

**Worldview-philosophy-through-film:
An Account of Cognitive Discomfiture in Viewer-engagement.**

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ABSTRACT

The philosophy of painful art has a lineage that goes back at least as far as Aristotle's treatment of tragedy. Since the 1990s, the problem of cognitively confusing, negatively valenced film-viewing experiences has achieved a renewed significance because of the flourishing of the puzzle film and its unresolvable variant, the impossible puzzle film. This trend, which has unfolded within the emergence of mass art films and a mass cinephilia that have popularised the techniques of art and avant-garde cinema, may be best embodied in the films of David Lynch and specifically in his early masterwork, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), a disorienting tale of incestuous sexual abuse.

To investigate this topic, I adopt the piecemeal, mid-level approach that Noël Carroll has established within the broader research programme of cognitive (biocultural) film theory. Accordingly, I construct a rich-disclosure framework that accounts for cognitive discomfiture film-viewing experiences from well-founded, constructive explanatory material within film theory and the philosophy of film, and interdisciplinary support from social scientific research in media psychology. The most important of these sources are David Bordwell's neo-formalist model of conventional and unconventional cinema; Todd Berliner's reappraisal of the challenging dimensions of mainstream film; Torben Grodal's PEMCA flow/freeze model of viewer-engagement plus the saturation-acceptance and upstream intentional access that it encompasses; Noël Carroll's drama-of-disclosure and erotetic, criterial prefocusing; and Aaron Smuts' integrative, non-hedonic theory of rich, value-constitutive film-viewing. The latter two sources contribute a further five important elements to the integrative cognitive-emotive model of viewer-engagement, namely folk psychology, asymmetrical, 'twofolded' character engagement, negatively valenced affects, maieutically guided moral involvement, and narrative practice with therapeutic potential.

Thereafter, I complete the overall conceptual framework by positioning rich-disclosure within the broader field of eudaimonic viewing practices. This basically involves linking the foregoing film theoretical/philosophical material to the film-based popularisation of

philosophy (movie-made thought experiments), to William Charlton's relatively uncontroversial definition of academic philosophy, and to Mark Koltko-Rivera's systematic worldview theory. It produces a sense of popular philosophical, eudaimonic viewer-engagement that is characteristically mentalisation-dependent, worldview-involving, and conversational.

In the end, the problem of motivated viewer-engagement with cognitively irresolvable impossible puzzle films is addressed in terms of, what I call, worldview-philosophy-through-film. The latter is defended in two moves: A primary, reflective, and descriptive definition of this gradually emerging, graded kind of viewer-centred popular philosophy. And, a secondary, integrative set of considerations of possible objections to this preliminary effort to characterise and account for an important-but-unaddressed filmic popularisation of philosophy via painful viewing experiences that hold the promise of renewing viewers' insights into their most basic beliefs.

Keywords | worldview-philosophy-through-film, eudaimonic viewer-engagement, cognitive film theory, impossible puzzle films, mass art, Noël Carroll, Torben Grodal, popular philosophy, mentalisation, David Lynch.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is almost impossible to enjoy a first attentive viewing of David Lynch's film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).¹ Indeed, very few viewers, critics or film scholars were positive about the film during the period of its initial release, which is not difficult to explain. The film has a jarring, unconventional two-part structure and most of the leading characters introduced in the first part [2:45–33:49] – FBI agents working on a murder case and our apparent hero-investigators – do not appear in the longer, second part [33:50–2:12:14].² The latter relates a tragic tale of incest, sexual abuse and personal degradation, and it ends with a father brutally killing his daughter, which most viewers explicitly knew beforehand was going to happen. It has a distracting flashback structure, presents its main clues in obfuscating ways that resist sense-making and narrative integration, and is held together by supernatural elements that make diegetic orientation deeply problematic and ultimately irresolvable. The film ends with an apparently 'happy,' though markedly unconvincing and generally unsatisfying denouement, leaving many vital plot issues unresolved. Nonetheless, many viewers are prompted by their initial viewing to watch the film³ multiple times and, over the past two decades, a growing number of amateur and professional cinephiles have been re-evaluating the film as a Lynchian masterwork.

This suggests a problem which involves two interconnected main issues. First, the nature of an identifiable category of difficult, confusing, sometimes irresolvable, and apparently unsatisfying films. And, second, the makeup of the common motivational framework of the substantial, and evidently growing, segment of viewers who choose to watch these

¹ Much the same can be said about Lynch's recent art television series *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), a follow-up set 25 years after the original *Twin Peaks* series (1990-91). It is closer in spirit to *Fire Walk*, which is supposed to be a prequel ("the last seven days of Laura Palmer") to the original series.

² Whenever it is relevant, I will include this formatted time code for references to a particular moment or sequence in the film: [hour:minutes:seconds].

³ Throughout the dissertation I will, as has become common practice, use "film" for the whole range of "media that now comprise the art form of the moving image" (Carroll 2006d:183); that is, for computer-generated and/or recorded, representational, moving-image media (Currie 2016b:642), rather than as a reference to celluloid or to the platform through which the artefact is accessed. I take this to include narrative television series but not computer games. This usage is also in line with David Lynch's repeated references to the new *Twin Peaks*-series as "an 18-hour movie" and to the idea that "television is a new art house" (Ryan 2017).

films. The latter is especially interesting because the global mainstream film market is, of course, dominated by more easily processed and supposedly more entertaining or escapist material. In addressing these issues, I will, in summary, argue that we are dealing with a new-fangled, mystifying and important form of mainstream viewer-engagement which deserves to be both more carefully studied as well as encouraged and cultivated.

The topic would not be pressing and worth investigating if films like *Fire Walk* were very rare. Since the 1990s, however, more challenging, complex films with convoluted narratives, metaphysical twists and irresolvable mysteries – forms traditionally reserved for international art films – have been increasingly popular in productions aimed at world-wide (across Europe, North America, Asia, and many smaller national cinemas) mass audiences (Buckland 2009b:6, Campora 2009:119, Poulaki 2014:37, Berliner 2017:66). While this phenomenon is reflected well in the increasingly common usage of the term "post-classical art film" (Todd 2012:5), I, risking the unnecessary proliferation of labels, prefer the even simpler label of the 'mass art film.'⁴

While the latter may seem contradictory (or at least counterintuitive), it reflects a quite radically new direction in global film production and viewer-engagement practices which combines some of the main aims and characteristics of both mainstream, commercial cinema with those of the (largely European) art and/or (largely American) independent film traditions. Galt and Schoonover have charted how art cinema – which developed since the 1960s, with a "foundational Eurocentrism" and championing of "serious cinema" – has been superseded, around the turn of the millennium, by an ambivalent and complex, global "diversity of locations and types of production" (2010:4). It now includes feature films, often produced outside of America and Europe, that lie "at the margins of mainstream cinema, located somewhere between fully experimental films and overtly commercial products" (ibid.:6). As one would expect, this trend in film

⁴ Herein I am taking a lead from Noël Carroll's book-length examinations and scholarly validations of film as mass art (1998a) and of art-horror as a mainstream genre (1990), as well as his reference to "mainstream 'art houses'" (Carroll & Seeley 2013:53).

production and consumption has produced a parallel growth in scholarly debate and publications about the nature and aesthetics of these mass art films.

In the following six sections of this introductory chapter I sketch a preliminary outline of the general problem of mass art films, introduce a conceptual framework that contextualises the problem and explain my approach to addressing the problem. This overview will be filled out in the individual chapters of the dissertation.

1.1 The basic problem of motivated, mainstream, cognitive discomfiture, film-viewing experiences

This study focuses quite narrowly on motivated, cognitive discomfiture, viewing experiences of recently mainstreamed mass art films.⁵ Minimally, such viewing experiences necessarily involve both pronounced cognitive confusion and accompanying negative affect. In these cases, the provoked confusion will primarily be cognitive rather than, for example, perceptual, spatial or temporal, though these dimensions are often important sources or aspects of cognitive confusion. These films mainly exploit and undermine inference-making processes so that viewers cannot understand clearly or with certainty what is going on, or what has actually taken place, in the film's diegetic world (story-world). Likewise, in these cases negative affects 'accompany' the cognitive confusion in the sense that it is caused by the confusion, though other sources of negative feelings, such as, for instance, moral disgust may play a significant role in causing the cognitive confusion itself. For example, many of the confusing scenes and sequences in *Fire Walk* – such as, taking a simple example, when a character appears in two places at once – evoke contradictory and incommensurable thoughts and feelings that typically involves cognitive dissonance. Viewers' attempts to reduce such dissonance may then, in turn, produce further feelings

⁵ To avoid repeated use of the longer phrase, I will often simply refer to 'cognitive discomfiture experiences.' However, this should not be taken to imply that what can be said about such film-viewing experiences also applies to other or general cognitive discomfiture experiences.

of frustration or vulnerability in the face of film elements and/or ideational responses that cannot be constructively integrated.

Overall, cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences leave two basic facts to be squared. On the one hand, the fact that in everyday life most people do not enjoy and, therefore, actively avoid, as far as we can, needless and/or fruitless cognitive confusion. On the other hand, the fact that many viewers do not avoid cognitively confusing, negative affect-producing film-viewing experiences but, instead, prefer and pursue the kinds of films that typically produce such experiences.⁶ Moreover, many of these viewers choose to watch such uncomfortable and disturbing films multiple times, fully aware of the negative experiences involved. Of course, knowing what to expect beforehand may make the repeat viewing experience less negative (e.g. less jarring or more manageable) but may just as well make the experience more negative (e.g. more uninteresting or frustrating).

While many philosophers have tackled the problem of this kind of motivated negative viewing experience by addressing it in the form of a logical paradox, I will, following Jerrold Levinson's (2013:xi) lead, simply approach it as a practical enigma. Our uncertainty over the nature and value of these viewing experiences will not be effectively neutralised by argumentatively resolving the (abstract) contradictions that these experiences imply (De Clercq 2013:120).⁷ For viewers, whether exacting philosophers or thoughtful everyday cinephiles, the mystery of these viewing experience is likely not only to remain intact but might even increase with a better understanding of the ambiguities and incongruities that are involved. I will start, instead, from the straightforward experiential and anecdotal evidence that the viewing experiences of puzzling mass art films like *Fire Walk* are, for a significant number of viewers, both, and

⁶ I have been in this 'group' since seeing Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) as a teenager in the late-1980s. It is a key motivation for my interest in the topic and provides many of the intuitions and first-person experiences that drive my research and reflection.

⁷ Foreshadowing the overall arc of the dissertation, this allows for the possibility that attentive viewers are not only aware of this kind of problematic viewer-engagement but also that reflecting on its implications may be a key source of the value of such experiences.

somehow simultaneously, deeply unpleasant *and* valuable (or appreciated).⁸ While, for instance, much of the film's narrative or characters' identities might not make sense, the overall aesthetic viewing experience none the less 'makes sense' to its suitably engaged viewership, and is, therefore, not shirked but actively sought out.

Cognitive discomfiture viewing is a topic within the broader area of aesthetics that has come to be known as the philosophy of painful art. It is common practice within the different philosophies of painful art to historically contextualise and trace the issue back to Aristotle's classical treatment of the paradox of tragedy. Thereafter, the problem of painful art is usually charted through modern treatments of the sublime, ranging from Hume to Nietzsche (Carroll 1990:161, Levinson 2013:xi). However, while the current discourse has not produced a particular, dominant or generally accepted theory of painful art (De Clercq 2013:111), it has largely moved beyond a primary focus on either tragedy or the sublime (Smuts 2013:126), and I will, therefore, do the same.

In recent years, American philosopher Aaron Smuts has been the most prominent, film-focused contributor to the philosophy of painful art. He has comprehensively charted and assessed a range of competing approaches to the problem of painful art. To address the shortcomings and to incorporate the best aspects of other approaches, Smuts (2009a:51-53) proposes a "rich experience theory"; that is, a theory of value constitutive painful viewing experiences. Accordingly, viewers ideally value these relatively safe, but unpleasant, cognitive discomfiture experiences for the possibility that they may yield first-person, experiential knowledge about the world and our different roles within it.

While a rich experience theory – supported by recent findings in the social sciences (see Oliver, Bartsch & Hartmann [2014] for an overview) – provides a solid foundation for explaining the viewing experiences of mass art films, it needs to be reworked and

⁸ This is different from the coactivation or affective blending of opposing, "largely mutually exclusive" viewer emotions (such as sadness and happiness), which does happen but it is "unpleasant, unstable, and often short-lived" and rare because it is a "poor guide for behavior" (Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo 2001:692).

adapted to account for a recent category of mainstream, cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences. Miklós Kiss refers to these post-classical narratives, which unwaveringly evoke experiences of thoroughgoing confusion and interminable perplexity, as "riddle plots" (2013:247-248). Thereafter, Kiss and Willemsen (2017:3-5) expanded this work to produce the first book-length, cognitive-psychological examination of the – "so far theoretically untouched" (ibid.:27) – cognitive challenges and attractions of increasingly popular "impossible puzzle films."⁹ Representative examples that provide a sense of the family resemblances, range and diversity of this recent mainstreaming include *Donnie Darko* (Kelly 2001), *The Intruder* (Denis 2004), *Primer* (Carruth 2004), *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (Alfredson 2011), *Under the Skin* (Glazer 2014) and *Arrival* (Villeneuve 2016).

While quite a few filmmakers have made impossible puzzle films, no filmmaker's oeuvre is more obviously defined by or has contributed more to the popularisation of this sub-genre than that of American director David Lynch, who was awarded an honorary Academy Award for lifetime artistic contribution in 2019. Interestingly, the impossible puzzle film tag was already foreshadowed in Ernest Mathijs' description of Lynch's "steep and wild puzzle narratives" (in Schneider 2007:490). Though this characterisation is typically based on Lynch's so-called 'Los Angeles Trilogy' – *Lost Highway* (1997), *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006) – first credit should in fact go to *Fire Walk*.¹⁰ This often-neglected Lynch film was released in 1992, predating *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino 1994), the film commonly recognised for initiating the current cycle of mainstream puzzle movies.¹¹ Almost all of the analyses and illustrative examples that I offer in support of concepts, distinctions and arguments will be taken from *Fire Walk*.

⁹ I came across and acquired a copy of this volume late in the process of writing the dissertation and would probably have approached the research and writing process somewhat differently if I had it as a starting point. It has been encouraging, though, to find some of my wording and emphasis confirmed by their approach.

¹⁰ The creators of the *Cavaliers Do Cinema* blog (2013) considers *Fire Walk* the "most hated of all in Lynch's filmography," position the film as the first film of a different, "overlooked trilogy" (with *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*) and nominate it as their bold choice for "most underrated movie of all time."

¹¹ The first fully developed precursor is probably Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980). This big budget star vehicle's confusing complexity, open-ended ambiguities, inconsistencies and paradoxes link it directly to the current (impossible) puzzle film cycle. Its supernatural elements, theme of childhood abuse and collapse of a trustworthy perspective (see Leibowitz & Jeffress 1981) also make it a forerunner to *Fire Walk*.

1.2 Overview of the scaffolding for a proposed solution

Against the background of Smuts' treatment of painful art, I will attempt to construct a plausible solution to the problem of cognitive discomfiture film-viewing based on material from three current areas of moving-image theorising: (i) foundational film theoretical sources on narrative cinema and puzzle films, (ii) recent cognitive (or philosophical) theories of viewer-engagement, and (iii) the ongoing, animated film-as-philosophy debate.

The foundational, first-level sources, support and fill out Smuts' rich experience theory. Bordwell and Thompson's (2013) neo-formalist theory of conventional and alternative narrational and stylistic strategies provides many of the concepts needed to explain how puzzling films undermine narrative conventions and narrative coherence. Their approach links straightforwardly with Todd Berliner's (2017) emphasis on how most mainstream (Hollywood) films traditionally, and still typically, attempt to maximise mass audiences' aesthetic pleasure by offsetting easy comprehension with modestly novel, complex, dissonant and ambiguous cognitive challenges. The recent ongoing boom in the production and consumption of a diverse range of mainstream puzzle films has motivated various, systematically expanding accounts (including those of Bordwell, Branigan, Buckland, and Elsaesser) of their nature and aesthetic-workings.

On a second level, the so-called cognitive turn in film theory has been propelled by a varied range of mutually engaged philosophers of film and/or philosophically oriented film theorists. I have selected the viewer-engagement theories of two main theorists, namely Noël Carroll and Torben Grodal (sometimes linked via the work of Carl Plantinga), because their work productively complements, improves and complicates each other, and provides valuable conceptual resources towards coherent reflective equilibrium on cognitive discomfiture experiences. More specifically, I will integrate their positive positions, which often prominently feature cognition and evolutionary explanations, on six topics: goal-driven viewer-engagement; agency and intentionality;

asymmetrical, 'twofolded' film-viewing; negative affect; moral involvement; and (therapeutic) narrative practice.¹²

On a third and final level, the film theoretical and cognitive material will be integrated with material from the ongoing debate about the philosophical capacities of film, as charted by Thomas Wartenberg and Noël Carroll, with specific emphasis on the latter's account of movie-made thought experiments. This will be related to popular philosophy and the popularisation of philosophy (e.g. in the work of Daniel Dennett), mainstream films with philosophical meanings (via Bordwell and Thompson account of implicit and symptomatic meanings), as well as to the real-world relevance of academic philosophy.

This broad conceptual framework will be supported throughout with recent social scientific research from the field of Media Psychology. A decade of ongoing transcontinental, self-report research within modern, secular cultures has produced a distinction between entertainment experiences that are (in classic Aristotelian phrasing) hedonic ("pleasure-seeking") and eudaimonic ("truth-seeking" or "meaningfulness-seeking"; though 'spiritually edifying' is, of course, closer to the original etymology) (Oliver & Raney 2011:989).¹³ It offers a corrective (also supported by Smuts) to the research tradition of the preceding three decades which erroneously assumed the primacy of hedonic motivations in media consumption. Instead, it recognises viewing practices that involve wrestling with life's meaning, truths, and purpose in the pursuit of well-being (flourishing) (ibid.:984-988). This focus on eudaimonic viewing processes and motivations has often been linked to "appreciation" as an important explanatory concept in both social scientific media theories (e.g. Oliver & Bartsch 2010) and theorising in the humanities (e.g. in the work of Carroll and of Berliner to which I will

¹² An alternative approach or further comparative research could include Stanley Cavell's (1971, 1981, 1996, 2004) influential work on cinema. Cavell's recognition of the philosophical capacities of popular films and his treatment of film-viewing as a way to overcome the traps of human subjectivity may be productively linked to the cognitive approach.

¹³ The samples for these studies are usually taken from so-called WEIRD (western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic) populations or societies (see Henrich et al. 2010), but the research results reveal experiential (conceptual) possibilities that can be productively discussed and applied without implying that these are being generalised wholesale across different cultures.

often refer). The concept typically covers viewing activities like the interpretive elaboration of a film's implied meanings and/or of the thoughts and emotion that it has evoked.

1.3 Conclusion foreshadowed: viewer-centred worldview-philosophy-through-film

Noël Carroll (2002:8-12) has (repeatedly, with shifting emphases) argued that and illustrated how viewing experiences mobilise viewers' pre-existing cognitive resources in ways that make these resources salient and, thereby, accessible for reflective refinement. When amplified by the saturation-acceptance experiences that are evoked by unresolved interpretive hyperactivation (Grodal 2006, 2009b), this kind of accessible-and-salient-making and revaluation may involve viewers' most basic, foundational beliefs or worldviews. To include the latter, I turn to Mark Koltko-Rivera's comprehensive psychological worldview theory, which defines worldview as the "interpretive lens" or foundational "set of assumptions about physical and social reality" that shapes a person's perceptions, affects, cognitions, and actions (2004:3-4). On this understanding, a worldview is a bottom-up "parent" structure of a person's cognitive schemas, abstract concepts and expressed beliefs (ibid:24-25), and it, hence, only indirectly refers to an umbrella-like summation of their most basic beliefs or to generally recognised philosophico-ideological perspectives, such as a scientific materialism.¹⁴ The thematic content and unyielding interpretive ambiguity of *Fire Walk*, as I will for instance show, is likely to prompt "suitably prepared" (Carroll 2002:4) viewers to reorient their understanding of the supernatural/everyday causes of evil actions.¹⁵

¹⁴ This approach is reminiscent of American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars' inspiring characterisation of the "manifest image," the world as it seems in everyday human life, filled with sensory experiences, inanimate objects, living fauna and flora, and people and their "stuff," things like buildings, finances, and artworks, but also intangibles like challenges, courage, free will, and the like (1962 in Dennett 2013:69). It stands in a puzzling relation to the "scientific image" of the world of "unsolid" molecular structures and subatomic particles, "illusory" colours, and so forth, and philosophy may be best armed to conceptually clarify how these pictures hang together. Bruce Aune has traced this distinction to David Hume's eighteenth-century contrasting of popular, theoretically unsophisticated ("external objects" rather than "subjective sensory phenomena") and modern philosophical "systems of ideas" or conceptions of the world (1990:537-538).

¹⁵ It is a secondary goal of this study to clarify the ways in which puzzle film viewers are prepared, that is, ready for and willing to engage with discomfiture viewing, via existing viewing practices.

In addition, having a worldview that adjusts to real-world experiences and which allows for reflective restructuring, depends on appropriate levels of mentalisation. Fonagy et al. (2002:3) define 'mentalisation' as the psychological process whereby we appreciate that and how the mind mediates our experiences. In other words, mentalisation reflects the degree of a person's understanding that there are second-order, representational processes mediating their mind-dependent access to and experiencing of the world. Hence, it is a prerequisite for the ability to witness the interplay between one's worldview and one's unfolding experiences.

From this foundation I will attempt to show, firstly, how cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences may activate and facilitate this kind of mentalisation-dependent accessible-and-salient-making of viewers' fundamental belief systems. And, secondly, I will argue that this allows for an ideal form of popular philosophy or philosophy-through-film-viewing for viewers who have not been formally schooled in philosophy.¹⁶ To the extent that the popularisation of philosophy is geared towards introducing the general public to basic ideas and methods from academic philosophy, it does not aspire to the latter's rigorous professional standards for generality and explicitness or for avoiding imposition and banality (Wartenberg 2009, Carroll 2013b). Accordingly, I will examine the nature and significance of this kind of viewer-centred, popular philosophising, which, despite being founded on aesthetic experiences, need not be gratifying or disinterested in the for-its-own-sake sense (Carroll 2008c:145-147). Puzzle film viewing experiences that, for example, involve moral engagement may, instead, be both very disquieting and practically useful.

1.4 Purpose, goals, and motivation

Based on the foregoing, I will address the issue of cognitive-affectively painful viewer-engagement by attempting to answer three closely interconnected, conceptual

¹⁶ This avenue remains open to professional philosophers, but I suspect that it is an unlikely option because they would be more prone to imposing pre-existing philosophical content or to philosophical film interpretation, which would obstruct the more elementary, more popular philosophical kind of worldview revision that I am positing for regular viewers of mass art films.

questions. First, what is the nature of increasingly popular, cognitively confusing, puzzle film viewing experiences? Second, what are the general motivations for viewers' cognitive-emotive engagement with and preference for these dissonant aesthetic experiences of mass art films? And, third, how may this kind of viewer-engagement be conceptualised as a significant, popular philosophical activity or practice?

The resources for answering these questions originate within a dynamic but under-theorised area of film aesthetics: irresolvable, cognitively confusing viewer-engagement. The basic rationale of the dissertation is to explore this topic by contextualising, relating and extending recent theories of viewer-engagement and by linking these to film-as-philosophy. Hence, I propose a fairly novel, mid-level case for the conceptual and practical viability of a viewer-centred kind of popular philosophising that occurs in response to mainstreamed art films. Even though this position is almost entirely based on positive and constructive cognitive film theories, it also consolidates the most common objections to film-as-philosophy.

I will undertake the illustrative analyses and critical interpretations of the content and meanings of *Fire Walk* in the spirit of the call for re-enfranchising film as the dominant partner in philosophical film interpretation (Sinnerbrink 2010a) and in recognition of the often-overlooked eudaimonic potential of engaging with mainstream cinema. This means that I will not only strive to avoid undermining the film's integrity through the unfair imposition of theoretically-laden meanings, but I will also, more importantly, illustrate how the film (as a token impossible puzzle film) empowers everyday viewers' philosophical involvement.

The dissertation aims to complement the existing literature by contributing to resolving the problem or paradox of painful viewer-engagement by constructing a plausible solution that I call worldview-philosophy-through-film. The different viewer-engagement related elements that will constitute my overall position are all actively theorised and debated within the domain of English-language philosophy of film. The most important of these will be a selection of the works of scholars with a cognitive orientation. As such,

I focus almost exclusively on material from the past three decades and I will only briefly refer to relevant contextual material from the history of philosophical aesthetics. Important secondary goals include offering general support for both popular philosophy and the popularisation of philosophy, developing a deeper appreciation for the mainstreamed mass art film, and to contribute to the ongoing analyses of *Fire Walk*. The latter may provide another entryway into David Lynch's challenging oeuvre and, by extension, into (impossible) puzzle films. In sum, I hope to contribute to demystifying the most cognitively demanding and troubling kind of contemporary, mainstream viewer-engagement.

The overall argument of this dissertation will be that a primary value of the cognitive discomfiture of engaging with both puzzle films and impossible puzzle films lies in the prospect of gaining knowledge or understanding best characterised, when appropriately delineated, as popular philosophical. In simplified, anticipated form, my argument goes something like this: There are good – sense-making and positive affect – explanations of the appeal of popular mass art films, including generic puzzle films that involve higher levels of cognitive confusion and negative affect. However, impossible puzzle films do not allow for the same gratifications of goal achievement or puzzle completion. These films typically involve high levels of irresolvable cognitive confusion and unsettled negative affect, which suitably prepared viewers do not typically avoid, as one would expect, but actively pursue. This paradoxical behaviour may be best explained by viewers' pursuit of meaning-rich aesthetic experiences that involve a kind of popular philosophising about human realities. It is made possible by the narrative (and non-narrative) and stylistic elements of cognitive-emotively taxing films that provide viewers with opportunities to access and review their worldviews.

1.5 Methodology – description and justification of philosophical approach

The thoroughly interwoven history of film theory and the philosophy of film dates back to the early decades of the twentieth century, but it was only towards the last decades of the century that the build-up of philosophers with a wide-ranging exposure and

knowledge of film, largely because of the many familiar technological advances, quite suddenly precipitated a rich, expansive and mutually-engaged philosophical discourse on film (Carroll 2008c:1-2). These English-language philosophers of film generally avoided the 1980s "social turn" in the humanities which found expression in more politically inflected, cultural studies-oriented film/media studies (ibid.; Sinnerbrink 2010b:84).¹⁷ Film theory in the latter mould has proceeded, for example, in Thomas Elsaesser's ideologic-symptomatic explication of puzzle films in terms of wider sociological (and economic) realities and changes, such as a nihilistic Western *zeitgeist* which has purportedly arisen from a shared experience of, among other things, being somehow dislocated from the world of our existence, fated to seek meaning in a meaningless cosmos, or, in a more recent variation, being confronted with the so-called condition of "post-truth" (2017:13, 16). More analytically-inclined philosophers (and theorists) of film, by comparison, have tended to be more naturalistically disposed and influenced by the "cognitive turn" which started almost four decades ago in the social sciences (Bordwell 2009:356).

Positioned broadly within the latter research tradition, I will follow the piecemeal methodology (and clear writing style) which American philosopher Noël Carroll (2003:359-362)¹⁸ champions. I will apply this approach to construct a relatively small-scale theory of motivated, cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences which is based on an eclectic but systematised selection of well-founded, similarly small-scale theories of the relevant aspects of moving-image viewer-engagement. This mid-level approach is typified by (i) a theoretically pluralist stance that is receptive to competing explanations of mid-level phenomena, such as cognitive-emotive viewer-engagement or puzzle films; (ii) dialectical comparison, systematisation and integration of different positive positions and relevant critique; (iii) abandoning pretensions to presenting an exhaustive account or aiming for Absolute Truth; (iv) a post-positivist, but not social constructivist, perspective; and (v) working within a multidisciplinary framework that incorporates film

¹⁷ This has not precluded philosophers of film from carrying out ideological (or symptomatic) film analyses. See, for example, Carroll (1993, 1996a [originally published in 1983], 1996b).

¹⁸ Carroll is commonly recognised as the most influential (and prolific) English-language philosopher of film (Plantinga 2016).

theory, relevant social scientific research results, as well as background theories from cognitive science and evolutionary psychology (Carroll 2003:379-387).

This piecemeal, mid-level approach will allow me to progressively accumulate and systematically mould a series of positive and constructive explanatory concepts and arguments into an overall conceptual framework that describes and supports worldview-philosophy-through-film. The main concepts that constitute this interrelated framework – that account for cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences – are, in a roughly chronological order, the following: painful art; non-hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment; rich, value-constitutive viewing experiences; erotetic, disclosure-directed viewing modes (accessible-and-salient-making); the aesthetic-safe-danger-zone; the mass art film and mass cinephilia (repeat viewing and conversational settings); completable puzzle films and irresolvable impossible puzzle films; cognitive-emotive (maieutic) moral involvement; therapeutic narrative practice; affective and/or sense-making saturation and saturation-acceptance experiences; different kinds of appreciation that entail mentalisation and wonderment; movie-made thought experiments; and popular philosophy and worldviews.

While cognitive discomfiture experiences could be explained through existing, 'grand-scale' theories, the dissertation's narrower (but pluralist) cognitive approach precludes the adoption of a single-concept-explains-all approach (via, for example, Aristotelian Tragedy, the Kantian Sublime, or the Lacanian Real) or even something like a hybrid absurdist or surrealist framework. Instead, I will, working close to Warren Buckland's (2009a:6) definition of film theory, speculatively attempt to reveal the non-obvious structures and causes that underpin the relative levels of coherence and the common meaning-making activities that are involved in a particular kind of film-viewing practice. In this case, the two generally 'unobserved,' mid-level dimensions are (i) the aesthetics or 'inner-workings' (the narrative and stylistic devices) of (impossible) puzzle films and (ii) the related cognitive-emotive, discomfiture, viewer-engagement processes.

More specifically, this attempt to reveal and systematise the non-obvious underpinnings of worldview-philosophy-through-film will involve, firstly, working towards reflective equilibrium via rational reconstruction of the arguments and explanations that appear in the material selected from the philosophy of film of the past three decades. And, secondly, it will entail clarifying and systematising the network of concepts and general presuppositions (Carroll 1999:3-5) that enable and sustain motivated, cognitive-emotively unsettled viewer-engagement. This mid-level conceptual clarification will, however, also be supplemented throughout with real-world examples as well as with empirical hypotheses and research findings.

Basically, as Robert Sinnerbrink (2011a:67) recommends and illustrates in his own film-philosophy, I likewise hope to expand on existing theories within the philosophy of film by relating and drawing out the relevant implications of various viewer-engagement theories and, to a lesser extent, the possibility of film-as-philosophy. This means that the study is a selective, dialectical integration of an eclectic mix of recent theories on the subtopics at hand, rather than a comprehensive historical review of the literature on a single narrower topic. The study is undertaken in Philosophy, rather than in Film Studies or Media Psychology because the phenomenon of motivated, cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences plays out, for the time being, beyond the reach of science's "very narrow coinage of ideas that can be precisely defined, quantified, and measured" (Haybron 2008:56).

Even so, as Valerie Tiberius (2013:324) points out, the normative theories produced by "armchair"¹⁹ philosophical methods are more convincingly articulated through real-world examples and the application of current scientific knowledge about human psychology. Since this applies equally to the philosophy of film and specifically to the aspects of viewer-engagement that are under review, the study is situated within the field of applied or practical philosophy by its open border with empirical research, recognition of

¹⁹ These days, of course, usually in front of a computer screen, overmatched by access to the ever-expanding mass of relevant online material and continuously bombarded by other electronic distractions.

everyday, film-related, popular philosophical activities, and emphasis on the real-world usefulness of philosophy itself.²⁰

Bordwell and Thompson's (2013) well-established, neo-formalist approach provides the main methodology for my analyses of the film form, levels of meaning, narrative form, and unconventional narrational strategies and stylistic elements of *Fire Walk*. This will include, among other things, how the film, whether during or after viewing experiences, (i) functions as a prototypical impossible puzzle film, (ii) resists coherent sense-making and narrativisation, (iii) prompts rational-intuitive modes of understanding and saturation-acceptance experiences, (iv) engages the existential themes of morality, free will and evil, and (v) implicates viewers' worldviews and cues a search for the filmmaker-director's implied worldview. This style of film analysis matches Petrie and Boggs' categorisation of films that take ideas as their thematic focus; that is, films that help viewers to "clarify some aspect of life, experience, or the human condition" (2012:22). Their list of typical ideational film content – which all feature prominently in *Fire Walk* – includes moral claims, truths about human nature, social problems, the human struggle for dignity, the complexities of human relations, maturing personal awareness, and mystifying philosophical riddles (ibid.:2012:22-27).

In line with the overall piecemeal, mid-level approach and for the sake of engaging more thoroughly with *Fire Walk*, I have chosen only to analyse this one film, but I will also include intermittent references (including the director's surname and the film's year of release) to other relevant films. Herewith I am also supporting the ongoing call for more close film analysis within the philosophy of film (see Choi 2004, Seeley & Carroll 2014:236, 251). As Poulaki (2014:50) points out, such micro-scale analyses need to be counterbalanced with macro-scale institutional and/or structural analyses of, for instance, relevant socio-economic factors. While retaining the mid-level focus, I will, hence, include contextual considerations of the impact of technological advances and

²⁰ Alternatively, this kind of research could soon be undertaken within experimental philosophy (see Sytsma & Buckwalter 2016). Many current cognitive film theories, foundational concepts, and methodological considerations will probably be 'tested' in the near future – hopefully collaboratively – within this established, but so far minor, programme of empirical philosophical enquiry.

social changes on current viewing practices that relate to mass art films and the emergence of mass cinephilia.

The choice of *Fire Walk* also meets the requirements that Carroll (2003:364) has set for worthwhile film analysis and critical interpretation – it is a problematic and puzzling film that deviated from, violated and refashioned the generally recognised film conventions of its era, and has come to be recognised as a distinctive Lynchian masterpiece. In the early-1990s it was a vital forerunner for the variety of disorienting puzzle films that have since become 'conventional' for a fair segment of the mainstream viewing public. At the time though, as the film's initial failure with audiences and critics, and subsequent critical and cult film recognition (e.g. Marsh 2013) indicates, *Fire Walk* may have been too radical and innovative for unprepared mainstream audiences and for critics who did not anticipate the growing mainstream appeal and success of puzzle cinema.

1.6 Chapter overview

In Chapter 2 I present a more thorough overview of the problem of cognitively confusing, negatively valenced, film-viewing experiences against the backdrop of theories from the philosophy of painful art. The chapter focuses, first, on Noël Carroll's drama-of-disclosure theory and, second, on Aaron Smuts' theory of rich, value-constitutive viewing experiences and its emphasis on non-hedonic spectator motivations. By integrating these two theories, I establish a broad, rich-disclosure framework that ultimately supports worldview-philosophy-through-film.

Chapter 3 adds to this framework by reviewing a foundational set of film theoretical concepts that contextualise cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences. It covers an introduction to traditional, global art cinema; the emergence of mass art films and mass cinephilia; David Bordwell's neo-formalist theory of conventional and unconventional cinema; Todd Berliner's revisionist account of the challenging nature of mainstream films; and recent theorising of the puzzle film and the impossible puzzle film.

Chapter 4 starts with a contextualisation of the recent (biocultural) cognitive turn in film theory. It introduces Jaak Panksepp's theory of instinctual affective systems but is largely an integrated discussion of two important cognitive theories of mass art viewer-engagement, namely Torben Grodal's PEMCA flow model and Noël Carroll's erotetic model of criterial prefocusing. This addition to the rich-disclosure framework encompasses the importance of folk psychology, the asymmetry and 'twofoldedness' of character engagement, negative affect, maieutic moral involvement, and the therapeutic role of narrative practice.

In Chapter 5 I concentrate more narrowly on cognitive-emotive viewer-engagement with impossible puzzle films. The chapter situates the impossible puzzle film within the tradition of avant-garde cinema and largely focuses on the experiences of unreality, saturation-acceptance and upstream ascents to filmmakers' intentions, which are all commonly evoked by films that block the PECMA flow.

Chapter 6 offers a penultimate, transitional discussion of film-based popular philosophy and, in particular, movie-made thought experiments, general arguments against the viability of film as a form of philosophy, William Charlton's definition of philosophy (as a reference point for defining worldview-philosophy-through-film), and Mark Koltko-Rivera's collated worldview theory as a basis for worldview-involving, eudaimonic viewing practices.

In Chapter 7 I bind the foregoing chapters together into a descriptive definition of worldview-philosophy-through-film, the core contribution of the dissertation. I create this conceptual integration via a five-part, viewer-centred, popular philosophical reorientation of Charlton's definition of philosophy. As a gradually emerging and graded phenomenon, worldview-philosophy-through-film provides a reasonable account of viewers' engagement with cognitively disorienting, painfully unsettling mass art films. I conclude this account with a brief consolidation of likely objections and reflections on its implications for film production and reception, as well as for philosophy as an academic discipline.

CHAPTER 2: THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVATED, COGNITIVE DISCOMFITURE VIEWING EXPERIENCES

In this chapter I provide a systematic but basic overview of background theories from the philosophy of painful art to contextualise and describe the problem and nature of motivated, mainstream, cognitively confusing, negatively valenced film-viewing experiences. The aims are, on the one hand, to harvest mid-level conceptual resources from the different proposed solutions to the problem of painful art and, on the other hand, to appropriate a fundamental explanatory distinction between hedonic versus non-hedonic (or eudaimonic) spectatorship motivations.

To this end, the six sections of this chapter present (i) a historical orientation in terms of tragedy and the sublime, (ii) a definitional discussion of the problem of painful art, (iii) an overview of five kinds of solutions that have been proposed for the problem of painful art, (iv) Noël Carroll's drama-of-disclosure solution, (v) Aaron Smuts' general critique of hedonic solutions, and, finally, (vi) Smuts' rich, value-constitutive experience solution.

The ways in which philosophers have tackled the problem of painful art mirrors, as on some level it should, the motivational 'problems' that viewers face when confronted with cognitively challenging and dissonant mass artworks. Different viewers' (or, the same viewer's at different times) motivations for watching painful impossible puzzle films will, of course, depend case-by-case on variables like life-experience, emotional maturity, and previous viewing experiences, as well as on the range of experiences a given film invites or allows. To be clear, theory meets practice in these cases to the extent that the different philosophical accounts of the nature of painful viewer-engagement real-world correlates in the different ways in which viewers may deal with the challenges of painful viewing experiences. Correspondingly, I am working towards a fairly comprehensive, plural or multivariate framework of conceptual possibilities that sustain the range of motivated cognitive-emotive activities that make up this complex practice of difficult film-viewing.

2.1 The backdrop of tragedy and sublimity

The problems of negative emotions in art and of painful art are commonly traced back in the philosophical literature to the 'paradox of tragedy' which featured prominently in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the first important aesthetic treatise in the history of Western thought. Indeed, tragedy has been both an "extraordinarily privileged" literary mode and an important "world view" in Western culture, and it has featured prominently in the shared history of Continental and analytic philosophy (Knight 2009:536). Throughout this tradition the label has been used more broadly than only for audiences' problematic reactions to tragic theatre, encompassing, instead, the "negative, hence ostensibly unwelcome, emotions" raised by everything from horror movies to sad music (Levinson 2013:xi). So, the problem of painful art involves "far more than mere tragedy" because of the complex range of "negative emotional experiences to which audiences willingly submit themselves" (Smuts 2013:126). Laura Palmer's tragic brutalisation, moral ruin and demise in *Fire Walk*, for instance, does indeed produce the exaggerated fear, disgust, and "unpleasant dread and profound sadness" that typify horror films (ibid.), but it is also likely to evoke painful feelings of shame, anger, pity, hopelessness, ambivalence and bewilderment.

In the modern era the problem of painful art has been prominently addressed by, among others, Hume, Burke, Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, typically in the form of the "quasi-paradoxical phenomenon of the sublime" (Levinson 2013:xi). While some contemporary philosophers consider "sublimity" to be "only [of] historical interest," others see it as "a lastingly important mode of response to basic items of human experience" (Hepburn 1995:857). In a broadly Burkean sense, the 'sublime' refers – unlike in its current, everyday usage as a "synonym for 'inspiring' or 'magnificent'" – to contradictory, terror-like, "thrilling feelings" that are supposed to leave us both "fragile and invigorated" in the face of realities like the "immensity and power of nature" or the "hardships and challenges of daily life" (Hackett 2013:120). Accordingly, the sublime amounts to a unique kind of "pleasure paradoxically predicated on pain, danger and trepidation," to a kind of "suffering that can restore happiness" (ibid.).

In the arts, "sublimity" refers to the "negative, even painful, presentation of the ineffable," to a breakdown in our "ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation," which, thereby, points at what may lie "beyond thought and language" (Shaw 2006:3). While such "transcendent" experiences have usually been taken in Judeo-Christian, Western cultures as "indicators of a higher or spiritual realm" (that is, supernatural realm) this is becoming increasingly rare in responses to art because of secularism and an "increasing global awareness and media sophistication" (ibid.).²¹ Consequently, there has been a turn to the "cognitive sublime" which arises in response to artworks that are typified by a "stubborn refusal to cohere or a permanent lack of key information or both," which results in an "intentional textual recalcitrance" that cannot be reduced through "successive readings" (Abbott 2009:132). These confrontations with the "permanently unknowable" require that viewers voluntarily cease their interpretive activities and become immersed in "a state of bafflement" (ibid.). This seems like an accurate characterisation of the enduring cognitive discomfiture that impossible puzzle films regularly evoke.

Some viewers may indeed describe cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences as 'sublime' in the colloquial sense and they may even be amenable to more traditional senses of sublimity. However, the anecdotal evidence and common phenomenology²² of cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences (e.g. of impossible puzzle films) does not support the idea that these experiences are overall gratifying or 'restorative' in the sense that is generally required by explanations based on traditional senses of sublimity. Both Smuts' (2013) position on painful art (discussed in section 2.6 below) and Carroll's (1990:240) position on the attractions of art-horror – an exemplary cognitive

²¹ Stephen Batchelor's secular Buddhism similarly addresses the wonder (awe) and terror of "everyday sublime" experiences; that is, experiences of "excessive" and ultimately "unmanageable" existential realities that overwhelm and dumbfound our minds, and which, hence, remain beyond our capacity for adequate representation in language, thoughts or images (2014:37-40).

²² Here, and throughout the dissertation, I am using 'phenomenology' in the way that contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists use the term to refer to the "phenomenal aspect of consciousness, the qualitative feel, or what Thomas Nagel (1974) has called, the 'what it is like' to experience a sensation or to perceive some object" (Gallagher et al 2015:7). This usage is not directly connected to the influential phenomenological epistemology and methodologies that were first articulated by Edmund Husserl and later reworked by, among others, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre.

discomfiture genre – point towards these significant disanalogies between Kantian or Burkean characterisations of the sublime and the typically enduring 'pain' or displeasure of irremediably confusing film-viewing experiences.²³

2.2 The problem of negative emotion in art and the problem of painful art

Jerrold Levinson (2006:51, 2013:x) has offered two orienting characterisations of the general problem of negative emotional responses to art. Artworks that present or portray emotions like shame, horror or despair, that are depressing, distressing or soul-searching, ostensibly evoke corresponding – though not identical – negative responses in spectators. On that basis, spectators would be expected to avoid this kind of art or at least to consider it inferior to other works that are amusing, heart-warming, uplifting or life-affirming. Yet, many viewers actively and rationally choose and prefer 'negative' artworks, even to the point of finding such artworks the most satisfying or worthwhile kind. In addition, these viewers, as well as many critics, often explicitly praise the artworks and their makers for the qualities of the negative emotions that they arouse.

Aaron Smuts (2009a:39-40) prefers to refer to this issue as the problem of painful art, which revolves around the obvious differences between what people tend to pursue or avoid in everyday, real-world experiences as compared to aesthetic experiences. The most intriguing of these differences is arguably our apparent willingness to experience troubling negative emotions and high levels of cognitive disorientation in aesthetic contexts, such as when watching jarring, dissonant films, while having strong aversions to such unpleasant emotions and cognitive processes in our daily lives.

For Smuts (2009a:40-42), the problem of painful art is a 'paradox' in a figurative or informal sense (though many philosophers have addressed it as a formal paradox), which should rather be understood as a set of interrelated problems or issues. The first

²³ Likewise, while many puzzle films (such as *Fire Walk*) are obviously 'surreal' in the sense that they offer a "radical challenge to coherence" and "force rational viewers to confront the irrational" (Peterson 1996:118) and/or involve identity loss, doubling, unexpected and bizarre events, dreams, disintegration and death (Creed 2007:128-129), they are not specifically surrealist and, therefore, not comprehensively explicable in terms of surrealism.

and most commonly tackled is the motivational issue; that is, why viewers willingly and knowingly submit themselves to experiences that they rightly expect (or, are suitably prepared) to find uncomfortable and unpleasant. There is also the issue of the nature and range of these negative emotional experiences. And, finally, there are moral issues that arise from these experiences, such as the implications of wielding suffering as a source of entertainment. Each of these issues – one might say, the why, what and so what? – likewise applies to cognitive discomfiture film-viewing as a particular, narrower sort of painful art and to *Fire Walk* as an exemplary painful mass artwork.

2.3 Kinds of solutions to the problem of painful art

In this section I briefly sketch the different approaches to the problem of painful art without discussing the merits of the arguments or criticising the different solutions, or, for that matter, often mentioning the relevant authors or primary sources.²⁴ Instead, the aim is to provide an overview of the possible conceptual resources – or, in an empirical sense, the main variables – that may be selectively integrate into a tenable, overall explanation of irresolvable, cognitive discomfiture film-viewing. Thus, the details of the arguments for and against the different positions on painful art will only be taken up selectively in relevant sections of the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

Levinson (2006, 2013) has presented a compact categorising survey of five kinds of across-the-board explanations of "suffering art gladly," which is also part of the title of the multi-author book which he edited on this peculiar phenomenon.²⁵ In this section I summarise his explanatory categories by linking these to Smuts' (2009a) similar, but film-specific, taxonomy.²⁶ While Levinson broadly supports the merits of the first three

²⁴ This particular job has already been done, though the work is of course ongoing, by Levinson and Smuts in the referenced works. I take up the results of their labour as part of addressing the narrower issue, as should be clear, of impossible puzzle film viewing as a significant and increasingly popular form of painful engagement with mass art films.

²⁵ In this case "gladly" should be understood as 'by choice' rather than as 'with pleasure,' though aspects of the latter and its opposite are of course also involved.

²⁶ As one would expect, there is significant overlap between the five categories of explanations and a given theory, when complex or broad enough, may be placed in more than one category. For example, Levinson and Smuts, depending on emphasis, place David Hume's views on tragedy in different categories.

kinds and discounts the last two, Smuts integrates elements from the different approaches into a more sophisticated, "rich experience" alternative (2009a:51). I will follow Smuts' lead, discuss support for his approach from elsewhere and rework it (specifically to accommodate impossible puzzle films) as part of my viewer-centred, worldview-philosophy-thought-film position.

The first set of accounts proposes that the negative and unpleasant emotions elicited by artworks are compensated for or outweighed by other rewarding aspects of the viewing experiences (Levinson 2006:52, 2013:xii). Hence, when viewers rationally choose painful artworks, they expect both negative emotions and fitting compensation. In terms of classical, Aristotelian catharsis, for example, tragic dramas are supposed to purge or purify the human soul by releasing (or, at least, raising the manageability of) the disruptive, excess emotions of fear and pity. While it is very common for ordinary viewers to describe emotionally gruelling viewing experiences as 'cathartic' – and thus capture something of their descriptive understanding of the experience – catharsis is rarely defended anymore within philosophical aesthetics (Smuts 2009a:50), largely because it is psychologically discredited.

Alternatively, according to more contemporary compensatory accounts, viewers are compensated by benefits, such as learning about life, gaining moral practice and development, or the aesthetic pleasures of, for instance, an interest in the qualities of the artefact. In other words, viewers are supposed to be repaid aesthetically and/or cognitively for dissatisfying aspects of the viewing experience by other pleasurable, often meta-response-level, aspects, such as aesthetic appreciation, valuing one's capacity for sympathy, or experiencing the powers of mastering a difficult challenge, of personal endurance or of recognising the fortitude of humankind (Smuts 2009a:40). Carroll's (1990) influential "drama of disclosure" theory of art-horror is usually placed here, but I will discuss it separately in the next section because of its importance to my overall case. Viewers may indeed be said to be repaid, but with significant non-compensatory qualifications, by a film-facilitated, improved understanding of the mental processes involved in engaging with impossible puzzle films, and even, thereby, more

skilful mentalisation (that is, awareness of the mental aspects of one's experiences) in everyday events and actions.

