again not Witt's voice), "all things shine."

The whole film up to this point (roughly the halfway point) has been pressing towards this moment where Witt (the human open to otherness) encounters the "absolutely other" (the dead enemy soldier) in the form of nature (the life of death), now visible now invisible through the smoky waves of vicious combat—a metaphor, perhaps, for the porous barriers of consciousness and the staggered stress of skepticism. On top of the hill, under the sky and in the broad afternoon light, in the naked aftermath of war and on the other side of the frontline, Witt throws himself into his attentive gaze with the entirety of his consciousness, without blinking, completely exposed to the paradox of the death of life (the soldier's muddy death mask) and the life of death (nature's stewing persistence thanks to death). He stares as if into a deep dark well, straight through his imaginary reflection, and if we go with him we are reminded of the film's staring opening image of a crocodile dropping down into a murky swamp, shutting one of its eyes just before it touches the water. This memorable or haunting opening scene is followed by the film's first of many unanswered and unanswerable questions stated in voiceover, *the* metaphysical question as far as Malick and myself are concerned: "What's this war at the heart of nature?" What this war "is" has quite a lot to do with *where* it is, and location is never just a simple matter of geography or psycho-geography. The heart of nature beats at the crossroads of human nature and the natural world, and since it is human nature to take dominion over the natural world (the crocodile, possibly the very same one, is later captured by the American soldiers), the war is at the heart of what it is to be human—and our blood is part poison. Nature is located—sited—at the line separating self and other, life and death, humanity and animality… where it blurs the line. Such lines disappear the moment they are crossed, and I would like to conclude by stating that to live as a human being— one foot in nature and the other in culture, so to speak—is precisely to cross them (out). Fundamentally thin, lines are the work of willful hands, the index finger of the mind, better known as the tongue: drawn in the sand and erased by the waves.

Throughout this part-theoretical and part-interpretive investigation into the concept of nature as a primary figure for the return of metaphysics (on what I have been calling the "physical" terms of film), film narratives like *The Thin Red Line* represent nature by way of its presence, entering its often dormant and indifferent landscape and inviting its eventhood as an intrusion from the outside, overexposing characters whose existence is less protected or more proximal, and shifting from something with no discernible meaning to something which is oversaturated with meaning, or at least potential meaning, thus remaining ambiguous. Film moments which deliberately yet spontaneously digress from the narrative to nature induce a variety of mental and emotional states in both characters and spectators: contemplation, ease, confusion, paralysis, mindfulness/absent-mindedness, etc. My analysis of the opening section of *The Thin Red Line* interprets the frontlines of war as constituting the closest point to the alterity of both enemy and death, revealing to the soldiers the mystery of nature, not as landscape but as lifeforce. The immanence of death reveals to the soldiers the multifaceted, proximal, ineffable, and enchanted/disenchanted state of nature, and suggests that if nature is coming to presence in some sense as "alive" it does so only on the condition that in this world at least "God is dead"—indeed this is what makes nature come out of its hiding and appear wild and free, or as Nietzsche might say, beyond good and evil. In the thoughts of the soldiers there is no certainty in terms of knowledge or faith as to whether the "book of nature" is written by a high/low/bright/dark force who will disclose itself to them in their time of desperation and despair. (If nature is written, it must be read, first, *as* written, and, second, as written for *you*.) When the world in its own image takes the form of the unity of nature and when the world in our image takes the form of the chaos of war, it is the former which attains clarity in the context of the latter and death which sheds the brightest light on life, a phenomenon which I take to be exemplary of this new metaphysics.

While my analysis of the war genre is focussed entirely through a single and rather unconventional example, I believe there are grounds for a significant link between the war genre as exemplified by *The Thin Red Line*—that is, by wars fought in nature, call them war zone films— and the logic of the new metaphysics. I will conclude with some preliminary remarks on this subject: War films set in "zones" are able to allegorize nature's radical indifference to human politics metonymically and through the simplest of means (i.e., a character gazes at nature, the film cuts away to nature, nature looks on from above or behind, offscreen or in the background). The narratives of these films also tend to be porous or broken or breakable, opening onto the

ontology of the medium, primarily because the precarity of life places a value on death in terms of transformation and collectivization rather than the cessation of the self and its epic disillusionment. World-as-zone and man-as-mortal face off, sparking the question of how to live in a world where the old metaphysical questions go immediately unanswered, and where this absence of an answer is also the best possible answer. Here, metaphysical speculation is automatic or somatic; epiphanies are inescapable and often traumatic rather than, say, leisurely earned through education; and the threshold of death, while unbearably painful, also brings peace—the peace of becoming one with nature rather than returning to it, for it is the friend who bonds with imperfect life while the stranger must wait, perhaps forever, for admittance into paradise. The age-old search for meaning or meaninglessness in the face of chaos appears as an attempt at ordering, which exposes the principle of narrative artifice as its own metaphysical drive towards systematizing existence. The result is that worldviews are at odds with the world in its own image, with the latter being that which endures the battle of worldviews better than history—nature.

Conclusion (in three movements)

Temptation of Truth… Metaphysics of Youth… Apocryphal Tears in **The Turin Horse**

> What sensation lies behind "true"?
> — Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*
>
> The world filmed is all profane, all outside.
> — Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*
>
> And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.
> — Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Any representation whose coming into being travels, automatically, through presence—photography and camera-based imagery being two of the more perceptually seamless, ubiquitous and rhetorically powerful examples—places the problematically puritanical yet nonetheless persistent myth of absolute objectivity or truth in ivory-tower, perhaps ironclad parentheses. Emerging at the threshold of the 20th century's labyrinth of ideas, a century fraught with unprecedented clashes of intellectual didacticism and moral relativism, the photographic and cinematic in all their forms are also noteworthy insofar as they carry the potential to come to presence in human consciousness as a soothing reprieve—for select representatives of theory, practice and spectatorship—from the chaotic clamor of competing paradigms and ideologies, of various intellectual movements vying for legitimation and in some cases cultural supremacy. This is especially the case when photographic/cinematic representations, or any representation modelled after psychological principles of exteriority, are seen as possible revelations of a "mind independent world" or "non-propositional truth," one whose ambiguity or contingency resists co-opting (whether this resistance manages to ward us off is another matter), and when those revelations organized into a whole as a vision or worldview are accepted as the bearers or vehicles of artistic values activated beyond the threshold of what we can normally perceive in our everyday environment. In this sense, the camera, being the primary and democratized tool for exposing the exterior limit of the world, is like the glasses of the mind, illuminating the blind spots of our

consciousness and rendering acute what Walter Benjamin called "the optical unconscious."[1] Since the beginnings of photography and again with its evolution into cinema and beyond, image theorists and philosophers of art have flocked to worship, destroy and debate the apparent "truth value" of these particular images. Cinematic representations in particular have been championed for their robust veracity, immersiveness, fleshy corporeality, dreams of totality, etc., striking even the most incredulous minds—after which reason or skepticism takes over—with the privileged capacity to show an aspect of "the world itself"; championed for moving an image of the world precisely by being moved, occupied or possessed—with all the techno-faculties available to it— by the very world it images, and coming into being as witness to another world, more present, more homelike… At least this line of thought about representation represents what we—some of us, some part of us—are *tempted* to say. Now the temptation may lead into falsehood, and if it does we are better able to ask: what is the truth *of* the falsehood? What does the idea of truth stir inside us when it seems to be at last within reach?

