CHAPTER 3

Slogans for Self-Transformation

How Films Are Thought to Do More Than 'Think'

It lurks alongside any assertion that film can be a form of philosophy: the nagging question of the actual *need* for film as philosophy. '*So what* if films can do philosophy?' Or, to truly aim for the artery: 'Of what use is "film as philosophy" if we already have philosophy itself?'[1]

In Chapter 1, I sketched the project of film as philosophy. And I presented my framework for an ethical meta-analysis of film as philosophy in Chapter 2. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to survey the many ways in which the project of film as philosophy commits itself to the idea of transformational ethics. Yet, in order to appreciate how 'philosophy through movies' can entail 'ethical makeovers', I must first emphasize the question of the need for film as philosophy as the off-ramp that takes film philosophers onto this ethical route. For the question targets the supposed *value* – indeed, the *added* value – of film as philosophy. And any manner of response necessarily broaches the deeper subject of 'the good' of film as such.

1 From Movies to Ethical Makeover-Slogans

Siegfried Kracauer, as D.N. Rodowick (2010b: 97) and others note, was the first theorist to directly pose the question of *film ethics* to film theory: 'What is the good of the film experience?'[2] It is a question of that elemental kind that will nudge its way into any film theorizing. The theorist of film cannot proceed without at least some implicit stance on what good film holds. This inadvertence of film ethics is perfectly illustrated by the film as philosophy debate. When philosophers argue that films can do philosophy, they are bound to make judgments about the good of film, thereby setting themselves on the turf

1 I credit Berys Gaut for posing to me this incisive question – in a much more cordial fashion, I must add – at a Film Philosophy workshop at the University of Groningen in 2015.

2 Kracauer opens the epilogue of his famous *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* with this question, referring to it as the issue "which is most central of all" (1960: 285). See also Brian Bergen-Aurand (2013), who uses Kracauer as point of departure for his discussion of film ethics.

of film ethics. Whether these judgments remain wholly implicit or not, and whether philosophers make them consciously or not – no matter how – the unyielding question of the good of film is one that philosophers cannot but address somehow.

So which answers to the 'good' of film are disclosed by the film as philosophy discourse? In the broadest view, I make out an obvious answer, and a not-so-obvious one. The obvious answer follows from the 'philosophy'-part: the good of film, quite simply, is that it can do philosophy. And, naturally, philosophers reckon that philosophy in the form of film amounts to something *more* than good old philosophy by itself. The 'moderate' accounts of film as philosophy, as I identified them in Chapter 1, all stress that the added value lies in how "films can sometimes do some things better" than written philosophical texts (Cox & Levine 2011: 11); things like "giving us a clearer grasp of the experiential dimensions of a philosophical issue" (Davies 2015: 150). Film thus bolsters the cognitive value that philosophy already has, by breathing aesthetic individuality, concrete experience and affect into what would otherwise remain abstract ideas. True to its name, the 'bold' position on film as philosophy ups the ante considerably: the value of cinematic thinking, far from only doing some things better, is that it does things that traditional philosophy indeed *cannot* do (e.g. Sinnerbrink 2011c). This view suggests a negative estimation of conventional philosophy and identifies 'the good' of film – its unique contribution to philosophy – with making up for that which philosophy lacks.

This chapter, however, scrutinizes the not-so-obvious answer that gets wrapped up into the obvious one: that is, that the 'the good' of film consists of it being a special means to the viewer's *self-transformation*. This general ideal of personal transformation motivates much of the added value that philosophers attach to cinematic incarnations of philosophy. Thinkers of many different stripes routinely intimate how film as philosophy can transform our thinking, reconstitute our experience or, at the very least, enhance our self-knowledge. In fact, the notion that films doing philosophy has some kind of transformational value proves to be a rare stretch of common ground between what are otherwise mismatching positions in the field.

Of course, the ideal of personal transformation that gets attached to film as philosophy is by no means unrelated to the claim that films do *philosophy* – for philosophy itself has a long-established tradition of being practiced for purposes of self-transformation. As noted in Chapter 2, Western philosophy has really always been in cahoots with transformational ethics, right from the earliest inceptions of Ancient Greek *philosophia*. At this time, and even more so in the Hellenistic and Roman periods thereafter, philosophy was by definition an existential pursuit. Philosophy and the practical issue of how to live

your life formed a package deal. And 'doing' this philosophy meant that you practice what you preach, and become proficient at personal practices – 'spiritual exercises' – that transform the self for the sake of a philosophical mode of existence (Visagie 1996a: 142; 1999: 21; cf. Hadot 2002: 1–6). Much as this understanding of philosophy was frequently forced into dormancy by medieval and modern philosophy, its many offshoots persist to this very day. Pierre Hadot, ever the patron of 'philosophy as a way of life', calls attention to the examples of Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, Shaftesbury, Kant, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Emerson, Thoreau, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietszche, William James, Bergson, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty – all figures who, "in one way or another, were influenced by the model of ancient philosophy, and conceived of philosophy not only as a concrete, practical activity but also as a transformation of ways of inhabiting and perceiving the world" (2002: 270). I take it to be quite natural, then, that these ethical-transformationalist associations with philosophy also seep into notions of how *films* can function as philosophy. It is not a big jump, nor a difficult one, to get from 'films do the work of philosophy' to 'films do the transformational work of philosophy'. Some philosophers even pick out self-transformation itself as the defining feature of the philosophical work that films do – such as the claim that films undertake the 'therapeutic' tasks of philosophy, as scholars inspired by the later Wittgenstein like to argue (e.g. Hutchinson & Read 2005; Read 2015; Abbott 2013).

So in busying themselves with how films do philosophy, philosophers consistently express the motive that such films also do *more* than philosophy: they can serve the ethical function of assisting aspirations for self-change. And the philosophers in question, it turns out, do *more* than only theorize the philosophical capacities of film: to put it bluntly, they also do film ethics – *transformational* ethics, to be exact. And most of them seem to be unaware of it.

In what follows, then, I take stock of the major strands of transformational ethics that flow from the film as philosophy debate. Since most of the philosophers in question do not address transformational ethics head-on, I make it my task to connect some dots that they leave unattended. The philosophers inevitably cast visions of how self-transformation can be achieved through films that do philosophy – I take their visions and draw out of them the different ethics that they imply. Part of my thinking through each transformational ethic is also to try and picture what the ethics may look like in actual practice – a *critical imagining* that uses the raw material provided by film as philosophy to figure out what options the everyday viewer has for self-transformation through film.

To streamline this enterprise, the chapter proceeds through a series of representative vignettes that are each headed by a distinctive say-it-all slogan,

the sort of maxim you may well spot on a bumper sticker. The bumper sticker slogans that I summon include golden hits like 'Know Yourself', 'Lose Your Self' and 'Sense Your Senses'; each of which signals a distinct theme and set of options under the mother of all self-transformational slogans – 'CHANGE YOURSELF'. That the very same slogans also happen to go down in hipster hashtags on Twitter must however not be taken as a show of shallow scholarship. In the under-celebrated tradition of 'bumper sticker ethics' (Wilkens 2011), these pithy clichés are thoughtful points of departure, inviting us in, right through the front door of whatever ethical conceptions they stand for.[3] This virtue makes bumper sticker slogans vital to my sifting through the many guises of transformational ethics in film as philosophy.

My recourse to stereotypical slogans moreover serves to drive home a particular point: the transformational ethics dished up by film philosophers are not quite as fresh as one might perhaps hope. One would expect the notion of 'transformational ethics of film' – whatever this may prove to be – to be something quite dissimilar to the transformational practices of the ancient meditator, the religious mystic, or the modern ascetic; we are speaking, after all, of self-transformation through the novel means of the Seventh Art! Yet film philosophers struggle to do more with this thought than only rearticulate ethical notions and categories as old as philosophy itself. To be fair, this is largely foreseen by the theory of transformational ethics covered in Chapter 2. The pursuit of personal transformation entails essential structures – involving fundamental modes of transformation, typical goals, or domains of selfhood – which can certainly be adapted and reimagined, yet cannot be circumvented by the supposed novelty of seeking self-change through film. As much as the conjunction of film and transformational ethics may be new, the core features envisioned in the cinemakeover still remain consistent with classical topoi of transformationalist discourse.

A good deal of my analysis therefore goes to show how film philosophers resort to what are really familiar ethical paths – ancient paths, even – since most of them inevitably lead back to ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. As a precursory step to this end, I arrange my inquiry below around a distinction drawn by Pierre Hadot, which turns out to be just as useful to our understanding of film ethics as it is to the ancient transformational practices Hadot

3 Steve Wilken's *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics* (2011) explores a range of ethical systems on the basis of popular statements that include "Look out for number one" (ethical egoism), "Doing what comes naturally" (natural law ethics), and "All you need is love" (situation ethics). For a comparable approach, see Sarah Bakewell's (2011) celebrated biography of Montaigne, which works through twenty one bumper-perfect answers to the question "How to live?".

devotes attention to. He shows that the many philosophical exercises of the Greco-Roman world boil down to two essential movements: a 'concentration of the self', and an 'expansion of the self' (2002: 189–220). These two directions characterize two sides of the same coin, as Hadot indeed argues. But the respective ethics hatched by philosophers of film, I find, are far more polarized, and give priority to either one movement, or the other. What I will group together as ethics of 'self-concentration' tend to emphasize transformation through film as an inward turning, a turning towards the self, resulting in different forms of self-knowledge. Ethics of 'self-expansion', in contrast, envision the viewer 'turned outwards', using film as a means to alternative perspectives, new experiences, and breaking the mold of the self. These two ethical orientations draw unto themselves distinct sets of topoi and tropes – like transformation being framed as somehow 'finding the self', as opposed to 'losing' it; or an act of 'recovery', versus one of 'discovery'. Each kind of ethics also appeals to distinct approaches to film as philosophy: supporters of moderate versions of film as philosophy prefer to dwell on uncontroversial notions of self-concentration, whereas bold conceptions of film as philosophy flaunt comparably bold hopes of self-expansion.

Dissimilarities aside, however, all versions of transformational ethics of film as philosophy indicate the need for self-transformation of an altogether different order – bringing me to wrap up my analysis in this chapter with the question of 'preparatory ethics'. Film philosophers paint a compelling picture of film as philosophy's power to transform, yet at the same time they assume prior measures of self-work that the ideal viewer must have in place in order for film to have these claimed ethical effects. These preconditions prompt questions of the extent to which film *per se* actually shoulders the work of personal transformation. Especially to those who fancy film as a prime mover of our self-transformations, the dilemma of preparatory ethics shows that there is much more to the bumper than only the stickers.

2 Ethics of Self-Concentration

2.1 *'Know Yourself': Film as Thought Experiment*

The first major strand of transformational ethics in the film as philosophy debate goes under the classic 'Know Yourself' – a sticker that goes all the way back to the so-called 'father' of Western philosophy, no less.[4]

4 The Delphic precept 'know yourself' is synonymous with the figure of Socrates. But in drawing this connection with Socrates, I do take seriously Foucault's advice that *gnōthi seauton* (know

The knowledge that we hold is not always entirely present to us. According to the 'Know Yourself' ethic, films that do philosophy lead viewers into an introspective uncovering of the self's knowledge: they make you aware of *what you do not know you know*. To practice this ethic would mean to watch films with the expectation that they may expose a surprising insight into how you think; to let them cast a spotlight on the unexamined corners of your judgment, and bring to light beliefs that have previously only sat in the dark.

This ethical vision typically comes from philosophers who consider film as philosophy a matter of whether films can embody recognized forms of philosophical knowledge: for film to be philosophy, it has to function as an argument, a thought experiment, or the like. Certainly, philosophers may value such films for the simple reason that they can transmit to us all sorts of philosophical insight. But the philosophers who prefer this approach to film as philosophy are specifically interested in the *value* of *self-knowledge*. And, being philosophers, they are after a very specific variety of self-knowledge: to become *aware* of the beliefs that you hold, the tacit beliefs that structure your knowledge, but which you have never explicitly thought about yourself. When films act as philosophy, they suggest, you are most likely to get *knowledge about knowledge* that is still *unacknowledged* in your thinking.

Why this particular emphasis on self-knowledge? The philosophers concerned are the most circumspect ones. They accept only 'weak'- to 'moderate' notions of film as philosophy, according to which film – even if embodying certain techniques of philosophy – can at best make only modest contributions to philosophical knowledge. So instead of saying that films produce new knowledge, they find it safer to rather emphasize how films play upon the tacit knowledge of the viewer, and thus serve the well-known Socratic cause of examining knowledge that is already in place.

2.1.1 Be-(a)-ware: *The Matrix* of Hidden Assumptions

The 'Know Yourself' ethic emerges most clearly when philosophers think of films as thought experiments. The familiar argument goes that films as philosophical thought experiments, by being more immersive and engaging than their traditional written counterparts, are particularly apt to expose unquestioned assumptions upon which we base our judgment.

---

yourself), for the Ancient Greeks, functioned within the broader justificatory framework of the imperative, *epimeleia heautou* (the care of the self) (Foucault 2005: 8). Much as the 'Know Yourself' ethic in film as philosophy may resemble Socratic self-examination, therefore, I cannot pretend that the film philosophers concerned rely upon *epimeliea heautou* as the ethic's motivating paradigm.

Consider Thomas Wartenberg (2003; 2007: 55–75) and Chris Falzon (2002: 25–31; 2006), who take this line on that great philosopher's favorite, *The Matrix* (Lana & Lilly Wachoski 1999). The two philosophers' accounts are similar, in that both of them proceed from the Socratic view of philosophy as critical self-examination, of philosophical discourse as devised for the purpose of questioning the beliefs we live by – and see *The Matrix* as fulfilling just this task. Insofar as philosophy aims, says Wartenberg (2003: 145), "at unsettling our established habits of belief and action in order to reestablish them on a firmer, more critically aware foundation", a thought experiment can help oppose "the tenacity of the habitual" (2003: 145). Wartenberg goes on to explain how *The Matrix*, with its famous narrative twist – in which the established diegetic world is revealed to be 'the matrix', an oppressive digital illusion – puts viewers in an 'epistemic position' in which they, too, are led to interrogate their own assumptions about the realness of reality as they experience it (2003: 152). Falzon (2002: 29–31), likewise, concludes that the disorienting narrative twist of *The Matrix* brings to awareness the viewer's reliance upon previously unrecognized assumptions. Much as philosophy is about bringing taken-for-granted epistemological frameworks to our critical attention, a film like *The Matrix* serves the purpose of challenging our complacency by creating an acute epistemological instability that we, viewers, need to deal with.[5] However, as both Falzon and Wartenburg suggest, this philosophical work performed by *The Matrix* rests on its manipulation of a typically cinematic 'reality effect' (*effet de réel*), which, on the level of experience, makes the effect of the thought experiment *in film* ever so much more effective.

Wartenberg and Falzon's take on *The Matrix* gives us the necessary ingredients to piece together a transformational ethic of film. In terms of the analytical frames that I introduced in the previous chapter, I extract from the claims of these two philosophers a technique, mode, domain and value of transformation respectively. First, *The Matrix* is thought to facilitate a particular work of the self upon itself: Wartenberg and Falzon imagine the viewer's encounter with *The Matrix* as an act of self-reflection, suggesting the specific transformational *technique* of *self-examination* through film. Naturally, this self-examination marks a *contemplative mode* of transformation, elicited in the viewer, they argue, through the pronounced narrative trickery central to

5 Falzon also considers other films, like *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg 1999), *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven 1990) and *The Game* (David Fincher 1997), as variations of the skeptical thought experiments found in the philosophies of both Plato and Descartes (see 2002: 26–29). This suggests that these and comparable "skepticism films" (Schmerheim 2013b) may have ethical relevance similar to that attributed to *The Matrix*.

The Matrix. Next, this contemplative mode is focused on a particular *domain* of transformation. Within the overall domain of the viewer's knowledge, self-examination may be directed at explicitly held views and arguments; beliefs and biases; or, more broadly, an entire episteme, cognitive frameworks and world views basic to one's thinking. Here Wartenberg and Falzon single out the transformational domain of *latent assumptions*. And, lastly, there are implicit *values* of transformation they adhere to. We can only speak of a transformational ethic if this self-examination through *The Matrix* is presumed to target some transformed end-state, defined by a particular value. Wartenberg and Falzon notably posit the value of gaining *awareness* with respect to the unconscious, habituated forms of knowledge that are basic to how we know the world. Yet values like clarity, openness of mind, and freedom (from false beliefs and dogmatism) apply just as much.

But what is the need for practicing this particular self-examination? On this point, Wartenberg and Falzon sketch roughly the same motivating *paradigm* for 'Know Yourself', which they get from *The Matrix*'s central theme. The film's self-reflexive unmasking of an artificial reality, they say, brings to attention our susceptibility to all of the technologically mediated and highly captivating cinematic (or televisual or digital) 'realities' that we so easily take for granted in our daily lives (Wartenberg 2007: 75; Falzon 2006: 101). Viewing *The Matrix*, as an exercise in self-examination, is thus negatively motivated by the context of an all-pervasive *screen culture*, and our habituation to it, in order to make us aware of what screens might screen us from.

Note, by the way, that both philosophers also approach *The Matrix* as a digital-era update of the 'evil demon' thought experiment – the famous skeptical scenario posed by René Descartes, which, they argue, the film enacts in its own narrative-cinematic (and again: captivating, as I would like to add) terms. This Cartesian connection thickens the ethical plot. For its 'evil demon' ancestor stems from a context absolutely steeped in the kind of transformational self-reflection that Wartenberg and Falzon imply of *The Matrix*. Descartes' thought experiment, after all, belongs to a series of 'meditations', designed to awaken the reader to the errancy of beliefs, and to discern the self as a thinking reality. As Hadot (2002: 264) notes, Descartes certainly knew that the title of his *Méditations* – presented as successive intellectual exercises, extending over six days – designated spiritual exercises belonging to the tradition of ancient philosophy (cf. Kobusch 2013). And, indeed, numerous classical exercises actually feature in the *Méditations*: commentators identify spiritual exercises like that of 'attention' and 'circumspection' (Kobusch 2013: 169–170); the Platonic discipline of *aversio*, turning the mind away from the senses (Cottingham 2013: 158); and the Stoic discipline of 'assent' (Hadot 2002: 265). So when the

likes of Wartenberg and Falzon use *The Matrix* to extend the long tradition of philosophical skepticism, it turns out they invoke also the tradition of transformational ethics that informs the *exercise* of skepticism.

2.1.2 Other Twists and Trammels: *Do the Right Thing* and *Happy-Go-Lucky*

Whereas Wartenberg and Falzon's version of 'Know Yourself' targets broad assumptions about the nature of reality, Dan Flory gives the ethic a more specific socio-moral emphasis, by considering how films specifically target viewers' ideological assumptions about race. He focuses on *film noir*-influenced Black films (i.e. African-American cinema), for the reason that they mobilize the classic genre's "distinctive potential for encouraging viewers to question presuppositions that might otherwise go unnoticed" (Flory 2009: 5).

Among the variety of cinematic-narrative devices that Flory explores, he too finds 'epistemological twists' ideal for triggering the self-examination of unnoticed assumptions.[6] Flory's (2010) analysis of *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee 1989) as a 'socio-political twist film' shows how the film exposes problematic *background beliefs* and *default values* relating to race. Ideally, this process can lead to a challenge of assumptions, and encourage viewers to reconsider how they perceive characters in terms of race. This is one instance of what Flory broadly sees as Black *noir*'s potential to minister to viewers an "opportunity for thinking, believing and knowing differently about race" (2009: 309). Much of Flory's argument would of course also apply to the 'feminist twist films' that expose problematic default assumptions pertaining to gender – as in a recent example, the gender role reversal narrative of the French Netflix comedy, *I Am Not An Easy Man* (Éléonore Pourriat 2018).

Even more than the cases above, lastly, Basileios Kroustallis (2012) stresses the epistemological disruption that philosophical thought experiments perform with regard to the viewer's latent assumptions. The possibility of a cinematic thought experiment, he explains, requires that "a proposition initially straightforward to agree with will be challenged, and will reveal different consequences by means of narrative, acting and the visual setting of the film" (2012: 80). The suggestion that a film as a thought experiment somehow obstructs the viewer's natural patterns of reflection and makes thinking difficult – the kind of disruption to thought that is actually also performed by the

6 The notion of the 'epistemological twist film', as Flory indicates, was formulated by George O. Wilson (2006) with reference to drastic revelatory narrative turns in films such as *Fight Club* (David Fincher 1999) and *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar 2001).

narrative and epistemological twists discussed above – requires a slight elaboration of the transformational *mode* to 'Know Yourself'. For Kroustallis and company, cinematic thought experiments posture viewers in what I specify as a mode of *contemplative endurance* brought about by the supposed nature of the film's transformational work, which is to obstruct and challenge the viewer's default ways of thinking.

Yet, when it comes to *how* film does this work of making thinking difficult, Kroustallis apparently wants to show that film has methods other than complex storytelling twists. He finds that Mike Leigh's *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008) undermines our automatic assumptions about the nature of happiness not through a narrative twist device, but by means of the actively estranging disposition played out by the main character, Poppy (Sally Hawkins). He describes Poppy as 'eccentric', 'idiosyncratic', 'ambiguous', and 'confusing' – terms which, in yet another twist, also go for the equally challenging figure of Socrates, he claims.[7] The resultant incongruity between our familiar assumptions about happiness, and the unfamiliarity of Poppy's, who embodies them, says Kroustallis, establishes an uncomfortable spectatorial experience, compelling viewers to examine the commonsense assumptions that it puts under strain (2012: 79–81).

While Christopher Grau (2013)[8] exposes several shortcomings in Kroustallis' argument – especially regarding his failings of interpretation – my own interest is less in the accuracy of Kroustallis' reading, than in the motive and argumentative strategy that guide his reading. He counts on a cinematic thought experiment to do the transformational work of actively frustrating our assumptions, and thereby have them ushered into the viewer's critical awareness. What ultimately drives the self-examination of assumptions, therefore, is an experience of dissonance, a cognitive unease[9], which – overstated as it may be – Kroustallis ascribes to a very specific narrative device: a character that resists commonsensical beliefs.

---

7 At the end of Plato's *Symposium*, for instance, Alcibiades describes that unique, near-ineffable Individual who is Socrates as *atopos* – implying that, not unlike Poppy, he is strange, absurd, unclassifiable, and even disturbing (Hadot 2002: 29–30).

8 It must be added that Grau's (counter-)reading of *Happy-Go-Lucky* is quite upfront about its *own* transformational interests. I get to this later in the chapter.

9 See Kiss and Willemsen (2017), who base their incisive account of contemporary complex cinema and complex cinema scholarship on the viewer's experience of cognitive dissonance. The category of 'twist films' under discussion here – for example, *The Matrix* and *Fight Club* – represents a key early development in the still-ongoing trend of narrative complexification that they study.

2.2 *'Remind Yourself': Noël Carroll*

We come to a rather similar picture with the ethic of transformation that emerges in Noël Carroll's account of film as philosophy. Carroll, I suspect, would not even mind to bear the 'Know Yourself' sticker on his bumper. Yet the particular spin that he puts on that ethic warrants a slogan of its own. Let me call it: 'Remind Yourself'.

As with the examples of 'Know Yourself' above, Carroll's implied ethic is one of self-concentration; he too affirms film as a means to *mind* your own knowledge. But whereas 'Know Yourself' is about getting knowledge of what you do not know you know – things like hidden assumptions or cognitive frames – 'Remind Yourself' is specifically about getting to know, again, afresh, *what you have long known*. This ethic construes film-going as an occasion to restore in us those truths that we know, no doubt, but do not keep in mind as we would like to – or should.

2.2.1 Self-Knowledge as Recollection and *Sunset Boulevard*

Carroll offers his most explicit treatment of film as philosophy in an essay on the Billy Wilder *film noir* classic, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) (2013: 161–182). In asking how *Sunset Boulevard* contributes to philosophical insight, he proceeds from an understanding of philosophy that strongly affirms its practical relevance – a position that also automatically brings to the fore the transformational ends of philosophy.

Carroll explains that, much as philosophy has the function of forging new ideas and advancing unimagined possibilities, it also has the basic task to remind us of matters that for whatever reason we overlook or even actively ignore or suppress. At issue, for Carroll, is the aware-making function that philosophy has with respect to the self's knowledge, its role as "a discloser of hidden truths, known but repressed" (2013: 179). And he appeals to the examples of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, who remain relevant and significant "precisely because they remind us of facts of the human condition which, although admittedly known, are readily forgotten" (2013: 174).

In recognition of philosophy's practical task to remind us of dormant truths, Carroll claims that narrative fiction films, by fulfilling this task, have an obvious capacity to do philosophy. The claim typifies Carroll's general approach to film as philosophy, as seen in Chapter 1: a film does philosophy when it midwifes reflections and insights on behalf of the viewer; film doing philosophy is essentially an occurrence in the viewer's mind. Accordingly, the philosophical contribution made by *Sunset Boulevard*, as he argues, is that it calls to mind for us the inevitability of our mortality with respect to the process of aging – an insight brought home not only by the story of the aged and fading silent

cinema Hollywood star, Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), but also by factors like Wilder's recourse to horror film stylistics, and their enlistment of disgust, which give cinematic substance to the theme of mortal aging (2013: 165–169).

Carroll must however agree that this philosophical exercise through film, as he describes it, is inherently also one of self-transformation. A lesser way of stating Carroll's transformational ethic is to simply say that viewing *Sunset Boulevard* encourages an enhanced state of contemplation, addressing the existential theme of mortality. The heart of his account, however, is that our encounter with the film constitutes an exercise in self-reflection, aimed at restoring knowledge that has become submerged from awareness: "to recall to mind features of human experience that, even if known once, have been forgotten or are only dimly grasped, ignored, neglected, and/or even repressed" (2013: 174). According to this picture, then, Carroll gives ethical weight to film as a means to be reminded of forgotten truths. This is not so much a 'remembering' something that we have literally 'forgotten', as it is a (sudden) becoming aware (again), expressed through the deep-rooted and existentially loaded metaphor of recollection. Watching film thus becomes a *contemplative technique of recollection*; it is aimed at transformational *values* of *awareness* and *self-knowledge*; and it is directed, within the self, at the *domain* of the well-known, but *neglected*/*suppressed truths*, fenced off from our daily existence.

2.2.2 Ancient Backing

Carroll bolsters the above argument – and rightly so – by contextualizing the task of reminding oneself of forgotten truths as something which has always been part of philosophy. As he puts it, the charge to "remind us of facts of the human condition which, although admittedly known, are readily forgotten [...] has been one of the tasks of philosophy since the get-go" (2013: 174–175). Carroll associates tasks of this kind with the ongoing tradition of philosophy – exemplified by the Ancients – that primarily concerns itself with how one should live, alongside which he cites the work of Pierre Hadot (2013: 174–175). He concludes that, since *Sunset Boulevard* compels us to remember our human condition, it also participates in this tradition that puts philosophy to 'the task of living' (2013: 176).[10]

Carroll's reliance on the Ancients' paradigm of practical philosophy is actually signaled from the outset of his essay. We see this in his carefully

10 On occasion, Carroll extends the same function of reminding to art *in toto*. In a brief passage on a different occasion, for example, Carroll remarks that "artworks may serve to remind audiences of what they already know by posing it vividly and concretely" (2010: 184).

chosen notions for the 'philosophy' that he says films do. Carroll pinpoints the philosophical contribution of films on how they can promote personal *insight* (one may go as far as labeling it *wisdom*) – not on how they deal with philosophical theories or arguments (2013: 162). It is certainly so, he admits, that philosophical arguments – understood in the restricted, technical sense – can deliver insights about how to live life. But the same kind of insights can be achieved through the devices of popular narrative fictions. The popular (mass) medium of film can therefore engage in what Carroll labels 'popular philosophy', aimed more generally at the reflective layman, and not only the scholar (2013: 176). And by doing popular philosophy, relevant to living daily life, film can fulfill therapeutic functions resembling those of Ancient philosophy – such as the recollection of important but forgotten truths.