According to a second set of accounts, the initially and normally negative and disagreeable emotions are converted or transformed specifically via aesthetic appreciation into an *overall* agreeable or enjoyable experience (Levinson 2006:52-53, 2013:xii). In other words, the complete, after-the-fact experience is supposed to be pleasurable rather than painful because more dominant positive emotions basically allow viewers to leave the pain of the viewing experience behind (Smuts 2009a:40, 43). There is, for example, David Hume's mid-eighteenth-century description of powerful aesthetic pleasures that engulf the concomitant painful emotions to produce uniformly positive, sublime experiences. Alternatively, identifiable negative spectatorial emotions may be enjoyed – for which, read 'converted' or 'transformed' – for the sake of the experience in aesthetic contexts because such emotions do not have real-life implications, require real-world actions or indicate actual 'damages.' In sum, then, these kinds of accounts recognise that viewers' experiences can be painful, but the pain may be retrospectively transformed into more complex, overall pleasurable experiences (ibid.:44). It is this recourse to the overall experience that distinguishes conversion theories from compensation theories that sometimes appear to be very similar. Ultimately, however, the problem of painful art remains because conversion theories do not adequately explain the mechanisms of the transformations involved or, more problematically, cases in which positive transformation is not (fully) possible.

A third category of accounts proposes that negative or painful emotions may be an ineliminable, essential dimension (rather than being compensated for or converted) of desirable and valuable viewing experiences, considered holistically or organically (Levinson 2006:53, 2013:xii). These may, in the case of *Fire Walk*, include the situationally appropriate fear evoked by its supernatural horror elements or the admirably humane revulsion aroused by Laura's moral degradation. In addition, immersion in the film's narrative and stylistic elements might motivate viewers to cognitively 'work through' or learn how to cope more constructively with such negative

emotions, but without these activities amounting to rewards for or overall transformations of the negative or painful emotions. I find this, in terms of both my own viewing experiences and the scholarly material discussed in subsequent chapters, to be the most generally convincing kind of explanations and worldview-philosophy-through-film may, with a few pluralist qualifications, be placed in this category.

Fourth, revisionary accounts deny that the evoked negative affects of painful art are inherently disagreeable or undesirable (Levinson 2006:53, 2013:xii). Accordingly, contingent, context-appropriate painful feelings and sensations can be unproblematically sought out and indulged because they are supposedly not innately unpleasant. Instead, it is the negative evaluations, the devaluing, of the aesthetic objects or situations that evoke these feelings that are actually unpleasant. Thus, according to such accounts there is nothing especially problematic or difficult to explain about the genre-specific dread and sorrow that viewers may experience watching *Fire Walk*. However, here I agree with Smuts (2011:242) that the negative affects are in fact straightforwardly disagreeable or painful (it feels bad), but without thereby or otherwise making such negative affects inherently undesirable and always to be avoided. This two-fold distinction is foundational to worldview-philosophy-through-film – specifically in terms of its prioritisation of saturated emotions (discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3) and appreciation – and is taken up further in the following sections of this chapter.

Fifth, and finally, there are a number of different explanations that more explicitly deflate the apparently negative viewing emotions and feelings that are evoked by painful art (Levinson 2006:53-54, 2013:xii). One explanation proposes that artistic emotions are not real-life emotions but only analogues of 'real' emotions with their own kind of hedonic tones, links to volition, and implications for behaviour. Another alternative simply denies that artworks can evoke basic, everyday emotions, allowing only for appropriately appreciative (aesthetic) responses, such as being moved by beauty or uplifted by sublimity. Yet another possibility maintains that these are only make-believe emotions, which unlike 'real' negative emotions, are not inherently unpleasant and therefore not actively avoided. More sophisticated control theories recognise that these

viewing experiences are painful, but the pain is alleviated by the viewer's voluntary control over exposing themselves to such experiences (Smuts 2009a:45). It is, then, our ability to halt the experience which is supposed to be a major difference between the motivational modes found in everyday versus aesthetic settings. However, I share Sinnerbrink's (2011:78) conviction that the emotions that viewers experience while watching films are neurophysiologically and phenomenologically real rather than, as has been argued, in some way less-than-real quasi-emotions or imaginative emotions.

2.4 Carroll's drama-of-disclosure solution to the paradox of horror

Noël Carroll published *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), an early, contemporary solution to the problem of art-horror films, almost thirty years ago.²⁷ Smuts considers it a compensatory account, horror supposedly being the price viewers willingly pay for the cognitive pleasures of the discovery (the disclosure or manifestation) of and/or joy of thinking through confrontations with "categorically interstitial monsters" (2009a:47). The 'monsters' in such, often supernatural, horror films are characteristically repulsive and disgusting "contortions performed upon the known" that mix "properties in nonstandard ways," rather than being "wholly other" or "wholly unknown" (Carroll 1990:166). Obvious instances include the many kinds of 'living dead' that populate the horror genre and the alternating Leland/Bob union in *Fire Walk*, but a subtler and more interesting example is the incestuous categorical mix of Leland as both Laura's father and her lover.

To contribute towards a comprehensive account of the paradoxical appeal and pleasure of art-horror, Carroll (1990:179-193) reviews, modifies and amplifies relevant aspects of previous attempts at explaining distressing and disconcerting art, primarily oriented by the ideas of David Hume. The issue, once again, is that almost all people tend to find the typical subject matter or "objects" of this mass art genre genuinely unpleasant,

²⁷ This text was one of the earliest sources of momentum behind the broad-based, philosophically serious study of film which started to flourish by the mid-1990s. Its only obvious forerunners were isolated works by Stanley Cavell (1971) and Gilles Deleuze (1983, 1985).

unsettling and horrifying, "rather than entertaining," and would ordinarily, as in "real life," be expected to avert such experiences (ibid.:179). Yet, in aesthetic contexts, many viewers tend to be intensely interested and gratified by the way in which the 'monster' is manifested within the overall structure of a given horror film's narrative.

Hence, art-horror narratives frequently "revolve around proving, disclosing, discovering, and confirming the existence of something that is impossible," that "violates, defies, or problematizes" the "standing conceptual schemes" or "cultural classifications" that underpin our "everyday beliefs about the nature of things" (Carroll 1990:181, 186).²⁸ In sum, these impure, anomalous, monstrous objects offer simultaneously disturbing and fascinating "frustrations of a world-picture" (ibid.:188). By extension, such 'undermining' may likewise 'disclose,' that is, reveal or highlight, our everyday, foundational worldview concepts in ways that encourage revision and may also, ideally, I will argue, evoke appreciation-based and mentalisation-aware insights into the dynamics of having a worldview.

In these terms, the most basic satisfaction that *Fire Walk* offers is supposed to arise from accompanying Laura as she "gradually realises that Bob and her father are the same being" (Newman 1992:53). It is certainly true that interested viewers may seek the morbid satisfaction of discovering who or what the monstrous Leland/Bob is and, thereby, how his/their abusive and murderous actions may be understood. But, since viewers' curiosity and interest are left largely unsatisfied because the process of discovery is left unresolved, viewers' primary satisfaction is left unexplained or, alternatively, their dissatisfaction is explained. I suspect that such a failure of discovery is at the heart of almost all first viewings of *Fire Walk*, though some viewers may intuitively have understood or 'discovered' more about Leland's damaged psyche, which may have prompted them to repeat viewings and further investigation.

²⁸ William Brown's *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age* (2013) is an inspiring, predominantly Deleuzian but also cognitivist examination of how digital technologies and aesthetics similarly portray 'impossibilities' that undermine and transform the conventional cognitive schemes that, he argues, tend to hamper a deeper understanding of our decisively "enworlded" positions (ibid.:123) .

The 'monstrous' mirroring of Laura as both Leland's daughter and his lover, for example, is one of the many cues of the key interpretive insight that Laura's tragic story (her double life) is, inseparably and co-constitutively, Leland's tragic story (his double life). Bob is an ambiguous, leftover representation of the man who sexually abused Leland as a child, whether taken either as a dissociative persona or literally as an inhabiting demon. So, Bob abused Leland much as Leland/Bob has been abusing Laura. This text-supported interpretation confusingly and painfully problematizes simple, imposed perpetrator/victim interpretations (e.g. Plummer 1997). Instead, the film encourages attentive viewers to appreciate the situation and actions from both the perpetrators and victims' (basically inseparable) positions.²⁹ This may, in turn, encourages viewers' engaged and general (proto or popular philosophical) reflections on topics like morality, free will, evil, or the supernatural – some of the main themes of *Fire Walk* to which I return in subsequent chapters.

I would argue, softening Smuts' position, that Carroll's theory of art-horror is, much like Smuts' rich experience account, a plural or many-strands solution, which encompasses hedonic motivations without requiring that the overall viewing experience should be positively valenced, and is, therefore, not simply a compensatory account. Carroll (1990:158) explicitly spells out that the generic disclosure mode which he defends requires supplementary accounts of other sub-genres or cycles of art-horror. He frequently illustrates how different explanations, such as the "admiration for the devil" explanation (viewers are attracted, awed and seduced by powerful evil figures), applies to some horror films without accounting for the genre as a whole (ibid.:163).³⁰ Agreed, most viewers are unlikely to find the 'possessed' Leland or the 'demonic' Bob potentially attractive in the stated sense that some villains may be. Instead, one of the main drivers of fuller cognitive-emotive engagement with the film necessarily includes an element or

²⁹ This kind of perspective taking stops short of fully-fledged, viewer-becomes-character identification because of, as Carroll often points out, the asymmetry between the viewers' perspectives (from outside of the narrative) and characters' perspectives (from inside the narrative) (see Coplan 2009:101). I return to this important topic in section 4.3.3 below.

³⁰ Carroll makes a similar case for how psychoanalytic theories of horror may be "germane to interpretations of specific instances of the genre" (1990:168), but ultimately "insufficiently general" for focussing too narrowly on the mechanism of repression (ibid.:178).

variant of dumbstruck fascination in the face of the disturbing and disorienting character and actions of Leland/Bob, especially since Leland comes across as a fairly conventional and well-integrated family man and productive member of the community.

2.5A general critique of hedonic solutions to the problem of painful art

Smuts' (2009a:42) review of the different approaches to the problem of painful art finds most accounts unsatisfactory because each denies, on some level, that viewers' experiences in these cases are indeed significantly painful. Hence, disagreeable and undesirable negative affects or 'pains' are variously set aside, bypassed or 'gladly suffered' via compensation, retrospective conversion, deflation, denial or, even, indulgence. However, both the anecdotal evidence from reflective fans and the everyday phenomenology of watching horror and impossible puzzle films, as well as the relevant social scientific research results (e.g. Bartsch & Hartmann [2015:3, 5-6] on the self-regulatory efforts involved in cognitively and affectively challenging media) indicate that these experiences are indeed properly painful. Viewers often describe such experiences as "on the whole, painful, distressing, gut-wrenching, and emotionally devastating, not as on balance pleasurable" (Smuts 2013:124). This accords with my own long-running interest in discomfiture cinema as well as with my experiences watching *Fire Walk*.³¹

Both Smuts (2009a:43) and an increasingly visible group of media psychologists (see Oliver & Raney [2011] for an overview) attribute this recurrent underestimation of painful viewing experiences to the commonplace (pre-2000s) assumption that human motivations are foundationally hedonic and/or affective; that is, that human behaviour results primarily from the pursuit of pleasure (especially, positive affects) and the avoidance of pain (especially, negative affects). Even if human motivations are prominently hedonic, many vital engines of our behaviour, such as the desire for self-understanding or meaningful sacrifices, are obviously not hedonically motivated.

³¹ It is particularly true of the first four or five viewings and of the expressed experiences of fellow viewers, but it has remained true even though I have watched the film more than twenty times.

Seeking pleasure and avoiding pain are, as Smuts shows, only part of the overall, human motivational picture.

Smuts (2009a:52) argues that the main reason for the mistaken hedonic assumptions of most solutions to the problem of painful art has been a historical confusion of motivational issues with moral issues. He traces this back as far as Hume's eighteenth-century treatment of tragedy. Since then, the challenge has, somewhat oversimplified, been to provide moral justifications for the pleasures that spectators derive from the misfortunes that befall the protagonists of tragic stories and plays. Thus, this moral emphasis obscured the motivational dynamics by assuming that pleasure must be the main motivational factor. In addition, once the motivational emphasis has been redirected away from hedonic factors, the moral issues that arise from painful art, such as causing undue suffering, also stand out in clearer relief.

Based on his critique, Smuts (2009a:48, 2013:123) favours "ahedonic" or non-hedonic accounts that explain how engagements with painful art can offer valuable experiences that cannot be simply reduced to positive and/or negative emotional responses. Almost no one would watch *Fire Walk* if it was *only* tragic, disorienting, frustrating, and disturbing. Instead, recognising that negative affects may be regrettable, sometimes deeply discouraging, burdens of artworks that, for example, promote insights into the human predicament or into different orientations towards the world, opens alternative, non-hedonic explanatory pathways. It also accommodates the fact that many cinephiles 'revel' in aspects of their painful viewing experiences when analysing or discussing how a particular film achieves its effects and/or their own emotional responses to, for instance, particular distressing sequences or stylistic devices.

2.6 Smuts' rich, value-constitutive experience solution

In response to earlier theories of painful art, Smuts has developed a more sophisticated, integrative "rich experience theory" (2009a:51-53) This theory has a three-part explanatory structure which avoids many of the shortcomings of previous solutions by

retaining and expanding three key insights into the multidimensional, complex nature of experiences of painful art, and does so without mischaracterising the phenomenology of these experiences.

The first important dimension of the rich experience theory is its incorporation of the "degree of safety" (Smuts 2009a:53) involved in aesthetic contexts and aesthetic experiences. Whether motivated positively by prudence or negatively by something like a lack of courage, viewers are willing to take risks which they would typically avoid in everyday contexts where the potential gains may be more easily and irreversibly outweighed by negative consequences. This aesthetic-safe-danger-zone, as I will refer to it, may encourage more intense perceptual and affective, especially intensely negative, viewer-engagement, which, in turn, may provide impetus to fuller cognitive, intellectual and reflective involvement. The same goes for cognitive discomfiture experiences, but the relative safety of these experiences overlaps with different kinds and degrees of 'danger.' These experiences may – and, to achieve popular philosophical ends, should (as I will argue) – put viewers' self-understanding and worldviews painfully at risk.

Secondly, while viewers may, over time, deal with painful viewing experiences in different ways, in most cases these experiences remain properly painful overall (Smuts 2009a:40).³² The negative or unpleasant emotions evoked are not transformed into or, alternatively, compensated for by other positive emotions that leave the overall experience positively valenced. Moreover, both the common phenomenology and frequency of these experiences plausibly suggest that many "viewers desire painful emotional responses" (Smuts 2009a:52), not in the sense of the limited masochistic cases, but, speculatively, in the sense of appreciating, within reason and contingent on the psychological makeup and cultural background of the individual, a broader range of the feelings that the human situation permits.

³² Thus, Smuts' rich experience theory would belong in Levinson's (2006:30) organicist category.

The third leg of Smuts' rich experience theory recognises that viewers are not driven only by avoiding pain or pursuing pleasure, but also by the prospect of having experiences that hold cognitive value. Indeed, viewers may value the viewing experience itself rather than simply or only the pleasures the film affords. More specifically, for viewers who prefer painful films these experiences are often valued for the possibility of yielding first-person, experiential knowledge about the world and their role in it (Smuts 2009a:53). As a case in point, engaging with *Fire Walk* may sharply reveal, first, viewers' "need for cognition" (Oliver & Raney 2011:994), for knowing and understanding, as well as, second, the emotional effects of not having this need satisfied. Nominally, viewers are driven to engage with and prefer painful, puzzling films by the desire for having such potentially knowledge-producing or insight-creating aesthetic experiences. More specifically, this may be knowledge of or at least a better understanding of the experience and effects of violent sexual trauma.

For many viewers this is likely to extend to valuing the given film or film genre and may, in receptive viewers, extend to valuing the human capacities, such as perception and cognition, that make these experiences possible in the first place. For cinephiles it often extends to valuing the filmmaker(s) who intentionally employ (see Plantinga 2011, Bordwell & Thompson 2013, Carroll & Seeley 2013)³³ narrative and stylistic techniques geared towards producing these specific viewing experiences. The latter may also encompass engaging with the perceived worldview of the filmmaker(s) (see Grodal 2005). Still, other viewers who do not find much, possibly any, value in such painful viewing experiences are likely to criticise the film and will simply avoid watching these kinds of films.³⁴

However, Smuts (2013:130-133) recognises that the value of painful viewing experiences result from viewers' engagement with the film and not, for example, from some detached compensatory benefit. But the worth of these experiences is not

³³ I discuss these topics and sources in subsequent chapters.

³⁴ Frey (2012) examines the related but often unacknowledged, largely (rigorously) unexplained phenomenon of walking out of or otherwise terminating film screenings because of, in particular, disgust or boredom.

immediately obvious, partly because they are not simply inherently valuable (for its own sake) nor only instrumentally valuable (for the sake of 'other' ends that are easy to separate out, like prompting self-reflection or awareness of mentalisation). Instead, these aesthetic experiences may be, in Smuts' phrasing, complexly value-constitutive. In other words, such experiences may, for example, constitute a more refined self-understanding for the attentive viewer that is affectively and intuitively 'grounded' and integrated, rather than merely intellectual, but also not simply 'caused' or 'communicated' via the narrative and stylistic content of a given film.

In this chapter I presented a straightforward synopsis of the problem of painful art against the backdrop of the paradox of tragedy and of the sublime, as well as an overview of potential avenues to addressing this problem. From these different options I selected two film-specific, essentially non-hedonic, multi-strand approaches: Carroll's drama-of-disclosure theory of art-horror and Smuts' rich, value-constitutive experience theory of painful art. In the next chapter I present support for an integrated and expanded perspective that for now, as a marker along the path to worldview-philosophy-through-film, may be called a rich-disclosure theory of cognitive discomfiture film-viewing. Broadly, these experiences are 'rich' in the sense of encompassing a variety of eudaimonic elements and the 'disclosures' reach as far as a renewal of viewers' extra-filmic understanding of the world. Backing for this rich-disclosure perspective is garnered from two primary and overlapping areas of film theory: first, revisionary accounts of the aesthetics of mainstream cinema which accommodates mass art films and, second, theories of the interrelated puzzle film and impossible puzzle film phenomena.

CHAPTER 3: FILMS AS PUZZLES AND THE PUZZLE FILM

In this long chapter I offer a mid-level, film categorisation-based overview of the foundational workings of progressively more puzzling narrative film-viewing experiences which, in the end, accommodates motivated, cognitive discomfiture, impossible puzzle film viewing. The source material is reviewed chronologically, with a couple of digressions, in seven sections: (i) the historical expansion of global art cinema, as background, (ii) Carroll's elementary cognitive explanation of the general power of movies, (iii) the neo-formalist approach to narrative and film form, (iv) Berliner's revisionist account of the often underestimated challenging disunity of supposedly easy-to-process mainstream films, (v) Bordwell and Branigan's proto-puzzle film theories, (vi) ongoing theorising of the thriving puzzle film phenomenon, and (vii) its more problematic, unsolvable version: the impossible puzzle film. The aim is to expand and solidify a combined rich-disclosure framework that can support a more comprehensive and convincing account of recent trends in difficult, cognitively disorienting, mainstream film-viewing.

3.1 The emergence, globalisation, and mainstreaming of art cinema

Influential American literary critic Norman Holland appears to have been the first scholar who explicitly noted and attempted a “guess at the psychological appeal” of a new popular “genre” which he called “the puzzling movie” (Holland 1964:71). By the end of the 1950s, American theatres were flooded by difficult, European (modernist) art films like *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman (1958), *L'Avventura* (Antonioni 1960), *Last Year in Marienbad* (Resnais 1961) and *8½* (Fellini 1963).³⁵ Holland found that these films usually left cinema audiences uncomfortably baffled and frustrated, bored or outraged because the filmmakers, underestimating how much we “fear the incomprehensible,”

³⁵ In interviews Lynch often claims not to be a cinephile, but he also often revealingly mentions Bergman and Fellini as favourite directors. Holland may have expanded his speculations (and probably also his moral distress) by recognising the 'invention' of complex, puzzling narratives in 1940s-50s American film noir (see Kiss 2013:238). *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder 1950), for instance, is impossibly narrated from the perspective of a murdered character. It is probably the film that Lynch has referred to more than any other, and Carroll has analysed how it promotes “philosophical insight, especially with respect to [its] intended...mass audience” (2013b:162).

"asked too much" while the "audience gave too little" (ibid.:84). Unlike in our constrained, real-world lives, where "things are either one way or the other; here, they are both" (ibid.). In ways that remind of dreams, the space-time continuum can be broken apart or mutually exclusive events can co-occur. Moreover, other than "intellectuals and academics," Holland claimed, few people are likely to take pleasure in the feelings of puzzlement that arise from films that are intentionally non-communicative and mystifying, whether scene-by-scene or in terms of overall meaning, and which, thereby, reflects the "moral and social confusion" which is characteristic of the twentieth century (ibid.:88-89).

Holland speculated that this "riddling quality," much as in the case of jokes with punchlines, grabs viewers' attention, encourages a relaxed and enjoyable playing along with incoherent streams of beautiful images which viewers would otherwise find "childish or insane," and engages our sense-making processes by bribing our rational processes with enigmatic promises of a hidden, tension relieving, "intellectual meaning" (1964:90). Viewers are allegedly offered "intellectual justification" for satisfying the simplest of primitive visual desires: "looking at violent and sexy things" (ibid.:91-92). Hence, by focusing on more manageable intellectual and aesthetic issues, these puzzling films displace pliable viewers' emotionally intense and fearful moral and religious inhibitions. But those that are not so intellectually inclined are, supposedly, left both repulsed by the frequent portrayals of sexual immorality and with a renewed fear of these morally confusing times. Accordingly, over-intellectual viewers are supposed to get exactly what they want: the comforting illusion of overcoming pre-verbal, "childhood bafflement" by solving the "riddle of emotions and sexuality by purely intellectual means" (ibid.:94-96).

Today, with the free flow of information, most moving-image scholars are likely to find these speculations oddly dated and overly moralistic. Fortunately, these themes – puzzling films, high-modernism, aesthetic experiences, painful art, film ethics, and emotion-based, rational-intuitive viewer-engagement – recur in contemporary cognitive

film theory, the conjectures now more argumentatively and scientifically sound, though still far from fully resolved.³⁶

Since the 1960s the trend that Holland identified has continued, every decade having produced similarly erotically bothersome (though sometimes perversely subtle), intellectually demanding art films and art cinema-inspired, steadily-more-mainstream, puzzling films. One might consider *La Jetée* (Marker 1962), *Blow-Up* (Antonioni 1966), *Point Blank* (Boorman 1967), *Hour of the Wolf* (Bergman 1968), *Je T'aime, Je T'aime* (Resnais 1968), *Solaris* (Tarkovsky 1972), *Don't Look Now* (Roeg 1973), *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (Rivette 1974), *Eraserhead* (Lynch 1977), *Providence* (Resnais 1977), *The Obscure Object of Desire* (Bunuel 1977), *In a Year of 13 Moons* (Fassbinder 1978), *Blow Out* (De Palma 1981), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Reisz 1981), *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982), *The Element of Crime* (Von Trier 1984), and *Blind Chance* (Kieślowski 1987). These films are all cognitive-affectively challenging in different, though characteristically disorienting, ways, but are also increasingly canonised close to or inside the margins of a broader understanding of the production and viewing practices of mainstream cinema.

By the 1990s, this trend rapidly – but considering the impending millennial crossover, not all that unexpectedly – started to accelerate into a significant and established mode in the global film industry and its related film cultures.³⁷ Obvious examples of the variety and international scope of puzzle films that have attracted a considerable audience and critical attention, spanning the decades before and after 2000, include *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino 1992), *Open your Eyes* (Amenábar 1997), *Khrustalyov, My Car!* (German 1998), *Being John Malkovich* (Jonze 1999), *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick 1999), *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999), *The Matrix* trilogy (Wachowskis 1999, 2003), *In the Mood for Love* (Kar-

³⁶ See Kiss and Willemsen (2017:12) for a recently updated list of the post-2000 proliferation of distinctive (nearing 30) scholarly perspectives on puzzle films.

³⁷ This growth can be partly explained as a commercial exploitation and mainstreaming (especially in Hollywood) of film forms that are well-established, already popular and lucrative, in international experimental and art film traditions (Buckland 2014:6). While such films attract only a minority audience, these supporters of the most prominent, recent kind of cult cinema are widespread and diverse, remarkably passionate and studious, and often take part in online forums, YouTube analyses and fan communities (Elsaesser 2009:13).

wai 2000), *Memento* (Nolan 2000), *Peppermint Candy* (Chang-dong 2000), *Minority Report* (Spielberg 2002), *Oldboy* (Chan-wook 2003), *The Big Charade* (McKeown 2003), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry 2004), *5x2* (Ozon 2004), *Cache* (Haneke 2005), *La Moustache* (Carrère 2005), *Inception* (Nolan 2010), *Post Tenebras Lux* (Reygadas 2012), *Interstellar* (Nolan 2014), and *The Other Side of the Wind* (Welles 2018).³⁸

At first glance, the latter films might appear less cognitive-affectively challenging than similar films from previous decades, but they are easy to underestimate. This is largely so, I would argue, because these films have been deliberately made to also appeal on a single viewing to a broader segment of the general audience. Carroll already identified an early incarnation of this "two-tiered system of communication" in popular, late-1970s, New Hollywood, "allusionistic" cinema – the film "sends an action/drama/fantasy-packed message to one segment of the audience and an additional hermetic, camouflaged, and recondite one to another" (1982:56).³⁹ In effect, then, there is a self-consciously, film-historically intelligent "art film in the genre film, which through its systems of allusions sent an esoteric meaning to the film-literate exegetes" (ibid.). Yet, for such a film to be "saying anything substantive of its own," it needed to do more than "merely 'mentioning' great themes about which great artists have expended great energies" (ibid.:74).⁴⁰ Wim Wenders' *American Friend* (1977), for instance, is worth deciphering because it was, at the time, the "most sophisticated" revisioning of the film noir style (ibid.:70). And, Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), one of Carroll's main examples, is an excellent proto-impossible puzzle film. Moreover, Huston (2009:77, 83) argues that the latter film is a substantial and robust instance of film-as-philosophy because of the way in which it

³⁸ Each of the sources discussed in this section provides relevant and prized examples, which adds up to a list as impressive for its length as for its breadth of stylistic, technical and genre variations and trans-national reach.

³⁹ A similar phenomenon has, of course, often been noted about animated films that are made to appeal both to children, as the primary audience, and the adults who accompany them when watching the films (see Rohrer 2009).

⁴⁰ Puzzle films are, of course, not by definition interesting or worth watching, and some are very poor by any criteria of evaluation. Witness, for example, *Southland Tales* (Kelly 2006), *The Lake House* (Agresti 2006), *Premonition* (Yapo 2007), or *Vantage Point* (Travis 2008).

instantiates viewers' beliefs about the contextual nature of linguistic understanding and it is, therefore, also an ideal aid for teaching philosophy of language.

Both mainstream cognitive discomfiture viewing and its main 'genre,' the puzzle film, have developed alongside other, often overlapping trends within three decades that have produced a broad expansion of art cinema. These post-1990s 'smart' tendencies are often referred to as the New New Hollywood, thereby tracing its lineage to the New Hollywood of the late-1960s. No era before the 1990s has produced as many difficult films valued by as broad an audience. From this perspective, films in the relevant, expanding segment of worldwide film reception are better than ever before and viewers better equipped than ever to deal with their challenging, cognitive-emotive demands.⁴¹ Furthermore, since around the turn of the millennium these phenomena have been reflected in a diversified proliferation of explanatory academic and popular works that are centred on a general, increasing complexity and sophistication within global mainstream cinema.⁴² In the rest of this section I provide a brief overview of a selection from this material.

Dudley Andrew's single-sentence characterisation of contemporary international art cinema as "by definition pan-national, following the urge of every ambitious film to take off from its point of release, so as to encounter other viewers, and other movies, elsewhere and later" (in Galt & Schoonover 2010:vi), basically summarises the positive end of the current situation. Here we are dealing with filmically-informed (responsively taking from and simultaneously contributing to world cinema), ambitious and demanding films, that are patient about reaching a heterogeneous, transcultural audience where,

⁴¹ I am taking this position carefully, not as another example of Steven Johnson's wholesale conviction that the general public is growing quantifiably smarter because of the mounting cognitive challenges of popular culture's increasing sophistication (see Poole 2005).

⁴² In "The Intellectualization of Film" Baumann (2007:126, 159) discusses a general transition from film considered as entertainment to film considered as an art form, which was reflected in the vocabulary and critical devices used by cultural experts and the American public from the 1960s to the 2000s. He credits the increasing availability of foreign films for making more commonplace Hollywood films appear "too easy to enjoy" and for raising the marketing value of a film's intellectual and critical reception. Indeed, "[w]hen people draw a contrast between 'Hollywood' and 'art' films, they are using sloppy shorthand to refer to the least respectable Hollywood productions" (ibid.:149).

when, and however it may. Hence, Galt and Schoonover's *Global Art Cinema* reflects on the possibilities, difficulties and controversies of "creating canonical national cinemas, and representations of locality" that form part of "globalization, world culture, and how the economics of cinema's transnational flows might intersect with trajectories of film form" (2010:3, 7).⁴³ As part of the "promise of international community," these films require that "we watch across cultures and see ourselves through foreign eyes, binding spectatorship and pleasure into an experience of geographical difference, or potentially of geopolitical critique," without overlooking the "perils of thinking the global" and of "a fetishistic multiculturalism" (ibid.:11).⁴⁴

From another perspective, cinematic globalisation may be viewed, instead, as partially constructed from the leftovers of traditional art cinema, which, selectively combined with the filmic and economic resources of commercial, Hollywood and independent filmmaking, allows for new, flourishing, internationally influential movements like, for instance, the so-called "American smart cinema" (Perkins 2012:2-3). The numerous variations of this broad current include aesthetic and thematic emphases on multi-strand narratives; irony, dark humour and a knowing emotional nihilism; explorations of fatalistic and relativistic worldviews; and a kind of taken-as-obvious surrealism – all easily identifiable in, as a case in point, *Donnie Darko* (Kelly 2001).⁴⁵ Alternatively, cinematic globalisation also encompasses the quest of the so-called "Post-Pop" directors, such as Spike Jonze, to make meaningful sense of the world without getting stuck in the clever filmic constructions, "jaded irony" and "wink-and-nod knowingness" of "postmodern pranksters" like Quentin Tarantino (Mayshark 2007:5). While retaining "hip references and technological and narrative trickery," these films are also "deeply concerned with ethics and morality, the obligations of the individual, the effects of family

⁴³ This volume includes an excellent, insightful revisionary essay by Philip Rosen on the international viability of African cinema as a strand of global art cinema: "Notes on Art Cinema and the Emergence of Sub-Saharan Film" (2010).

⁴⁴ As a corrective to a contemporary "presentism," Robertson and Inglis have empirically identified a secular "global consciousness" or "global spirit" which they trace back to a "well-developed set of pre-modern 'global' sensibilities...that characterised much ancient Greek and Roman thought" (2004:39).

⁴⁵ This film is often cited as an early, trendsetting example of complex and obscure storytelling that has attracted a growing fan base after initially failing to attract an audience (see Kiss & Willemsen 2017:9).

breakdown, and social alienation" (ibid.). This is also a good first-run characterisation of *Fire Walk*.

Likewise, Matthew Campora's "Art cinema and New Hollywood" (2009:119) illustrates how the multiform narratives traditionally associated with art cinema have become commercially feasible in the twentieth century. He argues for a range of reasonable explanations centred on a new audience sensibility which has resulted, with its roots in the 1980s, from the growth of rewatch technologies⁴⁶, the increasingly widespread accessibility of non-Hollywood films, the popular uptake of avant-garde aesthetics in music videos (and in, I would add, advertising), the convergence towards cyber-space narrative forms, the "multiform subjectivity" of interactive media and gaming, and, ultimately, from cinematic attempts to "represent the increasingly complex existential realities of our hypermediated culture" (ibid.:129-130). Similarly, the increasing free flow and exchange of information, and especially the popularisation of scientific theories, have left almost everyone aware, on some level, of "alternative possible selves, of alternative possible worlds, and of the limitless intersecting stories of the actual world" (Murray 1997:238). This suggests that the mainstreaming (popularisation) of art cinema may somehow be part of equipping viewers for the challenges of living in a secular world.

In sum, apart from the obvious overlaps, the trends and movements of globalised art cinemas, New Hollywood films, and smart and post-pop cinemas are indications of global changes in increasingly common moving-image attitudes and practices.⁴⁷ It

⁴⁶ I will emphasise multiple viewing throughout because I take it to be the key, necessary aspect of the charm and very possibility of puzzle films, of appreciating Lynch's cinema, and, ultimately, I will argue, of worldview-philosophy-through-film. More literally, in the case of the circular and folded form of Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997), watching the film once is only watching it halfway since, as Buckland illustrates, "to travel around the entire length of the Möbius strip, one needs to go around it twice" (2009:56).

⁴⁷ 'Slow cinema' or 'contemporary contemplative cinema' is another new millennium trend in world cinema which has contributed to the global mainstreaming of art films (e.g. *Five: Dedicated to Ozu* [Kiarostami 2003]) and art television (e.g. *Twin Peaks: The Return* [2017]) (see Stein & DiPaolo 2015). These films, "of slower than average pace, or longer than average duration, do not just undertake a tightrope walk between pleasure and boredom, they also tread a fine line between newness and cliché" (Stringer in De Luca & Jorge 2016:xx) and offer "de-centred and understated modes of storytelling, and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday" (Flanagan in De Luca & Jorge 2016:1). This kind of "diegetic understimulation" (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:45) is likely to involve the

covers much more than only puzzle films, but the family resemblances are pronounced and, for my purposes, clearly applicable to *Fire Walk*. Yet, against this background, it is worthwhile taking a couple of steps back to provide a firmer foundation for the universal mechanics of mass art viewer-engagement.

3.2 The simple power of conventional mainstream films

In 1985 Noël Carroll (1996c:79-83, 92) presented one of the earliest cognitive, rather than identification-based, explanations of the "power of movies."⁴⁸ He argued that both the global internationality (transcending, roughly, culture, society, class, education, age and gender) and intensity of mainstream viewer-engagement are result of the accessibility of Hollywood-style, mass media cinema. These popular movies simply, though not exclusively, utilise our immediate and untutored, reflex-like rather than reading-like, evolved neurophysiological abilities to recognise and differentiate pictorial representations via resemblances to the objects portrayed. Hence, diverse viewers basically understand mainstream films because they are generally able to recognise the kinds of people, places and events portray.

In addition, filmmakers control viewers' attention and involvement through framing and editing techniques that index, bracket and scale screen images (Carroll 1996c:84-88).⁴⁹ The resulting automatic intelligibility and clarity of these organised and uncluttered displays satisfy our mental pursuit of order to a degree seldom achieved in our daily lives. Filmmakers also control viewers' attention and engagement by selectively plotting

cognitive discomfitures that arises from boredom, impatience, mind wandering, effortful attentional control, and so forth, but is only likely to play a secondary role in the kind of cognitive confusion I am attempting to address. Also see Frey (2016) for an account of mainstream art films that overshoot, by way of graphic violent and sexually explicit content, the kind of cognitive discomfiture viewing to which I am referring.

⁴⁸ I am sidestepping Carroll's extensive critique of Contemporary Film Theory's reliance on identification, subject-positioning, the illusion of reality, and ideology-critique, as before, to be able to funnel the study to a narrower and constructive mid-level position. Coplan (2009) and Plantinga (2009c) provide very good, brief overviews of the main issues and arguments involved.

⁴⁹ The basic aspects of Carroll's approach to viewer-engagement were first developed more than 30 years ago. Two recent publications, co-authored with William Seeley (2013, 2014), offer many refinements and interdisciplinary support from research into phenomena like (i) diagnostic, recognition framework-based, object identification, (ii) selective (biased competition) attention and (iii) the nature of everyday human visual routines.

narratives that engage our generic, human action-centred, practical reasoning and inference-making tendencies. These cognitive activities play out in response to narrative organisations that cue viewers to ask questions for which the answers only become available, sometimes only partially, during later stages of the film. I will discuss this – Carroll's "erotetic" model of film narration – in section 4.3.1 of the next chapter so that I can give it a more prominent place in the overall framework.

The point, for now, is simply to introduce the possibility of universal underpinnings for the standard workings and appeal of conventional, mainstream movies that are a prerequisite for comparative explanations of both idiosyncratic kinds of films, like puzzle films, and idiosyncratic viewing experiences, like culturally socialised or viewer-specific responses. The elementary aesthetics of most mainstream films and everyday viewer-engagement may be explained by the activities and pleasures involved in relatively undemanding, attention-dependent narrative comprehension. Most basically, it involves mainstream dramaturgical patterns that typically involve the suspenseful, "linear problem-solving process of the protagonists," viewers' positive affective responses to protagonists' successes, and a "happy ending" (Eder 2008:69-70). Overall, most viewers are freely partaking of mildly challenging but relatively effortless and 'painless,' goal-directed completions of filmic puzzles that have a fairly narrow, limited range of meaningful interpretive possibilities (see Branigan 2014:249-250).⁵⁰

3.3A basic neo-formalist theory of conventional and unconventional cinema

Since the 1980s neo-formalist, often broadly cognitivist, film theorists have made remarkable progress in explaining the narrative structures and film forms, and the related constructive, socially and contextually embedded, perceptual and inferential sense-making processes that underlie the pleasures and popularity of global, commercial, mainstream, genre-based, classical, Hollywood-style narrative film-

⁵⁰ Neither 'undemanding' nor 'effortless' should be taken to reflect a lack of appreciation for the neurophysiologically embodied and enworlded, existential marvel of mass art viewing experiences.

viewing.⁵¹ The main figures, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson "revived the methodology and key concepts of Russian formalism as part of an updated poetics of film" because they were "frustrated with the established direction of film study" in the 1970s (Thomson-Jones 2009:131).

Their foundational, co-authored textbook, *Film Art: An Introduction* – first published in 1979 and spanning eleven updated editions – provides a fair reflection of the basic elements of a neo-formalist theory of film. They argue and illustrate how intensely and actively involving viewing experiences – the interest-based forward momentum of conventional, mainstream cinema – can be explained via the concepts of film form (which includes the four levels of meaning) and narrative form (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:51, 58-60). But they also mention "puzzle films," an increasingly prevalent cycle of films that do not provide conventional levels of narrative and formal "unity and clarity" (ibid.:84). I will discuss each of these topics but in a somewhat different order.

The satisfaction of traditional, mainstream (classical) cinema typically arises from four well-established tendencies in narrative form (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:97-99). First, these films present a series of relatively easy-to-follow, causally linked events that are primarily driven by individual characters' goal-directed behaviours. Second, the temporal order, duration and frequency (repetition) of the depicted events presents the causal chains in more or less suitably clear, understandable and interesting ways. Third, the narration or storytelling is relatively objective (in terms of the 'metaphysics' of the given film's diegetic world) and departures into characters' perceptual or mental subjectivity are clearly signalled. Fourth, these films end with high levels of closure or emotionally satisfying completion of the main causal possibilities established at the beginning of the film. In other words, conventional narrative film narration – the articulation or telling of the story – prioritises a causally-constituted, meaningful whole which viewers willingly decipher and construct, sometimes with an effortful struggle, because they expect it to make sense in the end (Poulaki 2014:36-37).

⁵¹ For instructive introductions and overviews see Bordwell (1985, 1989), Gaut (1995) and Thomson-Jones (2005, 2009).

To reinvigorate the medium and audience support, innovative filmmakers have expanded this conventional (classical) framework by appropriating alternative narrational and stylistic strategies from global art cinemas and independent film traditions (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:72-110). These, in contrast to the four conventional tendencies, include characters with unclear identities and intentions; the presence of narratively (causally) unmotivated 'dead time'; broken and disordered story chronologies; perplexing, ambiguously objective and/or subjective narration; a lack of causal unity; open endings; ironic variations on established film conventions; and the distancing ('disinvolving') of viewers via the explicit foregrounding of the use of such unorthodox devices. All of these aesthetic alternatives occur in *Fire Walk* and many are taken about as far as they have been in mainstream cinema, which explains both its initial failure and its critical endurance.

In addition to these narrative-specific, formal elements, Bordwell and Thompson (2013:57-58) have also proposed four levels of filmic meaning. Even though viewers attribute these (and even some unintended) meanings, the meaning-making process ultimately depends on the filmmakers' intentions and the ideas that they are conveying and communicating.⁵² With each level viewers' interpretations tend to become more subjective and, thus, the likelihood of unfounded impositions also increases. A film's first-level, "referential meaning" may be captured in a basic, concrete summary of its plot or of the most relevant objects, characters, places and events that viewers need to identify in the story-world to make sense of the plot (ibid.:58). In *Fire Walk* a group of FBI agents, who find themselves in an incapacitating dream-like reality, are alerted to prostitute Teresa Banks' murder; a year later, teenager Laura Palmer spends her last seven days in a desperate frenzy of drugs, prostitution and dissociative hallucinations during which she steadily figures out that it is her father Leland who has been sexually abusing her since early childhood, and the apparently possessed Leland, now aware of Laura's realisation, murders her, just as he did Teresa Banks.

⁵² I return to this topic in section 4.3.2 of the next chapter where I discuss Carroll's criterial prefocusing and Plantinga's filmmaker-audience loop.

A film's second-level, "explicit meaning" is its relatively concrete-but-context-dependent, "openly asserted" or spelled out (and sometimes obscure) overall message or point, which in combination with its implicit meanings constitutes its thematic focus (ibid.). On the whole, the 'message' of *Fire Walk* is that sexual abuse, which is hard to comprehend, leads to further cycles of abuse that, left unbroken, will end in extreme catastrophe. A film's third-level, "implicit meanings" are the more abstract, open-to-interpretation messages or subtexts that are largely intentionally but also unintentionally invited by its treatment of its main topics and subject matter (ibid.:59). *Fire Walk* comments, among other things, on the fragilities and resilience of youth, on the attractions and anguishes of immorality, on familial and societal structures and patterns that facilitate both abuse and despairing pursuits for relief, on the corrupting effects of law-enforcement, and on the dissociative effects of acute trauma. A film's fourth-level, "symptomatic meanings" reflects its (apparently unaware) endorsement of – but sometimes also hard-to-identify opposition to – culture-specific values, beliefs, conceptions and ideologies that are prevalent in broader society and in other cultural artefacts of the period (ibid.:60). These meanings typically reflect the realities of power relations, social class, discrimination, gender, religion and politics, which makes films objects for social critique. *Fire Walk* engages, among other things, with gender-based abuse, with regressive conceptions of supernatural evil, with the apparent grand-scale failure of masculine law-enforcement, with the underestimation and/or overestimation of the limits of human comprehension, and with the expanded possibilities of mainstream cinema.

Furthermore, Bordwell and Thompson (2013:62-70) discuss five basic formal principles that are usually maintained in traditional, mainstream cinema. First, filmmakers purposefully present patterned, holistically related narrative events and stylistic elements with particular motivations and functions to, more or less successfully, cue specific responses, such as sympathy, however troubled, for Laura in *Fire Walk*. Second, these patterns are based on similarities and repetitions that, without requiring viewers' explicit awareness, establish and satisfy their formal expectations, such as presenting Laura in a patterned series of disturbed sexual relations. Third, viewers'

interest is sustained through a range of obvious and more subtle differences and variations, such as the contrast, momentary overlap and divergence between Laura and Donna's attitudes and experiences or Laura's sexual aggression towards men. Fourth, a film's planned, overall, formal progression or development, its beginning-to-ending, patterned changes, shape viewers' active, moment-by-moment engagement, such as Laura's cumulative degradation. Fifth, there is usually a satisfying degree of perceived overall unity that arises from the ways in which the relationships between these elements are resolved or integrated and from how viewers' questions are answered. It is here that *Fire Walk*, like many mass art films, diverges most radically from conventional, mainstream fare. Or, more correctly, this is where this impossible puzzle film, as part of a larger movement, brought traditional art film techniques – mainly a welcoming of intentionally ambiguous and multivalent elements – into mainstream cinema.⁵³

Of these, the most significant is the film's deeply disorienting disruptions of the 'metaphysics' of the story-world. Laura and Leland's shared narrative, their entwined and mirroring double lives, the film's main story, is nested within an incomplete and fragmented law-enforcement (frame) narrative. Accordingly, the film has two conspicuous sections, separated (at [33:49] of its 134-minute length) by a "ONE YEAR LATER" title, the original television series music and the familiar "Welcome to Twin Peaks" road sign. The film could have started here, which would have amounted to telling Laura/Leland's story chronologically, intercut with some explanatory elements, namely an ambiguously signalled dream sequence in which Laura visits the Red Room, a couple of clearly cued, lightly disorienting flashbacks to Leland's relationship with and

⁵³ Influential French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's two *Cinema* volumes (1986, 1989) provide a difficult, macro-level overview of two expressive filmic modes in twentieth century film history, largely based on his personal cinematic preferences plus an image and sign-based, Bergsonian framework (see Rushton & Bettinson [2010:112-123] for a brief introduction or Rodowick [1997] for a book-length treatment). In the first mode, movement-image cinema, movement dominates time in the sense that the narrative moves relatively smoothly, in a beginning-middle-end fashion towards definitive good-triumphs-over-evil outcomes by way of characters' goal-directed actions. By comparison, post-World War II, time-image cinema, provides viewers with direct time-images in which temporal relations are either unclear or radically unresolvable because of the (often memory-based) subjectivity of portrayed perceptual experiences and an accompanying moral dislocation. The similarities to the simpler mainstream-art film distinction should be obvious and it is possible to position cognitive discomfiture viewing productively within a Deleuzian framework (see Brown 2011). Nevertheless, I will not do so here because of the methodological mismatch.

murder of prostitute Teresa Banks, and a series of (brief) interferences from an apparently supernatural, alternative dimension of reality. This would probably have made it more satisfying for general audiences. It would certainly have been a more regular, closer to the standard 90-minutes, expressionistic horror film, though significantly more cognitively and emotionally taxing than most. By simply presenting a more adult and explicit visualisation of the events suggested in the *Twin Peaks*-series (1990-91), it may also have been more popular with the series' large mainstream following. However, this would – in terms of Bordwell and Thompson (2013:60-62) suggested criteria for relatively objective film evaluation (realism, ethics, narrative and stylistic unity, intensity of effect, complexity, and originality) – arguably have made it a much lesser film.

Instead of starting the film with an orienting, expository opening sequence, Lynch offers a fairly long (about a quarter of the film's screen duration), disorienting tableau of fragments from the FBI's ineffectual and abortive investigation into the murder of Teresa Banks.⁵⁴ Near its end, this frame narrative achieves its highest level of cognitive-emotive disorientation (and, arguably, of aesthetic innovation) by freely mixing realistic stylistic devices, such as clearly establishing place, time and characters, and realistic character motivations (e.g. characters spelling out that they are having a tough time figuring out what is happening) with dream-like sequences and real-world impossibilities. The section reaches a highpoint with the mysterious appearance (and disappearance) of agent Phillip Jeffries (David Bowie), which prompts the most radical disruption of the film's diegetic world: agent Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) appears in two places at once and the inhabitants of the Lodge reflect opaquely on what it means to "live inside a dream" [29:35]. Thematically, this opening section establishes the central theme of the failure of (masculine) law enforcement and foreshadows the film's

⁵⁴ A case could be made that this is a parody, even a 'postmodern parody,' of the 'FBI' as portrayed in mainstream media or a satirical portrayal of the follies of law enforcement, but this overextended opening provides more than mere parody or satire.

exploration of the problematic relationship between, as Hampton (1993:39) points out, the protection and violation of innocence.⁵⁵

As such, the section functions as a disorienting framing device for the much longer Laura/Leland's story section. First-time viewers are likely to find it extremely foreboding, puzzling and jarring, and almost impossible to simply indulge for its weird Lynchian absurdities. Yet, it also provides several popular philosophy-prompting, 'painful' interpretive keys for repeat viewers.⁵⁶ The fascinating Lil-sequence [5:10-7:36], for example, is both part of the film's overall mystery and a hidden-in-plain-sight but equivocal warning about the desire to solve such mysteries. Finding 'correct' answers to the 'wrong' questions prompts a proliferation of unanswered, sometime unanswerable, questions and it leaves 'secrets' unrevealed. Here Lynch's ambiguously instructs viewers to pay extremely careful attention, to anticipate deliberately impenetrable 'clues' and to avoid symbolic (non-literal) interpretations, while also foreshadowing the ultimate failure of the will-to-interpretation. Lil's performance and agent Desmond's decoding of it offers a charming and amusing but perverse, quiet-before-the-storm, retrospective 'treat' for enduring the painful horrors of the rest of the film. It is, in other words, a disorienting shift of our attention to the apparently unfathomable trauma and tragedy of childhood sexual abuse.

This metaphysical disruption frame, moreover, introduces and anchors the rest of the experimental or avant-garde techniques that are, in turn, nested within the film's fairly

⁵⁵ Billy Stratton (2019) has pointed to Lynch's foresight into recent revelations of the scale of sexual abuse and its ongoing political denial in America. NBC has, for example, recently reported how American state organisations, including the FBI, have knowingly failed to protect "young female gymnasts from sexual abuse" (Fitzpatrick et al 2019).