The psychologically spellbound leap (and others like it)—leaping upon widely spread stones of grammar and risking the plunge into reverence or even worship—gets a strong foothold, I suggest, because cinematic representation in particular, via the concept of representation in general, casts the concept of truth and everything we know about its metaphysical indeterminacy, historical contingency, and pragmatic utility, *in terms of representation alone*, that is, as a perceptually accurate and mechanically generated correspondence or likeness, one that is also existentially determined (the photographic index) or appears to be so determined (the digital simulacrum). However, it does so in such a way that the sheer verisimilar vividness of the space-time transparency in front of us betrays its own structural or referential rhetoric, ultimately *casting away* the problem of truth by transforming "truth-as-problem" into "truth-as-picture." This implies, amongst other things, that truth is being understood or intuited via experience as simultaneously pictorial *and* propositional—superficial and metaphysical, instantaneous yet utterly ephemeral. But more importantly, these ontological conditions allow the medium of the moving image to act as a hinge between the correspondence theory of truth and the ancient Greek theory of truth as unconcealedness known as *aletheia*. Because for the latter, truth is not a theory

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[1] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Rodney Livingstone, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 37.

but an event, an experience, and it is through the mode of event/experience that the moving image sets up our relationship to truth—representing a presence or series of presences, amounting in some cases to a palpable atmosphere, whose radiant self-manifestation has fizzled out and darkened within a consciousness determined by none other than the order of representation. The somewhat ironic conclusion here is that the representational configuration of modern consciousness forces us to find and feast on presence *within* the order of representation, albeit an order "disordered" by the sheer weight and consistency of presence itself. It's as if the two representational structures, human and mechanical, cancel each other out when put into dialogue; and I have wagered that we will derive the most satisfaction or "attunement" from those mechanical representations which emphasize presence despite absence and invite our proximity despite mediation. Within the context of the disordered order of cinematic representation, in other words a permeable and open-ended order, the appearance of presence is the resonant figure and perhaps also the last vestige of Being, for ours is a disenchanted age which heeds the call of Being by grasping it as an object.

What I find to be of equal interest in this paradoxical logic (logically nonsensical, if you will) is that it gives voice to a *temptation for truth* that is rarely if ever audible within philosophical systems engineered for the verifications and falsifications of truth claims, for example the scientific priorities and logical practices of the analytical tradition of philosophy. Logic, for all its rigorous fortitude, intellectual hygiene, and bold commitment to a science of thought, can yield results—undoubtedly *good* results, sometimes of foundational or axiomatic integrity—but which may not be adequate or relatable to the imaginative, affective and oftentimes contradictory depths of human psychology and its multiplicity of moods. For these results (especially those of analytic philosophy and, more recently, ordinary language philosophy) often point to and in some cases are even based upon discoveries and reminders of the limitations in our thinking called "finitude," which must—logically, I suppose—forgo the temptations inherent in those limitations, temptations vital in reaching a place where limits can be meaningfully drawn and redrawn. Many truths of analytical philosophy are precisely—I do not say merely—critiques of truth claims, *exposures* of the figments or fictions of metaphysics, of its strivings; yet in exposing the problems of philosophy to be the symptoms of nonsense (routine misunderstandings of the workings of our language), the temptation of truth is written out of the nature of truth whose roots in the human condition are as

tragic as they are philosophic.[2] For "truth"—the kind which leads to temptation—has always been that which humans want yet cannot have, need but cannot always will, because, despite the many facts for which it would be unreasonable to doubt, we place truth beyond our reach as an unattainable absolute, beholden to the criteria of perpetual search and suffering, at the tail-end of a painful and endless (i.e. circular) struggle for certainty known as skepticism (a struggle pursued to its depths and thoroughly mapped out or "psychoanalyzed" by Stanley Cavell in his epic philosophical work *The Claim of Reason*).[3] And no matter how many times the difference is observed between what is desired and what is ultimately achieved, it is human nature not to settle (to remain restless) and take the path of wanting, even if it is known in advance that truth is not waiting at the end of any endeavor or hardship except possibly in the form of peace and the continuous linking of days over time. So to return to the temptation for truth stirred by cinema and the cinematic metaphysicians who give into it (perhaps as an outlandish way of reversing the fall from grace, as suggested in Chapter 4), it is to some extent natural to *want* to say that cinematic representation "resembles reality uncannily" or "transfers the world metaphysically" or "presents us with the things themselves that we so often mistake as possessions" or "restores the necessary innocence of consciousness needed to see the light even if only for a fraction of a second"—even though we "know" (because this is what both philosophic and everyday experience has taught us) that we cannot rationally hold such beliefs short of trusting the old adage "seeing is believing" and thus prioritizing a rapt, uncriticized belief within our ripened sense of practical reason. And yet this sound-fitting belief is not so easily quelled through reason, for it comes not only from our own eyes but also from our knowledge about the camera's eye (non-knowledge), and it also meets a real need—which is what?

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[2] The human preoccupation with truth is also, according to Justin E. H. Smith, fundamentally *historical* or perhaps *psycho-historical*. In his fascinating study of the philosopher as type, i.e. the various methods, mandates, attitudes, guises and moods of the philosopher throughout the long and by no means linear history of philosophy (*as* a discipline and *prior to* its clear emergence as an autonomous field of knowledge), Smith begins with a figure called "the Curiosa" whose interest in what he calls "singular things and timeless truths" is closely related to the ivory purposes and passions—however well-justified and tempered they may be—of contemporary metaphysicians working within or outside of philosophy, on behalf of the aims of science or religion, or as is the case here, in between philosophy and film theory. See Chapter 1 in Justin E. H. Smith, *The Philosopher: A History in Six Types* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 21-53.

[3] See especially Part 4 of Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 327-496.

I have tried to show why we might want to say this of cinema (for example, that its realism is absolute, hence unprecedented), and that when we do feel so tempted it is because philosophy has wreaked havoc with a belief it cannot fully or properly overcome. The "strong" philosopher will always perform critical diagnostics above all on himself, and the struggle for authenticity since time immemorial is to live up to what has been learned to be true so that when knowledge is forgotten one will still be in the know. But our appetite for truth seems to be greater than our knowledge that it is falsifiable, potentially misleading, or sometimes just merely hopeful, and this is the reason why indulgences are ultimately *disappointing*—like most objects of desire which fall short of our desires in the end or are a poor match for them. If we do manage to gain some sense of satisfaction, it is bound to wear off in time like a quick fix for a nasty addiction. As Nietzsche points out in his parable of the madman, the death of God—i.e. our deliberate yet premature destruction of truth—falls on deaf ears; the most important and life-affirming news in the world is simply too shocking and awful for humans to bear. Many of us will go on living as if nothing happened or, like the atheists in the parable, not being able to practice (live) what is preached (known). The old temptation towards metaphysical thinking and truth-seeking is philosophically reawakened and gratified by the moving image, a "cine-metaphysics"; and if the 20th century saw an overcoming of metaphysics on logical grounds and through ascetic discipline that is no stranger to repression, then the ontology of film stands as a reminder—a haunting—that metaphysics is *always* to be overcome, always *to be*, and perhaps forever *alive* in our condition as human.