2.2.3 Self-Knowledge as Clarification

The claim that film, or art, serves to 'Remind Yourself' is certainly not a view that Carroll as a cognitivist is particularly well-known for. Still, the claim does agree with Carroll's broader philosophy of art, where he shows the same transformational interest in self-knowledge, and how art essentially lets us "know what we know" (Landy 2012: 6). The *Sunset Boulevard* essay frames such self-knowledge as an act of *recollection*. But far better known in Carroll's work is the notion that self-knowledge through art is an act of *clarification.* Art can clarify our existing knowledge – this marks the more pivotal and indeed overarching metaphor on which Carroll's ethic of self-knowledge hinges. For the recollection of knowledge entails also a clarification: to 'Remind Yourself' through art implies ultimately to gain a certain clarity into what you know, and therefore goes under what appears to be Carroll's umbrella ethic, 'Clarify (to) Yourself'. Below I refer to a relevant and representative sample of Carroll's philosophy of art, an essay in which he develops an account of the relation between art and morality (Carroll 1998).

Crucial to what Carroll calls the 'clarificationist view'[11] is his commitment to the position that art – and here he concentrates on the narrative arts – does not give us brand new knowledge. Instead it activates both the cognitive

11 Carroll's clarificationist position is first and foremost a defense of the idea that there are significant relations between art and morality – contrary to the position of 'automatism' (arguing that art and morality are essentially separate realms), which he takes issue with. Carroll deems the clarifying effect of art on moral cognition to be the most prominent stratum of the relation between particularly narrative art and morality (1998: 154–155). What I am after is the transformational agenda implied by his position.

and the emotional stock material that we already possess and thereby offers an "occasion for exercising knowledge, concepts and emotions that we have already, in one sense, learned" (1998: 141). This is therefore a different sense of learning: "in mobilizing what we already know and what we can already feel, the narrative artwork can become an occasion for us to deepen our understanding of what we know and what we feel" (1998: 142). In such a manner, narrative art – by its very nature, Carroll suggests[12] – encourages in its beholders a process of clarification. Carroll describes clarification as the (re)connection, reorganization, reclassification and reinterpretation of established knowledge forms (e.g. beliefs, premises, and categories of thought) (1998: 142–143). The ethic suggested here is that the filmgoer can use film-viewing in active pursuit of clarification, which as a particular contemplative *technique* is aimed, as we have seen before, at the *domain* of one's established beliefs, premises, and categories of thought. But note that in Carroll's account the technique of clarification also branches into the transformational domain of the *emotions*: to the extent that emotions have a conceptual component, he argues, they form part of our established knowledge forms, and therefore are likewise amenable to clarification through art (1998: 144). What adds to the ethical-transformational thrust of this position is that Carroll is specifically interested in the role of clarification *vis-à-vis* our moral capacities. Since moral recognition and judgment are based on moral beliefs, concepts and emotions, his main interest is in how the exercise and clarification of the latter, through narrative, can specifically deepen moral understanding. Clarification thus results in deeper *understanding,* which Carroll distinguishes from knowledge: understanding is the *clarified*, *refined* and *deepened* insight gained into anterior knowledge and emotions (1998: 142–144).

In this way, Carroll's position epitomizes the ethical interest that is most likely to accompany weak to moderate notions of film as philosophy: that film can foster self-transformation within the *domain* of the *viewer's knowledge*. As to the nature of that transformation, the likes of Carroll, Wartenberg, and Falzon are not likely to claim that films introduce something fundamentally new, or different, to the viewer's knowledge. Instead, they emphasize how films call the existing knowledge of the viewer to attention and subsequent reflection. The transformation, as such, is measured by *values* like *awareness*, *insight* and *self-knowledge* being inserted into the knowledge that the self already has.

12 Carroll holds that narratives are essentially incomplete: they rely on presuppositions that are filled out by the knowledge that the audience brings to the text (1998: 138). Narratives therefore necessarily mobilize and exercise the existing knowledge of their audiences.

It is precisely this transformation of knowledge-already-possessed, a typical ideal for philosophers of film, that finds such clear expression in Carroll's complementary metaphors of recollection and clarification.

2.3 *'Know Yourself' Some More: A Word on Film as Philosophy Doubters*

It is worth briefly considering also some film as philosophy doubters, for the reason that they, too, affirm the kind of transformational ethics of film surveyed up to this point. Take two clear-cut skeptics: Bruce Russell, already introduced in Chapter 1, as well as Berys Gaut. Both are only willing to endorse a weak engagement between film and philosophy, as I have defined it. Yet they still acknowledge the broader cognitive value of film, and in doing so tread on the same themes of self-reflection, and transformation within the domain of knowledge, that we have encountered in the ethics of 'Know Yourself' and 'Remind Yourself'.

Bruce Russell is known for insisting on definite limits to the philosophy that films can be said to do (see Russel 2005; 2008). But with the philosophical functions that he does grant film, he affirms the by-now familiar theme of transformation aimed at one's existing knowledge: in addition to the functions of raising philosophical questions and offering counterexamples, he notes that films can "remind us of things we already know", "motivate us to find out things we do not already know" and to "double-check what we think we know" (2005: 390).

In a similar vein, Berys Gaut (2015: 41) holds that, although certain cognitive functions of films may overlap with philosophy, this does not mean that films *do* philosophy. Not all forms of cognition are philosophical; and film embraces emotional and aesthetic aims seldom shared by philosophy. Yet when Gaut evaluates *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott 1982), and the effect of the 'cognitive vision' that the film casts, he endorses the exact same 'Remind Yourself' sticker that Carroll sports in his reading of *Sunset Boulevard*. In the context of an already death-obsessed film, as Gaut describes it, *Blade Runner* presents viewers with the plight of the replicants – androids who have the radically curtailed life-span of only four years. Gaut claims that this plight presents viewers with an intensified rendition of what is also our own finitude, thus prompting us to reflect on our mortality. Much of the film's power, he concludes, lies in it initiating this posture of self-reflection (2015: 42).

So even though Russell and Gaut deny film to do philosophy in any strong sense of the term, they do attach to film transformational functions of self-knowledge. This sets them on what may perhaps be the unintended ethical common ground they share with their opponents.

2.4 *'Sense Your Senses': Vivian Sobchack*

The transformational ethics that we have covered up to this point are all about films engaging viewers at a level of higher cognition or reflective knowledge. Yet to leave it *only* at that, Vivian Sobchack would say, is to very literally take leave of our senses.

Her favorite bumper sticker, 'Sense Your Senses', says it all. With what is also an ethic of self-concentration, Sobchack wants to use film not so much to know what you know, but rather to *sense how you sense*, to *perceive how you perceive* and, ultimately, to *experience how you experience*. In short, she radically orients the idea of self-transformation through film towards the body. Much like Richard Shusterman's well-known 'somaesthetics' seeks to redress self-transformation understood purely as a one-sided project of the mind (see Shusterman 2008; 2012; 2013), Sobchack too, as far the film experience is concerned, helps put the 'soma' back into 'tran(s)f(o)r(ma)tion'.

As we have seen earlier, in Sobchack's thinking the idea of film as philosophy takes the form of 'film as phenomenology', the idea that films themselves partake in and perform phenomenology. Films can do phenomenology because they share in the same structures of embodied existence as their viewers. And the philosophical payoff of film doing so, she suggests, is that film in effect performs for us a 'meta-phenomenology': it gives expression to an experience *of* experience, and so enables us to experience *our* experience. More specifically, our engagement with film's own 'body' and 'experience' mobilizes and concentrates the 'body's attention', lets the body 'sense itself', and so enhances our 'sensual being' (2004: 62, 72, 77). As covered in Chapter 1, she thus sees in film the capacity to create for its viewers an experience of 'extreme self-reflection' on those very perceptions – or, structures of embodied existence – that condition the cinematic experience (Sobchack 2011: 204; 1992: 5).

This account leaves little doubt as to the possibilities of personal transformation that Sobchack sees in our meta-phenomenological encounter with film: it affords a transformation of *how we experience our embodied selves*, based on a restoration of a self-reflective *awareness* of our own experience. That is, by heightening and intensifying the experience of the viewer's sensorium, the film experience gives her a greater *sense of sensing.* Or, as Sobchack also puts it, "the cinema quite concretely returns us, as viewers and theorists, to our senses" (1992: 13).

With this Sobchack puts her own cinematic stamp on a phenomenological tradition that, starting with Edmund Husserl, has always set itself the ethical-transformational agenda of renewing our reflective engagement with

the world.[13] Following Husserl, she characterizes the 'radical reflection' of phenomenology as retrieving and clarifying phenomena of existence, phenomena which have been lost to our reflective knowledge through either habituation or the institutionalized abstractions of scientific thought (1992: 28). Habituation and abstraction, then, represent the main negative motivations that Sobchack adopts within her *paradigm* of self-transformation. For her, the procedure of phenomenology seeks to reanimate what is taken for granted or obscured by abstractive practices. There is a gap between our 'actual experience' and the 'theory' we use to explain that experience: phenomenology calls us back to the former (see Sobchack 2004: 53). In so doing phenomenology "opens up not only fresh possibilities for reflective knowledge, but also fresh possibilities for living knowledge and experiencing phenomena, for seeing the world and ourselves in a critically aware way" (1992: 28).

2.4.1 Sobchack's *Blue* Exercise

In the spirit of these claims, Sobchack strongly affirms not only the practical value of phenomenology, but also the need to engage in the actual *practice* of phenomenology: you really have to *do* phenomenology to fully understand what it is all about. And, unlike the cases considered up to now, Sobchack gives us quite a tangible picture of her theoretical ideals put into practice. In an essay where she lets us in on her pedagogy of phenomenology, Sobchack describes her use of Derek Jarman's demanding biopic, *Blue* (1993), as a way of introducing her students to the phenomenological method (2011: 191–206). With this exercise, as I see it, Sobchack leads her students in what is essentially a transformational *technique* of *self-reflection*, based on their experience of a film. Incidentally, an obviously *contemplative* technique in this case also incorporates the transformational *mode* of *ministering*, seeing that the self-reflection and its outcomes rely on Sobchack's guidance as a film phenomenology teacher too.

The goal of the *Blue* exercise, Sobchack explains, is to forestall students' habitual recourse to quick-fire judgments and theoretical interpretations ('abstractive practices'), and instead get them to first attend to their own embodied experiences (2011: 192–194). Yet contemplative techniques of transformation invariably call upon the directions of an explicit guiding text. And

13 This agenda is clear to see, for instance, in Simon Glendinning's assessment that phenomenology "aims to cultivate and develop your capacity faithfully to retrieve (for) yourself (as from the inside) a radically re-vis(ion)ed understanding of yourself and your place in the world" (2008: 48). For another example, see Joaquim Siles i Borràs (2011) on the pronounced ethical interests at play in Husserl's phenomenology.

the *Blue* exercise does just that. Sobchack calls on Don Ihde's *Experimental Phenomenology: An Introduction* (1979), which provides her with a sequential set of hermeneutic rules[14] that guide the students in adopting the required reflective attitude. Evidently the concrete business of attending to 'actual experience' cannot, after all, proceed without a tinge of abstract theory in place. This touches on issues of the assumed model viewer, and her preparatory self-transformations, which I will get to later on.

Sobchack notes that sitting through Jarman's final feature film is typically experienced as difficult and demanding, and that students' reactions to it are polarized. This is no doubt on account of its radical minimalism. (One might find similar responses, for example, to the minimalism of Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975).) Visually, *Blue* is reduced to a single shot of the screen saturated with the color blue. Yet Sobchack insists that the 'extreme conditions of somatic attention' provoked by Jarman's privations – belonging to the transformational mode that I previously identified as a *contemplative asceticism*, following from the great deal of visual stimuli from which the film withholds the viewer – help challenge one's assumptive 'natural attitude', and so allow students to expand the limits of their own perception (2011: 191, 194, 196, 199–200). And this is indeed, then, the kind of transformational result that she reports on: following the exercise, students' phenomenological descriptions become more reflexive; they become sensitized to subtle alterations in their visual attention; they become more receptive to the expansion and sensuality of the aural field; and they can even discover synaesthetic dimensions in their experience (such as listening to color) (2011: 197–199).

2.4.2 Disclosures, Disruptions, and Deepenings

It is fair to say that 'Sense Your Senses' overlaps with the other types of ethics discussed so far on the basic transformational *value* of *self-knowledge*, or even more generally, *self-awareness*. But self-knowledge, as it emerges in Sobchack's ethic, gets linked to a very different profile of transformational *domains*. Whereas 'Know Yourself' & Co. want to use film for knowledge of the self's *knowledge* (its constituent themes, assumptions, biases), 'Sense Your Senses' probes for more elemental knowledge of the *senses* and *embodiment* of the self.

14 The five rules read as follows: one, "attend to the phenomena of experience as they appear"; two, "describe, don't explain"; three, "horizontalize or equalize all immediate phenomena"; four, "seek out structural or invariant features of the phenomena as they appear"; and, lastly, five, "every experiencing has its reference or direction towards what is experienced, and, contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present" (cited in Sobchack 2011: 195–203).

Yet to say that Sobchack is after self-knowledge of our embodied being is to merely scratch the surface of her vision of self-transformation through film. Within the broader *domain* of embodiment, she zooms in on a range of further details of how film can disclose to us our sensory experience.

First, Sobchack elaborates the idea of self-knowledge of the body by adding that film also grants us awareness of how the body itself knows. Here we can speak of self-knowledge aimed at *embodied knowledge* – a composite domain in which the domain of the body incorporates also its own form of knowledge. Noteworthy in this regard are Sobchack's meditations on *The Piano* (Jane Campion 1993) (2004: 61–64). Here she recounts how the unidentifiable opening images of the film – which turn out to be the main character's hands – evoked an anticipatory sense of what, she says, *her fingers already knew*. These images, as Sobchack explains, mobilized and concentrated her body's attention: "my tactile sense of being in the world through my fingers grasped the image's sense in a way that my forestalled or baffled vision could not" (2004: 64). That her fingers can 'grasp' or 'comprehend' in a manner that can only afterwards be refigured into conscious thought, demonstrates what she takes to be "the carnal foundations of cinematic intelligibility" (2004: 59). The film experience, by giving a greater sense of sensing, can thus also sensitize us to what she variously calls our 'bodily knowing', 'embodied intelligence', or 'carnal thoughts' (e.g. 2004: 60, 75, 84). In this manner, says Sobchack, we become more attuned to how the body reflexively knows *before* we reflectively know.

Besides getting to know our bodily knowing, Sobchack suggests that film's engagement of the senses can furthermore stimulate and deepen our capacity for synaesthesia. Synaesthesia is described as a basic exchange and translation between the senses – to experience one sense in terms of another. Such an exchange between the senses she asserts as a given condition of the human sensorium. But even though synaesthetic perception is the rule, she goes on, we become unaware of it through both over-familiarity and cultural conditioning (2004: 67, 69–71). Sobchack therefore wants the particular sensory solicitations of a given film, or filmic moment, to step in and disclose for us this supposedly obscured synaesthetic dimension of our experience. This, too, is a central theme in her meditations on *The Piano*: film can harness the viewer's synaesthetic capacities, on the basis of our total embodied involvement with it, and thereby let the dominant senses of vision and hearing 'speak to' our other senses, and *vice versa* (2004: 67). The cited fingers-example in *The Piano* is thus taken by Sobchack to illustrate how film quite literally touches us through what we see; and, thereby, shows us the deep extent to which sight is informed by the sense of touch (2004: 80).

But Sobchack has still more in mind. The disclosure of synaesthetic exchange among the senses, as she sees it, ushers in yet another transformational prospect for film viewers: to have our naturalized sensory hierarchy altered and rearranged (2004: 80). Here she is specifically driving at how film can destabilize the dominance of the audio-visual, and in particular the 'cultural hegemony' of vision with its "hierarchical sway over our other senses" (2004: 63–64; cf. 2011: 199). Presumably film can help us approximate what Sobchack at one point calls a 'pre-logical and non-hierarchical unity of the sensorium', which precedes the hierarchical arrangement of the senses that later develops through cultural immersion (2004: 69). With this thought, as I see it, Sobchack adds to 'Sense Your Senses' the time-honored transformational *value* of *unity* – a value that in discourses of mysticism often gets related to entities external to the self, like unity with Nature or God[15], but which otherwise can also apply to a unity (integratedness, wholeness) *within* the self, whether that may be a unity of parts of the soul, mental faculties or, in this case, the senses.

Finally, for Sobchack, all the above disclosures effected by film – relating to embodied knowledge, synaesthesia, and integrating the senses – give viewers access to greater *depth* and *richness* in their sensual experience (e.g. 2004: 67, 71). At this point 'Sense Your Senses', which starts off as an ethic of self-concentration, quietly transmutes into one of self-expansion. As much as film *heightens* and *intensifies* (i.e. concentrates) our experience of the self's sensorium, Sobchack sees it as an experience that we simultaneously recognize as *general* and *diffuse* (i.e. expanded) (2004: 77). She speaks of this self-expansive flipside to her ethic in terms of an *opening* of the self and an *extensive* mode of being (2004: 78–79). The embodied intelligence that is roused by the film experience, she says, "opens our eyes far beyond their discrete capacity for vision, opens the film far beyond its visible containment by the screen, and opens language to a reflective knowledge of its carnal origins and limits" (2004: 84). As this suggests, Sobchack even thinks of this opening of the self

15 Sobchack does in fact hint at this first kind of transformational unity. Owing to the relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity between the viewer's body and the film's body, she notes that "objectivity and subjectivity lose their presumed clarity" (2004: 66). Quoting from Iris Marion Young, she even speaks of embodied subjectivity as leaving "no basis for preserving the mutual exclusivity of the categories subject and object, inner and outer, I and world". This view has echoes of the aim of unitive experience in various forms of mysticism, a typical feature of which is the blurring of subject-object boundaries. And, as I will still show, this puts Sobchack in the company of both Daniel Frampton and those who subscribe to the 'Lose Your Self' ethic.

as being an embodied sense of *transcendence*.[16] According to this dramatic denouement of 'Sense Your Senses', then, particular film-going practices can evoke a deepening of the self's experience to the extent that the very limits of that experience are transcended and transformed.

So with Sobchack having already opened the door to the topic of self-expansion, let us now turn to transformational ethics of film where such ideals are the main focus of interest.

3 Ethics of Self-Expansion

3.1 *'Expand Your Mind': Stephen Mulhall and Others*

Ethics of self-concentration in film as philosophy, I have shown, construes film-viewing as a way to know yourself – that is, to better know what you already know, and to dig deeper into the knowledge and experience that makes you *you*. With the ethics of self-expansion, film philosophers emphasize transformation in the opposite direction: film-viewing is a way to know what is new, different, and other – not to affirm the self and its existing knowledge. This line of ethics banks on film to break you loose from forms of experience that restrict you to being *you*. Ultimately, ethics of self-expansion wishes for the film viewer not just to know what is other, but to *become* what is other.

So what better place to start, then, than with the evergreen transformational slogan, 'Expand Your Mind' – the promotion-savvy guru's bumper sticker of choice. In using this slogan for film philosophers like Stephen Mulhall, however, I do not intend it to mean an expansion of one's Mind in some grand metaphysical sense (although we will still get to cases that resemble this). No, for Mulhall, and many others, film as philosophy affords a more sensible, down-to-earth instance of self-expansion: films, quite simply, direct our thinking toward different perspectives and unconsidered ideas. 'Expand Your Mind' thus prescribes an attitude of openness to film, and what it 'thinks', so that it can open up pathways along which *we* are yet to think.

Bear in mind that already with Vivian Sobchack, above, we have crossed some significant borders within the film as philosophy landscape. Both Mulhall and Sobchack assume a clearly different condition for films to engage in philosophy: films do so, not because they enact forms of philosophical *knowledge*

16 See Sobchack (2008; 2011: 202–204) for a sampling of how she approaches the experience of transcendence on the basis of our material, bodily immanence.

(think Wartenberg and Falzon, earlier on), but because they draw viewers into relevant *subjective processes* and enact such processes. Sobchack, we have just seen, identifies the philosophical contribution of films with the broader forms of embodied experience that they enlist and express. Mulhall, on the other hand, narrows film as philosophy down to films that engage in philosophical thinking.

On top of that, we are now squarely in the terrain where films are taken to do philosophy in the most direct and literal sense – the so-called 'bold' conception, according to which films can actually *be* philosophy. And the designated poster boy of 'bold' film as philosophy is, of course, Stephen Mulhall (e.g. Sinnerbrink 2013: 207–209). As I have previously discussed, Mulhall patently claims that some films think systematically, address philosophical questions and, quite simply, philosophize. Yet, as I have also argued, there is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding this 'thinking' that films supposedly do: it remains unclear whether this 'thinking' refers to film's own thinking, the thinking that it generates in the viewer, or the thought that the filmmaker (supposedly) wishes to convey to the audience. What is clear in Mulhall's account, however, is that a film's thinking – whatever, exactly, it may be – does not leave *the viewer's* thinking unaffected.

3.1.1 The Thinking Film's Transformations of Thought

Mulhall gives a number of indications that philosophizing films have a subjective agency that grants their viewers transformations of thought. It is no coincidence, by the way, that most of these indications come up precisely when Mulhall (2008: 129–155) sets out to respond to critics of his bold stance on film as philosophy: in having to elaborate on what counts as 'philosophy', and how films can do it, he is bound to consider also ethical-transformational effects that are intrinsic to (films) doing philosophy.

The resultant transformational ethic that Mulhall gestures towards, it has to be said, is not exactly as 'bold' as the position on film as philosophy that he is reputed to have. Mulhall, to begin with, values film for motivating in the viewer a movement of thought. He takes some films to be particularly adept at encouraging viewers to ask questions and make meaning – like, again, *Blade Runner,* which Mulhall says 'educates' our reflections on what it means to be human (2008: 29–45). From this angle, film-viewing constitutes a contemplative *technique* in the simple sense that it enhances contemplation, which means that contemplation in Mulhall's ethic figures as both *mode* and *value* of transformation. But compared to the likes of Carroll, Mulhall sees contemplation through film as more open-ended, not as set on some cognitive outcome. Films do not lead viewers to particular philosophical insights, but rather give

them broader ways for thinking, ways leading to whatever insights they may arrive at.

Mulhall also differs from the cases dealt with before in that film-viewing, as he treats it, becomes not a transformational *technique* of self-reflection or introspection, but rather what I would call *contemplating the world*. This is to reflect, through film, on the nature of existence, and our place within it. But how does such contemplation involve self-transformation? When Pierre Hadot goes into 'contemplation of the world' – deeming it one of the most general spiritual exercises of ancient philosophy – he specifically relates the technique to a transformation of *vision*, the way in which the philosopher *sees the world* (see Hadot 1995: 251–263; 2002: 229–231). Although not exactly the same[17], Hadot's assessment is useful for pinning down the transformation of thought that Mulhall is after: films in the act of philosophy disclose for their viewers alternative 'visions of the world' and 'visions of what matters in human life' (Mulhall 2008: 136, 140–141). This is a conversion of thinking in the same sense as "encouraging one's interlocutor not so much to change her mind about a particular course of action but to *look at everything differently*" (2008: 140 [emphasis added]).

So besides regarding film as inducing us to think *more*, Mulhall sees in film's thinking the ability to accomplish fundamental reorientations of how we think and reason. By providing 'pathways to thinking', films can initiate *new directions* and indeed *new ways* of thinking (2008: 136). Again, this is not about films engaging in arguments, in the narrow sense of the term. The point for Mulhall is that any argumentation relies on a shared space of thought, which presupposes the shape and significance – the givenness – of the topic under discussion. What films do is to let us "reconceive *that space*, by finding a new way of thinking about the topic" (2008: 137 [emphasis added]). To re-envision the space of thought is to alter our sense of the stances available to our reasoning about a given topic. In this manner film's thinking can provide "an open space in which thinking takes place, enabling new modes of organizing and making sense of experience and knowledge" (Andersen cited in Mulhall 2008: 136–137).

Mulhall goes on to suggest that film has an especially important part to play in such re-envisioning and reorientation with regard to 'ethical perception'

17 For ancients like Seneca or Lucretius, as Hadot evaluates them, contemplating the world is at its core about rediscovering a naive vision: to see the world with new eyes, as if one were seeing it for the first time. In contrast, Mulhall claims that film inspires, not some *renewed primitive vision* of the world, but *new visions* – different perspectives – in terms of which to consider the world.

(2008: 141). Because ethical perceptions arise from deeply committed visions of the world, their transformation often requires more than rational engagement alone. Their reorientation relies just as much on appeals to the '*heart*' (emotional responses and sensibilities) and to the *imagination* – things, presumably, that film is especially suited to appeal to. Here I take Mulhall as proposing that 'Expand Your Mind' occurs within a complex of transformational *domains*. He seems to say that with the experience of film we have an ideal way of harnessing affect/emotion and imagination as domains *by means of which* to impact and transform the *target-domain*, the viewer's ways of thinking. Put differently: it is by "engaging with and altering our affections and sensibility that film gets to dislodge deep-seated perceptions and reorient them" (2008: 141). That said, to be affected in such manner requires of the viewer to be sufficiently open to the film experience. But the viewer's preparedness for self-transformation is an issue that I save for later in the chapter.

3.1.2 Perspectives, Frames, and Aspect-Seeing

It turns out, then, that Mulhall does in fact nominate for 'Expand Your Mind' a more specific transformational *value* than only contemplation for contemplation's sake. Now I must admit that certain general values, like achieving *awareness* or *insight*, will apply to practically every transformational ethic that I identify in this chapter – and Mulhall is no exception. Yet within each ethic these values still acquire individual flavors: an ethic typically seeks not just awareness but a particular *object* of awareness; or better put in Mulhall's case, not just insight but a specific *kind* of insight. Mulhall hardly uses the term, but it is clear that the kind of insight that he aims for is one of *perspective*; the reorientations of our thinking that he attributes to films comes down to the *shifting-* and *gaining of* perspectives.

There are a number of other philosophers who, like Mulhall, treat film in the act of philosophy as initiating viewers into transformations of perspective – whether this be called perspective-shifting, frame-switching, or aspect-seeing – and in this respect the likes of Mullhall provide us with further possible formulations of the 'Expand Your Mind' ethic.[18] Perspective as a transformational issue is especially evident in philosophers who draw on familiar ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein, like his distinction between 'saying' and 'showing', and his concept of 'seeing aspects'. Phil Hutchinson, for example, argues of the films *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón 2013) and *Melancholia* (Lars von

18 Questions of perspective, in relation to self-transformation, also emerge as a major theme in philosophical readings of Terrence Malick's film style, which I take up in the following chapter.

Trier 2011) that they both explore the 'life is a journey' metaphor – one of the most pervasive cognitive frames through which we reflect on life – and indeed explore it "in inventive ways [that] might well give us *new perspectives*, bring to light *new aspects* on, our lives" (Hutchinson 2015: 86). Rupert Read, another philosopher known for his work on Wittgenstein, hits a more spiritual note in his assessment of *Avatar* (James Cameron 2009): he argues that the film takes us through a process of transformation that "opens our eyes", and "midwifes a change in conscience and consciousness", with regard to how we relate to nature and the future of our planet (Read 2015: 90, 93). And even Julian Baggini, despite his doubts about some of Mulhall's ideas, agrees that films are well suited to "shifting the way we look at things" (Baggini 2011: 209). It is because they *show* rather than *tell*, Baggini makes clear, that films have the power to make us attend to aspects of the world – ways of seeing it – that may otherwise go unnoticed.