⁵⁶ I discuss some of these devices in subsequent chapters. Many viewers have of course also tried to alleviate the confusion by seeking answers in the original *Twin Peaks* series (1990-91). However, having for decades read many different interpretations in everything from peer-reviewed publications to elaborate online cult or fan forums, I would argue that the most revealing interpretations of *Fire Walk* have, against expectations, been put forward by viewers – whether amateur or professional critics – who have focused on the film itself. I take this to be a result of Lynch's intention that the film should also be able to function as an independent work (see Joel Bocko's [2015] excellent YouTube walkthrough). Furthermore, series-based interpretations are complicated by the fact that the film is simultaneously and 'impossibly' a prequel *and* sequel to the series. Much of the same applies to interpreting *Fire Walk* retrospectively via *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), though, as Lynch pointed out in a *Variety* interview, the film is "very important to understanding" the new series (Ryan 2017).

conventional, tragic central narrative.⁵⁷ Overall, these dynamics vitally undermine viewers' attempts to construct a coherent whole out of the films' divergent parts. Instead of the pleasure of eventually fulfilled – even when postponed for suspense or undercut for the sake of surprises – expectations, puzzle films may forcefully compromise or overextend conventional formal principles by offering unpleasant conflicts, tensions, shocks, discrepancies and contradictions that disturb these expectations (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:55). To find 'satisfaction' in these disagreeably disoriented expectations, viewers need to be swayed to engage in new and more apt ways with the film's form, and this is likely to involve some, ideally mentalisation-aware, reflection on one's revealed assumptions about how films are supposed to work. Hence, while the overall viewing experience remains painful and unpleasant to the attentive viewer, it may simultaneously be worthwhile and valuable.

Kristin Thompson – one half of the Bordwell and Thompson, husband-and-wife, film theory juggernaut – has offered a neo-formalist perspective on "The Strange Case of David Lynch" (2003). Here she examines a recent tendency to "draw in art-cinema lovers, but also a share of the mainstream market" by aiming for a "middle ground between mainstream commercial films and pure experimental cinema" (ibid.:108).⁵⁸ Hence, as is typical of experimental cinema, *Fire Walk* is both more personal, e.g. its characteristic Lynchian stylistics and obscure motifs, and often distinctly non-narrative, e.g. its fractured plot and disrupted diegesis.⁵⁹ It also prominently exhibits the five key traits of art cinema: non-linear causality, depictions of psychological realities (like the

⁵⁷ Lynch's career successes and failures may indeed be attributed to his focus on "extreme representations of the family romance," his "authentically Surrealist vision," and his attempts at "cutting across commercial and avant-garde categories" (Luckhurst 2008:197).

⁵⁸ Charles Ramírez Berg uniquely excludes Lynch's "more oblique" films from his taxonomy of recent alternative narratives in cinema because, he believes, the films are "primarily interested in formal experimentation" rather than in storytelling, and should, therefore, be classified as "fascinating examples of avant-garde filmmaking, firmly within the Dadaist tradition" (2006:12). While this position recognises the level of Lynch's experimental inclinations, it underestimates, firstly, his tendency to nest experimental and avant-garde techniques within familiar narrative frameworks and, secondly, the continuity between his work and the range of less experimental films that populate the continuum of mainstream narrative innovation. I return to this topic in section 5.1.

⁵⁹ 'Lynchian' was taken up in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2018; i.e. "for juxtaposing surreal or sinister elements with mundane, everyday environments, and for using compelling visual images to emphasize a dreamlike quality of mystery or menace" (Roffman 2018).

trauma of abuse), violations of space-time (like uncued transitions into dreams), explicit expressions of an authorial vision (like the strange mix of the banal and the bizarre), and unresolved ambiguity (like the mysteries of the Lodge) (ibid.:110-113).⁶⁰ By taking up these elements, Lynch uniquely popularises art film techniques for a "diverse audience, from general spectators to intellectuals" (ibid.:135), who I refer to, as I will soon explain, as 'mass cinephiles.'

In time, as audiences engage with an expanded range of formal possibilities, some of these alternatives may become part of the generally accepted conventions of mainstream cinema. Viewers are not only prepared for film-viewing by their prior experiences of the world, but also significantly by their previous experiences of other, always at first unfamiliar, kinds of cinema (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:56). Of these, the rise of the puzzle film has been one of the most prominent recent trends. In these cases, viewers are led to "doubt the actuality" or objectivity of diegetic events by deliberately misleading, subjective narration (Bordwell 2006:81).⁶¹ Some very popular filmmakers, like Christopher Nolan, have grown quite confident about challenging viewers – backed by easy-to-manoeuvre, digital access to film content and related information on the internet – to rewatch films, to search for clues hidden within perplexing temporal or causal patterns, apparently comfortable with accepting that some mysteries will not be solved by the end of the film (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:82-84).⁶²

Elliot Panek, writing within a framework of both Bordwell's and Thompson's work, refers to the (American) "psychological puzzle film"; that is, "narratives in which the orientation of events in the plot to diegetic reality is not immediately clear, thus causing doubt in the viewer's mind as to how reliable, knowledgeable, self-conscious, and communicative the narration is" (2006:65-66), a process which is also likely to raise viewers' awareness of mentalisation. While this kind of playing with ambiguities is becoming increasingly

⁶⁰ First theorised in Bordwell (1979).

⁶¹ Bordwell (2006) appears to be the first to have used "puzzle film" in this specific sense.

⁶² It is not always possible to tell whether this kind of incoherence, such as apparently random edits, is intentional (Cole 2019).

common, films that are completely incomprehensible and indeterminate, where, for example, it is not cued whether sequences are real or imagined – as in ("perhaps only") the films of David Lynch – have remained quite rare in American (and, therefore, global, mainstream) cinema (Bordwell 2006:82, 89).⁶³

Yet, this narrower emphasis on puzzle films may be taking the attention away from how puzzling many mainstream films actually are.

3.4 The often-overlooked puzzling elements of traditional, mainstream film

In *Hollywood Aesthetic: Pleasure in American Cinema*, Todd Berliner (2017:1-2) proposed a science-friendly, broadened and refined understanding of the aesthetic pleasures afforded by time-tested, international "entertainment cinema" which includes, and has developed under the long-running influence of the "Hollywood aesthetic."⁶⁴ He argues against a widespread set of assumption in academic Film Studies that mainstream films have historically, and to this day, primarily offered a sort of passive, "reassuring" or "soothing," amusement that results from "trivial diversion from reality" or confirmation of dominant bourgeois ideologies (ibid.). Instead, he argues that the best, most successful, "exhilarating, memorable, even life- changing" movies attract "mentally active and engaged," broadly cross-cultural, mass audiences who willingly perform the cognitive labour that attentive viewing requires (ibid.:4-5).⁶⁵ This mass audience also

⁶³ While obviously not literally the 'only' filmmaker who goes this far, Lynch's work, and specifically *Inland Empire* (2006), clearly belongs at the furthest – most or near-completely puzzling – end of the continuum of contemporary puzzle films (see Buckland 2009:11).

⁶⁴ I will simply refer to this as 'mainstream cinema.'

⁶⁵ Brad Chisholm offered an earlier case against the widely held, fearful belief (often fired by ideological critique) that popular film and television viewing involves a passive "escape from thought" that is "aesthetically impoverished as well as possibly harmful" (1991:389-390). Instead, he showed, by way of, among others, the original *Twin Peaks* series, how television often presented viewers with difficulties, challenges, complexity and inaccessibility in the way it "poses confusing or oblique cues that impede the viewer's construction of its narrative" to "re-engage their minds, not to disengage them," and even to sharpen their cognitive abilities (ibid.). His analysis includes reference to the pleasurable difficulties of mysteries and trick narratives, confusing and confounding narratives, viewers' dependence on prior narrative exposure, stylistic and detail overloading, and structural contortions. He also noted how, because of VHS, "[d]ifficulty can be offset and complexity conquered by taping programs and watching them at the viewer's pace...[and] favorite (or unclear) scenes can be re-examined..." (ibid.:401). Today, not yet three decades later, both access and viewing control are still escalating.

includes a significant number of cinephiles who build their own film collections and rewatch their favourite films many times, sometimes again every year.

According to Jullier and Leveratto (2012:143-150) there has been a recent, global spread of cinephilia which has – despite significant religious resistance – paralleled industrialisation, increased urbanisation, higher living standards, the normalisation of leisure, and the development of national cinemas. They emphasise the role of digital, transmedial technologies in providing access to high-quality films and information about films, the promotion of critical communication, and active rather than passive forms of reception. Bartsch and Hartmann's (2015) research supports this sense of a general progression from passive consumption to more complex viewing motives and experiences. Overall, this adds up to a recognition that we have entered an era of 'mass cinephilia' in which many more 'mass cinephiles' engage in more informed ways with a broader range of films and, specifically, with mass art films.

Berliner engages so thoroughly with recent film theory – by integrating (cognitive) trends, providing innovative revisions, addressing key aesthetic questions and, in particular, responding, among others, to Carroll and Bordwell's foundational theorising – that it may just as well have been the focus of this dissertation. But here I only provide a selective overview of six issues that relate more closely to the topic of discomfiture viewing experiences.

Firstly, Berliner starts off by proposing a pluralist definition of aesthetic pleasure: "pleasure of the mind, dependent on an artwork's sensory properties, involving appreciation of the work's character, content, or structure" (2017:5-6, 52).⁶⁶ This kind of appreciation (another articulation of this important concept) involves story-world construction, imaginative mentation, and intrinsically satisfying emotional experiences. The problem-solving mental activities that it involves, may include thoughts about,

⁶⁶ This focus on the relationship between the viewer's responses (reception) and the qualities of the work is characteristic of most cognitive and neo-formalist film theories, but these approaches also focus on the production process, which includes the filmmakers' intentions, and historical contextualisation of both production and reception (see Rushton & Bettinson 2010:138-141, 159-160).

reflections on, and evaluations of plot, theme, characterisation and meaning. And its emotional facets, importantly, do not preclude negative emotions like anxiety or sadness.

Secondly, Berliner (2017:15) argues that the basic psychology of the appeal of mainstream cinema involves a counterweighing tension between easy, unity and coherence-based, mental processing and more difficult, emotionally intense and varied, and imaginative cognitive involvement. Hence, mainstream cinema maintains its aesthetic value by balancing the "unity and uniformity" of its enduring, conventional attractions with more experimental elements of "deviance and difficulty" that appeal to experienced viewers' preference for "moderate amounts of novelty, complexity, incongruity, dissonance, and ambiguity" (ibid.:16-17). It offers maximum aesthetic pleasure to viewers "seeking understanding, emotional engagement, cognitive play, and psychological stimulation" (ibid.:18). In addition, such challenging deviations from the norm are valuable features within competitive media markets, encourages repeat consumption (ibid.:20), and advances both the genre-based artistry and standardisation of film production (ibid.:186).⁶⁷

In other words, the more exhilarating prospect of cognitively effortful understanding builds on the 'calm' pleasure of immediate understanding. Moreover, this ideal balance (or tension) applies similarly to more demanding moments in the narrative development of a given film *and* to a particularly innovative film among other more mainstream films. In both cases the films aim for aesthetic "delight" which "lies somewhere between boredom and confusion" (Gombrich in Berliner 2017:26). "Average" viewers are likely to lose interest in and to stop trying to make sense of films that create too much doubt about their ability to cope with or to master the meaning of the film (ibid.:29). At the time of its release, *Fire Walk* may well have overburdened and displeased audiences with its

⁶⁷ Berliner's many examples of movies that have satisfied both audience and critic's "aesthetic desires" (2017:xi) include mid-twentieth century proto-puzzle films like *Double Indemnity* (Wilder 1944), *The Killing*, (Kubrick 1956), *Touch of Evil* (Welles 1958), and *Vertigo* (Hitchcock 1958). Despite often discussing Hitchcock, Berliner inexplicably does not include the puzzle film irregularities, innovations or impact of *Psycho* (1960).

confusing, irregular structure and ambiguous content, especially since it predates the uptake of such elements into mainstream cinema.

Thirdly, there is a parallel tension at play in the ideologies put forward in mainstream cinema. Most movies present a coherent worldview which guides viewers to easily evaluate the meanings of its events and to experience strong and apt emotions (Berliner 2017:19). Alternatively, a film's worldview may itself be contradictory or may clash with other dimensions of its narration, thereby, complicating viewers' emotions, views, and values. Hence, the aesthetic pleasure of viewers' stimulated cognitive work may involve the "exhilaration of expanding and reshaping their knowledge" (ibid.:21).⁶⁸ In addition to hedonic value, then, the epistemic value of aesthetic pleasure includes the knowledge emotions – like interest, curiosity, surprise and confusion – that are part of engaged filmic thinking and understanding (ibid.:27). So, again, in the pursuit of sustaining viewers' interest, films temporarily evoke moderate but encouraging levels of uncertainty and confusion; e.g. How will the killer be brought to justice? More ambitious films aim for more profound levels of interest, thereby risking discouraging levels of confusion; e.g. How are we to make sense of living in a seemingly unjust world?

Fourth, while an "internally consistent story logic" has been (since, at least, Plato and Aristotle) *the* staple organising principle of satisfying dramaturgical narratives, storytellers have found that a balanced degree of cognitive challenge produces "less pleasant and more interesting" forms of "intense engagement" (Berliner 2017:52, 56). As long as viewers stay motivated to try to make sense of a puzzling twist or mystery film's seemingly attainable narrative resolution, there is added aesthetic pleasure (e.g. exhilarating free association) and aesthetic value (e.g. reflection and creative thinking)

⁶⁸ Changing responses to a specific film rewatched across life phases provides easy access to changes in one's perspective, as many, maybe most, people who do this have probably found. In cases where this is or includes a puzzle film, these insights may be uniquely revealing because of our (hopefully) maturing (beyond the childhood joys of the hanging-upside-down kind of disorientation) capacity to deal with and find value in confusion and unknowing. Having watched Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) more than 30 times in three decades, I have come to appreciate that solving the film's initially puzzling, amateur detective elements hides the fact that it is strictly an impossible (even stranger than it appears at first) puzzle film. The parts, much as in the second section of *Fire Walk* and Bergman's *The Silence* (1963), do not add up to a coherent whole.

to be found in the more dynamic, harder to process disunity that results from "gaps, complexities, discontinuities, novelties, inconsistencies, [and] incongruities" (ibid.:57-58).

Fire Walk, for example, illustratively exhibits many of the mastery-resisting and norm-straining devices that Berliner (2013:30-32) identifies in a range of enduringly engaging mainstream films from as far back as the 1930s: the ideological discordance of both admiring and critiquing characters; conflicted attraction-aversion responses; unsympathetic heroes and sympathetic anti-heroes; curious blends of the banal and transcendent; enthralling combinations of humanity and cruelty; intricately complex narratives; baroque images; deviations from genre conventions; unsettling humour; and relationships that are bizarre but oddly sensible. In addition, just as withholding vital information guides and challenges coherent story construction, it drives the excitement of generating new and revised sense-making hypotheses (ibid.:59-66). Hence, recognising pattern violations and resolving incongruities may encourage sudden creative solutions, renewed insights into part-part or part-whole relationships, and the loosening of unwarranted assumptions. This may, in turn, translate into anything from hazardously erroneous to deeply revealing everyday insights, which, as before, may trigger mentalisation-awareness.

Fifth, the invigorating pleasure of this kind of free cognitive play is likely to intensify with increased difficulty, complication and strain, but only to the point where viewers' efforts at imaginative resolution and coping becomes overburdened and unwarranted (Berliner 2017:65-66). Thus, because the search for a film's meaning relies on the assumption that it actually exists to be found, utterly irresolvable, enduring disunities are likely to be considered aesthetic defects.⁶⁹ And yet, even in these cases viewers may find their

⁶⁹ In a recent interview (Carroll 2018), Lynch opposed the idea that he "doesn't always know what is going on in his stories": "I need to know for myself what things mean and what's going on. Sometimes I get ideas, and I don't know exactly what they mean. So I think about it, and try to figure it out, so I have an answer for myself." While he encourages viewers to make the same effort, he also believes that the verbal should not dominate the interpretive process: "I don't ever explain it. Because it's not a word thing" (in Carroll 2018). By the end of the dissertation I hope to have shown that it is a 'cognitive thing,' that is, a near-simultaneous, emotionally nuanced, visual/intuitive

way. For instance, more than seventy years ago audiences were somehow ready for the notoriously unresolvable lack of story logic of *The Big Sleep* (Hawks 1946)⁷⁰, or answers may be sought in the supernatural (which *Fire Walk*, of course, clearly invites), or viewers may simply avoid counterproductive close examination in the face of films like Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) (ibid.:67). Despite the fact that his films are usually too disunified and difficult for most inexperienced (or, for that matter, cognitively fatigued) spectators, Lynch has achieved "astonishing popularity" by taking advantage of the aesthetic and commercial value of highly indeterminate works that offer the barest, but lingering, prospect of understandability and seeming deep significance (ibid.:68-69).

In testing the viability of aesthetic innovations, then, puzzle films necessarily run the risk of alienating mainstream viewers who are unprepared for the required mental effort or likely emotional distress. *Fire Walk* may have failed with a broader audience because of simultaneously resisting mastery in too many elements (e.g. meaning and ideological commitments) and overstraining too many existing norms (e.g. narrative and stylistic conventions). Nevertheless, within a decade Lynch's extremely demanding, relentlessly downbeat *Mulholland Drive* became the most popular, commercially and critically successful impossible puzzle film to date. It was, among other things, voted the "greatest film of the 21st century" in a 2016 BBC Culture poll of 177 critics across 36 countries, maybe for, pithily, being "as maddeningly baffling as it is mesmerising" (Brown 2016).

Being an exceptional member of the growing impossible puzzle film family is, however, no guarantee for critical or popular recognition. Case in point, the relative commercial failure of *Enemy* (2013), notwithstanding its excellent production values, character actor

process of knowing and understanding that is also always on some level verbal, rational and analytical (the "think," "figure out" and "answer" parts).

⁷⁰ This over-complex film is made even more puzzling because of a famous plotting mistake inherited (overlooked by both scriptwriters and the director) from the novel. Not even the original author, Raymond Chandler, could explain who was supposed to have killed General Sternwood's chauffeur. Badly made and ill-constructed films may of course be puzzling for similar reasons, but this is likely to detract (especially with repeat viewing) from the viewing experience because of viewers' sense of an obvious lack of control, continuity and realism.

star (Jake Gyllenhaal), esteemed, brilliant director (Denis Villeneuve), often-appreciated Lynchian elements, and Nobel Prize-winning original author (José Saramago). As with all other genres and films, there is no failproof formula for success and no sure explanation of puzzle film failures.⁷¹ This can be partly attributed to the fact that it is not clear why these films are worth watching in the first place.

Sixth, and finally, Berliner (2017:190, 199) attributes the self-reinvigorating, worldwide, increasingly sophisticated and/or complex Hollywood aesthetic to the evolving genre proficiency and aesthetic maturity that global audiences have gained from heavy exposure to formal film conventions. These audiences often find films that initially resist understanding more stimulating and enjoyable, specifically so when they are able to rewatch the film at home via whichever 'new' technology (ibid.:198). At the production end, many filmmakers have of course responded to changes in reception practices and technology by making their own creative contributions, thereby adding further changes to these domains (ibid.:201). In sum, even though the demand for "inordinately interesting" films remains relatively small, many novel and complex movies support longer-lasting interest – whether rewatched or taken up by successive generations – by extending viewers' mental capacities and range towards higher levels of understanding and knowledge (ibid.:238-240).

Berliner's revisionist approach links well with Carroll's "pluralistic category approach" to film evaluation, which is, like many other current issues in the philosophy of film, insightfully summarised in Kathrine Thomson-Jones' excellent *Aesthetics and Film* (2008:96-100). It is a common practice for general viewers to move quickly from making sense of a film to evaluating the film, often by offering reasons to fellow viewers. Professional critics' reviews, whether written or recorded, help informed viewers to decide which films to watch based on their personal preferences *and* the merits of the films.⁷² They are especially helpful when viewers are confronted with unfamiliar,

⁷¹ This is, so far, also true of big data-based entertainment companies, like Netflix (see Smith & Telang 2016).

⁷² Of the near-endless content, popular and worthwhile stops include the often-hyper-critical Slant Magazine and specifically the entries by reviewer Ed Gonzalez, David Thomson's popularisation of sophisticated criticism in "*Have you seen...?*" (2008), and Mark Kermode's wide digital presence.

obscure and unusual films.⁷³ Critics ultimately guide viewers to categorise films better in terms of shared purposes, structures and viewing expectations, whether in genre, style or even, for those interested in film history, movements. And, importantly, to appreciate the different standards and criteria that suit different categories. Hence, puzzle films are obviously supposed to be cognitively confusing and viewers who understand this are more likely to find value in these viewing experiences of mass art films.

3.5 Two proto-puzzle film theories: Bordwell and Branigan

David Bordwell (2002:88-91) initiated (as with so many other important film theoretical topics) the current discourse on puzzle films with his discussion of its most conservative, elementary form – the “forking-path” film – as a simple variation upon the core conventions of classical narrative cinema. These films typically either intercut well-cued parallel versions of the same narrative (e.g. *Sliding Doors* [Howitt 1998]) or replay different versions (outcomes) after returning to a main split point (e.g. *Run Lola Run* [Tykwer 1998]). They basically portray alternative future events that unfold much like our hypothetical or imaginative, though usually ontologically fairly sensible, reflections on counterfactual possibilities (what-if or if-only) or on the general course of our lives. Thus, Bordwell persuasively illustrates how these films extend and enrich well-entrenched, classical and off-Hollywood, art cinema narrative conventions and strategies by manipulating aspects like space and time, causal relationships or point of view to present essentially nonsensical ideas in ways that audiences can still comprehend and manage via familiar, everyday folk psychological inferential and sense-making processes.

Moreover, according to Bordwell (2002:91) these forking-path films explore the implications and consequences of characters' choices or of pivotal events, rather than, as some claim, simply depicting a prevalent moral nihilism. Since these films' endings tend to re-establish satisfying narrative coherence, they play out in a sort of safe holding

⁷³ In the popular media, Gilbey (2015) and Hoffman (2015) have reflected on the responsibilities of, and opportunities for, critics when they are confronted with films that require more than one viewing.

space or context which is sheltered from more radically disorienting epistemological and ontological possibilities. At worst, one retelling of the narrative may somehow 'contaminate' – e.g. via inexplicable changes in characters' knowledge or motivations – the events that are unfolding in the primary or objective narrative.

Around the turn of the millennium audiences were already so accustomed to forking-path narratives that filmmakers could exploit this familiarity further. Throughout the essay, Bordwell indirectly points to a possible title for the most general category of this more radical alternative: the "multiple worlds" film (2002:88). For Bordwell, these films – as do Jorge Luis Borges' magical realist literature, quantum mechanics strangeness and philosophical metaphysics – test the limits of narrative sense-making and purportedly go beyond the constraints of the human mind.⁷⁴ These ideas certainly seem to be applicable to *Fire Walk*, but were only developed more comprehensively under the banner of the impossible puzzle film, to which I turn in the final section of this chapter.

Augmenting Bordwell's forking-path account, Edward Branigan (2002:106-107) moved in the direction of a multiple worlds theory by adapting Daniel Dennett's "multiple draft" model of consciousness to explain the viewing experience of more radically fragmented and dispersed film narratives. Such films ultimately do not make sense despite our efforts to reconsider and reorder their non-chronological plot elements or foregrounded details. Instead, viewers are invited into portrayals of characters' alternative states of consciousness or drastically separated "identities" which are a result of "subjectivised" (childhood) traumas that have been "overwritten" (in the multiple drafts sense) through selective mental processes like displacement, personification, revision, disguise or elision (ibid.:108, 110). Branigan's illustrative examples range from Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) to Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997), but he primarily focuses on Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999).

⁷⁴ In literary terms, Lynch's work is probably closer to that of Franz Kafka, one of the few authors he has mentioned in interviews (see Rodley 2005:56), for its shared bizarreness and absurdity (see Nieland 2012 and Dalgic 2016). But I find it even more like the complexity and paranoid (American) strangeness of the work of Thomas Pynchon. The latter's often-thought 'unfilmable' work successfully made it to the screen in PT Anderson's brilliant and widely acclaimed impossible puzzle, neo-noir film adaptation, *Inherent Vice* (2014).

Branigan's position correlates quite closely with Janet Walker's discussion of a "trauma cinema" which has developed since the 1990s (2001:213-215).⁷⁵ Films in this cycle typically portray world-shattering personal and/or public events, such as the effects of incest, in two modes. Firstly, via non-realist narratives, whether non-linear, fragmented or repetitive, and non-realist stylistics, such as non-synchronous sound, disjointed editing and irregular camera angles. And, secondly, by focusing on intense bodily and visual experiences rather than on verbal and contextual narration. Again, *Fire Walk* is clearly an illustrative instance of trauma cinema and its typical stylistics, perhaps most prominently in its destabilising of place and undermining of understandable dialogue, for example, during the Pink Room sequence [1:15:39-1:23:57].⁷⁶ According to Panek (2006:76-77) Lynch's later films, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, are, similarly, stories about characters searching for information, which cues viewers to undertake their own searches, about violent and traumatic past events, but, importantly, without achieving (or offering viewers) closure.

Luckhurst (2008:1-3) goes so far as to identify a pervasive "trauma paradigm," a "contemporary trauma culture," which has taken root in developed industrial countries since the late-nineteenth century. Accordingly, our understanding of human experience and subjectivity has been saturated by the reexperiencing of a shared woundedness which has drifted away from physical trauma into the mental realm of vicarious traumatisation and victimhood via popular metaphors of having suffered psychic scars and wounds. This cultural paradigm is reflected in the mainstream uptake – since the 1990s – of art cinema's stylistic devices for cuing non-linear temporal and perspectival disruptions as cultural forms for representing discordant traumatic experiences and traumatised selves (ibid.:176-182, 196). These include disordered, looping or mosaic-like, fragmented plots that cohere around flashbacks to a character's enslaving traumatic secret, whether as repressed memories or dissociative disorders resulting from (sexual) abuse. *Fire Walk* is unique and doubly-disorienting for its mixing of Laura

⁷⁵ Once again, to be clear, this is the era of the internet, the puzzle film, and the popularisation of philosophy.

⁷⁶ This sequence was not subtitled for the original cinema release, which made it near-impossible for viewers to pick up the vital revelation that Teresa had been blackmailing Leland before she was murdered.

and Leland's mirroring but mismatched dissociations. And, Leland's own abuse is effectively hidden from the viewer because his flashbacks only reach into the past far enough to reveal Laura's prostitution and, thereby, another of his self-protective motivations for filicide. Instead, as Luckhurst points out, the film's "evocation of a post-traumatic mood" is nested within a more overriding sense of "pre-traumatic dread" (ibid.:202).

Branigan (2002:110-113, 2014:236), furthermore, explains the basic interest and satisfaction of such irresolvable trauma films in terms of our familiar capacity and inclination for imaginative "what-if" scenarios that are constructed out of what is "almost true" or already-experienced-in-another-form. We are continuously honing our moment-by-moment abilities to construct hypotheses, make inferences, and, in particular, to assess branching networks of alternative behavioural possibilities in a situation that is similar to real-world encounters, but, of course, not as punishing of mistakes or as irreversibly dangerous. Moreover, this core mechanism (alongside abstraction, language, subjectivity, and so forth) of our constant mental recreation of the world partially explains our ability to rewatch a film even though its content and ending are already familiar.

More recently, theorising of the current puzzle film boom has typically been pursued via taxonomies of its types and subcategories.⁷⁷ Almost all of these accounts revolve around the role of narrative complexity in the films' formal structures and the ways in which attentive viewers are prompted to engage with this complexity. However, puzzle films can also be categorised on either sides of a line that separates films that are puzzling because of their complexity (puzzles that are difficult to solve) from films that

⁷⁷ See Elsaesser (2017:5-6) for a comprehensive, recently updated list of the most important taxonomies and the "bewildering" range of definitions and titles that different authors have put forward; viz. complex, multi-strand, multiple-draft, forking-path, network, modular, fractal, database and hyperlink narratives. Kiss and Willemsen's (2017:10) list add multilinear, fractal, episodic, alternative-plot, cubist, loop, and multiple-embedded narratives. Earlier, Berg (2006) offered an as yet under-exploited taxonomy of twelve "alternative plot formations" made possible by the so-called "Tarantino Effect," which he traces back to antecedents from the 1930s and even earlier: viz. plots that are polyphonic, parallel, multiple personality, daisy chain, backwards, repeated action, repeated event, hub and spoke, jumbled, subjective, existential or metanarrative.

are so 'complex' that they ultimately remain puzzling (puzzles without solutions). The latter films "hold seemingly endless interpretive possibilities" (Sterritt 2016:478). In addition, here the word 'complex' may denote, beyond its everyday meaning, an ever-broadening range of narrative and/or stylistic ways in which these films can be cognitively disorienting.

3.6 More comprehensive accounts of the puzzle film phenomenon: Buckland and Elsaesser

Film Studies scholar Warren Buckland (2009b, 2014) has edited two topic-specific, multi-author volumes that have, firstly, all but cemented "puzzle films" as the most generally accepted of the many titles proposed for this broad category of puzzling films, and, secondly, situates the phenomenon within a supposedly post-classical era of narrative cinema.⁷⁸ Almost all of the essays share Bordwell's cognitive theory of film comprehension, but most develop in opposition to his Aristotelian approach to canonical (conventional) simple and complex narrative forms, which I discussed in sections 3.3 and 3.5).⁷⁹

In his introduction to the first volume, Buckland argues that we are in a new, "post-classical"⁸⁰ storytelling era that "rejects classical storytelling techniques and replaces them with complex storytelling" (2009b:1). He starts his argument with the explicit assumption that human beings "understand their experiences and identities,"

⁷⁸ Alternatively, the different names have been subsumed under "complex narratives" (Simons 2008) or "complex films" (Poulaki 2014). However, this is somewhat misleading because complexity is only one of many ways (including ambiguity and incoherence) in which films may be puzzling and whereby viewers may be puzzled. Hence, forking-paths films, multiple-draft narratives, mind-game films, subjective narratives, etc. may all be considered, with much obvious overlap, as still-developing narrower styles, cycles or sub-genres of puzzle films, rather than alternative titles for the overall puzzle film phenomenon.

⁷⁹ Interestingly, Bordwell's pivotal *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) covers five historical modes of (fiction) film narration. The first four are familiar: classical, art-cinema, historical-materialist, and avant-garde (including the film-essay). But his "parametric narration" – the "least public and most rarely discussed...[and]...most controversial" and heterogeneous kind of "style centred" narration, whether "dialectical," "permutational," or "poetic" (1985:275) – has been strangely overlooked in subsequent film theory (see Burnett 2004 and Turvey 2015). I suspect that it might be the key to a fruitful alternative approach to the nature and historical importance of (impossible) puzzle films.

⁸⁰ This is Thanouli's (2006) coinage.

transculturally and folk-psychologically, "by engaging the stories of others, and by constructing their own stories" (ibid.).⁸¹ Hence, because our experiences and identities in new media cultures have become "radically new" and "increasingly ambiguous and fragmented," their associated, folk-psychology-undermining stories have "become opaque and complex" and are "usually coded as disturbing and traumatic" (ibid.).⁸² In addition to being complex (e.g. interwoven plots), the "intricate" puzzle films that Buckland has in mind are perplexingly complicated and entangled (ibid.:3). In these cases, viewers are typically confronted with nonlinear, time-looped, and disjointed spatiotemporal realities; distorted levels of reality; plot gaps, duplicity, maze-like structures, ambiguity, and implausible coincidences; characters that suffer psychotic episodes or amnesia and narrators that turn out to be fundamentally unreliable, if even alive; and narration that produces, rather than resolves, incoherence (ibid.:6).⁸³

While all of these films are puzzles, some, in terms of Buckland's characterisation and his illustrative examples, are puzzles without solutions and should, as per Kiss' (2013:248) original terminology, be considered as "riddles" instead because their missing pieces and/or contradictory extra pieces make them unsolvable. Kiss and Willemsen (2017:62) later decided to stop using "riddle film," opting for "impossible puzzle film" instead, because, they argue, "riddle" is a synonym for "puzzle," and both imply that a (correct) solution could be found. In addition, "impossible puzzle film" immediately indicates, as a sub-genre, its relation to and key difference from more conventional puzzle films. I will follow their usage.

⁸¹ This assumed human tendency to and dependence on narrativisation and its accompanying supposed normative value appears to be one of the most deeply entrenched popular and academic axioms (see anti-narrativity positions in Strawson [2004], Woods [2011] or Harrelson [2016]). It may well be that (impossible) puzzle films are especially appealing to people with a more episodic mental (and life) orientation. I will briefly return to anti-narrativity in the final chapter, but it is, unfortunately, another pressing topic that I need to set aside.

⁸² Thus, Buckland supports the insight that the relevant viewing experiences are not ultimately pleasurable or satisfying, and, hence, do not need to be transformed or compensated for.

⁸³ Music critic Simon Reynolds (1998) has identified a similar popularisation of difficult and puzzling music which has developed, like puzzle films, since the 1990s. "Sampladelic" music, music created with digital technologies like samplers, refers to "disorienting, perception-warping" electronic music which undermines a traditional sense of "musicality," has digitally appropriated the experimental techniques of *musique concrete*, produces sounds that appear to come from "imaginary or even unimaginable instruments," and has a fanatical fanbase (ibid.:41-42). Again, the parallels are obvious.

Alternatively, international Media and Culture Studies theorist Thomas Elsaesser (2017:10) has developed a comprehensive ideologic-symptomatic, sociological but also progressively more "philosophically inflected" (meaning, more methodologically careful and cognitively informed) account of "mind-game films"; puzzle films that are typified by intensely unstable ontologies and epistemologies as well as problematised forms of human agency and subjectivity. Elsaesser bases these more recent refinements on an overview of his original, 2009 chapter, "The Mind-Game Film," in combination with key theorists' arguments and insights from the academic discourse of the intervening decade. Mind-game films typically (i) "play" with audiences and/or characters by holding back or presenting vital information in misleading ways, (ii) range across many genres (e.g. the science-fiction, horror, neo-noir, mystery, or teen film) but often address familiar genre topics (like teenage/adult identity crises, issues of gender and sexuality, 'oedipal' psychodramas, and dysfunctional communities; all familiar aspects of *Fire Walk* and of Lynch's oeuvre), and (iii) offer popular enquiries into philosophical topics, like consciousness, agency, reality, truth and morality (Elsaesser 2009:14-15).

In mind-game films, overall, the "diegetic world" (or story-world) characteristically appears realistic at first but is revealed to comprise of "several parallel, disjunctive and potentially incompatible universes" (Elsaesser 2017:11). Hence, viewers are obliged to retrospectively reconsider the reality-status of the different depicted 'worlds,' as well as its implications for making sense of the narrative and for interpreting the meaning of the film as a whole. In these cases, cognitive confusion and accompanying negative affect, whether ultimately resolved or not, are inevitably involved.

Elsaesser (2017:21-35) explains how this distinctive kind of viewing experience arises from twelve common features of mind-game films. I will list each with illustrative examples from *Fire Walk*. (i) "Multiple universes and unframed ontologies," like the mysterious Lodge and Red Room, and its residents, disrupting characters' everyday reality; (ii) disorienting temporal structures, like the perplexing "timeless time" of the Red Room (see Luckhurst 2008:202); (iii) overcomplex and irresolvable causality, like Leland's (initially) confusing rather than explanatory flashbacks; (iv) "retroactive

causality," like the obscure implications and effects of wearing the ring (e.g. Does Laura put the ring on to provoke him into killing her or because she knows Leland is going to kill her?); (v) mirroring effects and doubling process, like the links between Laura and Teresa, Leland-Bob, or, more interestingly, Laura and Leland;⁸⁴ (vi) the contaminating presence of the observer (protagonist) as part of that which is being observed, like Cooper seeing himself in the security camera scene or Laura seeing herself in the moving photograph on her bedroom wall; (vii) an inevitable, complex and irresolvable contradictoriness, like the mystifying relationship between the two parts of the film or the ambiguously cued transitions into Laura's dreams and dissociative hallucinations⁸⁵; (viii) illusory resolutions, like the film's ending, with Laura's tears of joy, Cooper and the angel in attendance, but with key causal and thematic issues left unresolved⁸⁶; (ix) "antagonistic mutuality," like the familial interconnectedness of Leland and Laura's identities and their shared fate; (x) inhibited-but-enabling agency, like Laura's abuse leading to both a desperate life of addiction, prostitution and hostile manipulation of other people (e.g. of Bobby and Buck) *as well as* a self-transcending capacity for kindness (e.g. meals-on-wheels) and protectiveness (e.g. over James and Donna); (xi) time-travel-like access to the 'black box' of trauma, like Cooper's contradictory but revelatory 'accompaniment' of Laura through her traumatic final days *before* he has been tasked to investigate her murder; and (xii) seeming to invite a problem-solving mentality, but portraying an incomprehensible world of dilemmas, of problems without solutions, such as the protective, gender-based enclave of the familial household also

⁸⁴ "Leland, through his identification with his abuser, both becomes BOB [sic] and represses his memory of his own abuse, so that, in a sense, when Laura sees her incestuous father, she sees *his* abuser" (Davenport et al. 1993:257, their emphasis).

⁸⁵ The "film's bifurcated narrative find[s] two worlds crashing together, the first a plane of frustrated desire and inscrutable mystery, the second a void into which a young woman is swallowed up. The procedural elements of the first are fundamentally disconnected from the tragedy of the second" (Marsh 2013).

⁸⁶ See Hampton's (1993:40, 49) perspective on how the film's supernatural 'cheat' ending supposedly absolves Leland and, thereby, the audience and Lynch himself from facing up to the gruesome realities of sexual abuse. However, I would argue that discontent with the ending, especially on repeat viewing, is likely to prompt reflection on, for example, the place of blame in one's worldview. Furthermore, I take the recurrence of such endings in Lynch's work as an indication that he is intentionally engaging these or similar reflective processes.

being a tragically common setting for systematic abuse or the apparent ineffectiveness and corruptibility of the institutions of law enforcement.⁸⁷

In short, mind-game films call on "viewers to carve narrative meaning out of seeming incoherence" via cognitive activities like "retroactive revisions, repeated reality checks, [and] mental reorganizations" (Sterritt 2016:479). Thus, mind-game films (and puzzle films generally) hold viewers' attention via different narrative and stylistic techniques that prompt back-and-forth puzzlement (good enough for a single viewing) or different levels of puzzle-solving (necessary for deeper engagement and investment). Viewers' interpretive activities may vary from fairly effortful/painful to very effortful/painful, depending on the particular film and/or specific viewer, and may, depending on the level of involvement of the viewer, be affectively and intellectually enjoyable in terms of mastery and skills development, social interaction, knowledge acquisition, and so forth. However, the progression that I have sketched from universally accessible to conventional film form to challenging to puzzle film to mind-game film still stops short of the "rarified zone of avant-garde radicalism" (ibid.:478), but finds, again with much overlap, its high-point in the more clearly identified and problematic impossible puzzle film.⁸⁸

3.7 Impossible puzzle films: Kiss and Willemsen

Dutch Film and Media Studies scholar Miklós Kiss (2013:240) has proposed an embodied cognition-based refinement of the complexity-based categorisation (in the recent debate and used for lists of film examples) of puzzle films to address his dissatisfaction with the range of diverse films usually lumped together and, thus, also repositions the work of David Lynch. In indirect, storytelling-media-mediated, puzzle film

⁸⁷ Likewise, the film's disruption frame can be interpreted as "Lynch's way of signaling that there will be no easy answers: we're about to witness a tragedy unfold without explanation, horrors happening that we can't justify or explain" (Marsh 2013). Fileva (2013:179-181) similarly argues that genuinely painful aesthetic experiences are valuable for challenging the conventional boundaries of thought and conversation that tend to exclude latent human fears and concerns about, for instance, loneliness, illness, aging and death.

⁸⁸ Sterritt's examples of the inhabitants of this 'zone' tellingly includes Maya Deren, whose *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) is probably the most regularly cited experimental influence on Lynch's style.

experiences the same problem-solving cognition on which we depend in direct, real-life experiences are exploited by "challenging compositional practices" that evoke "temporary or prolonged cognitive confusion" (ibid.:241). While viewers are challenged in most cases to cope with solvable or manageable confusion via "intact" cognitive processes, some films push viewers to the point where these processes are "broken" (ibid.:242). Hence, the unnatural "riddle plots" of "impossible puzzle films" prompt "uncompromisingly confusing experiences" through narrative strategies and very strange story-worlds that are founded on unsolvable, ceaselessly perplexing, analytically unsegmentable "ambiguities, mutual exclusivities, and paradoxes" (ibid.:247-248).⁸⁹ Yet, some (or even many, and apparently more and more) viewers show a "persistent willingness" to continue an "unsatisfying struggle" to map these confusing experiences "cognitively or/and graphically" (ibid.:248). I take this 'struggle' to be, in my preferred terminology, motivated, cognitively confusing, discomfiture viewing experiences.

On this foundation, Kiss and Willemsen (2017:2-5) produced the first book-length cognitive-psychological (or viewing experience-focused) treatment of the nature, attraction, cognitive demands, and "widespread domestication" (ibid.:11) of confusingly complex impossible puzzle films.⁹⁰ They attribute the resurgence and enduring national and worldwide success of genre and platform-crossing mainstream narrative complexification to two main factors (ibid.:12-16), which are already familiar from the foregoing chapters. On the one hand, technological advances, like internet access, make it possible for audiences to actively decipher demanding films collectively, which, in turn, equips viewers further and fuels the demand for such films. And, on the other

⁸⁹ Mainstream films are (more) 'natural' in the sense that viewers can process their content or information more easily and integrate this information, via naturalising and rationalising cognitive routines (such as attributing subjective memories or alternative realities), to make coherent sense.

⁹⁰ While this volume is a commendable, necessary first approximation, it is often hampered by a reliance on concepts and theories taken from literary narratology, and which overlooks the significant differences between literary (reading and imagining) and moving-image (seeing plus imagining) 'make-believe' (see Kroeber 2006). I take this to be an unaddressed leftover of, first, their assumption that human beings are "narratively wired," that is, that narrative is a "fundamental human cognitive instrument" (ibid.:108) and, second, the discredited film-as-language approach of outdated semiotic film theory (see Currie 1993).

hand, narrative and stylistic complexification takes commercial advantage of rewatchability and repeatability to secure a more devoted viewership.

These films, ranging from unexpected cult favourites to big-budget blockbusters, basically produce "cognitive puzzlement" by obstructing or suspending viewers' "construction or comprehension of the story" (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:27). This puzzlement increases as films become, as epitomised by Lynch's work, more "narratively contradictory or logically incongruent" without offering "explicit resolution" (ibid.:62) by, for example, not cuing unambiguously that certain parts are a character's subjective and/or unreliable fantasies, dreams or mental projections (ibid.:79). Viewers are, instead, confronted with a mix and accumulation of disorienting 'impossibilities' and complexities in plot and story, cued emotional responses, visual elements, possible meanings, and self-referentiality.⁹¹ The resulting inexorable narrational paradoxes, uncertainties, contradictions and ambiguities, typically trigger a wider than usual range of inextricable implicit meanings, associative interpretations and imaginative alternatives.⁹²

For example, the many impossible supernatural places and events in *Fire Walk* are portrayed so that they are not obviously a particular character's subjective projections, but also not a wholesale depiction of a well-established religious (Judeo-Christian) iconography. Lynch freely mixes banal 'angels' from childhood images and pop-culture with unplaceable entities like the Man from Another Place or Mrs. Tremond and her grandson (the boy-magician). Attentive and thoughtful viewers may make sense of this by "positing a transcendental realm" (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:116) with its own kind of 'purgatory' (the Red Room and Lodge) and 'heaven' (for Laura's 'redemptive,' Red Room afterlife), with 'hell' apparently reserved for horrific events in the everyday world.

⁹¹ It is yet another instance of what David Davies calls "intentionally inaccessible art" (whether excessively tedious or shockingly violent) and which, he argues, may serve the justified aesthetic purpose of prompting viewers to "reflect not only on the events in the film but also on their reaction to these events," so that, ultimately, the "morals of the work [may] be realized" (2013:263).

⁹² Of course, some, probably not many, viewers believe that they have found the definitive interpretation and may support it with detailed analyses, but impossible puzzle films are, by definition, films with incoherent and indeterminable referential and explicit meanings.

Moreover, the many ways in which impossible puzzle films hinder viewers' everyday routines for sense-making and meaning-creation also routinely elicit enduring cognitively confusing and cognitively dissonant (for which, read 'painful') experiences, especially for the significant proportion of viewers who remain determined to try to solve these ultimately insoluble puzzles (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:6-7). These effects are, of course, likely to be especially threatening to unprepared viewers who expect film narratives to be congruent and cohesive (ibid.:109). Either way, viewers strive, as far as possible, to "eliminate or reduce" these conflicted, dissonant mental states because they are obviously not enjoyable (ibid.:107). They may, for example, interpret the dissonance itself as an aesthetic effect that is part of the intended purpose and function of the film or genre or, specifically in the case of more well-informed viewers, of the filmmaker's oeuvre; like the bizarre attractiveness of the many Lynchian eccentrics and grotesqueries (ibid.:120).⁹³ However, when more thoroughly "bewildering and perplexing" impossible puzzle films ultimately resist viewers' "prolonged efforts" to reduce the cognitive dissonances evoked, these dissonances may be "more global and lastingly disconcerting" (ibid.:127).⁹⁴

While 'unintelligible' impossible puzzle films, then, obviously do not, overall, offer the satisfaction of conventional narrative comprehension, these viewing experiences – viewers' interest, engagement and immersion – are still founded on and made possible by a framework of classical narrational strategies (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:142). In addition, these "crossover" films typically combine "diegetic riddles with an action-driven classical genre" (ibid.:169). At base, then, *Fire Walk*, is a mystery-horror film that tells the relatively simple, causally coherent story of Laura's abuse, but this story unfolds

⁹³ I return to this topic in section 4.3.2 of the next chapter where I discuss Carroll's position on the interpretive ascent and Grodal's upstream search.

⁹⁴ Other authors have also contributed to correcting the curious absence of cognitive dissonance as an explanatory concept in theories of moving-image spectatorship. See Van der Pol (2013) for a positive take on its role in problematic character engagement in art cinema (and, hence, in mass art films). Alternatively, see Moss-Wellington (2017) for an extremely negative take on the patriarchal misogyny which he finds hidden behind the common dissonance-reducing viewing strategies of (mistakenly) attributing (i) profundity (or even philosophy) to radically ambiguous films and (ii) visionary auteur status to filmmakers like David Lynch. My focus, however, is both narrower and broader. I am attempting a cognition-focused account of the problem of ultimately unmitigated, confusing, dissonant viewing experiences without primarily attributing these experiences to cognitive dissonance or primarily basing my solution on the reduction of cognitive dissonance.

within the context of a mysterious framework of, first, supernatural interference, and, second, potentially endemic masculine failure, whether of the parental, protective, abusive, or policing kinds.⁹⁵ Hence, the film minimally offers some narrative comprehension pleasures, acculturated genre 'pleasures' (e.g. fear, dread and disgust) and the pleasure of reflecting on its broader – implicit and symptomatic – meanings (e.g. on the natural versus supernatural nature of evil). But, still, the results of the latter are very unlikely to offer viewers much joy or relief.

Nevertheless, Kiss and Willemsen (2017) discuss and illustrate several ways in which impossible puzzle film viewing experiences may prompt positive mental responses. Up to a point, impossible puzzle films may, among other things, produce an "attractive struggle" (64), be exaggeratedly ('hyperactivatingly') "engaging" and profoundly fascinating (107), create a "higher appreciation of and a stronger or more prolonged mental connection" (120), and may be "rewarding and satisfying," without being overall pleasurable, to the extent that viewers' interpretive activities reduce dissonance or make them "feel competent and insightful" (126).

In more extreme cases, "frame-switches" allow viewers to engage with incoherent and illogical narratives by adopting more "'poetic' or 'aesthetic' modes," by completely abandoning narrativity, or via the distancing effects of associative, allegorical, symbolic or symptomatic meaning-making (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:127-130). But, they argue, these alternative modes of meaning-making are more characteristic of art cinema viewing and can be used to separate art film out from impossible puzzle films, which are mainstream (ibid.:134).⁹⁶ From an alternative perspective, as I have tried to show throughout this chapter, this distinction has dissolved to the extent that art film techniques are being taken up ("infiltrating") into the mainstream (see Kovács 2007:60).

⁹⁵ This theme ultimately needs to be addressed by a gender-based approach, but it lies outside of the focus of this dissertation because of the magnitude of the topic and its highly contentious foundations.

⁹⁶ Of course, many (less well-informed) viewers may simply consider puzzle films as art films because of both the freer everyday use and the relative vagueness of the concept.