What I am calling the temptation of truth drives not only the motive towards metaphysics but is also inextricably tied to what Benjamin calls "the metaphysics of youth."[4] Temptations are at their strongest when they are still unconscious, and who would deny that there is not something profoundly unconscious and dreamlike about the experiential intensities of adolescent youth which are indebted, not without irony, precisely to the *lack* of experience? The great metaphysical "reach for the stars" pomp and zeal would get nowhere without the energized folly of youth, and perhaps the most curious and expansive reaches secretly covet the golden star of childhood—a planet in which all things radiate truth, dry land and the waters not quite separate yet. It seems pertinent by way of concluding to briefly call upon an early, exploratory and unstable period in my thinking

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[4] See Benjamin, "The Metaphysics of Youth," in *Selected Writings* Volume 1, 1913-1926, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 6-17.

and writing about film, a time when a premature and overzealous atheism found compensation or solace in a sober cinephilia. In retrospect it shared something of the theological inflections and materialist teleologies of Siegfried Kracauer's notion of "the redemption of physical reality" as developed in his *Theory of Film* and André Bazin's "myth of total cinema" as theorized in his essay of the same name. Outgrowing this memorable phase has come with a price, harsh but fair, for in exchange for my wits and a slowly realized appreciation of Christian Metz's "methodological lovelessness" for the sake of film theory,[5] I have not quite been able to recapture the high personal stakes and breathless spirit of adventure in my academic adulthood.

This journey into the past can be traced through three pieces of writing from my formative years, starting with the end of my undergraduate study and ending around the beginning of my Masters (with a one-year hiatus in between the two degrees), a period where my relationship to film flirted with the numinous and acts of criticism became threatened on all sides by nonsense, solipsism, and the gravitation towards poetry. Call this period "premature" if you must, yet without it there is no path towards the fruits of maturation. Here my interest in thinking and writing seriously about film was spurred by the power of certain films (and certain directors I overly admired, that is, unjustly isolated, simplified) to explore the medium's own revelatory powers via an uncanny ontology of world-dependence—the form and feeling and metaphysical stylings of "worldhood." After watching these films in a certain way, let's call it a philosophical way, I repeatedly found myself pleasantly yet restlessly confounded for reasons I could not quite ascertain nor articulate. But this stupor of restless speechlessness before the aesthetic form and feeling of the world onscreen made the experience positive or pregnant, in other words far from silent. I was imbricated within and hostage to a language eager to span the distance between word and image, a language calibrated to its limits so as to make transgression virtually inescapable, a language developed in response to a medium so different from it, a medium which could communicate by showing exactly what it thought, as if bypassing the mediations and reductions of language and its condemnation to acts of telling. I vividly recall the urgent yet unnatural movement from the experience of film to the experience of writing about film to be that of a heated tug-of-war, fraught with the wretched strain of compromise until one side let go; and without fail the loser of this

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[5] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 15 and pp. 79-80.

struggle would be the very film I was trying to write about. As a result, this tendency to protect the experience of film and the epiphanies I felt I had in my possession caused me to push and pull at the limits of language. Philosophical ideas about the world, which I did not realize were metaphysical and sometimes spiritual in nature, gained a foothold in films which seemed to be doing this philosophy or materializing it—albeit in a manner that I refused to describe as logical or even intentional—using fundamental life-processes, harnessing them like a wind farm rather than intending them like an artform. It was as if the medium of film itself could realize thought through things, and in such a way that it seemed to me somehow plausible that the things themselves could think or were themselves the very thoughts that compelled me to track down truth far outside the linguistic proposition. Of course, this is before I learned and took to heart the insistence of philosophers that truth is fundamentally propositional, a matter of meaning as opposed to conditions of possibility which are ultimately un-representable, but I still want to say that this is only one way of approaching what we call "truth." Another way is by being deeply affected by aesthetic experience, by the excitement and swooning of the senses, by notions in a molten state of infancy—by what I referred to in Chapter 1 as the work of art's ontological breakthrough.

I will proceed with this piece of intellectual autobiography by offering a broad-stroke summary of the three writing projects to which, perhaps, I will one day return and save from that part of me who now knows all too well what he is saying. Overwhelmed by the beauty of the natural world in *Days of Heaven* (Malick, USA, 1978), a beauty casually imbricated into the lives of the characters and which often completely overwhelms or at least brackets the narrative events, I feel as though I have been invited to directly experience the "dramaturgy of Nature" that Bazin suggested grounds the ontology of film. In bringing various images of indifferent nature from the film into words, images which deviate from the narrative and expand it into a more metaphysical space, my strange goal is to find "verbal equivalents" for these outstanding and ultimately excessive images in order to avoid the reductive hooks of hermeneutics. A copy of Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation* remains within reach, with her plea for an erotics of art in place of a hermeneutics that fills me with wonder.[6] I set myself what I believe to be the simple yet seemingly impossible task of using language as a mirror for images which mirror the world in terms of the

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[6] Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), p. 14.

displaced presence of the world. My experimental hypothesis is that cinematic representation activates the participation of presence, and when such presence is animated by nature in the grip of culture, these terms of presence, as it were, become measurable by the camera and describable (at the time I might have devised words like "conjurable" or "summonable") through language. To describe these images in this way is also to think through the filmmaker's thoughtlessness and clearing away of narrative organization and thematic specification. The results, as I look back, are a peculiar hybrid of poetic description and philosophical speculation.[7] In describing images for which words are typically lacking, or in describing them in such a way as to prevent the words from reducing them to signs or segments in a greater order of meaning, I discover that I must write in a manner alien to my own voice and inhospitable to routine conversation. I also notice that this use of language to follow the movements, vibrations and resonant luminosities of the world onscreen holds certain decisive similarities with Martin Heidegger's discourses on Being. In both cases, language is not being used solely to comprehend, communicate and persuade; rather it is lit from within, as it were, by what he refers to as the call of Being, and insofar as language is the house of Being it is being used, above all, to listen to itself. I take this to heart, and run with it.

One innocent night—eagerly anticipating the viewing of a new film, in the mood for a masterpiece, a perfect setup for revelation—I am bowled over by the grotesque messianism and long-take contemplativeness of *Werckmeister Harmonies* (Tarr, Hungary, 2000). About five years later when I began my graduate work in film studies, I devoted my first essay project to making these feelings of ineffability and awe and inexhaustible gratitude sharable for the first time. The result was equal parts success and failure: I seemed to do justice to the film by inhabiting the details of one of its most mesmerizing sequences, yet my account once again was too obsessively subjective and blatantly hostile to conventional methods of interpretation. Philosophical language allowed me to cut what feels like a secret path inside the world of the film, deeper than the film itself seemed capable of realizing, yet the path proved difficult to light and I struggled to make my illuminations comprehensible. I seemed to have wanted too much and too little from my words: on the one hand, I wanted them to serve the images by dramatizing them, deploying metaphor after metaphor and stretching grammar way past its zones of comfort and coherence. But on the other hand, in coming to terms with Tarr's epic sequence shots and intensely realist approach to extraordinary and often explicitly symbolic events (symbolisms which Tarr is always at pains to

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[7] A sense of this fusion can perhaps be felt in my analyses of the film in Chapter 2.