But let me elaborate more on the further example of Christopher Grau (2013), seeing that he brings us back to the character, Poppy, from the film *Happy-Go-Lucky*. Earlier on I explained how Basileios Kroustallis identifies Poppy's supposedly estranging demeanor as crucial to how *Happy-Go-Lucky* leads viewers in a self-examination on the nature of happiness. One of the many things that Grau takes issue with in this reading is that Kroustallis fails to recognize that viewers' perception of Poppy may change, and in fact *should* change. Grau does not deny that Poppy at first comes across as annoying. But he argues that the film is precisely an exercise in challenging the viewer to come to see Poppy from a different perspective from the one that she is initially tempted to adopt. Grau explicitly likens this shift to Wittgenstein's notion of 'aspect-seeing', which he then explains in terms of his own viewing experience:

> I am struck by how my own perspective of Poppy has undergone *a transformation*: she no longer strikes me as irritating. The film has succeeded in altering *my vision* such that a person who I couldn't help but see as obnoxious I now see as something much closer to the 'laughing Buddha' described by Eddie Marsan [an actor, whose statement is quoted earlier in Grau's essay]. *Happy-Go-Lucky* has helped me undergo a certain kind of *aspect shift* in my own perception of that character. (2013: 19 [emphasis added])

This account matches with the core 'Expand Your Mind' picture that we get from Mulhall and the others: for Grau, also, the accomplishment of *Happy-Go-Lucky* is that it grants viewers new insight related to the shifting – the transformation – of *perspective*. He makes clear that the film incites us not only to shift

our perspective on Poppy, the challenging character that she is, but likewise to shift closer to the challenging life-perspective that she herself holds. What the film does is far from a conversion experience, Grau admits, but still worth calling an "edifying cinematic accomplishment" (2013: 18).

3.2 *'Blow Your Mind': Deleuzian Inspirations in Sinnerbrink and Frampton*

Our next bumper sticker is perhaps best introduced by a dictionary-style definition: to 'blow someone's mind', as they say, is to affect, to excite, to elevate, to overwhelm. Accordingly, film philosophers who advocate the following ethical slogan make emphatic the intense affects, emotions, and experiences that films can rouse in the viewer. But, as the 'blow'-bit certainly implies, the notion also speaks of potential discomfort: that the mind at stake may be ruffled, disturbed, shocked, or simply blown *away*. Yet, for the philosophers concerned, it is precisely this moment of disruption that gives films a foothold to redefine the parameters of philosophical thought.

In terms of aspirations of self-expansion, things get considerably more adventurous from here on. Self-expansion now begins to take on the form of *ekstasis*, the ideal of stepping outside of oneself. In this ethic, more exactly, the ideal manifests itself as a desire to step outside the restraints of our thought. Philosophers who endorse this ethic find in the distinct thinking of film – 'cinematic thinking' – a means of pressing beyond the limits and limitations of philosophical thinking. For them, in essence, cinematic thinking transcends our own conventional forms of thinking. And, by doing so, it pushes us to also transcend, and transform, those forms of thinking for ourselves. According to this vision, then, you go to the cinema in search of experiences that cognitively overwhelm you, that disrupt your usual philosophical certainties, so as to be in a position to be forced to invent thinking beyond the confines of your existing thought. This envisioned outcome may go by many names: 'ecstatic thinking' (Bernauer 1988); 'thinking the outside' (Foucault 1987); thinking 'the unthought within thought' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 59–60); reaching for the 'unthinkable in thought' (Deleuze 1989: 168); even 'thinking the impossible' (Gutting 2013). However, to mark off the supposition that *films* are instrumental in achieving the outcome of such thinking, I label it 'Blow Your Mind'.

I put forward Robert Sinnerbrink and Daniel Frampton as two paradigmatic representatives of 'Blow Your Mind'. Of course, the reason for them suggesting a common transformational ethic is that they have in common the same 'cinematic thinking' approach to film as philosophy. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, the cinematic thinking approach, which emphasizes the

confrontational difference of this form of thought, finds a key inspiration in the thinking of Gilles Deleuze.

"Something in the world forces us to think", Deleuze observes in *Difference and Repetition* (1994: 139). And, to be sure, that 'something' may be anything, owing to the infinite, incessant play of forces that animate the Deleuzian ontology. But as his *Cinema* books no doubt witness, Deleuze reserves a special role for cinema as something that forces us to think. This is made especially evident in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Deleuze 1989: 156 ff.), where Deleuze portrays the intensities, affects and percepts flowing from cinema as 'shocks to thought'. These shocks encountered through cinema, among other things, "forces us to think and re-think our own thinking, bringing about a new image of thought" (Huygens 2007). Or, put in an alternative way: the creative forces of cinema inevitably force the creation of new concepts (see Deleuze 1998a: 14–16).

Therefore, rather than tapping the film-philosophical potential of specific Deleuzian notions such as the 'movement-image' and time-image', 'crystals of time', or 'powers of the false'[19], the cinematic thinking approach exemplified by Sinnerbrink and Frampton takes its lead from this more basic viewpoint. Firstly, that cinematic thinking forces or shocks us into thought. But, secondly, also, that cinematic thinking enacts this force or shock by virtue of its inherent distinctness from our own forms of thinking. Cinematic thinking is conceived of as an imagistic and affective Other, standing in contrast to the usual conceptual-abstractive thinking that characterize philosophy. It is an Other, consequently, that confronts philosophy with its own limitations. And, for this reason, cinematic thinking forces philosophical thought beyond itself, to become Other. Cinematic thinking thus overwhelms philosophy, challenges and resists philosophy, and jolts philosophy into revision and invention – and, in this sense, can be said to 'do philosophy'. The philosophical value perceived in cinematic thinking therefore revolves around the supposed *power* deriving from its otherness – an influence that is at once affective, disruptive, and creative.

The ethical implication of this approach to film as philosophy, of course, is that any encounter with this supposedly forceful cinematic thinking is one of potential formation and transformation. This (trans)formative power of cinematic thinking is especially noticeable in claims of its capacity to generate 'the New': new concepts, new knowledge, new perceptions and new possibilities

19 Of course, many do find considerable philosophical value in these and related concepts – see the work of Patricia Pisters (2003; 2012) and D.N. Rodowick (1997; 2010a) as two influential examples in this regard.

in thought and experience. When 'Expand Your Mind' says that film orientates our thinking to new perspectives, we have something 'new' in the sense that an alternative, previously unconsidered perspective is revealed. The suggestion at hand here is far more audacious: we have the formation of new perspectives that would not have existed at all without the creative intervention of cinema. As a transformational ethic of film, then, 'Blow Your Mind' asks – much like Deleuze would – 'What might thinking become?' And, importantly: 'How does the thinking of cinema incite the becoming of our own thought?'

3.2.1 Robert Sinnerbrink: Ethical Motives and Motifs

I should first point out that placing Robert Sinnerbrink under the 'Blow Your Mind' banner is by no means done because I take him to be a boots-and-all Deleuzian in his thinking on film. His 'romantic film-philosophy', as he refers to it, echoes many other voices. He explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Stanley Cavell as well as Stephen Mulhall (see 2011a: 137–139). A good deal of his thinking on film as philosophy also responds to Heidegger – especially with the notion of aesthetic world disclosure (see 2006; 2014c). Additionally, in more recent work, he (as do Pisters (2012) and other Deleuze-inspired film scholars, for that matter) increasingly takes on board insights from cognitive film theory (see 2016a).

Yet when it comes to his notion of cinematic thinking, Deleuze's voice echoes the loudest. Recall from Chapter 1 that, like Deleuze, Sinnerbrink treats cinematic thinking as essentially distinct from – and Other to – conventional philosophical thinking. Cinematic thinking stands apart as a 'thinking in images', a thinking that he identifies as intuitive, affective, aesthetic, and non-conceptual in nature (2011a: 89, 139, 152). Also recall that, on account of this otherness, cinematic thinking for Sinnerbrink does not engage *in* philosophy so much as it engages *with* philosophy. Cinema's contribution to philosophy thus resides in what is a generative confrontation between two distinct forms of thought. It is thus no wonder that the standout Deleuzian motif in Sinnerbrink's thinking is that cinema produces a 'shock to thought' (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 137 ff.; cf. Deleuze 1989: 156–164). Sinnerbrink elaborates on the motif of cinema's power by claiming that cinema: "performs a cinematic thinking in images that both challenges and resists philosophy, provoking us to think in response to what film enables us to experience, without, however, reducing cinema to a mere reflection of a philosophical thesis or framework" (2011a: 137). So in a double movement, as he portrays it, cinematic thinking stages for us an experience that provokes philosophical thinking, yet at the same time actively disrupts and challenges that thinking. And by exposing the inabilities of conventional modes of philosophy to come to terms with it – that is, through its aesthetic,

affective, non-conceptual nature – cinematic thinking forces philosophy into new possibilities of thought (2013: 213; 2011c: 33).

Compared to earlier cases in this chapter, Sinnerbrink is quite explicit on the ethical commitments that he makes with his particular stance on film as philosophy. For one thing, Sinnerbrink is explicitly concerned with the theme of transformation, and makes quite clear the particular ideal that he is after: cinematic thinking, as both a provocation and resistance to thought, should transform philosophy. Between film and philosophy transpires what he calls a transformative "thinking dialogue", which spurs "philosophy to respond creatively to the kind of thinking that cinema allows us to experience" (2011c: 36).

Less explicit is the added personal transformations, for the philosopher-viewer, that the transformation of philosophy clearly also holds. For the renewal of philosophical thinking, as Sinnerbrink envisions it, surely entails more than 'thinking' only in an abstract, cultural sense. It entails also the renewal of the thinking viewer-subjects who must transform in their capacity to think and embody (re-)new(-ed) philosophical thoughts. To his credit, Sinnerbrink often brings up such 'extra-philosophical' transformations. He points out, for example, that our grappling with cinematic thinking can result in new ways of thinking and feeling; open new possibilities of thought; question our normative practices and frameworks; challenge habituated ways of seeing; and even do as much as transform our experience of the world (2011a: 7; 2011c: 40; 2013: 207). These remarks are in keeping with the 'Blow Your Mind' motto: they signal the transformational ambition that films, by pushing us to move beyond conventional *philosophy*, can moreover help us move beyond *regular* forms of thinking, feeling, and experience in general.

To further back up this broader ambition for cinematic thinking, Sinnerbrink specifically petitions the idea of aesthetic world-disclosure which, he says, can help recuperate the 'ethico-political dimensions' of film (2011c: 42–43). But before getting to its ethical uses, I must acknowledge that the idea of world-disclosure adds a distinctly Heideggerian dimension to Sinnerbrink's Deleuzian inspired notion of cinematic thinking and its effects. One obvious token of this dimension is that Sinnerbrink never speaks of the transformation of thinking in terms of the 'creation of concepts', as Deleuze would do. In allegiance to philosophical romanticism (more on that in a moment), while by no means in opposition to Deleuze, he rather speaks of such transformation in terms of *disclosure* and *opening up* of new possibilities of *thought*. Cinema's aesthetic forms of disclosure amounts to its distinctive ways of thinking (2011c: 38). And by our encountering these alternative forms of world-disclosure, Sinnerbrink argues, we are compelled to new ways of thinking, or to 'think the New' (2011c: 37).

I should point out that Sinnerbrink does not deploy the notion of aesthetic world-disclosure in a consistent manner. In his book, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (2011a), the term is nowhere to be found. In a later essay like *Technē and Poiēsis: On Heidegger and Film Theory* (2014c), in contrast, Sinnerbrink resorts to 'world-disclosure' much like Heidegger himself would do. On most other occasions, however, Sinnerbrink is content with a much looser application of the term. In a revealing essay on romantic film-philosophy, he aligns his use of world-disclosure with the tradition of 'philosophical romanticism', as in particular formulated by Nikolas Kompridis (2005; 2006a; 2006b). Sinnerbrink takes from this tradition its emphasis on the arts as providing alternative forms of world-disclosure that can open up new possibilities of thought and action (2011c: 36 ff.). Not that his allegiance to this line of thinking is entirely reciprocated. Kompridis himself, albeit in a different context, denounces Sinnerbrink's notion of aesthetic world-disclosure as something of a decorative concept. Kompridis claims that what Sinnerbrink means by 'world-disclosing critique' lacks ontological grounding, gets no special meaning from Heidegger, and merely amounts to any sort of aesthetic 'eye-opening' (see Kompridis 2011: 1074–1075).

The exact merit of Sinnerbrink's concept of world-disclosure is not decisive for my argument here. Much more important is that Sinnerbrink finds in aesthetic world-disclosure (casual as his take on it may be) a further resource for affirming the ethical-transformational value of cinematic thinking. Through aesthetic world-disclosure, film essentially does the work of possibility-disclosure – for Sinnerbrink, the possibility of new forms of meaning-making, new horizons of experience, and by implication new viewer selves (2011c: 42). Incidentally, the idea of world-disclosure also allows Sinnerbrink's 'Blow Your Mind' ethic to incorporate elements of 'Remind Yourself' – discussed earlier with reference to Noël Carroll, who, likewise, makes an appeal to Heidegger, even if only briefly so. In effect, world-disclosure needs not only open up the novel in our experience. It can likewise disclose, and thus help retrieve, aspects of our experience that Sinnerbrink describes as forgotten or lost (2011c: 41–42).

Now I take it that any form of art or fiction may lay claim to the function of world-disclosure. But Sinnerbrink seems to reserve for cinema a special capacity for it: since our experience in cinema is essentially that of cinematic worlds, films disclose the world via the actual construction of alternative worlds (2011c: 35, 41–43). This apparent recommendation of a *cinematic* world-disclosure rides on a strong conception of viewer immersion, but one of which he gives little account. He basically accepts cinema's capacity for viewers to temporarily 'inhabit' its richly sensory virtual worlds, with no mention of how this process may work, nor how it may extend to worlds established by other

art forms. If anything, he suggests that immersion relies on the attitude of the viewer – a matter to which we shall return. But it is nevertheless on account of the film's immersive powers, for Sinnerbrink, that cinematic world-disclosure gains its particular *affective* engagement. In this way, disclosure and immersion team up in a powerful experience of cinematic worlds that "both reflect and transform our subjective orientation in the world" (2011c: 42).

Finally, I must say a word on Sinnerbrink's recent turn to cinematic ethics, seeing that it very much affirms and deepens the above ethical interests that come to the fore in his writings on film as philosophy. In his *Cinematic Ethics* (2016a) he extends the idea of film as philosophy by going deeper into the idea of 'film as ethics', that films can 'do ethics', by considering cinema as a "medium of ethical experience with the power to provoke emotional understanding and philosophical thinking" (2016a: x). His favorite notion of a powerful cinema experience as 'provocation' thus already shows up on page two, even though here he refrains from calling it 'cinematic thinking'. And films that pose enough of a challenge to viewers, he goes on to say, have the capacity to "be exercises in ethical (and political) provocation with a *transformative* potential" (2016a: x [emphasis added]). The undeniably *ethical* motive of transformation, which has long been at work in Sinnerbrink's thinking, is now made explicit and moves center stage. Of course he expands his ethical interests on a number of fronts, addressing for example cinema's relevance with regard to sympathy and empathy, emotional engagement, perspective-taking, and cultivation of the imagination. But his anchor-notions of an affective medium evoking powerful experience, which challenges and pushes the viewer, while disclosing alternative possibilities for thought and action, remains firmly intact. No wonder then that the value and ideal effects that he sees in cinematic ethics sound so familiar: "to effect an ethical conversion, altering our horizon of understanding and transforming how we think, feel, and conduct ourselves in the world" (2016a: 185).

3.2.2 Sinnerbrink's Ethic: Domains and Modes

Let me round up the main features of the transformational ethic emerging from Sinnerbrink's account of film as philosophy, starting with the *domain* of transformation. Sinnerbrink himself nominates philosophy as the main 'what', or domain, to be transformed by film. And even though philosophy or philosophical thinking constitutes a broader cultural domain, we have seen that it cannot be uncoupled from personal domains of viewers: Sinnerbrink's transformation of philosophy thus entails the transformation of our ways of *thinking*, in particular, yet reaches also into our *feelings*, habits of *perception*, and *experience* of the world (e.g. 2011a: 7, 141–142; 2011c: 40; 2013: 207). In addition, this already comprehensive set of transformational domains grows even larger in Sinnerbrink's

work on cinematic ethics. Here, for example, he credits films for leading us in the self-work of challenging our *beliefs* (reminiscent of 'Know Yourself'), and exercising our *moral perception* or *moral imagination* (2016a: 16–17).

Next, we have the implicit *modes* of transformation that Sinnerbrink poses, especially within the domain of the viewer's thinking. As to be expected by now in this chapter, we also find in Sinnerbrink's account the idea that film elicits self-transformation in the mode of *contemplation*. 'Contemplation' in this technical sense encompasses not only the thinking prompted in the viewer, but also the triggered affects, emotions, and experiences of the viewer in which the thinking is prompted. Indeed, for Sinnerbrink, films evoke a contemplative mode of transformation by "provoking us to think in response to what film enables us to experience" (2011a: 137).

In fact, Sinnerbrink's notion of cinematic thinking poses more than one contemplative mode, or as I prefer to see it, poses distinguishable contemplative aspects within that mode. We can derive these contemplative *modes*, as I emphasized in Chapter 2, from the particular transformational *work* attributed to films. Sinnerbrink's claim is that, in addition to provoking thought, cinematic thinking also resists thought, withholds closure, and forces us to think the New. Each of these latter actions point to 'sub-modes' that we can distinguish within the contemplative mode implied for the viewer: i.e. that contemplative transformation through cinematic thinking holds the inner-aspects of *asceticism*, of *endurance*, and of *mysticism*. To get a better sense of what I mean by each of these sub-modes, consider the following passage with which Sinnerbrink prefaces an analysis of David Lynch:

> Instead of arguing [...] that bringing philosophical reflection to popular film genres shows how such films can be philosophical, I would like to explore the reverse scenario: responding to films – such as Lynch's *INLAND EMPIRE* (2006) – that both provoke and resist philosophical reflection. Such films, of varying provenance, genre, style and commercial popularity, 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. These are films that 'resist theory', evoking an experience that is aesthetic and reflective, yet where the former cannot be reduced to, or even overwhelms, the latter. Such films communicate an experience of thinking that resists philosophical translation or paraphrase; thus they are films where we encounter what I am calling cinematic thinking in its most intensive and dramatic forms". (2011a: 141–142)

Alongside provoking philosophical thought, then, cinematic thinking does the work of resisting philosophical thought. One way to construe the resultant mode of transformation for the viewer is to say that cinema's resistance to thought prompts a contemplative *endurance*. In this composite mode, the traditional mode of transformation through endurance gets qualified by that of contemplation; it speaks not of literal physical endurance but an endurance of a specifically contemplative nature. In Sinnerbrink's ethic, it is indeed not a shock but a shock *to thought* that the viewer has to endure. The viewer must endure cinema's active resistance of her conventional philosophical responses and the frameworks that those responses rely on. In other words, the viewer must endure the difficult-making of philosophical thinking at the hand of cinematic experience that "resists cognitive closure or theoretical subsumption" (2011a: 139). And by putting us through this particular endurance, Sinnerbrink hopes, films can 'provoke', 'incite' or even 'force' viewers to new possibilities of thought.

When proponents of the 'Know Yourself' ethic envision the viewer's contemplative endurance, they typically attribute it to a particular strategy on the part of a film – as when a well devised twist-film upsets a routine assumption or schema in the viewer's thought. But for Sinnerbrink contemplative endurance is intrinsic to his very definition of cinematic thinking: it is a form of thinking that is essentially Other to philosophy (remember: non-conceptual, affective, and aesthetic) and thus, by default, resists our run-of-the-mill philosophical procedures. This also explains, I should add, Sinnerbrink's preference for films like David Lynch's *Inland Empire*. If cinematic thinking by definition must resist our philosophical mastery of films, then it is only natural for Sinnerbrink to associate cinematic thinking with complex and ambiguous art cinema – including, along with Lynch, the oeuvres of Terrence Malick and Lars von Trier. The particular aesthetic, intellectual, even moral challenges that these filmmakers pose are tailor-made to the contemplative endurance that Sinnerbrink seeks from cinematic thinking. Also in his later work, where he addresses not so much cinematic thinking as he does cinematic ethics, Sinnerbrink remains attracted to the same breed of filmmakers. His analyses of films like *A Separation* (Asghar Farhadi 2011), *Talk to Her* (Pedro Almodóvar 2002), and *Biutiful* (Alejandro González Iñárritu 2010) all underscore that 'ethical experience' thrives most when cinema viewers come up against ambiguity, moral ambivalence, estrangement and complex perspective-taking and switching (see 2016a: 80–164).

Another way to construe this resistance of cinema to our thought is to say that it leads the viewer into a mode of *contemplative asceticism*. From this viewpoint, cinema's resistance, its work of difficult-making, as I see it, involves

also *withholding* from viewers certain basic aids to their thinking. Again, this is not a literal mode of asceticism, but the specifically *contemplative* asceticism in which the film suspends for the viewer cognitive conveniences that we mostly take for granted – things like essential narrative information, logical consistency, or ease of perception. What interests Sinnerbrink about *Inland Empire*, to use the example above, is its incessant deployment of disorientation, dissociation, disparateness – with the net result that the film withholds the viewer from attaining any interpretative coherence (e.g. 2011a: 148). Rather than merely experience philosophical thinking made difficult, viewers experience in such instances their thinking rendered incapable. It is in this sense, therefore, that Sinnerbrink envisions viewers in a mode of contemplative asceticism: when cinematic experiences overwhelm our thinking by denying us the usual cognitive resources by which we want to make philosophical sense of them.

This brings us to a third dimension in the contemplative mode that Sinnerbrink posits for cinematic thinking, namely that it initiates for the viewer a *contemplative mysticism*. In his own words, cinematic thinking "prompts philosophy to reflect upon its own limits or even to experiment with new forms of philosophical expression" (2011a: 7). So whereas mysticism proper would entail transcending our ordinary forms of experience, by contemplative mysticism I take Sinnerbrink's vision to mean that we may analogously transcend and renew our conventional forms of thinking – a vision not unlike the ideal of 'ecstatic thinking' or 'thinking the outside' that I noted earlier. To summarize, for cinema to 'resist' philosophical thought can mean that it enacts on our thinking the work of difficult-making (contemplative endurance), and that of withholding (contemplative asceticism). But for cinematic thinking to elicit a mode of contemplative mysticism, means that it moreover does the work of *exceeding* and *reaching beyond* our standard philosophical conceptions – thanks to those concept-transcending powers that by Sinnerbrink's definition sets it apart from our thinking. Cinematic thinking, free from the constraints of our thinking, thus exposes for us the limits of philosophy, yet by the same token exerts pressure on them. In the resultant mode of contemplative mysticism we are forced – aided, really, Sinnerbrink would assure – to overcome those limits, as cinema leads us to think beyond the accepted confines of our own thought.

3.2.3 Romanticism, the New, and Practicing Receptivity

The stand-out transformational *value* that emerges in Sinnerbrink's ethic, it should be quite clear by now, is that of the *new*. It persistently defines the nature of transformation that he seeks from cinematic experience. Regarding

the way we think – Sinnerbrink's primary concern – he envisions *renewal*, the opening up of *new possibilities* of thought, and more directly for us *to think the New* (e.g. 2011c: 37). And the potential transformations of feeling, action, and experience that may follow, he foresees as being the disclosure of what is novel in each of these domains.

This priority of the new in Sinnerbrink's ethic follows from its most prominent guiding *paradigm*: the earlier mentioned *philosophical romanticism* as championed by Nikolas Kompridis (2006b). For philosophical romanticism, the main mission of philosophy is to expand intelligibility and possibility within our cultural conditions – "to make room for the new", as Kompridis (2006b: 4) puts it – which includes also making room for new possibilities within philosophy itself. Kompridis goes as far as to claim that the new is normative to philosophical romanticism, not as a law of any kind, but as a normative challenge: we are compelled to be answerable to the new, as well as to revise or abandon those sense-making frameworks that the new disrupts (2006c: 33). And how does Sinnerbrink heed this normativity of the new? Precisely by responding to challenging cinematic art as harboring for us yet unrealized possibilities of thought and experience. His resultant ethic thus incorporates the new as both the motivator of self-transformation and the value that defines the transformation aimed for.

Having put together a portrait of 'Blow Your Mind' in Sinnerbrink's film-philosophy, let me ask in closing how one is to imagine the actual practice of his transformational ethics. On this front as well he provides much for us to work with – not least the romantic paradigm that he relies on. He makes clear that the occasion of his ethic-in-practice should be seen as our thinking *with* cinema. Cinema thinks in its own complex and ambiguous ways, and in response, viewers think along with it (see 2011a: 8; 2011c: 38). In more concrete terms, Sinnerbrink (2011c: 36) sees this thinking-with as a mutually transformative *dialogue* – a notion not really in need of the adjunct, considering that its esteemed history as a *technique* of self-transformation goes back to Socrates and the model exercises of the Platonic dialogues (see Hadot 1995: 89–93; Gordon 1996). Still, what makes our thinking with cinema a transformative dialogue, says Sinnerbrink, is that on the one hand it helps draw out the thought immanent within particular films, while on the other it spurs us to respond creatively in thought to what those films allow us to experience. Related to this dialogue, then, Sinnerbrink suggests that we can also conceive of the practice of his ethic as an experiment; not a set thought experiment as we encountered in 'Know Yourself', but an open-ended experiment *in thought* (Sinnerbrink 2013b: 212; 2011a: ix). 'Blow Your Mind' as experiment is thus to try out different styles of reflection in response to cinematic experiences, and devise a language

appropriate to their aesthetic particularity. And this experiment, as a broader contemplative technique, finds its most concrete expression in the technique of *writing* – a performative practice that Sinnerbrink especially associates with Stanley Cavell (see Sinnerbrink 2011b; 2014a), but which his own writings on films are certainly also meant to demonstrate.

Everything above however hinges on a conspicuous 'if': we can only respond to the new, and cultivate new thinking, *if* we are indeed sufficiently open and receptive to the supposed newness of cinematic thinking. We must first be prepared to 'get' the new, to put it bluntly, if we want to go on and think it. This provision is yet another point that Sinnerbrink is quite clear on. And I consider it a significant one. For it anticipates the place of preparatory ethics within the bigger picture of the cinemakeover that I am to sketch in this chapter.

Sinnerbrink emphasizes that cinematic thinking – for both its claimed effects on philosophy, and its ethical effects on us – requires an appropriate attitude on the part of the philosopher-viewer. In essence, he is asking for prior measures of self-transformation by which viewers set up the (further) self-transformation desired through film. Such measures are what I label preparatory ethics. The preparatory elements in Sinnerbrink's ethic start, already, with the most basic tenet of his romantic film-philosophy, which is that it "*responds* to film as a way of thinking" (2011c: 26 [emphasis added]). And to help ensure this responsive attitude to film, he singles out what are basically three imperatives for the philosopher-viewer to make. I consider them ethical preparations because they each entail a measure of work on the self. The first is a clearly *ascetic* imperative calling for philosophical self-restraint: we must *avoid* applying any 'readymade conceptual framework' as a key to a film's philosophical meaning. (His own romantic framework appears to be exempted from the category of 'readymade'.) The second imperative is to maintain a 'sustained receptiveness' to what films disclose for us. Understood in terms of transformational ethics, this is a cultivation in oneself of the *value* of *receptivity*. Receptivity is the normative twin that must accompany Sinnerbrink's pursuit of the New. For "[t]he new is not something we will", as Kompridis (2006b: 4) explains, "it is something we let happen". In this sense, "[r]eceptivity is essential to 'making' the new possible" (2006b: 4). Hence for us to make possible new thinking, we must practice receptivity towards the thinking immanent to films; and we do so through devoted film-critical attention to the aesthetic particularities that they disclose. Sinnerbrink's third imperative, then, centers on the closely related value of *openness*: to be able to respond to the (remember: transformative) thinking of film, we need an "openness to transforming how we think and write philosophically about film" (2011c: 38). We thus allow for a

potential transformation of thought through our openness to such a transformation. This openness we must instill through preparatory acts of self-transformation, whereby we search in ourselves for the thoughts, the words, and the writing that can open us up to the thinking in film.

As I see it, preparatory ethics pose certain thorny issues to the project of film as philosophy, issues well illustrated by Sinnerbrink's measures for making 'Blow Your Mind' happen. Among other things, his preparatory ethics raise questions over where the main initiative for our transformation through film comes from, and suggest that films perhaps play a far less eminent, more incidental role than he would like to admit. But for now I leave this and other questions for the concluding section of the chapter.

