CHAPTER 1

'Going Meta' on Film as Philosophy

Opening Up the Field

This chapter lays the table for the dinner that is the rest of this book. The proverbial feast that I am promising entails, of course: various instances of transformational ethics, which I track down for the sake of putting together a particular display of the 'cinemakeover' – an image, that is, of how we may use films for personal transformation. Yet before we can get to that menu, we first need to be clear about the table around which we are actually gathering; because my tracking down of transformational ethics will be exclusively within the theoretical project of 'film as philosophy'. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to chart the main contours of this project within which I do my meta-critical work. The markers that I lay down on the table here will guide my analyses throughout the rest of the book. This holds especially true for the conclusion of the chapter, where I embed my charting of film as philosophy within a set of fundamental ontological horizons that frame the project.

My analysis in this chapter is not a historical account of film as philosophy, nor is it an overview along the lines of influential theorists and their arguments (e.g. Wartenberg 2011b; Falzon 2013; Sinnerbrink 2013). In the pages that follow, rather, I am taking the first, crucial steps of my own meta-theoretical project with respect to the project of film as philosophy, as I will distinguish and plot in relation to one another the various conceptions of film as philosophy that, together, comprise this project. As noted, the resulting constellation of conceptions, with their key assumptions, will provide the main reference points to the transformational ethics of film that I explore later in the book. But it is my contention that the mapping arrived at in this chapter also aids film as philosophy as such – that is, apart from any questions of transformational ethics – by drawing analytical lines and connections along which debate can be more constructively carried forward.

1 A Two-Way Street: Philosophy of Film and Film as Philosophy

What is the nature of the relationship between film and philosophy? The very endeavor of doing philosophy of film, in which such questions are posed, already presupposes a basic understanding of this relationship: that film

is simply one of countless things in the world at which our philosophical reflection can be directed. This – what could also be called 'philosophy *about* film' – is the most general and taken-for-granted conception of the relationship between film and philosophy: that of philosophy taking film as its object of study (cf. Botz-Bornstein 2011; Smith & Wartenberg 2006: 1).

Yet, over the past two decades, considerable attention has been devoted to the possibility of inverting this conventional understanding, thus marking the overt emergence of film as philosophy. While the film work of Gilles Deleuze and Stanley Cavell – perhaps the unofficial 'godfathers' of film as philosophy – has certainly laid much of the groundwork, the late 1990s and onwards witnessed a drastic upsurge of the view that film is more than the mere passive object upon which philosophy is exercised: rather, films have the ability to make their own, uniquely cinematic, contributions to philosophical understanding; films can serve as a distinctive source of philosophical thinking or knowledge (Wartenberg 2011b; Sinnerbrink 2013). It is a transition moreover characterized by a growing interest in how fiction films, specifically, and mainstream fiction films in particular, have a claim to stake in doing philosophy.[1]

This idea goes by many names: 'film as philosophy' (Smith & Wartenberg 2006; Wartenberg 2011a), 'cinema as philosophy' (Livingston 2006; 2008; 2009), 'cinematic philosophy' (Wartenberg 2011a), 'philosophy through film' (Falzon 2013), 'film-philosophy' (Colman 2009; Carel & Tuck 2011; Sinnerbrink 2011a; Sinnerbrink 2013), even 'filmosophy' (Frampton 2006a). Regardless of this proliferation of terms, however, these notions all converge on the view that 'philosophy' (whichever way it is understood) can be conceived of from the point of view of film; and that, instead of merely being subjected to pre-existing theoretical agendas, film should be allowed to articulate its 'philosophicalness' on its *own* terms. Especially according to the hotly debated 'bold thesis' of film as philosophy, as Paisley Livingston (2006) coined it, film has certain philosophical capacities that are held to be intrinsically part of the distinctively multi-modal nature of the medium. Put differently, philosophy (or some quality thereof) can be uniquely incarnated by the cinematic process – which entails that film has the capacity to make genuine contributions to philosophical understanding, by distinctively cinematic means.

1 My discussions of film as philosophy will roughly be restricted to the question as it pertains to narrative fiction film. This corresponds with a recognized tendency in the field to focus more on the latter (see Carroll 2013: 161; Livingston 2008: 591).

What this inverted perspective adopted by philosophers therefore drives home, is that the meeting of film and philosophy is something of a 'two-way street': it can just as much be conceived of from the perspective of film, in terms of film engaging with/in philosophy, as the other way around.[2] Call the result: philosophy made in the image of film. In fact, as we will see, endorsers of 'bold' film as philosophy go so far as to claim that any 'philosophy of/about film' that does not sufficiently account for film's reciprocal reflective agency, 'aimed back' at philosophy, is fundamentally deficient.

Of course, to affirm this promising inversion between film and philosophy is one thing. But to ask *how* exactly film may engage with/in philosophy is quite another. Once you go into details, this turning of the tables on philosophy advocated by film philosophers scatters into a miscellany of often competing viewpoints and assumptions. Worse, even, is that the business of writing about film as philosophy often proceeds on autopilot, showing little to no regard for "explicit theoretical discussions of the legitimacy of using film as a vehicle for philosophy" (Wartenberg 2006: 19). This is especially true of the burgeoning practice of doing pop-philosophical exegeses of movies – bearing titles of the 'X and Philosophy' kind, where 'X' can stand for anything from *Alien* to *X-Men* (cf. Wartenberg 2003: 139, 141; Smith 2010).

As an encapsulating term, 'film as philosophy' thus invokes a wild assortment of postulations and perspectives, joined together only by the view that, in one way or another, films can take part in the enterprise of philosophy. Yet, while pop-philosophical ignorance of the issue remains rampant, the assortment does feature increasing efforts at theoretical substantiation of its claim. Such efforts, some more forthright than others, amount to a theoretical project, one that presents 'film as philosophy' first and foremost as a question: to what extent, and on what grounds, can we claim films to be a form of philosophy? The answers that philosophers put forward in response – their various conceptions and theories of film as philosophy, that is – makes up the meta-picture that I endeavor to sketch below.

2 Degrees vs. Conditions: Axes of Engagement

Whether they do so consciously or not, a number of philosophers contribute to the theoretical project of film as philosophy by advancing distinct conceptions,

2 My emphasis of the two-way relationship between film and philosophy draws on similar distinctions made by Botz-Bornstein (2011), Colman (2009), Falzon (2013), and Sinnerbrink (2011a), among others.

and sometimes even outright theories, of how film(s) can (or cannot) engage with/in philosophy. Yet where to start a productive meta-analysis of such a variety of conceptions? I propose that within film's postulated engagement with/in philosophy there are in fact *two* axes of engagement which we first need to distinguish:

1) the degree of engagement
2) the condition of engagement

The degree-axis deals with the extent to which film is understood to engage with and contribute to philosophy: in other words, does the philosopher pose a weak, moderate, or bold engagement between film and philosophy? The condition-axis involves the claimed or assumed conditions that enable (or, for some, prohibit) film to engage with/in philosophy.

Existing assessments of the film as philosophy debate tend to revolve only around arguments and positions along the first axis, pertaining to degrees of engagement. Typically, in these assessments, the axis of conditions finds itself conflated with the first.[3] Yet it is crucial to keep in view the distinct claims that the two axes essentially deal with. Whereas the first involves *the extent* to which film can 'be' philosophy, measured by its assumed contribution or value to the enterprise of philosophy, the second involves the conditions of engagement which give film *the means* to be philosophy – irrespective of the (weak, moderate, or bold) extent to which it is 'philosophy'.

To give equal prominence to conditions of engagement is to set up a much more constructive picture of the project of theorizing film as philosophy. As Murray Smith (2010) observes, the "field lacks [...] anything like a properly developed 'metaphilosophy' of film". And the project is especially headed nowhere unless we, as philosophers, can get a firmer grip on the (related, complementary, or inconsistent) assumptions that guide different claims of how film engages with/in philosophy. And it is precisely to those assumptions that an appraisal of various conditions of engagement leads us. The conditions posed by philosophers are always tethered to significant presuppositions at work within their theories of film as philosophy, as will become increasingly clear.

3 Wartenberg's (2011a; 2016) most recent overviews of different conceptions of film as philosophy, for example, are structured around four positions that pertain to degrees of engagement: (*a*) 'extreme anti-cinematic philosophy', (*b*) 'extreme pro-cinematic philosophy', (*c*) 'moderate anti-cinematic philosophy' and, his own, (*d*) 'moderate pro-cinematic philosophy'. Also see Sinnerbrink (2013), Falzon (2013), and McClelland (2011).

3 Degrees of Engagement: Weak, Moderate, and Bold

Let us begin by first considering the film-philosophy relationship along the more conventional of my two axes of inquiry: the degree to which film is claimed to engage with/in philosophy (see Smith & Wartenberg 2006; Livingston 2008; Cox & Levine 2011: 1–22; Wartenberg 2011a; Falzon 2013; Sinnerbrink 2013). From this vantage point, the philosophical status of film as described and debated by philosophers is approached as being of varying degrees or intensities, from weaker claims that films can only offer illustrations of heuristic value to bold claims which hold that films can actually do or be philosophy. The stronger the degree – that is, the stronger the sense that film is philosophical – the greater a film's supposed contribution to philosophy is taken to be.

In what follows, I break up what is obviously a continuum of degrees into three basic positions sufficient for our purposes: film considered as being in (1) a weak, (2) moderate, or (3) bold engagement with/in philosophy. Defenders of a merely 'weak engagement' oppose any significant sense in which film can be said to be philosophy. Advocates of a 'bold engagement', on the opposite side of the spectrum, go so far as suggesting that film has the potential to be its own independent form of philosophy in ways comparable to standard verbal philosophical discourse or, alternatively, in a mode entirely unique to film. And somewhere between these two extremes lie various tempered outlooks on a 'moderate engagement'.

3.1 *Weak Engagement: 'Film as (Illustration of) Philosophy'*

While there is a range of well-rehearsed *a priori* arguments against any strong claims of film as philosophy, no one seems to have a problem with the idea that film can be an illustrative, heuristic or educational resource to philosophy (Livingston & Plantinga 2009: xviii; Wartenberg 2011a: 17).[4] This 'weak engagement' is indeed the most uncontroversial sense in which films can 'be' philosophy: they can offer illustrations of (predetermined) philosophical ideas, themes or theories.[5] According to this view, film narratives, especially popular narratives, can be a useful heuristic or pedagogical resource for philosophy by being a means for depiction, clarification or reflection (Sinnerbrink

4 *Philosophy goes to the Movies*, by Christopher Falzon (2002) or *Philosophy through Film*, by Mary Litch (2010) are two well-known examples of film as philosophy approached as a heuristic-educational practice.

5 Films can of course also be 'philosophical' in a much more obvious, and widely acknowledged, sense: namely when they explicitly deal with recognized philosophers and philosophical texts.

2011a: 119–120; 2011c: 32; Falzon 2013). Film can make a contribution to philosophy "by illustrating philosophical ideas, exploring situations and problems of general philosophical interest, or eliciting sophisticated criticism and analysis by suitably engaged theorists" (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 120).

To defenders of a 'weak engagement' between film and philosophy *this* is as far as the philosophical capacities of film can go. These theorists deny film the status of being philosophy in any stronger sense, and oppose claims that film can contribute to philosophy in ways that are exclusive to the cinematic medium. Apart from explicitly (verbally) voicing philosophical arguments or theories, or more generally offering pedagogically useful material to prompt philosophical activity, these theorists argue that films cannot do philosophy. This 'philosophical disenfranchisement of film' (Wartenberg 2007: 16; Sinnerbrink 2011c) rests on a few recurring objections to the idea of film doing philosophy, which can be summarized as follows:

1) General 'Platonic' objections: the visual images and representations on which film is based cannot be a source of true knowledge (Falzon 2013; Wartenberg 2007: 16–31; Smith 2006).
2) The explicitness objection: film lacks the explicitness needed to present the precise claims which characterize philosophical thought (Wartenberg 2007: 16; cf. Smith 2006: 40).
3) The generality objection: film narratives, with their specific depictions, scenarios, characters, and actions cannot present the abstract, universal, and generalized claims which are essential to philosophy (Wartenberg 2007: 24).
4) The imposition objection: the 'philosophy' attributed to films is really the activities, frameworks, and presuppositions of philosophers that are ultimately imposed onto them (Wartenberg 2007: 25).
5) Objections related to the different structuring interests: film and philosophy have essentially different goals and concerns; unlike philosophical texts, epistemic aspects of the films are subject to film's (primary) aesthetic aspirations (Smith 2006).