categorically deny in interviews), it is as if I wanted my words to become images in their own right. I sometimes found myself inventing words whose significance amounted to a kind of desperate incantation, a backwards movement beyond the intelligible, as if words could take pictures of what cinema's acts of showing were ultimately saying or producing in me as affects. I also found myself, once again, examining a whole film through one of its parts, unable or unwilling to connect the part which struck me with the whole in which all parts resonate and depend on one another. For me this sequence in the film of a quiet mob unleashing a pitiless wave of violence upon sick patients in a hospital before retreating, as quietly as they came, at the sight of an old naked man withered to the bone and presiding like a statue, this carried a metaphysical weight and meant far more than it appeared; yet I hesitated to reduce it to a particular meaning and preferred, perhaps out of respect for its beauty and terror, not to interpret it the way I was taught—to keep it half in the shadows, buried in its own mystery. It had something to do with the philosophical worldview of a particular character—an aging composer, the film's "wise man"—to the effect that all the ills of the world are actually due to a cosmic defect, to ruptures in the fabric of time and space, to the fallenness of Being which leaves all beings stranded in the darkness and human beings teetering on the brink of chaos. Guided by the film's philosophical themes and allegorical symbols, I am brought to read the unhinging of time and space less as an expression than a living specimen of the absence or impotence of God, as the metaphysical conditions for apocalyptic disenchantment. I am convinced it is possible for a movie's black and white otherworldliness to show the world as it really *is*: full of the bareness of life, perfectly unredeemable, abandoned by God yet buttressed by an infinite emptiness—the naked remainder of human frailty.

The courage necessary to write about works of art which feel "sacred" does not always consult with our actual intellectual and emotional *capacity* to make ourselves understood. *The Color of Pomegranates* (Sergei Paradjanov, USSR, 1968) is a one-of-a-kind film that still strikes me as using the medium to metaphysically investigate—as oppose to narrativize—the tortuously overflowing soul of Armenian poet and songwriter Sayat Nova. Here is another film which leaves me speechless, and yet, because of this, I am (masochistically?) compelled to come to terms with it. Not knowing where to begin or how to analyze a film which seems to me to create an entirely new cinematic language (albeit a language rooted to the wordlessness of the fully cultivated image, modelled after painterly tableau, miniature, and photographic posing), I decide to consider instead the various methods, responses and temperaments of critics and scholars, only to discover that

each one more or less explicitly acknowledges the simultaneous desire and futility of articulation, a paradox provoked by the film's allure. These writers resort to long lists of descriptions, almost as if they were compiling inventories of the film's highly esoteric iconography in the hopes of reaching a sense of totality in excess of a mere sum of tantalizing parts. I am struck by the way these writers negotiate their silence, and often regret the breach of it. Paradjanov's static yet multilayered tableaux contain discrete strata of figures, props, repetitions of gesture, and sudden transformations reminiscent of the hidden cuts of Georges Méliès; and the forces which connect the internal components of an image remain as obscure as that which binds an entire image with those coming before and after. Even after multiple viewings, the logic of the film remains a total mystery; the author sees it clearly and yet what is so clear defies all traces of convention, including the idiosyncrasies of style. We might want to say that the film is "pure," that the author has used the materials of physical life to evoke the immaterialities of the spiritual life. However, such phrases are underwhelming in their reductive accuracy, for they organize and explain something that seems so effortlessly to speak for itself because it is so purely and uncompromisingly an act of showing, if not one of revelation. The purity of the show, as it were, captures the attention of "tellers"—we want to tell others about our experience of a film that shows the soul of a poet, not his blood—and it is fittingly incomprehensible. But the value of our inability to comprehend is comprehensible only until we try to comprehend it, and that is when our words become incomprehensible to us. The film can indeed inspire the pen, but if the pen proceeds to instruct what has inspired it, then it risks spiraling out of control. It is the absurd comedy of criticism: we want to know what moves us, and for that we must stop the vibrations in our own pining souls and straighten ourselves out most awkwardly. This is also, I suppose, the tragedy of criticism. Cinema, like music, and like all great art, is (remains) a "silent" medium insofar as its revelations take place in a different world from the linguistic proposition and the instrumentality of truth.

Bela Tarr's most recent and by his own admission final film *The Turin Horse* (Hungary, 2011) stimulates in me the old "truth temptation" yet for reasons more known to me, discovered to a large extent in the writing of this thesis. One reason why it does so is because of its interest in, or voluntary subjection to, the ontological silence of cinema, the wordlessness of the world in its own image where sound is used to expand rather than fill space with mere words. The film also resonates with my metaphysical conception of film in the mode of philosophy without necessarily being exemplary, not to say that a model form of exemplification is possible or even desirable, for

what I'm aiming for is a *conversation* between philosophy and artwork. In fact, there may even be aspects of the film which seem to fly under the radar, or in the face, of the view I have expounded in this thesis regarding the significance of the return of metaphysics in a post-metaphysical (i.e., analytical, political, "scientistic," postmodern, post-truth, post-Nietzschean, etc.) age. I am not bothered by this because my efforts at exemplification have shown me that neither cinema nor philosophy are likely to benefit much from transaction under duress; meaningful dialogue must occur more naturally. Philosophical ideas when constructed into theories are at their strongest, it seems to me, when they are used to create rather than dictate a corpus, which then has more power, or just more of a chance, to expand or revise the theory in turn.

I have claimed that the cinematic materialization of the metaphysical at the end of the 19th century coincides with philosophy's first spirited—analytic philosophers like to use the term "deflationary"—critique of metaphysics, marked if not monumentalized by Nietzsche's perpetually untimely declaration of the death of God. Without being remotely explicit on the subject, *The Turin Horse* seems to be aware of this coincidence cinematically or, if you will, cine-philosophically. As a film with a philosophical past and an almost purely cinematic present, it begins after the end of Nietzsche's life, that is, immediately before the birth of cinema and immediately after the death of God. The horse and its owners, father and daughter, isolated on a farm amidst endlessly receding plains and incessant winds, are tracked through six days of menial repetition broken only by shifts in light and markers of the passing days, the actions and movements and gestures verging upon a sense of eternal recurrence. As time passes and the winds continue to howl, there is a palpable premonition that life is coming to an end, that an apocalypse is about to descend and spread darkness throughout the earth. But the apocalypse has already taken place: it is the death of God, the end of all endings, and what's more a God killed by us prematurely and without complete understanding of the consequences of such a death-defying deed. On the razor threshold of this decisive historical and existential moment, we along with the people and animals in this film are asked to exfoliate a will to live based on hope in afterworlds or fixations upon supersensory worlds, generating a will to power that derives its edge from what Nietzsche never hesitates to call, simply enough and with confident naïveté, "a love for and faith in the meaning of the earth"[8]—a love tested by an earth that has lost its color (the film is in black and

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[8] See especially the Fourth Part of Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 343-439.

white) and forever awaits the coming of the overman and a new palette of being in the world. But while the temptation may be to wait for a dramatic sign of redemption or finality, the film remains remarkably vigilant in the endurance by which it attends to details for their own sake, completely avoiding anything resembling narrative progression and placing a radical emphasis on the repetitive and mundane routines of the everyday where humans, animals, objects and the surrounding elements are bound by alternating constancies of labor and rest.