3.2.4 Daniel Frampton: Posit a 'Filmind' to 'Blow Your Mind'

'If we begin to understand how film "thinks", Daniel Frampton declares in a promotional article for his book, "we will start to understand how moving images affect our life and being" (Frampton 2006b). However, before going into Frampton's up-front 'if', and the 'life and being'-part that depends on it, let me first sum up how *philosophical thinking* gets affected, and transformed, within this audacious scheme that Frampton names 'filmosophy'.

Wherever filmosophy considers the impact of film-thinking on philosophy, it conveys a 'Blow Your Mind' transformational ethic very similar to that of Sinnerbrink. Taking his cue from Deleuze, like Sinnerbrink, Frampton characterizes 'film-thinking' as a thinking radically distinct from ours: it is 'language-less', non-conceptual, and imagistic. It is film's own thinking, it goes beyond our thinking, it is thinking that we cannot replicate (e.g. 2006a: 10–11, 92). Not that film-thinking is better than ours, he cautions – it's 'just different' (2008: 366). Yet it is this difference that generates the power for film-thinking to transform our thinking; which, Frampton suggests, occurs through the same *modes* of transformation that I described in Sinnerbrink. First there are the moments of *contemplative endurance* and *asceticism*. Frampton claims that film-thinking makes us recognize the 'limits' and 'impower' of our logical thinking: we struggle to formulate the direct, affective, indistinct meanings that film-thinking conveys; we cannot think images (or 'image-concepts') as clearly; hence we cannot create and show new ideas and concepts in the way that film-thinking does. Yet, as with Sinnerbrink, our grappling with film-thinking culminates also in a *contemplative mysticism*. By thinking new realities, says Frampton, film moves us to construct *new* ways of thinking. "Film-thinking forces thought to think the unclear, blurry, dispersive, outside" (2006a: 102). It can even provide new categories for us to think by (2006a: 212). It thus drives our thinking

outside of itself, beyond its entrenched forms – to thereby reveal (he takes the term from Deleuze) the 'unthought within thought' (2006a: 101–102, 155, 160, 166 ff.).

Yet *before* we can have any of this, Frampton is quite clear, we must take up filmosophy as a new approach to understanding film. Frampton's entire filmosophy is really an envisioned *practice* for the filmosophical filmgoer. It is essentially what I call a preparatory transformational practice, since it orients the viewer for an optimal experience of cinema. Frampton is after all not describing cinematic experience. He is *re*-describing our experience of cinema, by effectively *prescribing* that we receive film as a thinking entity. For the philosopher, "[f]ilmosophy thus offers a practice, a skill to do something; a strategy for being philosophical about film and seeing the philosophical in film" (2006a: 212). So to accomplish 'Blow Your Mind', you first need to harbor the idea of a 'filmind', with the rest of Frampton's conceptual inventions, as your preparatory mindset towards cinema. Because, he makes clear, "[f]ilm bleeds its ideas *if* you allow yourself to become attuned to its thinking" (2008: 373 [emphasis added]). Also, Frampton doesn't reserve the practice of filmosophy for the philosopher alone. While filmosophy may "reconfigure our [theoretical] understanding of the encounter between film and filmgoer", it helps more generally to "shape the experience of the [everyday] filmgoer" (2006a: 148). Prepped with filmosophy's concepts, filmgoers enhance for themselves cinema's capacity to immerse, to mean, and to affect: "[Filmgoers] will have a more suitable *mode of attention*, and thus *experience more*, and thus have more meaning possibilities to steer their interpretations" (2006a: 149). Unlike any other philosophical work covered here, Frampton's book is quite consciously a *guiding text*: one for attaining both a transformed and, in return, transformative experience of cinema.

3.2.5 Filmosophy, the Prequel: Preparatory Ethics

However much Frampton's filmosophy casts the ethical picture of 'Blow Your Mind', then, its greater emphasis is on the preparatory self-transformations that must precede that picture. Thanks to the detail that Frampton goes into, we can formulate his preparatory ethic in the same terms of domain, paradigm, and value of transformation that hold for the other ethics discussed so far.

The main *domain* that Frampton designates for preparatory transformation is *cinematic experience*; as filmgoers, that is, we are to enhance what we may experience of cinema (in accordance to a set of values that I will get to in a moment). Yet this must go hand in hand with self-work in the domain of

concepts and language.[20] In Chapter 2 I explained that transformational ethics often stipulate multiple domains, with particular hierarchies and interactions between them. Here Frampton demonstrates an exchange between what I called a 'target' and 'source' domain: he poses the self's experience of cinema as the target-domain, which is operated upon via self-work on our concepts and language as the source-domain of transformation. In effect, Frampton proffers his own Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: to change our experience of cinema, he is saying, we need to pay attention to our words.

In Frampton's compilation of neologisms – involving the 'filmind' as 'film-being', doing its 'film-thinking' – the filmgoer has a "certain kind of knowledge (concepts) of film's action, resulting in a certain type of linguistic direction (rhetoric)" (2006a: 158). To adopt these concepts, and let them govern one's cinematic experience, is the basic self-work on language that filmosophy requires. Frampton describes the practicalities hereof in a number of ways. He speaks of filmgoers having to 'use' these concepts when experiencing a film (e.g. 2006a: 99), or to experience film "with this language in their knowledge" (2006a: 149). He also speaks of having "to see the film 'through' the concept of thinking" (2008: 366). But apparently, also, our recourse to such a new concept should not be too calculated and effortful. "[I]ts true habitat", says Frampton, "is in the *back of our thinking* […] to be learnt, then forgotten, even though it never goes away" (2006a: 98).

What does Frampton's call for inducting ourselves into his alternative vocabulary tell us about filmosophy's guiding *paradigm*? Certainly, one cannot ignore his indebtedness to *phenomenology*, with its characteristic striving for the words that may best describe our experiences. But we should keep in mind that Frampton's philosophy is of a Deleuzian breed (or a compromised one, at least) that must, for example, answer to Deleuze's anti-subjectivism (cf. Ferencz-Flatz & Hanich 2016: 51–52). While he takes considerable inspiration from Vivian Sobchack's phenomenology, therefore, he is just as quick to distance himself from the 'anthropomorphic' conceptions of cinema that drives her approach (e.g. Frampton 2006a: 46). And to add a further complication, Frampton's main business is not a phenomenological description of the filmgoer's experience, but its *re*-description, unto an *ideal* experience. If anything, he is formulating a consummate 'best-case' phenomenology.

---

20 Of course, although an ethic of transformation may conceive of language as a domain 'within' the self, it overlaps with (the attempted transformation of) language as an obviously far broader, supra-personal, cultural domain. Accordingly, Frampton thinks of filmosophy as also providing a new discourse for film writing and criticism in general – and not only for the hypothetical individual filmgoer (see 2006a: 169–182).

For these reasons, I find more illuminating for my analysis the negative motivations of filmosophy. In Chapter 2 I explained that guiding paradigms of transformational ethics often also exhibit an anti-normative pole, which defines the 'enemy paradigm' that the prescribed act of self-transformation (in this case, a preparatory one) is meant to counteract. That paradigm, for filmosophy, is what Frampton describes as the abounding *technicism* of film studies and criticism, epitomized by the formalism of David Bordwell and others (see 2006a: 99–107). Filmosophy takes issue with the experiential effects of what he deems as a technicist rhetoric: those supposedly 'clunky' and 'cold and calculating' terms like panning, tracking, zoom-in, and close-up, together with talk of schemata and formats and cues (2006a: 100, 106). This "lumpen technical terminology", Frampton argues, gets in the viewer's way: it "obscures the possible poetic experience of film" (2006a: 172; cf. 2006a: 368). The technicist rhetoric dissects film in terms of techniques and mechanics that explain nothing of the full experience thereof. It only categorizes. It cuts up. It separates (2006a: 99, 105–107). (This reasoning – having noted Frampton's debts to phenomenology – is fully congruent with phenomenology's long-standing *anti-scientism*.)

In response, the concepts of filmosophy engender a "poetic rhetoric" – "an emotive and fluid language" – that replenishes the film experience so reduced by technicism (2006a: 99). The strict 'technicist-poetic' dichotomy that Frampton draws here is typical of how transformational ethics construct their anti-paradigms. Rather than "technicize" the filmgoer's experience, he reasons, filmosophy attempts to "organicize" it (2006a: 106). And whereas technicism breaks up the experience, filmosophy aspires to bring the pieces back together in "a new organization of the whole", under the unifying concept of an intending, thinking filmind (2006a: 171). One may question, as Philipp Schmerheim (2008: 117–118) does, whether it is entirely possible (or even desirable) to completely excise technical conceptions from a poetic appraisal of film. But Frampton sticks resolutely to his dichotomous either-or, because, as I will show in a moment, technicism (by his rhetorical definition) is simply not compatible with the kind of experience that he wishes to fashion. Doing away with technical language is of course a measure of *contemplative asceticism* required on our part, which he calls "an *unlearning*, a more 'suitable', more cinematic reconceptualization" (2006a: 212 [emphasis added]). Note, however, the ironical twist: we need to make our own a set of concepts in order to attain an experience of film-thinking that Frampton defines as inherently 'languageless' and 'non-conceptual'. Yet even apart from the apparent contradiction, I cannot but question whether a mere reconceptualization of cinema can achieve such an experience.

Despite these issues, it remains the ambition of filmosophy to ensure for the filmgoer an enhanced experience of the cinema. By which transformational

values does Frampton define this enhancement? There are at least three general values that come to the fore: fullness, openness, and unity (or wholeness).

First and most evident, is that Frampton wants to cultivate "the fullest and most poetic experience for the filmgoer" (2006a: 101). He qualifies this fullness of experience especially as a fullness of *meaning*. The concept of the filmind, he claims, gives a poetic reason for everything we encounter in a film. By seeing film as thoughtful we experience all its forms and actions "as fully intended, giving every formal move a possible meaning" (2006a: 101). Whereas "technicist rhetoric weighs down the meaning possibilities of film" (2006a: 100), filmosophy proliferates possible meaning by transfiguring film into the product of thoughtful intention.

I turn to the second value. The 'meaning' that Frampton refers to above is clearly not in the conventional sense of knowledge or an insight derived from interpretation. Frampton speaks outright of "affective meaning", adding that "the meaning is in the experience" (2006a: 168); or he speaks of the "meaning to be experienced" (2006a: 101). So it is our access to this sort of meaning – thus, the filmgoer's *openness* to it – that filmosophy is meant to foster. It is to this end that Frampton emphasizes the immediacy and directness of experience that filmosophy facilitates between filmgoer and film. Whereas the technicist mindset removes the filmgoer from the experience, the filmosopher experiences film 'directly' and 'more intuitively' (2006a: 8). In the latter case, "[t]he affects of film produce immediate, pure meaning", since "[f]ilmosophical (affective) 'meaning' [...] arises directly from experiencing the film" (2006a: 168).

Frampton's aim for both fullness and openness (directness) in the filmgoer's experience is arguably an extension of his third and clearest transformational value: *unity* (or *wholeness*). As a marker for enhanced experience, as Frampton sees it, unity in fact manifests itself in more than one way. On one level, it refers to the unification of the various elements of films in the viewer's experience. Unlike technicism, filmosophy aims to "organicize" and remove the separation between style and content; form and meaning; or in Frampton's terms the 'object' of film-thinking (e.g. a character) and the film's particular 'thinking of' (framing, movement, etc.) that object (2006a: 100–101, 162). This unification of form and meaning through the use of the concept of film-thinking, creates for the filmgoer an 'integral whole' (2006a: 101).

On a further level, however, filmosophy engenders unity also in the 'organic uniting' of filmgoer and film (2006a: 101). Frampton fancies that his theory has been labeled 'science fiction' (Frampton 2008: 373; cf. Price 2008: 103). And, at this point, his science fiction seems like an account of a cinema-worshipping mystic cult: he envisions "a filmosophical filmgoer who actively merges with

the affective thinking of film" (2006a: 12). It so happens that Vivian Sobchack (2004: 66) alludes to the same mysticist topos of unitive experience: she suggests that cinema undermines our usual separation of subject and object, owing to the relational structure between the viewer's body and the film's body. But Frampton, remember, refuses to impose Sobchack's anthropomorphic 'body' or 'embodied experience' onto film (although he is quite happy to impose a 'mind'). In a polemical distancing act, he rather assumes the role of the classical 'mystic' who harbors an anti-materialist disinterest in the body. He maintains that "[f]ilmosophy sees a mix of minds rather than bodies", adding that "our bodies remain with us, merely forgotten, redundant" (2006a: 160). Yet, to be fair, Frampton is not simply proposing that we 'become one' in mind with the filmind – as if he's Plotinus who discovered the movies. He takes care to underline this as a unification of *two* thinkings – a 'mix of thinkings' between the filmgoer and film, a joint creation of thoughts, coalescing into a 'unique third thought' (2006a: 162–164). Where Sobchack tends to pose a continuity between the bodies of the filmgoer and film, Frampton wants to forge a unity of thinkings that, from the outset, are discontinuous and indeed remain distinct. This distinctness-in-unity is reflected by delicately chosen metaphors for the two thinkings united as a new whole. He speaks in terms of linking, joining, weaving, combining, fusing, or merging; which results in – depending on varying degrees of optimism – a 'mix', a 'collision of ideas', a 'dialogical connection', or an 'organic unity' (e.g. 2006a: 8, 12, 102, 161–162, 164).

It is ultimately on the basis of providing this uniting 'link' with film-thinking, I gather, that filmosophy promises also the (meaning-)fullness, directness, and openness that define Frampton's ideal film-going experience. Yet Frampton readily admits: filmgoers will not necessarily make the connection. Because, he says, "the link is not one that filmgoers are *practiced* at recognizing" (2006a: 158 [emphasis added]). Hence, I must again stress: we are still squarely in the sphere of preparation, where filmosophy spells out the practices of self-transformation that must shape our experience of film.

Yet why take the trouble to shape our experience? What are the benefits that the filmosopher may reap from it?

3.2.6 The Sequel to the Prequel: Filmosophy's Transformational Effects

'Throw out your usual technical jargon, and see film as a thinking filmind'. Check. 'Come to enhance your experience of film'. Check. Here ends the preparatory dimension of the cinemakeover as filmosophy conceives of it. Now the filmgoer, who up to this point had to transform (the experience of) cinema, can just as much expect to be transformed by it. From here on, therefore, Frampton foresees the resulting transformational *effects* of our engagement

with film (understood) as a thinking entity. And it is by reason of *these* effects that his ethic earns the 'Blow Your Mind' label.

I have already noted the transformational effects that Frampton foresees for film-thinking on philosophy. But the transformation of philosophy forms part of a broader set of effects – at the mentioned scale of 'life and being' – that he expects from film-thinking. These latter effects are not quite as grandiose as they sound: as a rule they relate to the domain of the filmgoer's *perceptions* or *ways of seeing*, much like you find in Mulhall's 'Expand Your Mind'. Frampton states in the introduction to his book, for example, that film "allows us to re-see reality, expanding our perceptions, and showing us a new reality"; right after he notes that it "perhaps even heightens our perceptual powers" (2006a: 3). And, once established, the perception-motif thrives up until the book's closing passages:

> [F]ilm can show us ordinary things in a new way, can make us look again at what we thought we understood, can make us see ordinary things anew. Film-thinking transforms the recognisable (in a small or large way), and this immediate transfiguration by film provokes the idea that our thinking can transform our world. (2006a: 208–209)

Frampton thus poses a direct relation between the way that film transfigures the things that it shows (or 'thinks') and, as a result, the transformation of our perception of those things. His particular emphasis on perception and sight in this regard – unlike most philosophers that I discuss in this chapter – suggests that Frampton even qualifies to be called a 'revelationist'. Revelationist film theories, according to Malcolm Turvey (2008), value cinema for uncovering features of reality that are otherwise inaccessible to normal human vision, and thereby extending our perceptual powers. Frampton, in fact, has no problem with openly extolling cinema as 'an instrument of revelation' (2006a: 212). And where he does so, unsurprisingly, he appeals to the very writers who Turvey describes as pioneers of the revelationist tradition – Epstein, Vertov and Balázs (see Frampton 2006a: 3, 204, 208, 212; cf. Turvey 2008: 21–48).

Frampton also shares with the revelationist tradition what seems to be a strategic vagueness on how notions of perception and sight are used (see Turvey 2008: 18–19). Take the double meaning alluded to with the phrase, "film-thinkings […] change our perception of the world" (Frampton 2006a: 211). Frampton blurs the distinction between the concrete sensual perception of things as opposed to the rational, cognitive 'perception' (understanding) we have of them – something that he does just as much with the term 'seeing'. This equivocation is convenient to his larger project. It enables him to make an easy

transition from claims that film transforms our physical perceptions (which in any case cannot be as straightforward as he makes it out to be), to claims that it transforms also our 'perceptions' of reality, which brings the philosophical relevance of film into the equation. He thus posits something of a chain reaction between three transformational domains: film transforms the base domain of *perception*, which then pools our *understanding* of life and being, which in turn affects the more specific domain of *philosophical thinking*. This constellation of domains is thus clearly at work in a statement such as: "Philosophically, film affects our way of understanding life, because it affects our ways of perceiving our lives" (2006a: 209).

Lastly, however, I need to be more specific about what it is that Frampton as a 'revelationist' takes film to reveal. In terms of transformational values, the classical revelationists were interested in truth or truthfulness – thus, how film reveals 'the true nature of reality', or reality as it *truly* is (Turvey 2008: 3). Not so for Frampton. By now we have seen that a cherished value of ethics of self-expansion – which the 'Blow Your Mind' ethic of filmosophy most certainly is – is that of the *new*. For Frampton, film's transformation of perception, the effect of its revelatory capacity, comes down to how it shows and engenders what is new (e.g. 2006a: 151, 155, 208–209). Film shows the new, thinks the new, conjures up new realities; and as a result engenders in us new experiences, new perceptions, new thinking – in sum, "a new point of view about the world" (2006a: 212).

Yet the next ethic asks: what is so new about 'a new point of view about the world' if it is still *your* point of view? This ethic, in contrast, sees in film a promise of ridding viewers of a subjective point of view altogether.

3.3 *'Lose Your Self': Deleuzian Inspirations Take #2* (*Radical Immanence*)

The ubiquitous motto 'to lose yourself' (in the moment … the pleasure … the spectacle …) is a frequently invoked incentive for our consumption of movies. However, for the philosophers who follow here, as for the transformational ethics of film that they propose, this Subjectivity-affirming motto is too meek. At the very least, they require to be set apart under the fine-tuned bumper sticker, 'Lose Your [note the space] Self'.

Similar to 'Blow Your Mind', the 'Lose Your Self' ethic moves within the topos of *ekstasis*. Yet whereas 'Blow Your Mind' wants to transcend forms of thinking, 'Lose Your Self' wants to altogether leave behind the individual self or subject that does the thinking. The ethical imperative to 'Lose Your Self' takes self-expansion to its most extreme: it pursues a self that expands, that opens up, to the point of its own dissipation. In a sense, 'Lose Your Self' pushes *ekstasis* to a point where it spills over to an equally prominent

topos: *kenosis*, or self-emptying; a pouring of oneself into the world from which the Subject can only pretend to stand apart. As a transformational ethic of film, 'Lose Your Self' thus envisions film as the means to a profound reconcilement: of the supposedly separate, individual subject with the world to which it in any case belongs. In effect, it proposes that to 'Lose Your Self', is to *truly find* yourself – not as a transcendental Subject, but as a thoroughly immanent agent, in fundamental connection to film, and all other agents and things that comprise the world. In short: you lose yourself only to find that self everywhere.

Whereas endorsers of 'Blow Your Mind' take their inspiration from Deleuze's two *Cinema* books (1986; 1989), those of 'Lose Your Self' concentrate on the wider Deleuzian 'metaphysics' that in the *Cinema* books recedes more into the background. Pivotal in Deleuze's ontology for the 'Lose Your Self' ethic is his commitment to the pure *immanence* of being: Deleuze insists on reality as absolute immanence in itself; "it is not in anything, nor can it be attributed *to* something; it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject" (Deleuze 2006: 385). This plane of immanence knows no outside, and allows for no true transcendence. It implodes the distinction between inside and outside, and – significant in this context – fuses subject with object.

This ontological leveling act represents one of the more radical instances of Continental philosophy's abiding quest of 'decentering the subject'. Deleuze decenters the subject straight off the map. An immanentist ontology such as his leaves no room for subjectivity in any conventional sense. He eschews the very notion, preferring instead to speak of 'pre-personal individualities' or 'non-personal individuations' (cited in Rushton 2008: 135). These individuations – expressed through matter, movements, forces, affects, intensities, and speeds on a plane of immanence – are effectively like 'little selves' underneath the self, which render an 'active' subject possible (Deleuze 1994: 75). Deleuze thus speaks of "our 'self' only in virtue of these thousands of little witnesses which contemplate within us", seeing that "it is always a third party who says 'me' " (1994: 75).

This perspective enforces the same ontological leveling between the viewer and film, fused together on the same immanent plane, as testified to by the Deleuzian maxim 'the brain is the screen' (Deleuze 2000: 366). Talk of subjective experience or consciousness, in this context, can only be conceived of as an emergent event of the viewer's ontological merger with film. As Richard Rushton (2009: 48–49) explains, for Deleuze one cannot posit a 'subject' prior to its encounter with film. If we are to suppose such an anterior entity (which in any case would be dismantled by the film encounter's flow of forces) it is for all practical purposes a non-subject. An eventual 'subject' can emerge only from

the flow of sensations and thoughts between the film and the viewer, based on their fusion with one another. Rushton (2009: 49) furthermore makes clear that the sensations and thoughts of cinema "are not things that can be possessed by or attributed to subjects, for they are, Deleuze writes (with Guattari), 'independent of a state of those who experience them' " (2009: 49). In fact, I would add, even the 'experience' itself is independent of the self (or subject) that is assumed to have the experience – for it is supposedly outsourced to a third party. When 'I' experience a film it is really the multitude of 'little selves', in circulation with those of film, that are going through the real motions.

By now, I trust, my chosen label 'Lose Your Self' must seem a misnomer, and one on a number of counts. I would welcome this judgment. The shortcomings of the slogan merely reflect dilemmas that are intrinsic to the ethic itself. My defunct bumper sticker thus helpfully obliges us to note these dilemmas before I go into particular cases below.

The most *self*-apparent issue: the reliance on Deleuzian-type immanence, as *paradigm* to the ethic, in many ways rules out the very 'self' that we are supposed to 'lose'. To think of 'Lose Your Self' in terms of *mysticism* solves little of this, since self-transcendence still implies an initial self to be transcended. (Thinking along any lines of transcendence would in any case be branded a 'distortion of immanence' (Deleuze 2006: 385) – but I get back to this tension in a moment.) In the particular 'Lose Your Self' cases discussed below, I instead attribute to the ethic the transformational mode of *asceticism*, which is the most natural fit with its assumption that film elicits a *loss* – a *lessening*, a *giving up* – of individual subjectivity. This ascetic self-*less*-ness, we will see, finds articulation in a range of terms and figures: desubjectivization, deterritorialization, destratification, self-dispersion, self-dismantling, self-destruction, and self-shattering, to name but a few. Not that the option of asceticism makes the predicament go away, however. As an ethic of selflessness, 'Lose Your Self' still designates the self as the *domain* where transformation must occur, even though that very domain is called into question by the immanentism that motivates the ethic.

When reflecting on 'Lose Your Self', therefore, I constantly grapple with this ambivalence: does the ethic bespeak our *actual* ontological condition, or an *ideal* condition, still to be actualized? Does it insist on our selflessness as already given, or does it set selflessness as a goal? The acceptance of pure immanence suggests the former, although we clearly also have an ethical directive here – a call to action – which affirms the latter. Each of the philosophers discussed below, I believe, try to uphold some compromise between actual condition and ideal condition: namely, that immanence and immanent becoming *is* our actual condition; but also, that we need various 'Lose Your Self' types of ethics

to *maintain* ideal immanence, in the sense that such forms of ethics must undo the distortions from which our immanent condition inevitably suffers.

Now for 'Lose Your Self' to make the dual-assertion of selflessness as both actuality and ideal, brings into play further transformational *values* that, by further specifying the 'selflessness' strived for, help ease the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal. As will become clear, to *merely* lose the self is hardly what the philosophers concerned are after – the basic ideal of selflessness is but shorthand for more definitive values.

The most prominent of the definitive values, and a crucial intermediary between accepted ontological actuality and ethical ideal, is the transformational value of *nature*. Generally, this value betokens the good as a life aligned with, or even abandoned to, nature and its forces. For any version of 'Lose Your Self', accordingly, the apparently negative act of losing the self is at once an affirmative losing of self *to* nature, *to* the world, in what we may call a '*becoming-world* of the self' (Braidotti 2006: 157 [emphasis added]). Therefore, as I detail later on, the ethic can be understood as urging a 'return to nature', recommending film as our means to nature and the self's absorption therein. Not that the ethic suggests nature to be something 'out there'. Rather, it sees film as allowing the viewer an engagement with nature "as it is incarnated in our selves and as it forms the background to our selves" (O'Sullivan 2008: 100). (Needless to say, the philosophers involved exhibit a corresponding Nature-motive in their conceptions of film as philosophy – described at the close of Chapter 1 – according to which the philosophical value of films derives from their capacity to connect with or instantiate nature/the real. By near default, therefore, these philosophers are investing their efforts in the transformational question of how films-as-philosophy may effect a 'return to nature'.)

However, being the broad notion that it is, the value of nature itself requires qualification by still other values. For Deleuze and Guattari's Body without Organs, as I will show, 'Lose Your Self' is to submit to the *flux*, *change*, and *becoming* of immanent nature; whereas for the likes of Bersani and Dutoit it is rather to submit to nature's *oneness* or *connectedness*. Concepts like change versus connectedness are obviously ontological descriptors. Yet here such descriptors take on a double role as also ethical values in an ontology-focused ethic. The values echo a variety of privileged assumptions *about nature*, and thus provide distinct measures of what an ideal self-lost-to-nature is supposed to look like.

Undoubtedly, then, the various values above clarify the extent to which 'Lose Your Self' turns the all-out immanence of subjectivity into an ideal: such immanence (related to notions of nature, change, connectedness, etc.) is as much something *to attain* – or, at the very least, *maintain* – as it is our most

basic ontological condition. By positing our condition of radical immanence (actuality), the ethic is by default committed to undoing every imposed dualism, hierarchy, or bit of transcendence that may distort it (ideal). I therefore cannot but agree with Kristien Justaert (2012a: 101) that the radically immanent in Deleuze's philosophy emerges as a goal – an ethical-transformational goal, I insist. The various 'Lose Your Self' ethics inspired by the Deleuzian plane of immanence only makes this more evident.

However, at this point we run into another dilemma inherent to 'Lose Your Self', and one not without irony: for when the radically immanent becomes an ethical goal, immanence itself has about it a whiff of transcendence. Justaert describes this transcendence of immanence in Deleuze's thinking as follows:

> [The Deleuzian plane of immanence] is indeed wholly other than this world. Deleuze creates a new dualism, between the 'old' world of representation and the new, creative plane of immanence [...] The radically immanent can be understood as transcending our lives, because the whole interpretation of immanence as a goal to strive for, away from the world of representation, pictures this form of immanence as quasi unattainable. To reach it, we have to transcend our own ego, give up our personality. With his plane of immanence, Deleuze creates a place where all egos are left behind [...] So transcendence does have a meaning in Deleuze's philosophy, but it is the dynamic meaning of transcending as an act of human beings or of beings in general. Their static form transcends towards a more dynamic constellation in which they can be creative, in which they can produce again. This is what happens on the plane of immanence: all these moving 'lines' produce different intensities of Being. The act of transcending has nothing to do with verticality: on the contrary, it is meant to annul any kind of hierarchical position. (2012a: 101–102)

Building on Justaert's account, I detect at least two senses of a transcendent immanence in 'Lose Your Self'. First, a broader sense. Any transformational ethic, even if only in the slightest way, aims for a higher plane of personal existence. Here, ironically, the hierarchy-annulling plane of immanence functions as that 'higher' plane. To aspire to fullness of immanence – from an ethical-practical standpoint – implies that we must *transcend* our world of everyday experience where assumptions of subjectivity, hierarchy, and other supposed distortions of immanence thrive. Yet immanence is also transcendent in the stricter, more direct sense: namely that the aimed-at condition of pure immanence appears to lie *beyond* our reach. The fullness of such immanence, for all

practical purposes, remains inaccessible. What better evidence do we need? Not even Deleuze seems able to conceive of pure immanence outside of the terms of transcendence that it is supposed to undo (just like he also cannot avoid speaking of subjects and selves – though, theoretically, he rejects the notions). Deleuze as a 'Lose Your Self' proponent – as the other proponents of this ethical imperative – cannot avoid the category of transcendence when they make immanence a goal of self-transformation.