Mention should furthermore be made of Paisley Livingston's 'problem of paraphrase', which although not typically cited as a standard objection to film as philosophy, has also been influential in the context of its criticism (2006: 12; 2008: 600–601). Livingston argues that the 'bold thesis' of film as philosophy – which he formulates as such: that capacities belonging exclusively to the cinematic medium offer films the means to make original and independent contributions to philosophy – runs into an apparently insoluble dilemma. The problem, in short, is an evidentiary one. The bold claim that a film makes a philosophical contribution needs to be substantiated with a (verbal) explanation

of what that contribution is. Yet if this contribution can be paraphrased, its supposedly (visual) cinematic nature is betrayed. Alternatively, it may be claimed that this exclusively cinematic contribution to philosophy cannot be paraphrased. Then, in effect, we should doubt its very existence since the claimed contribution lacks adequate evidence. Livingston (2006: 15–17) contends that both the demands of (medium specific) exclusivity and (epistemic) originality, placed upon film as philosophy by the bold thesis, need to be weakened in order to formulate more adequate notions of how film can make its philosophical mark – a proposal that brings us to the next position on film's degree of engagement.

3.2 *Moderate Engagement: 'Film (to Some Extent) as Philosophy'*

Between the opposites of outright denying and enthusiastically granting film the status of being philosophy lies a variety of moderate positions. These positions generally hold that films can do more than the 'mere illustration' of philosophy – often pointed out in this context is that films may also adopt a reflective attitude towards, and thus do something with, the themes they show us (e.g. Grau 2006: 119, 128–129; Shaw 2006: 112, 117).

More to the point, the theories that I group together here propose a 'moderate' engagement with/in philosophy insofar as they generally wish to avoid global, *a priori* assertions of the philosophical abilities of film. The philosophers involved tend to be circumspect, specifying strict criteria for the restricted set of cases that may count as films doing philosophy. Coupled with that, they maintain a good deal of soberness about how much of a contribution such films can actually make to philosophy. Noël Carroll (2013: 162), for example, makes it clear that only some films can promote philosophical insight; and on the question of whether films can actually do philosophy he admits to his "intuition that authentic cases are rare" (2006: 184). Thomas Wartenberg's (2007; 2011b) widely recognized 'moderate thesis' of films doing philosophy is equally indicative of this self-critical restraint. For him, the possibility of film as philosophy remains an open, empirical one. Wartenberg approaches the question by cautiously considering how films can assume the form of generally accepted philosophical methods; thought experiments, in particular (2007: 9, 31, 133–134). But he insists that such instances need to be argued for and indicated in a local, individual, and empirical manner, in order to demonstrate how particular films, in particular circumstances, can instantiate particular philosophical techniques.

A prominent criterion which moderate stances repeatedly resort to is that one can only speak of 'film as philosophy' if the filmmaker(s) somehow intended to use a film for doing philosophy. So much for the often proclaimed

'death of the author' (Barthes 1977).[6] A widespread commitment to intentionalism already shows itself in a preference for the phrase 'philosophy *through* film' (e.g. Wartenberg 2007: 12; Carroll 2013: 3; Falzon 2013; Cox & Levine 2011), which implies that the medium is used as *a means* to express (the filmmaker's) philosophical ideas. Paisley Livingston's (2008; 2009) account of film as philosophy has however emerged as the most explicit and rigorous version of such intentionalism (cf. Sinnerbrink 2011a: 117, 125). Livingston sets off from the understanding that "neither texts nor films really do philosophy, it is *people* who articulate and convey philosophical ideas and arguments using these and other expressive devices" (2008: 593). While audience-centered interpretative approaches to film as philosophy abound, they achieve little more than impose on film the philosophy of the interpreter (see 2008: 598–599; 2009: 195–198). In Livingston's strict creator-centered approach, one can only base the notion of film doing philosophy on interpretations aimed at "the elucidation of the actual filmmaker's philosophizing" (2008: 599).[7] Since his argument assumes a filmmaker who "provides evidence of his or her philosophical interests and background and offers interpreters a way into this framework", he does admit that his approach shoulders "a heavy evidentiary burden" (2009: 199). For a film to count as an instance or act of philosophy requires clear textual and biographical indications that the filmmaker intended to (and successfully did) explore recognized philosophical notions in an artistically significant way.[8] Moreover, for those films that do make the cut, Livingston insists that claims of the originality and exclusivity of the contributions made by 'philosophy through film' should still be modest and viable (Livingston 2008: 601; 2009: 200) – a hallmark position in film as philosophy's 'moderate' camp.

3.3 *Bold Engagement: 'Film as Philosophy'*

Film as philosophy, conceived as a bold engagement, holds that film does not simply offer practical illustrations or reflect philosophical themes but can actively engage in philosophizing, broadly construed, doing so on its own

6 The death of the author thesis, which includes the New Critics' rejection of authorial intent as 'the intentional fallacy' (see Wimsatt & Beardsley 1946; Brooks 1951; Eliot 1982 [1919]), has always drawn its share of criticism – which as of late has been on the increase. For a prominent recent critique thereof, see Seán Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author* (2008).

7 Livingston is obliged to nuance this position as a 'partial intentionalism', however, since at the end of the day "intentions determine some, but not all, of the semantic properties of at least some works of art" (2009: 93). For a critical assessment of Livingston's intentionalism, see Sinnerbrink (2011a: 129–130).

8 Livingston addresses the work and biography of Ingmar Bergman as a clear instance of film as philosophy meeting his strict intentionalist criteria (see 2009: 125–193).

terms and in an independent manner. This means that films (or certain ones, at least) can just as much do philosophy (even if in their own distinctive way) as traditional philosophical texts, meaning that such cinematic performances of philosophy can contribute to the larger project of philosophy (see Livingston 2008: 592; Sinnerbrink 2011a: 120). Film, according to this view, thus offers *another medium* to philosophy (Wartenberg 2011a: 13; Falzon 2013). This position also includes the more radical view that film may enact a distinctive kind of 'cinematic thinking' that actively resists traditional philosophical terms and interpretations (e.g. Frampton 2006a; Sinnerbrink 2011a; 2011c).

The respective projects of Gilles Deleuze (1986; 1989) and Stanley Cavell (1979; 1981; 1996) are generally considered to be the two most prominent contemporary sources for the idea that films can in some way do philosophy (cf. Smith & Wartenberg 2006: 2; Livingston 2008: 592); although one could cite further sources such as Vivian Sobchack and her related insistence on film's capacity to do phenomenology (see Sobchack 2009; 2011: 191–192). Nevertheless, it is Stephen Mulhall's philosophical commentaries on the *Alien* film series that have emerged as the emblem for more recent proposals of a 'bold engagement' at work between film and philosophy. Mulhall's unambiguous statement of intent in the Introduction of *On Film* (2008) is often cited as *the* exemplar of an extreme conception of film as philosophy:

> I do not look to these films as handy or popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the way philosophers do. Such films are not philosophy's raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action – films as philosophizing. (2008: 4)

In reaction to the charges of his critics, who hastily assume that this view on film as philosophy is a global claim, Mulhall however pleads for a 'priority of the particular' (2008: 129–155). By this he insists that claims about film's ability to do philosophy, especially given the various forms it may assume, should not be formulated on the basis of general theoretical stances, but rather on detailed readings and interpretations of individual films. Robert Sinnerbrink (2011a: 123) – who proposes a bold conception of his own, 'cinematic thinking' – sets himself the same priority. For Sinnerbrink, the "philosophical dimensions of film [...] are enacted or performed rather than posited or proven", resulting in the claim that "the question of 'film as philosophy' cannot be decided by theoretical argument alone" (2011a: 141). He thus also develops his approach

to film as philosophy on the basis of detailed, philosophically informed film criticism that heeds the aesthetic singularity of individual films (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 10, 137, 141 ff.).[9]

Bold film-philosophical projects such as those of Mulhall and Sinnerbrink are by default repudiations of a generally perceived 'unequal', 'hierarchical' relation between film and philosophy, whereby philosophers are prone to make film the lesser 'junior partner', 'handmaiden', or 'instrument' of philosophy (Carel & Tuck 2011: 2; Cox & Levine 2011: 10; Sinnerbrink 2011c: 32–32; Frampton 2006a: 9–10). Sinnerbrink invokes Arthur Danto in his designation of the 'philosophical disenfranchisement of film', which speaks to these chronic tendencies to subordination, as he sees them, of reducing the aesthetic into an inferior mode of knowing which requires 'pure' philosophical thought to analyze, organize, clarify and ultimately *complete* it (2011a: 4, 8, 128; 2011c: 25). Any translation of film into a philosophically acceptable meta-language, says Sinnerbrink, means that films lose their singularity and complexity by being reductively subsumed within that theoretical framework (2011c: 26, 33). In Mulhall's similar diagnosis, this is a matter of philosophers who render films passive objects for the mere application of theoretical constructions, constructions that have their origin outside of the films and, often, the field of film studies as such. The consequence is that films simply become a means of confirming the truth to which the theoretical apparatus is already committed (Mulhall 2008: 7–8).

Having spoken of meeting of film and philosophy as a 'two-way street', we thus find in the camp of bold theories an acute sensitivity for the 'direction' less travelled: philosophy of film should make a u-turn from philosophy engaging with film, 'philosophy about film', to equally recognize its complementary reversal – 'film as philosophy', film's perceived ability to engage with/in philosophy. To generate more traffic in the opposite direction, consensus has it, films should be allowed to 'speak for themselves', in their own, uniquely cinematic, terms. Mulhall for instance argues that theoretical frameworks are blind to what films themselves may have to contribute to our philosophical understanding of those very films (2008: 8).[10] Films may have features that just as much contribute to the philosophical exploration of issues as pre-established

9 Some prominent 'moderate' theories of film as philosophy, as discussed above, are also characterized by a demand for the 'priority of the particular'. See Wartenberg (2007: 31, 133–134) and Livingston (2009: 200).

10 One should however be skeptical of how any form of philosophical thought in a film can be discerned without inevitably relying on any pre-exiting philosophical framework whatsoever. More on this in Chapter 3.

theories do, especially so when they put those very theories into question. This is in fact what his 'priority of the particular' is for: to recognize how *individual* films offer ways of questioning the *general* theories that philosophers bring to them (2008: 8). In this way, Mulhall concludes, films give us a way of holding philosophy to the self-questioning that it requires of itself (2008: 145). Along similar lines, Sinnerbrink stresses that the meeting of film and philosophy relationship should be seen as a mutually transformative one (e.g. 2011a: ix), which is obviously an affirmation of the active role for film to play in their meeting: cinematic thinking, with its own modes and qualities of aesthetic experience, can be seen as resisting (conventional) theorizing and thereby has the potential of opening new ways of thinking to philosophy (cf. Frampton 2006a: 10–11; Carel & Tuck 2011: 2). The general argument seems to be that the potential for film to make its philosophical contribution of film is more than a handy option – it is a necessity without which philosophy is in lack. Daniel Frampton (2006a: 9) sums it up: "If the starting point for these philosophers is 'what can film do for philosophy?', how long will it take for them to realize what film offers philosophy?"

3.4 *A Reconsideration of Degree: 'Engaging in' versus 'Engaging with' Philosophy*

My description of theories situated along this axis of film's engagement of philosophy – focusing on the extent of engagement – can however do with a further specification. Meta-analysis of film as philosophy in terms of the claimed degree of engagement requires that one sometimes uncouples the conjunction of 'with' and 'in' within the term 'film engaging with/in philosophy', as I have used it up to this point. After all, the proposition that a film engages *with* philosophy – irrespective of whether film's perceived engagement is 'weak', 'moderate' or 'bold' – is very different from saying that it engages *in* philosophy. In terms of the conditions of engagement that they presuppose, the latter requires film to somehow conform to, or 'become', philosophy in a way that the former does not.