There are moments where the human characters stare out of windows and appear quite contemplative, but we are not privy to their thoughts and their contemplations are as routine as anything else they do—and given the demanding nature of these routines, the act of thinking can be a restful reprieve. The horse, too, is sometimes shown standing and staring, perhaps contemplating, perhaps just being. There is no reason to think that humans think, compose themselves through thought, while animals drift in a wild domain of the moment; nor that the appearance of thinking is necessarily a search for ultimate meanings or a systematic interpretation of contingent and chaotic events. The film's magnification and ballet-like orchestration of daily life on a dwindling farm makes no appeal for an external meaning or outcome to justify the epic ardors of persistence in the face of apocalypse; and in this sense the moral of this refusal to moralize seems to be that as agents we must relinquish our hold on everything except that which holds us, which is the will to live or love, an incredibly strong but by no means automatic and immortal flame, exemplified less by the freedom of the subject than the gravity of the object—gravity as a relentless 'yes' to this earth, this life. "Willing life" is also a certain type of will which must be relinquished so that we may live solely on our own terms—the terms of life itself freed from the metaphysical in all its forms of insubstantial or inauthentic buttressing, variables of modestly clad or altogether masked absolutes. In *The Turin Horse* the death of God gives way to the birth of life in the materiality of things, in everyday activities such as cooking, eating, cleaning, getting dressed in the morning, chopping wood and working to stay alive, working the land to the monotonous song of the relentless wind and crackling earth—this human earthbound ballet refracted through the gaze of a horse who endures the burden of being in the same way as the farmer and his daughter. From the point of view of cinema, the "word" of the world in its own image states that the death of God constitutes not an "overman" but rather the primacy of the human body, the assertion of animal life, the materiality of things, routine as resistance to blind

progress, an embrace of decreation, and a committed "earthboundedness" that the medium of film harbors at its core, teaches by its lights, and dances with the grace of pure light.

The Turin Horse begins with a voiceover prologue on a black screen, the nature of which immediately piqued my interest, for reasons both obvious and mysterious to me. Here is the passage in full: "In Turin, on January 3rd, 1889, Friedrich Nietzsche steps out of the door of number six Via Carlo Alberto, perhaps to take a stroll, perhaps to go by the post office to collect his mail. Not far from him, or indeed very far removed from him, a cabman is having trouble with his stubborn horse. Despite all his urging, the horse refuses to move, whereupon the cabman… Giuseppe? Carlo? Ettore?... loses his patience and takes his whip to it. Nietzsche comes up to the throng and puts an end to the brutal scene of the cabman, who by this time is foaming with rage. The solidly built and full-mustached Nietzsche suddenly jumps up to the cab and throws his arms around the horse's neck, sobbing. His neighbor takes him home, where he lies still and silent for two days on a divan, until he mutters the obligatory last words, 'Mutter, ich bin dumm (Mother, I am dumb)', and lives for another ten years, gentle and demented, in the care of his mother and sisters. Of the horse, we know nothing." If we follow the logic of this anecdote—and there's no reason to regard it as anything but an anecdote, ripe for the telling—the film's historical setting becomes pertinent in its precision to my way of thinking. The film begins on the cusp of two interrelated paradigm shifts, one philosophical and the other technological or techno-poetic. As the prologue makes clear, this is taking place *after* the end of Nietzsche's philosophical life, in the ruinous wake of the death of God as an ecstatic yet precarious emancipation from the absolute, and immediately *before* the birth of cinema and the return of metaphysics where material is life is freed from abstraction and a reinstatement/re-evaluation of the absolute occurs through a moving image of the world in its own image.[9] So we could say that the film is set on a double hinge where the door of metaphysics, as it were, swings in both directions, closing on what Kracauer calls the world of ancient beliefs, opening on what Nietzsche calls the re-evaluation of all values, closing

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[9] As an aside, while Nietzsche did not live to witness or at least contemplate the cinema as we know it today, a silent black and white film has been composed from a series of photographs in which the philosopher's period of convalescence due to an untreated case of syphilis is re-enacted, Nietzsche appearing quite out of his mind and completely unaware of the camera in his face. This fiction of a very early film recording feels intrusive, obsessive and altogether fetishizing, however as a piece of the historical puzzle linking philosophy and film most unexpectedly, it adds some depth to the allegory related here that a "truth machine" bears witness to the man who philosophized with a hammer and destroyed all claims to truth for a living. In this allegory, cinema is not another truth to be dismantled but rather a symbol of what survives when all claims to truth have been relinquished.

the transcendent realm of the absolute and opening an immanent realm of the absolute image—a film set in the midst of that disorienting yet peacefully arranged "blank slate" or "still life" interlude where the cultural itinerary of everyday life is no longer given, where the deep ruts of rote everydayness appear like strange traces of an alien civilization. Like those rare occasions where we mislabel a familiar perception or, early in the morning, must get on without a pair of glasses and reach about for support in a liquid haze of colors.

Before proceeding any further, let me state for the record that I regard Nietzsche's presence in this film as a largely fictional one, as a silent offscreen character, or better yet a philosophical backdrop which falls to the floor and is trampled upon when the action begins. The film presents itself as following the horse that Nietzsche allegedly witnessed being beaten publicly on the street, where an uncharacteristic and arguably hypocritical wave of pity precipitates a psychotic break and decade-long silence from which the philosopher would never emerge until his untimely death. Why is this horse so important and deserving of its own film?

Figure 78. The apocryphal horse of Turin: *The Turin Horse* (Bela Tarr, Hungary, 2011).

Before we address this question, let us pause over Nietzsche's final words of sanity from the prologue, "Mother, I am dumb," ironically described by the narrator as "obligatory." At first glance, Nietzsche's last words may strike us as the philosopher finally embracing the silent beast within himself, as if a life of philosophizing, of deep thinking and self-questioning, must end by recognizing a blind spot about oneself, the one truth destined to get away because our way of thinking casts a shadow precisely there, an occasion to come full circle philosophically by rediscovering the meaning of the ancient Socratic idea that the only thing that is truly knowable in this world is that we know nothing. What this Nietzsche parable with the horse does is foreground

a tension which philosophy tends to smooth out, often without so much as a trace, or at best defer to the art of poetry: a tension between the power of knowledge to detect falsehoods, shatter illusions, and rise above our deepest temptations, and the power of human intuition and emotion to guide what is ultimately worth knowing and inscribing as an epitaph, that is, knowledge based on what makes us human (i.e. pity for the other) rather than on what humans might one day become (i.e. overmen). Nietzsche, the philosopher most instrumental in bringing about the death of God and calling an end to metaphysics, celebrating and getting intellectually drunk off this great liberation of the human spirit, discovers on his way to the post office or wherever that he is unable to endure, not to mention embrace, the cabman's powerful show of brutality over the horse on the street: his tears attest—or confess—to a secret aversion to power, an instinctive or affective identification with weakness, unanswered suffering and enslaved animality, the very *opposite* set of values embodied by the Nietzschean overman. If Nietzsche's actions on this fateful day were to bear out his late philosophy, he would surely have sided with the cabman, quietly to himself if not explicitly consenting to the cabman's successful domination of a lower lifeform and balking not over the plight of the horse, checking off yet another instance where might makes right in this world because there is no right or wrong, good or bad, free of power and its reflex towards self-subsistence and self-fashioning. If the will to power were true he ought to feel no pity whatsoever for the poor horse whose strength of muscle and general "horsepower" is completely outmatched by man's brutal utilitarian brain, traditions of domestication, and the systematic exploitation of livestock. The film therefore begins with a severe and rather disorienting case of contradiction between, simply put, ideas *about* the world and experiences *in* the world which catch the philosopher off guard, a contradiction which philosophy risks all the time: for Nietzsche the thinker and author of philosophy books, God is dead and man is free to overcome himself, but for Nietzsche the runner of errands in Turin, God is the love for all living things and the freedom of man is the devil in disguise, a twisted perversion of the overman. The contradiction seems irresolvable and, for Nietzsche, philosophically fatal, but perhaps the horse holds the key to a new metaphysics, which is now in order and on the wing. (And what is most obvious is also worth mentioning: that the horse which puts Nietzsche to rest is not an actual horse but a *film horse*, one which helps overturn Nietzsche by (dis)appearing and retaining the mystery of being split between nature and culture, encrypting its strange power as part of a sprawling outsideness and profanation,

unlocking a kind of post-secular *film ecology* where the only protagonist left is time itself, bent out of shape and synchronized with our irregular breathing.)