3.3.1 Dismantle Your Self: The Body without Organs (as Return to Nature)

Before moving on to examples of a 'Lose Your Self' ethics of film, let me first consider a more general, paradigmatic instance of 'Lose Your Self', as emerges from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's meditations on the 'Body without Organs' in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987: 149–166). Sketching this Deleuzian-Guattarian exemplar helps to flesh out the broader Deleuzian paradigm that informs the transformational ethics of film following below. The 'Body without Organs' usefully demonstrates how immanence – to 'attain' immanence, in effect – translates into ethical-practical matter and indeed an ideal of personal transformation. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to show how 'Lose Your Self' goes hand in hand with the transformational ideal of 'a return to nature'.

The uninitiated reader would be forgiven for confusing the plateau 'How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?' with a (perplexing) self-help manual. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that the 'Body without Organs' is not a notion nor a concept, but "a practice, a set of practices" and moreover "an inevitable exercise or experimentation" (1987: 151). Yet what is the aim of this practice? Deleuze and Guattari explain:

> Where psychoanalysis says, 'Stop, find your self again,' we should say instead, 'Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self'. Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation. Find your body without organs. (1987: 151)

The authors appropriated the notion from Antonin Artaud (1976), who pits the ideal of a changeable Body without Organs against what he considers the inherent stasis of the organism. The organism, says Artaud, is indicative of the judgment of God: it is static, a fixed consolidation of organs, each 'organized' into a discrete function. The Body without Organs, in contrast, is not an organism. As an inherently open condition, not organ-ized, and not fixed; it is

capable of fundamental change; and can therefore escape Artaud's supposed judgment of God (Adkins 2015: 98).

In their elaboration of Artaud's idea, Deleuze and Guattari argue that it is ultimately not the organs that are the enemies of the Body without Organs. It is precisely the *organization* of the organs – called the organism – that the Body without Organs is opposed to (1987: 158). They see the organism as concretions and layers that accrue on the Body without Organs: "[I]t is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences" (1987: 159).

To make oneself a Body without Organs, consequently, is to dismantle the inhibiting forms, strata, and organ-izations that make you an organism. In my own framework, this emphasis on doing away qualifies Deleuze and Guattari's challenge as one of radical *asceticism*. Although they never use the term, they make quite clear: their project with regard to the organism is to 'diminish' and 'shrink' it (1987: 162). Moreover, they state, the Body without Organs "is what remains when you take everything away" (1987: 151). Yet they do caution: this self-dismantling is an art of dosages requiring due temperance. "You don't reach the BwO [...] by wildly destratifying" (1987: 160). You must invent self-destructions only bit by bit, and still retain sufficient rations of subjectivity that enable you to respond to the dominant reality and turn it against itself. "Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself", they explain, "but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor" (1987: 160).

How do Deleuze and Guattari envision the limit or destination of this practice? When you take everything away, they say, you arrive at an immanent field – "nonstratified, unformed, intense matter" (1987: 153) – upon which only intensities can pass and circulate. In other words, the Body without Organs is ultimately occupied and populated only by intensities. So Deleuze and Guattari's challenge is clear: forget about finding your self – and look instead to dismantle the (sedimentations of) self, causing an open flow "of singularities that can no longer be said to be personal, and intensities that can no longer be said to be extensive" (1987: 156). This resultant field of immanence knows no Selves, as they conceive of it, because the interior and exterior are equally part of the immanence (the 'absolute Outside') in which they have fused (1987: 156). Subsequently, "[t]here is no longer a Self [*Moi*] that feels, acts, and recalls;

there is 'a glowing fog, a dark yellow mist' that has affects and experiences movements, speeds" (1987: 162).[21]

Perhaps Deleuze and Guattari would balk at my calling their proposed ethical practice 'ascetic' – ever the Nietzscheans, they would point out that the making of a Body without Organs is an affirmative, liberating process. Yet the real issue at this point is not the ascetic *mode* that I identify. To do justice to their position, instead, one only needs to recognize the particular transformational *values* that Deleuze and Guattari espouse, values that are unlike the repressive ideals that normally get associated with asceticism. They do not consider a diminished or dismantled self an end in itself. As Brent Adkins (2015: 96–107) rightly notes, the basic ethical challenge that the Body without Organs poses is to realize in ourselves the tendency towards *change* and, ultimately, a state of *becoming*. The self, when leveled out to a field of flows and intensities, can open up to new relations and new combinations. This flattened, continuous ontology enables change and creation, and affirms becoming over static being (see Adkins 2015: 105). Deleuze (1998b: 51) astutely captures this transformed state of becoming when in a different context he instructs: "Stop thinking of yourself as an ego (*moi*) in order to live as a flow (flux), a set of flows in relation with other flows, outside of oneself and within oneself".

These transformational values behind the practice of a Body without Organs correspond to the selfsame change and becoming that characterizes Deleuze's process ontology, as it conceives of reality as a constant flux of forces. A related way of construing Deleuze and Guattari's ethical project, therefore, is to say that we are to abandon our selves to Nature, in the sense that we submit to the ceaseless flux of matter-energy that is the plane of immanence. In this case, the values of change and becoming link up with the further transformational value of (submitting to, connecting with, or even instantiating) *nature*.

This is an interpretation offered by John Sellars (1999), who in an illuminating essay brands the Deleuzian-Guattarian Body without Organs as an injunction to 'live according to nature'. (The 'nature' that Sellars invokes here is of course nature in the Deleuzian sense of the plane of immanence, which encompasses both the animate and inanimate, as well as the artificial and natural.) What Deleuze and Guattari see as a dismantling of the self, Sellars understands as an "overcoming of the division between man and nature" (1999: 2). Deleuze and Guattari ultimately propose that we engage in a destructive, deterritorializing

21 The phrase "glowing fog, a dark yellow mist" is taken from Carlos Castaneda's *Tales of Power* (1974), which Deleuze and Guattari also cite a few passages earlier. Telling about this otherwise enigmatic reference, to my mind at least, is the indistinctness and diffuseness of fog and mist.

process in which we open up the organism-self to new connections within the flows of nature. Hence, Sellars concludes, to make oneself a Body without Organs is to work towards "a dissolution of the man-nature dichotomy" (1999: 7).

The main aim of Sellars' essay, however, is to demonstrate the indebtedness of Deleuze and Guattari's idea of a Body without Organs to ancient Stoicism. Sellars argues that their philosophy of a Body without Organs follows the same metaphysical-cum-ethical model of 'a return to nature' set out by the likes of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Central to the Stoic model is the notion of adopting a 'point of view of the cosmos', based on a naturalism (and, I may add, anti-subjectivism) similar to that of Deleuze.[22] As Sellars explains, both Marcus Aurelius and Seneca frequently resort to the image of a cosmic perspective as a means of relocating the self within the infinity of nature in order to escape one's limited point of view (1999: 21). When Marcus Aurelius, for example, uses the phrase 'to live in accord with nature', he means to disregard the way things appear from our limited and subjective human judgment in favor of the way they are from the objective, overall point of view of nature. Most of Marcus Aurelius' famous *Meditations* can thus be seen as an initiation into the contemplative technique of observing one's life from this cosmic point of view, from which "local encounters between bodies become insignificant compared to the vast flows of matter-energy that form the system of nature taken as a whole" (1999: 18).

Sellars considers a Body without Organs to involve the same shift in perspective. Much like Marcus Aurelius, Deleuze and Guattari wish to relocate the individual organism within the greater context of nature. They ask that we dismantle the perspective of the individual organism in order to "move towards a limit-perspective from which everything would be experienced as unformed flux" (1999: 5). It is thus in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari, like the Stoics, want to overcome the human-nature dichotomy that Sellars speaks of. They also propose a transformational reorientation, in which the perspective of the finite self is transcended by our submitting to the boundless, extra-subjective perspective of the cosmos.

Yet for all their similarities as 'Lose Your Self' ethics, with a mutual naturalistic emphasis, I must insist that the Stoics do urge our self-abandonment

22 Pierre Hadot (1995: 238–250) situates this Stoic theme within a broader philosophical tradition that practices 'the view from above' (involving the contemplation of individuals and society from the universal viewpoint of the cosmos), which in the ancient context he traces from the Homeric epics and later Platonic philosophy, to its apex in the Epicurean, Cynic and Stoic schools.

to nature with markedly different end goals in mind. The Stoics do not have any apparent investment in Deleuze and Guattari's transformational values of change and becoming. A figure like Marcus Aurelius, rather, practices the point of view of the cosmos as a technique for attaining inner *peace* and *tranquility*. As he sees it, our personal value-judgments inevitably cause anxiety. So to alleviate our anxieties, we suppress our individual judgments by contemplating our lives from the objective, judgment-free point of view of the cosmos (Sellars 1999: 16; cf. Hadot 1995: 242–245).

3.3.2 Lose Your Self (to Nature)… through Film

In light of the Body without Organs as a 'Lose Your Self' exemplar, let us consider how its ethical principles recur in the context of film as philosophy, and film philosophy in general. I turn to three cases – that of Elena del Río, William Brown, as well as Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit. Although these philosophers have not yet featured in this book, their cases are deeply indicative of how a (Deleuzian inspired) immanentist outlook on how films do philosophy leads to the same 'Lose Your Self' ethical picture sketched above. Much as in the Body without Organs philosophy, each case advances the 'self-less' immanence of the viewer-subject not only as an ontological actuality but also – in one way or another – as an ethical ideal. The main difference, however, is that these film philosophers construe *film* as initiator of our transformation unto self-less-ness – a move that privileges our encounter with films as a special node, somehow, in the flows and intensities that populate the plane of immanence. All three of the cases therefore rely on a motive of Nature for their conception of film as philosophy: the philosophical relevance of films derives from how they express, instantiate, or move forces of nature/the real. And by mobilizing nature, these philosophers propose, films eat away at the artifices of individual subjectivity, and encourage an abandoning of self to nature. Accordingly, in what follows, I give special attention to the connection between the asceticism of 'Lose Your Self' – the ambition to do away with the individual self through film – and the ethical *topos* of a 'return to nature'.

3.3.3 Affect Your Self: Elena del Río

Elena del Río's affective-performative approach to cinema presents a first sample of 'Lose Your Self' understood as a transformational ethics of film. Inasmuch as 'Lose Your Self' entails a return to nature, that 'return' in Del Río's case is specifically to the realm of body and affect. At first glance, therefore, it would seem that her conception of self-transformation makes for a comfortable fit with 'Sense Your Senses' – the ethic that I earlier identified with reference to Vivian Sobchack's film phenomenology. Not unlike Sobchack, Del Río

positions herself against traditional representational approaches in film theory. In her *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (2008) she argues for a non-representational paradigm of performance, in which performance is understood as the mobilization of affects, and affects themselves are understood as the powers of bodies. Moreover, Del Río recognizes the ability of cinematic images to both affect and be affected, meaning that, like Sobchack, Del Río takes a special interest in affective exchanges between the 'body' of the film and the body of the filmgoer (2008: 4, 12).

However, Del Río's simultaneous insistence on desubjectivized immanence, as she adopts from Deleuze, bares assumptions that are at odds with those behind 'Sense Your Senses'. Whereas Sobchack's approach to film as philosophy is based on a motive of Subjectivity, Del Río proceeds squarely from a motive of Nature. Most notably, when Del Río speaks of affect, she does so from a tradition that conceives of affect as a strictly depersonalized, intensive *force* – not a personal state (see Ott 2017). Affect rests only upon "the workings of a nonorganic, anonymous vitality" (Del Río 2008: 115). For Del Río the whole point of addressing affection thus understood – as the power of all bodies to affect and be affected – is to downplay individual subjectivity, to carry out a leveling across human and non-human bodies, and thereby to consider 'the human event' in 'a less personal way' (2008: 211).

In the same Deleuzian vein, Del Río means by 'body' an assemblage of forces or affects, which combine and recombine with other forces in a greater process of creative becoming (2008: 3, 12). A body, as much for Del Río as it is for Deleuze, is thus by definition a moving body: its powers of affection and becoming are ceaselessly in the making. It is this inherent movement or becoming of bodily forces that she takes to be 'ontologically akin' to a performance – the central theme of her film philosophy (2008: 3). Yet, notice how she has to strip 'performance' from all aspects of subjective intent in order to equate it with creative becoming. It is only by trimming performance down to "the expression and perception of affect in the body" that Del Río can claim that performance coincides with the creative becoming of existence itself (2008: 10).

Against this broader affective-performative backdrop that Del Río sets, let me outline three senses in which a return to nature emerges from her approach to film. The first of these senses pertains to her account of how films are relevant to philosophy, and the latter two to the 'Lose Your Self' ethic that emerges from that account.

In the first sense, Del Río proposes a theoretical reorientation, a 'return to nature' that promises to galvanize the philosophical potential of films. She proposes the need to (re)consider cinema from the viewpoint of nature, which is

to say from the pre-human, ego-less world where she situates *affect* – the world which she privileges over the "human-all-too-human world of phenomenology" (Boundas cited in Del Río 2008: 12).

What philosophical potential exactly does this viewpoint hold for films? From the immanent viewpoint of nature, Del Río explains, "performance involves a mobilization of affective circuits that supersedes the viewer's investment in the image through representational structures of belief and mimesis" (2008: 4). From this viewpoint, that is, the affects mobilized by performance are unassimilable; they circumvent language, binary structures, ideological functions, and similar static forms. Mobilized affects summon a creative ontology operating outside of such static forms and compels them to change.[23] It is in this inevitable displacement of static forms that Del Río sees the philosophical promise of cinema's performing bodies: she finds these bodies "capable of transforming static forms and concepts typical of a representational paradigm into forces and concepts that exhibit a transformative/expansive potential" (2008: 6). To single out one example: in her treatment of Sally Potter's semi-autobiographical drama, *The Tango Lesson* (1997), the static concept in question is that of narcissism (2008: 129–143). Del Río seeks to demonstrate that the film – which deals with a turbulent dance partnership between a filmmaker (Sally Potter) and her conscripted dancer-actor (Pablo Verón) – transforms the traditional notion of narcissism by undoing the subject-object binary, and fixation on identity, that underpin it. (As Del Río explains, narcissism in the film refers not only to the self-absorbed filmmaker in it but also – as some critics hold – to Sally Potter casting herself in that role.) Contrary to traditional notions of narcissism as a self-absorbedness at the expense of the other, Del Río finds, *The Tango Lesson* enacts the narcissistic impulse as an affirmative, creative power: the narcissistic body thrives in its affective connections with other bodies, in an open-ended unfolding of its potential for becoming. Yet this particular disclosure of narcissism still depends on a radical reconsideration of bodies and selves from the viewpoint of depersonalized forces – Del Río's proposal for film as philosophy to return to nature.

Intertwined with her approach to film as philosophy above, is Del Río's 'Lose Your Self' ethic, where 'return to nature' emerges in a second – now ethical – sense. Just as we have seen with Deleuze and Guattari's Body without Organs,

23 Restated in the more exact Deleuze-Guattarian terms that Del Río resorts to: static bodies and organizations on a 'molar' plane (populated by subjects, identities, binaries, and other inhibiting strata) are all susceptible to the destabilizing movements of intensive forces and affects on a 'molecular' plane of impersonal becoming (Del Río 2008: 9, 16; cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 39–60).

nature here manifests as a transformational value; that of a life submitted to nature. In Del Río's thinking, submitting to nature translates to submitting oneself to *affection* – the interplay of body, affect and force on the plane of immanence – in an effort to undo the self, to dismantle static structures of subjectivity. As she notes, "the capacity to engage with the powers of affection goes hand in hand with the capacity to live in an expansive, creative way" (2008: 212). It is true, though, that powers of affection as Del Río conceives of them are an ontological given. This she would not deny. At a certain (molecular) level, bodies and affects are in any case on the move, always chipping away at static (molar) structures such as the subjective self. Yet, as much as powers of affection are inevitable, Del Río's whole project hovers around the suggestion that cinema *intensifies* affection and thus creates an opportunity for viewers to engage actively with affection's powers. And the more abstract and impersonal the films (she singles out the work of Claire Denis and David Lynch in this regard), the greater the affective intensity that cinema can deliver (see 2008: 49, 212). Cinema therefore allows viewers to quicken in themselves the principles of motion and exchange that characterize an ontology of becoming. This transformational return to nature, as in all other variants of 'Lose Your Self', marks an ideal of desubjectivization. Del Río states that affective intensity pairs off with the weakening and dismantling of subjectivity, meaning that she places subjectivity in inverse proportion to affect (2008: 6–7; 212). For the viewer to engage with the intensified affection mobilized by cinema – as 'return to nature' – is thus to enter a process of shedding (static structures of) subjectivity. The implied transformational ethics here has the same basic features as that of Deleuze and Guattari's Body without Organs. Del Río posits an *ascetic* mode of self-less-ness, of *doing away with* subjectivity – the only difference being that she identifies cinema as a concrete (re)source for this transformational mode; for cinema sets in motion depersonalized affects that *withhold* viewers from relying on static, subject-affirming structures. Del Río furthermore posits the same transformational value of *change* or *becoming*, which qualifies what it means to return to nature and, thereby, realize self-less-ness. To realize self-less-ness, as much for Del Río as for Deleuze and Guattari, is to flee a static, stratified self; thus, to give up one's self to the fundamental change and becoming that characterize nature. In short: they reject a constant self in resistance to flux, pursuing instead a resistant self in constant flux.

How do we imagine this somewhat abstruse transformational ethic play out in practice, though? What needs to happen between film and viewer? Del Río portrays the cinema situation as an assemblage of desubjectivized forces and bodies, generating an array of intensified affective circuits on the basis of "the affective continuum that joins life and the cinema" (2008: 208). These

circuits run between the bodies *in* cinema, and cinematic images *as* bodies, in a performative exchange with *viewer*-bodies too. Though Del Río herself does not explicitly draw the connection, the exchanges between film and viewer happen to find a pertinent model in the affective push-and-pull between dancer-bodies in Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson.* In her reading of the film, the mobilization of affective circuits between the dancers occurs only once Sally Potter refrains from reactive self-preservation, and actively embraces the powers of affection within the dance partnership. It seems to me that Del Río envisions the same process for the film viewer, for whom the transformational technique of cinema-going supplants that of dancing. Instead of a dance partner, the viewer depends on films to initiate an "ethical process that ensures the maintenance of the movement and flow of forces between bodies" (2008: 141). It is up to cinema to, as it were, 'take the lead' by raising the affective circuits running between the viewer and itself. Then it is up to the viewer to help maintain that flow, by abandoning the self – quite literally – to the resultant powers of affection on display.

Parallel to the transformational ethics above emerges a third and final sense of 'a return to nature' – a more modest ethical thread in Del Río's thinking, suggesting a more conventional transformational ethics. This is not the radical ethics of ascetic self-dismantling in the name of becoming, but an ethics of awareness, where 'a return to nature' simply means to become aware of your capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies. She notes, for example, that "one of the foremost functions of the cinema is to bring to consciousness the body's powers of affection" (2008: 212–213). A few passages on she adds that "the cinema has a unique capacity to bring to living consciousness the most intense, transformative affects in our lives" (2008: 216). According to the implied ethics, then, *affects* (inevitably) bring about transformation – the transformational function of films is only to enhance awareness of these affects and their effects. A return to nature in this instance is thus qualified by the transformational value of *awareness*, an awareness *of* nature; in Del Río's terms, awareness of "a field of forces that are already here and now" (2008: 215).

To bring Vivian Sobchack back into the picture, Del Río's agreement with 'Sense Your Senses' is nowhere stronger than with the particular ethic of awareness that she expresses here. Despite her mismatching assumptions about the nature of affects, Del Río is at this point just as invested as Sobchack in the ideal of cultivating awareness of affect through cinema. According to Sobchack, we have seen, viewers need this technique of transformation because of conditions of habituation and abstraction that estrange us from our bodies (e.g. Sobchack 1992: 28). Del Río cites similar negative motivations for a transformational engagement with cinema: conditions like 'our cultural alienation from

sensual and bodily experience', and 'our customary state of numbness' (Del Río 2008: 174, 210). The problem for Del Río, however, is that her ethic of awareness runs up against the overall desubjectified approach to cinema that she is trying to put across. It remains unclear how she ultimately reconciles the ideal of films bringing to consciousness the body's affection, with her stated agenda of "[d]e-emphasizing ego-centered, individual subjectivity" (2008: 211). Even if she insists that this is 'consciousness' in a different, depersonalized sense, I am not sure what value such a bringing to consciousness could have apart from an enrichment of individual subjectivity. Del Río therefore poses what seems to be two opposing strands of a transformational 'return to nature': to weaken or dismantle subjectivity by our *submitting to* affect (understood as depersonalized, intensive force) is at odds with our *becoming aware of* affect. If anything, the latter will only strengthen individual subjectivity.

3.3.4 See Your Self Enworlded: William Brown

My second sample of 'Lose Your Self' as film ethic comes from Willam Brown's immanentist explorations (which, again, I take to be mainly Deleuzian inspired) of digital cinema in his *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age* (2013).

I want to focus on a key claim that runs throughout his otherwise wide-ranging book: Brown argues that digital technology begets an enhanced cinema, a 'supercinema', that enables us to see our 'enworlded' nature[24], as he likes to put it, by which he means that we see ourselves embedded in the fundamental continuity of the world (e.g. 2013: 154, 156). Brown's implied ethic picks up on the same thread that we left off with Del Río above. Here we again encounter 'Lose Your Self' as essentially an ethic of *awareness* – not a radical ethic of self-dismantling. The point for Brown is not to lose yourself, but to recognize – in terms of my bumper sticker – that the self is *already* 'lost' in fundamental connection to the world. The transformational role of cinema is but to dismantle our mistaken *notions* of a self that stands in opposition to the world. Digital cinema thus fosters a 'return to nature' inasmuch as it makes us mindful of how the self is already thoroughly enworlded.

How does Brown arrive at this ethical stance? To start with his Deleuze-inspired conception of film as philosophy, the primary question that Brown asks is not so much whether cinema does philosophy, but rather what cinema

24 With this term, Brown takes particular inspiration from Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's (1991) arguments in favor of the mind's 'enworlded' nature, according to which the mind does not operate in objective detachment from the world, but actively emerges from relations between environments, brain and body (Brown 2013: 144–146).

as such does. He underlines that one of the things that cinema does is to make us think; it creates new thoughts, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994) would have it (Brown 2013: 6). Therefore, he says, cinematic experience is at least 'philosophical' insofar as it always involves the production of thought between film and viewer (2013: 123).

So what is it that digital cinema, in particular, does? What 'thought' is produced between the digital film and its viewer? That thought concerns the continuity and interconnectedness of all things. Whereas analogue cinema with its obvious material limitations is compelled to cut, Brown argues, digital cinema is predicated on continuity (2013: 2). Citing films like *Fight Club* (notably its opening sequence) and *Enter the Void* (Gaspar Noé 2009), he describes how digital technology enables films to present continuous spaces in which supposedly empty space and solid objects melt into a single continuum. Analogue cinema fragments space. A film such as *Fight Club,* in contrast, exemplifies "a conception of space as a continuum, in which space consists not of discrete units, or points, but instead in which all space is interconnected […] in which empty space and the objects that fill it share an equal ontological status" (2013: 43). By presenting the interconnected nature of entities, events and space (a reality affirmed by the contemporary theoretical physics, as Brown repeatedly points out) digital cinema paradoxically achieves a greater realism – a realism based not on indexical realism, but on how it enacts ontological continuity. Naturally, most films in the digital era persist with the convention of cutting. But, Brown stresses, we know that *they do not need to*. For this reason, he speaks of the 'supercinema' capacity of digital cinema: although it possesses powers of perfect continuity, digital cinema is like Superman who, for the sake of fitting in, limits himself to the Clark Kent-countenance of analogue cinema (see 2013: 9–12).

The super-continuity of 'super' digital cinema presents an equal ontology in which bodies, minds, physical objects, and space exist in a seamless continuum. Such continuity according to Brown – and here he really earns the 'Lose Your Self' label – gives an indubitably posthuman, non-anthropocentric impulse to digital cinema. "[I]f space becomes indistinguishable from all that fills it", he explains, "then this brings about a fundamental decentering of the figures that fill that space […] [T]he result of this 'decentering' is a minimizing of anthropocentrism in digital cinema" (2013: 2). With this posthuman continuity, consequently, cinema has the capacity to "take the viewer beyond the human" (2013: 8), as it "allows us to transcend our limited human perception" (2013: 47). Clearly, though, Brown is not advocating here a wholesale transcendence of self, but a transcendence of perception (akin to the mode of contemplative mysticism, as identified in 'Blow Your Mind') that lets viewers

apprehend their existing connectedness and interdependence with the world, hence my assessment that Brown's implied transformational ethic is an ethic of awareness: to engage with digital cinema, he makes quite clear, enables us to become conscious of our fundamentally enworlded nature, and so to rethink our relationship with the world.

However, the same issue raised with Del Río could be raised here. That is, does a growing *awareness of* our enworlded nature – which implies a distancing of the aware self from its object of awareness – not work against Brown's insistence on a self that is fundamentally inseparable from the world? Brown is no doubt aware of this inner tension in his position. To allay this tension, I gather, he prefers to speak of an awareness 'with' the world, not 'of' it. Because a properly rethought relationship with the world, as he conceives of it, will affirm that we are *with* the world – not *in* it, and even less so *apart from* it. Therefore, through digital cinema, he argues, we ultimately "achieve consciousness not of, but with films, and consciousness not of, but with the world" (2013: 156).

In the final chapter of his book, I can add, the ethical investments that Brown puts into 'enworldment' reach an explicit *crescendo* (2013: 147–156). According to his 'sophophilic' conclusion, to achieve consciousness with the world – "to understand that we only exist in relation with the world" – amounts to *loving* the world" (2013: 154). To discover our enworlded nature is thus an act of love. It is not to love this or that, Brown says, but to love everything, holistically. And the effects of this love, especially how he phrases it, would certainly be fully endorsed by Bersani and Dutoit, who follow next. Such a love, as Brown puts it, exhausts and shatters the human. Moreover, it promises to turn an egocentric being into one "dispersed everywhere and everywhen" (2013: 154).

3.3.5 Disperse Your Self: Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit

For a final sample of the idea(l) of 'Lose Your Self' through film, I turn to the philosophical aesthetics of Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit in their *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (2004). Whereas in Del Río, I identified the primary transformational value of change or becoming, and in Brown a particular value of awareness, Bersani and Dutoit's implied ethics is principally concerned with that of connectedness – to not just recognize our connectedness, that is, but to further actualize it. And once more we have an ethic that relies, and quite openly so, on a strict ontology of immanence, even while the name 'Deleuze' drops with far less frequency in this case.

In the spirit of an immanentist imploding of the inside versus outside, I start off with the outside of their book. On the cover it states of the three films that the book examines – Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963), Pedro Almodóvar's *All About My Mother* (1999), and Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998) – that

each of them, by means of a visual argument, re-imagines the relationship between subjectivity and the world. The subject's relationship to the world is a well-established theme for the two steady collaborators, especially for Leo Bersani. His long and varied career as literary theorist can arguably be summarized under the heading of 'relationality' – or, better even, 'connectedness'. This is for example the only overall theme that he is willing to ascribe to his recent *Thoughts and Things* (2015), a collection of previously unrelated (pun unintended) essays. He notes that the essays all share "the question of connectedness: of how the human subject connects or fails to connect to other human subjects and to the nonhuman world" (2015: ix). Significant here is his recognition of the *failure* to connect. While Bersani accepts an intrinsic 'oneness of being', he recognizes in the same breath that the oneness is opposed by a destructiveness intrinsic to being human, "a destructiveness always ready to shatter the oneness of being" (2015: xiii). Our intrinsic condition may thus be a oneness of being, but for Bersani our effective connectedness amidst that oneness is not a given. It remains something to be achieved – and notably so with the aid of art, in which Bersani finds the potential to open up alternative relational fields for our connection to the world.