In the final chapter of their resourceful book, Kiss and Willemsen (2017:184-207) call for further research (and informed viewers' reflections) by speculatively proposing eight "explorative" hypotheses that may, on the one hand, form part of a comprehensive account of the strange appeal of impossible puzzle films or, on the other hand, explain the attraction (or failure) of a particular impossible puzzle film.⁹⁷ First, the unresolvable sense-making loops of these films invites a kind of hermeneutic (or cognitive) play which involves the constant testing of multiple interpretations, knowledge frames, analytical manoeuvres and critical skills. Viewers may find this process satisfying because it is novel, liberating, triumphant over reason, order, logic, and purpose, because it celebrates subjectivity, ambiguity, and irregularity, or because it mirrors and prepares viewers (i) for functioning in an overly-complex and ambiguous ('postmodern') life-world or (ii) for the complexities of our sense-making processes and mental lives more generally.⁹⁸

Second, embodied-cognitive viewer-engagement is enhanced by films that deeply challenge viewers' mapping-based, real-life orientation and navigation skills, such as imaginative spatio-temporal visualisation, reordering or recategorization (e.g. by attributing content to a character's mental subjectivity). This process usually continues (or is repeated) after the viewing experience and may include online research, discussions, comparisons, authorial interpretations, and so forth.

Third, videogame-primed viewers, used to reaching higher game levels without fully mastering the overall gameplay, are more likely to enjoy and be fascinated by trying to figure out how they have been manipulated by a film or what its underlying rules are, and failure to do so is not an unexpected outcome; in fact, failure may itself be a source

⁹⁷ Here I only offer a brief listing-summary, but many of these ideas recur in the subsequent chapters. Worldview-philosophy-through-film is closest to their eighth suggestion, but it also encompasses elements from the other seven strands into this plural, multivariate and dialectically integrated position.

⁹⁸ In some circles it is, of course, commonplace to attribute these themes to postmodernity or to its more recent outgrowth: 'post-truth.' Yet, these are also familiar dimensions of the recent reappreciation of the ongoing global impact of the values of the Enlightenment (see Pinker 2018) and some of its outgrowths, such as the secular Buddhist "culture of awakening" (see Batchelor 1997, 2014) or other related forms of secular, 'post-faith' spirituality (see Harris 2004, 2014).

of fascination.⁹⁹ Unlike in gaming, though, impossible puzzle film viewers, by definition, ultimately 'fail' to solve the film's impossible puzzle and, as I will argue, the major additional and commendable motivation for watching these films in the first place and for further engagement may be the opportunity for popular worldview-philosophising.

Fourth, because of the cognitive phenomenon of effort justification, viewers may, in retrospect, overvalue watching, finishing and making sense of an impossible puzzle film (and overestimate the quality of the film itself and the merits of the filmmaker) because of the unpleasant efforts – the mental exertion and endured cognitive confusion – which they have invested. Indeed, appreciating *Fire Walk* may involve a sense of a successful 'trial by fire,' of having 'walked through fire' with Laura, with Lynch and/or with fellow viewers.

Fifth, viewers may be attracted to the metacognitive reexperiencing of the fundamental, evolved, cognitive-mimetic conflict (and, at times, dissonance) which arises from temporarily decoupling our here-and-now experience of actuality from that of alternative, imaginative 'realities' which are mediated by memories, fantasies, fictional (diegetic) worlds, and so forth.¹⁰⁰ This process is probably mirrored in the ubiquity of literal and perspectival character-doubling in puzzle films.

Sixth, the many loops and duplications in impossible puzzle films may tap a deep-seated human and/or cultural curiosity about and fascination with the bewildering possibilities and implications of endlessness or infinity. It is often expressed in religious thought (e.g. the afterlife), science (e.g. in cosmology or quantum physics), and in the arts (e.g. in the work of M.C. Escher).

⁹⁹ The pervasiveness of game failure usually leaves gamers only slightly or fleetingly annoyed and they are typically excited and motivated by this challenging situation (see Tavinor 2009:118).

¹⁰⁰ In section 4.3.3 of the next chapter, again, I relate this complicated and controversial idea to Carroll's emphasis on the asymmetry between the viewer and characters' perspectives, to Grodal's recognition of the centrality of reality-testing in viewing experiences, and to Plantinga's position on the twofoldedness of viewer-engagement.

Seventh, the breakdown of ontological certainty, that is, of the 'innerworkings' (narrative structures) or boundaries of the story-world, may evoke strange and interesting affective and intellectual experiences. Consider, for example, the unstable and ambiguous worlds within worlds in *Fire Walk*; that is, the strange relationships between Laura's everyday world and the Lodge or the world of the FBI frame narrative or Laura's subjective projections.¹⁰¹

Lastly, and overarchingly, the "confusion-paradox," that is, the fact that the "negative valence of being confused may be considered enjoyable" during impossible puzzle film viewing, can basically be dissolved by emphasising the more eudaimonic dimensions that make these experiences "engaging and fascinating" (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:205). Accordingly, the seven basic kinds of motivations discussed so far are more reflective and knowledge-seeking or founded on personal development, rather than (though not mutually exclusive from) hedonic or entertainment-seeking drives. Either way, impossible puzzle films, like all films, ultimately appeal to some of the viewers' many intrinsic psychological needs, and, for increasingly knowledgeable viewers, self-determination (independence, interpersonal relations, and competency) may well be the most important of these.¹⁰²

In conclusion, it is easy to find (maybe Villeneuve's *Arrival* [2016]) or imagine puzzle films that are so mildly 'impossible' that the light misbalancing of the viewer's perspective may be pleasantly disturbing or may evoke a sense of despair so gentle that it may even be soothing. While puzzle films typically portray some variant of "ontological pluralism," such as multiple dream levels (e.g. in *Inception*), there is little ambiguity about the nature of and movement between these realities, which, consequently, minimises viewing dissonance (Buckland 2014:8). But, 'full catastrophe'¹⁰³ impossible puzzle films, like *Fire Walk*, produce unmitigated, cognitively

¹⁰¹ In *Inland Empire* (2006) Lynch portrays another kind of jarring ontological breakdown of the boundaries that separate different 'worlds' by including aspects of the filmmaking process in the film itself.

¹⁰² Of course, the attraction remains because no matter how experienced we are as viewers, we cannot know fully what we are getting into when confronted with films that we have not watched before.

¹⁰³ This phrase, originally expressed by Zorba (the Greek), has been popularised by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990:5-6) to cover the gamut of the human condition – the human folly, small and large crises, impermanence, chaos and

confusing, discomfiture experiences that cannot be addressed fully through film historical or formal-stylistic explanations. Hence, in the next chapter I turn to cognitive film theory to expand these explanations of mass art film viewer-engagement and, thereby, add more strands to the expanding rich-disclosure scaffolding for worldview-philosophy-through-film.

incomprehensibility – that we are challenged to face and transcend (via, in his case, meditation-based stress reduction). The similarities to impossible puzzle film experiences are self-evident.

CHAPTER 4: COGNITIVE THEORIES OF MASS ART VIEWER-ENGAGEMENT

In this, second long chapter I continue the cumulative piecemeal construction of the overall, mid-level conceptual framework that I will utilize to describe the nature and support the relevance of worldview-philosophy-through-film. To this end I provide a selective but comprehensive-enough (for my purposes) and illustrative overview of cognitive film theories that account for mass art viewer-engagement. The aim is to add these cognitive elements to the previously established rich-disclosure framework in such a way as to facilitate its expansion, in the next chapter, to also include impossible puzzle films.

It is worth noting from the start that there are at least two good reasons why it would be more correct to refer to cognitive-emotive film theories: first, because of the central role they accord to affective states, and, second, because of how tightly all human cognition and emotion are interdependent. I return to this topic throughout the chapter. It comprises of three main sections. First, I introduce Jaak Panksepp's SEEKING system as the broadest cognitive-emotive motivation for film spectatorship. Secondly, I contextualise the cognitive shift which has taken place in turn-of-the-millennium, English-language theorising of viewer-engagement. Thereafter, in the core section of the chapter, I provide an integrated six-part cognitive scaffolding for conventional mass art spectatorship that is based on Torben Grodal's PECMA flow model of mainstream viewing aesthetics and Noël Carroll's erotetic model of viewer-engagement, with occasional input from Carl Plantinga and Murray Smith.

4.1 Panksepp's SEEKING system and spectatorship

The influential Estonian affective psychobiologist Jaak Panksepp's neuroevolutionary work on the seven basic or instinctual, pre-cognitive, mammalian emotional systems – our "primal affective consciousness" (2017:141) – has recently appeared more frequently in foundational cognitive explanations of viewer-engagement (e.g. Grodal

2012). As background to cognitive film theories, two specific, interrelated aspects of his theory are especially significant.

On the one hand, it has added momentum to the movement away from the academically entrenched "emotion-cognition divide" in narrative-based theories of spectatorship; that is, it undermines the untenable separation of concurrent primary (e.g. perceptual and affective) and secondary (e.g. inferential) cognitive viewing processes (Badt 2015:66-74). At base, cognitive engagement takes direction and impetus from more basic but closely related affective processes. As human beings, viewers are intrinsically driven by four reward systems – SEEKING (discussed separately in the next section), LUST (erotic and reproductive), CARE (parental nurturance), and PLAY (joyful frolicking) – and three punishing systems – RAGE (competitive anger and other irritations), FEAR (self-defensive anxieties), and PANIC (childhood separation distress and adult sorrow/grief) (Panksepp 2017:149-151).¹⁰⁴

While all seven systems are involved in film-viewing, I will, for the sake of brevity, only mention that viewer-engagement most obviously involves the PLAY system. It offers viewers, among other things, generally pleasurable practice opportunities for navigating social realities. These playful navigations, because they are fundamentally linked to cognition, prompt many viewers to behavioural reflections that add to and refine their understanding of social relations. Films may, in addition, trigger viewers' "developmentally programmed cognitive systems" to create "higher-order emotions" (Panksepp 2017:151) or "cognitive feelings" (Badt 2015:69), such as anger, sadness, disgust, shame, gratitude or admiration, which, thereby, moves viewer-engagement into the domain of ethics.

Furthermore, the most important and "remarkable" of these systems, the SEEKING system, underpins (by providing dopamine-fuelled energy and enthusiasm) an array of goal-directed human urges, appetites, desires, and expectations related to discovering

¹⁰⁴ These unsightly capitalisations are Panksepp's way of cuing his usage of familiar words with theory-specific meanings.

and harvesting the world (Panksepp 2017:149). In its more information-directed form, SEEKING includes the attention, interest and curiosity that prompt exploring and investigating the environment (Badt 2015:66-69). Such SEEKING feeds our second-order, ideational awareness (or secondary consciousness); that is, the human thought processes and cognition which support more reflective appraisals and learning. Ultimately, SEEKING enables, and is uniquely bound to, our tertiary-level, meta-cognitive consciousness (Badt 2015:78, Panksepp 2017:149-150), which is necessary for higher-order mental activities like mentalisation, mature emotional self-expression, aesthetic experiences, worldview construction and, of course, philosophy itself.

In the case of film-viewing, SEEKING finds expression in how viewers, firstly, ask narrative questions, searching shots and sequences for relevant information and clues, and, secondly, seek and prefer (more so in the case of mass cinephiles) novel and unusual non-narrative elements, like new images, technical flourishes, and innovative *mise en scène* (Badt 2015:67, 72). Since SEEKING is so innately, neurobiologically exciting, it rewards and promotes vigorous self-stimulation and runs the risk of being self-administered in drug-like, addictive or obsessive ways (Panksepp 2017:149) that typify the experience of diminishing returns. It is the main biocultural enabler of current trends like binge-watching and excessive engagement with puzzle films. SEEKING also explains many of those idiosyncratic interpretative activities that produce responses which do not match the filmmakers' intended effects and meanings (Badt 2015:73). Interestingly, many of these themes inform David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), an impossible puzzle film that revolves around the joys and unavoidable hazards of meaning-making, of looking for answers, solving mysteries, and pursuing self-understanding (see Lim 2015).

4.2 The cognitive turn in viewer-engagement theory

4.2.1 A brief recent historical background

During the late-1980s, film theorist David Bordwell (in Film Studies) and aesthetician Noël Carroll (in Philosophy) together initiated a distinctive strand of theoretical inquiry

into cinematic comprehension that developed into current cognitive film theory (Rushton & Bettinson 2010:156).¹⁰⁵ Much of their early work – including the foundational, co-edited, interdisciplinary volume *Post-theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996) – developed as a corrective to the so-called "Grand Theory" which was dominant in English-language academia at the time: "that aggregate of doctrines derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Structuralist semiotics, Post-Structuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism" (Bordwell & Carroll 1996:xiii).¹⁰⁶

As a self-proclaimed "part-time cognitivist," Bordwell characterises this approach as an "empirical-experiential family of theories" that are founded on regularities in the mental "processes of perception, comprehension, emotional responses, and more abstract appropriation" that underpin viewer-engagement (2010:5-6).¹⁰⁷ Hence, it emphasises empirical research into basic convergences in the constructive, "patterned process of perceptual and inferential elaboration" of most viewer responses, which, thereby, also uncovers divergent responses (ibid.:10). It allows, therefore, for atypical individual responses by addressing the shared, embodied mental processes that make viewer-engagement possible in the first place. However, while viewers may freely impose implicit and symptomatic meanings, there is an increasingly problematic breakdown in intentional communication when these interpretations become less true to the particular film's referential and explicit content.¹⁰⁸

Since the mid-1990s a second generation of Anglo-American (but also, among others, European and Australian) cognitively-oriented theorists and philosophers has developed various competing explanations of the different dimensions of cognitive-emotive

¹⁰⁵ See Bordwell (1996) for a definitive characterisation of Grand Theory and its historical role in Film Studies.

¹⁰⁶ For the purposes of this dissertation I will simply note and set aside these initial, and to some extent ongoing, critical engagements with this tradition – variously referred to as SLAB theory, psycho-semiotics, subject-positioning theory, or Contemporary Film Theory – to focus instead on the positive positions within cognitive film theory that contribute to addressing cognitive discomfiture, impossible puzzle film viewing experiences. See Buckland (2000) for an alternative positioning of Bordwell and Carroll's contribution in relation to the Continental strand of cognitive-semiotic film theory.

¹⁰⁷ This theoretic perspective is often traced back to German-American psychologist Hugo Munsterberg's proto-cognitivist approach in *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916) (Bordwell 2009:356).

¹⁰⁸ See Carroll (2013a) for his defence of modest actual intentionalism as opposed to both hypothetical intentionalism and anti-intentionalism.

spectatorship and character engagement by prioritising some variant of identification, sympathy, empathy or simulation (see Plantinga [2009a] for a compact, insightful overview). This expansion has progressively produced an analytic-cognitivist turn in the theorising of moving-image viewer-engagement which is, first, often foundationally biocultural, second, internally diverse and self-critical, and, third, increasingly varied in its areas of inquiry and its explanatory concepts.

The title – analytic-cognitivist – has come to stand for a shift towards moving-image theory that is, first, largely done by analytic philosophers and analytically-oriented (or at least analytically-sympathetic) film theorists, and, secondly, is broadly cognitivist to the extent that it takes the mental and cognitive underpinnings of viewer-engagement as its starting point.¹⁰⁹ However, there is no analytic-cognitivist school or unified cognitive theory of film. Instead, the title refers to a broadly consolidated research tradition (Nannicelli 2015) that includes, among others, film theories that are explicitly cognitive (e.g. Bordwell 2009), philosophy of film that is categorically analytical (e.g. Carroll 2008c)¹¹⁰, Carl Plantinga's "cognitive/analytic approach" (1998, 2006a), Murray Smith's film theory "in an analytic vein" (Allen & Smith 1997:2), Torben Grodal's (2012) evolutionary psychology-based work in media studies, and scholarship which analytic philosopher Berys Gaut (in Martin-Jones 2010) self-identifies simply as film theory.¹¹¹ The furthest boundary cases of cognitive film theory, and arguably the best indications of how it is likely to transform and survive in the future, are the two prominent cross-over cases: Robert Sinnerbrink's (2011c, 2013) excursions into "cinematic romanticism" and William Brown's "supercinema" (2013) and "non-cinema" (2018). Despite the seeming restrictive title, then, work done within this paradigm does not need to be strictly

¹⁰⁹ See Plantinga (2002), Mullarkey (2009b), or Sinnerbrink (2010a, 2010b) for critical overviews.

¹¹⁰ In *Noël Carroll and Film: A Philosophy of Art and Popular Culture* (2019), Mario Slušan credits Carroll's extensive, controversial, and polarising work (since the late-1970s) for both shaking film studies from the dominance of Continental philosophy *and*, counterintuitively, for providing productive bridges across the so-called analytic-Continental divide. For the last decade or so there have been several multi-tradition volumes that indicate the potential yields of such a reconciliation (see, for example, Smith & Wartenberg 2006, Livingston & Plantinga 2009, Herzogenrath 2017 or Maoilearca 2019).

¹¹¹ This excludes an alternative Wittgensteinian-Cavellian strand of the analytic philosophy of film, which is most visibly and fully developed in the work of Stephen Mulhall (2008), as well as Daniel Frampton's Deleuzian-Cavellian "filmosophy" (2006). For a representative collection of essays in this strand see Read and Goodenough (2005).

analytic, in the more traditional (and largely redundant) compared-to-Continental sense, or even strictly cognitivist, in the traditional all-information-processing, black-box-of-the-mind sense.

4.2.2 *The (biocultural) concerns and assumptions of a cognitive orientation*

Because cognitive film theories take cognition as its main explanatory concept and as the central aspect of viewer-engagement, I will start with a working definition. Carl Plantinga (2016) defines cognition as the mental and sense-making (especially, inferential) activities involved in gaining "knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses," and it includes perception, comprehension, emotion, intuition, insight, and so forth.

Rick Williams, an independent scholar of visual cognition, likewise defines cognition as the "mental processes of knowing or understanding" that equip human beings to "respond to the world and the self in relation to the world" (2005:193-194). He distinguishes two independent but ideally complementary, specific brain hemisphere-based cognitive processing systems or modalities (ibid.:194-201).¹¹² "Intuitive cognition" (or intuition) is immediate, direct or bottom-up (and therefore primary) knowing, which mainly arises from right brain activity, is typically visual and "synthesistic," holistic or global, largely guides behaviour unconsciously, and involves musical, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal and naturalistic intelligences. Intuition, in other words, refers to "a single instance of an instant insight, or to the process of immediate or rapid cognition without apparent rational thought" (Kerr 2009:533). It is typically "habitual, implicit, associative, heuristic, and often emotionally charged," "more susceptible to biases," and tends to appear "self-evident and certain" Kerr 2009:535-536). "Rational cognition," by comparison, is knowing via reason (including failed or 'irrational'

¹¹² Nobel Prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman refers to these mutually-influencing systems as "System 1" or "fast thinking" (automatic, often unconscious, over-confident, associative memory-based, and intuitive) and "System 2" or "slow thinking" (deliberate or controlled, effortful, agency and concentration-based, and rational) (2011:13-21). Though largely psychological, this book's emphasis on thinking makes it a work of popular philosophy and an ideal companion to Daniel Dennett's (2013) on intuition pumps and other thinking tools.

reasoning), which is top-down, secondary, mainly arises from left brain activity, is typically verbal and analytical, especially logical and mathematical, and it guides our actions more consciously (Williams 2005:193-194). Accordingly, cognition encompasses many corporeal and affective processes and is not necessarily conscious, nor limited to rationality.

Even though intuition is a suitable form of understanding and support for decision-making in most everyday contexts, our responses to a given task or challenge tend to be more effective when matched by an ideal balance of inter-reliant, rational and intuitive cognition. This ideal interlocking of intuition with conscious, rational reflection may be skilfully identified, strengthened and refined in areas of an individual's developing expertise, such as cinephilia. Making sense of the disordered chronology of a puzzle film like *Fire Walk*, for example, requires both open-ended intuitive, visual understanding and purposeful, reasoned, inferential narrative reconstruction. Hence, mentalisation-aware viewing experiences and viewing practices may make (reactive) intuitions accessible-and-salient for (more responsive) rational reconsideration. The latter is effortful but energised in the relevant cases by the cognitive-emotive interest which is systematically raised (or criterially prefocused) by specific films.¹¹³

More film-specifically, cognitive film theories share two distinctive central concerns (Coplan 2009:100-107). First, to explain active, imaginative, affective viewer-engagement via a combination of involuntary (bottom-up) mirroring and reflex responses, such as emotional contagion and startle,¹¹⁴ and conscious, high-level (top-down) cognitive processes, such as sympathy and moral reflection. And second, to validate the potential beneficial effects of viewing experiences that reach beyond pleasure and aesthetic appreciation into domains like knowledge production and increased self-understanding. Bartsch and Hartmann's (2015:4) study provides

¹¹³ In the final chapter I situate both intuitive and rational cognition as vital, interrelated aspects of worldview-philosophy-through-film.

¹¹⁴ This includes cognitively impenetrable, unconscious and preconscious mental aspects of film-viewing, such as heuristics and cognitive biases, that filmmakers engage, usually folk psychologically, to guide viewers' responses (Smith 2015).

empirical support for both concerns; i.e. for active viewer involvement and for viewers' pursuit of challenging material in the interest of personal development.

In *What is Film Theory? An Introduction to Contemporary Debates*, Richard Rushton and Gary Bettinson (2010:157-159) argue that this kind of interdisciplinary receptivity to scientific evidence and theorising is the first of four foundational assumptions of the cognitive turn. Cognitive film theories, secondly, characteristically suppose that film-viewing involves the same, basic cognitive (information/knowledge and affective experience directed) skills and procedures that viewers employ to function in the everyday, extra-cinematic world.¹¹⁵ Viewers go through actual, empirical-psychological, rather than, for example, essentially imaginary, experiences of purposefully designed aesthetic, and often fictional, objects (Berliner 2017:8).¹¹⁶

Despite their recording-based construction, films are not, as a matter of experience, representations of 'other' real-world objects or of non-existent, imaginary worlds, but are actual audio-visual artefacts that present created diegetic worlds with prominent (though not always obvious) representational implications.¹¹⁷ As Grodal emphasises, "*film does not possess a semblance of reality*; it is not an illusion...on the contrary, *film is part of reality*" (1997:10).¹¹⁸ According to this foundational anti-illusionism (Currie 1999:110,

¹¹⁵ A long series of ecologically oriented research projects have confirmed how we use the same embodied cognition when navigating real-world environments and when we make sense of structured audio-visual narratives (Kiss 2013:237).

¹¹⁶ Story-worlds are also "not non-actual in the same sense that possible worlds are, that is, they are not alternative ways the world might have been" (Ronen in Kiss & Willemsen 2017:84).

¹¹⁷ These social and practical implications arise, for instance, when viewers and critics interpret portrayed objects and events as generalisations about people or places. Such symptomatic interpretations tend to focus on normative and/or moral issues related to the socially constructed meanings of gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation, etc.

¹¹⁸ The difficult issue of filmic realism (rather than realism as a historical movement or style) requires careful consideration, but here, since it is not germane to my overall position, I will only include a brief description. Torben Grodal, like most cognitive film theorists, opposes "common-sense representationalism" (2006:7); that is, the prevailing supposition that filmic images represent absent and somehow unreal, pro/extra-filmic objects and events, which, thereby, requires that viewers, in popular parlance, suspend their disbelief. Accordingly, viewers supposedly act as if they do not believe that the story-world is real. Strictly, however, viewers primarily and quite naturally (by way of ongoing cognitive reality-status appraisals via frontal premotor cortex activities), suspend *belief* in the perceived referents of a story-world that is neurobiologically, and as projected light or digital data, real. Hence, watching *Fire Walk*, I am frightened by Bob, but I do not literally prepare to defend myself when he appears on-screen. See Rushton (2011) for a book-length anti-representationalist case for filmic reality.

Carroll & Seeley 2013:54-55), film-viewing, in other words, does not usually contradict viewers' beliefs (that is, create illusions) about, for example, the nature of the viewing situation or of the screened content. Indeed, the appearance-versus-reality tension persists across viewing and other everyday situations, and is, arguably, even less problematic in the former cases because of viewers' intentional involvement, coupled with a radical narrowing down of bodily activities. Unlike momentarily confusing a coiled rope for a snake, viewers almost never confuse a snake on screen with an actual live snake in their living room.

Thirdly, since the human mind is not a blank slate, viewer-engagement typically results from the ways in which films (narrative and stylistic elements) exploit viewers' shared psycho-biological "cognitive architecture" and culturally refined adaptive predispositions (Rushton & Bettinson 2010:159). These include, ecologically integrated mental processes, such as perceptual and inferential meaning-making, plus the capacity to activate these processes voluntarily in aesthetic contexts. This common balancing of biological and cultural factors recognises our evolved "human nature," that sometimes heatedly opposed or denied driver and limiter of, among other things, both personal agency (e.g. social status promoting cinephilia) and cultural specificity (e.g. the favoured themes of national cinemas) (Andrews & Andrews 2012:60).

Lastly, a cognitive orientation typically recognises that active and purposeful viewer-engagement arises non-deterministically from the direct viewer-film interface and, thereby, avoids attributing the viewing experience exclusively to either the viewers' responses or to the qualities of the film (Rushton & Bettinson 2010:159). The "aesthetic," as Aldama puts it, "is a relation" between the film and the viewer (2015:80). Here the emphasis falls on the mental 'work' that the viewer needs to do in combination with the 'work' that the film does (based on the production 'work' done by the filmmakers) to initiate, encourage, direct and sustain viewers' engagement.

I take it, then, that accounting for cognitive discomfiture experiences under the broadest analytic-cognitivist umbrella should ideally be constructed from material from four

foundational explanatory domains: interdisciplinarity, everyday cognitive-emotive functioning, broad biocultural similarities, and film-based viewing responses. Likewise, such accounts may be ideally critiqued in terms of the extent to which it successfully explains viewing experience in terms of each of these dimensions.

Even more specific than the central concerns and foundational assumptions, a cognitive orientation encompasses two main cognitive dimensions. First, it tries to explain spectatorship by merging aesthetic cognitivism with a more sophisticated neo-formalism that incorporates both production and reception contexts. In other words, it combines a foundational constructionism with the explanatory power of formalism, while avoiding the shortcomings of radical forms of either of these separate perspectives. This integrative approach, second, supports the possibility that viewers may gain non-trivial, "rare and valuable," real-life insights in the form of "facts, principles, or new perspectives" (Thomson-Jones 2005:375). The nature of these insights will depend on whether viewers are engaging with general mass art (with films), with the narrower category of mass art films (with puzzle films), or with the more problematic cycle of painfully disorienting impossible puzzle films.

On a different, both celebratory and cautionary front, most humanities scholars working within the analytic-cognitivist research tradition are critically aware that their broadly naturalistic and more empirical-rationalistic work should avoid overly scientific, totalising positions (Andrews & Andrews 2012:58-59). This avoidance of the "pit of naturalism," the deepest worry of the so-called "neuroskeptics," is generally achieved in the philosophy of film by seeking a constructive balance between, on the one hand, experience-and-reflection-based theorising (Smith 2014:40-42) or, in other words, humanistic, experiential methods plus critical textual analysis and, on the other hand, relevant scientific, experimental results (Nannicelli & Taberham 2014:4).

To this end, cognitive film theories often adopt an explicit biocultural perspective (but seldom wholesale bioculturalism), the most prominent counter-movement within the humanities against an entrenched doubtfulness and antagonism towards theories and

evidence from the natural sciences (Smith 2008b:60-63, Grodal 2012:128).¹¹⁹ Herein, theorists typically draw on and integrate (but largely avoid the untenable extremes of) both explanatory scientism, a recognition of the cross-culturally universal, biological, genetic and material underpinnings of viewer-engagement, and interpretive culturalism, a recognition of the diverse (normative) forms of cultural self-awareness which is expressed in viewer-engagement as a set of cultural practices and in films as cultural artefacts.

As a case in point, "philosophically minded scholars" like Noël Carroll apply cognitive-affective theories to deepen our understanding of the potential cognitive gains of emotionally engaging with narrative films (Aldama 2015:82-85). Relevant perceptual and mental viewing experiences – of, for instance, the absurd undercutting of realism in *Fire Walk* – may be considered as distinctively emotive, popular thought experiments that inform discussions on, increasingly online, social forums. Such discussions naturally involve self-reflection, support renewed awareness of one's own and others' life-worlds, and may ideally contribute everyday insights into the meaning (or lack or loss of meaning) of human existence.

In summary, during the last three decades there have been abundant indications of a widescale change – 'paradigm shift' might be the right phrase – in the philosophy of film which has paralleled changes in global viewing practices. It has unfolded alongside a similar proliferation of meaning-focused media research in the social sciences (see, for example, Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld 2004, Oliver & Bartsch 2010, Wirth, Hofer & Schramm 2012, Vorderer & Reinecke 2015).

¹¹⁹ See Boyd (2006) for a brief, balanced defence of "bioculture" or Hall (2012) for an oppositional critique ("the epistemology of ignorance") of the relevance of neuroscience and evolutionary psychology for addressing foundational questions in the humanities.

4.3 An integrated, six-part framework of cognitive-emotive, mass art viewer-engagement: Grodal and Carroll

In this section I bring together a selection of the main ideas and arguments presented by two prominent cognitive film scholars on the most important cognitive dimensions of viewer-engagement. It identifies cognition as the central and integrative component of all conventional viewer-engagement. The interrelated and overlapping parts (or themes) are: (i) goal-driven viewer-engagement (the PECMA model), (ii) human agency and intentionality, (iii) the asymmetry and twofoldedness of film-viewing, (iv) the prominence of negative affect, (v) the role of moral involvement, and (vi) the potential therapeutic value of narrative practice.¹²⁰ The material is structured around the basic elements and furthest reach of Grodal's PECMA approach.

4.3.1 The cognition-centred PEMCA flow model of goal-directed viewer-engagement

Danish professor emeritus, film theorist Torben Grodal's work typically builds on a "double historicity" (2012:142) which reconciles the biological and the cultural; that is, it links the evolution of the embodied human mind to film reception (and production).¹²¹ Grodal's main contribution – the neurocognitive PECMA flow model of moving-image viewing experiences (2006, first developed in 1997) – provides a constructive, structuring framework for mid-level viewer-engagement theories. Positioned within the ancient Aristotelean tradition of investigating the general characteristics of the "cultural products of the human mind," this theory of visual aesthetics combines a radical, brain processes-based, mind-of-the-beholder constructivism with an overall, pragmatic,

¹²⁰ The scope of each topic is so broad and significant that it could be dealt with in a separate chapter (or dissertation). Here I am selectively presenting the material which I hope adds up to a convincing foundation for worldview-philosophy-through-film.

¹²¹ Carroll (2003:26) likewise attempts to strike a balance between the natural and the conventional. As mentioned before, he attempts to explain general and more universal responses and, thereafter or, even, thereby, atypical or idiosyncratic responses, which, hence, encompass both individual and cross-cultural similarities and differences (see Barratt 2014).

evolutionary realism (ibid.:1-2).¹²² More simply, it explains the structured psycho-biological flow which is typically prompted by audio-visual narratives and which is made possible by the presence of common mental markers of reality-status whereby viewers distinguish experiences of "offline" fictions from "online" facts (ibid.:3).¹²³ In other words, the large evolutionary gains in human brains size and functionality have resulted in our capacity and instrumental predisposition to temporarily substitute inner, but sometimes increasingly autonomous, symbolic or "metaphysical worlds" for external reality (Grodal 2012:138-141).¹²⁴

Simplified, the embodied PECMA flow typically unfolds in four stage-like, but continually interacting ("reverse flows"). mental processes (Grodal 2006:3-8).¹²⁵ First, perceptual (P) and sensory information is processed by relevant, modular brain systems that manage complex, chaotic information-environments by emotionally rewarding the recognition of salient and significant forms and objects, and, thereby, directs our attention. Second, this content is compared to stored templates and schemas (including knowledge and beliefs) that represent our previous experiences of similar objects and events, as well as their inherent (autonomic) and associative (limbic) emotional valences (E). Third, the foregoing content, including the situation within which it arises, is cognitively (neocortically) (i) appraised for its emotional and related behavioural import and, when necessary, (ii) more carefully analysed in terms of sense-making

¹²² Herein it is an oppositional alternative to the formerly dominant, strongly culturist-historical explanatory framework typified by psycho-semiotic film theory. See Carroll and Seeley (2013:56) for a brief summary of the disanalogies that undermine the film-as-language hypothesis or Gregory Currie's earlier, more comprehensive critique of the idea that there is a "language of cinematic images, their modifications and their juxtapositions" (1993:207).

¹²³ The interesting and onerous topic of reality-status evaluation in film-viewing (of filmic realism, as mentioned before) deserves and requires comprehensive coverage. I hope to make this a topic of future research. See Grodal (2010a) for an overview of his own evolutionary psychology-based work on the embodied universal and acquired mental devices and mechanisms (e.g. salience and agency) that underpin human experiences of realism.

¹²⁴ The explanatory importance of reality-status evaluation is also indirectly incorporated into Carroll's recognition of the general asymmetry between viewers' and characters' experiences and Plantinga's argument for the twofoldedness of film-viewing. I turn to this in section 4.3.3.

¹²⁵ Grodal's use of "flow" finds an interesting parallel in Hungarian-American experimental psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (2014:xv-xx) research, from 1964 to 2010, into the positive psychology of attentional "flow" states as the root of human productivity and flourishing (happiness). Csikszentmihalyi commonly traces his perspective back to the ancient Greek interest in autotelic activities, activities that were considered worthwhile simply for the sake of the experiences themselves. His scientific work has also been widely published in popular psychology/philosophy.

hypotheses and simulated outcomes (C). Fourth, the foregoing perceptual, emotional and cognitive processing prompts viewers to experience the voluntary, indirect and vicarious (offline, reality-status guided) implementation of established, preference-based action tendencies and motor activities (MA). The latter is made possible by our evolved, mammalian capacity for reality-bracketing play, which is triggered, at base, by the PLAY system.

Because of the embodied processes that are captured in the PECMA flow, filmmakers (have over time learned to) orchestrate high levels of control over viewers' attentional processes by adapting the narrative and stylistic elements of moving-image media to the elementary mental frameworks that we employ when making sense of real-world actions and events (Grodal 2006:5-6). Hence, most mainstream films cognitively evoke satisfying cycles of tension, frustration and release that involve different combinations of viewers' central (or "primary") emotions: joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust and surprise. These perception-and-action-bookended, cognitive-emotive cycles are ideally engaged by goal-oriented (or puzzle-solving) narratives that encourage cognitive simulation of and identification with the concerns and motivations of characters who take action to deal with and overcome obstacles (or puzzles) within challenging, but spatio-temporally intelligible, situations. Such narrative films largely prompt genre-specific effects by exploiting viewers' action tendencies and reality-status testing. As a supernatural horror film, *Fire Walk*, for instance, prompts viewers to join the FBI agents' investigations, to orient themselves to the nature of Leland/Bob's existence, and to lament Laura's tragic downfall. However, viewers' responses to different scenes will depend significantly on their interpretation of the ambiguously cued psychological or actual 'reality' of the portrayed events.

It may not be immediately obvious, but cognition is the main, integrative element of the PECMA flow. In the simplest sense, perceptual information and affective responses inform cognition, that is, knowing and understanding, which, in turn, guide behaviour. Since 1985, Noël Carroll (1996c:88-91) has argued for and refined, in prototypical mid-level style, an "erotetic" model of viewers' typical engagement with narrative films that is

based on the central human, cognitive need for (intelligibility favouring) answers.¹²⁶ Film narratives are, therefore, characteristically structured around scenes, typically start with the exposition provided in the opening sequence, that prompt internally relevant questions to which subsequent scenes, sometimes in fairly complex ways, offer partial or complete answers. Such a series of pressing, micro questions and answers is usually ordered clearly and hierarchically, though not necessarily chronologically, to constitute a film's overarching macro question and answer. It guides, ideally, diverse viewers' cognitive-emotive interest and satisfaction by creating expectations, sustaining curiosity, and providing a sense of coherent closure at the end.¹²⁷

In sum, narrative films exploit our evolved capacities for, fascination with, and desire to learn from observation, pursuit, trapping, and fight or flight, whether in real-world or play-scenarios (Grodal 2012:131). Narrative films may also extend these goal-oriented urges to track and detect as well as to understand (to recognise and appreciate) to scenarios that involve higher order concepts like virtue and vice (Carroll 2002:17) or truth itself (Carroll 2008a:44). The foundational goal-directedness of viewer-engagement should be obvious, but, because of its central importance, I take this discussion further in the next section through a shift of emphasis.

4.3.2 The importance of agency and intentionality: folk psychology and criterial prefocusing

Grodal (2005:15-19, 28-29) argues that and illustrates how PECMA-friendly films and viewing experiences are founded on intention-based human agency.¹²⁸ The actions and

¹²⁶ To be clear, this is not simply another form of Panksepp's SEEKING. The SEEKING system is strictly part of the emotion component of the PECMA structure, but it motivates and is both neurophysiologically and experientially inseparable (except in the abstract) from this kind of higher-order cognitive seeking.

¹²⁷ James Harold notes that the question of what a given "film as a whole prescribes us to feel is a more difficult one" (2010:285). This is obviously even more problematic in the case of the mainstreaming of ambiguity in puzzle films. In the final chapter I argue that it is the combination of narrative and emotional question-raising and puzzlement that trigger the most profoundly affecting forms of worldview-philosophy-through-film.

¹²⁸ This is my phrasing. Grodal (2009) broadly distinguishes the PECMA flow of mainstream films from the blocked or frozen PECMA flow of (most) art films (see sections 5.3 and 5.4 of the next chapter). I will refer to the latter as 'PECMA-unfriendly.' This distinction also roughly matches, and offers a cognitive, reception-end explanation of the Deleuzian distinction between movement-image cinema and time-image cinema.

motivations of filmmakers, viewers and characters are, because of our shared, evolved mental and psychological processes, best understood as those of embodied rational agents.¹²⁹ Thus, most mainstream viewing experiences amount to voluntarily taking relatively easy "downstream" (ibid.:19) rides (or flows) towards and through the value-laden meanings embedded in purposefully designed audio-visual communications. These rides, again, are typically focused on characters' emotionally guided goal pursuits in coherent, realistic-mimetic story-worlds. However, this account also recognises that filmmakers' and viewers' intentional (and ultimately SEEKING-based) rationality is, of course, limited, partly non-conscious, imperfect, and often difficult to explain verbally.

Plantinga refers to this as the "filmmaker-audience loop" (2011:30-31); that is, the shared, folk psychological understanding of the human mind and behavioural motivations which links the processes of film production and film reception.¹³⁰ This 'loop' allows filmmakers to refine their instinctive understanding and intuitions about the effects that different techniques may have on diverse, multicultural audiences through a combination of (formal and informal) schooling in film conventions and trial and error. Since both mainstream narrative films and audiences primarily focus on character engagement, films (and their filmmakers) are likely to be successful to the extent that they engage audiences by appropriately – skilfully and sensitively – employing a shared, common-sense folk psychology.¹³¹

Though in most cases untutored, folk psychology, Plantinga (2011:48) argues, is best understood as a practice or skill that, while susceptible to error and inappropriate application, can be developed with experience and learning. It encompasses both

¹²⁹ Here, the meaning of 'rational' should not be understood too narrowly. As I have mentioned before, reason and intuition together constitute embodied, affect-dependent human cognition.

¹³⁰ Plantinga also includes the work of film critics and film scholars within the furthest reach of the filmmaker-audience loop. They similarly employ the principles of folk psychology (though, in the case of film scholars, often corrected and augmented by the results of experimental psychology and material from other academic disciplines) and their work in different ways impacts the practices of both viewers (e.g. via sophisticated film reviews) and filmmakers (e.g. via the film theory typically taught at film schools).

¹³¹ Part of Plantinga's (2011:41-42) case for the importance of folk psychology is based on a critique of approaches to film spectatorship, such as apparatus theory or cultural studies in general, that are not sufficiently informed by current, especially experimental, work in psychology and cognitive science.

"theory of mind," according to which we "understand ourselves and others as intentional agents with minds that harbor desires and beliefs," and "mindreading," whereby we attribute hypothetical mental states (thoughts, feelings and other responses) to predict and explain other people's behaviour (ibid.:28-29). Furthermore, narrative films can contribute productively to our use of folk psychology (or, at times, ideologically via distortions) by thematically taking a position and commenting on or critiquing familiar folk psychological elements of established (or contested) cultural beliefs and social institutions (ibid.:28, 38). Ultimately, most narrative films are about – whether superficially or profoundly – the functions and failings of human personhood (or identity) and its role in human welfare, and can, hence, contribute to general viewers' honing of their capacity to employ folk psychology more critically.

Fire Walk may indeed be considered a forceful, folk psychological, cinematic and fictional exploration of long-term sexual abuse as an indication of the collapse of the (American) nuclear family, the seeming unconcerned ignorance of the community, and the general incompetence of the authorities (Jennings 2000). It portrays Laura's struggles to construct her own identity and to gain an element of control over her desperate life through drug abuse and sexual promiscuity, but also through genuine friendship, all coloured by an admixture of modelling her father's disavowed abuse and her mother's distant, distracted neglect.

Carroll and Seeley (2013:57-58) have, likewise, illustrated how filmmakers – to communicate particular meanings – have developed "artistic rules of thumb" or formal, attention-management devices. These devices, broadly, control viewers' access to information and, more specifically, reinforce the experienced coherence and continuity of sequences of pictorial representations (the film's referential content).¹³² Filmmakers also intentionally undermine these established conventions to articulate certain meanings and create effects, whereby the repertoire of conventions is then revised and expanded. Filmic meaning-making does not require that general viewers should be able

¹³² This is a refinement of Carroll's recognition-via-resemblances model of the "power of movies" (1985), discussed in section 3.2 of the previous chapter.

to describe these conventions. But, explaining and appraising filmmakers' motivations (or a film's implied and symptomatic meanings) in specific cases do depend, of course, on the relevant critic's knowledge and understanding of film conventions and even their historical development (ibid.:57, 72).

In an ideal world (for some), we would be "natural-born philosophers, reflectively wandering the world in search of meaning, scanning for information salient to our goals" (Carroll & Seeley 2013:64). But, to cope smoothly with our everyday environments, most of our time is filled with ordinary, habitual and stereotypical behaviours and activities. Hence, mainstream filmmakers match their instrumental goals to those of the audience by "criterially prefocusing scenes and sequences"; which means, presenting and foregrounding content which is "categorically appropriate" for eliciting affective (cognitive) appraisals that trigger context-fitting emotional reactions (ibid.:66, 68).¹³³ Mainstream films basically evoke genre-specific emotions by triggering cognitive recognition of the portrayed sorts of emotion-producing situations. The most typical moments of typical horror films evoke fear/revulsion via content, at whatever level of conscious awareness, that matches the criterion (that is, the category or concept) of harmfulness/impurity (Carroll 1998a:264). Consider, in the case of *Fire Walk*, the many forms of danger – hostile and enraged expressions, parental and social deceptions, erratic driving, vicious attacks – and dirtiness – smoking waitresses, soiled mattresses, mounds of dirt, smoking cigarette butts, spilt blood – as well as the contrasts – neat homes, hands washed before dinner, clear speech, FBI agents with perfect offices, suits and hair – that position and intensify the 'impurities.'

¹³³ Herein, Carroll (1998a:272) holds a moderate cognitive theory of emotion; that is, viewing emotions are typically constituted by cognitive processes, which are sometimes (propositional) beliefs, usually just (unasserted) thoughts, or, in rare cases, he speculates, merely attentional patterns. This "thought theory" has been central to his theorising of many mid-level filmic phenomena and has been refined and defended from early on in his prolific publishing career (Carroll 1990:79-87). The most sophisticated current versions of this understanding of the biology of the emotions appears in brain science-supported, computational accounts (via active inference-based interoception and categorisation) called the "conceptual act theory of emotion" and, more recently, the "theory of constructed emotion" (Barrett 2017). See Plantinga (2016) for a recent critical summary of 30 years of "putting cognition in its place" (for which, read 'reintegrating it') in relation to affect in accounts of the narrative film-viewing experience.

In addition to, but not separate from, this primary cognitive-emotive thrust, the pared-down information flow of films is also criterially prefocused in several other ways. First, films typically impose "attentional scrips" that match the visual routines of an "interested observer," except in those rare instances when the perspective could not even be that of an "ideal observer" (Carroll & Seeley 2013:65-70). Second, films activate prior cognitive schemata whereby viewers model a coherent story-world and make sense, and appreciate the broader significance, of the narrative, largely via unfolding expectations and imaginatively construing and reordering elided or non-chronological elements. Third, films prompt folk psychological schemata and heuristics that viewers employ to interpret and predict characters' motivations. This process primarily revolves around characters' stereotypically associated and inferred, vaguely or exactly, or explicitly expressed (e.g. via internal dialogue) mental states, including their feelings, wants and beliefs. Lastly, sensorimotor cues activate the premotor and motor cortices that are involved in preparing for and in actually performing such depicted activities, which makes watching films, given its vicarious character, such affectively intense and visceral experiences.

Carroll's criterial prefocusing broadly corresponds, with somewhat different emphases, to Grodal's PECMA flow model. Both accounts may be considered reductionist, a shortcoming which is "stereotypically attributed to analytic-cognitivist theory" (Sinnerbrink 2011:19). However, the only 'reductionism' involved is that each offers a (fairly conservative) general and basic starting point for further research. Grodal (2006:1) explicitly positions the PECMA model as a general theory or framework for more specific research into mid-level or piecemeal dimensions of the viewing experience and for concrete film analyses. Likewise, Carroll and Seeley clearly spell out that their attentional account of, specifically, mainstream, mass, fictional, narrative film and television is "at best, a beginning" (2013:73). Hence, these accounts, the former in its generality and the latter in its specificity, approach viewer-engagement from opposite ends, which together form a more comprehensive explanatory framework.

4.3.3 The asymmetry and twofoldedness of film-viewing as a mass aesthetic practice

Both the PECMA flow, with its emphasis on reality-status evaluation and 'off-line' behavioural involvement, and agency-based criterial prefocusing suggest a quite radical departure from the historically dominant (since, at least, Plato's *Republic*) and popular everyday sense of identification as the primary relationship between viewers and characters. Carroll (2007:92-95) persuasively argues that the asymmetry between the positions and affective experiences of viewers and characters discounts identification as the most important dimension (and, therefore, explanation) of emotional viewer-engagement.¹³⁴ Even today, more than ten years later, the full implications of this recognition of viewer-character asymmetry have not been generally acknowledged nor adequately incorporated, as far as I can tell, within the theorising of viewer-engagement.

There are obviously moments in which a viewer is in the same – synchronised and compatible but not identical – emotional state as a character, and specifically *because* the character is in that state. This tends to happen because of automatic affective mimicry (and/or emotional contagion) via mirror reflexes or when both parties "appraise the fictional situation in the same way" (Carroll 2007:93).¹³⁵ In fact, Carroll's expressly pluralist position recognises that there are many relations, including kinds of identification and simulation, that make up viewers' overall engagement with characters (ibid.:90, 110).¹³⁶ But, more often than not, viewers' emotions are different from, and sometimes even the opposite to, characters' portrayed emotions because viewers are

¹³⁴ Improved and more refined versions of identification include Berys Gaut's (1999) aspectual imaginative identification and increasingly popular theories constructed around the phenomenon of empathetic simulation (e.g. Currie 1999:115-116). As before, my aim is not to interrogate Carroll's arguments against identification or simulation, but rather to harvest the argument for asymmetry as a support for worldview-philosophy-through-film.

¹³⁵ Carroll (2007:109) speculates that this automaticity might be the reason why the role of identification has been so commonly overestimated.

¹³⁶ In *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, Gregory Currie offers an elaborate defence of film-viewing in terms of simulation: the imaginative capacity to let one's "mental processes run as if [one] really were in that situation" but "'off-line', disconnected from their normal sensory inputs and behavioural outputs" (1997:144). His closer matching of the experiences of viewers and characters sets his approach on a different tract than the one I am pursuing here. But whenever I dip into this extraordinary book, I am more convinced that it is yet to find its rightful status within the philosophy of film.

responding from outside and with a different set of beliefs about – through differently informed access to – the story-world in which characters are (fictionally) responding to events and to other characters' actions. Hence, they are responding emotionally to different objects, which, in the case of viewers, are usually more encompassing and, therefore, more complex. To accommodate this, characters and story-worlds are normally "designed to be understood quickly and clearly by untutored audiences" (ibid.:98) and "artworks, in the typical case, command attention, not action" (Carroll 1998a:261).

Viewer-character asymmetry also informs Bordwell and Thompson's recognition that films are demarcated from everyday life by the formal and viewing conventions whereby viewers willingly "suspend the laws of ordinary experience" (2013:56). It is further articulated in what they call the "hierarchy of knowledge" (ibid.:88). Depending on the story information offered at different times and in the overall film, viewers and characters know different amounts about what is going on in the story-world. Story information varies in terms of range, between restricted and omniscient, and in terms of depth, between mentally subjective and objective.