The need for this distinction grows in significance the further one moves up along this axis towards bolder conceptions of the extent to which film can contribute to philosophy. A comparison between those of Mulhall and Sinnerbrink, as briefly touched on above, makes for a particularly clear case in point. As will still be elaborated upon later, both theorists claim particular films to engage in a form of reflection. But while for Mulhall this reflection involves films "thinking seriously and systematically" about philosophical issues "in just the way philosophers do" (2008: 4), Sinnerbrink works from the understanding that film's distinctive kind of reflection is quite unlike that of conventional philosophy.

According to Sinnerbrink, 'cinematic thinking' offers the possibility of "a non-conceptual or affective thinking in images that resists cognitive closure or theoretical subsumption" (2011a: 139). In his case, it is precisely the dissimilarity and otherness of a unique cinematic reflection that grants it the agency to contribute to standard philosophical reflection. For Sinnerbrink film therefore does not have to engage *in* – conventional forms, features or qualities of – philosophy for it to be able to engage *with* and thereby transform philosophy.[11]

Although I will still resort to the umbrella-reference, 'film engaging with/in philosophy', I now do so with the understanding that there are, at the very least, two types of engagement at stake here. And although theories on both sides of this distinction are concerned with the extent of film's supposed contribution to philosophy, it should be kept in mind that for some of them films do so precisely by *not* becoming philosophy.

4 Conditions of Engagement

The question of the 'degrees of engagement' between film and philosophy is only one side of the story. Theories of film as philosophy should also be considered along a complementary 'axis' that consists of putative *conditions* for film's engagement with/in philosophy. This axis involves an essentially different claim, as there has to be something that allows film to engage with/in philosophy – irrespective of the supposed degree of this engagement. Any theory of film as philosophy harbors an understanding of the distinctive means whereby film may engage with, or perhaps even be (a form of), philosophy. An evaluation of theories along this axis therefore looks for what they posit as the enabling conditions for film to relate to, and contribute to, philosophical reflection. These conditions involve the claimed properties, capacities or related contexts of film(s) which supposedly enable and constitute its active relationship with philosophy. A consequent meta-critical 'plotting' of positions on the two axes – that of the 'degree of engagement' correlated with these 'conditions of engagement' – can therefore show how a group of theories may be equally bold in their claim that film can do philosophy, yet differ in the supposed conditions that allow for this.

It is of course so: in assessing claims of how certain elements of film enable it to uniquely 'partake' in, or at the very least align with, philosophy,

11 This distinction is indebted to Chris Falzon's (2013) insightful comparison of Mulhall and Sinnerbrink.

we are inevitably confronted with the much larger question of what precisely is meant by 'philosophy'. Unsurprisingly, one finds that different notions of 'philosophy' – or, at the very least, a more ambiguous aesthetic or poetic 'philosophical-ness' – often serve as unquestioned points of departure which set an agenda for how a particular theory construes the interaction of film and philosophy. A meta-critical appraisal of film as philosophy therefore needs to be sensitive to the possible assumptions at work in any theory's understanding of 'philosophy' (cf. Smith & Wartenberg 2006: 2).

One major distinction that can be drawn regarding such assumptions is the difference between 'philosophy' as a verb and 'philosophy' as a noun – philosophy as something that you do, an activity, versus philosophy as subject matter, a relatively independent body of knowledge or discourse characterized by its own themes and interests. As will become clear below, philosophers of film across the Analytic-Continental divide prefer to approach philosophy as a verb – as a process, an action, an act of creation, even. Yet what the philosophy-as-verb perspective overlooks is that the act of philosophizing (whether by a person or a film) still presupposes *something* that one philosophizes about, the noun-aspect of 'philosophy', which involves a certain subject matter. Such decided assumptions about 'philosophy' are therefore likely to result in equally decided – and hence: selective, one-sided, impoverished – notions of film as philosophy too.

The pertinence of such assumptions to the debate is clearly visible in the way detractors of the idea of film as philosophy get accused of a too narrow, reductive view of what 'philosophy' is (e.g. Mulhall 2008: 130–146; Sinnerbrink 2011a: 117; Carroll 2013: 174). Such accusations tell us that any theory of film as philosophy has to offer some meta-philosophical account of what it regards 'philosophy' to be, even if only implicitly so (cf. Smith 2010; Falzon 2013). Yet the same applies to what is meant by 'film' or 'cinema'. So our assessments should also not lose sight of the parallel assumptions and definitions that also go into a theorist's understanding of the 'film' in 'film as philosophy'.

In the discussion that follows, I start with the less controversial conditions for film as philosophy, roughly corresponding with 'weak' and 'moderate' positions on the axis of 'degrees of engagement'. I however take special interest in the 'bolder' notions of film as philosophy that I then work my way toward, as they provide the key case studies for my ethical analyses later in the book.

4.1 *Film as Illustration and Representation*

The first and most widely assumed condition for films to engage with/in philosophy is that they can obviously illustrate philosophical ideas – even if this is taken to only achieve a 'weak', heuristic relation with philosophy.

Notwithstanding the fact that the very idea of representation is often drawn into question in certain philosophical circles, many approaches (often implicitly) rely on what can be broadly construed as the representational capacities of film as a general condition for film as philosophy (e.g. Falzon 2002; Litch 2010).

But what exactly do films have to represent to gain philosophical value? One apparent option is that films can directly represent actual philosophical discourse. A film may for example deal with a particular philosopher – like Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* (1993), the documentary *Derrida* (Kirby Dick & Amy Ziering 2002) or, more recently, *Hannah Arendt* (Margarethe von Trotta 2012). Or, alternatively, characters may explicitly discuss recognized philosophical ideas and texts, as in Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001) (see Falzon 2013). However, a film that merely exemplifies an established piece of philosophy without somehow developing and furthering it cannot be said to do philosophy in any significant sense; such a film does not so much 'make' philosophy as simply recount it (Carroll 2006: 174; Shaw 2006: 113).

Another option, much more comprehensively explored, is the indirect representation of philosophical discourse, particularly by virtue of the *narrative* status of films. A fiction film may for example function as a an adaptation of a recognized philosophical text or passage – as, for example, Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970), which by its appropriation of Plato's allegory of the cave arguably adds a socio-critical dimension to Plato's epistemology (Falzon 2002: 19, 23).

Yet exponents of this approach to film as philosophy do not necessarily require film narratives to deal with canonized philosophical thought as such. For example, in his reflections on how 'popular fictions' can do 'popular philosophy', Noël Carroll argues that Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) makes a contribution to the philosophy of love (2013: 183–192). By that he does not refer to any philosophy in particular, but rather to how the film can simply be 'philosophically revelatory' to the general public, its target audience, by enabling these viewers to discover some pathologies to which romantic love is prone (Carroll 2013: 184, 192). And the film achieves this, Carroll concludes, not through explicit articulations in character dialogue or voice-over narration, but through the narrative structure of a 'double romance' based on the sequential juxtaposition of two love affairs (2013: 185–186, 192).

Of course, the claim that a film's *narrative* makes a philosophical contribution is not the same as stating that the contribution is made on the basis of a distinctly *cinematic* representation. The latter requires that a film makes its philosophical contribution through representing its narrative, if not in a medium-specific manner, at least in a manner that foregrounds the experiential

resources at its disposal. And this is indeed the view that many theorists hold: that the cinematic means of representation gives philosophical value to the narratives that films portray; that the medium somehow adds to or augments the philosophical themes raised by the narratives in films. According to Damian Cox and Michael Levine (2011: 10–12), for example, the medium of film simply does some things better than standard philosophical writing: by achieving greater nuance and perspective, cinematic representation of philosophical issues can sometimes be more suitably (emotionally, morally) engaging. Noël Carroll hits a similar note, on occasion. In his analysis of *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder 1950), he gives special consideration to the aesthetic complexities of the film – such as the film's subtle reliance on horror imagery – as integral to the emotional engagement by which the film leads viewers to philosophical insights on aging (2013: 177). By this kind of account, the philosophical work of a film such as *Sunset Boulevard* does not rest on narrative representation alone; it rests also on a variety of aesthetic and experiential resources at the disposal of the narrative *as film*.

4.2 *Philosophical Methods*

4.2.1 A Methodological Characterization of Philosophy

A second general condition for films to do philosophy, one usually hammered on by Analytic philosophers, is that films must somehow give expression to the recognized methods of philosophy – things like arguments, thought experiments, and counter-examples, among other tried and tested techniques of the discipline.

Thomas Wartenberg (2007; 2011a) is the most influential representative of this approach to film as philosophy. He sets off from a 'methodological characterization' that rejects specifications of philosophy based on its subject in favour of a more suitably uncontentious conception of philosophy: philosophy as involving characteristic forms, methods, or techniques *through which* it addresses its subject matter. If it can consequently be shown, as Wartenberg proposes, that some films can successfully 'screen' a given philosophical technique, then we are quite right to claim that those films are doing philosophy (Wartenberg 2007: 29–31).

The two philosophical techniques that have received the most attention as potential conditions for film as philosophy are the argument and the thought experiment.

4.2.2 Argument

Debates over the philosophical status of film often hover around the condition of argumentation: can a film – and particularly a popular fiction film – do

philosophy by enacting its own argument(s) in a way that is true to the form of film?

Detractors of this idea generally argue that film does not measure up to what they consider to be the qualifying features of argumentation. For them, claims of film being or doing philosophy are at best metaphorical – apart from verbal arguments articulated by characters, *ad nauseam,* in a case like Woody Allen, film as a predominantly visual and narrative art cannot give reasons, make arguments or draw conclusions, hence it cannot be philosophy in the proper sense (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 117).

One such detractor is Bruce Russell (2005). With his account of the 'philosophical limits of film', he holds that potential philosophical contributions of film are strictly limited to raising philosophical questions and, in cases of sufficient explicitness, offering counterexamples to proposed necessary truths – nothing more. As he stresses, a film cannot establish a philosophical thesis. This is because, firstly, the particular examples that a film presents are not sufficiently generalizable and, secondly, the elements of an imaginary, fictional world do not necessarily correspond to the actual world and therefore cannot offer real evidence or data. Julian Baggini's (2003) criticism of Mulhall's work on the *Alien* tetralogy proceeds along similar lines, even though he does not seem to work with such a tightly defined notion of philosophical argumentation. Baggini emphasizes that "for philosophy to be anything more than an exchange of opinions, it must involve the giving of good reasons for accepting or rejecting the position under discussion" (2003: online). Although many films and works of literature do offer compelling symbolic representations of the world, most do not provide reasons for us to accept these representations as accurate. And, spoiler-alert: Baggini finds such reasons also to be lacking in the quartet of *Alien* films.

Film may however be seen as engaging in argumentation if notions of what counts as an 'argument' – or, more generally, 'rationality' – are made less restrictive. This is the go-to rebuttal against overly reductive 'logicistic' standards levelled at the possibility of film as philosophy. I highlight two examples: the views of Stephen Mulhall and, once again, Noël Carroll.

Mulhall clearly appeals to a more inclusive notion of cinematic argument when he argues that (films) doing philosophy can take more forms than only that of narrowly construed arguments or "reason-giving" (2008: 137). The shift from 'reason-giving' to mere 'reasoning' opens up considerably more possibilities for film to be of philosophical value. Instead of offering arguments, Mulhall proposes, film may reorient, even re-conceive, the pre-existing 'space of thought' within which arguments take place, by presenting alternative or novel ways of thinking about a given topic (2008: 137–138). By casting unique

visions and symbolic orderings of our world, a film may question or challenge certain philosophical, ontological, or ethical priorities by asking us to look at things from a different perspective. On top of that, Mulhall asserts, film has potent resources for achieving such re-envisionings of the space of thought. As we do with our interlocutors, film can make appeals to the heart, to one's affective responses and to one's imagination; it enhances understanding via more-or-less direct access to our affections and sensibilities (2008: 141).