In *Forms of Being*, then, Bersani and Dutoit stage this drama of separation and connection through the films, *Le Mépris*, *All About My Mother*, and *The Thin Red Line*. Their project, in Bersani's own words, is "to define a different relational mode, one of exchanges and correspondences between the subject and the world, exchanges that depend on the anti-Cartesian assumption of a commonality of being among the human subject and both the human and the nonhuman world" (2015: 62). Accordingly, the particular visual argument that they trace in the three films is that they each "propose the implausibility of individuality" (2004: 6). The films do so, they argue, by enacting the subject's 'dispersal' – their preferred metaphor for the subject's effective connection to the world – sometimes exchanged for related figures like the subject's 'dissemination', 'dissolving', or 'shattering', any one of which results in a 'multiplication of being' (e.g. 2004: 6, 8, 169–170, 177). These notions speak of nothing else than – once again – 'Lose Your Self' as a transformational *return to nature*: the self-dispersal that Bersani and Dutoit envision, to relinquish individual subjectivity to the oneness of being, is at once a multiplication "that allows us to reoccur, differently, everywhere" (2004: 9). The ascetic imperative, 'lose', in the 'Lose Your Self' slogan could thus not be more pertinent, because "the multiplication of the individual's positionality in the universe is, necessarily, a *lessening* or even a *loss* of individuality" (2004: 5 [emphasis added]).

How does their selection of films achieve this dispersal of the subject? Or more to the point, how do these films present the said correspondences

and commonalities of being – between the human subject and the world – which would provide the basis for a dispersed subject? Bersani and Dutoit's reponse: since "[i]mmanent in every subject is its similitudes with other subjects (and other objects)", the films bring about the subject's dispersal through 'unexpected couplings' (2004: 8). Consequently, Bersani and Dutoit are constantly on the hunt for any instance in these films of what they variously call couplings, doublings, pairings, correspondences, replications, repetitions, reoccurrences, and reappearances. They never put things as plainly, but it is plain enough to see that 'coupling' (or any of its substitute-terms) always entails 'connection'. And while they take note of large structural or thematic connections, it is visual connections that interest them most. For it is the visual connections or 'couplings' that enable the films to be visual arguments that "propose an ontology of universal immanence"; an ontology that grants the subject's dispersal; "an ontology that treats as merely incidental, as a by-product of the illusion of individuality, the opposition between the outside and inside" (2004: 169–170).

As to be expected, the promise of the subject's dispersal is not limited to the on-screen subjects of Bersani and Dutoit's three elected films. It holds also for the viewing subject. Take their analysis of *The Thin Red Line* (which I revisit in greater detail in Chapter 4, when I discuss the philosophical reception of this and other films by the director, Terrence Malick). Bersani and Dutoit claim that *The Thin Red Line* performs a "reworking of the individual within a new relational ethic" (2004: 135). Yet the claim, it soon becomes evident, deliberately conflates two matters: the film's aesthetic reworking of individual characters, on the one hand, and a transformational 'reworking' of the individual viewer on the other.

In terms of character, Bersani and Dutoit repeatedly play up the film's presentation of private Witt (Jim Caviezel) as the raw embodiment of receptivity and connectedness (e.g. 2004: 151, 159, 169–170, 175–176.). They pay special attention to the film's persistent facial close-ups of Witt. These close-ups, they say, show how his face registers the world, and thereby demonstrate the open, all-absorbing nature of the character's look. For Bersani and Dutoit the openness of his look testifies that, in terms of losing the self, Witt has earned his wings:

> [T]he precondition of his wholly receptive gaze is a *subject divested of subjectivity* [...] Witt's look designates a subject without claims on the world, who owns nothing [...] Witt approaches the limit of *subject without selfhood*, ideally *an anonymous subject*. (2004: 164–165 [emphasis added])

Witt's connectedness however exceeds the film's diegetic boundaries, extending also unto the film viewer. Bersani and Dutoit point out that Witt's open, self-effacing look is mostly directed at *us*. This, then, is the standout 'coupling' that *The Thin Red Line* enacts – one that defies the assumed separation of film and viewer, and which Bersani and Dutoit load with transformational potential. For this particular coupling, as they see it, spurs us to collaborate with and form part of Witt's look: the film summons us to both the world that Witt so openly receives, and at the same time to reciprocate that receptivity as our own mode of connection to the world. Clearly, the 'new relational ethic' that Bersani and Dutoit attribute to the *The Thin Red Line* is an ethic of transformation. Owing to Witt as ethical model and instigator, the film petitions an exercise in self-transformation whereby we as viewers may solidify our own connectedness to the world. As Witt divests himself of individual selfhood – as an act of connection to the world – we, presumably, are prompted to do the same.

That Bersani and Dutoit posit a transformational ethics of film aimed at the main *value* of connectedness is easy enough to see. Their implied *mode* of transformation, however, is harder to settle. To say that they pose a mode of contemplation may well be seen as going against the whole idea of undoing individual subjectivity. Yet, more than once, they do suggest the mode of *contemplative endurance* that has come up throughout this chapter, particularly in my appraisal of Sinnerbrink and Frampton. Bersani and Dutoit, for example, note the need for a film viewer's assumption of individuality to be jolted out of place. They see the Seventh Art, which thrives on the film star, at least in the classical era, as especially conducive to our accepting the existence and priority of individuality. For this reason, "the film-maker must somehow *traumatise* our perception [...] *shock* our visual habits, and in so doing at least begin to train us to look" (2004: 8 [emphasis added]). Such a 'traumatized perception', they explain, both shatters the security of individual selfhood and makes evident the dispersed self's "limitless extensibility in both space and time" (2004: 9).[25] However, to touch on another recurring theme, this transformation cannot occur without willing and prepared viewers. The contemplative endurance thus requires some preparatory 'effort' and 'work of spectatorship' on our part: "It involves, first of all, *allowing ourselves* to be transferred from one mode of vision to another, to be jolted out of our ingrained habits of cinematic viewing" (2004: 8 [emphasis added]).

25 They speak of such traumatized perception with specific reference to Jean-Luc Godard's *Oh, Woe Is Me* (1993) and the sudden visual displacements of characters that Godard achieves through jarring montage.

Naturally, also, any 'Lose Your Self' ethic – having the general aim of giving up individual selfhood or subjectivity – is by definition framed in terms of the mode of *asceticism*. Normally the ascetic gives up certain things for self-transformation. Here, however, the condition for achieving a transformed connectedness with the world is to give up and give over the *entire* individual self. This self-surrender in Bersani and Dutoit's vocabulary is a 'lessening', 'withdrawal', or 'retreat' (2004: 5–6, 8). They moreover speak of making the self 'superfluous', with an 'active passivity' that multiplies your being within the world – because, at bottom, "[l]essness is the condition of allness" (2004: 165).

However, in terms of the transformational ethics of film that Bersani and Dutoit propose here, it is not so clear where the main initiative for the viewer's ascetic mode of 'lessening' springs from. Once more, we touch on the issue of preparatory ethics: is it the film that, at least initially, elicits a lessening of the viewer-self? Or is the supposed effect of the film merely incidental to the preparatory self-work of the viewer? They do suggest that artefacts by their very nature induce a lessening of the subject. For instance, they note that "artful ascesis is the precondition for a lessness that allows us to reoccur, differently, everywhere" (2004: 9). In addition, their notion of the 'aesthetic subject' – which presumably emerges from the spectator engagement with art – marks by definition a 'retreat' or 'withdrawal' from any fixed subjecthood (2004: 6,9). Yet, in the same breath, they uphold the mentioned 'work of spectatorship' that is required for lessening the subject. They also call this work a 'relational discipline' whereby spectators must open themselves up (2004: 177). This preparatory work of the viewer is by far the more explicit precondition that Bersani and Dutoit set. Indeed, they make it clear that the 'precondition' for private Witt's unreserved connectedness to the world – which prefigures and initiates also the *viewer's* connectedness to the world through film – is for him to be 'subject divested of subjectivity' (2004: 164). In the viewer's case, it may be that the film can help the process along. Yet, ultimately, it seems to be the viewer's responsibility to *initiate* the condition of self-lessening upon which Bersani and Dutoit predicate their ethics of connectedness.

3.3.6 Prepare to Lose Your Self: The Deleuzian Model Viewer

To cap this discussion, it is worthwhile to briefly consider the kind of viewer that a 'Lose Your Self' ethics envisions – especially in light of the Deleuzian paradigm that it so strongly relies upon. To this end, I find particularly illuminating Richard Rushton's propositions on Deleuzian spectatorship (2008; 2009). Rushton points out the lack of any explicit conception of the film viewer in Deleuze's writings, and undertakes to flesh out such a conception – the result

of which usefully captures what the 'Lose Your Self' ethics generally implies for the viewer.

Rushton's central claim is a provocative one with respect to Screen Theory's traditional championing of the active and engaged spectator: he argues that the Deleuzian spectator eschews activity (2009: 46–48). In other words, the Deleuzian spectator excels at a certain *passivity* (which, of course, is the *one* p-word that sets political alarm bells ringing among Screen theorists). By passivity, Rushton means a relinquishing of our control or mastery over films, "that we lose control of ourselves, undo ourselves, forget ourselves while in front of the cinema screen" (2009: 53). Simply put, the cinema experience should *happen to* the subject, and not be *caused by* the subject (see Rushton 2008: 130). Note, however, that Rushton primarily speaks of this passivity as an ideal to be attained. It is not the given condition of the viewer; passivity is ultimately a 'challenge' that Deleuze throws down to us (2009: 53). Obviously, the idea of striving after passivity risks being a contradiction in terms. But Rushton probably has in mind what Martin Seel (2016) describes in another context as the viewer's 'active passivity'. Drawing on Theodor Adorno, Seel commends active passivity as giving oneself over to the play of powers of an artwork at hand. Active passivity essentially means to let oneself be determined (cf. Seel 2006). In the context of the cinema experience, it means for viewers to "actively determine themselves in giving themselves over to a passive state of being determined" (Seel 2016). This measure on the part of the viewer allows films to unfold their own processual nature, in a manner that draws the viewer into this process.

Rushton further elaborates on this ideal passive spectatorship in terms of immersion versus absorption – or, at least, in terms of what he understands by the two notions. When a viewer's relationship to film is one of immersion, he says, then the film comes out towards *me*. In other words, the film enters *my* space, *my* perception, *my* body, even. An active self is the controlling central point around which immersion unfolds. Absorption is a reversal of this arrangement. In absorption, Rushton explains, it is not the film that comes out to the spectator, but the spectator that goes into the film. To be absorbed is to be drawn into the world of the film, which gives the sensation of bodily occupying the space of another world, and even that of another being. Absorption necessitates a passive self that relinquishes control.

Rushton argues that absorption, thus conceived, is the more fruitful path for understanding Deleuzian spectatorship. It is not difficult to see why. His carefully devised distinction between immersion and absorption is really shorthand for a relationship to film that is either subject-*affirming* or subject-*negating*. Immersion for Rushton only reinforces subjectivity and identity – it

reaches out to me on *my* terms and thus "offers only the option of remaining firmly within the bounds of one's own selfhood" (2009: 51). Its affirmation of the subject makes immersion more suitable to the ethics of self-concentration covered in the first half of this chapter. Rushton's notion of absorption, in contrast, is tailor-made for an ethics of self-expansion, and none more so than 'Lose Your Self' with its aim of negating individual subjectivity. Absorption takes you where you are not, and lets you become someone – or, more exactly, some*thing* – that you are not.

> What absorption encourages in the beholder is a sensation that one is no longer oneself, that one has lost one's selfhood in order to become something other, that one has lost the coordinates by which one's subjectivity can be defined in order to occupy a position that is in some sense objective rather than subjective.
>
> RUSHTON 2009: 50–51

Remember that Rushton describes absorption as part of the Deleuzian ideal for spectatorship, thus suggesting that it is the viewer's responsibility to ensure it. So what must the viewer do to be absorbed in film to the degree of a loss of selfhood? Rushton's answer – the answer echoed by all advocates of 'Lose Your Self' – is to be passive; surrender; give yourself over to the film. Yet for the viewer to attain that passivity requires work of the self on itself, a measure of self-transformation, which once more raises the topic of preparatory ethics.

As in most cases of preparatory ethics, we shall see in a moment, the prepared Deleuzian viewer must practice self-transformation in the mode of *asceticism*; to be suitably passive entails giving up things. The act of giving up constitutes the unavoidable activity inherent to the passivity that 'Lose Your Self' requires from viewers. As a means to passivity, the viewer must actively give up control, mastery, even activity itself. In Seel's terms, the domain of transformation in this instance is self-determination as such: you let yourself be determined by giving up – surrendering to film – your own determination of self. Only then "will we be able to loosen the shackles of our existing subjectivities and open ourselves up to other ways of experiencing and knowing" (2009: 53).

True to form, then, the potential for contradiction in 'Lose Your Self' only grows when we consider its preparatory dimension. In keeping with its implied viewer, the ethic in effect states that you can only realize 'Lose Your Self' (through film) based on a preparatory measure by which you already lose your self (to film). (I respond to this sort of circularity stemming from preparatory ethics in the concluding section below.) On top of that, the mere preparatory

measure to lose the self – that is, to make oneself appropriately passive, determined, and absorbed – can only occur by exerting that active, determining self which the viewer is meant to put out of play.

4 *Intermezzo*: Stanley Cavell and Some Stickers That 'Could'

My analysis here would be far from complete without a consideration of what Stanley Cavell brings to this ethical party. Yet what hope can one have to assign a single bumper sticker to an (*in*)famously *indirect* philosopher who, according to one recent assessment, "won't get to the point", and apparently has good reasons for not doing so (see Jackson 2015). I can therefore only take a leaf out of Cavell's book: to not get to the point, but to take the scenic route along some contender-stickers that *could* fill the bumper, even if only to conclude that perhaps it is a bumper better left blank.

4.1 *From 'Overcome Yourself' to 'Connect Yourself': The Moving Image of Skepticism*

Our guiding question is straightforward enough: in what ways can we picture self-transformation through film from the perspective of Cavell's film philosophy? Granted – Cavell's notion of 'film as philosophy', as such, entails various things. So let us set off from the earliest and most familiar Cavellian contention in this regard: that the philosophical value of film consists in how it addresses the philosophical problem of skepticism – encapsulated by Cavell's famous description of film as a "moving image of skepticism" (1979: 188), which I examined in Chapter 1.

The transformational potential of this moment in Cavell's thinking can no doubt be elaborated upon along the lines of a 'Know Yourself' ethic.[26] In Cavell's version of 'Know Yourself', film-viewing initiates a contemplative mode by which we encounter – not hidden assumptions in our thinking about this or that, but – our *condition of subjectivity* as such. Here the value of *self-knowledge,* or *awareness,* concerns knowledge of our own subjectivity. In particular, we encounter in this self-reflective process our distinctly modern experience of subjective *isolation* from the world. For cinema's screening of the world expresses – dramatizes, even – our being screened off from the world by subjectivity itself. Subjectivity is the only 'screen' present to our isolated

26 Naturally, Cavell's interest in self-transformation of the 'Know Yourself' kind goes far beyond his work on film. See, for example, Andrew Norris (2017: 15–48) on the way Cavell construes ordinary language philosophy as a practical act of self-examination.

selves; it is interposed between us and the 'presentness' of the world, and we experience it just like the cinema screen (Cavell 1979: 22–24; see also Bauer 2005; 2012). From the very conditions of cinema, therefore, we get insight into our "human distance from the world" (Cavell 2005 [1985]: 116). This challenging self-insight William Rothman and Marian Keane summarize as follows:

> Movies awaken us to the world's reality and thereby awaken us to the reality of our unnatural condition, a condition in which we have become displaced, have come to displace ourselves, from our natural habitation within the world. (2000: 180)

Indeed, movies awaken us to the *world's* reality too. The flipside of Cavell's moving image of skepticism, let us not forget, is that at the same time it promises respite from our subjective isolation and distance from the world. The transformational ethics implied by this side of Cavell's argument can be elaborated upon under a number of slogans. A noticeable candidate is 'Overcome Yourself'. For good measure, we could also throw in 'Reach Outside Yourself', in a quite literal sense – as if to 'Escape Yourself'.[27] As much as cinema expresses the problem of skepticism, Cavell suggests, it simultaneously beckons towards the possibility of its overcoming. That possibility resides, as detailed before, in the automatism of photography. Photography reproduces and presents the world mechanically, without any intervention of a human subject. By screening the world, therefore, cinema makes the world *present to* the viewer in a way that 'bypasses' subjectivity, as it were, and so breaches our subjective isolation from the world (see Cavell 1979: 23). Yet to brand all of this as an 'Overcome Yourself', I have to admit, is an overstatement of Cavell's position. (Bumper stickers revel in the hyperbolic.) The only transformation that this ethic can reasonably foresee is that the viewer stands to gain a sense of the world's 'presentness'.[28] And that outcome is but a spit in the sea compared to a complete escape from our subjective isolation. The satisfaction of this metaphysical

27 Here I am thinking of Cavell's reference to "the human wish, intensifying in the West since the Reformation, to *escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation* – a wish for the power to *reach this world*" (1979: 21 [emphasis added]).

28 Cavell's notion of presentness, which he adopts from Michael Fried, is not to be confused with the common transformational value of 'being in the present' in a strictly temporal sense, nor with the philosophical concept of 'presence' associated with Jacques Derrida's deconstructive critiques. For Cavell, 'presentness' is simply as ordinary a noun as 'whiteness' or 'blackness'. It refers to the same, everyday quality we refer to when we speak of someone or something *as* present (Rothman & Keane 2000: 64).

wish, Cavell seems to say, is something that cinema can point towards, but can never actually reach.

It is worth noting how this apparent impasse has recently been navigated by a flourish of commentary on Cavell's moving image of skepticism (e.g. Sinnerbrink 2011a: 102–108; 2016a: 28–32; Kelley 2012; Abbott 2013; Trahair 2014). A rough consensus reads that, though you cannot truly 'Overcome Yourself' or 'Escape Yourself', cinema's breaching of our subjective isolation does warrant a more modest attempt to 'Connect Yourself'. This iteration, however, demands a more nuanced understanding of how cinema addresses the problem of skepticism: that is, rather than 'solve' the problem of our subjective isolation, cinema *re-orientates* our relation to it (Abbott 2013: 171). Or: rather than let us 'get out of' skepticism, cinema lets us 'get over' it (Sinnerbrink 2016a: 32). By, in effect, exacerbating the experience of our skeptical condition (as per Cavell's 'Know Yourself' moment above), cinema encourages us to forego the obscuring desire for certainty of knowledge, to instead *acknowledge* that which is nevertheless right in front of us.[29] In this position, we cannot but acknowledge our subjective finitude. Yet, understood as our finitude in relation to the world, we precisely acknowledge that we have some sort of existent(ial) relation with the world. This is the claim made on us by cinema's screening of the world: that the world is made present to us, at least, in spite of our finitude, no matter how incomplete or fleeting. Almost paradoxically, then, it is by enlisting acknowledgment of our subjective isolation – hence by a change of epistemological attitude – that cinema leads us to "experience reconnection to the world, a connection we feel has been severed in modernity" (Abbott 2013: 171; see also Rodowick, n.d.: 3). Note, however, that this transformation into a connection with the world is not of the subject-negating kind sought by 'Lose Your Self'. It is indeed a (subjective) *sense* or *experience of* connectedness. Though Cavell affirms a motive of Nature (by insisting on cinema's present-making of the world), he does not do so at the expense of an equal motive of Subjectivity (cinema, after all, makes the world present to *me* as subject). As Rothman and Keane observe, "our wish to escape subjectivity cannot be separated from our wish to achieve selfhood" (2000: 65), since the wish for presentness is "to reach this world *and* attain selfhood" (2000: 90 [emphasis added]). In keeping with this dual-affirmation, then, acknowledgment fosters a connectedness with the world – construed by commentators also as a conviction, belief, or trust in the

29 Richard Eldridge (2005) eloquently sums up Cavell's notion of acknowledgment as "the taking up, articulating, and registering of what in our experience calls for various routes of feeling and interest that we are also inclined to suppress". This may range from the acknowledgment of the pain of another, to acknowledging our own finitude.

world[30] – while thoroughly recognizing our ongoing separateness from it (see Trahair 2014: 142–145).

In sum: by bringing our skeptical condition to the fore, cinema compels viewers to respond with a transformation of self that fundamentally reorients that condition. It is therefore the type of event (to link it to a different context) "in which a *crisis* forces an examination of one's life that calls for a transformation or reorienting of it" (Cavell 2004: 11 [emphasis added]). What this link shows, however, is that the moving image of skepticism has been moving within an ethical province all along. In *Cities of Words* (2004), Cavell calls that province 'moral perfectionism'.

4.2 *Not 'Perfect Yourself', but 'Become Yourself': Emersonian Perfectionism*

In view of our guiding question, there are certainly much more direct ways of getting to the theme of film and self-transformation in Cavell's thinking than going via the ethics of the moving image of skepticism. Like his overall philosophical enterprise, the best share of Cavell's philosophy of film has explicitly ethical questions at its forefront. And at the forefront of those questions is Cavell's abiding interest in moral (Emersonian) perfectionism – which, of course, is nothing other than an interest in personal transformation.

A promising route map through this winding ethical terrain in Cavell's thought is his essay, enticingly titled "The Good of Film" (2005 [2000]). As I explained at the outset, this chapter is about how philosophers concerned with film as philosophy answer the question of 'the good' of film. And here – finally – we have one philosopher who actually devotes an essay to this exact topic. Yet what at first glance looks like a definitive statement on the ethical value of film quickly becomes a trademark detour. Contrary to his title, Cavell goes into what he takes to be 'good films' (2005 [2000]: 334–336). Not that one could hope to accuse him of dodging an essay title of his own choosing. Rather, opting for his usual indirect course, Cavell in this case narrows down the question – from 'the good of film' to 'the good of *good films*' – thereby making a very long story, if not short, at least somewhat more manageable.

So what are 'good films', according to Cavell? I pick up three criteria worth noting. Firstly, he says, good films have the "capacity to sustain and reward criticism" (2005 [2000]: 335). This is a capacity sometimes realized by the most

30 See, for example, Schmerheim (2013b), Früchtl (2017), and Sinnerbrink (2011a: 90–91). As these authors make clear, Gilles Deleuze advances a claim similar to 'Connect Yourself' by suggesting that cinema gives us reasons 'to believe in this world' (e.g. Deleuze 1989: 171–172).

popular of films and genres, yet this may remain unacknowledged by viewers taking these films for granted. Secondly, he mentions that all films of great interest, intelligence, and passion feature a common sort of crisis: "a crisis is precipitated in the name of demanding a new beginning, another chance" (2005 [2000]: 345). And, finally, presupposing the first two criteria, and the clincher for Cavell: a large class of good films bears an affinity with a "particular conception of the good" – a conception which we find in moral perfectionism, and specifically the strand of perfectionism that Cavell deems 'Emersonian', after Ralph Waldo Emerson (Cavell 2005 [2000]; cf. 1990; 2003). Although a host of films satisfy this final, crowning criterion (indeed, an aim of Cavell's essay is to consider how certain recent film trends measure up to his idea of 'good films'), Cavell finds its quintessence in the Hollywood "remarriage comedy" (2005 [2000]: 337–338; cf. Cavell 1981). Citing films such as *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor 1940), *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks 1940), and *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra 1934), Cavell in fact credits the subgenre for effectively spurring his personal interest in perfectionism. The only other genre that piques Cavell's perfectionist interests to the same degree, mentioned but not examined in this particular essay, is melodramas of the unknown woman, which he calls a "comedic cousin" of remarriage comedies (2005 [2000]: 337; cf. Cavell 1996). In these minor subgenres, curiously enough then, lies the major intersection between the themes of film and self-transformation in Cavell: that *good* films, like the remarriage comedies that Cavell so cherishes, are films that busy themselves with moral perfectionism. In my own analytical terms: these films ostensibly express and examine the human motive of personal transformation.

Evidently, what Cavell generally means by 'moral perfectionism' and what I call 'transformational ethics' roughly carves out the same ethical space. Transformational ethics, no less than perfectionism, "has something to do", as Cavell puts it, with being true to oneself, caring for the self, moreover, a dissatisfaction with the self as it currently stands, and therefore with a progress of self-cultivation too (2005 [2000]: 336). Similarly, where I have emphasized the self's relationship to itself as the kernel of transformational ethics, Cavell bases moral perfectionism on a conception of a "divided self", an "insistent split in the self", without which a better future self cannot be envisaged and pursued (Cavell 2004: 2, 5; cf. Hadot 2002: 190; Davidson 1986: 228).

Key to Cavell's treatment of moral perfectionism in the terms of the classical remarriage comedy, therefore, is the stress in these films on "becoming, or being changed into, a certain sort of person" – a process prompted by a marriage in crisis, and carried out by means of recurrent passages of conversation

between the couples concerned (2005 [2000]: 338). Notable about these typically exquisite conversations, says Cavell, is that they entertain very little of what one would regard to be standard moral reasoning. (Namely, talking about moral duty, or ends justifying means, *à la* Kantianism and Utilitarianism.) "The issues the principal pair in these films confront each other with are formulated less well by questions concerning what they ought to do, what it would be best or right for them to do, than by the question of how they shall live their lives, what kind of persons they aspire to be" (Cavell 2004: 11). Not that such perfectionist concerns are in competition with the familiar goals of either Kantian or Utilitarian moral reasoning; if anything, moral perfectionism assumes it has a place – sometimes preparatory, sometimes supplementary – in both (Cavell 2005 [2000]: 339). Much as I have argued in Chapter 2 that self-transformation is an inescapable aspect of morality, Cavell deems moral perfectionism "not a competing theory of the moral life, but something like a dimension or tradition of the moral life", one "that spans the course of Western thought" (1990: 2). Cavell thus suggests that there is something inevitable about moral perfectionism; that it will always show up in moral reasoning – or films – of any sort.

However, as the essay is at pains to show, Cavell's fascination with the moral perfectionism that emerges in remarriage comedy is a moral perfectionism of a very specific breed. Whereas classical perfectionism as expressed in Plato's *Republic* would read 'Perfect Yourself', the outlook that Cavell reclaims from Emerson's writing is of a perfectionism without perfection – motivated, if anything, by a wariness of our finitude, a sense that will always render perfection remote and irrelevant (see Norris 2017: 217). To distinguish this type of moral perfectionism, Cavell first and foremost invokes the Romantics who spoke of self-transformation as "becoming who you are" (2005 [2000]: 336). Hence, considering its opposition to 'Perfect Yourself', let us name Cavell's Emerson-inspired outlook on personal transformation, 'Become Yourself'.

How are we to profile 'Become Yourself' as a transformational ethic, seeing that it is only 'yourself' that you aspire to be? Cavell explains:

> The decisive difference of Emerson's outlook from that in Plato's *Republic* is that the soul's journey to itself is not pictured as a continuous path directed upward to a known point of completion but rather as a zigzag of discontinuous steps following the lead of what Emerson calls my '*unattained but attainable self*' (as if there is a sage in each of us), an idea that projects no unique point of arrival but only a willingness for change, directed by *specific aspirations* that, while rejected, may at unpredictable times return with new power. (2005 [2000]: 337 [emphasis added])

The transformed self, according to Emersonian perfectionism, is never completed; it remains a self *underway*. Locked in pursuit of an ever-retreating unattained-but-attainable-self, 'Become Yourself' seeks neither a final nor a fixed state, nor any particular state (see Norris 2017: 215). Though many would want to call this outlook non-teleological (e.g. Rodowick, n.d.: 4; Sinnerbrink 2016a: 32), I am inclined to think that 'Become Yourself' still has a transformational telos or aim, but only that it is an inherently open-ended one. The 'point of arrival' aimed for is in itself a state of ongoing *becoming*, of a willingness for *change*. (In this respect 'Become Yourself' – certainly in light of what emerged in this chapter – is not unique. Many transformational ethics, notably when they dismiss the mystical or dualist kind of ontological assumptions one finds in Plato and his ilk, are just as set "against any idea of ultimate perfection" (Cavell 2004: 3). For all such ethics, self-transformation is effectively the work of ensuring and maintaining one's endless change.)