Notice, for instance, how viewers, during the rape sequence [1:42:21-1:46:25] in *Fire Walk*, know that Leland has delicately-but-forcefully drugged an apparently unknowing Sarah while Laura is in bed, herself cocaine intoxicated. While both the viewers and Laura know that the fan on the stairs has been switched on, possibly in the past to distract attention from the sounds in Laura's room, it seems to have become more of a ritualised signal for the members of the Palmer family and at the same time a loaded (and eerily ironic, because of the cooling relief it is supposed to bring) cue or motif for viewers. Though there is no reason to doubt that Leland does in fact rape Laura, the doubling of drug-induced altered states of consciousness, highlighted by Sarah's hallucination of the white horse, further separates viewers' and characters' understanding and emotional responses to the horrific, unfolding psychodrama.

In the place of identification, Carroll first offered preliminary suggestions and "crude distinctions" centred on "care, concern, and sympathy" (or antipathy) as non-fleeting pro/contra-attitudes and accompanying emotions *for/against* characters, rather than emotional states shared *with* characters (2007:90-91). Sympathetic engagement is usually structured around the shared, though sometimes temporarily unsynchronised, goals (and obstacles) and interests that reside, for diverse audiences, in sufficiently generic endeavours and loyalties (ibid.:102-106). This process, Carroll speculates, generally depends on protagonists who intended-but-heterogeneous mass audiences can endorse morally because of a broadly shared, increasingly globalised cultural orientation or, in other words, because of broadly shared values.

Thereafter, Carroll (2011:175-177) expanded this initial position by supplementing sympathy and antipathy with solidarity between viewers and characters. As before, he developed his argument by starting with a critique of the "diverse, often conflicting, incommensurable, and/or mutually cancelling ways" (ibid.:163) in which empathy (another 'refinement' of identification) has been used in attempts to explain mainstream viewer-character relations. And again, though empathy is of course part of character engagement, it is restricted by a marked "audience/fiction divide," which is characterised by viewers who are largely in an "onlooker's state" (ibid.:168). Carroll's recourse to emotively complex solidarity, then, places newfound emphasis on the evergreen idea that mainstream films tend to emotionally ally viewers to protagonists and against antagonists. Hence, these films are criterially prefocused so that protagonists' moral appeal secures viewers' hard-won, visceral sympathies. They are typically presented in contrast to and often in literal conflict with morally offensive antagonists who tend to evoke feelings of "anger, indignation, hatred, and sometimes even moral disgust" (ibid.:176).

Solidarity-based criterial prefocusing, of course, does not exclude the mainstream occurrence of well-rounded characters with (serious) moral shortcomings, temporary moral failings in redemption narratives, or unconventional antiheroes. In art films (as in high art), by comparison, the "emotive address may be more complex, ambiguous,

and/or recessive, and, therefore, harder to pith" (Carroll 2011:162). And the same goes for mass art films. To the extent that *Fire Walk* is an impossible puzzle film, Laura, as the protagonist, and Leland/Bob, as the antagonist, both tap and complicate (possibly irreparably) processes of morality-based sympathy and solidarity.

Film theorist and philosopher of art Murray Smith has, likewise, developed and refined an important, agency-based cognitive-emotive model of sympathetic viewer-engagement, which is also an insightful aid for character-based film analysis. Smith's comprehensive, three-part "structure of sympathy" describes the standard way in which narrative films structure or direct viewers' sympathetic engagement with characters: (i) the "recognition" of individuated characters with particular, fairly stable traits, (ii) "alignment" via the access and attachment viewers are offered to different characters' actions and/or mental processes, and (iii) the "allegiance[s]" formed with and antipathies against different characters as their roles and relationships unfold (1995:81-95). Smith also moves away from identification-based theories by prioritising "acentral imagining" (impersonal, from outside), rather than "central imagining" within his structure of sympathy model but does so without denying the importance of empathy (ibid.:79-81, 95-102).

In the problematic case of *Fire Walk*, the ambiguous amalgamation of Leland and Bob undermines viewers' ability to recognise the 'character,' which destabilises our alignment with Leland or Bob or Leland/Bob, and this, in turn, distorts our allegiances to the two (?) characters. Most viewers are likely to find this very unpleasant, and this may drive them to reconsider the mental foundations and mechanisms of their own film-based sympathy (or solidarity) and possibly even of sympathy in their everyday lives.

Like Carroll, Plantinga, in "Putting Cognition in its Place: Affect and the Experience of Narrative Film" (2016), also explains viewer-engagement in terms of a sympathy-based "twofoldedness": that is, the difference in kind and/or degree between viewers' emotional experiences – as observers, rather than participants – and characters'

presumed or portrayed emotional experience in the story-world.¹³⁷ As viewers' observable behaviour shows, institutionalised viewing situations (or aesthetic contexts) are typically non-threatening because viewers understand, in almost all cases, that films are representational artefacts. These mass artefacts provide structured stimuli that viscerally activate cognitive schemata to produce active, sensuous viewing experiences. The wide and heterogeneous cognitive schemas that are relevant to viewer-engagement include viewers' background knowledge of and beliefs about the world, their experiential templates (e.g. of genre conventions), and their moral principles.

In sum, the overall viewing process, first, activates foundational (bottom-up) cognitive processes that are automatic, rapid, non-conscious, intuitive, non-deliberative, and patterned but also rationally "appropriate" and explicable (Plantinga 2016).¹³⁸ These evolved cognitive-emotive procedures facilitate fast and efficient responses to the environment but are not always unproblematic – as in the case of distorting cognitive biases. Thereafter, higher (top-down) cognitive processes, such as contextualisation, inference-making, and hypothesising, are activated as part of appropriately categorising viewing experiences. The latter cognitive framing, which centrally includes reality-status evaluation, allows viewers to be knowingly immersed in story-worlds. Here it is more (or first) about viewers responding to the overall "artifactual status" of a film, than about cognitive-emotive responses to its particular fictional content (Plantinga 2009b:74).

The twofoldedness of viewers' knowing involvement is, furthermore, predicated on a recognition of the "radically different positions in the world" that separates viewers and characters (Plantinga 2016). Here, viewers' emotions, understood as "concern-based construals" that may be very cognitively intricate, arise in response to characters who are "creative constructs" (ibid.). This twofoldedness, lastly, also allows viewers, at times,

¹³⁷ Here Plantinga expands on Murray Smith's (2011b) filmic application (though he used "twofoldness") of Richard Wollheim's (1987) use of "twofoldedness" for our capacity to be aware simultaneously of the painted surfaces *and* depicted objects of paintings.

¹³⁸ See Plantinga (2009b:49-50) for a differentiation of this kind of "cognitive unconscious" from the traditional psychoanalytic unconscious.

to "take a distanced but intense interest" (ibid.) in ambiguous protagonists, like Laura, and in deeply strange and puzzling antagonists, like Leland/Bob.

Taken further, both the asymmetry and twofoldedness of viewer-engagement can be related to Murray Smith's characterisation of the "fully fledged aesthetic experience" (2017:7). Unlike ordinary experiences, these experiences are, he argues, constituted by a self-conscious relishing and reflection during and after the encounter. This characterisation is supported by experimental psychologist Gerald Cupchik's (1994:177)¹³⁹ characterisation of the "reflective" aesthetic experiences that multilevel artworks provoke. In these instances, the more intricate relationships between form (style or technique) and subject matter – the two most obvious 'levels' – prompt viewers to self-reflectively engage their previous emotional experiences as part of construing polyvalent and potentially more profound meanings. By contrast, "reactive" instances or modes focus on the pleasures of more fleeting, positively valenced, warm, sentimental feelings and more moderate levels of arousal (ibid.). Overall, it corresponds to the increasingly commonplace distinction between eudaimonic and hedonic viewing experiences and practices.

Lastly, this emphasis on reflection closely relates to mentalisation as an important aspect of asymmetrical, twofolded (aesthetic) film-viewing practices. Viewer-engagement, in other words, is likely to be both significantly impacted by and/or to contribute to the degree to which a viewer understands that there are second-order, representational processes that mediate her/his mind-dependent access to and experience of the world. This transformed understanding could, depending on the form and thematic focus of a given film, extend to other insights and even into popular philosophy. It ideally unfolds in the aesthetic-safe-danger-zone which I introduced in the previous chapter. Most importantly, such experiences enter the domain of worldview-

¹³⁹ Also see Cupchik's updated, science-and-humanities-bridging, book-length treatment of the relationship between emotion and aesthetics, and particularly his "Emotional Phase Theory," which examines the hierarchical "interrelations among affects, feelings, and emotions" (2016:xv).

philosophy-through-film, but here I will only note the possibility so that I do not race ahead too far.

4.3.4 Negative affect, horror, and disgust

PECMA-friendly (or, let us say, accommodatingly criterially-prefocused) film-viewing also involves negatively valenced, unsettling or dissonant, experiences, such as, minimally, the challenges and frustrations of goal seeking, and, maximally, the painful affects evoked by confrontations with tragedy (Grodal 2007:91-103). While human beings tend to avoid negative emotional experiences and to go after pleasant emotional experiences, we are also innately adapted to be fascinated by negative events that may hold survival value. These include, for instance, events or actions (or their portrayals) that involve sorrowful losses – triggering the PANIC system, which develops from childhood separation distress into experiences of "adult sadness, sorrow, and grief" (Panksepp 2017:150) – or appalling human wickednesses that reaffirm the value of human attachments and interpersonal bonds. Hence, as play-simulations, mainstream films – including dramas, political thrillers, horror movies and social problem films – typically also evoke negative feelings that stoke and help to calibrate our cognitive abilities to deal with these sorts of vital-but-everyday social concerns and existential realities.

While Laura and Donna's late adolescent chattiness in *Fire Walk* [39:23-42:05] may seem (intentionally) oversentimental and overwrought (e.g. "falling in space...faster and faster...and then you would burst into fire...forever. And the angels wouldn't help you...because they've all gone away"), the banality and amplification of these melodramatic elements are vital to the patterning of the film's dread-filled tone and to encouraging viewers to reflect, during these 'quiet' moments, on the more cognitive-emotively challenging content. This kind of prompting of conscious reflection is also supported by conspicuous, attention-grabbing film techniques (Carroll & Seeley 2013:57), such as the striking overhead camera position (suggesting the angel's

perspective) in this sequence.¹⁴⁰ The sequence is made even more though provoking by the negative feelings it evokes: mild annoyance or embarrassment at their childlike silliness, worry about Laura's knowing jadedness, and anxious discomfort at its naive foreshadowing of impending disaster and doom.

Carroll has, like Grodal, emphasised the link between narrative exploitation of the human "desire to know" and negative affect (1990:182). Disclosure plots (previously discussed in section 2.4), particularly those of detective, mystery and horror films, magnify viewers' natural cognitive inquisitiveness to instil fascination and sustained narrative interest, but they also produce a set of effortful and even painful viewing responses (Carroll 1990:180-190). In these cases, the eager relishing of the viewing experience – made possible by not having to take action in response to onscreen events – still demands much that involves negative feelings. This can vary from easily unnoticed sensations, like slowly escalating dread, to intensely disturbing emotions, like despair. Other dysphoric elements include being explicitly and often irresistibly driven to satisfy our stimulated attention and curiosity, undertaking demanding ratiocination, genuinely unpleasant experiences of suspense, fear and ambivalence, and more extremely discomforting ordeals with the unknown or with seemingly unassailable evil.

Fire Walk, for example, contains many cognitive-emotively unsettling elements of the supernatural horror genre, which Carroll (1990:162-164) relates to the inherent sense of awe that viewers tend to experience in the face of morbidly unnatural, visionary mysteries. During Leland/Bob's meeting in the Red Room with the Man from Another Place and Philip Gerard [2:06:39-2:09:04] near the end of the film, viewers are confronted, in a little more than two and a half minutes, with a breakdown of the laws of physics and the directionality of time, the disconcerting melding of identities, a disgust

¹⁴⁰ These are, of course, filmic versions of the defamiliarisation techniques which Russian Formalist literary theorists first identified in the 1910s and the distancing effects first developed in the Brechtian plays of the 1930s (see Thomson-Jones 2009). Other obvious examples of this kind of unmissable over-stylisation in *Fire Walk* include characters moving to non-diegetic music, extreme close-ups, obscure motifs (e.g. the ring), the signature 'backwards talking' dialogue, the *mise en scène* of the Red Room, the foregrounding of characters' eccentricities, and, most strange of all, the offscreen light source when Leland is forcefully leading Laura and Ronette to the train car [2:01:54].

inducing closeup of spilled blood (the return or transference of Leland/Bob's "garmonbozia" or accumulated "pain and sorrow") and of the ingestion, and associative linking, of creamed corn, as well as with a monstrous speaking man-monkey (a prime example of Carroll's categorical interstitiality).¹⁴¹

However, Carroll notes and opposes common but unconvincing analogies between this kind of horror-based awe and awe-based religious experiences, which is often found in theorising that is based on or derived from Rudolf Otto's influential, early-twentieth century analysis of the so-called "numinous experience" (in Carroll 1990:167). Instead, he argues and illustrates how art-horror genre films hinge, in a simpler, more secular sense, on unpleasant exposures to different kinds of ontological or moral abnormalities (or transgressions), which are then eradicated in ways that reaffirm and reinstate, albeit partly, some form of normality (ibid.:199-202).¹⁴² To the extent that this implicates culturally constructed and dominant senses of normality, the genre allows filmmakers, at different distances from the heart of the mainstream, to explore more oppositional, anti-establishment, or emancipatory senses of what counts or should count as 'normal.' In the final analysis, horror films engage viewers' troubled sense of the vulnerability, powerlessness, contingency, and instability of human existence (ibid.:213).¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ For many years I was again and again surprised by how many senior Film Theory students, who had been exposed to a wide variety of difficult cinema, seemed 'unreasonably' disturbed by *Fire Walk*. Wondering about this has been a key trigger for undertaking this dissertation.

¹⁴² As before, these experiences of awe need not be supernatural, but their interpretation will, of course, depend on the viewers' secular, at the one end, or religious, at the other, worldview. See Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell's (2008) tripartite (cognition, affect, and motivation) model for a naturalised, empirically grounded account of the role of awe (alongside beauty and interest) in knowledge-expanding aesthetic experiences. Keltner and Haidt provide an instructive review of the literature on awe as a "moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion" that arises in the case of vastness-experience that resist assimilation into one's "current mental structures" (2003:297).

¹⁴³ There is, of course, a widespread view, a kind of summation of mainstream news media, that the human situation is as hazardous as ever, possibly getting worse (see, for example, Bernard Stiegler [2015] on the "permanent state of shock," the "reign of stupidity" and the "economic crisis of global proportions" that characterise the current epoch). Yet, there is also a minority view, as expressed, for example, in the widely disseminated works of popular philosophy of Sam Harris (2010) and Steven Pinker (2018), which attempt to rebalance this, as they argue, distorted view. We may indeed be witnessing a transition from a traditional "mean-world syndrome" to "what may be aptly called a 'kind-world syndrome'" (Oliver, Bartsch & Hartmann 2014:239). Either way, the topic is clearly philosophical (or ideological) because it seems to depend on radically divergent, foundational belief systems that are difficult to resolve.

Fire Walk is obviously an atypical horror film (Carroll discusses many such non-instantiating examples); it is really an impossible-puzzle-horror-film which activates but forcefully undermines the erotetic, disclosure and return-to-normality dynamics of mainstream film narration and viewer-engagement. Still, some, maybe many, viewers may maintain a quite literal, religious interpretation of the film's demonic and angelic iconography in the service of a kind of Christian return to 'normality.' The latter strategy depends on the ability to set aside or, more correctly, not to be engaged by the film's thoroughgoing and troubling ambiguities.¹⁴⁴

From a different angle, Plantinga (2006b:84-86) has emphasised the increased pervasiveness of visceral filmic disgust against the backdrop of a global popular culture which is increasingly coarse in its near-epidemic and favourable portrayals of vulgar, depraved and abhorrent content.¹⁴⁵ He argues that David Lynch's work at times requires that viewers suppress their aversion to the unpleasant feelings of disgust in pursuit of the "satisfaction of solving the mystery...and to engage in [the] filmic journey into the impure, unclean, and contaminated areas of American life" (ibid.:87). In addition to the resultant push-and-pull attractions of grisly curiosity and morbid fascination, these disagreeable feelings of revulsion can also play more complex roles in thematic motifs (e.g. the recurrence of sweetcorn in *Fire Walk*), in the structuring of sympathy or antipathy towards characters (e.g. Laura wanting to show off and then imagining the head-shot deputy Howard [1:55:50]), and in supporting the rhetorical work and

¹⁴⁴ Lynch's oeuvre has sometimes been curiously interpreted as regressively conservative, fundamentalist, Manichean, or crudely elitist. Jeff Johnson's "Pervert in the Pulpit: The Puritanical Impulse in the Films of David Lynch" (2003) provides an overview of critics (contra Lynch's apologists) who position his work within a particularly American, nostalgic moral (literary) tradition which encompasses belief in humanity's inherent depravity, a secularisation of traditional Christian virtues, a standard fixation on sin, guilt and redemption, a Zoroastrian sense of a positive evil which resides in nature, and a schizoid understanding of innocence as both an ideal virtue and a corrupting, wicked naiveté. Johnson finds *Fire Walk* little more than a "pedestrian...detailing [of] the dangers of that trinity of American scourges: sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll [sic]" (ibid.:10). I consider this another of the strange ways in which to be puzzled by Lynch's films and throughout this dissertation, while comfortable with the idea that the film does engage the listed themes, I try to show that it has been made to prompt more radically disorienting responses.

¹⁴⁵ Herein, Plantinga supports the increasing call from cognitive film theorists for a more sophisticated understanding of the "link between universal human capacities, culturally-specific variation, and ideological concerns in the viewing and reception of films" (2006b:91).

ideological stance of the film (e.g. its unresolved, question-raising interrogation of moral culpability).¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, Plantinga (2006b:88) illustrates how important characters in these films become metaphors of malevolence via an explicit or implicit blending of physical disgust with socio-moral disgust. Leland/Bob's appearance and actions make him an obvious icon of malevolence in *Fire Walk*, but Laura is a more subtle and interesting case. Consider, for instance, how the moral offensiveness of her decline is paralleled by a series of viscerally (and ambiguously) off-putting kissing in the Twin Peaks-section [from 33:50] of the film. The motif is introduced very early by Bobby kissing the glass of the school's trophy case which holds Laura's prom queen photograph [36:12], quickly moves on to Laura romantically kissing James in the school's locker room [37:34], and then to tenderly kissing Harold in his agoraphobic hideaway [45:58]. Thereafter it escalates to the rough, open mouthed, prostituted kissing of Buck [1:14:30] and of her pimp Jacques [1:16:30]. The cycle ends with Laura unwillingly kissing Bobby [1:49:04] the morning after being raped by Leland/Bob and kissing James, heartbroken and distressed [1:54:41], before the final, lipstick-smearing kiss during the bondage-orgy with Ronette, Leo and Jacques [1:59:08], which finally pushes Leland to murderous action.

Disgust is also central to "vengeance narratives" in which society is ritually cleansed of criminals through vindicated murders or executions for the sake of the greater good (Plantinga 2006b:88). This dynamic clearly plays out in *Fire Walk*: Laura actively orchestrates her own 'punishment' and 'death penalty,' and Leland, thereby, actively suffers the worst – matching the scale of his sexual misconduct – 'punishment' imaginable. The discomfort or offence that this interpretation (Laura's partial blame and Leland's partial absolution) is likely to evoke is part of what makes it an impossible puzzle film and a suitable vehicle for worldview-philosophy-through-film, as I argue in the final chapter. In sum, this adds up to a very puzzling example of the use of disgust – which Plantinga recognises in Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980) – to motivate viewers

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Antonio Sanna's (2012) on the film's controversial gender-role reversals.

to witness and celebrate the humanity or even the spirituality that lies within characters' physical and moral, and especially sexual, deformities.

This kind of moral involvement is such an important dimension of cognitive viewer-engagement that I will expand on it in the next section.

4.3.5 Cognitive-emotive moral engagement

Noël Carroll has consistently (1998b, 2002, 2006b, 2008a, 2010) considered and argued for the relative prevalence of the moral emotions and moral knowledge production in engagement with the narrative arts. There are, of course, many age-old, transcultural traditions in which narratives are used as illustrative examples (and counterexamples) to teach and reflect on human virtue and vice, whether in children's stories, classical Greek drama, African oral traditions, or Buddhist tales (Carroll 2002:11-19, 23).¹⁴⁷ In a more modern context, many mainstream films motivate reasonably attentive viewers (largely by providing entertainment)¹⁴⁸ to cognitive-emotive involvement – a raised awareness of and a thinking through of – the moral significance of given scenarios. This typically second-order form of understanding (or meta-cognition) extends quite naturally from viewers' primary interest in, and appreciation of, characters' (and filmmakers') emotional experiences and motivations.

In other words, such films present concrete, detail-rich, but simplified and intentionally structured (prefocused), 'case studies' that tap viewers' imaginative emotional involvement and participatory – absorbing and potentially rewarding – engagement with practical and conventional moral issues.

¹⁴⁷ Standout examples from the long list of recent publications on the relationship between film and ethics includes Kupfer's (1999) excellent examination of popular films that prompt viewers into wonder about characters' moral strengths, Baggini's (2011) case for film-as-ethics in the works of the Coen brothers, and Sinnerbrink's (2016) examination of "emotional engagement and philosophical thinking" in film-prompted ethical experiences.

¹⁴⁸ Carroll's understanding of "entertainment" is clearly closer to the more intrinsically rewarding, meaning-rich and reflective (eudaimonic) entertainment experiences revealed by social scientific research (Oliver & Bartsch 2010:54-56), rather than to the popularly held sense of entertainment as mindless and distracting enjoyment.

Films are marginally enthymematic (in the sense of being argument-revealing) or maieutic (in the sense of being belief-revealing) as soon as they prompt moral involvement; e.g. when this is necessary for understanding a character's motivations as part of making sense of an unfolding narrative. Films that succeed in prompting more sustained moral reflection are, of course, more likely to be argument-revealing or belief-revealing. Viewers' capacities to form moral judgements may be enhanced by the experience of working out or through a film's explicit and implicit moral claims and implications. Material that would come across as too "preachy" when verbally summarised, can be presented in narrative films in ways that are more concrete and naturally applicable to viewers' everyday lives (Carroll 2002:14).

In other words, for the general viewer, film narratives offer a more accessible and stimulating avenue to moral contemplation or self-education than intellectual theorising – whether on a particular course of action or cultivating a meaningful life – because its emotive resources and capacity to structure viewing experiences promote intelligibility as well as the possibility of convergence in viewers' shared moral understanding (Carroll 2008:35). Elsewhere, Carroll (2006c:382-383) argues that and illustrates how some films (e.g. *Parenthood* [Howard 1989]) can "convey moral knowledge" by heuristically or dialectically strengthening (or weakening) the credibility of particular moral inferences or hypotheses that viewers need to consider as part of making sense of the narrative. Much like philosophical thought experiments, then, film narratives can prompt everyday forms of morally edifying inductive or abductive reasoning, may move viewers towards the more successful options among competing explanations, or may shift the burden of proof to interlocutors, all without offering formal or explicit arguments.¹⁴⁹

In the case of *Fire Walk*, morally oriented viewers, especially reflective repeat viewers, are likely to develop a deeper, potentially more compassionate appreciation of Laura's immoral behaviour and, in particular, of her sexual depravity. They may also find it easier to reserve moral judgement, to reconsider and refine their position, on Leland's

¹⁴⁹ I return to these stricter kinds of film-as-philosophy in Chapter 6 and I ultimately 'soften' it further in support of an even more informal kind of worldview-philosophy-through-film.

accountability, without carelessly sliding to the point of absolving him completely. In both cases this is likely to reflect the use of a more balanced, rational-emotive, rather than moralistically judgemental, moral compass, which is more suited to flourishing in a morally complex and nuanced world.

In addition to this more general kind of moral engagement, some mainstream films prominently (and almost all narrative films to some extent) feature a "virtue wheel" or "virtue tableau" (Carroll 2002:12). Such films present a series of characters in a thought experiment-like, enthymematic systematisation of varying instantiations of appropriate or inappropriate traits (or actions).¹⁵⁰ These portrayals may be constructed around sets of delicately polarised relationships and often include revelations of the origins and mechanisms of the relevant good or bad behaviours. In doing so, these popular filmic, rather than justificatory, enthymemes invite and guide viewers to moral emotion-based contemplation of the general similarities and differences between characters or courses of action. This process allows viewers to move towards and to cultivate a better-coordinated, more refined understanding of shared moral concepts, and of the criteria and conditions of their (more) correct application. It usually plays out in the "reflective afterlife" (ibid.:13) prompted by a given film and ideally within conversational settings.¹⁵¹

The assumption is not that all or even most viewers naturally make this kind of spontaneous move towards moral self improvement. The argument is, more conservatively, that this is indeed a familiar capacity of narrative films and that a significant number of viewers, as the social scientific research indicates, are receptive to these structured aesthetic experiences as part of their (everyday) pursuit of a more refined understanding of the relevant human concerns. Films can, of course, also lead

¹⁵⁰ It is possible to generate another kind of virtue/vice wheel around the central or enabling role of dishonesty. Sam Harris, again in a work of popular philosophy, argues that "[a]cts of adultery and other personal betrayals, financial fraud, government corruption—even murder and genocide—generally require an additional moral defect: a willingness to lie" (2013). Also in line with the issues at hand, Harris often includes literary examples in support of his arguments.

¹⁵¹ This is, as far as I can tell, Carroll's phrase. It is an amalgam of Peter Kivy's (1997) discussion of the role of the "reflective imagination" (108) in the "afterlife" of aesthetic experiences (131-134). It has often been falsely attributed to Kivy.

viewers into error (Carroll 2002:26), a topic which Carroll typically addresses in his work on film and ideology (1993, 1996a, 1996b).¹⁵²

To return to the virtue wheel, the most important male characters in *Fire Walk*, for instance, markedly populate a good/virtuous to bad/evil continuum that can be effortlessly ordered like this: Chief Gordon Cole-agent Cooper-agent Stanley-agent Desmond-James-Harold-Carl Rodd-Bobby-Leo-Jacques Renault-Deputy Howard-Sheriff Cable-Leland-Bob. Many (repeat) viewers should find even an inkling of this kind of graded hierarchy, the implied overlaps, and the effects of swapping characters around, immediately thought provoking and revealing. It should spontaneously disclose and pause our Manichean tendencies. In addition, whomever one considers more evil – Leland or Bob? – will highlight one's secular or religious orientation, making this accessible for reassessment. The difficulties, once we are shaken from black-and-white thinking (or, in psychological jargon, from splitting), involved in placing Phillip Jeffries, the Man From Another Place or Philip Gerard on this continuum, reveals the reality of moral confusion. It confronts suitably prepared, mentalisation-aware viewers with a virtue puzzle, maybe even an impossible virtue puzzle, rather than (or in addition to) a virtue wheel. Other than encouraging a healthy moral agnosticism, this, as I argue in the final chapter, is likely to be a key initiator of worldview-philosophy-through-film.

The kind of informal, moral conceptual clarification that I have discussed so far is probably more common than some would imagine at first glance. It may be undertaken lightly, as almost all attentive viewers are likely to do to some extent, or in a more concentrated form by mass cinephiles, near-unavoidably, during multiple, contemplative viewings. It is likely to reveal a graded sense of Laura's own, and Sarah's easily underestimated, blameworthiness, as well as of Leland's and the FBI agents' masculine and law enforcement failures. Alternatively, careful viewers may note and imaginatively move along a subtle and deliberate innocence/corruption 'vice wheel' that is made up of the group of young women: Donna-Shelly-Ronette-Laura-Teresa. This possibility is

¹⁵² I will, as before, only note this important topic here because of the dissertation's focus on positive positions and constructive possibilities, but it remains a vital area for further research.

foregrounded before, during and after Donna accompanies Laura to The Bang Bang Bar (the Roadhouse) and is exemplified by Laura's misplaced adolescent berating of Donna: "Don't ever wear my stuff!" [1:23:33].

Both the general and more focused kinds of filmic moral engagement that Carroll argues for finds support in Oliver, Bartsch and Hartmann's review of new-millennium social scientific research into the "enjoyment of sad entertainment" and its consequent reconceptualisation in terms of non-hedonic (or eudaimonic) "appreciation" (2014:230-232). Many (and apparently an increasing number of) viewers positively appraise painful and ambivalent viewing experiences that motivate them to reflect on and elaborate their thoughts and feelings about the meaning of life and, more narrowly and closely related, ethical living.¹⁵³ In these cases, dealing with the cognitive-emotive challenges of distressful information and troubling fundamental insights – much like coping with real-world, existential crises – tends to instil more long-lasting perceptions. Such eudaimonic appreciation is, in other words, prompted by film content that evokes a mixture of practical sympathy and cognitive dissonance. Such portrayals involve severe hardships and adversity; immorality, injustice, and evil; moral judgement; and confounded moral intuitions, moral dilemmas, unresolved controversies, and cognitive conflicts that are provoked by situational complexities or ambiguous information (see Lewis, Tamborini, & Weber 2014, Bartsch & Hartmann 2015:16-18). Much of this is prominent in *Fire Walk*, in characters' confrontation with events in the story-world as well as in viewers' experiences of the film.

In addition to general and virtue wheel-based moral engagement, there are a few other ways in which the cognitive dimension of morality features prominently in film-viewing. Our evolved, ultra-social ability to function with other people in a shared moral world depends on the human capacity to develop and implement mental models (Grodal 2012:138-141). This includes many cognitive templates, such as the tendencies to

¹⁵³ Many viewers may, of course, find films like *Fire Walk* too ambivalent and/or too painful for these positive gains (an introductory kind of worldview-philosophy-through-film), but, as I argue in the final chapter, this kind of overmatching is often a necessary precondition for the most self-revealing sorts of worldview-philosophy-through-film.

anthropomorphise non-human and inanimate phenomena, to overattribute mental causation, and, ultimately, to treat the world itself as if it is mind-like.¹⁵⁴ This kind of mental doubling of the world and its related mental activities underpin the motivating (and potentially enriching) fascination and satisfaction of engaging, as in *Fire Walk*, with an assortment of characters that range from morally unfaltering heroes, to more well-rounded, flawed characters, to morally confused teenagers, and on to morally monstrous villains. It also explains the intense, and more ethically worrying, appeal of portrayals of patently counterintuitive supernatural or magical actions, causes, and events – for example, Bob's demonic control over Leland's behaviour and Laura's apparent ongoing existence with Cooper in the Red Room after her death [2:09:08]. While agency is indeed the best, typically folk psychological, model of human mental functioning (Grodal 2005:15), our evolved, hair-trigger predisposition to attribute agency often results in an agential understanding of phenomena, like natural forces or nature itself, which easily shifts to supernatural impositions (see Atran 2008:479).¹⁵⁵

More specifically, crime films, the genre which most explicitly takes up the theme of morality, typically present familiar, paradigmatic scenarios¹⁵⁶ in which social norms are violated, trust is broken and exploited, and conflicts escalate (Grodal 2011:143-146). These narrative situations and events specifically target those innate moral emotions – particularly fear and anger but also a different level of moral disgust – that are aroused when our sense of fairness and/or justice, a key evolutionary dimension of group living, is undermined. Hence, the crime genre allows viewers to indulge exciting portrayals of immoral behaviour *and* to enjoy the detection and punishment of immoral characters. In this way the basic SEEKING system is extended to support viewers' intense moral

¹⁵⁴ Related to the latter, Robert Solomon (1988) offers an intriguing overview of the development (from 1750 to the 1980s) of Continental philosophy which focuses on the rise and demise of the transcendental self or Transcendental Pretence, a placeholder for everything from accounts of a universal human nature to variations on the idea that reality is somehow constituted by the mind (e.g. by a World-Soul in German idealism).

¹⁵⁵ Daniel Dennett (2013:73-85) discusses and defends the use of both "folk psychology" (which he coined in 1981) and the "intentional stance" (which he coined in 1971) as everyday thinking tools. I would argue that viewers' second-order awareness of employing these thinking tools, without necessarily knowing the titles, implies a move into the domain of popular philosophy. But, since Dennett is widely published in popular philosophy, it is not hard to imagine that there are (and in the future might be, because of information technology and the boom in popular philosophy itself, many more) viewers that do understand these terms.

¹⁵⁶ This is a different way of pointing out that and how these films are, in Carroll's terms, criterially prefocused.

interest across the two parts of *Fire Walk*, first via the disorienting machinations of the FBI investigations and then via Laura and Leland's many deranged experiences.

Lastly, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt's work in moral psychology, often published as popular philosophy or disseminated in online presentations, has recently also been taken up by cognitive film theorists. Haidt's ongoing theorising of five (later six) foundational moral systems (in Grodal 2012:136) provides a structure for ethical analyses of both the moral position of a given film and of viewers' responses to the film. These systems represent an ideal progression from more traditional, conservative, and hierarchical societies to more modern, secular, and liberal societies. Yet, its different strands still make up and unfold in the cultural artefacts of existing societies, as *Fire Walk* illustrates.

The first of Haidt's systems is the purity or sanctity system, which revolves around avoiding contagion, whether physical or spiritual, and values abstinence, wholesomeness, and controlling one's desires; e.g. Bob as a symbol of both Leland and Laura's moral contamination and failure. Secondly, there is the authority or respect system which prioritises the social order and hierarchical obligations, and values respect, obedience, and role-based responsibilities; e.g. Laura and Sarah's inability to resist Leland's cruel fatherly dominance. Thirdly, the in-group or loyalty system is even more narrowly concerned with obligations of group-affiliation, such as allegiance, self-sacrifice, and vigilance against disloyalty; e.g. the wholesale corruption of the Deer Meadow sheriff's department and the unfulfilled hope of more effective law enforcement at a federal level. Fourthly, the fairness or reciprocity system focusses on impartiality, honesty, justice, and civil rights; e.g. the possibility of a mental disorder defence for Leland or, alternatively, criticism that the film disavows Leland's culpability. Lastly, the harm or care system aims at addressing suffering and promoting care and compassion; e.g. the interpretation of *Fire Walk* as a multidimensional exploration of familial sexual

abuse that resists oversimplified moral judgements and may evoke a more sympathetic, though uneasy, understanding of this tragic human experience.¹⁵⁷

The latter also relates to Haidt's work on the "families" of, often unpleasant, moral emotions: "other-condemning" (e.g. contempt), "self-conscious" (e.g. shame), "other-suffering" (e.g. compassion), and "other-praising" (e.g. gratitude) (2003:855–863). For both characters and viewers, *Fire Walk* offers near-encyclopaedic coverage of these moral emotions. But its most interesting element is arguably the (sometimes puzzling) elevation – feelings of open chested warmth but also chills and gooseflesh – evoked by Laura's plight for survival in a disorienting and ultimately life-destroying world of ill-will, meanness, desperation, intemperance, and meaninglessness. The pro-social impact of such intuitive feelings of elevation on action-tendencies and behaviour (ibid.:865–866) is probably the most positive *and* mysterious effect of cognitive discomfiture film-viewing.¹⁵⁸

4.3.6 Therapeutic narrative practice: accessible-and-salient-making

In addition to moral edification, mainstream, narrative films are especially suitable for communicating real-world insights into patterned human behaviour because they often offer illustrative examples that can be easily related to aspects of viewers' own lives (Carroll 2006c:385). Fictional (and, in that sense, non-factual) films, are commonly, though not universally or uncritically, recognised as a cognitive resource for conveying pre-existing psychological and social knowledge (Carroll 2002:3-8, 20).¹⁵⁹ Briefly listed,

¹⁵⁷ In *Feminist Ethics in Film: Reconfiguring Care through Cinema* (2012), Joseph Kupfer offers a book-length examination of how popular films convey and reconstruct – rather than just helpfully supplement – philosophical theories of the "ethics of care" (originally formulated by Carol Gilligan [1982]), an integrative approach to the relationship between morality and human flourishing that emphasises the social construction of self, care as a virtue, and relationships with family and friends. These dimensions vividly parallel the "humanistic foundations of ethics in African" (Bewaji 2005:398).

¹⁵⁸ The somewhat loose-fitting parts of this subsection provide groundwork for the reasons-to-be-moral theme to which I turn in section 7.1.5 of the final chapter as part of descriptively defining worldview-philosophy-through-film.

¹⁵⁹ Carroll (2002:4-6) makes his case by countering three common objections to art as a genuine source of enlightenment: the banality, no-argument, and no-evidence arguments. I will review these arguments in the final

then, narrative cinema, as a mass art, can, beyond its narrower artistic purposes, encourage and guide viewers to reflective engagement in at least five familiar ways: (i) to work through thematic implicatures in quintessentially pragmatic and conversational terms, (ii) to reprocess and review familiar ideas, (iii) to consider situational descriptions and their constituent elements and processes, (iv) to reflect on, clarify and perhaps reconfigure their beliefs and general conceptual commitments, and (v) to, in rare cases, break free from sceptical doubts. From Gregory Currie's (2016a:407-408,416) discussion of the cognitive changes that this kind of filmic imaginative learning may produce, we can add another five, case by case, possibilities: renewed ignorance and misconceptions, ill-defined or intuitive epistemic improvements, holding more reasonable beliefs, revealing unarticulated propositional knowledge, and proper knowledge acquisition.

By the same token, Plantinga illustratively argues for the "therapeutic value" of films that contribute to viewers' self-understanding by experientially rehearsing commonplace folk psychological insights – e.g. that all people have a capacity for evil – rather than simply "telling" that it is so (2011:35).¹⁶⁰ It is closely linked to a kind of folk psychological "narrative practice" (ibid.:40).¹⁶¹ The latter is a standard, imaginative, adaptive, and emotionally satisfying way in which humans learn about, and, in particular, learn to think about, human behaviour (to refine their social cognition) away from the involuntary reactions and direct demands of real-world situations. Importantly, the "cognitive value" of this kind of viewer-engagement resides less in the teaching of truths than in promoting skills that are partly philosophical, psychological and practical (Currie

chapter as part of transforming the controversial possibility of film-as-philosophy into the less ambitious possibility of worldview-philosophy-through-film.

¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, Plantinga (2011:35) bases his position on critics' (primarily George Tolles and Robin Wood's) responses to the sustained unpleasantness (despite repeat viewings) that arises from the lack of release and closure, gradual loss of solid ground, enveloping despair, and disturbingly sympathetic antagonist in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). This all adds up to make it a definitive impossible puzzle film.

¹⁶¹ Here Plantinga's position on film is based, first, on Daniel Hutto's (2007) work on how narrativisation (from childhood) provides mental frameworks for understanding motivated behaviour and, second, Brian Boyd's (2009) work on the evolutionary relationship between human nature and the consumption of fiction.

2016b:650); such as, the morally beneficial capacity for interpersonal insightfulness and sensitivity.¹⁶²

Viewers may also extend the reach of this potentially therapeutic form of narrative practice further. Merlin Donald (2006:5) argues that the innate human predisposition for self-observation regularly compels individual viewers to metacognitive viewing experiences. This self-reflective tendency naturally includes tacit and/or explicit considerations of the role of the filmmakers' mental processes in the creation of the work. Such second-order reflections may readily expand to include society itself and its role in shaping our cultural identities. It plays out against the backdrop of the contemporary prevalence and appeal of "chaotic and fluid" artistic forms and subject matter, and which may be a consequence of the profusion of worldviews within modern secular societies (ibid.:6). Its present apex, I would argue, is the global mainstreaming of the unpleasant impossible puzzle film.

For my purposes, however, the most important sort of therapeutic narrative practice occurs when a given film's very intelligibility and its appropriate comprehension depend on the presuppositions that the "suitably prepared viewer" brings to the viewing experience (Carroll 2002:4).¹⁶³ Films, in other words, mobilise viewers' tacit (or intuitive) understanding – in this case, moral, social or psychological understanding – in ways that make this understanding itself "accessible and salient" and, thereby, open to reflective restructuring (ibid.:8-12). These enquiring and maieutic viewing experiences, alongside those proposed by other scholars in this section, prompt reflection and enliven viewers' thought processes by activating involvement with their pre-existing

¹⁶² Currie (2016b:651) also examines the lack of "systematic experimental evidence" – largely because of causal and conceptual difficulties – in these kinds of cases. Tracking improvements in empathetic skills, for example, is hampered by the fact that readers, especially those who tend to acquire skills from reading, are likely to be empathetically strong and atypical to begin with. Still, two decades of increased scientific research into the relevant topics is adding up. See, for example, Andrade and Cohen's "On the Consumption of Negative Feelings" (2007) or Mar's "The Neural Bases of Social Cognition and Story Comprehension" (2011).

¹⁶³ As an ideal, 'suitably prepared' implies a matching of the demands of a given film and the activities of its viewers: e.g. attentive enough to follow the causal chain of plain mainstream fare versus effortfully rewatching and contemplating puzzle films. Likewise, understanding a film 'appropriately' means correctly understanding how and why its events unfolded, in the case of mainstream films, versus appreciating different levels of puzzlement, in the case of puzzle/art films.

cognitive resources. Such conscious manifestations (or disclosures, to use Carroll's own term in a different sense) of latent, and perchance erroneous, ideas and accompanying cognitive processes, allows for revision and refinement of viewers' general beliefs in response to or, more fittingly, in collaboration with a given film's narrative and stylistic contents. In addition, shared viewing experiences and/or discussions of films (especially in the case of mass cinephiles) may similarly manifest one's understandings and beliefs to other people, and vice versa, which allows for further reorganisation in reply to someone else's accessible-and-salient-making, as I will refer, in short, to this whole process.

Importantly, accessible-and-salient-making allows viewers to salvage and witness – and, I would add, to remember – the "results of the imaginative employment" of their pre-existing beliefs and/or shared (societal) truisms (Carroll 2002:4-8). Thus, unexpressed and/or taken for granted ideas can regain their 'newness,' fascination, and informativeness, or their overlooked indeterminacy and contestable meanings may be revealed, and, consequently, viewers' mentalisation may be increased. When films mobilise and potentially problematise viewers' own conceptual and verbal knowledge, then, they have an opportunity to refine their competence at applying these concepts. The ideal results of accessible-and-salient-making can be described, in a summary phrase, as to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, in the face of a film's narrative incongruity, we may sometimes have a tense (intuitive) sense that something noteworthy-but-uncertain has transpired in our minds, that we know more than we realise, and we may preserve this feeling to boost our curiosity and to keep searching for answers (Schaeffer in Berliner 2017:248).

As a case in point, *The Third Man* (Reed 1949)¹⁶⁵ allows attentive viewers to refine their understanding of loyalty by working through endorsements of *and* reservations about

¹⁶⁴ It encompasses, probably quite often in ideal cases, the agnostic or Socratic possibility: to better-appreciate-what/that-one-does-not-know.

¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, Charles Drazin (1999) uses *The Third Man* – which "traces the stages in his [Holly Martins'] getting of wisdom" (157) – to "lay a fault-line between two cultures – a European feel for paradox and mystery versus an American urge to explain. In the Cinema of Answers, there must be no scope for ambiguity"(36). This situation has changed quite radically in the past three decades because of the popularisation of puzzle films, as I have shown in

the moral dictum that one should choose, when these conflict, in favour of a friend rather than a cause (Carroll 2002:10-11). *Fire Walk* similarly prompts viewers to reorient themselves about familial duty and devotion within a binary of the psychological-versus-supernatural causes of evil. It allows viewers to imaginatively work through significant implications of either a secular or religious orientation. However, this is problematised by the film's unyielding interpretive ambiguity. In the case of impossible puzzle films, then, the nature of viewers' interest and fascination, and the possibility of a puzzling sort of therapeutic narrative practice still need to be accounted for.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a mid-level, biocultural, cognitive-emotive conception of mass art viewer-engagement. Overall, it has been a piecemeal, cognition-focused, fleshing out of the rich-disclosure-experience framework developed in the two previous chapters via the main concepts of SEEKING-PLAY, agency and goal-directedness, asymmetrical erotetic (disclosure) involvement, negative affect, moral engagement, and therapeutic (accessible-and-salient-making) narrative practice. This material, to be clear, provides a near-comprehensive sense of the broadest foundations of basic eudaimonic viewing activities and practices, which is itself a foundation for cognitively confusing, impossible puzzle film viewing experiences as a mid-level phenomenon. In the next chapter, then, I position the impossible puzzle film as the main mainstreamed sort of mass art film that involves pronounced and enduring (painful) experiences of cognitive discomfiture.

Chapter 3. The tag "cinema of questions" has been used in reference to the work of contemporary filmmakers like Abbas Kiarostami (see Cheshire 1996) and Michael Haneke, but Berliner (2017), as I have discussed, traces this often-undervalued trend in Hollywood aesthetics back to the American film noir of the 1940s.

CHAPTER 5: IMPOSSIBLE PUZZLE FILMS AND COGNITIVE VIEWER-ENGAGEMENT

In this chapter, which is a companion piece and expansion of the previous, multi-author-focused chapter, I almost exclusively discuss the work of Torben Grodal that is relevant to describing and explaining cognitive-emotive viewer-engagement with impossible puzzle films. The narrowing of attention to this sub-genre – the mainstreamed sort of mass art film that involves the most enduring experiences of pronounced cognitive discomfiture – is also an elaboration of the introduction presented in section 3.7 of Chapter 3. It is, hence, presented in such a way as to funnel the foregoing material more specifically towards accounting for the nature, the distinctive cognitive-emotive unpleasantness, and straightforward viewing-motivations of cognitively confusing, impossible puzzle film viewing experiences as a mid-level phenomenon.

As mentioned, I take most of the material from Grodal's treatment of the PECMA-unfriendly narrative and stylistic devices that undermine viewers' reality-status evaluations, evoke saturation-acceptance experiences, and prompt an upstream ascent to the filmmakers' implied worldviews. The chapter has four sections: (i) avant-garde and modernist cinema as background, followed by Torben Grodal's work on (ii) art cinema experiences of unreality, (iii) the impacts of blocking the PECMA flow, and (iv) the role of searching for the filmmakers' articulated intentions.

5.1 Extended avant-garde and modernist foundations

Animation Studies scholar Paul Taberham has lamented (and contributed to addressing) the scarcity of aesthetic theories that explain artforms, specifically avant-garde film, that (initially) confound – rather than "explicitly and unambiguously" engaging – viewers' evolved perceptual and cognitive comprehension skills (2014:215).¹⁶⁶ The human appetite for aesthetic experiences is readily explained as an extension of adaptative, play-based cognitive patterning, but experimental film is

¹⁶⁶ See James Peterson's (1996) illuminating defence of the cognitive approach to avant-garde cinema.

frequently dismissed as an aberrant side-effect of this process (ibid.:227-228).

Taberham, instead, argues that more experimental fare takes advantage of our evolved tendency to develop 'new' ways of attending to sensory experiences without altering the underlying, embodied cognitive-perceptual structures. The increased rewards that sometimes – arguably, often in the relevant cases – result from identifying patterns that are harder to discern, can be radicalised by coaching viewers to appreciate progressively more complex forms (ibid.:225-226). Accordingly, difficult avant-garde films stretch those engagement skills that are both less accessible and not as instantly rewarding, and which are, therefore, traditionally under-rehearsed in mainstream cinema.¹⁶⁷ Watching unconventional films, then, may help to develop unusual play and pattern recognition-based abilities and sensitivities, and, at the furthest extreme, initiate viewing practices that are 'unique' to a particular film or filmmaker (ibid.:229). These skills clearly relate to eudaimonic accessible-and-salient-making and mentalisation. Rather than discuss the specifics or examples of Taberham's position, I present it here as background to the rest of this chapter.

In the late 1970s Noël Carroll started his academic publishing career with a near-exclusive focus on avant-garde cinema.¹⁶⁸ Some experimental films implicitly redefine the artform by 'training' viewers in how such films are to be understood, and do so by offering something like a rudimentary 'narrative' of image sequences that reflect, if anything, the workings of the human mind or "states of consciousness" (Carroll 1977:37).¹⁶⁹ These films often have discernible, dream-like or associative "expressive structures" that are only "vaguely decipherable" and reminiscent of "mental breakdowns" or "visionary experiences" (ibid.:42-43). While experimental films often initially seem "confused and confusing," they tend, in the end, to be remarkably

¹⁶⁷ Both art film producers and experimentalists work to distinguish their films from the mainstream and to promote their cultural standing by systematically creating "inaccessible works, a process that they have justified through modernist, avant-garde, and/or formalist rationales that promote the new, the unfamiliar, the un-easy" (Andrews & Andrews 2012:73).

¹⁶⁸ See Carroll (1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982). This (incomplete) set of publications offers building blocks for an unexplored alternative approach to impossible puzzle films.

¹⁶⁹ Carroll bases this on a largely psychoanalytic interpretation of Harry Smith's avant-garde animated film *Heaven and Earth Magic* (1957).

coherent in structure and thematic focus (ibid.:44). At half a step back, Carroll may just as well have been describing the dynamics of some more recent impossible puzzle films or even *Fire Walk* itself.