Carroll (2013: 170–172) appeals likewise to a more loosely construed notion of 'argument' in defending the idea that films may perform philosophical argumentation. He notes for example that explicit argumentation is not an essential feature of all philosophizing – think of Nietzschean aphorisms, or Wittgensteinian puzzles, typically unaccompanied by conventional argument (2013: 170). Yet the bigger problem, Carroll points out, is that detractors of film's capacity for argument are looking for the argumentation in the wrong place. The argument, as such, does not lie in the film but in the minds of viewers; films can provide the material that enables viewers to reason and to reach relevant philosophical insights by themselves (2013: 171–172, 179, 215). For Carroll, certain films have a 'maieutic' character (a notion pertaining to the action of a midwife who draws an infant from the mother's body) insofar as they elicit the reasoning required to reach a particular philosophical claim or insight (2013: 171, 186, 215). The actual argumentation is delegated to the viewer. Hence, Carroll concludes, filmic argument much rather proceeds in the manner of a rhetorical question – arguably a philosophical method in its own right (2013: 171, 180, 186). A series of rhetorical questions can further a philosophical thesis, since "[i]t elicits conclusions by recruiting the ratiocination and the standing beliefs of the audience to do the pertinent work of reasoning and analysis" (2013: 186). Therefore, contrary to the intentionalism of other 'moderate' stances noted earlier, Carroll makes central the involvement of *the viewer* in completing, and thus bringing home, the philosophical arguments that films may have to offer.

4.2.3 Thought Experiment

Another philosophical method typically singled out as a condition for film as philosophy is the thought experiment – a method that fiction films seem particularly suited to perform, much more than laying out premises and conclusions, at least.

Thomas Wartenberg has been a frequent advocate and expositor of this approach (e.g. Wartenberg 2003; 2007: 55–75; 2011a: 18–21). To name one prominent instance: he argues that the philosophical significance of *The Matrix* (Lana & Lilly Wachoski 1999) lies in its screening of René Descartes' classic thought experiment of the 'evil demon' scenario (Wartenberg 2007: 56). In the

same way that Descartes' thought experiment invites us to imagine a malicious and all-powerful demon that deceives us into accepting a dream as reality, the film portrays a situation in which malicious machines hold humanity captive in an elaborate illusion called 'the Matrix'. Hence, the film just as much presents a scenario in which the deception hypothesis is true. Yet, for Wartenberg, the film goes beyond being a sheer analogy of Descartes' thought experiment: the film is structured so that viewers participate in the main protagonist's false reality and the ensuing removal thereof; and thereby viewers are led to question beliefs about their own reality (Wartenberg 2007: 73–74). So, Wartenberg concludes, by showing a situation in which skepticism about external reality is justified, and supporting that possible situation through a digital, visual, and narrative 'deception' of the viewer, *The Matrix* is not simply illustrating philosophy but in fact *doing* philosophy.

Yet thought experiments as philosophical method should not be reduced to dealing only with narrative scenarios. Theorists have therefore also expressed interest in what this approach has to say about how non-narrative, structural avant garde films may do philosophy (see Carroll 2006; Wartenberg 2007: 117–132; 2011a: 21). In this regard, Noël Carroll (2006) claims that Ernie Gehr's structural film, *Serene Velocity* (1970), is an instance of philosophizing through the moving image; and that it achieves this feat by functioning as a philosophical thought experiment. For Carroll (the thought experiment is "patently a form of argumentation" that "can also be designed to reach positive conclusions" (2006: 180). But Carroll makes it clear that the thought experiment necessarily involves the reflective resources of the viewer/listener and that the resultant "argument, so to speak, transpires in the movement of thought in the reader's mind and not necessarily on the page [or in the film]" (2006: 180). In the case of *Serene Velocity*, the film's rhythmic juxtaposition of moments of stillness and moments of movement draws the viewer into reflecting on the difference between photography and cinematography, while at the same time vividly foregrounding the possibility of movement in film (2006: 178). Hence the film acts as "a piece of conceptual of analysis" showing us that movement is an essential attribute of any instance that we may call film (2006: 179, 183). Wartenberg (2011a: 21), who deals with such minimalistic structural films along similar lines, distinguishes this essentially non-narrative mode of philosophical work as the performance of "real cinematic experiments".

4.3 *Philosophical Thinking*

A third prominently argued-for condition for films to engage with/in philosophy is that films can somehow stage or enact philosophical thought. Considering the work of classical theorists like Sergei Eisenstein (cinematic

montage and 'shock to thought'), Hugo Münsterberg (cinema as mirroring mental processes) and Jean Epstein (cinema as 'intelligence machine'), among many others, one may be warranted to claim that there has always been something like a 'film-as-thought' tradition in film theory (see Botz-Bornstein 2011). This tradition generally may be said to theorize cinema as an extension, analogy or substitute of the human mind (Elsaesser & Hagener 2009: 151–157). But in the context with which I am concerned here, the claim is rather that film can specifically assume a form of *philosophical* thinking; and that this serves as the condition for film's capacity to do philosophy.

4.3.1 'Thinking in Just the Way Philosophers Do'

As discussed before, Stephen Mulhall (2008) makes this claim in a bravely unambiguous fashion – stating that the films he deals with exhibit 'reflective engagement' to the extent that they can be said to 'philosophize'. As 'philosophy in action', these films are considered to 'think seriously and systematically', 'address questions', 'deploy and develop issues', 'critically evaluate theories', 'reflect on their own conditions' and even 'give account of themselves' (Mulhall 2008: 3–5, 7–9; cf. Livingston 2008: 592).

Quite similar assumptions about how film can engage in its *own* philosophical reflection are on display in Simon Critchley's well-known commentary on *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick 1998). Critchley warns, much like Mulhall does, that reading the film through the philosophical meta-language of an established theory is to be concerned with ideas about the film, rather than with the film itself, and thereby to "miss what is specific to the medium of film" (2005: 139). For him, the film-art of director Terrence Malick demands that we let the film *itself* do the philosophizing; "that we take seriously the idea that film is less an illustration of philosophical ideas and theories [...] and more a form of philosophizing, of reflection, reasoning and argument" (2005: 139).[12]

It is never absolutely clear in these cases whether a film's 'philosophical thinking' is meant to be taken in some figurative sense. Yet Mulhall, especially, gives us no reason to believe that this is a mere flurry of metaphorical rhetoric. A particularly telling claim is that the films concerned exercise their reflective abilities "in just the way philosophers do" (2008: 4). Hence, one can assume that this is a matter of film engaging *in* philosophy (and not *with* philosophy, as distinguished earlier) and that Mulhall is speaking of 'philosophizing' in a more or less conventional and *literal* sense. It is presumably for this reason

12 Malick's cinematic oeuvre is frequently labelled as having a 'contemplative' quality (Cavell 1979: xiv–xvii; Frampton 2006a: 74, 97, 193; Sinnerbrink 2011d: 180, 190; Rybin 2012). More on this in Chapter 4.

that Mulhall takes these films "as making real contributions" to philosophical debates (2008: 4). While there may be uncertainty about questions of literalness, there is little doubt over the strong, inherent agency that this approach attributes to 'philosophizing' films. One may even be justified in calling this a subjective agency insofar as Mulhall seems to intentionally personify films by, for example, considering them to be 'preoccupied', 'obsessed', 'self-aware' and even 'making demands' (2008: 3, 4, 9).[13] One should, of course, ask on account of what exactly films can have such a (reflective, philosophizing) agency, since it is not obvious that something other than human agents can be capable of philosophical activity (Wartenberg 2006: 23n20). On this point Mulhall's descriptions disappoint, as the supposed philosophical agency of film remains much more of a guiding assumption than a substantiated claim.

Another way of putting this problem is that the exact (ontological) locus of the film's 'philosophical thinking', '-reflection' or '-reasoning' – and by implication the source or grounds of the film's supposed agency – in accounts such as Mulhall's is not readily apparent. How is film's philosophical thinking constituted? It seems that there are three options (or some mixture thereof) of relevance here: firstly, that the 'philosophical thinking' is somehow inherent to the medium of film and the cinematic-narrative process that it enacts; secondly, that the 'philosophical thinking' of a film is ultimately an expression of the filmmaker's thinking; or, thirdly, that a film's 'philosophical thinking' rather refers to thinking evoked in the viewer. Mulhall certainly comes across as wanting to convince us of the first option – that the thinking is predominantly inherent to the film. Yet indications of the second and third options repeatedly sneak into his film readings. In spite of his claim that films themselves 'philosophize', for example, he exhibits an auteurist tendency to make the filmmaker's intention of decisive importance in explaining the philosophical perspective of a film (e.g. 2008: 56; cf. Livingston 2008: 592–593). At other times, Mulhall also undermines the alleged independent thinking of film by drawing the viewer's reflective work into the equation. He would speak of films as inviting, ultimately, certain interpretations or thematic considerations *from us* (e.g. 2008: 9, 30, 106, 254). In such instances, Mulhall seems to suggest that the philosophical thinking of film is basically that which takes effect in the viewer.

13 This reminds of how W.J.T. Mitchell (2006) approaches the power of images in the more or less literal terms of their having 'desires', 'drives', 'needs' and 'demands' of their own. Novel as Mulhall and Mitchell's personifications might seem, though, they do build on earlier, more acknowledged models – for example, the inclination in philosophical hermeneutics (e.g. Gadamer) to view the encounter between recipient and artwork as a meeting of two subjects, rather than subject and object.

It thus remains unclear whether film only initiates philosophical thinking in its audience or whether film itself does the thinking (for us); alternatively, it could be that these two things are purposely assumed to overlap (cf. Flory 2009: 14–15). Moreover, there are instances where Mulhall also combines the two options above, notably so when he suggests that filmmakers intentionally address the reflectively receptive viewer in a philosophical way (e.g. 2008: 30, 106). This leaves me wondering what role, if any, the supposed 'thinking' of the film itself plays in these instances. Therefore, I must admit, the nature of the 'philosophical thinking' enacted by film – while intriguing as a claimed condition for film to do philosophy – remains elusive and difficult to pin down in the oft-cited Mulhall who supposedly endorses the notion.

4.3.2 Thinking Philosophical Problems

To broadly qualify the 'philosophical thinking' performed by films as 'explorative', 'evaluative', 'systematic' or 'self-reflexive' still does not spell out what film's philosophizing essentially involves, nor how it contributes to philosophy. Yet the field does offer some indications of what the 'substance' of a film's philosophical activity may more specifically involve. One notable specification of the nature of film's 'philosophical thinking' sees it as a matter of film engaging with/in some philosophical problem. This offers a way of clarifying what is at stake when someone like Mulhall claims that films 'reflect philosophically': it means that such films respond to a philosophical problem in a distinctly cinematic way. They therefore go beyond the illustration of philosophical problems by more concretely embodying, even addressing, such problems. Mulhall (2008: 3–5) indeed attests to this understanding by saying, for example, that the *Alien* films have a recurrent concern with the problem of the relation between human identity and embodiment.

Here Mulhall shows, most clearly so, his indebtedness to Stanley Cavell[14], as Cavell's early work especially is a paradigmatic example of approaching the 'thinking' of films in terms of how they contend with philosophical problems. For Cavell, the film as a photographic medium is deeply interwoven with the modern condition of skepticism: the philosophical question of whether our finite knowledge and experience withhold us from certainty about the nature of the ('outside') world and other minds. Cavell famously locates film's philosophical value in it being "a moving image of skepticism" (1979: 188; 2005 [1985]: 118). Yet in Cavell's account the cinematic engagement with a

14 Apart from the fact that Cavell is one of the few philosophers of film whose views Mulhall invokes, there is also a strong perception in the field that Mulhall represents a Cavellian approach. For a sample, see Smith and Wartenberg (2006: 2).

philosophical problem runs much deeper than the mere portrayal thereof – even in the case of films like *The Matrix*, that arguably enact skeptical thought experiments of their own. For him film's engagement in and with skepticism is rather inherently tied to properties of the medium itself, its means of screening reality, and hence the very conditions of cinematic presentation and perception (Schmerheim 2013a: 413; Rodowick, n.d.: 2–3).