Yet while the cited passage poses the broad, open-ended transformational values of becoming, and (a willingness to) change, Cavell does admit this continuous becoming to be directed by further "specific ambitions". With these ambitions, 'Become Yourself' declares a set of more immediate transformational values. These values usher our continuous becoming into definite directions, and thus fix a number of touchstones for what becoming *yourself*, then, would in fact mean.

The value of *singularity* is one such touchstone in the essay under discussion. Cavell refers to it as "that without which one cannot become the one one is" (2005 [2000]: 344). Hence, in light of this guiding aim, 'Become Yourself' is a matter of one becoming more *singular*, *individual*, or *authentic* (in contrast to conformity, as denounced by Emerson). For Cavell, this is a transformational value with intrinsic democratic promise, distancing 'Become Yourself' from the traditionally elitist manifestations of perfectionism. "In being universally distributed", he says, singularity "is the signal negation of elitism", even if it is "for the most part buried in distraction and conformity" (2005 [2000]: 344). Unlike transformational aims such as wisdom or perfection, that is, the potential for singularity is in everyone's purview – hence, he calls it "the sage in each of us" (2005 [2000]: 344). And this is what so greatly enthuses Cavell about the (equally democratic) medium of film: film presents a laboratory that can call into question the elitism of perfectionism. For this laboratory demonstrates how the perfectionist call to singularity, which is inevitably also a call to self-knowledge, stems from the sort of everyday manifestations of skepticism – "undramatic, repetitive, daily confrontations [...] with respect to the reality, the separateness, of another" – that remarriage comedies are so apt at calling attention to (2005 [2000]: 340). In these films, 'Become Yourself'

dictates, transformation is not the attainment of exclusive sophistication or prominence or transcendence. It is rather a matter of recovering our singular selves from the ordinary everyday – where it sits in plain view, and within anybody's reach.

Another touchstone for 'Become Yourself' that the essay elucidates is "the demand to make ourselves, and to become, intelligible to one another" (2005 [2000]: 339). From the perspective of this aspiration, to become yourself is to make yourself intelligible – as much to yourself as to the other. It is thus a call to give account of yourself, to provide reasons for your conduct, and a justification for your life; all of which is to give an account of your moral standing with the other (see Cavell 2004: 24–26, 42). Stated in terms of transformational values, we here have different permutations of the basic value of *knowledge*. As a call to make ourselves intelligible, 'Become Yourself' is about accruing *self-knowledge* (making oneself intelligible to oneself). Such knowledge of oneself – of the motivations, attractions, and aversions that precede and inform one's moral reasoning – invariably stands in need of "the perception of a friend" (2005 [2000]: 42). On the other hand, this self-knowledge in 'Become Yourself' corresponds to also becoming increasingly *knowable* (making oneself intelligible to others). That is, by giving account of yourself in a growing acknowledgment of the other, you increasingly become 'yourself' *to* the other. This becoming-known to one another Cavell considers foundational to social consent, the possibility of community, and a shared life in pursuit of happiness.

The demand to make ourselves intelligible at the same time foregrounds the *mode* of transformation most vital to 'Become Yourself'. Even though acts of making oneself intelligible obviously call upon the mode of contemplation, Cavell's version of perfectionism ultimately anchors these acts within the mode that I distinguish as *ministering* – self-transformation realized through either ministering to, or being ministered to by another. In Cavell's case, the emphasis falls on the latter. He underlines that moral perfectionism is essentially concerned with "the responsiveness to and examination of one soul by another" (2005 [2000]: 339). Indispensable to Cavell's outlook on self-transformation, therefore, is the inevitable intervention of the Friend (who Cavell insists is an equal, not a guru-esque mentor) who guides the progress of 'Become Yourself' through everyday instances of confrontation and conversation (2005 [2000]: 336; 2004: 27). In light of the particular importance that Cavell attaches to (conversion through) conversation, the role of the Friend, in more concrete terms, is to initiate the classical transformational technique of *dialogue* as a means to (mutual) self-change (see Hadot 1995: 89–93). Of course, our embarking on this transformational exchange of words is almost never a

preconceived project, but something that develops, can develop, from a relationship that is a necessary given. 'Become Yourself' only becomes intentional self-transformation as a response to – or better, an acknowledgment of – the unavoidable moral claim that the Friend *will* make on you. Elsewhere, Cavell notes that though any moral outlook will attach significance to friendship, only perfectionism "places so absolute a value on this relationship" (2004: 27). And it is ultimately the presence of a demanding form of friendship – that with the marriage partner – that establishes Cavell's remarriage comedy as such a captivating study of how to 'Become Yourself'.

4.3 *Open-Ended Ends*

By the end of Cavell's "The Good of Film" essay, however, I find myself still suspended on the edge of my seat in unfulfilled anticipation of what its title had promised. In proposing to speak about 'the good of *good films*' (such as remarriage comedies), Cavell went on to say much about 'the good' *in* those good films (namely, their affinity with the 'Become Yourself'-type of conception of the good, as prescribed by Emersonian perfectionism). But, at the end of the day, he has said surprisingly little about 'the good' that these films may be *for* – to *us*. That Cavell is leaving this question hanging is no doubt something that he is fully aware of. In his closing paragraph he indeed proposes to formulate "some initial answer" to the question of the good of "that species of film" that he distinguishes as remarriage comedy (2005 [2000]: 347–348). Yet there, again, he only goes on to note what he takes to be an important perfectionist issue raised by these films (in this instance: the ethico-political significance of the remarriage comedy's affirmation of the ordinary, and acceptance of compromise with respect to the pursuit of happiness); and then he ends, cryptically, with the observation that the lingering influence of remarriage comedy on recent films is "worth stopping over" (2005 [2000]: 348).

What I would have loved to hear more of from Cavell is not the perfectionism that these films thematize for our sake, but the potential perfectionism that the films inspire, evoke, even demand, from us, their viewers. There can be little doubt, as the French Cavell-expert Sandra Laugier (2018: 143–144) sums up, that Cavell finds in popular culture the same capacity for pedagogy and self-transformation ('education for grownups') that he attributes to philosophy; and that he sees 'good films' as providing viewers with moral resources for working through their own sentiments and situations. So surely in his essay, then, Cavell is gesturing us towards the thought that the same conception of the good *in* good films – their preoccupation with personal transformation of an Emersonian kind – marks also the good *of* good films, their ethical value to us. That is to say, in the process of busying themselves with 'Become Yourself',

Cavell's good films inevitably appeal to their viewers to 'Become Yourself' too. Yet why not say it outright? This, I believe, would be much too didactic for Cavell's particular pedagogical ambitions. To leave the question hanging, thereby inviting his reader to answer it, is precisely to enact the perfectionist claims that he is trying to drive home.

With the exemplar of the remarriage comedy still in mind, the invitation at hand is thus to consider how the kind of self-transformation that transpires *between remarriage couples on-screen* may be echoed by *the viewer's exchange with* the remarriage comedy screened. This is 'Become Yourself' construed as a transformational ethic of film, which effectively gives us Cavell's perfectionist vision of the cinemakeover. Most striking in this vision is that film (the remarriage comedy as 'good film') now steps into that crucial role of 'the Friend', who initiates for the viewer a transformational mode of ministering through its own forms of confrontation and conversation. For instance, insofar as remarriage couples find between them occasions of "making themselves incomprehensible to others" (Cavell 2005 [2000]: 334), it seems that they can confront the viewer with the same everyday crises of skepticism, of separation of the other, that they confront one another with on-screen. One could go as far as saying that the remarriage couple comprises 'a Friend' who reaches beyond the screen to form a 'couple' with the viewer. And, as part of *this* couple, the viewer can just as much expect "the responsiveness to and examination of one soul by another" (2005 [2000]: 339). With the confrontations that they present to one another, and to the viewer, the remarriage couple thus invites the viewer into a transformational dialogue not unlike their own, despite the fact that this particular 'Friend' cannot exactly reciprocate the moral demands that it puts on the viewer. (Cavell's moving image of skepticism reminds us here that although the screened couple is made present to us, and therefore may make certain claims on us, we remain absent to them.) Even if not an occasion to make ourselves intelligible to this particular 'other', then, the remarriage comedy as Friend may at least call us to self-knowledge. It turns us inward to our own unattained-but-attainable-selves by means of conversations that it stages and, thereby, elicits. This purpose of remarriage comedy, according to 'Become Yourself', is rather like Cavell happens to describe the effect of reading an Emerson essay: seeing that the remarriage comedy is just as much a "conversational text", it too provides "an exercise in coming to oneself" (2005 [2000]: 337).

In the end, however, this vision of the cinemakeover depends on whether we as viewers can *acknowledge* a remarriage comedy as 'Friend', urging us to 'Become Yourself'. Recall Cavell's observation that many 'good films' remain unacknowledged only because we are so familiar with them. In the event of

such a failure of acknowledgment, the call to 'Become Yourself' – though it can be accepted or refused – is one that we are unaware of altogether.

So perhaps the true 'Friend' in this scenario is Stanley Cavell, who, like his hero Emerson, writes to guide his readers to acknowledgment – of good films, in this case, and, by implication, the good that they hold for us. I do not believe Cavell is out to attract any particular praise, or devout reader-disciples. I would say (as I assume he would) that with his writing he is simply taking up the conversation that good films extend to him – by virtue of their capacity to sustain and reward his criticism. If anything, his writing as an act of conversation stems from his readiness to be a reader himself, whether a reader of other philosophers or a 'reader' of Hollywood films. Cavell conceives of philosophy as "a kind of reading", by which he has in mind "a kind of responsiveness" (2012: 32). "Philosophy's first virtue", for Cavell, "is responsiveness, and it is in reading and responding to the works of those who have come before us, and doing so together, that we learn who we are and how to become who we are" (Cavell quoted in Norris 2017: 7).

In Cavell's writing – which is writing as response, an extension of how he reads – we therefore have the clearest instance in this chapter of a film philosopher who performs, right before our eyes, his personal attempts at transformation. What Cavell's writing most immediately testifies to is his embrace of *writing as a technique* of self-transformation. Cavell's writing *is* his act of practicing responsiveness. To read his writings on films is to be at the very site of him cultivating and honing his own responsiveness to them, in a continual search for ways-with-words that might do justice to the experiences and insights that they afford (see Sinnerbrink 2014a). Considered from another angle, as he explains in an interview with James Conant (1989: 58–61), Cavell finds in the concrete practice of written prose a means to foster the *conviction* that formal argument and poetic persuasion cannot provide. In light of everything considered up to this point, it would not be unreasonable to translate him as saying here that writing offers him a means to foster *acknowledgment* – especially, acknowledgment of the ministering that good films, as conversational Friends, afford him in his personal efforts to 'Become Himself'.

Yet the perfectionist self-work that Cavell performs *before* us, he surely also intends to be *for* us. By that identical technique of writing, prompted by the ministering of film as Friend, Cavell in turn becomes a Friend offering transformational ministering to his readers. After all, much like remarriage comedies, "Cavell's texts, many of which revolve around and end with questions, consistently seek to enact and elicit a *conversation*" (Norris 2017: 6 [emphasis added]). Certainly, Cavell will hope that for his reader there is self-becoming to be gained from conversing with him alone. But, more so, the conversation

aspires to prepare the reader for her own conversations with as-yet unacknowledged good films.

So why is it, then, that Cavell 'won't get to the point'? One reason, it seems, is that for his readers to be guided to open ends is itself to practice 'Become Yourself' in the way that good films, as Cavell suggests, teach us to.

5 'Ready Yourself': Model Viewers and Their Preparatory Ethics

As I hope to have demonstrated, the motive of personal transformation at work in film as philosophy finds a range of distinct expressions, each suggesting an ethic of transformation that I distinguished under the heading of a bumper sticker. These stickers – from 'Know Yourself' to 'Lose Your Self', whether an ethics of self-concentration or self-expansion – help us to piece together an outline of the cinemakeover; of what it may look like when we seek self-transformation through film.

However, our picture of the cinemakeover still has one gaping hole in need of filling. Peeping out from underneath most of the stickers laid out in this chapter is a prior sticker that reads 'Ready Yourself'. It speaks of the ideal viewers posited by film as philosophy, and the preparatory self-work that they are supposed to do. The tale therefore has a twist: many philosophers not only envision self-transformation as the *effects of* film as philosophy referred to by the bumper stickers. Paradoxically, they envision also certain forms of self-transformation as *preconditions for* film as philosophy – that is, forms of self-transformation required from the model viewer *before* any of those sticker-stated-transformations can ever occur.

In what follows, I develop a brief account of what I call the 'preparatory ethics' of film as philosophy, starting with the question of the model viewer of film as philosophy, and ending with a number of critical observations.

5.1 *Aspects of the Model Viewer*

I take it to be an uncontroversial claim that every account of film as philosophy, with the transformational ethic that it entails, relies on an image of its ideal viewer.[31] The issue here is to identify appropriate lines along which to unravel the general model viewer that has taken shape in this chapter.

31 Besides the model viewers envisioned by these philosophical accounts of film, there is also the related matter of the model viewers that particular films *themselves* solicit – much like Umberto Eco argued of 'model readers' of texts (e.g. Eco 1979: 7–11) – which unfortunately falls beyond the scope of my brief considerations below.

An obvious aspect to begin with is the implied model viewer's assumed philosophical proficiency. Most philosophers take their hypothetical viewer of films-as-philosophy to be a (film) philosopher or a theorist. For a viewer to discern how films do philosophy, let alone appreciate its implications, she has to be versed in relevant philosophical theories, perhaps even theories of film. Although, clearly going against such assumptions concerning the viewer as philosopher-theorist, one or two philosophers do opt for an everyday, non-theorist model viewer. The clearest example in this chapter comes from Noël Carroll, who sets out to establish how films do 'popular philosophy' that primarily engage the 'layperson' of the general public – not the scholar (see Carroll 2013: 174–175). Yet, unsurprisingly, in order for such a popular philosophy to take effect, Carroll still has to qualify the ideal layperson as at least a 'reflective viewer' who forms part of a 'thoughtful audience' (e.g. 2013: 168, 171, 214–215).

Alongside inherent qualities, such as the viewer's philosophical proficiency, a model viewer encompasses also an ideal manner of engaging with film. That is to say, for films to do philosophy, the viewer must assume an appropriate attitude or state. Considering that the topic in question is philosophy, it may come as a surprise that not a single case of film as philosophy in this chapter calls for a distanced, critically detached viewer. Put differently, the philosophers concerned have no interest in an attitude of 'suspicion' (Ricoeur 1970: 32–36). As we have seen, the required manner of engaging with film may lead to such a critical attitude (for example, in Dan Flory's socio-critically inflected conception of film as philosophy), but such an attitude is never set as a precondition for an ideal encounter with film as philosophy. In fact, most philosophers discussed in this chapter would say that a critical attitude will only undermine the idea of film as philosophy. If the whole point is to see how *films* initiate or do philosophy, then a predetermined critical posture gets in the way of film actually taking the philosophical initiative. For this reason, philosophers in this chapter imagine more or less the inverse of the critically detached viewer: their model viewers are wholly immersed, even to the point of deception (Wartenberg), open and receptive (Mulhall, Sinnerbrink), 'fused' with the films they are viewing (Frampton, Brown), and surrendered to their affects (Sobchack, Del Río). One could even think of this inverse attitude as the viewer pursuing a certain passivity – the notion of which I have already highlighted in Rushton's explanation of Deleuzian spectatorship.

However, our understanding of a model viewer cannot stop at the viewer's most appropriate attitude or state. It must also include those things that the viewer must do in order to be in that state. This question of *praxis* is key to the model viewers posed by film as philosophy. The issue is not only whether the viewer is adequately immersed, receptive, or passive, but – prior to

that – whether the viewer also takes the measures necessary to ensure those states. Most accounts of film as philosophy indeed count on their ideal viewers taking such measures. These implied measures or preconditions ensure that viewers engage with films in the appropriate manner, which then enables the films to bring about their philosophical effects.

Because these measures invariably involve some form of work on the self, they can be described in the same ethical-transformational terms that I have used up to this point: they can be reconstructed as practices of self-transformation. Admittedly, these instances of self-transformation are of a different order from 'Know Yourself', 'Remind Yourself', and the rest of the bumper slogans in this chapter. Hence I distinguish this order of transformational ethics as 'preparatory ethics'; and I band them together under their own, separate bumper sticker slogan: 'Ready Yourself'.

5.2 *The 'Spirituality' of Film as Philosophy*

So how exactly do we demarcate the preparatory ethics in film as philosophy from the rest of the transformational ethics explored in this chapter? Not for the first time in this book, Michel Foucault provides a convenient reference point to help elaborate the concept under discussion: *preparatory* ethics. This elaboration requires but the briefest of visits to Foucault's 1982 course at the Collège de France, released as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005). He wraps up the very first hour of the course by distinguishing 'spirituality' from 'philosophy', within the context of the philosopher-subject's relation to truth. Suppose we call 'philosophy', says Foucault, the form of thought that examines the nature and extent of the subject's access to the truth. If this is 'philosophy', then:

> we could call 'spirituality' the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call 'spirituality' then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth. (2005: 15)

Here, Foucault deals with "*preparatory transformational* work on the subject"; Rabinow (2009: 37 [emphasis added]) could not put it any better when he refers to Foucault's topic in these terms. Foucault draws attention to a class of transformational techniques through which a subject may render herself 'available' to the truth. Yet, clearly, these techniques are preparatory, as Foucault goes

on to explain, since they are understood to open subjects up to return effects (what he calls 'rebound' effects) that the truth may have on them. By gaining access to the truth, therefore, subjects gain enlightenment, beatitude, or tranquility from the truth in return (Foucault 2005: 16; Rabinow 2009: 37–38).

The rough comparison that I wish to make between Foucault's concept of spirituality and the preconditions of film as philosophy is as follows: film philosophers in this chapter suggest the need for viewers to carry out transformations on themselves in order to have 'access' to film as philosophy, as it were (which substitutes Foucault's 'truth'). Gaining such 'access' would be for viewers to fully discern, grasp, or experience the particular form of philosophy that films potentially (are said to) 'do'. Then (under these right conditions) viewers can anticipate the resultant film as philosophy to have certain transformational effects on them in return (as with Foucault's 'rebound effects'). My comparison thus also applies to Foucault's overall distinction between philosophy and spirituality. One can distinguish between the 'philosophy' of film as philosophy, i.e. *theoretical* formulations of the nature of film as philosophy; and its implied 'spirituality', which concerns the *practical* self-transformation required to be open to film as philosophy and to receive its transformational effects. To say films can do philosophy is one matter. To say that film as philosophy brings about self-transformation in the viewer is another. But to speak of the measures that viewers need to take – so that films can do philosophy, and so that their transformational work can take effect in us – is a matter of an altogether different order. What Foucault would call the order of 'spirituality', then, corresponds to the special class of transformational ethics that I demarcate as preparatory ethics.

All of the transformational ethics explored up to this point rely on the help of films – films doing philosophy – to initiate self-transformation in viewers. 'Ready Yourself' concerns transformational ethics that *precede* that encounter, the *prior* self-work by which the viewer becomes *available to* the help afforded by films. In saying that preparatory ethics are 'prior', and that they 'precede', I mean it in a conditional, constitutive sense – not in the chronological sense. The viewer's preparatory measures, as philosophers imagine them, may well co-occur with the act of viewing film. But such measures remain 'prior' or 'preliminary' self-work inasmuch as they make possible both the viewer's access to film as philosophy and, consequently, its transformational rebound effects – even while the viewer may be 'in the moment' of watching a film.

In short, preparatory ethics (self-transformation *that ensures* film as philosophy) enables transformational ethics of film (self-transformation *afforded by* film as philosophy). 'Ready Yourself' paves the way for 'Lose Yourself', 'Blow Your Mind', and the rest of the ethics defined in this chapter. In fact,

preparatory ethics lies at the heart of the project of film as philosophy *per se* – even prior to any consideration of the transformational effects that such films may yield. Why? Because film as philosophy, whichever way you want to construe it, requires that we attend to films precisely *as philosophy*, and not merely as films. Only doing the self-work that comprises such attending will give you access to film's philosophy, and the potential rebound effects that it holds.

5.3 *Ascetic Preparations and Ethics of Interpretation*

Having clarified what I mean by preparatory ethics, let us now consider the specific nature of this ethics within the project of film as philosophy. The issue of preparatory ethics is most endemic to bold conceptions of film philosophy, and has already proved unavoidable my discussions of Sinnerbrink, Frampton, Bersani and Dutoit, as well as Rushton's account of Deleuzian spectatorship. Here I offer a more general impression of preparatory ethics in the field, by taking a look at the predominant modes, domains, and values at stake.

In terms of transformational modes, most evident is the general *ascetic* character of the measures that film philosophers expect from the viewer of films that do philosophy. One way or another, that is, the sufficiently prepared viewer must enact some form of preparatory giving up. Typically guiding this imperative are the transformational values of *openness* and *receptivity,* as well as particular conceptions of *immersion* (*absorption*) or *passivity* towards film.

Below I list some prominent cases in point, taken from relevant philosophers surveyed in both this chapter and the next. Note especially the common ascetic imperative that runs throughout these examples, whether implied or articulated head-on: each posits a mode of self-work in which viewers must withhold, suspend, disregard, relinquish, renounce, or surrender.

From 'Expand Your Mind':

1) *Stephen Mulhall*. In light of his claims of how films can be philosophy in action, Mulhall (2008: 145) regrets viewers who "permit their preconceptions about the nature of film to dictate what their experience of particular films might be". Ideally, viewers should instead allow "experience of particular films to teach them what ethics, art, imagination, emotions and thinking might be" (2008: 145). To not do so, he says, is a failure of 'self-questioning', as well as a failure "to be sufficiently open to one's experience" (2008: 145).
2) *Simon Critchley.* Addressing the films of Terrence Malick as a form of philosophizing, as we will see in the next chapter, Critchley (2005: 139) cautions against reading "from cinematic language to some philosophical meta-language". Doing this, he explains, "is both to miss what is specific to the medium of film and usually to engage in some sort of

cod-philosophy deliberately designed to intimidate the uninitiated" (2005: 139). He equally rejects Malick's *own* early philosophy career as the source for a philosophical 'pre-text' or 'meta-text' by which to interpret Malick's cinematic images (2005: 138–139).

3) *Steven Rybin.* Also in the next chapter, Rybin echoes Critchley in a similar assessment of Malick's cinema as philosophical thought. He advises that "film philosophers must encounter the cinema itself – the cinema *by itself* – as non-textual, non-meaningful, non-philosophical" (2012: xxxi). According to Rybin, Malick's films call for aesthetic immersion without the external interventions of philosophical texts that aim to master their meaning. The work of film philosophy begins in asking "how a film immerses us" and "why that engagement is valuable" (2012: xv–xvi).

4) *Rupert Read.* In his reflections on *Avatar*, which came up under 'Expand Your Mind', Rupert Read emphasizes – repeatedly – that the film can only do the transformational work of opening our eyes, if the viewer manages to 'really *see*' the film (2015: 88). To do this, viewers must *leave behind* a particular bias: "the too-knowing cynicism that immunizes us against hope by insisting that nothing good can come out of anything that is popular or money-making [i.e. a mainstream movie like *Avatar*]" (2015: 90). Much like the film's protagonist struggles to truly see things for what they are, Read argues, the viewer too must struggle to see *Avatar* – despite its status as a Hollywood money-spinner – for the source of self-transformation that it in fact is (2015: 94).

From 'Sense Your Senses':

5) *Vivian Sobchack.* Recounting some central tenets of the phenomenological tradition that informs her approach to cinema, Sobchack states that phenomenology as method proceeds from "a commitment to the openness of its object of inquiry, rather than to any *a priori* certainty of what that object already 'really' is" (2008: 436). Central to this commitment, in the foundational Husserlian formulation, is the making explicit and consequent 'bracketing' (*epoché* – a *suspension*, or *setting aside*) of presuppositions about the object of phenomenological enquiry. Bracketing presuppositions rooted in acculturation and habit (what Husserl calls the 'natural attitude') serves to reveal the full possibilities or 'essence' of the object (2008: 436). In Sobchack's articulation of the phenomenological method, we have seen, this bracketing of presuppositions helps disclose the richness of our sensual, embodied experience in response to cinema.

From 'Blow Your Mind':

6) *Robert Sinnerbrink.* As discussed before, Sinnerbrink's romantic film-philosophy, seeking to respond to film as a way of thinking, requires from the viewer a commitment to receptivity and openness – not only towards

what films disclose, but also to what philosophical thinking may become in response to those disclosures (e.g. 2011c: 26, 37–38, 43). This demands from viewers sufficient immersion, enabled by "the *relinquishing* of one's engaged perception, thought, and action in favor of a sensuous receptivity, affective engagement, and reflective openness towards virtual cinematic worlds" (2011c: 35 [emphasis added]). Also necessary, for the philosopher-viewer, is to *eschew* all attempts at 'theoretical mastery' over films, as well as to *avoid assuming* any 'readymade conceptual framework' or theoretical approach that is supposed to reveal a film's philosophical relevance (2011c: 43).

7) *Daniel Frampton.* Although one is easily tempted to read Frampton as simply claiming that films think, and do philosophy, Frampton is quite clear that he envisions his filmosophy as a preparatory "practice […] a strategy for being philosophical about film and seeing the philosophical in film" (2006a: 212). Filmosophy thus offers a manner of transforming (our experience of) film, which establishes the possibility for viewers to be transformed by it in return. The primary preparatory measure that Frampton prescribes, we have seen, is for viewers to *give up* technicist language about film, and instead feed their experience of films with the more suitable, poetic concepts provided by filmosophy (2006a: 100–101, 172, 212).

From 'Lose Your Self':

8) *Elena del Río.* Although Del Río argues that films generate (desubjectivizing) affection, as well as a growing awareness of affection, she does concede that viewers require a certain pre-awareness of affects for all this to take effect. That is, we have to acknowledge powers of affection in our own and other bodies – be attentive to them, even – in order for them to have transformative effects on us. The need to intuit such depersonalized forces requires that viewers *disregard* the limitations of their own visual perception – since, when it comes to affect, "it is the invisible level that is most important in a culture that increasingly depends on the visible" (Pisters quoted in Del Río 2008: 210). This, in Del Río's own words, is one of the most radical thoughts that Deleuze and Guattari have 'bequeathed' to us: "the existence of an incorporeal materialism that *calls on us to become attentive* to a micropolitics of the affections, a virtual plane, no less real than the actual, on which affects, thoughts, and desires continue to brew and transform long before and after they take a shape that we can see, name, or recognize" (Del Río 2008: 210 [emphasis added]).

9) *Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit.* The 'Lose Your Self' ethic of Bersani and Dutoit demands viewers who are willing to *give up* their commonplace assumptions about individual subjectivity; or, as they also intimate, to *renounce* the myths of subjectivity that we cling onto (2004: 8–9). On this

> point, they do accept that films may help 'jolt'/'shock'/'traumatize' viewers out of their ingrained habits of cinematic viewing, but it is still up to the viewers, as part of their 'work of spectatorship', to *allow themselves* to undergo this shift (2004: 8). Moreover, as I have made clear, Bersani and Dutoit suggest that 'Lose Your Self' through film can only occur if viewers themselves first initiate a condition of *self-lessening*. Among other labels, they refer to this preparatory condition as a 'retreat' from identity, 'active passivity', making one's self 'superfluous', opening oneself up, and being a 'subject divested of subjectivity' (2004: 9, 164–165, 177).