Thereafter, in his work on popular cinema, Carroll (1990:187) included some non-narrative horror films as variations within his explanatory category of disclosure plots: films that guide viewers' attention and curiosity within the structured revelation of evil creatures. But what about general cases in which such disclosures are radically obscure or even permanently postponed? As, for example, in the case of rare surrealist films that are disjunctive and dream-like rather than, from the viewers' perspective, sequenced in a rational form (Carroll 2006a:59).¹⁷⁰ Impossible puzzle films certainly seem to cause what Carroll would consider a "breakdown in the normal functioning of our cognitive-perceptual capacities for rational calculation and decision making, or in our conative and emotional behaviors" (2003:395). So, we can start by recognising that these films undermine the standard "cognitive mapping" (Sinnerbrink 2011:67) that explains most of our enjoyable engagement with mainstream films.¹⁷¹ In these cases, prepared viewers' awareness of both mapping activities and their 'malfunctioning' are likely to be revelatory.

Impossible puzzle films, like many modernist films,¹⁷² fall outside of or, in some cases, obviously subvert Carroll's (1996c:88) erotetic model by prominently posing pressing questions without providing satisfying answers. In its place, Carroll provides three overlapping cognitive explanations of otherwise-unified narrative films – that is, unified in terms of higher order coherence in form or significance – that raise questions about

¹⁷⁰ Here Carroll's example is Buñuel's *An Andalusian Dog* (1929), an obvious intertextual antecedent for Lynch's films.

¹⁷¹ Impossible puzzle films could also be called or, more correctly, subdivided into 'non sequitur films' (a phrase which is starting to recur online, but without explicit reference to puzzle films) because of their apparent incoherence. However, the resultant absurdity is, in most cases, as a source of confusion rather than of amusement.

¹⁷² Scholars with different foundational commitments and some cinephiles would rather refer to these films as postmodern. Alternatively, Carroll identified these question-bearing modernist films as a "loose family of movements, sensibilities, and genres that we may think of as antistructural or as poststructural...rather than 'postmodern'" (1985:102). Almost forty years later the 'place' of the postmodern is still, as far as I can tell, generally disorienting and unresolved.

story-world events that they "refuse to answer" (2009:214-215).¹⁷³ Firstly, films may forgo closure in ways that prompt an "interpretive ascent" (ibid.) wherein viewers transform story-world questions into questions about the filmmakers' intentions and motivations for purposefully withholding crucial information. In such cases viewers are enticed into inferring the non-narrative meanings and significance of a given film's thematic focus for the sake of a sort of interpretive closure. It is not uncommon, for instance, for these films, as *Fire Walk* also does, to guide viewers to acknowledge that 'answers' in our regular lives are not ordinarily as clearly spelt out as in unified mainstream films. Secondly, films may withhold narrative answers to achieve an "expressive unity," such as the escalating and ultimately unalleviated sense of existential dread that permeates *Fire Walk*. Thirdly, some "reflexive films" eschew tacit questions to encourage "ambitious" viewers to meta-aesthetically reflect on the ways in which this denial of closure reveals the extent to which we tend to assume that such answers are forthcoming (ibid.) or even available in the first place.¹⁷⁴

Recombining Carroll's own terminology, one could, overall, refer to this as the lack-of-narrative-disclosure or the non-disclosure-narratives category, in the sense that the narrative is not disclosed or that we are confronted with narratives that do not disclose, for instance, the reality-status of their plot elements. What is 'disclosed' (made accessible-and-salient), instead, is a range of appreciation-based activities that are characteristically second-order and extra-textual, and these activities may be refined and cultivated in the existing eudaimonic practices of mass cinephilia.

More specifically, Elliot Panek considers Lynch "[t]he consummate practitioner of ambiguous narration," specifically for using the "detective trope to provoke the audience into looking for answers that the film doesn't provide" (2006:76). Because the detectives introduced in the first acts of *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001)

¹⁷³ It is worth noting the staggering number of questions, often not clearly answered, that characters ask in *Fire Walk*.

¹⁷⁴ Two of Carroll's examples, *L'Avventura* (Antonioni 1960) and *Last Year in Marienbad* (Resnais 1961), are ideal early companion pieces or level up challenges for budding impossible puzzle cinephiles, especially for those who are already onto Lynch's work.

disappear, Panek argues, the protagonists and the audience are forced into the frustrating and ultimately frustrated role of trying to solve riddles without discernible solutions. The first version of this Lynchian pattern, however, appeared in the disorienting 'metaphysical' disruption of the FBI frame narrative with which *Fire Walk* opens: agents Desmond and Jeffries literally disappear from ambiguous strands of the story-world and the FBI investigators almost completely 'disappear' – Cooper and, for instance, deputy Howard only being abstrusely present – from the events that unfold in the Twin Peaks section.¹⁷⁵ Even in *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017) "Cooper, not unlike the critic, is still seeking and failing to set things right, still trying to fit the final puzzle piece into something that is not a puzzle" (Schwager 2019).

Lynch's work literally, and impossible puzzle films indirectly, also find unlikely support in media theorist Douglas Rushkoff's anti-anti-humanism project: Team Human. Rushkoff recognises and calls for a global "prohuman" culture and artmaking that questions the value of "pat narratives," that produces "open-ended stories, without clear victors or well-defined conflicts" instead; works that "don't answer questions; they raise them" (2019:139). Like Shakespeare's "problem plays," these artworks are supposed to resist easy analysis, especially to the extent that they do not offer clear insight into characters' motivations. In addition, they portray a breakdown in the processes whereby the real-world is supposed to be visually referenced. Instead, their subject matter is the human mind and its failed attempts to find a perfect correspondence between objects and their fragmentary images. Accordingly, Rushkoff claims, somewhat obscurely – perhaps in line with the *modus operandi* which he champions – that Lynch is undermining the viewer-engagement that results from "tension and release, or even just plot" to train viewers to abandon "conventional story expectations" so that they can refocus and reflect on human behaviour, on activities that arise from boredom, and on characters' embeddedness in their worlds (ibid.).

¹⁷⁵ An even earlier prototype occurs in Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), where small-town student Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) starts his own investigation alongside that of the backgrounded, hard-to-trust detective John Williams (George Dickerson) and his corrupt partner Tom Gordon/The Yellow Man (Fred Pickler). In the Lynchian universe there are suggestive reasons to think that agent Cooper is in fact the grownup Jeffrey Beaumont. *Blue Velvet* could, accordingly, provide intertextual references for interpreting the whole *Twin Peaks*-franchise.

British philosopher William Brown (2011:136-138), alternatively, places revisionary emphasis, following recent Deleuzian scholarship, on filmic thinking in non-mainstream cinemas from different countries and eras that – like earlier post-war modernist (Antonioni and Resnais, again) and New Wave filmmaking – is not based on action. Instead, these cinemas offer viewers the opportunity, simply, to think, encourages them to think critically or "differently," and may even inspire them to produce "philosophical thought" (ibid.:140).¹⁷⁶ The implicit breakdown in action or goal-directedness and emphasis on mental processes, again, seems, on face value, to also fit accessible-and-salient-making processes, improved mentalisation and the (global) increase in impossible puzzle films.

5.2 Torben Grodal on experiences of unreality in art cinema

It is possible to solidify the foregoing by way of Torben Grodal's theorising of art cinema and the PECMA flow/freeze. His work makes the most compelling contributions, in terms of my purposes and parameters, to clarifying the value of the cognitive discomfiture involved in viewer-engagement with impossible puzzle films.¹⁷⁷

Different genres and films typically emphasise different aspects (though always activating the whole) of the PECMA flow (Grodal 2006:9). So, action films, for instance, tend to prioritise engaging action tendencies, whereas detective films prioritise ratiocinative cognition. The basic design of action films – constructed around moving towards pleasurable attractors and, ultimately, away from harmful, painful repellents – provides a safe, play-rooted "training ground" for the intricate mental structures that we need to be able to cope with and master the existential demands of complex environments (Grodal 2007:92-93). This is obviously another version of the aesthetic-

¹⁷⁶ Elsewhere, Brown (e.g. 2013, 2018) develops more controversial reappreciations of these propositional, ideational, and cognitive processes, and he apparently takes this beyond a further 'breaking point' in "Kinoteuthis Infernalis: The Spread of Chthulumedialia" (unpublished). I am including his work here because of his repeated calls for a rapprochement between Deleuzian and cognitive approaches, an area which deserves and requires more consideration than I can offer here.

¹⁷⁷ As before, this aspect of Grodal's work is worthy of more thorough review and elaboration than the steppingstone role that it performs here.

safe-danger-zone and it supports the possibility of the accessible-and-salient-making of, specifically, mentalisation. In addition, having to cope more intensely or to master more demanding challenges in adverse or distressing circumstances is likely to provide many viewers, within the limits of diminishing returns, with even deeper, more eudaimonic satisfaction.

Most art films (and, by extension, mainstream puzzle films), by comparison, tend to defuse many of these (physical) coping and mastering tendencies and create, instead, crisis experiences that require acceptance and the recalibration of one's value system (Grodal 2007:93-94).¹⁷⁸ These films offer viewers dramatic-experiential opportunities to develop a better understanding of the hierarchical and concessional relations between immediate (primitive, limbic) and more abiding and emotionally sophisticated (neo-cortical, frontal lobe) human concerns.¹⁷⁹ Tragic narratives, in particular, do not offer the satisfaction and resolution of vicariously coping with the practical challenges that characters face in action films, romantic comedies, dramas, detective films, thrillers, and so forth. Instead, filmic tragedies typically engender a "failure to cope" which facilitates a sad, sorrowful, "painful, passive acceptance" – made possible by "parasympathetic (anti-coping) reactions" – of the existential boundary conditions of human life, like "destiny, loss, and death" (ibid.:95).¹⁸⁰ Much of this is confirmed in Calum Marsh's dense review of *Fire Walk* in *The Village Voice*:

¹⁷⁸ The contact boundary between mainstream films and art films, in addition to the mainstreaming of mass art films that I have discussed throughout, is naturally very porous. Much that applies to art films generally also applies, for instance, to mainstream melodramas.

¹⁷⁹ Grodal also notes here that it is not uncommon for viewers of mainstream, coping/goal-directed films to experience, much like in everyday life, a sense of emptiness when the final goal has been attained. This is probably part of why some people (finding mainstream films 'empty') prefer art films instead. But dealing with these feelings of emptiness, with a loss of purpose, however fleeting or feeble, might itself offer viewers a chance to reconsider their everyday concerns.

¹⁸⁰ Here, as before, the issue is tragedy itself in the everyday sense: the distress and suffering caused by accidents, illness, ill-will, natural disasters, human finitude, and so forth. It stops short of the "*philosophy of tragedy*" (Nikolopoulou 2012:xxiv, his emphasis) or Tragedy. Other worthwhile sideroads that I avoid here include Judith Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, a subversive, animation-focused examination of the ways in which "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2011:2-3) and Frank Ruda's call, in *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary use of Fatalism* (2016), for a "comic fatalism" that resists the disorienting and repressive significance of freedom.

Instead of a struggle against death, Laura's journey here is one of realization and, finally, resignation...Our knowledge of Laura's fate eliminates any classical suspense, leaving us only with sadness...[We] witness a tragedy unfold without explanation, horrors happening that we can't justify or explain. Laura's world is morally confused, and Lynch presents it as basically illegible...It's why the film seems, at times, like a puzzle. The contrasting halves of the film's bifurcated narrative find two worlds crashing together, the first a plane of frustrated desire and inscrutable mystery, the second a void into which a young woman is swallowed up (Marsh 2013).

Here viewer-engagement is, as before, founded on a cognitive-emotive interest in and fascination with ostensibly vital existential information, but is typically more negative and painful; as in the case of exposure to the reality of evil (Grodal 2007:104). And, acceptance, with its temporary decoupling of experience from taking action, is interrelated with the human capacity for self-transcending "submissive abandonment" to awe-inspiring supra-individual societal (tribal) institutions or (supernatural) agencies (ibid:97).¹⁸¹ This, in the case of *Fire Walk*, seems, again, to be right at the centre of both Laura and many viewers' 'shared traumatic' experiences, though almost always from different perspectives.¹⁸²

Viewer-engagement with art films, including mass art films, and filmic acceptance experiences can also be explained in terms of Grodal's PECMA framework. Many of these films can be categorised – wholly or via prominent elements – as films without coherent narratives, alongside non-linear and/or non-narrative avant-garde and

¹⁸¹ Grodal (2007:98-99) also explores laughter as way to defuse overmatched coping abilities and as a support for acceptance. Lynch's work usually contains moments of his unique, bizarre humour. Le Blanc and Odell (2000:64) consider the lack of Lynchian humour and the unmotivated weirdness offered instead, as a major shortcoming of *Fire Walk*. Like Lynch, though, the puzzling American performing artist Andy Kaufman also drove audiences to saturated laughter through a mix of reality-status confusion (typically through sustained, uncued 'incompetent' performances) and negative affect (e.g. embarrassment and enmity). Carroll (2013a) revealingly analyses Kaufman's work in his review of the debate around intentionalism within the philosophy of interpretation.

¹⁸² Grodal (2005:17) argues that viewers largely simulate characters' intentions, experiences, and actions from a first-person perspective while retaining awareness that these characters are really actors. Carroll would probably find the mental 'gymnastics' required for a fairly comprehensive simulation of characters' mental states and a matching third-person awareness over-elaborate and phenomenologically inaccurate.

experimental films, music videos, and religio-supernatural fiction films (Grodal 2006:5-8). Such films toy with the brain's natural reality-testing tendencies to produce a sense of unreality or "irreality" that may result in experiences of a second kind, in addition to saturation-acceptance experiences, of emotional saturation that is often negatively valenced (ibid.:8). In these cases, viewers find it hard or impossible to vicariously activate action potentials because of, on the one hand, problematic inputs (e.g. ambiguous images or inferences) or, on the other, problematic outputs (e.g. our thoughts and feelings in cases where we are unsure whether we are dealing with characters' mental projections).

Watching *Fire Walk*, this is likely to occur because of, among other things, the breakdown in the trustworthiness of reality-status cues. The picture-against-the-wall dream sequence [59:21–1:04:51], for example, produces a series of real/not real disorientations by deceptively cuing Laura in states of dreaming or wakefulness. The resultant feeling of unreality is heightened by stylistic elements, like her strange response to finding the injured Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham) in her bed and the accompanying, mismatched visual-acoustic design [1:03:09]. More confusingly, Annie, like agent Cooper, appears to Laura in an altered state of consciousness, with obscure foreknowledge of future events that do not appear in the film.¹⁸³

For anyone who stays true to the content of the film, these elements constitute, even for reflective repeat viewers, a higher, more complicated sense of unreality. It arises, primarily, because it is impossible to attribute a defensible full mental subjectivity or total objectivity, or a coherent objective/subjective structure to the film. Attributing it all to mental subjectivity overlooks the impact or role of the many moments of indisputable realism, such as Laura fetching the picture off the grass and taking it down after her night of bad dreams. Considering all the events as objective occurrences, in turn, leaves one with the insoluble challenge of explaining how objects, like the picture itself or Mrs.

¹⁸³ Annie's revelation that the "good Dale" is stuck in "the Lodge" [1:02:50] provides an explanation of the final moments of the original *Twin Peaks* series (1990-91) that only makes sense after the release of, and simultaneously provides a vital interpretive key to, *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017). This leaves viewers with the pieces to an unlikely and incomplete puzzle that is spread across three decades.

Tremond and her grandson who delivers it, could move between the portrayed physical world and the phantasmagorical realms of the Lodge and the Red Room. The structure of the film itself makes it impossible to convincingly identify and separate out, as many fanatical viewers have tried to do, objective and subjective events and experiences, especially during the opening FBI frame narrative. *Fire Walk* is, ultimately, an impossible puzzle film because of its mixing of different experiences of 'irreality' and its sustained incommensurabilities. And, this goes some way to explaining the unique cognitive discomfitures that it evokes.

5.3 Torben Grodal on the PECMA freeze

These processes and experiences of unreality and acceptance are, as one would expect, implicated in – by way of blocking or freezing – the PECMA flow.¹⁸⁴ The behaviour-prompting emotional arousal or tension produced by films and film sequences that do not provide emotional release through offline (vicarious) action, can build up to a third kind of negatively valenced emotional saturation (Grodal 2006:5). Here the dislocation from an objective, purpose-oriented story-world typically evokes disembodied experiences of overpowering and disorienting "fear, lust, hate, or sublime-oceanic feelings" (ibid.). It tends to happen when engaged viewers are unable to orient themselves unequivocally towards a simultaneous and/or sequenced build-up of significant, emotionally loaded objects and events. Consequently, the unimpeded mind spontaneously activates associative networks of meaning that produce affectively overcharged experiences of escalating perceptual and cognitive complexity and 'depth.' These are the kinds of experiences that some viewers are likely to describe as moments of terror-tinged awe or sublimity. In the case of *Fire Walk*, this is arguably most obvious in the case of the recurring ring (popularly known as the Owl Cave ring)

¹⁸⁴ Ros and Kiss' "Disrupted PECMA Flows: A Cognitive Approach to the Experience of Narrative Complexity in Film" (2018) provides a very good recent overview of how the matching of audio-visual information to familiar cognitive schemata within Grodal's flow model can be used to distinguish (with some overlap) non-mimetic experimental cinema, classical mainstream cinema, art cinema, puzzle films, and impossible puzzle films.

motif¹⁸⁵ that evidently-but-incomprehensibly ties together, first, the two unintegrated parts of the film, and, second, the radically ambiguous causal chain of the narrative.¹⁸⁶

Here is an overview of its presence: Agent Stanley first wonders where the dead Teresa's ring is [13:15]; agent Desmond finds a photograph of Teresa wearing the ring when they search her trailer in the Fat Trout trailer park [20:53]; sheriff Cable denies any knowledge of the ring and lamely quips that the station's phone has "a little ring" [24:33]; Desmond disappears when he finds the ring staged on a shaped mound of earth under a trailer (in a freeze-frame, a common PECMA freeze device [Grodal 2006:6]), having gone back in search of the equally obscure Blue Rose, with which the ring is then visually associated [26:56]; during agent Jeffries' visionary visit to the FBI (the film's main and most problematic moment of metaphysical disruption), the encroaching images from the Black Lodge includes the Man From Another Place's recital of "with this ring, I thee wed,"¹⁸⁷ while Jeffries' unplaceable 'voiceover' twice repeats the word "ring" [29:51-30:01]; the ring next appears, foregrounded, when the Man From Another Place offers it to Laura, agent Cooper implores her not to take it, and it appears in Laura's hand, apparently-awake-but-not, during the dream sequence mentioned above [1:00:51-1:03:15]; during the even more bizarre, stuck-at-the-stop-sign sequence, Philip Gerard (the One Armed Man) threatens Leland and tries to tell Laura that Leland is indeed her molester by displaying the ring on his small finger [1:27:51]; Teresa inconspicuously wears the ring (at first carefully hidden by an ice tray and towel) during Leland's memory of cancelling the orgy he suggested because Laura turns out to be one of the prostitutes [1:30:40]; Laura vividly recalls both Philip Gerard and the Man From Another Place showing her the ring and then remembers that she had seen Teresa wearing it (which Laura might have taken as a sign that Leland killed

¹⁸⁵ This does not exclude the possibility that there may be more than one ring and that these rings indicate membership of some exclusive, secret order of teenage prostitutes. This would imply that Leland kills Laura not just to protect his identity but also to deny that it is his abuse itself that has led her to a life of prostitution.

¹⁸⁶ Electricity is another of these integrative-but-obscure visual motifs: e.g. light sources, television screens, welding, video cameras and recordings, telephones, unnatural energy flashes, traffic lights, fire, the ceiling fan, and telephone poles and wires.

¹⁸⁷ This phrase, followed by the Man From Another Place's laughter, suggests that the ring should be ironically associated with marriage, that is, with infidelity, which is supported by the fact that the ring is or the rings are mostly worn by teenage prostitutes.

Teresa, but this, like so much else, is left unresolved), moments before strange electrical disturbances foreshadow the last time that she will be raped by Leland/Bob [1:32:55]; and lastly, Ronette (or possibly Philip Gerard) apparently drops the ring in the train car and Laura puts it on, which is the final provocation for Leland to stab her to death [2:04:36-2:04:46].¹⁸⁸

At least two vital issues are left fundamentally unresolved: first, whether Cooper is correct or mistaken in advising Laura not to take the ring, and, second, whether putting on the ring in the end somehow supernaturally protects Laura despite the fact that it is the decisive trigger for her murder. Attentive viewers are left with many apparently meaningful and interconnected (hence, fascinating) pieces of an unfathomable puzzle.¹⁸⁹

In these kinds of cases, salient but paradoxical, or even meaningless, perceptual and emotional information – like the presence or meaning of the ring – hyper-activates viewers' action-regulating, "monitoring and sense-making" processes (Grodal 2006:5-9).¹⁹⁰ In other words, the mind's interpretive machinery, assigned to detecting and solving puzzling occurrences, becomes over-engaged while vicarious behavioural preferences are deadlocked. Being prevented in this way from actively coping with the situation autonomically triggers a range of responses like laughter, crying, fearfulness,

¹⁸⁸ A more complete analysis would include the many mystifying associations between the ring and the repeated arm motif. During the above scenes, the missing ring mysteriously guides agent Stanley to follow the bruises on Teresa's arm to the lettered piece of paper under her fingernail; Irene mentions Teresa's arm being numb and Stanley takes her body to Portland to check for nerve damage; Laura has a 'dead' arm during her dream; Leland conspicuously pins down Teresa's arm; and Laura and Ronette's arms are tied during the foursome in the log cabin and when Leland abducts them. Lastly, the Man From Another Place (strongly associated with the ring) says to Cooper: "I am the arm" and later takes the position of the amputated arm of Philip Gerard (the One Armed Man) [2:07:24].

¹⁸⁹ This reminds of Robert Sklar's (1978:90) description of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (published in 1965) as a riddle or inviolate mystery that keeps taxing the mind because it cannot be correctly solved or can only be outwardly (apparently) solved. For Sklar, this short novel becomes more complex, rather than simpler, with every rereading. Even more mysteriously, the plot of *Lot 49* likewise involves an unexplained signet ring. Luigi Serafini's *Codex Seraphinianus* (1981) achieves similar effects in the domain of impossible puzzle illustrations, as does Boards Of Canada's *Tomorrow's Harvest* (2013) in electronic ambient music.

¹⁹⁰ An alternative would be to apply Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the "desiring machine" (originally developed in 1972): impossible puzzle cinephiles do intuitively remind of "a decentered, nonhierarchical assemblage of people and technology" and impossible puzzle films might indeed be "characterized by flow-without-goal and expression-without-meaning" (in Reynolds 1999:246).

gooseflesh, or shivering. In sum, the viewing experience reverts to (is blocked from moving past or freezes in) the more lyrical and less personalised affective stage of the PECMA flow. As mentioned before, this is part of our survival-based capacity to halt behavioural responses when situations do not allow us to act, when we concede to the goals of our groups, or when we need to deal with unrecoverable losses.

Grodal's (2009b:282-292) main discussion of this kind of freezing of the PECMA flow focuses on the work of Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier, but it can be readily generalised. *Fire Walk* offers a near-encyclopaedic list of PECMA-unfriendly narrative and stylistic devices. (i) The film complicates (encourages *and* subverts) viewers' ability to empathise – or, in Carroll's terms, to positively orient their solidarities – with the Lodge characters (because of their strange appearances, supernatural setting, and ambiguous good/badness), with a non-heroic Cooper, with an apathetic Sarah Palmer, with the unappealing-but-indispensable male characters, or, most interestingly, with Laura as protagonist and, especially, with Leland/Bob as antagonist; (ii) it 'encourages' a defeatist resignation in the face of long-term sexual abuse and of self-sacrifice; e.g. Laura 'sacrificing' herself to save Ronette and to avoid becoming Bob's 'host' ("he wants to be me or he'll kill me" [44:56]); (iii) it involves the intensely contradictory feelings and action tendencies of a character who lacks agency or who is both victim and perpetrator; e.g. Leland at Bob's command and Laura's forceful crotch-grabbing of Buck [1:13:36]; (iv) it depicts characters who seem to be playing out their inescapable, often tragic fates; e.g. Laura and Leland's separate and shared life paths; (v) it ambiguously links erotic pleasure and suffering; e.g. Laura and Ronette tied up; (vi) it opens with a disconnected and/or unreal framing narrative or 'second' story-world; e.g. the different ways in which the FBI agents 'disappear' and the many equivocal suggestions that this whole section is a dream (e.g. "I was worried about today because of the dream I told you about" [27:24]); (vii) it portrays a breakdown of objective and definite space and time; e.g. agent Jeffries' description of a past traumatic experience disruptively 'manifesting' in the excessively well-established FBI offices (onscreen place title, repetition of the Liberty Bell, Cooper spelling out the exact time and date, immediately confirmed by the desk calendar and Bureau Chief Gordon Cole checking his watch, the overly obvious FBI

paraphernalia, and the agents' painstaking use of names [26:58- 31:19]);¹⁹¹ (viii) it foregrounds its own constructedness and breaks from mainstream conventions via its anti-naturalistic techniques; e.g. characters' movements synchronised to non-diegetic sound [39:01] or the extreme closeup of sweetcorn consumed off a spoon [2:08:14]; (ix) it seems to portray a different type of reality in which the 'rules' of the everyday world do not apply; e.g. the Red Room and its negation of gravity and the directionality of time [2:06:40-2:09:06]; (x) it features prominent figurative and disorienting tableaux scenes and montage sequences without clear narrative import; e.g. the Lodge inhabitants' antics during Jeffries' vision; (xi) it evokes "passive, fatalistic emotions," (ibid.:288) like sorrow instead of the expected moral disgust; e.g. for Laura but, for some, also for Leland; (xii) it prompts the transformation of unpleasant, painful feelings into pleasant emotions (an innate adult capacity) via amusement or unreality; e.g. the little masked, invisible-to-Leland, jumping boy (Mrs. Tremond's grandson) after Leland has "chickened out" of the orgy [1:30:43]; (xiii) it suggests that our reality-status evaluations cannot separate out imaginative content (memories, hallucinations, fantasies, dreams, etc.) unproblematically; e.g. Cooper and Cole using the security video, rather than their own sensory experience, to confirm that Jeffries had in fact been in their offices [31:05], while the technology had been revealed, moments before, not to be trustworthy (showing Cooper in two places at once [28:19]); and (xiv) the abrupt shifts in intense emotions during the film's last five minutes tend to make its (apparent) 'happy' ending unsatisfying (Grodal 2009c:246).

The list could go on, but these examples of how *Fire Walk* prevents viewers from synthesising unified experiences of reality (Grodal 2009c:240), indicate both the strain that the film places on taxonomies of puzzle film techniques and the many disagreeable, frozen PECMA challenges – and associated accessible-and-salient-making and mentalisation processes – that attentive viewers are expected to deal with.

¹⁹¹ The astonishing craftsmanship (especially its matching of style and subject matter), mainstream film historical significance, and resistance to convincing theoretical explication of this sequence is easily and often overlooked, I would argue, because of the very PECMA freeze which it effects. This also explains the brilliant reviewer Ed Gonzalez' headline for his four-star review of *Fire Walk*: "Arguably Lynch's most literal-minded creation, the film is also his most scatterbrained" (2002).

In opposition to Grodal's basic position, Kiss and Willemsen (2017:117-118) claim that some viewers' personality traits, such as a low need for cognitive closure, may allow them to 'give up' more positively by submitting to more affective, lyrical-associative meanings. They argue that this, like Alber's (2016:54) "Zen way of reading," requires that viewers (or requires viewers that are able to) accept the unresolved cognitive dissonance, remain stoically attentive in the face of the discomforting strangeness and unpleasant feelings of fear, dread, panic, etc., and, ultimately, abandon narrativity wholesale and, instead, revel in the challenging polysemy and unnaturalness of the overall experience. Except for this relatively small group, the bulk of puzzle film viewers may, closer to Grodal's position, undertake the more manageable task of switching to more poetic/lyrical-associative (e.g. saturated) or aesthetic (e.g. upstream search) interpretive activities (ibid.:127-131). This kind of frame-switching may develop into more sophisticated forms of interpretive (hermeneutic) play, such as the pursuit of the mental gratification of shifting between multiple interpretations or examining alternative knowledge frames. These sorts of viewer-engagement, it should be clear, increasingly depend on and encourage reflective, meta-cognitive, and, under ideal conditions, (popular) proto-philosophical viewing practices. It, furthermore, involves cognitive-emotive skills that can be honed and cultivated. Indeed, the goalless "infinite play" of impossible puzzle films may encourage viewers to question the very boundaries (now made accessible and salient) that have ruled their everyday ideas and beliefs so far (Panek 2006:76).

In addition to hyperactivating viewers' interpretive architecture, Grodal argues that PECMA-unfriendly films may also entail the pursuit of "abstract and/or subjective permanent meanings" (2009a:205). Mainstream films tend to involve transient, emotionally unambiguous experiences – the flowing, full PECMA – of concrete, present-tense, voluntary, goal-directed actions within the story-world. Art films, by comparison, tend to involve imaginative processes and cognitive schemas that constitute more enduring (conceptual) fields of abstract meaning.¹⁹² Viewers often take these (implicit

¹⁹² For my purposes, our culturally constituted personal worldviews are the most relevant of these abstract frameworks of assumptions, beliefs, insights, prejudices, and so forth. See also Ajume Wingo's (2004:425-430)

and/or symptomatic) meanings, on the one hand, to be more personal, mentally subjective, and open to interpretation, and, on the other, to be expressions of deeper or higher, and intersubjective or collective truths of an eternal and/or spiritual kind (ibid.:207-212, 220). In other words, the structures and experiences of embodied, action-based causal chains give way to forms of disembodiment that prioritise mental processes and/or alternative, sometimes otherworldly, visions of reality.¹⁹³ In many cases, this involves experiences of a modest, trauma-like rupture of the sense of (autobiographical) self, which is usually prompted by portrayals of characters' experiences of intense trauma and psychological disintegration – like the depersonalisation and derealisation that results from sexual abuse in *Fire Walk*. Lastly, the questing after non/anti-narrative experiences of more lasting value is sustained after the viewing experience by a combination of unreleased, painful emotional saturation and the active search for veiled meanings and unstated answers. It is, for an ever-expanding minority of the viewing public, an acquired preference for an intense but frustrating sort of filmic fascination.

Indeed, some detection-based (art) films portray and may provoke radical forms of non-functional, obsessive seeking (Grodal 2010b:69-70, 73). In these cases, seeking loses its voluntary goal-orientation, thoughts and actions tend to become repetitive and ritualised because viewers' associative processes are hyperactivated. Such hyper-triggered hunting expectations, combined with an overactivation of the cognitive-

account of the multi-layered complexity of communal African art. It shares many interesting similarities (which I can only list here) with puzzle films (think *Fire Walk*): it primarily revolves around added on levels of abstraction, it inspires a myriad of interpretations, it has a vital social dimension, it makes participants consciously aware of their sensory experiences, it comprises a dialectical integration of the imagination and the intellect, it unites clashing imaginative modes, it must appeal to a diverse public audience (who are the ultimate judges of its merits), it prompts pleasurable reflection but ultimately resists intellectualisation, it has organically inseparable material and formal aspects, it is not immediately dependent on the particulars of the everyday world, it does not have a museum-orientation, it invokes supernatural visitations, it unites incommensurable features into "the indescribable" (ibid.:429), it often involves masks, it hides its aesthetic functions, it requires active engagement which it achieves through abstraction and complexity, it often aestheticizes death, and it often ruins the aesthetic unity of an artwork's parts (e.g. figures that are missing a limb).

¹⁹³ This descriptive, rather than evaluative, distinction should not be considered absolute, especially since art films often share mainstream narrative and stylistic devices, such as those related to epistemologically uncertain narration in noir and horror films (Grodal 2009a:207, 223). As more of a continuum, this distinction, therefore, allows for the mainstreaming of traditional art film techniques, as I have repeatedly emphasised.

emotive salience and meaning-seeking systems, run the risk of leaving viewers with near-delusional experiences of coherence and significance. By exploiting 'blind spots' in our mental architecture, filmmakers can lure some viewers into engaging with "endless puzzles" to the point where it produces a sense of cosmic plenitude, a more extreme form or level of "oceanic" saturation (Grodal 2009c:247). By undermining viewers' attentional control and self-guided coping strategies, PECMA-unfriendly viewing experiences may, paradoxically, be simultaneously closer to the distressing realities of everyday life *and* be intensely subjective experiences that are "larger than life" (ibid.:249). Both the disorienting stylistic techniques and supernatural thematic focus of *Fire Walk* would obviously accommodate such, for lack of a better word, 'spiritual' experiences, but in the final chapter I argue that it may also achieve a more secular opposite.

5.4 Torben Grodal on the upstream search for filmmakers' (worldview-revealing) intentions

"Film buffs" (cinephiles, and, more recently, mass cinephiles) in a "philosophical mood," confronted with art (or PECMA-unfriendly) films, may undertake an "upstream" search (a synonym for Carroll's 'interpretive ascent') for the communicative source or mental flow of these unclear or incoherent narrative and/or stylistic meanings (Grodal 2005:17-22).¹⁹⁴ These viewers generally focus on the director as a magician-like controlling personality who skilfully crafts personal insights and a distinct vision of the world. This approach assumes, though not necessarily naively, that filmmaking is primarily a form of intentional audio-visual communication in which most uncued associational interpretations should be regarded as distracting 'noise.' Art films that are more open to different interpretations do not necessarily allow viewers more imaginative freedom. At base, these films, as Grodal illustrates, are just as powerfully and precisely pattern-

¹⁹⁴ According to Oliver and Bartsch's empirical research it is not uncommon for viewers to find "disturbing and upsetting" viewing experiences meaningful because of the access it provides to filmmakers' artistry and insights (2010:58).

bound in their presentation of ambiguous content to mentally overload viewers for the sake of producing the mental plenitude of saturated feelings and associative responses.

Nevertheless, Grodal's (2005:23, 25-27, 30) approach also recognises, however implicitly, the role of filmmakers' embellishments and of purposefully withholding information, non-conscious aspects of creativity, and the difficulties of putting one's intentions into language, as well as the limitations of insensitive viewers, of the possibility of impoverished or mistaken interpretations, and of unintended effects. Both the issues of intentional control and of purposeful ambiguity are illustrated in the self-referential moment in *Fire Walk* when agent Cooper – apparently as a voice for both the 'knowing' and uninformed viewer – asks the speechless Bureau Chief Gordon Cole, who is played by the director David Lynch himself, "Gordon, what's going on?" [30:59]. They immediately turn to the 'untrustworthy' security video (for which, read 'the film itself').

The high point of this series of saturations occurs, easily overlooked, when agent Desmond appears on a different screen (apparently of an outdoor security camera, heading to their offices) in response to Cole's question "And where is Chester Desmond?" [31:15]. Hence, in terms of Carroll's erotetic model, some of the audience's questions are not only verbalised in the story-world, but answered in such disorienting ways that most viewers will experience the saturation-acceptance of hyperactivated-and-undermined sense-making, while some viewers will think that they have found the answers. This is, then, a 'typical' illustration of the workings of an impossible puzzle film that could be used to expand existing taxonomic accounts. But I will, instead, use it in support of the possibility of worldview-philosophy-through-film.

The mass cinephile's director-centred form of viewer-engagement is likely to include seeking out both the motivations and more permanent aspects of the filmmaker's worldview (Grodal 2009a:221), not only in the film but also in biographical information, interviews, and so forth. It implies a move, like the move from embodied action to disembodied mental awareness discussed above, away from the viewers' own

experiences to the 'experiences' of an imagined (or, in more technical terms, implied) author. It allows viewers to shift to understanding the film or specific sequences as projections of the filmmaker's own interior world (Grodal 2009c:247). This important dimension of art film reception closely relates to our innate need to find the causes and origins, often in transcendental sources, of existential actualities, such as our selfhood, moral values, and finitude (Grodal 2009a:226-228). It feeds into the evolved human mind's increased recourse to inner, mental processes and landscapes in the place of, and as a prominent dimension of dealing with, the external world.

Yet, this seeking out of the auteur's worldview as a "truer" representation of reality than that which is usually offered in mainstream films, is also implicitly linked to an appreciation that films are "ambiguous and transient," rather than "objective representations" (Grodal 2009a:221). It is a result, first and cognitively, of the fact that art film directors tend to be more epistemologically sceptical of understanding the "true nature" of the world, and second and affective-aesthetically, because of the prevalence, in short (as I have described above), of unpleasant saturation-acceptance experiences in the face of defeat (ibid.:222). This process, moreover, implicates the troubling issue that we need to interpret and understand the world before we can take purposeful action in it, and shortcomings in the former sometimes makes the latter impossible. It reflects the fact that our interior mental worlds may become – or may be thought to be, because of, for example, the so-called crisis of modernity – alienated or cut off from reliable contact with the external world and from the possibility of trustworthy communication.¹⁹⁵ It may indeed be that impossible puzzle (or non-disclosure) narratives simultaneously express (or reflect) and satisfy the need for engagement with this sort of dislocation.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a mid-level, biocultural, cognitive-emotive conceptual framework of the nature and basic viewing-motivations of cognitively

¹⁹⁵ Of course, these themes have a long philosophical history within the philosophy of mind/consciousness and the metaphysics of mind-dependent/independent reality, but Grodal (2009a:222) specifically mentions the frameworks of neoromantic idealism and versions of postmodernism. In terms of philosophical fashions (in the positive sense), the most significant current possibility and challenge is, arguably, to position these kinds of topics in the philosophy of film within the framework of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology. See Martin-Jones (2016) for a contextualisation of initial moves in this future direction.

confusing, impossible puzzle film viewing experiences. It, in summary, positioned (along with Chapter 3) the impossible puzzle film, first, as the foremost of the mainstreamed sorts of mass art film and, second, as a sort that involves pronounced and enduring (painful) experiences of cognitive discomfiture. The latter was described in terms of PECMA-blocking narrative and stylistic devices that undermine viewers' grasp of reality-status, that tend to induce experiences of saturation and acceptance, and regularly prompt attempts to access the filmmakers' meaning-creation, all with forms of accessible-and-salient-making and mentalisation on board. Overall, it has been a piecemeal, cognition-focused addition of frozen PECMA processes to the rich-disclosure framework developed in the three previous chapters. In the next chapter I add the last two building block for worldview-philosophy-through-film, namely, first, a sustainable bond between film and popular philosophy and, second, and the neglected concept of worldviews.

CHAPTER 6: ON PHILOSOPHY AND ON WORLDVIEW

In this short transitional chapter, I make final piecemeal additions to the full conceptual framework with which I describe and substantiate worldview-philosophy-through-film in the final chapter. The main material from which I have constructed this framework so far, as a brief reminder, consists of (i) a clarification of the problem of viewing experiences of mass art films that involve motivated cognitive discomfiture (as a form of painful art), (ii) a discussion of mainstream film-viewing as a goal-directed, puzzle-solving activity that has been uniquely reconfigured in the recent popularisation of puzzle films, (iii) cognitive theories that explain this kind of mass art viewer-engagement as well as (iv) the more problematic case of cognitive-emotive engagement with impossible puzzle films.

Before moving onto the concluding chapter, I will add – to bind the aforementioned, mid-level strands more closely together – integrative material about the first two terms in the phrase 'worldview-philosophy-through-film' (henceforth, WPTF). I first discuss philosophy itself, understood both broadly (i.e. popular philosophy) and more narrowly (i.e. academic philosophy), with film-as-philosophy as a sort of midway possibility between these poles. Thereafter, I discuss worldview as the essential understructure for what I will call eudaimonic viewer-engagement. The latter generally involves both cognitive discomfitures, varying from relatively mild to intensely unresolved, and different elements and degrees of accessible-and-salient-making. These are, then, enabling foundations for the filmic clarification and recalibration of viewers' worldviews. This process becomes significantly 'philosophical,' in a graded sense, with the inclusion of, likewise graded, processes of second-order reflection, mentalisation, and appreciation.

The general aim of the chapter is to provide an elementary, accommodative conceptual space for a fairly uncontroversial kind of film-as-popular-philosophy that employs informal, viewer-centred, wisdom/ignorance-revealing versions of some standard reflective methods that are commonly recognised by professional philosophers. To this

end, I present the material in four sections that cover (i) film-based forms of popular philosophy, (ii) four general objections to the film-as-philosophy thesis, (iii) a working definition of philosophy, and (iv) Koltko-Rivera's a worldview theory, with specific emphasis on the role of worldviews in eudaimonic viewing practices.

6.1 Film-as-philosophy and popular philosophy

During the past three decades the English-language discourse around the many links between film and philosophy has – as the bibliography of this dissertation should indicate – shown a steady increase in output, diversity, controversy, sophistication, and, more recently, potential multi-tradition synthesis.¹⁹⁶ No one has done more to chart and characterise, while also contributing to, the relationship between film and philosophy than American philosopher Thomas Wartenberg. These relations include, at the simplest end, a near-universal acceptance of film as a "viable medium for presenting philosophical ideas" and, at the most contested end, spirited disagreement about whether some films may actually be "doing philosophy" and may be considered as "works of philosophy" (Wartenberg 2009:549).¹⁹⁷ The broader range of film-philosophical possibilities includes the accessible demonstration of philosophical ideas to the general public, offering thought experiment-like counterexamples, making recognisable philosophical claims, making viewers aware of the nature of film itself, and engaging in social critique (Wartenberg 2009:556-558). It is not difficult to find examples of these possibilities in the illustrative example from *Fire Walk* that I have provided throughout.

¹⁹⁶ See Sinnerbrink (2019) for a compact introduction to the current state of the debate (both analytic and Continental) against the backdrop of its forerunners in twentieth century film theory. Peter Lamarque (2006) provides an excellent overview of the cognitive reach and merits of the arts, specifically of literature, as part of his argument against truthfulness and didacticity as artistic values. See Stolnitz (1992) for a more radical position on the supposed cognitive triviality, stuntedness, and inconsequentiality of fine art.

¹⁹⁷ Interestingly, the film-as-philosophy debate started maturing into its current form around the early-1990s, thus covering the same period in which puzzle films have been mainstreamed. This implies some unaccounted for hidden third variable, which may be as simple as the technological changes (during the 1970s-80s) that gave many more viewers easier access to a wider range of cinema.

Noël Carroll has, in turn, emphasised the productive pedagogic use of films and film sequences to, first, set up, illustrate and clarify pre-existing, previously authored and articulated, "philosophical problems, dilemmas, and positions," as well as, second, to "raise philosophical questions [and] motivate philosophical debates" (2006d:173).¹⁹⁸ More sceptical thinkers may also admit that films can "motivate philosophical problems, suggest philosophical solutions, reframe problems, and possibly even present counter examples to existing philosophical views," but are unlikely to recognise the possibility of "movie-made philosophy" (Carroll 2017:269). A first conciliatory step may be to recognise that Werner Herzog – an icon of the so-called New German Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s – "consistently defamiliarizes human life, examining it from a position detached and quizzical and, therefore, philosophical" (ibid.:283).¹⁹⁹

More ambitiously, Carroll has convincingly established the "live possibility" of "philosophical motion pictures" or "philosophizing through moving images" by showing how a meta-cinematic avant-garde film – Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (1970) – promotes "apperceptive reflection" on (or may "disclose") the "nature of the moving image" in ways that are significant and original enough to be considered as "doing philosophy in film" (2006d:173-174, 176, 179).²⁰⁰ Once again, as in the case of the drama-of-disclosure in horror narratives, the viewing experience centrally revolves around disclosure. But in this case, it discloses (or manifests) engaged viewers' second-order, reflective understanding of the 'inner workings' of a particular film and/or kind of (experimental) cinema.

Aaron Smuts has, likewise, carefully defended a bold version of the film-as-philosophy thesis²⁰¹ by showing how *October* (Eisenstein 1928) offers "analogical arguments that

¹⁹⁸ Worthwhile publications in the more general category – introductions to philosophy through film – include Falzon (2002), Rowlands (2003), Cox and Levine (2012) and Gilmore (2017).

¹⁹⁹ Impossible puzzle films may prompt such a strenuous form of this somewhat detached, quizzical stance that viewers' own belief system could be made 'unfamiliar,' and thereby, once again, accessible-and-salient for reconsideration.

²⁰⁰ See Carroll (2008b) for his refinement of this position in defence of Bruce Russell's (2008a) criticism.

²⁰¹ Herein, Smuts distinguishes his "bold" position from the "super bold" film-as-philosophy position held by Deleuzian scholars like Daniel Frampton, and which liberally attributes "unique philosophical abilities" to film (2009b:410).

[are] both innovative and independent" (2009b:419) in the sense of not simply restating an existing argument. This, in turn, and likewise similar to Smuts' account of painful art, may be considered as another sort of rich, value-constitutive experience in the sense that it adds argumentative or philosophical dimensions to, and thereby enriches, more generic viewing activities.²⁰²

More important for my purposes, Carroll has also made a comprehensive – though, of course, not broadly accepted among Anglophone philosophers – case that some philosophically themed films may be "doing popular philosophy" or "philosophy for the masses" (2013b:179).²⁰³ Carroll's extended narrative and stylistic analysis of the main moral or existential theme that is embodied and articulated in *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder 1950) – that the denial of ageing and mortality in Hollywood makes some people tragically monstrous – illustrates how "works of popular entertainment can *do* philosophy outright" (ibid.:162). Hence, films within the "arena of popular culture" may encourage "plain" but thoughtful members of the "intended...mass audience" to "produce philosophical knowledge" or to be afforded substantive "philosophical insight" (ibid.). Moreover, the analysis reveals how negatively valenced emotions, in this case specifically the disgust evoked by the selfishness, cruelty and vanity of Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson), can be "enlisted to abet philosophical conviction" (ibid.:168).

Besides these possibilities, Carroll has provided an even more important, third brace for the prospects of WPTF. While the function of philosophy is often to produce new

²⁰² Many other authors have distinguished and provided alternative support for fairly conservative kinds of film-as-philosophy (see, for example, Hunt [2006] on film narratives as a philosophical resource, Huston [2009] on film's capacity to justify beliefs, or Mulhall's "film as philosophy in action" [2008]). More expansive 'Continental' versions can be found in Mullarkey (2009a), Carel and Tuck (2011), and Sinnerbrink (2011b, 2011c). Comprehensive critical and oppositional perspectives include Paisley Livingston's (2006, 2008) construction of the dilemma of paraphrasing a film's content into words, Bruce Russell's (2006, 2008a, 2008b) restrictively narrow demand that films would need to provide explicit arguments and explanations, and Murray Smith's (2006, 2008a) contrasting of philosophers' cognitive aims and filmmakers' artistic aims.

²⁰³ Anthony Quinton has distinguished "three main kinds of popular philosophy: first, general guidance about the conduct of life; secondly, amateur consideration of the standard, technical problems of philosophy; thirdly, philosophical popularization" (1995:703). This matches the overall extent of filmic popular philosophy and individual instances could be sub-categorised accordingly. An alternative title, closer to Carroll's general terminology, would be 'mass philosophy.'

thoughts and concepts, it has an equally important role to play in reminding us, first, of familiar matters that we only understand in vague or inarticulate ways or, second, of profound truths that we actually know but for some reason, such as being overinvested in our everyday activities, actively neglect or disregard (Carroll 2013:169-178). In a related sense, films can, in addition to their primarily artistic aims, present popularised filmic thought experiments that offer accessible, emblematic illustrations of everyday existential issues. In such cases, films may implicitly and dialectically prompt general viewers to a more compelling appreciation, ideally in conversations with others, of what is at stake in recognisable existential situations or in instructive moral scenarios. By engaging (or entertaining) viewers both intuitively and intellectually, movie-made thought experiments (or movie-made intuition pumps) are more likely to avoid the overly intellectual inclination (especially in academic discourse) to separate the cognitive and affective dimensions of philosophical issues too readily. Likewise, while criterially prefocused, films are less likely than 'academic' thought experiments to oversimplify real-world complexities. In sum, then, we are dealing, once again, with processes that fall under the general category of accessible-and-salient-making and, thereby, the possibility to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows.

Ultimately, filmic popular philosophy, with its potential global reach, is closer to the ancient Greek roots of Western philosophy in the general desire to understand how regular people may live flourishing lives (Carroll 2013:175). It is also part of a broader popularisation of philosophy for the sake of its sustainability. By redirecting professional philosophical practices back towards the classical sense of philosophy as the 'love of wisdom,' the discipline has shown signs of regaining its everyday and real-world relevance.²⁰⁴ This tendency has found expression in, among others, Fish's (2003) views on the irrelevance of a person's abstract philosophical views in an era of information technology and the easily-accessible guidance of experts, Hadot's (1999) return to

²⁰⁴ On the popularisation of philosophy, see William Irwin's (2007) distinction between popular philosophy and pseudo-philosophy, and his reservations (often contra Noël Carroll's views on mass art) about a "pop-culture-philosophy hybrid" or John Huss' (2014) distinction between the pedagogical and applied variants of popular philosophy, and the rules that he has proposed for non-facile engagement between popular culture and philosophy.

classical, formative, 'spiritual' exercises that underpin a philosophical life-style, and Moeller and Whitehead's (2016) sense of a comparative and intercultural "world philosophy" that incorporates material from many different (global) wisdom traditions.