The role of the screen in cinema occupies a central place in Cavell's line of reasoning – particularly as a barrier between the projected film world and the world of the viewer (see Schmerheim 2013a: 414). The screen makes the audience invisible by *screening* viewers from the world of the film; and at the same time it *screens* the existence of the film world from the viewer (Cavell 1979: 24). The screened reality of film and the audience thus exist in mutual absence to one another. In this way cinema's screening of the world expresses the modern skeptical attitude of a self, unhinged from our 'presentness' to the world, in which only the interposing 'screen' of subjectivity is present to this isolated self (Cavell 1979: 22).[15] The very conditions of cinema as photographic medium thus instantiates our ontological distance and detachment from reality, "the modern fate to relate to the world by viewing it, taking views of it, as from behind the self" (Cavell 2005 [1985]: 116–117). By conveying the understanding that our only connection with the world is through our perceptions of it, film embodies the problem of skepticism (Rodowick, n.d.: 2). It is a 'moving image of skepticism' "because I see what is not before me, because our senses are satisfied with reality, while that reality does not exist" (Cavell 2005 [1985]: 118).

Yet, film does *more* in this situation, as photographs still relate something of the real world to the film viewer. Here the extensive influence of André Bazin on Cavell's thought is significant. Like Bazin, Cavell (1979: 16) stresses the photographic basis of film (Cavell 1979: 16; Eldridge 2014b: 4). A photograph is essentially a photograph of reality. While a painting presents us with the 'likeness' of things, a photograph "presents us, we want to say, with the thing itself" (1979: 17). This intuitive ontological connection between a photograph and what is photographed is, Cavell tells us, something of a mystery that we struggle to adequately capture in language (1979: 17–20). Yet this does not withhold him from claiming that "a photograph emphasizes the existence of its subject, recording it" in a way that "it may be called a transcription" (2005 [1985]: 118). So despite creating our skeptical state of ontological disconnection – the

15 Since genre, for Cavell, is an extension of the *medium* of cinema he later also explores how skepticism comes into expression through specific genres of film – a prominent example being what Cavell (1981) labels the 'comedy of remarriage', which features in my discussion of Cavell's ethics in Chapter 3.

audience's absence to the film world and its simultaneous absence from us – the screening of the world at the same time makes its reality present to the viewer. Photographical 'transcriptions' of reality maintain the 'presentness' of the world (1979: 23).

Cavell's view of the cinema is therefore more than an analogy or exemplification of skepticism: in addition to expressing the problem, film also addresses it, and in so doing shows us its possible overcoming. As Rodowick (n.d. 3) notes, "the almost perfect realization of skeptical perception is a way, paradoxically, of reconnecting us to the world and asserting its causal presence". This response to the problem of skepticism is realized through the conditions of cinema as medium. The images of cinema are after all not hand-made, but achieved through the 'automatism' of photography. This entails that the automatic manufacturing of images of the world is achieved "by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction" (1979: 23).[16] Photography therefore promises an overcoming of skepticism's subjective isolation by mechanically reproducing and presenting the world independently of human subjectivity. Yet what we ultimately want from such a sense of the world's 'presentness' is "not exactly a conviction of the world's presence to us, but of our presence to it" (1979: 22). And here Cavell admits that the photographic medium falls short as a 'solution' to skepticism: it only "maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it" (1979: 22). Photography's overcoming of subjectivity is thus compromised insofar as it makes reality present to me while I am not present to it (1979: 23). For this reason, cinema can only offer us the direction to an answer, the hope for satisfying the human wish "to escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation – a wish for the power to reach this world" (1979: 21).

Cavell offers a dramatic picture of how film can engage with philosophy on the basis of addressing a philosophical problem – in this case that of skepticism. Yet where does the 'thinking' of film fit into this picture? Commentators of Cavell tend to be quick to use the notion without telling us what exactly constitutes the moment of film's 'philosophical thinking' (e.g. Eldridge 2014b). Cavell himself does not give a straight answer to this question. In speaking of the question of what a photograph is, Cavell (2005 [1985]: 117) remarks that he is "likely to characterize this question as asking what a photograph is thinking about" or "what the text knows of itself". And this thinking not only takes the form of "self-reference" and "self-acknowledgment", but also "sometimes of its knowledge of others, of me" (2005 [1985]: 117). In the context of

16 Not that one should conclude that Cavell, and Bazin, adhere to an uncomplicated, naive photographic realism. See Eldridge (2014b: 7–9).

the problem of skepticism one may infer that the 'thinking' of film has to do with the self-knowledge of its own skeptical status and the awareness with which it deals with this problem. And films probably also 'think' insofar as they knowingly acknowledge their conditioning of the viewer's skeptical position. Nevertheless, what we can safely conclude is that, for Cavell, the reflective powers of film first and foremost arise from the nature of *the medium*: Cavell stresses, with reference to *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Frank Capra 1936), that in dealing with the thoughtful reflexivity of what comes across as a "gullible, sentimental, unintellectual film", he is "not speaking of the man Capra but of the power and glory of a medium, of what it knows of itself" (2005 [1985]: 118). And it is presumably through this 'knowingness' of the medium that films have the potential to "reorient everything philosophy has said" (Cavell 1996: xii); not offering philosophy any satisfying answers but 'directions to answers' and distinct 'ways to think' (Cavell 2005 [1983]: 92; cf. Flory 2009: 14–15).

4.4 *Self-Reflection*

A fourth claimed condition for films to do philosophy involves their ability to elicit and facilitate experiences of self-reflection. This approach requires that one's understanding of 'philosophy' also makes room for the necessary self-examination and self-consciousness that go hand in hand with its practice. Since its earliest days Western philosophy was framed by the Socratic admonishment to 'know thyself', which entails that philosophical methods and arguments should in the first place be applied to one's own thought and experience. The reasoning is thus that whenever films inspire, guide, or mediate relevant forms of self-reflection, they can be said to perform this important aspect of philosophy. In fact, this claim is frequently part and parcel of earlier discussed assertions that films engage in argumentation, or enact a 'thinking' of their own, since the dividing line between the film's work and the reflective work of the viewer remains at best a porous one.[17] A common claim in this context, for instance, is that 'reflective' films play the role of the interlocutor by leading its viewers in a process of self-reflective philosophical *questioning* – notably a questioning of the viewer's beliefs (e.g. Sinnerbrink 2014b: 171; Carroll 2006: 180; Flory 2009: 5).

The condition of self-reflection for films to do philosophy is however more openly foregrounded in phenomenological approaches to film, which I would like to briefly illustrate in the terms set by Vivian Sobchack's influential film

17 I have already covered Carroll's 'maieutic' characterization of filmic argumentation as prominent case in point.

phenomenology. Sobchack, a major name in film philosophy overall, is not a recognized participant in debates on 'film as philosophy' as such, nor would she likely consider herself one. Yet she does have a very clear position on 'film as phenomenology' – the idea that film partakes in phenomenology as a distinct philosophical practice and tradition – which I want to incorporate into this discussion as an illuminating subvariant of the claim that films can do (some type of) 'philosophy'.

Sobchack leaves little doubt over the fact that she considers film to harbor self-sufficient phenomenological capacities. Notably, she invokes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of film as an essentially 'phenomenological art', and offers an outline of what she considers to be historical predecessors of the idea of 'film as phenomenology' (Sobchack 2009: 439–442). By posing the conjunction of 'phenomenology of film/film as phenomenology', Sobchack furthermore makes it clear that any phenomenological account of film should be inherently harmonized with a recognition of the phenomenological performativity of film itself, that "the cinema enacts what is also being enacted by its viewer" (Sobchack 2011: 192). The application of the phenomenological method to film and film's own reciprocal 'application' of phenomenology are therefore two sides of the same coin – the one illuminates and 'fleshes out' the other (2011: 191–192).

Key to the special intertwinement that Sobchack identifies between film and phenomenology is the unique 'meta-phenomenological' qualities of the former: film stages an experience of our experience, and thereby serves as a telling phenomenology of our own phenomenology.[18] While phenomenology generally calls for the need to attend to phenomena as they are given to conscious experience, Sobchack emphasizes the distinctive *self-reflective* experience that necessarily accompanies our experience of cinema (Sorfa 2013: 355). She analyses, for example, how the supposed 'minimalism' of Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993) – consisting of a single shot of the screen filled with the color blue, accompanied by a moving audio narration of Jarman's life – subjectively constitutes for its viewers "a meaningful experience of extreme self-reflection on the dynamics, habits, creativity, and plenitude of their own embodied perception" (2011: 204; cf. 2009: 437). Film – comprising a 'double movement' of both recording experience *and* offering itself as an experience (Sorfa 2013: 353) – thus achieves what Sobchack (1992: 5) calls "experience expressing experience" as the means to the viewer's phenomenological self-reflection.

18 Although Sobchack herself does not use the term 'meta-phenomenology', as far as I am aware, I find Daniel Frampton's label for her approach a useful one (e.g. Frampton 2006a: 91).

How exactly does film realize this meta-level 'leverage' over our experience? For Sobchack film achieves this effect through an inter-subjective exchange between film and viewer, as she explicitly argues film to have its own perceptual, reflective and even experiential agency. Hence this account makes it patently clear that film acts as an active, autonomous subject in relation to the equally active film-spectator: the film experience entails "a film and its spectator as two active and differently situated viewers viewing in intersubjective, dialectical, and dialogic conjunction (2009: 443). Film is, just as much as its viewer, a perceptive and expressive actor and even an outright 'subject' (2009: 443; 2011: 192–193). Film is furthermore both subject *and* object at once, "an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood (1992: 3–4). And, through editing, film can even demonstrate acts of reflection and meaning-making (2009: 437).

How, one may ask, can this kind of subjective agency inhere within film? Sobchack, first of all, eschews transcendental, incorporeal notions of phenomenology (Edmund Husserl) in favor of an existential phenomenology (particularly that of Merleau-Ponty) that emphasizes the contextual situatedness of consciousness (2009: 438, 443). This tradition of thought is extended to her understanding of the film-as-subject: the subjective agency of film – its capacity to express perception and reflection – is enabled by the "common structures of embodied existence" that precede and constitute film experience (1992: 5). The filmmaker, the film and the spectators *share* a capacity for and possession of experience, through the structures of embodied existence that they have in common. And their similar (perceptual, embodied, material, existential) modes of 'being-in-the-world' form the inter-subjective basis of cinematic communication (1992: 5). Sobchack thus posits a deep-seated *continuity* (entailing also interaction and transition) between film and spectator inasmuch as they are equally constituted by a corporeal-material existence (Elsaesser & Hagener 2009 119; Sobchack 2011: 204).[19]

This gives another inflection to the characterization of cinema as 'experience expressing experience', or what Sobchack alternatively terms as "the expression of experience by experience" (1992: 3): the particular perceptive and expressive capacities of cinema as technology "not only refer to embodied experience but also use embodied experience (of material enworldedness, orientation, movement, seeing, hearing, and reflection) as the medium of such

19 Sobchack (1992: 10) however warns that this continuity, this shared 'double occupancy of cinematic space', should not be taken to entail a conflation of the film and the viewer. Film's own concretely bodied experience still stands over against that of the viewer.

reference" (2011: 192). Cinema thus *uses* experience (modes of embodied existence) to express experience. Cinema shows us (through the technological mediation of camera, projector and screen) acts of seeing, hearing and moving as both the original structures of existential being and also as the enabling, mediating substance of cinema's own 'language' (1992: 3–4, 11; 2008: 443). Film experience therefore involves a distinctive doubling of our structures of experience. The film viewer sees the film's visible images, for instance, both as *a world* and as the *seeing of a world*, since film not only represents but also performs the existential structure of sight (1992: 56). The viewer's experience of a film is thus met by the film's own expression of the structures of experience that we share with it.

If we therefore ask what the conditions are for film to engage with/in phenomenology, Sobchack is really presenting us with two claims: the first condition relates to how film can have its own phenomenology (and thus engages *in* phenomenology); and the second relates to how film (as its own phenomenology) can in turn engage *with* and contribute to philosophical phenomenology. The first claim is that film's sharing in our experience – and more specifically our structures of embodied experience – is the enabling condition for film to enact its own phenomenology; or to enact what is also being enacted by its viewer, as Sobchack would likely put it. For this reason the meeting between a film and its viewer entails a dynamic, dialogic and dialectic engagement between "two perceptive and expressive subjects" (2011: 192–193). The second claim is that by staging for us an experience of (its) experience film can uniquely prompt processes of self-reflection on our own material, embodied experience (which we have in common with film). This marks film's unique contribution to philosophical phenomenology. A reflective posturing towards the self – in the experience of our experience, and the consciousness of our consciousness – is the most fundamental condition, the 'ground zero', of the practice of phenomenology (see Gallagher & Zahavi 2010). For Sobchack, the 'meta-phenomenological' capacities of film can lead viewers to that experiential space in a special way.