Clearly, the domain for ascetic self-work that the philosophers above most frequently designate is the (existing, established) *knowledge* that the viewer brings to film. In preparation for the philosophy done by film, most notably, viewers must give up their preconceptions, beliefs, and biases – especially those concerning what viewers think film's philosophy might, or should, be. Likewise, viewers must give up the philosophical concepts, frameworks, or even the technical language in terms of which they would normally want to consider a film. In short, the philosophers above all call for some measure of epistemological self-restraint. The basic mode of self-transformation required from viewers is a *contemplative asceticism*. As explained before, it is an asceticism of a specifically reflective nature; it involves a giving up of things specifically in your thinking about films.

The perceived need for such ascetic conditioning of knowledge – a measured, preparatory giving up or reduction of certain elements of one's knowledge, as the philosophers above urge – marks what is in fact a perennial ethical topos in philosophical thinking, both in the West and the East. The topos of contemplative asceticism is quite evident, for example, in the long trajectory that can be drawn from phenomenological bracketing as contemplative *askēsis* (Ricoeur 1996: 38–43; cf. Gregor 2017), through Descartes' practice of assent (the systematic withdrawal of particular preconceptions or judgments), back to the Stoics from whom Descartes derives his method (Hadot 2002: 265). A clear equivalent to this in Eastern philosophy is the well-known Zen Buddhist concept of *shoshin* or 'beginner's mind', an attitude of openness that is to be cultivated by clearing the mind of its preconceived ideas, subjective intentions, and habits (see Suzuki 1970).

The topos of contemplative asceticism that I am tracing here, however, includes not only such restraint within knowledge, but also within the related domains of the *will* or *desire* that impels one to impose the knowledge – as demonstrated by film philosophers' pleas for viewers to relinquish attempts at theoretical *mastery* or *control* over films. This aspect of the contemplative asceticism – that is, for viewers to have a non-willing, actively-passive epistemological attitude towards films – finds a major common reference point in Martin Heidegger's call for *Gelassenheit* ('releasement'), a practice of

detachment and letting-be that he appropriated from the Christian mystical tradition, and Meister Eckhart in particular (Heidegger 1966). In Heidegger's ethos, *Gelassenheit* is to give up calculative and representational thinking in the interest of letting beings be; and, more generally, to eliminate every trace of willing in favor of an openness which, ultimately, 'lets Being be' (Caputo 1986: 178–179). Yet the ascetic demand that releasement places upon thought, for it to ensure the 'letting-be' of Being, is that our thinking has be strict and disciplined. That is to say, "it must resist the temptation to explain Being in terms of 'reasons', to produce a 'highest being' and a 'first cause' " (1986: 178). For this reason, Heidegger repeatedly emphasizes the *effort* of thought and meditation required to realize releasement.

The cultural prevalence of contemplative asceticism can be magnified yet further with reference to Geoffrey Harpham, and especially his work on hermeneutics (see Harpham 1992: 239–269). Harpham goes so far as to claim that the entire Western tradition of textual interpretation and criticism is invariably conceived in terms of asceticism. Any general account of interpretation, he proposes, is predicated on the ascetic imperative to resist temptation, and at least implicitly prescribes to the interpreter ways of restricting and directing her impulses (again, in the domains of will and desire) in response to a given text (1992: 239–240).

Harpham's views have an especially close affinity with the theme of preparatory ethics I have been investigating here. It is not only that his claims about interpretation exemplify the topos of contemplative asceticism at work in the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy. His claims also indicate what is essentially at stake in such preparatory ethics: that the transformational self-work that film philosophers require from viewers fits within the broader field of hermeneutics and its ethics. I grant that there is much more at stake in film as philosophy than resisting temptation and suppressing impulses that transgress the meaning-limits of 'texts'. The preparatory ethics of film as philosophy is patently guided by transformational values of *openness*, *receptivity*, *fullness of experience*, even *oneness* with film – far more so than values of accuracy or fidelity of meaning. But, even so, to situate this preparatory ethics against the larger horizon of hermeneutics raises perspectives that mutually enrich our understanding of both film as philosophy and interpretation. As for film as philosophy: it proves productive to not lose sight of the fact that these film philosophers are indeed busying themselves with interpretation; they are guiding viewers to interpret (encounter, receive, experience) films-as-philosophy; moreover, they construct different forms of ethics of interpretation, by prescribing contemplative-ascetic measures that viewers must take for their interpretations of films-as-philosophy to be adequate. As for interpretation: the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy – as but one case in the long tradition of deciding how we should interpret – offers a design for thinking specifically

about the ethics of interpretation. Like film as philosophy requires self-work to access the philosophical and transformational potential of films, or doing philosophy requires self-work to access the truth (Foucault), interpretation requires self-work to access the meaning of texts (Harpham). Any account of what the act of interpretation should ideally look like will have a preparatory-ethical dimension; it will inevitably posit measures of self-work to be taken by the interpreter, measures analyzable within the same framework that I here use for analyzing the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy.

5.4 *Questions and Problems*

The preparatory ethics sketched above represent a final – and highly significant – piece in the mosaic of the cinemakeover that emerges from the project of film as philosophy. If anything, it sets up camp right in the middle of that picture. For there is much to suggest that without the necessary measures that preparatory ethics prescribe, no cinemakeover, let alone films that do philosophy, would be able to occur.

Not surprisingly, then, it is precisely in the sphere of preparatory ethics that some of the most pressing questions regarding the cinemakeover come up. Here difficulties such as contradiction and inconsistency – things already touched upon in this chapter – come into especially sharp focus. Therefore, to bring this chapter to a close, I raise the most important of these questions as a manner of drawing my conclusions. In posing my respective questions of exclusivism, idealism, contradiction, and initiative, I start with what may be perceived as more peripheral issues, and work my way to those questions with more urgent implications for the cinemakeover and the project of film as philosophy as such.

5.4.1 Exclusivism

A first question worth raising is whether the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy encourages an undue exclusivism in our consumption of cinema (which, as many would have it, is ever *the* celebrated medium of the masses). Now one might argue that the very idea(l) of wanting films to do philosophy already expresses exclusivist intentions to elevate 'mere movies' above the supposedly impoverished popular functions that they normally fulfill. Yet the point for some philosophers (Carroll, explicitly so, but to a degree also Flory, Wartenberg and others with similarly moderate conceptions of film as philosophy) is that films may precisely do *popular philosophy*. By this, they mean that films, despite being mass entertainment, may still encourage philosophical activity and self-transformation in the ordinary, unsuspecting viewer, who has no prior commitments to making such effects occur. For

this reason, you will find, these philosophers require little preparatory ethics from the viewer. Any member of the ordinary masses should suffice as the model viewer that their moderate conceptions of film as philosophy aim to address.

However, the *bolder* philosophers grow in their claims that films can do philosophy, the weightier the 'Ready Yourself' requirement becomes that they set for viewers. And the *more important* the requirement for viewers to prepare themselves for the effects of films, naturally, the *fewer* the viewers who will in reality experience those effects. In these bold conceptions the emphasis is thus less on what films alone may achieve, and much more on what the viewer *also* has to achieve – meaning that, by default, far fewer viewers make the cut. By having to put in the extra mile of self-work, it will only be the sufficiently prepared model viewer who opens up a philosophical-transformational dimension to otherwise 'mere movies', a dimension which most (ordinary, unsuspecting) viewers would simply not be privy to. So, in effect, these visions of film as philosophy, reliant upon preparatory ethics as they are, forecasts an exclusive class of viewers: they are the ones who are ethically prepared, the self-mastering viewers, the select few who manage to fashion the ordinary activity of film-going into an extraordinary event.

I find a striking example of how preparatory ethics entails such elitism in Rupert Read's (2015) assessment of *Avatar,* visited twice already in this chapter. He defines for *Avatar* a model viewer who must strive – in the face of his or her prejudices about Hollywood blockbusters – to 'really *see*' the film, and thereby reap the true benefits that it has to offer (e.g. 2015: 88). In an earlier, related piece on *Avatar*, Read (2013) stresses the same need for seeing-beyond-prejudices, so much so that his tone on this occasion borders on that of a guru. He notes, for example, to cynics who look down on or dismiss *Avatar*:

> If you find yourself resisting what I am saying in this paper, it may be because what I am saying is wrong, or silly, or whatever; or it may be because you are *not quite ready* to embrace these teachings and make them your own. (2013: online)

The irony here is that Read himself is denouncing what he sees as an *intellectual* elitism that rejects films like *Avatar* as mere popular entertainment. He points out that it is tempting "to remain on the barren heights of cleverness and intellectual superiority" and "to look down on a popular film, to 'prove' yourself superior to it – because then you are by implication 'superior' to the tens or hundreds of millions who love it" (2013: online). Yet, in denouncing such intellectual elitism, Read supplants it with what I take to be an even more

exclusive *ethical* elitism. Next to the millions who love the film, and the supposedly disapproving intellectual elitists who reject the film, he postulates a third hypothetical group of viewers: those who manage to find in themselves the necessary courage and openness to see the film for the philosophical depth that it truly has (2013). This group of ethically prepared viewers, it appears to me, is even more select than the group of intellectualists who supposedly look down on *Avatar*, much as they are also set apart from the millions who may be assumed to *simply* love the film (given its box office results). Therefore, in spite of his own objections against elitism, Read draws his own elitist line between two classes of viewers: the majority, who 'merely see' the film (whether they be disapproving intellectualists or lovers of the film); and the select few, who 'really see' the film – because they excel at the ethical self-preparedness that enables this privileged way of 'seeing'.

This sentiment in Read really only echoes a much more pervasive exclusivist tendency in transformationalist discourse: to set apart some higher plane of existence that not only transcends (and often devalues) the ordinary-everyday, but also remains out of reach for the majority of average Joes who will never master the specialist self-transformations that define that plane. In Read's case, as with the preparatory ethics posed in other bold conceptions of film as philosophy, that higher plane concerns an *extra*-ordinary way of viewing film. I would like to think that, ideally, notions of film as philosophy should be concerned with how films may do philosophy to the transformational benefit of most viewers. However, the preparatory ethics of the philosophers highlighted here suggest quite the opposite. The inherent demands for self-work set by their bold positions imply that film as philosophy and its ethical benefits are by no means open and available to all. According to their visions, instead, the cinemakeover becomes exclusive, the privilege of a select few; the ones who manage to transform and elevate their reception of films above that of the ordinary masses.

5.4.2 Idealism

Of course, the philosophers concerned may respond to the above by saying that there is nothing wrong with what I label 'exclusivism': genuine self-transformation by its very nature cannot occur without effort, which implies that not everyone can or will make the cut. Fine – this is a position that many of us could live with. Yet, if we then drop the potential charge of exclusivism, we would do well to ask whether all of this is in fact achievable. Is the preparatory self-work required by the bold versions of film as philosophy feasible, something that *anyone* could in reality achieve? Simply put, are these preparatory requirements not overly idealistic?

The idealism that I have in mind here concerns the recurring contemplative-ascetic requirement that the 'bold' camp set for their model viewers. To what extent can you really give up *your* frameworks, concepts, assumptions, and beliefs – so that film can have enough room to do *its* philosophy? Is it at all possible for viewers to exercise such restraint in the knowledge that they bring to films? I struggle to see how such a cognitively open, assumption-free encounter with a film (or any other experience, event, text) could exist or be fostered (not least, as I will still get to, because that hypothetical attitude itself proceeds from very definite assumptions). Even if a viewer somehow succeeds in completely giving up her philosophical assumptions, with the ambition of causing the film's own philosophy to emerge, at some point I take it that she nevertheless needs to *recognize* the film's philosophy and the relevance that it may have for her. And, surely, this recognition can only occur with reference to existing assumptions, concepts, and knowledge that must breach her supposedly unprejudiced openness to the philosophy done by film.

This set of issues abound in the approach to film as philosophy argued for by John Mullarkey (2009a; 2009b; 2011), who we last met at the end of Chapter 1. Recall that Mullarkey's approach radicalizes the idea of cinematic thinking: he argues that if we are to take seriously the idea that films think in their own distinctive ways, "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 [emphasis added]). In Mullarkey's uncompromising outlook, therefore, we need to rid ourselves of *all* philosophical judgments in order to be entirely open to what the 'philosophy' of films might turn out to be(come). Again, I simply do not see this as humanly possible. And, apparently, neither does Mullarkey. His core claim is that all film philosophers fall short of this requirement. While they may express the desire for *films* to think in their own way, they still define this thinking in *philosophy's way*, meaning that film's thinking is still pre-figured and ultimately reduced by the particular assumptions that philosophers have about philosophy.

So how, then, does Mullarkey hope to meet his own uncompromising requirement for letting the philosophy done by films simply be whatever it becomes? I have already addressed his Laruelle-inspired solution of 'non-philosophy' in the first chapter, where I also expressed my doubts whether it actually succeeds in ridding film as philosophy of any pre-figuring definitions of philosophy. Let me only point out here the preparatory practice that appears to go together with Mullarkey's solution. On occasion, Mullarkey speaks of the need for what he calls a process of 'unknowing' (Mullarkey 2009b: 14, 211, 214–218), a notion also echoed by Daniel Frampton in calling for an 'unlearning' of our usual conceptualizations of the cinematic experience (see Frampton

2006a: 212). This process of unknowing accepts that the potential philosophical contributions of film may well be unforeseeable, even unrecognizable, in terms of our existing definitions of philosophy, seeing that cinema thinks in a *non*-philosophical way. Mullarkey's process of unknowing is therefore not something that philosophy gives to film. It is instead an effort to unknow or 'unphilosophize' philosophy so as to allow for the event of something new – something that *could* be 'philosophy' – to emerge from film (2009b: 214).

Is the 'unknowing viewer' who Mullarkey envisions someone who can realistically get away from *any* definition of philosophy, though? It does not seem so. For one thing, Mullarkey himself reserves a necessary place for such definitions in the process of unknowing. In this process, which is immanent in the relationship between the viewer and film, as he argues, it is film that 'unphilosophizes' philosophy by *resisting* the philosophy that we bring to it. Film "breaks our definitions of what is and is not 'thinking' by retrospectively creating new possibilities in the wake of its own actuality"; and thereby it co-engenders new, unanticipated possibilities for philosophy (2009b: 213). Therefore, even though Mullarkey urges that we must first of all get away from any of our definitions, his line of reasoning at this point portrays the viewer's definitions of philosophy as integral to the work of unknowing. As I see it, the model viewer implied here is someone who is simply willing to put forth her definitions before film – so that, in a mode of *contemplative endurance* rather, those definitions may be resisted, abraded, or even broken in an ongoing process of revision and regeneration. This strikes me as a far more practicable alternative to a strictly ascetic ideal of 'getting away from' any of our philosophical definitions. But, construed in this way, the process of unknowing runs counter to Mullarkey's overall ideal for film as philosophy: since the process inherently acts on the viewer's definitions, the ongoing 'philosophy' that emerges from film will still in one way or another remain a function of those definitions.

Suppose, however, the hypothetical 'unknowing viewer' of Mullarkey *can* realistically get away from any definition of philosophy. Then it may well be that film will have enough room to do something new that could become philosophy. However, once this 'something new' comes about, at some point we would still have to recognize it as such. And would this not require that we resuscitate some of our discarded definitions of philosophy in order to appreciate the new philosophy that film (may) have produced? Mullarkey does advise that the knowledge at stake in this process is an emergent and performative knowledge; not knowledge as a representation, but knowledge as an affect (2009b: 206). "Hence", he argues, "we do not know or define what the new is because the new *can only* be felt – that is why it is new, why it is a 'shock to the system', and why it consequently engenders new thoughts" (2009b: 211).

My response to this is that even the most minimal of considerations of the new – as to how it makes us feel, its effects, or indeed the new thoughts that it engenders – cannot proceed without activating the order of knowledge and definitions that the new supposedly defies. I am assuming that the new and its implications are things that we in fact want to take up. If not, we embrace an otherworldly idealism according to which film does new things, yet things that can only remain new as long as we do not pin them down to our impeding definitions or explanations or appropriations. In that case, we opt to simply let the 'something new' of film be, to let it run its own course within its own, ineffable order – that of knowledge as an affect; something that we can at best only feel. Then film as philosophy and its potential value to us amounts to just that: nothing more than an (indefinable) feeling.

5.4.3 Contradiction

Another problem with the degree of epistemological self-restraint that film as philosophy often demands from viewers is that it courts contradiction. The avid logician will no doubt have a field day dissecting the issues hatched by the preparatory requirement to give up one's philosophical beliefs about film (also: assumptions, definitions, or frameworks, all of which I henceforth bundle up in the term 'beliefs'). As I see it, the preparatory requirement to give up one's philosophical beliefs is not necessarily a contradiction; but the hypothetical act of *meeting* the requirement is a clear-cut performative contradiction. To give up one's philosophical beliefs in accordance with the ascetic requirement (assuming this could be done) would mean that the accepted requirement being met, as well as that the philosophical beliefs by which it is motivated, are *not* given up. You would be performing a mental state that is incompatible with the very state that you claim to achieve. This hypothetical act – that of the film philosopher who succeeds in giving up her philosophical beliefs about film – can thus be characterized, to borrow a term from a different context, as 'self-performatively incoherent' (Clouser 2005: 82–87).

For all that, one hardly needs recourse to logical nitpicking to see *the* contradictive elephant in the room: precisely by urging a drastic abandoning of our philosophical beliefs about film, philosophers still affirm very definite beliefs about film and film as philosophy. Most essentially, these philosophers affirm a belief *in film* as such. One way of articulating this belief is that the film somehow 'knows' more than we do; and, therefore, that our receptive submission is the most appropriate response to it. Stanley Cavell, to name an example, is always ready to acknowledge the claim of such knowingness on us, as when he notes that "we must let the films themselves teach us how to look at them and how to think about them" (1981: 25). This is the main contradiction of the

precondition that we have to give up our beliefs about film: it exonerates at least one basic belief of undeniable philosophical significance. It is the belief that the film knows something, or does something, that is worth letting ourselves in on.

This belief in film marks a telling resemblance between the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy and what Colin Davis (2010) expounds as the practice of 'overreading'. Overreading refers to philosophical interpretations of literature and film that push – and often completely overrun – the boundaries of how we normally gather meaning from a work. (Both Cavell and Deleuze happen to belong to the 'canon' of overreaders that he identifies and explores.) Central to the hermeneutics of overreading – and its resemblance to preparatory ethics – is the extent to which it really is a matter of faith. As Davis puts it, the overreader has an "unshakeable faith that the text *knows something* that it will reveal to us if only we ask it in the right way" (2010: 166). Accordingly, Davis labels this a 'hermeneutics of conviction', by which he means to contrast it to both 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and hermeneutics as 'the recollection of meaning' (cf. Ricoeur 1970: 28–36). Like the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy, the hermeneutics of overreading does not set out to unmask works of art in terms of its own critical agenda. Yet neither does it have a straightforward confidence in the possibility of retrieving meaning: it requires conviction, even to the point of desperation; a conviction that (and note also here the exclusivist sentiment that I diagnosed before) the work "rewards the *devoted attention* that is paid to it because there is in it a kernel of knowledge which *only the most unstinting reader* can discover" (Davis 2010: 185 [emphasis added]).

Both the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy and the hermeneutics of overreading thus proceed from a supposed belief in the knowingness that films and related works possess. However, apart from submission and attentive devotion to that knowingness, Davis points out, the overreader may also need to apply some necessary pressure or even violence to a film, in order for it to yield to us what it knows (e.g. 2010: 185). Surely this is where the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy and overreading part ways? After all, the former's asceticism is about guarding viewers from pressuring films with their own beliefs, assumptions and frameworks. Or is it not? Does the belief or expectation that a film somehow 'knows' not place upon it, paradoxically, *that very pressure of preconception* which film philosophers want us to abandon?

The contradiction of the preparatory asceticism inherent to film as philosophy thus grows grander. The basic gesture of openness is to refrain from governing films with our preconceived philosophical beliefs about them. Yet when we give up those beliefs in the name of letting films 'speak' for themselves, we impose on them the deeper belief that they do in fact have something to

say. And I do mean 'impose'. For it may turn out that film – as James Elkins (1996: 594) once described a drawing – is simply a "stubborn, silent object" with zero stake in the philosophical expectations that we bring to it. However, film as philosophy innocently passes over this option by the very nature of its endeavor. Philosophers' ambition *to allow* films to 'do' philosophy rides on a belief that in principle already *obliges* the films to do so.

An ironic implication of the contradiction proposed here is that the film philosophers concerned (and also Davis' overreaders, for that matter) are not as far away from hermeneutics of suspicion as they think. They simply harbor a more particular breed of critical agenda. Theirs is the suspicion that the unassuming medium of film hides its profound knowingness from us. And they work at unveiling this knowingness (or epistemological agency or power – as this kernel is conceived of in many ways) to reap the philosophical and transformational rewards that it supposedly promises. Yet indispensable to this project is a belief *in film*, a fervent conviction, which these philosophers – in breach of their avowed ascetic stance – have to impose *on film*.

Philosophers do not ask themselves whether this belief is justified. It is a pre-theoretical commitment that their entire project takes for granted. And, even if not justified, I suspect that they would still seize on it as the "enabling self-delusion" (Davies 2010: 186) that sustains the promise of films doing philosophy.

5.4.4 Initiative

My final question regarding preparatory ethics concerns the locale of the 'engine room' by which the cinemakeover is understood to run. In short: where lies the main initiative for the supposed self-transformation that follows from films doing philosophy? Or even more to the point: who initiates and sustains the cinemakeover – the film or the viewer? The answer should be simple enough. 'The film, of course'. Is that not the point of the cinemakeover: that *film* is the prime mover behind the transformational process; much as film is the mover behind its *own* philosophy? By now, it should be obvious that the lingering theme of preparatory ethics suggests quite the opposite. Yet not so obvious, perhaps, are the pressing implications that this holds for the transformational ethics of film as philosophy, and even film as philosophy as such.

Let us take stock: the view that film as philosophy elicits self-transformation constantly goes with delicate disclaimers which in one way or another imply to 'Ready Yourself'. It states that the ideal viewer here is the prepared viewer. And the prepared viewer is the viewer who accomplishes those measures of self-work (notably: acts of giving up, letting go, submission, opening up, becoming

aware) that will ensure access to a transformative experience of film in the act of philosophy. This proviso of preparedness, we have just seen, proves to be especially prominent in bolder conceptions of film as philosophy, with the more dramatic 'ethics of self-expansion' that they tend to impress.

What is notable about preparatory ethics as precondition is the circular shape that it gives the envisioned process of transformation. Reminiscent of circular reasoning, the cinemakeover must *begin with* what it is in fact meant to *achieve*. That is, viewers have to engage in self-transformation (in preparation *for* film) in order to achieve self-transformation (*through* film). In the case of 'Lose Your Self', as I have shown, these two orders of self-transformation even involve transformations of the same kind. There, in preparation to 'Lose Your Self' through film, you must already in some way or other have lost (lessened, passivized, or abandoned) your individual selfhood. In a manner of 'like attracting like', therefore, you must lose your self to 'Lose Your Self' some more. And the preparatory ethics of film as philosophy in general is not all that different. Here the circularity only widens beyond self-loss: overall, you must *transform* yourself to *be transformed* by film (which is to actually be transformed by *your* transformed experience *of* film).

If the point was not yet clear enough, this back-to-front circularity brings it home: because preparatory self-transformation must *precede* the transformational effects of film as philosophy, the burden of initiative in the cinemakeover rests squarely on the viewer. As many accounts in this chapter suggest, it is up to viewers to *enable* film to perform its transformational work on them. They must at least open the door for film to work; and possibly even maintain that work once it gets going.

This conclusion however holds challenging implications. Most pressingly, it calls into question the real extent to which *film* would actually do the work of personal transformation. Frankly, how can we be so certain – considering how the initiative rests on the viewer – that films will do any substantive transformational work at all? Even if it seems to actual viewers that film does do such work, they would not be able to know whether it is the effect of the film or the effect of their own transformational efforts.

What I fear, consequently, is that the supposed transformational affordances of film may be far more incidental – or worse: dispensable – than philosophers would like to believe. If a film's effect comes down to the ethical-preparatory excellence of its beholder, then who is to say that a poem, a painting, or a pleasant conversation could not be put to the exact same transformational use? The deciding factor, after all, is the openness, giving up, or submission of the beholder – which can be brought to bear on film, yes, but presumably many other things too. Film can lay no special claim to transformational effects just

because it happens to be (one of many possible things) intended for such effects by someone with the necessary ethical attitude.

Where does this leave the idea of the cinemakeover then? The delegation of initiative to the viewer undermines what I take to be the core incentive for the cinemakeover. The incentive is that films promise a distinctive and potent basis for our ideals of personal transformation inasmuch as *they* (possess the agency needed to) make this ethical appeal on *us*. Yet when films require our imbuing them with that appeal, as the precondition of preparatory ethics suggests, the incentive goes out the window. Film then no longer promises to be a necessary agent that leads us to otherwise-unattainable ethical outcomes. Instead, it offers only an incidental *accessory* – one of many possible substitutes – to its transformation-bent beholder, upon whose initiative film's ethical contributions essentially depend. The cinemakeover thus loses both its presumed potency and distinctiveness as a potential source of personal transformation.

The above issues concerning initiative prove equally pressing to the overall project of film as philosophy itself. After all, we would not be talking about the cinemakeover here if it were not for the project of film as philosophy pointing to it. And we should keep in mind that the philosophers discussed here pose the need for preparatory ethics for exactly that: the sake of films doing philosophy. Only once we allow films to do philosophy, they suggest, viewers can expect the transformational effects of those films. Preparatory ethics is thus a precondition for the cinemakeover only insofar as it is first the precondition for film-doing-philosophy, with its supposed effects, to occur. The real burden of initiative on the viewer, therefore, is to enable film to do philosophy – for self-transformation through film could only follow from that. So, predictably, the same circularity noted a moment ago enters the equation here. For films to do or to be philosophy, we need to *attend to them* as (doing) philosophy. Hence, the preparatory ethics: we need to do the self-work of instilling in ourselves the restraint (or openness, abandonment, etc.) that will let us attend to film as philosophy (and not, for example, as the mere movies that we would ordinarily take them to be). We may even need to enlist concrete techniques such as *writing* to help cultivate the "particular kind of attending" that film as philosophy requires (Baggini 2011: 211–212; cf. Sinnerbrink 2014a).

Just as predictably, though, the same circularity gives rise to the same pressing questions. If the initiative for film as philosophy depends on the viewer's preparatory acts, to what extent can we say that it is film doing the philosophy? Can we tell apart the film's supposed philosophical work from the self-work by which the viewer has to evoke it? Are we not confusing the viewer's work for the film's philosophy? An interlocutor may object that I am forcing an 'either-or' onto a process that obviously unfolds as an interaction between film and

viewer. But remember: the key tenet of film as philosophy is, if not that film can enact its own form of philosophy, that film can at least take the initiative in a philosophically relevant exchange with its viewers. Yet eating away at this tenet, and the transformational ethics it gives rise to, are constant nods to the self-work, the *actual* initiative, that the viewer has to bring to the table. By having to own up to the precondition of preparatory ethics, film as philosophy undermines film's claim to philosophical initiative, and thereby its own *raison d'être*.

To conclude: if the admittedly exciting notion of transformational ethics of film that emerged in this chapter is to have any future, the question of initiative is the one that, to my mind, needs to be addressed most urgently. Considering the significant degree to which film as philosophy and its effects appear to be dependent on preparatory work and a specific preparatory ethics, we need to tighten our theoretical grasp of the divide that separates the viewer's ethical initiative from the supposed initiative of film. No doubt, in the cinemakeover as we have been imagining here, both will have their part to play. But we need more insight into, for instance, how films may nevertheless prompt preparatory self-work in the viewer; and whether such promptings might in turn require yet earlier 'pre-preparatory' acts from the viewer. Whatever the questions, though, we would do well to start clearing up where the 'Ready Yourself' work of the viewer ends; and the active, transformational work of film begins. That is, if such work can be reasonably attributed to film. For it might prove to be the case, to snipe a final bumper sticker-slogan from Hamlet, that 'the readiness is *all*'…