The ambitious premise of *The Turin Horse* is that this is not just *any* horse, but *the* horse which caused Nietzsche the anarchist, iconoclast, and antichrist to recant his argument for the death of God, plead mere mortal ignorance, and become silent for his remaining days under the care of loving family. However, the narrator is explicit about the fact that "of the horse we know nothing," evoking two disclaimers before we play along with the film's imaginary thought experiment. The first is basic: what we are about to see is fiction expanding upon historical fact with a twist of the apocryphal. The second is a more complex extrapolation of the horse itself as a knowable entity: even if the fate of the Nietzsche horse were entirely known, the narrator's declaration of ignorance suggests to me that animals whose lives are inextricably entangled with humans present a series of obstacles or traps to knowledge, threatening to lead our common sense astray through the all too common fetishizing of otherness, a suspicious bewitchment of reason via the irrational animal. In other words, there is a tendency to suspend if not sanctify the animal as a bold instance of "radical alterity" capable of withstanding the reductions of human consciousness or speech, insofar as the lesser or altogether different capacity of animals to be conscious and speak is not something which we must withstand. The history of human relations with animals is largely progressive, tamed and not wild. Domesticated animals in particular live lives shaped or at least framed by the values of property, currency, companionship, or sustenance, bizarrely at odds with each other depending on the animal and its surrounding cultures of appropriation. The criterion for "knowing" a domesticated animal is problematic given that such animals are, in a sense, extensions of our knowledge; but even so, our knowledge in this case is a living thing with a separate (unknowable) life of its own. The criterion might lie somewhere in between the tedious history of a piece of furniture, on the on hand, and the ecstatic possibility that domestication is actually the anti-anthropocentric cultivation of an animal's mute intelligence. It is for this reason, I think, that one cannot accurately compose a biography of the life of a domesticated animal independently of the lives of its owners: the animal as material object or lower lifeform, and the animal as pure symbol of, say, paradise lost, equally fall flat and evade the paradox of living, breathing, perhaps thinking beings destined, like us, to die. Hence Robert Bresson's characterization of the life of a donkey in *Au Hassard Balthazar* (France, 1966) as a random series of ownerships, suggesting that what makes Balthazar's life worthy of narration has

little to do with his unconditional ability to bear the brunt of human cruelty. Rather, in being repeatedly disowned by various people and contexts, his existence can be construed as taking a random sample of a culture at a given time and on the front lines, as it were, of various manifestations of the daily struggle, a culture for which he bears only the physical and not the emotional baggage. Tarr will take the opposite approach in *The Turin Horse* by confining the horse to one set of owners, and he will do something strange by leaving the horse on the margins of the apocalyptic picture, standing in the stables and making an appearance only when the two human characters tend to it and, most strikingly, having the horse refuse tending to, losing its will to live without any suggestion that it is depressed and longs for a better life free in the wild. It turns out Tarr is not that interested in the horse after all, for it wasn't the horse which made Nietzsche weep but rather man corrupted—debased—by the will to power. Nevertheless, as viewers expecting some sort of "animal story," it is impossible to forget that the horse is somewhere in the background at all times, alone with its thoughts, listening to the wind, waiting for something. Perhaps it will unconsciously engineer another burst of melodramatic irony, for the characters or for us, and we might wonder when and how it will rise to the occasion of the film's remarkable prologue and question-begging title.

After the voiceover prologue on a black screen, the first of the film's sequence-shot structure depicts what we can only assume is the cabman and horse making their way back home through a heavy wind storm sweeping the countryside.[10] Without documenting their arrival, the next sequence shot shows an isolated farmhouse surrounded by barren hills with nothing but a single

Figure 79. The desolate surroundings of the farm: *The Turin Horse* (Bela Tarr, Hungary, 2011).

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[10] Though Tony Pipolo in his fine review of the film is correct to remind us that the barren, windswept, utterly dismal terrain of the film's setting can in no way be confused with the Italian countryside surrounding the small city of Turin. However, what appears like a firm foreclosure of a biographical interpretation based on setting need not impede the relevant philosophical interpretation based on Nietzsche's ruined state of mind, destroyed from both sides by the untimely death of God and the unexpected twist of an inadequate will to power. See Tony Pipolo, "The Turin Horse," *Cineaste* (Spring 2012), pp. 48-50.

lonely tree in the distance, a landscape reminiscent of the set from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The domestic life of the cabman and presumably his daughter is tracked over six days where various casualties and chores, like cooking and cleaning and wood-chopping, are repeated like clockwork against the background of the raging storm, and are repeated with such heightened attention to detail on the part of the actors and filmmakers that the only source of drama and eventfulness in these routines becomes the gradual yet utterly mysterious collapse of the business of everyday life, which turns out to be quite the dramatic event in its own right. As time passes and the winds continue to howl in a hauntingly musical way, it dawns on us that this is no mere storm as the daily routines of life begin to break down, one by one, starting with the horse who is like a barometer of apocalypse: first the horse refuses to move when harnessed, and shortly after will not eat or drink. A distant neighbor comes in search of brandy and, while waiting for the preparation of the bottle, delivers a dense philosophical interpretation of the storm, asserting that what lies at the root of the cosmic phenomenon is actually a catastrophic accumulation of political misdeeds and sanctioned corruption for reckless personal gain, an irreversible debasement of the holy earth at the hands of what sounds like capitalism (although the loaded term is never mentioned, in fact fittingly no facile "isms" are deployed here). Before long the well water inexplicably dries up; the solitary pair attempt to flee at this point but the wind proves too strong and a thick dust cloud makes navigation extremely precarious. Back at home, faced with their fate yet oblivious to the cause and disinterested in speculation of any kind, be it fear of the unknown or last-minute faith, the light of the sun dies out, lamps extinguish and cannot be rekindled, hot embers go cold. Throughout it all we may have noticed that the wind is always blowing from the same direction and the generic howling sound is eerily reminiscent of a choir of high pitched screams. These are shaping up to be the six days of *decreation*, and on the 7th day, which is not shown, there will be no rest, no sense of accomplishment, anticipation, memorialization or even catharsis. The restoration of absolute nothingness and an ending to mark all endings constitutes a return to the beginning before there was any such thing as intended light: before a sense of history, of meaning, of possibilities for the future (sometimes called fantasy), all of which conspire to light the horizon of our strange human existence when the darkness of being is plenty bright.