4.5 *Cinematic Thinking*

A fifth and final prominent claim, relating to possible conditions for film as philosophy, is that film adopts a dynamic relation to philosophy by way of its own distinctive 'cinematic thinking'. The designation 'cinematic thinking', often embracing also broader notions of 'aesthetic experience' and 'thinking', admittedly encapsulates a variety of related approaches. Yet it is not unreasonable to conclude that this line of theorization has a basic indebtedness to the influential film writing of Gilles Deleuze (1986; 1989), who remains the leading

reference to contemporary approaches examining the philosophical potentials of a distinctly cinematic thinking (see Sinnerbrink 2011a: 90–102, 137; Flaxman 2000: 35–47; Huygens 2007; Colman 2011: 179–190).

There are two general themes in Deleuze's thinking that I deem especially influential in the cinematic thinking approach to film as philosophy: the implications of (*a*) his *immanentist* outlook in conjunction with (*b*) his understanding of philosophy as the *creation of concepts*.

First, Deleuze's immanentist, anti-representationalist philosophy strictly rejects the notion of the transcendental subject and the division between subject and object, or between consciousness and its contents, that it entails. For Deleuze, as Elsaesser and Hagener (2009: 158) helpfully sum up, "cinema is material and immaterial, a form of becoming rather than a mode of signification or meaning, and he posits for it an immanence of being in which matter, motion and consciousness are inseparably intertwined". Images therefore function on a material-vitalist 'plane of immanence', enveloping subjectivity so radically that notions of its transcendence, interiority, separateness and even existence are rendered impossible. Deleuze effectively levels consciousness and cinema on the *same level* of existence – which he fleshes out in terms of matter, movement, force, energy, biology and neuro-physiology – thus allowing for sweeping unifications such as the well-known pronouncement that "the brain is the screen" (Deleuze 2000: 366). This perspective has given impetus to characterizations of 'cinematic thinking' as not only being expressive of categories of immanence but, importantly, as being essentially distinct from other conventional senses of (our own) 'thinking'. Any claim that film 'thinks', in this context, should therefore *not* be taken as expressive of some subjective agency – as, for example, appears to be at play in the claim that films 'think philosophically' (Mulhall, Cavell). Cinematic thinking, on this account, rather emerges as a provocative Other to philosophical thinking: it is not conceptual but perceptual, affective and imagistic; and accordingly resists paraphrase into conventional philosophical terms. Cinematic thinking is its own, wholly independent, mode of reflection. Yet, as Falzon (2013) rightly points out, such a radical rendering of 'film as (its own) philosophy' does run the risk of making cinematic 'thinking' too different from philosophy for it to do anything recognizably philosophical. If so, film as an autonomous mode of thinking would at best only offer a way of escaping or transcending – and not engaging with – philosophical thought.

The second influential Deleuzian theme in the context of film as philosophy is the view that philosophy – not only as a practice, but as a power or force, as per Deleuze's process ontology – involves the creation and invention of concepts (e.g. Deleuze 2005). Essentially, for Deleuze, "[a] theory of cinema is not

'about' cinema, but about the concepts that cinema gives rise to" (1989: 280). He tells us, in fact, that philosophy *must* make concepts, as a matter of necessity; yet that philosophy is especially inclined to do so when it is provoked by the sensations, percepts, and affects of cinema (2005: 34). While cinema as a creative activity works through sensations, and philosophy through concepts, there is still intercommunication between the two as a result of them sharing in similar problems, the 'same tremors', occurring in the different circumstances of 'totally different terrains' (2000: 367). And the ways in which cinema seeks to resolve such problems, for itself, by its own means, compels philosophy to look for *its* answers in the cinema (2000: 367; Mullarkey 2009b: 78). So even though Deleuze may be reluctant to say that cinema works through concepts *per se*, there is nevertheless the suggestion, certainly in his two *Cinema* books, that moving images do possess a certain *conceptual power* (Mullarkey 2009b: 80). For "[c]inema not only puts movement in the image, it also puts movement in the mind" (Deleuze 2000: 366). As the cinematic image produces "a shock to thought", the "automatic movement" of cinema gives rise to a "spiritual automation" in us (1989: 156). Through these movements, then, as part of an entire immanent existence of movement and becoming in Deleuze's thinking, cinema instigates the creation of concepts. And the cinematic thinking approach inspired by Deleuze follows suit: it puts great emphasis on the supposed creative power of cinema, which derives from an essential disconnect between cinema and conventional forms of thought. For those following this approach, it is because cinematic thinking is inherently perceptual, affective, and imagistic – and *not* conceptual – that it can challenge and compel philosophy to establish new forms of thought.

In what follows, I present two paradigmatic examples of how the cinematic thinking approach construes the idea of film doing philosophy, both proceeding from the Deleuzian tenets laid out above: Robert Sinnerbrink's 'romantic film-philosophy' and Daniel Frampton's 'filmosophy'.[20]

4.5.1 Cinematic Thinking in 'Romantic Film-Philosophy'

Robert Sinnerbrink, as noted earlier, opposes the prevailing tendency to disenfranchise cinematic aesthetics by subjecting it to conceptual theorization. As an alternative, he proposes what he calls a 'romantic film-philosophy' (2011c: 26, 36–38; cf. 2011d), which "responds to film as a way of thinking, one that might

20 There are certainly a host of other film philosophers who find more general inspiration in Deleuze's thought, beyond the context of the film as philosophy that I investigate here – among them, Patricia Pisters, Ronald Bogue, Felicity Colman, Gregory Flaxman, David Martin-Jones, and Paola Marrati, to name but a few.

even be understood as distinctively cinematic" (Sinnerbrink 2011c: 26). This is an effort to restore the balance between film and philosophy: to let film, in all its complexity and philosophical reflexiveness, confront philosophy with a thinking of its own. Cinematic thinking, as Sinnerbrink describes it, has the distinct qualities of an 'intuitive', 'affective', 'aesthetic' kind of reflection, a 'non-conceptual' 'thinking in images' even, that invites philosophical reflection, yet resists cognitive closure and any final subsumption under theory (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 139, 152). The Deleuzian tones in these descriptions are evident. Yet Sinnerbrink also demonstrates the marked influence of Heideggerian philosophy on his understanding of what cinematic thinking is and does: by aesthetically (cinematically) disclosing novel aspects of experience, such thinking can question normative frameworks, challenge given, established ways of seeing, and open up new ways of thinking (2011a: 141–142; cf. 2006; 2014c).

Sinnerbrink mostly associates cinematic thinking with 'more challenging kinds of film' and singles out the work of directors David Lynch, Lars von Trier and Terrence Malick as cases in point (2011a: 9–10, 138–139). Films like *Inland Empire* (David Lynch 2006), *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier 2009) and *The New World* (Terrence Malick 2005), he argues, can evoke new ways of thinking and feeling through novel strategies of questioning and experimentation. "Such films [...] have aesthetic and cinematic qualities that prompt an experience conducive to thought; films that provoke, incite, or force us to think, even if we remain uncertain as to what kind of thinking (or writing) might be adequate to such an experience" (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 141–142). The challenge of these films is that, while they typically provoke philosophical reflection, they simultaneously evade philosophical appropriation, since they actively resist reduction to philosophical theories or translation into general abstractions, claims and arguments. And, in doing so, they challenge existing normative frameworks and open up alternative possibilities of thought. Sinnerbrink's analysis of *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch 2001) usefully illustrates this: rather than exploring scenarios of global illusion that draw attention to a distinction between appearance and reality, the film can be seen as bringing into question the very distinction between the real and the illusory, in order to explore an indeterminate zone between fantasy and reality (Sinnerbrink 2005).

What does all of this entail for the idea of film as philosophy? A first point is that, for Sinnerbrink, films do not contribute to philosophy, or 'do' philosophy, by becoming philosophy. Since cinematic thinking is essentially distinct from conventional philosophical reflection, films have the power to engage *with* philosophy – not to merely engage *in* philosophy. A second point is that the philosophical value of cinema thus lies in its capacity for 'confrontation' and 'resistance'. Sinnerbrink frames capacity in terms of the Deleuzian claim that

cinema can enact a 'shock to thought' (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 137). That is to say, films that excel at cinematic thinking incite, even force, a (reflective, aesthetic) 'experience of thinking' of a nature that 'overwhelms' our attempts at philosophical translation or paraphrase (2011a: 142). And this ties in directly with a third overall point: Sinnerbrink affirms cinematic thinking with the hope that philosophy may ultimately be transformed through its encounter with film. "If we can speak of the becoming-philosophical of film", he says, "then perhaps we can also speak about the 'becoming-cinematic' of philosophy" (2011c: 29). This open-ended question of philosophy's potential transformation is to be worked out by the practice of romantic film-philosophy. In this regard Sinnerbrink speaks, with another nod to Deleuze, of the ideal to 'philosophize *with* film' – and not 'on' or 'about' film – which demands "a different way of thinking (and writing) philosophically with film", one that especially relies on "robust and detailed philosophical film criticism" (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 10). The point of this practice is to avoid reducing film and philosophy to one another, since the apparent key to the nature of their meeting is their distinctness; it is precisely film *and* philosophy, a dialogue, founded on how each one of these can critically alter our understanding of the other.

Central to Sinnerbrink's vision of how cinematic thinking may benefit philosophy, therefore, is the need to take one's lead from film(s) with openness and receptivity to its specific forms of aesthetic disclosure. Philosophizing 'with' film is essentially an act of recognizing, drawing out and elaborating the 'thought immanent within film' (2011a: 181; 2011c: 40, 43). Such translations between 'media of thought' (that is, between film and philosophy) are at once also potential transformations of the thought involved (2011a: 181). The 'romantic' film philosopher therefore acts as a mediator, even a medium, between the philosophical and the cinematic. And by seeking novel, creative ways of expressing distinctly cinematic forms of thinking in a suitable philosophical idiom, the encounter between film and philosophy can become one in which our philosophical thinking – even our 'experience of the modern world' – is renewed and reformed (2011a: 7; 2011c: 43).

4.5.2 Cinematic Thinking in 'Filmosophy'

Daniel Frampton's *Filmosophy* (2006a) is by his own admission intended as a 'manifesto-like' provocation and paints an accordingly provocative picture of cinematic thinking. Filmosophy is a call for a 'thoughtful poetics of cinema', a 'style of understanding film', the primary aim of which is to (re-)describe the film form (and 'film-being') in terms of film's own thinking (2008: 369, 373). For Frampton (2006a: 6), "seeing film as thoughtful, as the dramatic decision of the film, helps us understand the many ways film can mean and affect".

To achieve this, filmosophy proposes a conception of 'film-world creation' based on Frampton's self-devised concepts of the 'filmind' and its 'film-thinking'. The 'filmind' is a theoretical originator of the images and sound in a film; and 'film-thinking' involves taking all actions of film form as the dramatic and intentional thinking of the filmind (2006a 8). Filmosophy thus requires that you see films 'through' these concepts, to the effect that it is film itself that thinks (2008: 366). The filmind is responsible for the simultaneous creation and refiguration of the film-world (consisting of recognizable people and objects) (2006a: 76, 80). It does so through film-thinking, which is the way that the filmind thinks – and thereby shows us – the film-world.

Frampton emphasizes that this filmind should not be taken as an empirical entity, but as a re-orientating conceptual understanding, a theoretical postulation, of the origin of a film's actions and events. In this way he wishes to place the source of film-thinking 'in' the film itself. The filmind is therefore part of the film, the film itself, as it functions from a 'trans-subjective' (neither subjective nor objective, nor limited to any subjectivity of narration or character) 'non-place' or 'realm of perspective' as the ultimate controlling force of the film-world. The film steers its own discourse (2006a: 7, 73, 86–87). The filmind is therefore not transcendental, but rather "actual and active" as "we can actually 'see the film thinking' " (2006a: 93). It accounts for each film's own individual character, style and identity. Each film is unique because it has its own filmind, autonomous and free to think and create as its wishes (2006a: 83).