Film-based popularisations of philosophy readily link to more general popularisations of philosophy, such as American philosopher/cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett's best-selling *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* (2013). Rather than offering an introduction to philosophical logic, the volume basically covers 73 thought experiment-based, information-structuring and mimetic tools, such as the use of examples and analogies. By extending their imaginative reflections and/or attentional focus, these tools can help everyday 'thinkers' to shift their intuitions in support of an enhanced understanding of aspects of their everyday lifeworld.

For many people in modern, secular cultures, films are an increasingly common source of popular, counterfactual intuition pumps. The everyday thinking skills of the viewing public, and especially those of thoughtful mass cinephiles, are activated and refined as soon as they rely on their cultural background to make interpretive sense of films with meanings that are not immediately obvious or explicitly presented. More challenging and ambitious puzzle films may encourage, equip, and reward viewers for effortful cognitive involvement by already doing much of the 'heavy lifting' that is required for making sense of these films. Since, as Alfred Hitchcock claimed, "[n]othing in the world is as dull as logic" (in Berliner 2017:50), convoluted puzzle films engage viewers' interest through mystery and complexity, and through "difficult problems that demand attention and thought" (ibid.:68). Popular philosophy, in turn, would do well to do more of the same, especially via engagement with puzzle films.

Somewhat more formally, film-viewing activities (or practices) that may be considered as basic, popular philosophical versions of the five traditional areas of philosophy can be briefly listed as follows. First, popular aesthetics: e.g. when viewers (i) experientially understand how particular film techniques or conventions achieve (or fail to achieve) their intended effects or (ii) examine aspects of film authorship during moments of

interpretive ascent (see Dahnke 2007). Secondly, popular logic: e.g. when viewers recognise how their practical reasoning or use of judgment heuristics has been exploited to 'hide' a film's surprising twist ending (see Branigan 2014:257). Thirdly, popular ethics: e.g. when viewers imaginatively reflect on the place of rules, consequences, intentions, psychological character or contingency in living a moral life (see Glendinning [2010:79] on such non-argumento-centric philosophical modes). Fourthly, popular metaphysics: e.g. when sceptical scenarios nudge viewers away from a taken-for-granted, naive realism (see Fumerton 2009). Lastly, popular epistemology: e.g. when a film that portrays the same event from multiple perspectives triggers a sense of the cognitive relativism of statements about states of affairs in the world (see Litch 2002).

The fully fledged discourse in English-language philosophy about the philosophical capacities of film matured into its current form in the early 1990s. While its first positive instance is usually attributed to Stanley Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981), the topic was not taken up in mainstream aesthetics – itself long considered the least important subarea of philosophical inquiry (see Proudfoot 1988:831-835) – for at least another decade. While philosophers of film are generally positive about a close relationship between philosophy and film, philosophers who do not specialise in aesthetics or who are not exceptionally knowledgeable about film, are likely to be extremely sceptical about the possibility that films can contribute to philosophy. Nonetheless, after three decades of debate the most common types of arguments against film-as-philosophy are now easy to categorise.

6.2 Four common objections to film-as-philosophy

Thomas Wartenberg (2009:552-555) and Noël Carroll (2002:3-6, 2013:175-176) have, with much expected overlap, reviewed and assuaged the most general kinds of arguments against the film-as-philosophy thesis. Here I will briefly summarise the reasons offered against film's capacity to do philosophy as a contrastive starting point for the prospects and significance of WPTF. First, films lack the necessary generality

because fictional narratives typically portray a single case that, therefore, cannot evidentially establish or justify general truth claims, even though it may contribute (even forcefully so) to the plausibility or implausibility (by offering a single counterexample) of a particular proposition. Second, films lack the necessary explicitness of philosophy because inherently ambiguous narratives do not put forward determinate (linguistic) propositions or arguments that can be precisely interpreted, analysed, and debated. Thirdly, philosophers' contestable interpretations impose sophisticated philosophical content onto artistic, fictional artefacts that have not been intentionally designed for philosophical purposes. Instead, unlike philosophical thought experiments, films are overly elaborate and unnecessarily complicated creative objects, that have been made to entertain rather than to instruct. Fourthly, since films are aimed at a mass audience, they can only proffer (familiar) philosophical truisms that are too trivial or banal to be considered as properly philosophical.

To address these critiques, Wartenberg deflates the objections into “regulative advice” (2009:551-553) that, on the one hand, recognises the possibility of legitimate philosophical attainment even in the absence of explicit arguments and, on the other hand, appreciates the necessary role of philosophical interpreters in excavating generalised, explicated, unambiguous, non-imposed, and non-trivial philosophical content from films. Carroll (2002:7, 2013:170) likewise deflects these objections by arguing for a more accommodating understanding of philosophy; one that is based on alternatives to explicit argumentation that have been historically employed and accepted across different schools of philosophy.²⁰⁵ He specifically focuses on the production of conceptual (and not obviously empirical) knowledge via a range of narrative-like philosophical techniques and structures, such as thought experiments. These methods – as we saw in Chapter 4 – primarily function through the accessible-and-salient-making and maieutic reorganisation of our intuitive (and now we may add, worldview-based) conceptual frameworks.

²⁰⁵ See Baggini and Fosl (2010) for an illustrative, introductory compendium of about a hundred standard philosophical methodologies. Though this is an academic publication (from Wiley-Blackwell), its informal and accessible style edges towards popular philosophy. In fact, Julian Baggini has been writing top-end popular philosophy for almost 20 years.

In the end, of course, a person's conception of philosophy, whether characteristically looser or narrower, is co-constituted by their receptivity to popular philosophy and to film-as-philosophy, and this conception will decide their attitude towards the informal popularisation of philosophy as a less-institutionalised intellectual practice. For my purposes, to delineate and defend a less ambitious, less controversial kind of popular-philosophy-through-film, both the contentious philosophical capacities of film and typical objections to these capacities provide revealing conceptual armature. Against this background, the next step towards completing this penultimate chapter, is to propose a functional working definition of philosophy.

6.3 A simple, five-part working definition of philosophy proper

Because of the nature and historical development of Philosophy as an institutionalised academic or professional discipline, every definition of philosophy is likely to be controversial and, by its nature, contentious to someone with a different understanding of the subject. Hence, as a springboard to describing and supporting WPTF, I have chosen William Charlton's basic definition of academic philosophy as an initial reference point: "the systematic applying of the resources of a civilization to the deepest problems that engage the human intellect" (1991:1).

This definition can be clarified – and reactive opposition to it, I hope, largely abated – via a descriptive summary of the five main elements of this definition of philosophy (Charlton 1991:1-16). First, it involves a range of relatively systematic (or disciplined) and systematising, and typically institutionalised, activities. Secondly, it can be distinguished in terms of dimensions like geographical location, national character, the development of different civilisations, worldwide, transcultural philosophical traditions, or, in the abstract, attributed to civilisation as a whole, but it usually still (within each dimension) retains varying degrees of internal differentiation and fragmentation. Thirdly, it applies intellectual, rational, and reflective resources to make and defend claims, but is more of an art than a science because it focuses on how things are conceived or on what they mean, rather than on questions that can be answered with facts and

observations. Related to this element, philosophy also has typical relationships, ranging from open-bordered and receptive to blatantly antagonistic, with the methodologies and outputs of the sciences. Fourthly, it attempts to address the deepest or hardest-to-answer and most engaging or pressing questions that arise from the human situation, without having a specific, preestablished subject matter. While every era has its own overriding issues, these are ultimately expressions of the relatively unchanging human predicament.

Fifth and lastly, philosophy pursues insights that are typically contentious and without immediate practical utility, and is, thus, likely to draw accusations of triviality and irrelevance. Furthermore, these 'inconclusive' answers to conceptual questions are often recycled and revised in successive epochs. As an intellectual pursuit, philosophy functions somewhere between the limitations of the meaninglessness of philosophers writing only for other philosophers and the equal unprofitability for non-philosophers of undertaking serious philosophical work.²⁰⁶ Still, it does allow, Charlton argues, for the possibility of developing a philosophy of life that – despite the likelihood of errors and uncertainties – provides a perspective that reaches beyond the contingencies of the present moment, and which, thereby, may help us to bear the misfortunes and adversities (and the ultimate tragedy) of human existence (and, at its worst, a nihilistic lack or loss of meaning) with greater equanimity.

Charlton's definition provides five conceptual counterpoints that I use in the final chapter to describe the nature and defend the possibility of a compelling kind of viewer-centred WPTF. This variant of popular philosophy is, as should be clear, supposed to provide a reasonable solution to the problem of motivated, painful, cognitively confusing, mass art film viewing experiences, and specifically to account for its most demanding variant: the impossible puzzle film.

²⁰⁶ Adam Kotsko provides a stimulating, brief introduction to the challenges raised by the contributions of amateur, blogosphere 'philosophers' to "one of the most promising developments in contemporary continental philosophy": speculative realism and object-oriented ontology (2013:35).

Before I can propose WPTF as the flip side of Charlton's definition, however, I need to set up worldviews as the final component of the overall conceptual/explanatory framework. To this end, I turn to American clinician Mark Koltko-Rivera's (2004) comprehensively collated, psychological worldview model.²⁰⁷

6.4 Worldview-involving (painful) eudaimonic viewer-engagement

Koltko-Rivera defines "worldview" as the foundational "set of assumptions about physical and social reality" that shapes a person's perceptions, affects, cognitions, and actions (2004:3). It is the "interpretive lens" through which we make sense of reality and of our existence, and it encompasses our multicultural value orientations (ibid.:4). More specifically, it is constituted by our hard-to-disconfirm, ethno-culturally and experientially founded beliefs about human nature (e.g. good/evil), free will, cognition (e.g. recognised sources of knowledge), truth, morality, and interpersonal relations (ibid.:27-31). It, in other words, refers to the 'building blocks' of a person's overall belief system or total outlook about the nature of the world (e.g. materialist or spiritualist) and of life (e.g. its purpose and worth), and, thus, encompasses their life-view or philosophy of life.²⁰⁸ To the extent that one's worldview – which is abstract, conceptual, and hypothetical – contains unproven (or even unprovable) assumptions, it provides a (potentially distorting) superordinate – cognitively downstream or bottom-up – foundation for other cognitive schemas as well as for one's explicit, expressed beliefs. Indeed, the cliché that 'everyone sees the world in their own way,' is itself a deep-rooted, ancient insight, Koltko-Rivera notes, that requires and is likely to reward newfound accessible-and-salient-making.

²⁰⁷ The first comprehensive worldview (*Weltanschauung*) philosophy was developed by turn-of-the-20th-century, German, life-philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. His position was basically that a "worldview attempts to provide not only a cognitive picture of the world, but also an estimation of what in life is valuable and worth striving for...[as] developed in literary, religious and philosophical works" (Makkreel 2016). He also used worldview as an anti-rationalist designation of the "inherently elusive and obscure source of all cultural life and thinking" and the term soon became a "buzzword in early twentieth century German culture" (Staiti 2018). See Solomon (1988:104–107) for a brief positioning of Dilthey's philosophy within traditional Continental philosophy's central focus (from 1750 to the 1980s) on the self.

²⁰⁸ Within African communitarianism, for example, community members' worldviews reflect meaningful lived experiences that typically unfold within a shared, communal lifeworld (Janz 2007:690) and which are commonly captured in narratives that articulate shared "values, ideologies, and truths" (Bell 2002:106).

A person's worldview is a system that “develops through its structural coupling with its environment and with other systems...[and]...reduces the complexity of its environment by selecting elements (information) out of it and integrating them into its own structure” (Poulaki 2014:42). It is basically a relatively stable, reductive and integrative guiding system that needs to be appropriately responsive and malleable to be situationally adaptive. A worldview that more accurately matches 'the way things are' or 'the way that the world works' should, over time and in most cases, provide an individual with a more functional orientation, perhaps most patently when it does so in accessible-and-salient-making, mentalisation-revealing ways.

Yet, a worldview is not, and of course neuro-psychologically cannot be, an exact, one-to-one representation of the world. It allows, among other things, for the possibility of having “positive illusions” – “beliefs about [our]selves, the world, and the future that are more positive than reality can sustain” – that have been shown to be “reliably associated with psychological well-being” (Taylor 2009:727). It also accommodates the possibility of evolutionarily successful “belief systems [that] are literally false and metaphorically true” (Weinstein 2018a). For instance, in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2011),²⁰⁹ Yuval Noah Harari focuses on two main underpinnings of the “large-scale flexible cooperation” that has made humankind the “masters of the world”: first, the unique human capacity to “create and believe fiction” – that is, to “use our communication system to create new realities” (e.g. the collective belief in the value of money) rather than, like other animals, only to “describe reality” (e.g. a chimpanzee may communicate the presence of a lion or a banana plant) – and, second, our “amazing capacity to believe in contradictory things” (e.g. in organic embodiment *and* free will) (in Gabbai 2015).

People seldom explicitly reconsider or spell out the assumptions and foundational beliefs that make up their worldview, other than in rare instances, such as after traumatic life experiences and/or in self-revealing conversational settings with trusted family members or friends. This is one of the main reasons why the aesthetic-safe-

²⁰⁹ This is another publication that fits the bill of popular philosophy.

danger-zone of distressing film-viewing is so valuable: it facilitates motivated, painful and potentially therapeutic, eudaimonic viewing practices that encourage viewers to think and talk through essential life matters that are normally set aside.

Berliner argues that mainstream (Hollywood) films characteristically present a "coherent worldview" (or "ideology") that, first, enables viewers to evaluate unfolding situations easily and, second, guides viewers toward intense affective experiences (2017:19). Yet, a film's ideological viewpoint may also "contradict itself or other aspects of the narration, complicating viewers' beliefs, values, and emotions" (ibid.:21). To deal with such filmic problematisations, prepared viewers may turn to the cognitively energised activities of reworking and expanding their knowledge, often alongside an interpretive search for and reflective responses to the filmmakers' implicit worldviews.

The role of worldviews in eudaimonic viewing experiences has also surfaced in some of the empirical research in media psychology to which I have been referring throughout. In Oliver and Raney's self-report research, for instance, the item that most often represented respondents' eudaimonic motivations was: "I like movies that challenge my way of seeing the world" (2011:992).

Eudaimonic viewer-engagement, as we might refer to this set of ahedonic or non-hedonic viewing practices, is in many ways similar to dealing with real-world existential experiences or traumas, such as confrontations with our mutability or mortality. It involves coping with "distressful information about life by engaging in sense-making activities, cognitive restructuring, and an integration of the distressful information into broader cognitive frameworks such as their worldview" (Oliver, Bartsch & Hartmann 2014:231). These, as discussed before, appreciation responses – e.g. gaining disconcerting insights into the nature of human existence – are typically underpinned by cognitively challenging viewing experiences, ambivalent emotional states, post-viewing cognitive elaborations, and a sense of longer-lasting meaningfulness. The resultant contemplative broadening of viewers' understanding of the world and their place in it, implies that they have grown wiser and more psychologically mature (ibid.:232).

Hence, eudaimonic viewer-engagement can – while avoiding real-world dangers and consequences – provide viewers with opportunities to "master cognitive challenges that involve successful integration of novel, complex, and dissonant information" as part of the process of gaining a more profound, differentiated, and consistent understanding of the world (Bartsch & Hartmann 2015:33-35). In these painful eudaimonic cases, the most relevant source of cognitive challenge, and especially of cognitive dissonance, is insightful content that is difficult to process because it opposes a person's intuitive dispositions, engenders moral dilemmas that are not easy to resolve, is difficult to assimilate into their existing cognitive schemata, and/or does not match their worldview.

Eudaimonic viewer-engagement, however, requires suitably prepared viewers, the hypothetical or ideal viewers that are implied (see Plantinga [2009c:249-250]), in this case, by discomfiture viewing experiences. This phrase occurs often in the works of Noël Carroll, and closest to the way I use it in his chapter on film evaluation; "for anyone with functioning eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind, suitably prepared, to appreciate it" (2008c:196 emphasis in original). Such viewers are 'prepared' in at least two senses of the word. Firstly, in the sense of being 'ready for engaging' with disorienting puzzle films; e.g. knowing what to expect based on previous viewing and, to a lesser extent, other real-world experiences.²¹⁰ Mainstream/mass cinephiles are, for example, readied by the growing prevalence of puzzle films but also by its increasing accessibility and a mass of other support material available on the internet, such as online discussion forums, podcasts, analyses and reviews.²¹¹ Secondly, these viewers are prepared in the sense of being 'willing to engage'; e.g. equipped to invest the active mental effort necessary to make the experience rewarding, in particular by watching puzzling films multiple times. Rewatching is possibly the most significant and influential, evolving

²¹⁰ Colin McGinn (2005) has, in addition, offered a cognitive exploration of the ways that dreaming prepares ("tutors") us for film-viewing experiences by, among other things, purveying emotions through sequenced attention-grabbing images and strange, direct access to the content of other's minds (in Allen 2009:448-449). While the so-called film-dream analogy has been thoroughly discredited (see, for example, Carroll 1988:11-13), dreams are of course often impossible puzzles and, thus, a likely preparation for impossible puzzle films.

²¹¹ This is the opposite to William Brown's (2014) unfortunate, "unhabituated viewer" (128) who may, as he argues, be easily entertained by the faux complexity of *Inception* (Nolan 2010) but who may at first struggle to "get into" (135) the complex responses and pleasures prompted by the slow simplicity of *Five Dedicated to Ozu* (Kiarostami 2003).

narrative film-viewing practice of recent decades. It is dependent on, and boosts the production of, films with the necessary complexity, hidden meanings and/or philosophical content (Wartenberg 2009:549).

It may not be completely obvious that eudaimonic viewer-engagement is an emergent, gradually developing or graded phenomenon. It simultaneously requires that viewers need to be prepared – in the sense of being willing and elementarily equipped – *and* it provides opportunities for cognitive-emotive (therapeutic) practice of the drives and skills that it requires. Moreover, particular instances may involve different mixtures of the explanatory concepts discussed in the previous chapters. The most important of these concepts, as final, listing stocktake, are: mainstreamed, mass art films (e.g. puzzle films) that activate the full, goal-directed PECMA flow; a mass cinephilia that is built on wide access, repeat viewings and online 'scholarship' (research and discussion); an aesthetic-safe-danger-zone comprising SEEKING and PLAY as well as taxing cognitive-emotive engagement; motivated ahedonic or non-hedonic entertainment experiences; rich value-constitution (both of meanings and meaningfulness); erotetic viewing modes that result in different kinds of disclosure and/or accessible-and-salient-making; maieutic moral involvement; the unresolved cognitive confusion of painful mass art films (e.g. impossible puzzle films) that prompt affective and/or sense-making saturation and saturation-acceptance experiences (PECMA blocking); and, lastly, different kinds of filmic appreciation that, ideally, entail mentalisation.

In conclusion, eudaimonic viewer-engagement is not simply an issue of leveraging these constitutive strands. It, instead, often involves problematising given aspects of the process, which may have a reciprocal effect on viewers' worldviews. The impossible puzzle film has, as should be clear by now, been the most obvious but also the most extreme cycle of mass art films to both depend on *and* resist (and, thus, extend) standard eudaimonic viewing practices. To be able to finalise my account of this interesting and potentially productive form of spectatorship, this chapter has made two final, piecemeal additions to the overall conceptual container. First, I proposed a sense

of philosophy as an enterprise that can accommodate informal, viewer-centred, wisdom-revealing versions of some standard operating procedures employed by professional philosophers. And, second, I followed this up with a conception of worldviews as the fundamental enabler of eudaimonic viewing experiences.

In the final chapter I shift the focus more rigorously to worldview-philosophy-through-film itself. I discuss it as a counter-position to my descriptive overview of Charlton's definition of philosophy, which I will call the Charlton reversal. In sum, I attempt to weave the most relevant ideas from the bulk of the dissertation together into a conception of WPTF that supports its practicability and value. In its most cursory form, it is an appropriately reflective, cognitive-discomfiture-based, saturation-triggered, intuition-and-reason-integrating, accessible-and-salient-making of suitably engaged viewers' worldviews.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION – WORLDVIEW-PHILOSOPHY-THROUGH-FILM

In the final chapter of the dissertation I present an overview of what has gone before, but not in the traditional style of simply recounting the content of the preceding chapters. Instead, I selectively bind the foregoing, piecemeal material together more solidly via a few additional, integrative sources. It is, consequently, in many ways the most abstract (the most dependent on the detail of prior chapters) part of the dissertation. The main aim is to define and describe, and to briefly defend worldview-philosophy-through-film as a significant sort of viewer-centred popular philosophy. In other words, I try to establish an acceptable level of reflective equilibrium via a rich-disclosure version of motivated eudaimonic viewing practices that accounts for sustained, cognitively unsettling viewer-engagement with impossible puzzle films.

7.1 The five-part Charlton reversal: worldview-philosophy-through-film

In this section I propose and describe a working definition of worldview-philosophy-through-film that is not so narrow or so broad that it would derail its fair consideration right from the start. The 'reversal' that I propose is a comparative or dialectical move, rather than a cue that this kind of popular philosophy is the opposite of academic philosophy. As we have seen, there are some similarities between academic philosophy and film-based popular philosophy, but the former is of course the standard setting cultural institution. Yet, as a dominant ideal, professional philosophy can gain broader exposure and a renewed real-world significance from its own, and especially filmic, popularisation.

Importantly, as an emergent phenomenon, WPTF gradually arises from the most basic, culturally embedded, thematic interpretations of films with significant implicit and/or symptomatic meanings, such as almost all mass art films. This kind of elementary worldview-philosophy tends to involve the second-order, often conversational and mentalisation-aware, engagement that one might set as a minimum requirement for identifying 'entry-level' popular philosophy. More sophisticated and sustained, but still

fairly uncommon, instances, such as mass cinephiles' engagement with impossible puzzle films, conceivably establishes and, in the most articulate cases, crosses the contact boundary with film-as-philosophy proper.

WPTF is foundationally a narrative-based, erotetic (a question-and-answer) process or practice, as in the case of viewer-engagement with puzzle films. But in the case of films without clear narrative or filmic meanings (questions-without-answers), such as impossible puzzle films, viewers' primary recourse – other than avoiding these viewing experiences – is to second-order, extra-textual 'answers' or rich-disclosures. Such eudaimonic disclosures may be generally characterised as mentalisation-based forms of appreciation. This kind of viewer-engagement is significantly popular philosophical – or, in a graded sense, simply more philosophical – to the extent that it is self-reflexive; that is, cognitively confusing, open-ended, and reflective (top-down) as well as appropriately sceptical about (bottom up) worldview-intuitions. This, I would argue, captures the core of the nature and value of mainstreamed cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences. It involves a set of unconventional, but not wholly unpopular, viewing practices that require and reward active cultivation. Hence, the activities that constitute WPTF are repeated or relearned by individuals who are invested in mass art films, by fan communities of puzzle films, and by successive generations of technologically prepared (mass) cinephiles.

Against this background, I propose the following – Charlton reversal – working definition of worldview-philosophy-through-film: the (i) philosophically untutored and intuitive, filmically autodidactic application of (ii) globally embedded, cultural and conversational (iii) PECMA resources to (iv) painfully perplexing and unresolved viewing experiences that (v) hold the promise of renewed insights into viewers' most basic beliefs.

To be clear, the five constitutive strands are not strictly processual steps. They are overlapping and interconnected dimensions or developmental phases that may be prioritised, valued, fixated on, exploited, and so forth, by specific films and film cycles as well as, in response, by individual viewers and online communities.

7.1.1 Informal, untutored, and intuitive, but orderly

Compared to the systematic and institutionalised nature of academic philosophy, WPTF is usually, especially initially, philosophically informal, untutored, naïve, haphazard or contingent. It involves quotidian mental activities that are typically common-sensical, pragmatic, heuristic and, vitally, intuitive. I will offer support for this characterisation in five key points.

First, much as watching (and making successful) films depends on and refines viewers' intuitive, common-sense, untutored, naïve folk psychology (as per Plantinga), viewers' "folk-philosophy" (i.e. a 'naïve,' 'natural' or 'intuitive' philosophy)," as evolutionary psychology and cognitive anthropology suggests (Galparsoro 2013:26), becomes similarly involved. As a case in point, Edward Branigan (2014:256-264) has illustrated how puzzle films (specifically its mind-game variant) typically exploit our shared folk philosophical tendencies, such as the routine use of the judgement heuristics of representativeness, availability, anchoring, framing and proximity, as well as the cognitive distortions caused by the fundamental attribution error, belief perseverance, disconfirmation biases, the bias for vividness, the dilution effect and our general lack of effective statistical heuristics. Hence, puzzle narratives engage viewers' interpretive need to "think and learn about ordinary life" via the "familiar forms of abduction, routines, folk theories, norms, metaphors, presuppositions, models, and acquired schemata arising from a way of life," and which "owes little to deductive or inductive logic" (ibid.:241). To the extent that these cognitive inclinations are typically engaged by eudaimonic viewing experiences, their workings may be disclosed to reflective viewers, who may then apply this understanding in other everyday contexts.

Secondly, intuition, it is important to note, takes a prominent (if not definitive) place within each of the five dimensions of WPTF that I am currently discussing, much as articulated intuitions – or "intellectual grasping" (Huston 2009:84) – does in academic philosophy. These rapid, heuristic, not-rationally-arrived-at, habitual and associative cognitions, while likely to appear self-evident and to evoke emotional defensiveness,

are generally the primary starting points for further reflection. In the context of film-viewing, Noël Carroll's recent, extremely careful case for "movie-made thought experiments" recognises the emotive, "gut reaction" intuitions that are germane, sometimes decisive, to viewers' maieutic reflections (2017:281-284). As in everyday life, our moral intuitions and reflections depend on 'deeper' emotional responses that detail-rich narratives (and puzzle narratives) can evoke and sustain.

Thirdly, informal and intuitive philosophical viewer-engagement takes place within a broader, information technology-driven context that encompasses three interrelated phenomena that I have discussed before: (i) the mainstreaming and repeat-accessibility of mass art films; (ii) an abundance of extra-textual information about and explanatory theoretical material related to these films; and (iii) the establishment of reflective and conversational, online communities of mass cinephiles. Thus, basic forms of WPTF may be systematic and self-correcting in terms of viewers' autodidactic expertise about canonical puzzle films, their narrative and stylistic conventions, other and older exemplars, specialised filmmakers, and even about the relationship between puzzle films and popular philosophy.²¹²

What starts out as a new kind of viewing experience, may then turn, for varyingly prepared viewers, into a distinct, active, challenging, and popularised mode of viewer-engagement that requires and repays different levels of effortful cultivation. Its motivating rewards include cognitive-emotive challenges, technical mastery, self-effectiveness, and social status. Receptive viewers may, in addition, be (largely online) readers of popular philosophy and even of popular film-philosophy. For example, in a short article in *The Guardian* – "I watch therefore I am: seven movies that teach us key philosophy lessons" (2015) – professional philosophers, including Julian Baggini, Peter Singer, and Slavoj Žižek, explain how popular films raise "philosophical quandaries" and "address the Big Questions." To date it has raised almost 700 comments and 3500 Facebook links. At least some ordinary viewers come to mass art films with a basic

²¹² See Silvia (2013) for more on the role of the knowledge emotions in the progression from "confused novices" to "interested experts."

understanding of films as everyday, counterfactual thought experiments. And, many general viewers may easily progress (with the necessary online support) from figuring out what a demanding puzzle film means, to questions about what a life with (or without) films means, and onto what life itself may mean (and not just to themselves).

Fourthly, with the global expansion in the range and refinement of the quality of mass art films (and, of course, art television – see Nannicelli 2017) over the last three decades, a genre like the puzzle film is increasingly finding, servicing and 'training' its audience. Though these films are typically more cognitive-emotively demanding than mainstream films have traditionally been, they are uniquely prefocused to do much of the attentional work or 'heavy lifting' required for eudaimonic viewer-engagement. Simply put, viewers of mass art films are coming to these films somewhat prepared and are becoming even better prepared via their everyday viewing experiences.

Lastly, as I try to show in the rest of this section, this kind of eudaimonic viewer-engagement may invoke and develop forms of appreciation that tend to be, however naively or intuitively, mentalisation-aware. Negative or limiting ways in which to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows may include crude levels of scepticism, dogmatism, cynicism, or even nihilism. Conversely, positive and productive ways may include a sense of receptive and agnostic openness (or even naivety) and playfulness, and may, thereby, allow for the possibility to better-appreciate-what/that-one-does-not-know. Appreciation ultimately implies (as the social scientific research suggests) that some, maybe many, practiced viewers of mass art films reflect (and even popularly philosophise) on, first, their motivations for undertaking these cognitive-emotively demanding viewing experiences, and, second, the value of cultivating its related practices.

7.1.2 Cultural, globally embedded, and conversational

As a phenomenon consolidated over the past three decades, WPTF has emerged within and been enabled by a shared, information technology-modernised (or "third

industrial revolution" [Rifkin 2011]),²¹³ global cultural context. This context has fostered a growing number of active online communities of suitably readied and engaged viewers of mass art films. To the extent that these viewers are, among other things, inclined to put their everyday understanding of the world into question (or to be mentalisation-aware), it would not be unreasonable to attribute a distinctive philosophical mindedness to their general outlook. This may, of course, reflect a more general cultural shift that has been precipitated by the unimpeded flow of cultural information, often via moving-image media, across much of the globe. This can be explained further via seven main ideas.

First, compared to the geo-national tendencies of academic philosophy, WPTF starts with viewers' worldviews, which are embedded in specific, prior existing, but typically to some extent globalised, cultures and cultural contexts. In the simplest, "value-neutral, anthropological" sense a culture is "a way of life" (Shusterman (2007:132). More comprehensively, it is the "actual practices and customs, languages, beliefs, forms of representation, and system of formal and informal rules that tell people how to behave most of the time" (O'Donnell 2005:523). It is the source of the "shared social meanings" that we use to "make sense of the world," and it supports social practices (e.g. film-viewing practices) that produce new meanings which, in ongoing cycles, change the culture itself (ibid.). Within the current biocultural paradigm, culture is primarily understood in terms of its evolved psycho-biological underpinnings. This is reflected in film theories that recognise, for example, human hyper-sociality or the standard PECMA flow.

Second, understanding a film's implicit and symptomatic meanings, the first step in WPTF, is "largely a social phenomenon" because these meanings "spring from systems of culturally specific beliefs about the world" (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:60). Although

²¹³ As I have repeatedly mentioned about a wide range of non-fiction publications, probably to the point of redundancy, this New York Times bestseller may also be considered as a work of popular philosophy. Such publications offer subject-specific (e.g. in economics, history, religion; and are, hence, often categorised as popular science) but often speculative deliberations on the human situation for a global (though basically or initially WEIRD) general public. Jared Diamond is another of these authors and in *The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies?* (2012) he specifically considers the related 'plight' of WEIRD societies.

a (mainstream) film's referential and explicit meanings are, by definition, less dependent on prior cultural knowledge, even these meanings may be socially clarified via explanations of cultural references and in social interactions with other viewers. Furthermore, to the extent that films engage viewers' culture-specific and/or global "storehouse of folk psychological wisdom," these films and viewers' responses may "contribute to, comment on, or critique some element of the human condition," sometimes even by both affirming *and* critiquing a given folk wisdom (Plantinga 2011:27, 38). In this context, the accessible-and-salient-making of a particular "folk belief" and its "default taking-for-granted" (Coope 2009:188), is a required prerequisite for its consideration and revision. It is, in other words, a potential, film-prompted disclosure of viewers' (and filmmakers') worldviews, and a first or opening step towards cognitive-affective reappraisal of the latter.²¹⁴

Third, according to Kiss and Willemsen the "model spectator" of puzzle films "holds a worldview that is more or less in line with the scientific worldview of modern Western culture" (2017:26).²¹⁵ While this "prevailing ethos and value system" is increasingly secular and non-religious (Brazier 2013:129), it has also encouraged a loosening of the "modern obsession" with "scientific conceptions of ourselves and the world" to allow us to 'see' the world afresh (Glendinning 2010:81). More negatively, Elsaesser argues that mind-game films are an "acknowledgement and a response" to the radically sceptical and philosophically nihilistic, modern, Western worldview which has arisen from the Cartesian-Kantian "realization that humanity is not only alone in the universe, but individually and preternaturally separated from the world" and, hence, "condemned" (as per Nietzsche, Sartre, etc.) to create meaning out of the meaninglessness – the indifference, contingency and finitude – of human existence (2017:16). Alternatively, painful eudaimonic spectatorship may be a reflection of Luckhurst's (2008:1-3) cultural paradigm of trauma; that (as discussed before) shared, psychologised and mentalised,

²¹⁴ This might be another version of the "aesthetic consciousness" that is found in African philosophy: people's different ways of seeing the world can be accessed and understood through artistic narrations that reveal both our human reflexivity and the "dialogical nature of our knowing and understanding of the world" (Bell 2002:107).

²¹⁵ For more on the relationship between cinema and modernisation, see Orr (1993) on film and the unfinished project of modernity or Kovács (2007) on the art cinema of the 1950s to 1980s as a modern and postmodern phenomenon.

vicarious trauma that is supposed to permeate our modern, globalised experiences and subjectivities.

Either way, WPTF is, to add a fourth point, ideally a popular kind of philosophy that, like academic philosophy, broadly, involves reflective processes within the "laboratory of the mind" that unfold "against our background of real-world experiences and our web of beliefs" (Carroll 2006d:180). It is, then, a similar, but less rigorous, sort of maieutic knowledge production. Like philosophical thought experiments, eudaimonic viewing experiences may activate the "cognitive stock" of viewers' responses in ways that reveal the "hitherto recessive or obscure" content of "what is already known" (Carroll 2002:8). In other words, engaging with a film's thematic or existential subject matter may reprocess and refocus our existing beliefs in ways that reveal their relevance (or irrelevance) and, thereby, offer opportunities for recalibration.

Fifth, this is, once again, largely a process that mobilises viewers' intuitions. Maieutic or Socratic viewing experiences (as a sub-category of eudaimonic viewer-engagement) surface, and ideally, in the relevant cases, shift the presuppositions – the 'unexpressed' propositional knowledge – and conceptual maps whereby viewers understand and respond to films that are intentionally prefocused for these purposes (Carroll 2002:4,7).²¹⁶ Since films are made for and "directed at" non-professional viewers, they may put "commonplace wisdom" (which moral philosophers may consider self-evident) into "bold relief" by way of a "seductive resonance" with, on the one hand, viewers' everyday preoccupations and problems and, on the other hand, ordinary, public discourse (ibid.:10). Insights or worldview-based intuitions that appear to be overfamiliar, redundant or foregone may, when filmically reactivated, Carroll argues, turn out to be reliable, revelatory, and even ennobling sources of real-world information, guidance and edification.

²¹⁶ In "Socratic Film," Nicholas Diehl makes a similar case for the "good aesthetic practice" of puzzle film viewing (specifically of the films of Christopher Nolan) that involves "self-examination through dialogue and reflection" (2016:23).

Sixth, these accessible-and-salient-making viewing experiences may help us not to forget and to more easily recall, to reconfigure, to pertinently apply, and to recognise the limitations of both "known but neglected" truths and uncritically accepted, conventional social beliefs (Carroll 2002:11). In addition to the capacity to refine and solidify, accessible-and-salient-making may also undercut, subvert and disconfirm, and thereby challenge and destabilise established and prevailing "moral, political, and even theoretical ideas" (ibid.:10). Both dimensions, recovering the neglected and challenging the established, are interconnected to a third dimension: eliciting pragmatic conversations and debate about social and cultural mores, specifically, as discussed before, within the reflective afterlife of maieutic viewing experiences.

Seventh, in a recent, book-length study of viewer-engagement in "emerging cinema" (replacing terms like "transmedia" and "multiplatform"), Digital Cultures scholar Sarah Atkinson (2014:xii) has brought together many of the ideas related to changing audience practices that I have raised throughout the dissertation. In what she calls "socially layered cinema," film-viewing is only the shared starting or reference point for "increasingly prevalent," sustained "post-cinematic conversations";²¹⁷ that is, for typically online, multiple viewings-based, potentially trans-continental discussions of both commercial and avant-garde cinemas (ibid.:101-102).²¹⁸ This change is also reflected in recent film production and marketing practices. It, like the social scientific research that I have referenced throughout, supports Carroll's overall position on the popular philosophical potential of mainstream (but also avant-garde) viewer-engagement.

In sum, the second strand of WPTF refers to the conversational interactions of mass cinephiles that are prepared at different levels for eudaimonic viewer-engagement. It involves the expression of viewing experience-prompted but culturally grounded beliefs that are interpersonally and socially communicated, and which may, thereby, be

²¹⁷ Conversational philosophy has also been one of the most interesting recent developments in African philosophy. Having moved on from having to defend the legitimacy of African philosophy as an enterprise, it tackles substantive philosophical issues via an interculturally receptive conversationalism (see Chimakonam 2015, 2017).

²¹⁸ See Jenkins (2006) for an earlier exposition of the "hypersociability" of these viewing practices within global "convergence culture."

demarcated, challenged and revised. The most healthy and productive, and seldom conformist, virtual communities are typically reflective, critical and eudaimonic. They are not simply groups of adulatory fans. Consider, for instance, the sustained discussions, elaborate, argued and illustrated 'theories,' and analyses of narrative and stylistic minutiae to be found on the forums of the *Welcome to Twin Peaks* (2020) website.

7.1.3 Resources of the whole PECMA: cognitive-emotive and rational-intuitive integration

Academic philosophy (as per Charlton) routinely attempts to address conceptual issues via reflective and argumentative procedures that are primarily intellectual, rational and propositional. WPTF, by comparison, is similarly dependent on these resources, but they are employed in more basic, informal and 'popular' forms that are typically also less explicit. This can be explained further in eight ways.

First, the four instinctual, affective reward systems (as per Panksepp) provide the most elementary motivating 'resources' for the action tendencies and activities of eudaimonic viewer-engagement. As discussed before, these systems are activated, for example in *Fire Walk*, first, by our goal-directed, appetitive need to understand (SEEKING) the worldview that underpins Laura's self-destructive and ill-willed behaviour. This is, second, matched by the gratifying opportunity to practice (PLAY) without real-world damages. Viewers may, for instance, reconstruct and reflect on the sources and implications of having a worldview, like Laura's, that allows for extremely exciting possibilities, without overlooking its awfully destructive consequences. This is a prime example of therapeutic narrative practice. David Lynch certainly does not shy away from portraying the exhilarating rapture of a life of sex, drugs, and partying like "[t]here's no tomorrow" [1:16:15]. Yet, he inseparably binds it to Laura's (and Leland's) childhood sexual abuse and her self-imposed self-closeting, callous cynicism, and (again, like Leland with Bob) deeply troubled but 'consenting' participation. In addition, the other two reward systems likewise motivate viewer-engagement: e.g. the erotic content (LUST) of the many sensual scenes at the Bang Bang bar or Laura getting dressed, in revealing

lingerie, suggestively posed, before slipping out on a school night [1:50:12] and the moments of tender nurturance (CARE) in Laura's troubled but sincerely loving friendship with Donna.

Second, these instinctual emotions are, to be clear, the ultimate drivers and regulators of our cognitive thought processes. For WPTF, the most important of these are second-order reflections about thoughts and feelings. The narrative and stylistic content of mass art films, and especially puzzle films, tends to be erotetically fascinating and eudaimonically open to interpretation in ways that are more likely to prompt such self-reflexive, top-down cognitions. This kind of filmic metacognition is well-suited for the processes of abstraction and generalisation – and, therefore, the possibility of raised process/mentalisation-awareness – that inform the quest (as per Grodal) for more permanent meanings. Such meaning would be captured, if at all, in one's changing, but relatively stable, worldview. This means that, while thought-provoking films may nudge almost all viewers to ponder, for instance, the moral implications of a given filmic scenario, the sustained viewer-engagement of mass cinephiles' repeat viewing and conversational involvement depends on and, in turn, contributes to developing, higher levels of cognitive integration.

Fire Walk, for instance, requires that such suitably engaged viewers seriously consider a supernatural explanation of Leland's incestuous actions, such as literal demonic possession by Bob. Their reflections will not only be an extension of their religious or secular worldview, but will also reveal, especially in conversational settings, this worldview more sharply, which allows it to be shifted and refined, sometimes to be rejected wholesale, or, of course, even to be defensively entrenched.

Third, to the extent that the PECMA flow is also a more general, structural framework for our regular interactions with the everyday world, it is an even broader foundation for philosophy than a person's worldview. While academic philosophy tends to prioritise cognition, and specifically rational cognition, sensory perception, emotion, reality-testing and action tendencies all play their role. In fact, it is possible to distinguish different

philosophical schools or styles in terms of the value that they place on the other PECMA dimensions. Though WPTF is likely to accord higher relevance to the non-rational dimensions, I would suggest that its results are usually most productive at an ideal level of PECMA integration.

The way in which most mass art films engage the whole, goal-driven and coping-based PECMA flow provides viewers with the widest possible range of sources for erotetic engagement, disclosure and accessible-and-salient-making. Thus, it offers five basic, typically interconnected resources for WPTF. These are, in the case of puzzle film narratives in general: perceptual information (e.g. identifying misleading visual or auditory information), emotional responses (e.g. the pleasures and frustrations of working towards puzzle solutions or feelings that folk psychologically reveal characters' motivations), cognitive responses (e.g. inferential puzzle reconstructions or reflective perspective-taking or to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows), reality-status evaluations (e.g. distinguishing objective and subjectively narrated aspects or judging correspondence to reality in the case of psychological realism), and invoked action tendencies (e.g. the preference to complete the puzzle or to rewatch a film or to do relevant research into a film's production process). In sum, making popular philosophical sense of the narrative aspects of the second section of *Fire Walk* ideally involves all of the aspects of the PECMA structure.

Fourth, to take this further, a balanced integration of the steps of the PECMA flow probably provides the most ideal support for the richer constitution of value that energises eudaimonic viewer-engagement. Both the viewing experience itself and the worth of such experiences tend to become 'richer' when its sensory, affective, cognitive, reality-relevant and behavioural dimensions are engaged, rather than when a few of the aspects are overemphasised. While cognition is at the heart of WPTF, the latter is, unlike most academic philosophy, not primarily driven or constituted by rational reflection.

Instead, WPTF is more comprehensively facilitated by the full PECMA flow for three main reasons. First, because it is decisively cognitive-emotive, and second (and interrelated with the first), because cognition is the central PECMA component and, in turn, a person's worldview is, by definition, its foundational or "parent" cognitive component. Third, the way in which the PECMA flow moves from perceptual processes to motor actions reflects the fact that cognition is determinedly both embodied *and* extended into the world, which allows for more integrated (cognitive) practice activities and raised (cognitive) therapeutic possibilities.²¹⁹ According to Bartsch and Hartmann's research, as one would expect, films that offer manageable affective *and* cognitive challenges tend to prompt "processes of deeper reflection and insight" that result in higher levels of "eudaimonic appreciation" and personal growth (2015:29, 32).²²⁰ Hence, viewers' "perception of deeper meaning" and the "feeling of being moved" motivate them to "elaborate on thoughts and feelings" triggered by the viewing experience (Oliver & Bartsch 2010:76). This may be extended to negative affects and to the elementary cognitive discomfitures of basic eudaimonic viewing experiences.

The full PECMA, furthermore, allows for the activation of a broader range of the instinctual, affective punishing systems (as per Panksepp) as 'resources' for WPTF. Eudaimonic engagement with *Fire Walk* is, at base (in addition to the reward systems discussed first), motivated by, for instance, anger about the pain and suffering that Leland inflicts (RAGE), anxiety and dread in reaction to the rising depravity and aggression involved in the story arc (FEAR), and separation distress in response to the utterly corrupted familial relations (PANIC/GRIEF). These feelings may energise second-order reflections, for good or bad, about, for instance, the state of the world or the nature of the human predicament.

Fifth and more broadly, WPTF encompasses eudaimonic viewing practices that contribute to "educating," that is, cognitively honing and cultivating the calibrated

²¹⁹ See Smith (2011a) for more on the important role of the "extended mind" in cognitive-emotive character engagement.

²²⁰ See Oliver and Bartsch (2010) for more on viewing experiences that "overcharge" viewers. I discuss this as an aspect of engaging with impossible puzzle films in section 7.1.4 below.

appropriateness of viewers' emotions (Carroll 2014:169).²²¹ Herein, mass art performs the important cultural and societal function of developing viewers' ability to make converging emotional appraisals and, thereby, converging – reproduced but renewed – judgements (ibid.:162-163, 176-179). This plays a vital role in the processes of social coordination, in inculcating participants into a culture, in maintaining conformity and dissent, and in cultural consolidation, which, ultimately, contributes to the adaptability and fitness of a given society. Overall, these social processes are clearly cognitive-emotive and co-constitutive of viewers' worldviews. It also links, in an overlapping way, this aspect of WPTF to the cultural emphasis of the second dimension discussed above.

Sixth, as an essential and integrated part of the overall PECMA flow, reality-testing enables the aesthetic 'safe zone' for the (eudaimonic) cognitive free play and mentalisation-awareness that typifies WPTF. This is in line with understanding the asymmetry of from-the-outside viewer-engagement (as per Carroll) and accommodates (as per Plantinga) narrative practice as a reflective (rather than reactive) and critical activity that is potentially therapeutic in the folk psychological and folk philosophical sense. In addition, it is this reality-testing that makes movie-made thought experiments possible because it supports imaginative, counterfactual thinking and encourages mentalisation, while, importantly, retaining reference to the everyday real world. Beyond the more abstract thinking tools of academic philosophy, then, we might recognise movie-made intuition pumps as more captivating, popular, full PECMA-tools. Paradoxically, this both supports and is supported by the insight behind Robert Nozick's influential, mid-1970s "experience machine" thought experiment: "being in touch with reality is valuable for its own sake" (in Tiberius 2013:321), which is also true in the case of watching films.

Seventh, cognition, that is, mentally knowing and understanding the world, is – as discussed before, but worth repeating because of its importance – a dual brain

²²¹ I return to this, specifically in terms of social scientific research into emotion regulation, in section 7.1.5 below.

hemisphere-based process (as per Williams and Kahneman).²²² It first and primarily produces immediate (largely unconscious and bottom-up) intuitions that are distinctly visual and emotional, and aimed at syntheses and generalisations that tend to be habitual and biased (or, in other words, worldview-based). Most everyday thoughts and conversational claims are intuitions; that is, they are not usually supported by rational thought or explicitly reasoned. But such intuitions are the main 'source' or starting point for rational knowing; that is, for secondary, conscious and top-down, analytical and typically verbal, reasoned understanding.

Against this backdrop, eudaimonic viewer-engagement, as a primary foundation of WPTF, involves the accessible-and-salient-making of viewers' reactive intuitions – we might call these worldview-intuitions – for more responsive rational reconsideration. This process ideally forms a feedback loop wherein the latter re-examinations then inform and refine or are integrated into viewers pre-existing worldviews. It is, of course, usually an effortful and 'painful' process, but it is, first, energised by the cognitive-emotive interest and fascination that is systematically raised (or criterially prefocused) by the relevant mass art films, and, second, cultivated via mass cinephilia. The repeated contact between intuition and reason is in itself likely to raise prepared viewers' awareness of and capacity for mentalisation and, ultimately, to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows.

In other words, as Carroll argues, movie-made thought experiments imaginatively trigger and boost viewers' thoughts and self-reflections by throwing them back onto, by probing, and by refining the antecedent, often vague and elusive, cognitive resources of their "cognitive map of the world" (2002:11, 18). It is also why "we should listen to stories that are all too familiar," as dramatised by Lynch's *Inland Empire* (Evans

²²² See also Iain McGilchrist's fascinating *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (2009), though it is due for an update (which is apparently forthcoming). This is also a work of popular philosophy.

2011:401) and, I would argue, likewise by *Fire Walk*. Once again, we are dealing with to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows.²²³

Eighth, as a qualification of the previous point, WPTF allows for or usually involves much higher levels of 'fuzzy reasoning' than academic philosophy generally allows. As Berliner (2017:58, 60) has comprehensively illustrated, narrative disunity – a form of cognitive discomfiture that is especially intense in mass art films and puzzle films – can, as long as its resolution seems achievable, bring wide cognitive variety to viewer-engagement. This includes levels of imagination, curiosity, improvisation, free association, and creative thinking and problem-solving that are animated by the (criterially prefocused) tension and excitement of (i) breaking free from the weight and restrictions of good sense and/or from one's current (worldview) beliefs as well as that of (ii) reaching towards new insights (ibid.). The typical abductive reasoning (of WPTF) might not always, or even very often, produce true conclusions, but it does offer general viewers practice opportunities to recognise (conceptual) problems, to consider evidence, to speculate about provisional or best-inference explanations, to make imaginative connections, and so forth (ibid.:59, 65). In sum, this adds up to an attractive compendium of familiar eudaimonic viewing activities.