In the biblical story of Noah, the apocalypse is meant for humans alone, for sinners, and Noah and his family are spared because they practice virtue and the animals—not *all* animals, of course, only a representative sample—are spared unconditionally because they embody innocence

and have not drifted out of the divine orbit. In *The Turin Horse*, however, the apocalypse—if indeed that is what is happening, if indeed God is dead—is indiscriminate: if you believe, like Noah, that there will be a flood of global proportions, then you can spend your summer building an arc, but if you look out the window, day after day, and see nothing but wind and debris, a wind element which goes on to obliterate the vital elements of earth, water and fire, then this apocalypse is not underwritten by the possibility of human or animal redemption, which is to say it is presented as final, absolute, without appeal.[11] Despite this, we might expect or desire that the horse, devoid of the human capacity to debase, will bear witness to the last judgment or perhaps personify the force of judgment itself, for think of all those animals in the history of cinema whose blank, wild, and inscrutable stares prompt the human characters to feel as if they are being watched, judged, or examined by a higher power when it is really just the tingle of their own conscience. But animals are no more innocent than children, and what are humans if not animals too? The idea of a non-human innocence surrounding the animal, underwriting certain theological fantasies of apocalypse, and signifying judgment, is a deflection of the moral weakness of beings who cannot act meaningfully in the world, who cannot commit and become responsible for deeds of a moral or immoral nature. The horse is a horse, and while it is indeed graceful, grace will not save it. It will not be spared for anything, as this apocalypse is without a vision of redemption—the horse bears physical rather than spiritual burdens and so cannot bear witness. Not only does Tarr refuse to thematize the horse as a judge/witness of human debasement, he goes so far as to deprive the animal of a perspective by which to do so, for this is often a false perspective generated by anthropomorphist projection onto the white saintly screen of the animal's face, resulting in a vague, perhaps indulgent experience of conscience with no sincere plans for ethical action. And yet, I maintain that there is still some core of strength in

Figure 80. Spirit of care: *The Turin Horse* (Bela Tarr, Hungary, 2011).

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[11] It came as no surprise, at least to me and other fans, that Tarr announced his retirement after the release of this film, though I do find it surprising, or vexing rather, that the metanarrative about the death of film is traced back and hitched to the moment preceding the birth of film. For this his final film, Tarr depicts the threshold of the *birth* of film, marked by the *death* of Nietzsche, the great philosopher of *Life*. Is all this fitting? Are all these dots connected?

the horse's somewhat ironic powerlessness, in the dirt-encrusted texture of its coat, in its capacity to openly shed tears when being urged on by the whip, and most of all in its deference, like all living things, even plants, to be cared for—a strength which Nietzsche totally underestimated. After the death of a certain god and the failure of human morality, the spirit of care endures in what I will call "the unbidden yet binding affect of ethics." It is tied to the horse's power of weakness, which is ultimately tied, in turn albeit tenuously, to the active passivity of the cinematic apparatus, embodied in this four-legged figure of the world in its own image—an Ouroboros world erasing itself into the total eclipse of nihilism.

Decreation can be understood as the personification of nihilism, as if nihilism were an autonomous force active within the world and which is most palpable when the world is allowed to image itself without human interventions biased towards the tempering of nihilism. The death of God and the extinguishing of the will to power leaves only one thing intact: the profound strength of the horse's pitiable weakness, the indifferent power of life in the noose of human devaluation and debasement, reaching a climax during what is, for me, the most thought-provoking, important, and moving scene in the film (though I confess to having completely missed it on my preliminary viewings, a fact which I also regard as part of its "power"). When cabman/father decides to abandon the house because the water well has gone dry, he orders his daughter that only essentials be packed and stored on a small cart. When the horse is led out of the stable, our assumption might be that it is being labelled not as an essential but rather as the engine for the vehicle, that the plan is to have the horse pull the cart through the windstorm; and if this is the plan we might find ourselves cringing with dread, for on the previous occasion when the horse was ordered to work, it refused and received a beating from the man, resulting in an unforgettable document of an animal crying (just the tears, no discernible grimaces and no histrionics; tears are thrust from the horse's eyes and it cries not to be helped nor heard). However, I am astonished to see that now, father and daughter, perhaps recalling the horse's fearful stubbornness, perhaps feeling guilty for punishing it unduly, instead attach its muzzle to the back of the cart where it will be carried along by the daughter who, unlike father, has the use of both arms. Maybe I make too much of this reversal and the horse is really no different from the other pieces of property packed for the trip, but if the horse can't pull the cart and is of no use to them as a working horse, why would they bring it with them in what is bound to be a precarious and possibly fatal journey? What could they want with a horse that can't work, won't eat or drink, and what's more, a horse which

neither person has managed to accept as a lovable companion? Here as elsewhere, there is no discussion or debate between the characters about how to proceed. They know what they must do and act together without any planning, weighing of options, justification of reasons, or conflict of values. And when the daughter starts to pull the cart and horse across mean terrain and into excruciating winds, I don't believe I exaggerate when I say that she has *become the horse*.

Figure 81. Daughter as horse, father displaced: *The Turin Horse* (Bela Tarr, Hungary, 2011).

That man and animal are now equal is also an understatement, for the animal is not just spared the ordeal but served like a prince; the ancient master-servant dyad is not only reversed but seems to me cancelled, because here a human being respects the animal by becoming the animal that he/she is. There is nothing humiliating about this, nor grandiose. The struggling yet resilient gait of the woman is remarkably devoid of anything resembling a proud rhetoric of human sacrifice and self-overcoming. No facial close-ups, no music, no suspense, no hint of irony even—the cinematic event is unembellished, again remarkably, allowing the viewer to experience the emphasis for himself. I therefore don't immediately notice what is actually going on here between the humans and the horse; I have to go *back*. And the only thing that the filmmaker emphasizes for our consideration in a rare close-up is a seemingly trivial tangent: one of the wheels of the pull-cart, biting into the parched earth and spinning in circles. Going back and looking closely at this scene, new questions come to the fore, the wheel of thought is in motion. Is circular repetition the secret to moving forward? Is it the cost? The brake?... It's as if Tarr's attention to the spinning wheel is drawn by the propulsion provided by man becoming animal, a propulsion indifferent to

distant horizons, goal-oriented gazes, and potential frontiers. It also strikes me that *this* wheel in *these* circumstances is a facet of a new metaphysics where rational human progress is made irrationally yet responsibly; reason's legacy of conquest is put in check without ceasing or reversing growth, without fully abandoning the Western model of progress for,

Figure 82. The camera lingers on the wobbly wheel of the wagon: *The Turin Horse* (Bela Tarr, Hungary, 2011).

say, eternal recurrence. The exposed wheel says, as it were, that progress is a by-product of repetitions full of dynamic variations, and just because the old can be made new again doesn't mean that we have progressed *from* the old *to* the new. Progress in the wake of metaphysics can lead us *home*, which is where father and daughter end up, back home, as if they passed through a circle. Home is not where the heart is, as the old saying goes, but in tune with how the heart beats. History is homeward bound because history conceived as constant moving forward, as a succession of strivings for what lies beyond, led us nowhere and left us gasping.