The place of the 'filmind' *vis-à-vis* the respective minds of the filmmaker and the film spectator, however, remains underdeveloped. Frampton admits that the filmind is 'always' created by filmmakers, who translate their motives and ideas into cinematic form by harnessing and using various strategies of film-thinking (2006a: 75). But in the same breath he distinguishes the filmind from the filmmaker's intentions by appealing to the experience of the filmgoer: the claim being that the (making of the) film cannot transcend the more comprehensive concept of film-thinking insofar as artistic intentions cannot completely control the experiences of the filmgoer. This creates the impression that the filmind has some special relation with the viewer's freedom of subjective experience. But then Frampton also goes to great lengths to dissociate film-thinking and experience from its human counterparts. He is critical of theorists like Vivian Sobchack who see an anthropomorphic, 'human-type' subjectivity in film subjectivity, as "it seems obvious that film 'experience' looks very different to our experience" (2006a: 42).

As to be expected, the supposed inherent differentness of film's thinking receives considerable attention from Frampton. The notion of a thinking filmind, and indeed film as thinking, Frampton explains, should not be taken

as a direct analogy between film and human thought, but rather a functional one: by shifting, blurring and slowing down, for example, film-thinking works in ways that ours do not (2008: 365); film 'thinks better than us', and it 'thinks beyond us', by showing us non-actual events and forms (2006a: 92); and film "reveals to us a way of thinking that we simply cannot replicate" (2008: 366). The unique reflective capacities and intentions of film thus warrants speaking of a film's own kind of thought that should be analyzed and studied in its own right (2006a: 7–9; 2008: 365–366). As to be also expected, Frampton's insistence upon the differentness of film-thinking is hampered by a host of ambiguities and complications – the rather contradictory claim that film performs its "own version of human thinking" (2008: 365) being but one of many. Yet what Frampton nevertheless appears to get at is that film-thinking is not reducible to human thought, and that it involves *more than* the fact that it makes the filmgoer think. Although this, he adds, to complicate the matter again, should not be taken as saying that film-thinking is somehow better than human thought, nor that the thoughts of the filmgoer and film are completely incommensurable (2008: 366).

The differentness and otherness of film-thinking looms even larger once Frampton's turns his attention to how film relates to philosophy. The ideas belonging to film-thinking, which are so specific that they cannot be reduced to our language about film, represent a poetical thinking that achieves a different order of philosophical-ness. So by harnessing the 'languageless' 'non-conceptual' and 'imagistic thinking' of film, "filmosophy attempts to find the *philosophical* in movements and forms of film", on the understanding that "film can add a new kind of thought to philosophy" (2006a: 10–11). This is a trademark claim of the cinematic thinking approach to film as philosophy: that it is a confrontation of essential *differences*, between film and philosophy, that allows for the production of new thoughts (cf. Huygens 2008: 2). To deepen our sense of these differences, Frampton unleashes a barrage of dramatic terms for the distinct intellectual attributes of film-thinking (e.g. 2006a: 98, 196). In addition to being an 'emotional intelligence' that is allusive, ambiguous, complex and tension-ridden, film-thinking is also characterized as 'primal', 'archaic', 'messy', 'loose', 'evocative', 'fuzzy', 'non-rational', 'intuitive' and 'affective'; it moreover relies on 'hints', 'vague notions of ideas', 'emotional ideas', 'feelings of thoughts' and 'fragments of concepts'. With these designations Frampton apparently wishes to demarcate the exact opposite of the traditional intellectual attributes of philosophy. Yet he also points out: these notions should not be taken as bad versions of clear logical thinking. This is rather thinking of a different order, distinctly filmic thinking, 'film-ideas', existing in a state of image, flow, and flux (2006a: 98).

The point then for Frampton, as with Deleuze and Sinnerbrink discussed above, is that "[f]ilm should not try to become philosophy, and philosophy should not try to find itself in film" (2008: 373). It is precisely because film-thinking "bypasses logic and forms pure image-ideas" that film can engage more productively *with* philosophy (2006a: 198–199). Film produces "intuitive image-concepts [...] non-conceptual affects, fractured perspectives, that meet directly with our own minds" (2006a: 200). This makes film-thinking a "brutal, imagistic, direct reasoning" that gives us "the feeling of ideas, philosophical inklings that are whispered to us" (2006a: 98). In this way, says Frampton, film functions as an " 'Eros' to philosophy's 'logos' " in that "it can provide a direct thinking of such abstract concepts as being, knowing, substance, cause, identity, time, space" (2006a: 200–201). Casting film as a 'companion' to philosophy in concept creation, as Deleuze also does, Frampton postulates the generation of 'film-concepts' that philosophy has no choice but to contend with. And by exceeding and questioning conventional philosophical concepts, the film-concept, he suggests, may lead us to a better understanding of difficult philosophical areas (2006a: 11, 200–201). As in Sinnerbrink's romantic film-philosophy, therefore, Frampton construes film-thinking's companionship with philosophy as one that is rather confrontational. "Film-thinking makes the filmgoer's logical thinking recognise its limits, its impower, its impotence. Film-thinking forces thought to think the unclear, blurry, dispersive, outside" (2006a: 102). We would therefore do well, on Frampton's account, to adopt the frame of (film-)mind prescribed by filmosophy. And, instead of wanting to turn film into (our) philosophy, we should "simply look at the forms of film and listen to what cinema has to say" (2008: 373).

4.6 *A Reconsideration of Conditions? The Suspended Condition of 'Non-philosophy'*

At the start of this survey of conditions for film to engage with/in philosophy, I noted that assumptions about what philosophy is tend to dictate how theorists approach the question of film's own philosophical resources. If, for instance, philosophy is taken as a matter of exercising certain philosophical techniques, then film can be said to do philosophy in cases where it enacts an argument or thought experiment. Or, if philosophy is primarily seen as a kind of thinking, then one may conclude that films can think in ways that philosophers do. But the whole intention of 'film as philosophy', as I have explained it, is to be a reversal of perspectives – to approach philosophy from the point of view of film and ask what philosophy 'in the image of' film may look like. So are the theorists of film as philosophy not simply subjecting film to the agenda of

philosophy by tying it down to existing philosophical frameworks that determine the supposed conditions for film's being philosophical?

This objection, in short, captures John Mullarkey's (2009a; 2009b; 2011) intervention in the debate. His central criticism of the field is that the all-encompassing, essentialist nature of most theories of film as philosophy (and certainly all those discussed here) cannot avoid the reduction of film to illustrations of the theorist's preferred version of philosophy (2009a: 65; 2011: 88). This criticism is especially aimed at bolder claims of film's philosophical ability. "If film thinks", Mullarkey tells us, "it is not in its own way but in philosophy's way" (2011: 88). If a film is considered to 'philosophize', it only does so in correlation with some privileged approach to philosophy (2009a: 66). While many film philosophers critically reject the imposition of general 'philosophies of film' (or 'about film') on individual films, Mullarkey holds that there is always a totalizing (exclusive, reductive, illustrative) 'philosophy of film' (or, again, 'about film') underlying any notion of 'film as philosophy' that wants to make films 'speak for themselves'. So while the likes of Mulhall, Critchley or Sinnerbrink intend to perform 'open' readings of a film, their understanding of the film's 'own' philosophical views inevitably remain interpretations that are pre-figured by established philosophical points of view.

So where to from here for the film as philosophy debate? Mullarkey's proposal is to get away from *any* supposed conditions for film to do philosophy, since these inevitably reduce what film's thinking may be: "If film is to think, if film is to philosophize, then we must first of all get away from any definition (that is, philosophy) of film, as well as any definition of thinking, or indeed of philosophy itself" (2009a: 77). Taking his lead from Francois Laruelle, Mullarkey approaches film as 'non-philosophy' which involves a thinking 'according to the Real' (2009a: 77).[21] The Real – and the Real of film, as one instance thereof – can never be captured and exhausted by (any one) philosophy (2011: 89). This allows Mullarkey to venture – in what he admits to be a 'speculative mode' – towards his own tentative notion of the thinking of film: "the resistance of film to singular philosophies is a kind of thinking, or meta-thinking, all its own, precisely because it does not allow us to begin with a definition of thought or philosophy, or rather, it forces us to change our theory of what theory (thinking, philosophy) is" (2009a: 76).

21 As Mullarkey explains, the 'non-' in Laruelle's concept of non-philosophy does not refer to a dialectic opposite or 'other' of philosophy, but to "an enlargement of the set of things that can count as thought" (2011: 91). Non-philosophy, as performative practice – a thinking, not *of* the Real, but *alongside* it – therefore seeks to work out what 'philosophy' becomes when 'thinking is everywhere' (including in film).

In light of my earlier discussion of the 'cinematic thinking' approach, however, Mullarkey's insistence on the 'resistance' and 'force' that film exercises with respect to philosophical theory is all too familiar. By considering film in terms of its 'immanent event-ness', 'multi-modality', 'hybridity' and 'relationality' (to single out just a few aspects that he considers to amount to the so-called 'messiness' of film), Mullarkey finds that film displays a distinct resistance to any singular (and by implication reductive) theory. Film compels us to think through its refusal to have reductive thoughts enforced upon it; and "such resistance to theory is itself philosophical and a source of new philosophy" (2009a: 74). Mullarkey thus adopts a similar position to that of Deleuze, Sinnerbrink and Frampton in that he considers (the 'inexhaustibility' of) film to have the power to enforce an essential rethinking and renewal of philosophy. And Mullarkey cannot deny that these theorists – despite the apparent reductions that he finds them to be guilty of – are also, in principle, just as committed to the view that the 'becoming philosophical of film' should be undetermined and open-ended. Mullarkey's own stance is perhaps best seen as a radicalization of their claim that film gains philosophical significance only through its own distinctive and disruptive forms of 'cinematic thinking'. He demands that claims of cinematic thinking's independence be taken *all the way*: if we are serious about granting film its *own* thinking, then we are required to suspend our judgment of what that thinking may in fact be. This involves approaching 'film as philosophy' with a complete openness as to what 'philosophy' can become.

While Mullarkey's contribution may be seen as a lethal blow to the entire 'project' of theorizing the conditions for film as philosophy, one should ask whether his critical assessment is in fact not also making film 'an illustration' of a favored, 'pre-figured' philosophical point of view – and that he thereby succumbs to his own criticism. Anticipating this objection, Mullarkey remarks that what he offers is not one more philosophy of film, but precisely a non-philosophy of film which he defines as 'a thinking according to the Real' (2009a: 77). Essentially, his non-philosophy does not dismiss other philosophies as false representations, but simply indicates each one's inherent limitation *vis-à-vis* its hold on the Real. Mullarkey's proposed approach is thus 'meta-theoretical', not in the sense of being a theory about theories, but by embracing – somewhat conveniently, in a 'democracy of thought' – (all) other theoretical perspectives in its immanent thinking of the Real (see 2011: 91, 94). Yet does Mullarkey put the issue to rest? For example, after arguing that we need to get away from all definitions if we are to say that films philosophize, he notes that (surely privileged) notions of film as 'multiple', 'relational' and 'evental' do not amount to definitions of film, but are 'at best' 'quasi-concepts'

functioning as 'place-holders' that mark a partial openness to every (limited) definition of film. However, do these 'quasi-concepts' not produce at least some definition(s) of film? And, even if this is not the case, surely Mullarkey's 'quasi-concepts' still highlight that he too has to set off from a pre-figured philosophical position, despite his best intentions to not do so? At the end of the day, Mullarkey cannot but refract film through a particular philosophical lens – involving, in *his* case, an adherence to established Continental philosophical traditions that emphasize notions of 'anti-transcendentalism', 'individuality', 'complexity', 'hybridity', 'becomingness', 'the event', and so forth.

In spite of my critical reservations, Mullarkey's central argument still deserves its spot on the 'axis of conditions' that I have detailed in this chapter. One strategy is to simply classify his claim, as pointed out above, as the most extreme instance of the already identified 'cinematic thinking' condition. However, to do his argument more justice, one would do better to reserve a separate point with which to plot his approach, one at the imagined *end* of this axis. For it is inevitable that the debate would reach this point: the condition that Mullarkey claims is *no condition* – a 'non-condition' – insisting that the formulation of any condition will restrict the 'philosophy' that film may become. Film can therefore only be philosophical in the capacity of 'non-philosophy', the notion of which usefully captures (apart from its technical Laruellian meaning) the supposed need to negate and suspend *our* definitions in an open embrace of *film's own* becoming-philosophical.

5 Conclusion: Motives and Meta-perspectives

In this chapter I have navigated readers through the most prominent conceptions of film as philosophy, with the aim of establishing what I take to be much needed meta-theoretical perspectives on this bustling sub-field of philosophy of film. Key to my charting of the debate was to disentangle two meta-analytical axes along which we can situate any claim (and even objections to the idea) that films can do philosophy. First, the axis of degrees, the extent to which film engages with/in philosophy, be it 'weak', 'moderate', or 'bold'. And, second, the axis of conditions, dealing with the enabling means for film to engage with, or be, a form of philosophy.

The latter of the two, as I have noted, has not been sufficiently distinguished and clarified in assessments of the debate so far – which is odd. For the question of conditions is clearly the one that cuts to the heart of film as philosophy: on the basis of *what*, we can ask any of the philosophers lined up here, can a film engage with/in philosophy? As I have demonstrated, the answers provided by

the philosophers discussed here takes a number of forms: that film can illustrate philosophy, present arguments, and thought experiments (Wartenberg, Carroll, Falzon); perform philosophical thinking (Mulhall, Critchley, Cavell); elicit self-reflection (Sobchack); or even enact a 'cinematic thinking' of its own (Sinnerbrink, Frampton, Mullarkey, Deleuze).

However, to merely distinguish such an assortment of conditions for film as philosophy is but a small step towards a "properly developed meta-philosophy" that the debate is clearly still in need of (Smith 2010). Such a development, to my mind, would have to involve the articulation of further unifying meta-perspectives that can help relate these various claimed conditions and approaches to one another: to show how, despite their incompatibilities, these different approaches can still be situated within a degree of coherence and dialogue with one another. An important step to this end, however, is to get a tight grip on the respective assumptions that guide the respective theories of film as philosophy. As we have repeatedly seen in this chapter, these theories all proceed from definite assumptions, inevitably so, about the nature of both film and, in particular, philosophy. So this, too, would be required from a proper meta-theory: to frame these assumptions within a broader, synoptic view that can correlate, and perhaps even reconcile to some extent, the disparate commitments and standpoints from which philosophers take on the project of film as philosophy.

Therefore, as a manner of bringing the mapping enterprise of this chapter to a close, let me indicate what I think such a subsequent meta-theoretical development could look like, and thereby also set the scene for the chapters to come. I want to in a sense 'look beyond' the positions presented here, and ask what is *more basically* at stake in the various enabling conditions proposed for film to do philosophy. It seems to me that a small set of foundational contexts, or ultimate horizons, repeatedly show themselves as pivotal motives in these theorizations. As meta-theoretical abstractions, the kind of motives that I have in mind involve such ontologically foundational, encompassing horizons of reality that theories *cannot but* adopt some orientation towards them. For this reason, they valuably encapsulate some of the pertinent assumptions at work in theories of film as philosophy. The three clearest of such motives, I find, are those of *Knowledge*, *Subjectivity* and *Power*, although the three can be usefully supplemented by the additional motive of *Nature*.[22] Although I do not want to be seen as constantly jumping on the 'meta' bandwagon, I consider these

22 My formulation of these motives draws, in part, on Johann Visagie's theory of 'macro-motives' (Visagie 1996a). Note that – like him – I use capital letters to distinguish the abstracted, technical qualification of these motives.

motives 'meta-conditions', seeing that they precede and motivate the more specific conditions for film as philosophy that came up in this chapter.

Firstly, the motive of Knowledge is especially central to the work of analytic-cognitivist philosophers of film. Many of their debates appear to assume that arguments, thought experiments or even illustrations of philosophy are objective forms of knowledge and that films can only be considered as doing philosophy if they assume a similar status. Film as philosophy, for these philosophers, would entail that a film functions as a relatively self-sufficient knowledge artifact; much like a book or a taped lecture, it should be able to spell out its philosophical point of view in relative independence of its 'author'. Another way of putting it is that a film should have its own 'conceptual' or 'intellectual competence' (Warr 2013: 120). Related to this is the tendency to assume that a film can only be called 'philosophical' insofar as it relates to established philosophical knowledge (e.g. Shaw 2006: 113; Livingston 2009: 199). But, moving beyond the confines of analytic-cognitivist approaches, advocates of 'bolder' conceptions of film as philosophy also draw from this motive in claiming that films can generate renewed and indeed new forms of knowledge (cf. Colman 2009: 8). Yet this convergence of analytic-cognitivist and more 'continentally' inspired approaches, within the context of Knowledge, also points to a significant difference between them: the former is more likely to speak of 'film engaging *in* philosophy' inasmuch as film serves as an alternative medium or 'expressive device' for dealing with established philosophical knowledge; the latter leans to the view that film rather 'engages *with* philosophy' by, among other things, producing new (forms of) knowledge.

Secondly, various claims that film engages with/in philosophy can be traced back to assumptions about a basic involvedness that film has with Subjectivity. There are roughly three overlapping variants of this theme: that film gains its philosophical abilities by either (*a*) expressing, (*b*) eliciting, or (*c*) enacting different manifestations of Subjectivity, which could range from 'thinking', as higher-order subjective process, to more basic forms of subjective experience. To begin with, a widespread preference for speaking of 'philosophy through film'[23] not only reflects the view that films mediate Knowledge, but moreover that it (*a*) gives expression to the subjective intentions of the filmmaker(s). This particular appeal to Subjectivity, we have seen, is central to the intentionalist positions of Livingston and Wartenberg. Here the interrelatedness of the various motives also becomes clear: Livingston, for instance, stresses that a film can only count as philosophy when there is a (subjective) intention, on the part of the filmmaker, to engage with established philosophical knowledge

23 See, for example, Wartenberg (2007: 12), Carroll (2013: 3), Falzon (2013), and Cox and Levine (2011).

(cf. Sinnerbrink 2011a: 128). Carroll turns to the opposite side of the spectrum by claiming that a film-as-argument (*b*) elicits subjective reflective processes from the viewer. The film's argument (Knowledge), for Carroll, is not in the film but in the minds of viewers. Hence, film's ability to perform an argument relies not on some subjective constitution of the film, but rather on that of the viewer. Mulhall, however, wishes to convince us that films themselves are somehow subjectively constituted in (*c*) enacting (presumably) subjective processes of 'thinking seriously and systematically', whereby they are said to philosophize. The supposed subjective processes inherent to film are thus emphasized more than their 'contents' of knowledge: the issue, for Mulhall, is not so much that film mediates or produces knowledge, but rather that films have the intentions of 'questioning', 'exploring' and 'giving perspectives'. Yet I also pointed out that Mulhall, at times, identifies the philosophical achievements of films with how they guide the reflective experience (Subjectivity) of viewers. In Sobchack's account of the phenomenological contributions of film, she interestingly combines all three variants above when claiming that the filmmaker, film and filmgoer share in the same structures of embodied experience. In this case, film achieves philosophical relevance by at once expressing, eliciting and enacting subjective experience. Lastly, Cavell's concern with film as 'moving image of skepticism' also clearly indicates the motive of Subjectivity insofar as it deals with our subjective isolation and the possible overcoming of that condition.

Thirdly: approaches that claim for film its own distinctive kind of thinking, varied as they may be, tend to have a shared reliance on a Power motive. This is not 'power' in a pejorative sense of 'domination', but rather in a more general and neutral or affirmative sense: the power of influence, formation or creation. While there are suggestions that the philosophical potential of film resides its influence over Subjective experience, most of the approaches concentrate on the relation between the Power that film exercises in relation to philosophy as Knowledge. The Deleuzian paradigm, under influence of its Nietzschean underpinnings, sees film as an extension of more general forces of becomingness. Both film and philosophy are distinct kinds of 'creative activity'; and film is taken to have a special function in the philosophical task of 'creating concepts'. Following Deleuze, the likes of Sinnerbrink and Frampton cast the Power inherent to 'cinematic thinking' in rather dramatic terms: film is claimed to 'challenge', 'resist' and even 'overwhelm' established forms of philosophical knowledge. Also Mullarkey draws on this context when pointing out that film's 'resistance' to theory is itself philosophical and, moreover, a source of 'new philosophy'. This highlights a prominent feature of Power as 'meta-condition' of film as philosophy: that it allows for various notions of how film may establish 'the new' in philosophy. Whereas the Cavellian 'moving image of

skepticism', for example, is really a mediation of existing philosophical knowledge, Deleuzian notions of cinematic thinking merge the contexts of Power and Knowledge by considering film able to contribute to philosophy through the creation of radically new knowledge.

Although it may not have the same prominence in theories of film as philosophy as the preceding motives, a fourth one must be added here. This is the fundamental horizon of 'Nature', which should be taken in the most comprehensive sense of involving, not only 'the material' or 'physical' or 'bodily', but more broadly 'the world', 'reality' or 'the nature of things'.[24] This motive is a key aspect of how, for example, Cavell understands film to contribute to philosophy. For Cavell (as for Bazin), film, as a photographic medium, gains its philosophical power through its inherent relatedness to the Nature of the world. In staging our condition of isolation or absence from Nature, film at the same time holds the promise of restoring our connection and 'presentness' to the world. There is also an element of the Nature motive in Sobchack's claim that film has Subjective agency by virtue of sharing the same material existence with the filmmaker and the viewer, as corresponding subjects. And the same horizon is at play in Mullarkey's contention that film, as 'the Real' (Nature), cannot be exhausted by singular theories (Knowledge).

In conclusion, identifying these underlying, foundational motives – Knowledge, Subjectivity, Power, and Nature – helps to draw out important reference points for an ethical meta-analysis as intended in this book. Yet these motives also hold meta-theoretical merit to film as philosophy as a theoretical project over and above any of my ethical arguments. For one thing, this set of foundational motives offers the meta-theorist a springboard to a more cohesive picture of the overall project. In this set of motives, we have a useful means of clarifying not only essential distinctions but also relevant interrelations between different conceptions of film as philosophy. I am in particular thinking of how philosophy as Knowledge retains an implied presence within conceptions of film as philosophy guided by the motives of Subjectivity and Power respectively. Tracing such a connection helps elucidate shared assumptions that different theories may have with respect to the claim that film can be a form of philosophy – and thereby lays bare potential common grounds upon which future theorizing of film as philosophy can proceed. Any discussion of horizons as fundamental as Knowledge, Subjectivity, Power, and Nature will bring to light all sorts of intimate connections among themselves. Thus,

24 In line with Cavell (e.g. 1979: 16) and Bazin, I roughly use 'nature' and 'reality' as synonyms in this context. Although the notion of 'the real' may also usefully apply, I wish to avoid its various philosophical connotations that I do not associate myself with.

tracing their presences within – and among – diverse theories of film as philosophy, promises to lay bare similarly fundamental connections between otherwise dissimilar approaches.

That said, the meta-critical agenda of the rest of the book is a much more specific one: I wish to cast the debate and broader project of film as philosophy within a distinctly ethical light. And, in order to shift to this agenda, the notion of fundamental horizons is indeed the right track to be on. My attention now turns to what is in fact another fundamental horizon amongst those already discussed here; one that is perhaps not as conspicuous, but just as persistent. This is the inescapable human horizon of the self, faced with the need to change itself. The historically recurrent ideal stemming from this horizon is the motive of *personal transformation*. It is a motive that makes an especially compelling series of appearances within the project of film as philosophy. As I will show, claims that films can do or be philosophy always go hand in hand, somehow, with suggestions of self-transformation that viewers may achieve through film. Yet in this context, as in any other, the motive of personal transformation does not operate in isolation; the other four accentuate this motive in noticeable ways. Therefore, I will also show that the ways in which philosophers construe film as philosophy in relation to the motive of Knowledge, or Subjectivity, or Power, largely determines the *kind of* personal transformation through film that they consequently suggest.

In order to consider the ways in which the motive of personal transformation enters the project of film as philosophy, however, we first need a more general, analytical grip on this motive itself, as well as the multiform transformational ethics that it can inspire. With this in mind, then, we move on to Chapter 2, where I construct my ethical framework of analysis.