Father and daughter, man and woman, also live circularly and, like the horse, have no names. In part this is because they do not represent ideologies or fantasies of rational or even irrational human agency, that is, they are not beings who exercise free will in order to make choices which will affect the world in which they live. The truth of their anonymous and repetitive everyday lives is perfectly captured by Beckett whose work is an inspiration for the film. The following passage from his novel *Molloy* suspects something awry, absurd and without foundation, lurking in the depths of human action and, perhaps, gutting those depths: "All the things you would do gladly, oh without enthusiasm, but gladly, all the things there seems no reason for your not doing, and that you do not do! Can it be we are not free? It might be worth looking into."[12] The film literally looks into it and has this to say, or show, about what we call freedom: the world in its own image includes the image-makers, human beings laid bear, without the fancy clothes and fragrances of a freedom reserved for them, free to be unfree, or free just to be, not unlike the horse. Father and daughter live by rote; they survive; they are what they do (hence aren't the ones doing it, as Beckett rightly insists), and what they do is take care of each other without otherwise showing

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[12] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy: A Novel*, trans. Patrick Bowles, in collaboration with Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p. 48. I thank Daniel Gerson for sharing this Beckett beauty with me.

that they care; they live as one, thriving in this way only. Now if such a life strikes us as an unflattering or altogether false depiction because it lacks, say, the magical human ingredient of agency or freedom, then before we dismiss it on these grounds we might find the courage to ask ourselves this: Is it really true that human beings are experts in making conscious choices, and that these choices, despite motive and context, can be categorized clearly as either self-serving or selfless based on measurable consequences whose goodness or badness can be accepted or denied and internalized into the next decision making moment? I think many of us are swayed to some extent by this popular or fantastical view of the human species as possessing and exercising free will at all times or at least at the right times; and perhaps all of us, especially within cultures privileging the individual, hold it in high regard as an ideal the fruits of which justify the demand along with various dogmatisms of responsibility as that which sets our species apart, from animals in particular. And we make movies whose stories typically hew quite closely to this picture of ourselves as choosers of our own destiny. But what's interesting about *The Turin Horse* is that it asks us to expand our view of human agency to include actions best described as *automatic*, an expansion which restricts the meaning and impact of such actions to the daily maintenance of self and other—of *relationships*—rather than, as is often the case in movies, pursuing the ultimate impact of the transformation of the world, in part or even as a whole, what heroes sometimes call "saving the world." I do not act in the world, or only rarely and not necessarily effectively; rather I live in the world, and while living here I act, or not, for others. If I act mostly for myself, then my world is small; if I act exclusively for myself, then I am my world. But if two people act together and as one, then even a domestic routine performed mechanically and without speaking can constitute a world, and perhaps such a world is what remains in bloom when the world has ended.

In the final scene of the film, after the winds have ceased, leaving an infinite sea of darkness and silence outside, and bringing the outside inside, nullifying this last and perhaps most primal dualism, an inexplicable light dawns in the frame, revealing the father and daughter still visible in the home, sitting across from each other at the table where they have their daily meal of one potato each. This light on the last day of decreation—where could it be coming from, how can it be, when there is no light left in this world, indeed when there is no world at all to speak of? Has the camera adjusted to the darkness like our eyes at night? Is the essence of the world in its own image connected to the light of Being itself, eternally luminous in our heightened sense of attention?...

The couple do not look at each other so much as sit in the presence of each other as they have always done during suppertime. They know what time it is even though time has stopped. They adhere to the ritual even though the potatoes are raw and they, like the horse, have permanently lost their appetite, hence the will to live or die (they would eat if they could). I would like to believe—I can stand on this belief—that the camera (the body of cinema) and the world in its own image (the soul of cinema) are responding here to responsibility itself and that the image registers it as if it were a glue-like substance glowing in the dark. Love is light, and this light—their human light of relationship togetherness—is the god which refuses to die, reborn onscreen as pure light, light without source, cinematic sorcery. The two of them together, nameless in this new worldless world, are a perfect example of living by example—face to face and self to self, lit by the other's presence and staring into themselves as mutual support in facing the end as one being, or one becoming: a symbiotic substance in which the self flows without inhibition or fear, like a spirit destined to re-enchant the world. The film's end of endings records this decisive moment where metaphysics returns more solid and inexorable in the form of sunless skyless light, emanating from within all things—light before being, or the being of light; the sweat of persistence and the inexplicable will to live and the death that is the drive of life itself.

Figure 83. Father and daughter mysteriously illuminated: *The Turin Horse* (Bela Tarr, Hungary, 2011).

But what of the horse? As we may recall from the film's opening narration, of the horse we know nothing. Amidst the extinguishing world it may have run away, or perished offscreen, or perhaps it is magically imperishable, a harbinger of what's to come. It is, for certain, a *myth*. No

one knows for sure if such a horse existed; no one knows for sure if Nietzsche wept over its pathetic plight. We do not know if it had owners resembling this father and daughter, if it dwelled in stables erected on windswept plains in the middle of nowhere. It is fitting that the horse is excluded from the final scene at the end of the world: like any good myth, it has yielded a deeper truth. And if we are tempted to speak of the truth value of the moving image, it is because filmmakers have demonstrated, time and again, that the verisimilitude of realism and gross adherence to "the facts" does not guarantee human interest, believability onscreen, or lasting insight into ourselves and our times. In fact, passive faithfulness to a perceived or historical reality might be more likely to backfire and guarantee the very opposite of what we expect great art to be able deliver to us and safeguard unto eternity: artifice, superficiality, expressionlessness. Since the cinematic apparatus, despite being fraught with non-conscious machines, may lead to various forms of self-consciousness in those who use it for aesthetic purposes, and because a filmmaker typically cannot capture something real without staging something fake (for reality on its own is precisely what art seeks to explore, oppose, or altogether transform), in this sense "truth" depends on acts of trickery as much as on acts of trust. Fiction is perhaps the first trick or turn towards trickery, evident in the belief that fiction is not only the mandatory path to truth but the *preferred* one. In the realm of the arts, a realm which can be seen to bevel and fragment the singular realm of the sciences, the "method" of fiction can either avoid the limitations and material connections imposed by facts or perhaps use facts as tools to stimulate the imagination, to synthesize and cross-fertilize the discrete categorical faculties of the mind in action. Fiction also has the power to redeem the triviality of certain historical facts by singling them out, taking them seriously, and ascribing a value that they may not inherently possess—not without *reflecting* upon them.

The filmmakers considered throughout this thesis draw upon some measure of the power of "the trick" (tactics or decoys or games are also valid terms; cheating or lying or sneaking are all valid tones), in order to tame or altogether overcome both the inauthenticity of human self-consciousness, on either side of the camera, and the over-authenticity of the camera's mechanical non-consciousness. Human consciousness is always in danger of becoming a self-consciousness when positioned before and to a lesser extent behind the camera, and the camera is such that it captures the lie as accurately as the truth, making no such distinction in its fully automated and mechanized descriptions of reality. One way to phrase the action of the trick as a means of engaging cinema's revelatory and hence metaphysical potential is to say that it strives to turn

mechanical descriptions of reality into human expressions of reality by undermining—short-circuiting—the mechanical rather than imposing the human. The gentle light that dawns amidst complete and utter darkness at the end of *The Turin Horse* is as impossible as the recurrent ripples of river water in the wake of Mouchette's suicidal plunge at the end of Bresson's film. I also detect a similar air of impossibility in the telephone call to the zone in *Stalker* and in the sunlight cascading over the hills in *The Thin Red Line* after the two soldiers are shot down in the tall grass, the former being a technological event which feels natural and the latter a natural event which feels strangely orchestrated from above. Such impossibilities appear to either prevent these films from going on any further, bringing their sense of reality to an end, or compel them to move on prematurely, to close their eyes, as when shaking off a strange dream or dismissing an omen wink amidst the imperturbable agendas and routines of everyday life. And if we are not careful, such impossibilities will register in our consciousness as little more than a glitch. This sense of a miracle without a worker, an occult coaxing out of the truth, can, however, all too easily, be mistaken for a glitch, accident, or error, if we are not careful.

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