7.1.4 Unresolved, painfully puzzling and perplexing experiences

WPTF, in terms of the three interconnected components that I have discussed so far, is the philosophically untutored and intuitive, filmically autodidactic engagement with and application of viewers' globally embedded, cultural and conversational, PECMA resources to mass art films and, specifically, to puzzle films. But, puzzle films, as a key

²²³ Consider this interesting parallel: "what comes to you when you take a psychedelic is not always a revelation of something new and startling; you're more liable to find yourself reminded of simple things you know and forgot you knew—seeing them freshly—old, basic truths that long ago became clichés, so you stopped paying attention to them" (Alexander Shulgin in Langlitz 2013:250). Anecdotal descriptions of non-recreational (or non-hedonic) psilocybin experiences seem, at first glance, like extremely potent eudaimonic and rich-disclosure but also cognitive discomfiture experiences. See Langlitz (2016) for a primer on the philosophy of psychedelics and Griffiths et al. (2018) for an example of the expanding scientific research that links psychedelic experiences to human flourishing and to changes in worldview.

subcategory of mass art films, encompasses the even narrower and remarkable sub-sub-category of impossible puzzle films. Since the latter is impossible to 'solve,' it is strictly the furthestmost opposite (even further removed than a conventional, easy-to-comprehend mainstream film) of a puzzle film, which, by definition, has a solution. Each produces a radically different or, again, opposite kind of viewing experience: the satisfaction of completing the puzzle versus the dissatisfaction of a puzzle without a solution. However, in both cases, viewer-engagement is still largely a process of sense-making.

With this in mind, then, we may add a fourth (second last) definitional dimension to account for the most demanding and, arguably, most revealing kind of WPTF: unresolved, painfully perplexing viewing experiences. This addition is the most important step towards explaining viewers' motivated engagement with the extreme and unresolved levels of cognitive discomfiture that are produced by films that have been intentionally prefocused not to make sense. Yet, once again, such engagement is made possible and sustainable – except for the most atypical viewers of impossible puzzle films – by its (i) intuitive, autodidactic accessibility, (ii) the presence of a conversational community (also for non-participating lurkers), and (iii) the larger 'container' of prospective full PECMA, worldview-invoking, rich-disclosure. In erotetic terms, the impossible puzzle version of WPTF reminds of the history of philosophy (or today's academic philosophy) understood as a series of attempts to address pressing, 'unanswerable' questions. I will clarify this further by discussing six additional points.

First, the painful, cognitive-emotive disorientation of impossible puzzle film viewing experiences obviously involves the underexplored category of "existential feelings" for which German media theorist Jens Eder (2016) has offered a preliminary investigation.²²⁴ Existential feelings reflect a "general sense of one's relationship to the world as a whole" and are the "foundation for other, object-directed experiences," and,

²²⁴ This is Eder's application to film-viewing of Matthew Ratcliffe's (2008) work on the phenomenology of this often-overlooked category of feelings, feelings that people usually find difficult to express in their everyday lives and which are common in psychiatric disturbances.

specifically, for our thoughts and actions (ibid.:77). Negatively valenced examples of these all-enveloping and more enduring substructures of a person's way of being in the world, of their sense of reality, include feelings of being overwhelmed, lost, unreal, dislodged, out of touch, disconnected, out of sorts, or not oneself, and experiences of intense unfamiliarity, surreality, strangeness, or otherworldliness. Watching Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977), Eder recounts, had the long-lasting effect that the "world felt different to me, ugly, weird, disturbing" (ibid.:92).

Likewise, in the case of the thematic focus of *Fire Walk*, many of these existential feelings are typical (without denying viewer-character asymmetry) of both Laura's (and Leland's) experiences in the story-world (e.g. depersonalisation and derealisation) and viewers' troubled eudaimonic experiences. These are obviously instances of the emotional saturation (as per Grodal) that results from the frozen PECMA of blocked goal pursuits; e.g. of being lost or overwhelmed. The negative existential (spectator) feelings are, in the end, generalised responses – responses that constitute and/or reveal a person's worldview – to being somehow incapacitated and they run the risk of further, feedback loop-like incapacitations.²²⁵

However, this kind of unresolved, painfully perplexing viewer-engagement also clearly offers more positive opportunities, especially when challenging the coherence of one's worldview, for irregular rich-disclosure experiences that may feed into more demanding variants of WPTF. These are likely to be filmic confrontations with realities that are normally beyond our control and which we prefer to avoid, such as the "existential boundary issues" of human experience (Olthuis 1997:21). For instance, films may raise viewers' self-conscious awareness of worldview-related issues like morality, evil, destiny or death, and of the quintessential questions, struggles, doubts, failures and the ultimate mutability of life. Eudaimonic viewing responses may, in Olthuis' terms, include cultivating and nurturing, first, a positive, accepting frame of mind, and, second, a

²²⁵ In African philosophy, "aesthetic consciousness" orders spectators' or participants' "experience to express human hope and wholeness," but an artwork may also portray the "fractured, disorienting, and suffering nature of human life" so as to judge a "culture that is itself fractured and hurting, pointing to the incompleteness of human life" (Bell 2002:116). This reminds one of WPTF and the resemblances warrant further research.

deeper appreciation of the everyday realities of interdependence, family, work, hardship, loss, ageing and illness.²²⁶

Second, while Kiss and Willemsen are correct that almost all healthy-minded viewers are extremely unlikely to take the portrayed filmic impossibilities seriously enough to question their "well-founded beliefs about the world" (2017:2), the cognitive confusion and disorientation experienced by prepared viewers certainly reveals their pre-existing 'fallback' belief, and especially those that are less well-founded or unfounded. This process is primarily driven by the desire to reduce the cognitive dissonance that is evoked by illogical or contradictory occurrences in the story-world, occurrences that transgress viewers' real-life experiences and sense-making frameworks (ibid.:80-82). For instance, engaged secular viewers need to find intellectual and reflective ways of dealing with the supernatural places and doubling of characters in *Fire Walk*.

A primary, effortful, eudaimonic way to deal with the cognitive discomfiture of unresolved inconsistencies and obscurities is to consciously, critically and creatively adopt and examine alternative cognitive and cultural knowledge frames, which has the additional benefit of raising viewers' second-order awareness and understanding of these interpretive activities (Kiss & Willemsen 2017:126). It may even be that this provides skills training for dealing with the interpretive complexity and multiplicity of a world without clear order, meaning or values (ibid.:187). Indeed, for a previous generation of theorists, the most common explanation of the unusual narration of the "psychological puzzle film" was that it is a critique of the Enlightenment "values of order and reason" (Panek 2006:67). Either way, for devoted mass cinephiles these films minimally involve processes of unresolved and unspecified accessible-and-salient-making and mentalisation.

²²⁶ During the late-1980s and 1990s, terror management theory (originally developed by Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon and Tom Pyszczynski) proposed a popular, research-based, social psychological explanation of worldviews as a cognitive device for "assuaging existential terror; that is, members of a given culture adopt that culture's worldview (however unconsciously) to gain a sense of meaning, permanence, and security in the face of existential meaninglessness, life's impermanence, and the inevitable annihilation of our bodies through human mortality" (Koltko-Rivera 2004:20; see also his decisive critique of this theory).

Third, Thomas Elsaesser's ongoing theorising of mind-game films (2009–2017) includes reference to "pleasurably painful learning experiences" related to "perennial philosophical concerns" (2017:13, 20). The mind games that these films and their viewers play, create the supposedly pleasurable pain or trauma of breaking-up or dismantling our unstable, customary understandings (or ontologies) of time, space, causality, consciousness, identity, agency, other minds, and so forth. The painful pleasure, in turn, supposedly arises from the consequent reorientations, often self-contradictory reorientations, of finding "different hermeneutic strategies" and "new ways of seeing the world" (ibid.). This approach supports both WPTF and eudaimonic viewer-engagement (which, of course, does not completely exclude hedonic motivations and activities), but it retains more of an overall hedonic emphasis. In addition, the 'pains' of learning (or of being uprooted) are compensated for or converted into (as per Smuts) the 'pleasures' of understanding differently.²²⁷

This kind of filmic learning is likely to involve significant levels of conflicted – and, therefore, unpleasant and disturbing – viewing emotions. To the extent that conflicted emotions arise from "conflicting, and thus inconsistent, beliefs," they, on the one hand, provide a self-correcting rationale for cultivating emotions and beliefs that are more harmonious (Harold 2010:291). On the other hand, mixed emotions are also a valuable reminder (even an accessible-and-salient-making) of our "epistemic limitations and of the messiness of moral and social life" (ibid.). Conflicted feelings may indeed be the most "appropriate response to an uncertain world" (ibid.:293), and they need to find their fitting place in one's worldview.²²⁸

²²⁷ As Alain De Botton (2001) reminds us: "[i]n their different ways, art and philosophy help us, in Schopenhauer's words, to turn pain into knowledge." This idea is presented even more 'attractively' (it would be a mistake to underestimate the visual rhetoric involved) via the short video introduction to Schopenhauer (viewed online almost 1.5 million times) at The School of Life's YouTube channel (which was co-founded by De Botton in 2008 and which has 5.2 million subscribers). De Botton has, since giving up his PhD studies in the early 1990s to write philosophy for the general public, steadily established himself as the most prolific and prominent popular philosopher of all.

²²⁸ See Eder (2008) for coverage of a range of sources of conflicting emotions: viewer-character asymmetry; divergent interests, drives, norms, and morals, whether one's own or compared to those of other people; interests/drives versus norms/morals; moral versus non-moral appraisals and appraisals from dissimilar perspectives; different levels of reflection and/or control; and conflict-bent cinema.

Fourth, unmitigated filmic puzzlement may be positioned within WPTF via the PECMA freeze (as per Grodal). As I have established, continued, motivated viewer-engagement with films that block goal achievement or even redemption-despite-failure, requires and prepares different variations of saturation-acceptance. Simple, reflection-prompting instances may openly ask thematic questions without providing answers, as *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982) does about what constitutes personhood (Carroll 2017:267).²²⁹ More gruelling, even damning instances, hyperactivate, overcharge, short-circuit or otherwise undermine viewers' sense-making apparatus and/or established interpretive capacities to generate, what we might call, unreality-saturation responses. Prepared viewers are required to accept both the unalleviated cognitive-emotive discomfiture of emotional saturation and their inability to cope with insoluble puzzles, like the tragedy of their existential mutability or their impending and ultimate intellectual defeat. The value of these eudaimonic experiences of free-but-painful-play, therefore, lies somewhere at the opposite end of the joyful frolicking of the PLAY system.

Instead, sustained viewer-engagement with impossible puzzle films holds the promise of different forms of rich-disclosure or even rich-accessible-and-salient-making that may trigger, direct or succour worldview revision. Most generally this may be a well-practiced, mentalisation-aware appreciation of the limitations of the goal-directed utilisation of reductive sensory awareness; of affects as behavioural prompts; of rational analysis, thought and language, but equally of intuition and of, for example, sceptical or agnostic attitudes; and of reactive reality-status evaluations. Taken together or integrated, these therapeutic realisations may allow us to move through social realities with adaptively reconfigured, and specifically morally refined, outlooks.

More specifically, these viewing experiences may reveal, or remind us of, most people's innate, long-term good sense and essential capacity for a positive acceptance that is not an anti-social, defeatist capitulation but rather a step towards a more realistic, wider, humanistic perspective (see Strawson 2007:113-114). Such a perspective may turn out

²²⁹ See DeMarco (2016) for more on the relationship between questions without answers within the context of ways of questioning and ways of wondering, as well as the dangers of degenerating into scepticism and nihilism.

to be close to that of Rushkoff's *Team Human* (2019). Yet more specific, the autonomic laughter or crying of saturation experiences (as per Grodal) may reveal the occurrence of "benign violation," that is, of threats to a person's beliefs about social norms and social relations that are somehow also safe and acceptable (McGraw & Warren 2014:75). This seems a good characterisation of the filmic rough-and-tumble of the Lynchian aesthetic-safe-danger-zone. A mass cinephile may even, in a moment of sincere rumination, find that their own life is about as puzzling as Lynch's "notoriously baffling" films (see Evans 2011:403), and may be nudged to extra-textual research and conversations that expose interesting explanations from the filmmaker's life and reconstructed worldview.

Fifth, one more addition to the previous listing is important enough to be discussed on its own. The typical non/anti-narrative elements of impossible puzzle films, such as a lack of linear causality and of closure, an incoherent story-world, or ambiguous cued reality-status and mental subjectivity, provides prepared viewers with opportunities to appreciate (and accept) the advantages, shortcomings and implications of narratives in general, of narrativisation as an all-purpose device for making sense of events and of human behaviour, of modelling the world through narratives, and even of narratology as a theoretical perspective (see Poulaki 2014). Non-narrativity encourages viewers to question the "cognitive and cultural function" (Elsaesser 2017:10) of traditional and conventional but also of nonlinear (supposedly, postmodern) narrative structures and styles of narrativisation, especially in the face of rapid and disorienting technological changes and the complexity of our current (global) situation. It obviously also relates to – and this requires much further research – the role of intuition, associative reasoning, analogies, metaphors, and so forth as thinking tools and, most importantly, as mechanisms of worldview construction and refinement.

The range of ways in which and radical extent to which David Lynch's films, as a case in point, resist and undermine narrative-based understanding, raises the question of feasible alternative, non-narrative systems for information ordering and sense-making. Consider how *Fire Walk* thoroughly obfuscates (i) the relationship between its two

disconnected sections, (ii) Leland's motivations and life story, (iii) the reality-status of its supernatural elements, (iv) the (symbolic) meaning of its motifs, and, ultimately, (v) Laura's (and viewers') ability to make sense of her life. Carroll goes so far as to claim that the "notion of a meaningful life, then, is parasitic on the notion of a meaningful narrative" (2008a:57). In other words, the intelligibility and coherence (or its opposite) of a person's life is supposed to be co-constituted by their ability (or failure) to construct an intelligible and coherent life narrative. Fair enough. Nicola Evans, however, uses Lynch's films and interviews to illustrate and celebrate his strategies of "life withholding" and tendency to "avoid life writing" (2011:399). Lynchian films may, then, encourage mass cinephiles to do the same and to explore possible alternatives to narrative-based understanding.

I would suggest – again with the proviso that this is a topic for further investigation – that both general sense-making and specific life-orienting alternatives may be found in existing eudaimonic viewing strategies that support WPTF. Such strategies may be practiced during eudaimonic viewer-engagement and then transformed to suit the activities and challenges of everyday life. These would include different mentalisation-based options, such as the reprioritisation of different PECMA elements (e.g. refocusing on our visceral, sensory embodiment), higher levels of overall PECMA integration or more refined integrations along the cognitive-emotive or rational-intuitive axes, or PECMA blockages that reveal the primacy of mental processes, of cognition, and of consciousness itself.

For example, an impossible puzzle film, like *Fire Walk*, is likely to evoke experiences of awe, described by Gallagher et al. (2015:6) as immediate (first-order) feelings of amazement, incomprehension and sublimity, and experiences of wonder, that is, more reflective (second-order) responses to failures of conceptual integration which evoke a questioning, rather than an answer-bearing, attitude. Wonder (as a precursor to more intense forms of puzzlement) has, of course, been, at least as far back as Aristotle, considered as the origin of philosophy. WPTF, as should be clear, definitionally implies a transition from experiences of (intuitive, saturated) awe to active and motivating

experiences of (e.g. extra-textual and prospectively more rational) wonderment.²³⁰ Here this includes the possibility of developing extant (but proto), second-order, non-narrative thinking tools (e.g. non/anti-narrative, filmic thought experiments) that support mind-restructuring insights (or to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows) about worldview matters like free will, reasons to be moral or the nature of evil.²³¹

Sixth, on a grander or more symptomatic scale, impossible puzzle-styled WPTF may be contextualised within popular philosopher-historian Yuval Noah Harari's characterisation of the current "age of bewilderment" (2018) in which a new story has yet to emerge to replace the old stories that have collapsed.

The first step is to tone down the prophecies of doom, and switch from panic mode to bewilderment. Panic is a form of hubris. It comes from the smug feeling that I know exactly where the world is heading – down. Bewilderment is more humble, and therefore more clear-sighted. If you feel like running down the street crying 'The apocalypse is upon us!', try telling yourself 'No, it's not that. Truth is, I just don't understand what's going on in the world' (Harari 2018).

Since, "[i]n a world deluged by irrelevant information, clarity is power," Harari offers 21 lessons that include "You know less than you think," "The future is not what you see in the movies," and "Life is not a story." As befits popular philosophy, the aim is to "stimulate further thinking, and help readers participate in some of the major conversations of our time" (ibid.). Maybe impossible puzzle films are co-constituting (reflecting and contributing to) the spirit of this age of bewilderment. Maybe they are even helping to equip mass cinephiles to function within it by developing skills for

²³⁰ See Kay Young's suggestion that puzzle films expose the "limits of what we can hold in mind" to prompt renewed encounters with our "capacity to wonder," specifically, about our experiences of (the nature of) time (2002:118). Plantinga has also examined how Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998) "elicits contradictory or incongruent affects" with the intention of "generating an experience of rumination and wonder" (2010:86). See Morrison and Schur (2003:xiii, 75-79) for an introduction to the mystifying 'impossible puzzle' of links between Malick's life and films and David Lynch's life and films.

²³¹ An ideal place to start – it is unfathomable why this has not been done – would be to link impossible puzzle films and their viewership to Galen Strawson's (2004, 2007) work contra the psychological and ethical narrativity theses and on the alternative possibility of episodic (though not strictly non-narrative) self-experiences and lives.

reconfiguring their worldview, such as eudaimonic viewing practices that include saturation-acceptance, mentalisation-awareness and the conversational community of other mass cinephiles.

7.1.5 Cognitive reappraisal and insight: worldview renewal

Prepared viewers' filmic pursuits of a more insightful understanding of the world is the fifth and final – and, in an important sense, culminating or integrative – dimension of the descriptive definition of WPTF. Eudaimonic viewer-engagement is explicitly motivated by the prospect of renewed insight into or, in other words, cognitive reappraisal of viewers' most basic, prior beliefs (or worldview). Like the insights pursued in academic philosophy, these insights are debatable, not often directly useful, often apparently trivial, and classically dependent on being relearned. The main issue, then, is the constructive mental responses – basically, rich-disclosure experiences – that may, somewhat counterintuitively, result from unmitigated, cognitively confusing viewing experiences. I will take this further in four explanations.

First, a summary selection from the social scientific, media research (which I have continuously linked) provides three main ideas that set the stage for the primary theoretical and conceptual ideas. (i) Eudaimonic viewing experiences, also those of the unresolved, painful, and puzzling kind, are both engaging and tolerably challenging because viewers anticipate the possibility of significant revelations about themselves and the world that they live in (Bartsch & Hartman 2015:3). (ii) The level of cognitive-emotive difficulty (and, thus, the depth of the practice opportunities) of different media content sets the range for intrinsically rewarding experiences of self-regulation and mastery (ibid.:5, 8). (iii) This is especially pertinent in the case of viewing experiences that encourage reflection (and, I would add, conversation) on the human condition, on the value of our finite human existence, and on the inescapability of unhappiness, meanness, and pain, but also on the significance of morality and resolve (Oliver &

Hartmann 2010:143–144).²³² These reflective themes are so profound that they are, by definition, worldview-based and potentially worldview-revealing, and, as should be clear, the mental devices of disclosure, mentalisation, acceptance and moral insight are likewise already in play. Moreover, attentive (repeat) engagement with *Fire Walk* is likely to involve all of these processes, which is arguably a minimum requirement for making sense of the film.

Second, what may at first appear to be deficiencies of 'philosophical' insights: contentious, 'impractical,' trivial, and recycled, are in fact the most important enabling mechanisms of WPTF. The global context of the free flow of information, of the hazards of cognitive overload, and of mutual cross-cultural and cross-generational incomprehension, sets a high premium on the accessible-and-salient-making and revision and refinement of what is already known. To the extent that films bear much of the (extended) cognitive load, popular movie-made thought experiments may entrain general viewers to simple eudaimonic engagement. This then offers a leeway into cultivating more sophisticated forms of saturation-acceptance (e.g. to better-appreciate-what/that-one-does-not-know) and of extra-filmic understanding (e.g. to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows). Rewatch technologies and practices allow mass cinephiles to recover and extract movie-made thought experiments from the history of cinema much like philosophers mine historical texts for underexplored, overlooked, misunderstood, underappreciated, or uniquely insightful positions that relate to current philosophical issues and debates.

While thorough engagement with impossible puzzle films offers many worldview-shifting interpretive opportunities and activities, we are only at the beginning of classifying and theorising these films and the related practices. We do know that viewers are confronted (i) with filmic puzzles that are impenetrably and irreparably incomplete or constructed out of an excess of parts that cannot be (honestly) made to add up to

²³² The latter reminds one of two Axial Age, philosophy-for-life traditions: ancient Buddhism and classical Stoicism. These are brought together in the popular philosophy – with "spiritual exercises" – of Massimo Pigliucci's *How to be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life* (2017).

decipherable wholes, (ii) with films that are fundamentally equivocal about the reality-status of the portrayed story-world, (iii) with hyper-bizarre causal chains, and (iv) with perversely indefinite spatial and temporal structures. Many viewers are patently engaging with – e.g. admiring, imitating, sharing, modelling, concerned about, critiquing – the implied and symptomatic – e.g. surreal, absurd, sublime, pop philosophical, tragic, freewheeling, pseudo-scientific, mystical, postmodern – meanings of these radically disorienting films. But they often appear to do so in typically self-directed, self-aware and self-revealing ways.

In addition, many mass cinephiles understand and appreciate these films with the same 'philosophically-minded' attitude that they bring to their everyday experiences. This attitude is probably a result of the free flow of trans-cultural, worldwide wisdom traditions and scholarly information (e.g. Batchelor's "culture of awakening" [1995]),²³³ which includes the popularisation of philosophy, but it is not hard to imagine that many people may have been first nudged towards a more open and speculative outlook by a mass art film. Most non-prepared viewers, on the other hand, avoid these films much as they would avoid popular philosophical topics and conjectures in their day to day existence.

Still, experiences and activities that have traditionally been very rare in response to more hedonic styles of mainstream cinema are undoubtedly becoming increasingly common with the increase in mass art films and art television. However, it would be a mistake to think of this relatively new style of spectatorship simply as the consumption of more demanding intellectual exercises or puzzles. Instead, as I have tried to show, it involves the film production-based engagement and reappraisal of established – whether assumed, habituated, learned, socialised, encultured, conditioned – concepts and beliefs.

²³³ Freelance scholar Annaka Harris refers to this as a (global) culture of "new thinking" in her popular philosophical introduction to the onerous topic of consciousness (2019). Her focus on "shaking up our everyday assumptions about the world" by evoking the "delight...[of] temporarily silencing a false intuition and glimpsing a deeper truth" (ibid.) reminds one of the workings of WPTF that I have sketched.

Third, while these film-led reappraisals are strictly cognitive reappraisals, WPTF, as I have illustrated before, recognises that they may be better understood as PECMA reappraisals (perceptual, affective, intellectual, reality-status aware, behavioural). Such reappraisals, depending on the specific film's narrative and stylistic form and thematic focus and/or on the particular viewer's current measure of cinephilia, may involve eudaimonic (critically reflective and conversational) viewer-engagement. This is typified by (i) a more balanced integration between the constitutive PECMA elements (whether between all the elements, cognitive-emotive balance or intuitive-rational balance) or (ii) a temporary refocusing on or revaluing of a certain (typically under/overestimated) PECMA element or (iii) more radical experiences of PECMA blockage that prompt saturation-acceptance experiences.

The latter, by most empathetically throwing viewers back on their pre-existing, extra-filmic (cognitive) resources and the upstream search, is likely to promote the highest levels of accessible-and-salient-making of their culturally oriented worldviews and the (second-order) mentalisation-awareness that constitutes rich-disclosure.²³⁴ Overall, these cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences basically hold viewers' attention through moderately painful, puzzle-solving activities – often nuanced by a more general wonderment – but then, in the face of the ultimate insolubility of impossible puzzles, need to find value in WPTF as a motivation for sustained eudaimonic engagement. Its ongoing, ideally self-correcting (via real-world reorientation, backed by the cultivation of mass cinephiles' expertise within conversational settings) outputs are partial, folk/popular philosophical insights, such as, again ideally, into the value of a healthily agnostic attitude or into the tragedies of the human situation.

Fourth, for the sake of illustrating WPTF, let us consider three of the standard (disagreed about for millennia), interrelated, multipolar dimensions of a person's worldview: morality, free will (volition) and evil (Koltko-Rivera 2004:25-27). Here we

²³⁴ No philosopher has, arguably, theorised second-order aesthetic engagement more comprehensively than Susan Feagin, but her focus has been (since Feagin [1983]) on meta-responses (responses to viewing responses) and meta-pleasures (the pleasures of viewing pleasures and even of displeasures). My focus, to be clear, is on more elementary levels or kinds of second-order engagement that are specifically non-hedonic.

might have considered other orientations (dimensions), such as towards knowledge, time, ontology, purpose, interpersonal relations or truth. Since these are the "parent" structures of our cognitive schemas, abstract concepts and expressed beliefs, having them ("one's very sense of reality") 'tested' or even disconfirmed is likely to have a transformative impact (sometimes catastrophic, though rarely so within the aesthetic-safe-danger-zone of film-viewing) on a person's thoughts and actions (ibid.), and, hence, on the way that their life is likely to turn out. My aim in discussing these three elements is not to describe or prescribe a more acceptable or well-adjusted worldview, but to describe how filmic rich-disclosures may prompt viewers to worldview renewals in their own terms. Viewer-produced WPTF is really about moving one's foundational understanding in the 'right' direction and this includes renewed awareness of what the right direction might be.

Considering why one should do the right thing in a particular situation (e.g. not to steal or cheat) is underpinned by an acceptance within one's worldview that, in the first place, human beings should be moral, that is, morally good. It presupposes having an answer to the seldom asked general question: Why be moral?²³⁵ Australian philosopher Chris Falzon has examined this "deeply practical concern," rather than "abstract theoretical question," in film-related terms (2009:591). The superficial, 'negative' answer would be: "to avoid external punishment (by God or society)" (ibid.:595), which covers the traditional, conservative, hierarchical and typically rule-based half of Jonathan Haidt's (previously discussed) progression of moral systems. In addition, Falzon argues that Lynch's films (specifically *Blue Velvet*) do not just "proclaim the virtues of the moral life"; they, instead, demonstrate the "enormous attractiveness" of immorality and the ("brutal") desires that it may satisfy (2009:597).

²³⁵ In Sam Harris' (2013) terms, as mentioned before, this basically amounts to asking and profoundly appreciating the question: Why be honest/truthful? Alternatively, see Daniel Dennett's discussion of the issue of "competence without comprehension"; that is, of sorts of "semi-comprehension, or pseudo-comprehension" that allow human beings (and other organisms) "to behave appropriately most of the time, without having to know why their behavior is appropriate" (2013:105).

Against this background, Falzon discusses positive (one might say, secular or universal) reasons for being moral which may be found throughout the history of Western philosophy, particularly in the works of Plato and Kant (ibid.:596-597).²³⁶ These include that living a moral life (i) has inherent value, (ii) serves human needs that are deeper than our immediate or base desires, (iii) fosters self-realisation via the inner freedom and balance of self-mastery, (iv) sets us free from the dominance of or enslavement by our desires, (v) prevents us from developing distorted human relations, (vi) affords us an existence that is freer and healthier, despite the reality of suffering, (vii) engages the resources of our higher cognitive (and particularly rational) faculties, and (viii) promotes self-determination and autonomy. Here we enter the domain of Haidt's most progressive, ideal moral system: the reduction of harm and alleviation of suffering through care and compassion. These constructive motivations also suggest avenues, including aspects of positive acceptance, for dealing with the nihilistic hazards of a loss of meaning.

As a movie-made, moral thought experiment – that is, a filmic refinement of our moral knowledge and concepts (as per Carroll) – the implied and/or symptomatic meanings of *Fire Walk* offer viewers many opportunities to think through punishment-based, religious or supernatural, and to a lesser extent, societal worldview-intuitions. In terms of further extra-textual research, viewers may also examine whether this is close to David Lynch's own moral outlook. Yet, it also encourages prepared viewers to reflect, however informally, on the encyclopaedic range of Laura and Leland's (but also the fringe characters') lack or loss of the positive dimensions of Falzon's sources of a moral compass. The ensuing moral horror story portrays the many levels and forms of depraved subjugation that produce Laura's immense suffering and terrible despair, and eventually her dreadful murder. This is, as a comparative reference point, an amplification of an apparently everyday, affluent, middle-class life (compared to that of people in the many disaster areas of the globe) and its aspects that are worth avoiding, despite its attractions and fascinations. Leland's moral and personal desperation and

²³⁶ See Wirth et al. (2012) for empirical support of these kinds of qualities (e.g. competence, autonomy, self-acceptance, relatedness) as aspects of eudaimonic viewer-engagement.

ruin are less explicitly portrayed, but it is clear that his life does not offer much, if any, peace of mind. If *Fire Walk* was tasked to answer the question – Why be moral? – the banal answer would be: to avoid or reduce needless suffering.

Closely related, Edward Branigan has argued that a film's "climax, dénouement, resolution, and epilogue" often offer the clearest "materialization of a moral stance," of the film's moral "lesson" or "point," but viewers need to retrospectively nuance and adjust it "backwards" through the film as a whole (2014:241). This is especially true of puzzle films and a motivation for the multiple viewings that are necessary for making moral sense of *Fire Walk*. Yet, because of the latter film's "bad faith" or "cheat" ending (Hampton 1993:40), this means that for secular (and, again, especially for repeat) viewers the foregoing tragedy takes on even worse proportions and more disquieting implications, especially in terms of the troubling and controversial recognition of Laura's complicity and Leland's loss of agency. The rich-disclosure effects of such retrospective reconsiderations and reinterpretations are amplified by the hyperactivated interpretive ambiguity and saturation-acceptance experiences that are triggered by the film's impossible puzzle elements. These include, its obscure causal progression and motifs, the infringing alternative worlds, and, most of all, the disorienting two-part, frame structure. The latter may bring viewers back to a reconsideration of the failure of parental and governmental law enforcement as an instance of the inadequacy of external punishment, whether supernatural or societal, as a foundational motivation for living a moral life.

This leads us to the second multipolar, worldview dimension: a person's belief in human free will. The existence of free will is either objectively true or false and there has been much scientific evidence that general, everyday experiences and understandings of free will are in fact based on an illusion.²³⁷ Here, however, this is not the issue. What is at issue, are eudaimonic viewing experiences that engage viewers' understanding of

²³⁷ See Sam Harris' (2012) popular philosophical comparison of incompatibilist (e.g. libertarian or determinist) and compatibilist approaches to free will, as well as his inclusion of the concept of moral luck. Alternatively, see Daniel Dennett's (1984) earlier popular philosophical case for the kind of free will, and everyday ways of understanding it, that is worth having.

functioning within (civilised) societies that socialise and enculturate mentally healthy adults to act morally and hold them accountable for their premeditated actions. One's sense of free will is an extension of grasping concepts like agency, intentions, purpose, consequences, responsibility, mitigation and resolve. And, movie-made thought experiments may reveal and thereby encourage the everyday clarification of viewers' understanding and usage of these concepts; once again, to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows. This may, in turn, contribute to correcting misguided ideas – e.g. of free will in the "bonkers sense" of decision-making that is free from its constitutive physical and chemical processes or, alternatively, that human beings cannot be held responsible for their actions (Dennett 2013:406) – and facilitate their capacity to deal with familiar and yet to be confronted moral challenges.

These filmic versions of Daniel Dennett's popularised thinking tools may remind attentive viewers that having free will means that we are neither completely free from nor completely at the mercy of external causes and forces (Dennett 2013:7). Instead, we may better appreciate how human beings are embedded in rich 'causal' circumstances – "genetic, social, or intrapsychic forces" (Koltko-Rivera 2004:39) – that both limit and constitute the value of self-mastery and self-discipline, of regulating our immediate desires, of making sacrifices, of humane relations with others, and so forth. On the other hand, it may also refine our ability to recognise how someone's capacity to cope may sometimes be overmatched by their circumstances, to appreciate rationalisations, including those with supernatural elements, and so forth, which should make us less likely to judge harshly and enhance our ability to judge thoughtfully, and to do so with more compassion.²³⁸

Thus, movie-made thought experiments, like those that portray Carroll's virtue/vice wheel, provide eudaimonic viewers with imaginative scenarios that disclose the importance and impact of variations in the different 'settings' of the main variables and

²³⁸ This kind of full PECMA, therapeutic narrative practice reminds one of psychologist (and popular philosopher) Paul Bloom's case against (or, strictly, for a refinement of) everyday or intuitive empathy as a moral guide, and its replacement with "cognitive empathy" and "rational compassion" (2016:36-56) as a viable and sustainable alternative.

considerations that are at play. Consider, for example, the contribution of Sarah's striking apathy to the familial horrors that unfold in the Palmer household (in *Fire Walk*). If one imagines Laura's younger childhood, it is easy to see how she is subtly modelling and responding to Sarah's more acceptably addictive incapacitations. As self-training opportunities for practising cognitive-emotive and intuitive-rational thinking tools, mass art films may, then, allow and encourage prepared viewers to consider and discuss their viewing responses and, ultimately, the worldviews that underpin these responses.

Fire Walk pertinently relates and contrasts the opposing worldviews that would attribute incest either to psychological and societal or to supernatural causes. It, thereby, allows viewers to think through these different perspectives in self-revelatory but reasonably safe ways, and the saturation-acceptance mechanisms urge viewers to retain a suitably agnostic position. Hence, the film portrays and magnifies Leland and Laura's awful addictive enslavements and loss of self-determination through the lens of depersonalisation disorders. In sum, the film offers a series of concrete, cognitive-emotively engaging, but also deeply disorienting scenarios, that are likely to guide prepared viewers' reflective considerations in accessible-and-salient-making ways that a factual documentary about incestual sexual abuse simply cannot match.

Both assumed morality and free will link to and overlap with the third worldview dimension: a person's foundational beliefs about the nature of evil. British-Canadian philosopher Adam Morton (2004) has proposed an approach to everyday thinking about evil and the concepts that the lay public may employ to understand and to respond to evil which links well with Carroll's account of everyday moral conceptual clarification.²³⁹ I will deploy it in support of WPTF.

While fraud, theft, lying, broken promises, and the like may not be difficult to explain, evil deeds are more "deeply puzzling" (Morton 2004:2). Consequently, evil – understood as the atrocities of deliberately inflicting suffering, particularly pain or humiliation and, in

²³⁹ Morton's *On Evil* (2004) is another example of popular philosophy, published as part of Routledge's Thinking in Action series.

extreme cases, death, on others – has, across cultures and epochs, been labelled as "demonic" and as psychologically completely unlike other (normal) human motivations (ibid.). This "diabolical image of evil" – entrenched by the fundamental attribution error and mainstream mass media – as supposedly unimaginable, incomprehensible, psychopathological and unforgivable, Morton argues, prevents philosophers and the public from understanding and avoiding (or preventing) evil behaviour. It, instead, creates deeply confused moral thinking (e.g. a self-serving "virtuous paranoia" (ibid.:5) or victim blaming) and leads to terrible consequences and, ultimately, results in further, self-justified evil actions (e.g. pre-emptive reprisals). *Fire Walk* both obviously portrays Leland in exactly such a demonic way and it encourages viewers to interpret his evil deeds in diabolical terms, but, overall, does so in such ambiguous and unresolved terms that it also problematises this process, especially for prepared (repeat) viewers.

As a corrective to such 'demonic' mystifications, Morton proposes an empirically supported "barrier theory of evil" (2004:34). Accordingly, evil deeds result from strategic or learned mental procedures whereby people find ways to cross the fairly high, evolutionarily predisposed, "social and emotional barriers against harming" and most fundamentally against killing other people, barriers that have been established to protect our "fundamental human interests" (ibid.:48). Of course, a person's enculturated worldview provides the most basic foundation for these immediately known or intuitive barriers, and their acquired barrier-crossing strategies may be rooted in their childhood history, such as in physical and sexual abuse. In addition, overcoming or eroding moral barriers often involves self-deception, such as 'unknowingly' blinding oneself to consequences (ibid.:57). In *Fire Walk*, Leland ultimately kills Laura because arguably he can no longer deceive himself about the consequences of sexually abusing her; thus, this is his muddled way to 'correct' the first evil deeds with one that is even worse.

Many of Morton's illustrative examples have been taken from film narratives that "can guide us or blind us" to moral insights and tend to do so by being "exciting-disturbing" rather than "confusing-disturbing" (2004:95). The same kind of immediate, emotional, visceral revulsion that usually prevents or barriers evil acts, is part of the negative

affects, of the disgust and outrage that viewers experience in response to portrayals of such evil acts. These painful affects may provide prepared viewers with imaginative access to characters' cognitive strategies for overcoming moral barriers. These include dehumanising victims, avoiding empathy, or placing the blame on the temptation or seduction by another person or even by a supernatural force (ibid.:101–107).

In the case of *Fire Walk*, many (religious) viewers may simply take the film as an embodiment of a religious worldview and may just blame Bob for Leland's evil acts. More reflective (secular) viewers may consider the implications of and critique such a shifting of responsibility. Eudaimonic viewers may, largely because of the film's disruption frame and saturation-acceptance elements, consider the film as both an instantiation and an undermining of such a supernatural worldview, but one that does not offer an alternative, 'correct' perspective. They may relate this to the rest of Lynch's films and to other information about the filmmaker, as well as to other impossible puzzle films. This kind of viewer-made WPTF, and specifically the "tug between intuition and rational thought" (Morton 2004:96), may shift prepared viewers' culturally founded moral perspectives by encouraging them to undertake the effortful and painful imaginative rehearsal of human motivations that they would otherwise avoid. This may reveal overlooked or denied "continuities between normal everyday behavior and extreme evil acts" (ibid.:30). It may, lastly, help to overthrow the "old picture of emotion as an uncontrollable irrational factor" and refine their understanding of the circumstantial or situational "rationality of emotions" (ibid.).

In sum, *Fire Walk* is, in eudaimonic terms, thematically prefocused on evil. It is largely a portrayal of Leland's evil actions, but also depicts Laura (witness the pain and humiliation that she inflicts) at times crossing the line that prevents evil deeds and the history of abuse that has 'equipped' her to do so. Leland's own abuse is only cued indirectly and then even in self-obscuring (saturation-acceptance) ways. The film, moreover, offers prepared viewers sustained opportunities for rich-disclosure of their beliefs about evil, which may prompt them to better-appreciate-what-one-thinks-one-already-knows, while also, through saturation-acceptance, allowing them to better-

appreciate-what/that-one-does-not-know. The film indeed "taps into something considerably more terrifying: not only the evil buried somewhere in the quintessential middle-class family, but the evil buried somewhere in all of us, and our capacity for it" (Marsh 2013). This gives new meaning to Carroll's sense that art-horror "monsters are not wholly other, but derive their repulsive aspect from being, so to speak, contortions performed upon the known" (1990:166).

And yet, practicing WPTF might not be worth the effort and the common objections against film-as-philosophy can help us to consider and respond to this possibility.

7.2 Some objections considered and consolidated

For the sake of a relatively comprehensive account of the relationship between cognitive discomfiture viewing experiences and film-as-popular-philosophy, within the limits of this study, I have not allocated much space to counterarguments and criticism. Instead, I have presented a piecemeal build-up and integration of a selective framework of the most relevant, constructive, mid-level issues, scholarly sources and explanatory concepts that most generally hang together as WPTF. It is, of course, a preliminary effort and a starting point for further research, for more sophisticated theorising and for a radical reconstruction of the WPTF-puzzle and its conceptual pieces. It may be made somewhat more convincing through brief consideration of expected objections to WPTF. To do so I return to and rework Carroll and Wartenberg's treatment of four general objections to the related, benchmark, film-as-philosophy thesis. Once more, the activities and practices discussed in responses to these objections are overlapping and interconnected.

First, questions might be raised about the generality of WPTF; that is, about the plausibility of and lack of argued support for the generalisations of philosophically unschooled cinephiles. In Wartenberg's terms, I take this, as with the other objections to WPTF discussed here, as regulative advice. Viewers' initial, interpretive projections (of the revealed, general truths) of the implicit and symptomatic meanings of a mass art film

are indeed likely to be too general and/or not general enough. The former, in the sense of producing unfounded, popular philosophical generalisations, and the latter, in the sense of meanings that apparently only apply to a given film's content or to a particular situation. However, since a person's worldview is the sum of their most general assumptions, any accessible-and-salient-making of these constitutive beliefs unfolds in the domain of their most general understanding of unresolved existential themes, like the human situation or human nature. This understanding can in most cases, in terms of WPTF as a gradually arising and improving practice, only be made more plausible through the sustained, eudaimonic engagement of mass cinephilia. This kind of viewer-engagement, as we have seen, typically involves seeking truth and meaningfulness, a high premium on general applicability to real-life experiences, and challenging interlocutors in conversational settings.

Furthermore, the history of cinema and current mass art films – and even its comparison with more conventional, mainstream fare – offers near-endless movie-made 'case studies' from which unremembered popular wisdom may be recovered and applied to the commonplace issues of the day. This may, along with increased exposure to trans-cultural, mass art cinema, help viewers to appreciate the historical and cultural embeddedness, as well as the potential specificity or universality, of the perspective that allows them to engage with these films in the first place. Exposure to viewing cohorts' revealed worldviews and upstream connections (or disconnections) with a filmmakers' reconstructed worldviews may, likewise, disclose the near-global, borderless, shared dimensions of an evolving (secular) world culture. Or, alternatively, it may expose more of the realities of cultural fundamentalism and imperialism. Ongoing technological changes and new forms of complexity-based viewer-engagement may be part, I would speculate, of emerging eudaimonic, rather than primarily hedonic, worldviews. Signs of this change may be found in, for example, recent moves towards minimalism (see the website of *The Minimalists* and its many popular philosophical, worldview-reorienting resources) and also in pleas and warnings about ecological and technological changes that will require new forms of austerity for humankind to survive (see Weinstein 2018b).

Second, it might be argued that WPTF does not produce explicit philosophical propositions and arguments that can be accurately interpreted, analysed and debated. In regulative terms this is true: popular philosophy does not generally meet or aspire to the high standards of peer review and criticism found in academic philosophy. But, such an expectation, though a good, inspiring ideal, would be setting the standard for everyday-relevant popular philosophy too high. In the best instances, WPTF shares an open border with professionally authored and published popular philosophy, which provides a second, more achievable, broadly exploited and appropriated source of philosophical standards and methods. The intuitions (for which, read 'worldview-intuitions') and starting positions (the premises) prompted by viewers' engagement with mass art films are unambiguous enough for the purposes and practices of WPTF. This 'raw material' becomes more philosophical and more philosophically justified to the extent that it is improved by the rational reflection, film minutiae-based interpretations, sustained attempts at puzzle completion, popular theorising and open-ended discussions that typify contemporary eudaimonic viewer-engagement.

In the place of explicit arguments, then, the graded levels of WPTF involve informal, dialectical, online discussions and the putting forward of 'evidence' harvested from engaged viewing experiences and extra-textual research. Viewers' positions and, hence, films' 'philosophical' contents are made more explicit by the excavating and explicating – again sustained across different films and interrelated with extra-textual sources – of implicit and symptomatic meanings by prepared viewers in conversational settings. These meanings, reformulated in verbal terms, are themselves, like those of mass art films, open to multiple interpretations and revision.

Such typically second-order interpretive activities are, as we have seen, worldview-dependent and, thus, worldview-revealing. Both making sense of and failing in some ways to make sense of Laura and/or Leland's actions (in *Fire Walk*) in secular or in supernatural terms may, for example, prompt viewers to a more compassionate understanding of the limitations of attributing levels or sorts of 'free will' in everyday human contexts. Such a shift in viewers' foundational (or banal) understanding of

volition is, by definition, likely to involve further, dialectical revisions of their sense of morality and of evil. The overall process of eudaimonic engagement with *Fire Walk* – which is dependent on multiple, prepared viewings – is likely to provide (potentially therapeutic) opportunities for filmic wonderment about the definitive-but-banal impact of our understanding of volition on our ordinary activities and overall existence.

In other words, WPTF may be characteristically 'explicit' in different terms. It makes, first, films' and their filmmakers' implicit worldviews more explicit, and, second, makes viewers' implicit (but ultimately shared) worldviews more explicit. More radically, however, painful, cognitively confusing, eudaimonic viewer-engagement with impossible puzzle films test, undermine and reveal the limitations of both explicit meanings and of attempts at rational justification and integration. Hence, saturation-acceptance experiences may ideally evoke a sense of positive acceptance (e.g. of the fact that these viewing experience are and should be allowed to be overall painful) and of non-defeated wonder that encompasses the wisdom of returning over and over to and relearning what is supposedly already known. This may translate into a newfound openness and ability to accept the experiences of being overmatched by the ambiguities and complexities of our transitional, as they always are, era (despite the popular philosophical/scientific talk of an impending technological 'singularity').

Third, it is easy to understand – especially with generality and explicitness in mind – why someone may feel that WPTF is likely to involve little more than the unfettered imposition of viewers' (at best) thoughtful interpretations. Philosophically untutored or uncritical viewers, they may worry, will simply and unreservedly find support for their pre-existing (and, likely, self-serving) beliefs in popular, commercial artefacts that are 'philosophically' hampered by the requirements of entertainment. However, while mass art films certainly offer and support a wide and seemingly unrestrained range of interpretations, in graded instances of WPTF this is typically bounded by several internal, regulative mechanisms.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ The wonderful Lil-sequence in *Fire Walk* (discussed in Chapter 3) provides the film's own ambiguous warning/encouragement about such impositions.

Viewers, whether they are barely prepared, naive initiates or experienced film buffs after a first viewing, are free and encouraged to start with the most open, intuitive, imaginative and extreme interpretive responses. Otherwise, neither the whole filmic puzzle (its full existential implications) nor their worldviews are likely to be thoroughly involved and, even (or especially) to themselves, properly divulged. Yet, starting with the widest of all possibilities, to be sustainably rewarding, needs to take further shape as part of contributing to suitably critical communities with worthwhile (even if unwritten) standards and productive borders. Alternatively, and maybe counterintuitively, impossible puzzle films and saturation-acceptance experiences (and repeat viewings and upstream worldview searches) make it both difficult and improbable for prepared viewers to attempt to maintain imposed meanings. Ideally, these films and experiences provide practice in skilful (or balanced) acceptance of meanings that are simultaneously ambiguous and not open to unrestrained interpretation.

In other words, staying true to the spirit of a given film and/or to the spirit of the puzzle film genre or impossible film sub-genre, implies interpretive practices that are ultimately self-regulated by the value constituted through rich-disclosure experiences. This may even include increased second-order, processual awareness of the dangers and productive possibilities of distorting cognitive phenomena like effort justification, the 'power trips' of the painful endurance of cognitive confusion, or worldview-biases. In the context of prolonged mass cinephilia, argumentative confrontations are likely to contribute to participants' critical capacities, such as an expedient agnostic attitude or practised skills for perspective taking. These are, maybe most valuable of all, likely to be powerful antidotes to both dogmatism and extreme, defeatist forms of relativism.

Fourth, lastly and most importantly, WPTF-sceptical critics may argue that its outputs are almost always too trivial or banal to have much philosophical, even popular philosophical, value. As before, this is granted, but here this regulative warning reveals the most valuable resource of a gradually improving WPTF: apparently overfamiliar, but

frequently overlooked, everyday truisms.²⁴¹ These taken-for-granted worldview-beliefs will usually lie and move between the outlier poles of person-specific or widely accepted, implicit or explicit, and imposed or wisely responsive. In the current, near-global (but specifically secular) cultural context, watching and discussing film-viewing experiences – especially of mass art films (and art television), possibly most productively in the case of mass cinephiles' engagement with impossible puzzle films²⁴² – provides the main expressive space, cognitive-emotive resources and practice opportunities for the disclosure of and for refamiliarisation with a person's (or collective's) most basic, banal beliefs.²⁴³

It certainly is trivially and 'universally' true that we should be moral (but we seldom seem to understand why we should be), that human beings have (some undecided kind of) free will, and that some actions (or even more trivially, some people) are evil. But these everyday ideas are also both profound and unsettled, and films offer philosophically untutored but otherwise prepared viewers occasions to experience and to cultivate a second-order understanding of these real-world-relevant, disorienting actualities. As before, a non-trivial sense of wonder, bounded by saturation-acceptance (which hopefully buffers a slide into nihilism), might be the key enabler *and* upshot of eudaimonic viewer-engagement.

²⁴¹ Keltner and Haidt discuss this under the heading of epiphany, the "revelation of something profound in something ordinary or seemingly routine" (2003:310).

²⁴² It may seem like I am overlooking or underestimating more interactive forms of media, such as computer games or virtual reality simulations. While these alternative media formats have appropriated many elements from narrative cinema and full convergence is often anticipated, for the time being, non-interactive films and specifically being at the mercy of narrative progressions that viewers cannot change (even in the case of 'impossible' narratives), provide unique opportunities of rich-disclosure and saturation-acceptance. The ongoing debate about both interactivity and convergence is vast and intensely polarised (see Elsaesser 2009, 2017 and Gregersen 2014).

²⁴³ This reminds in many ways of the well-known defamiliarisation or "making strange" that was proposed by Viktor Shklovsky and the Russian (literary) formalists in the 1920s; those novel aesthetic experiences that they valued for undermining familiar descriptions and concepts in ways that restore an awareness and appreciation of the significance of over-familiar subject matter and themes (Smith 2009:48). Here there is a possibility for further, comparative research, but it would need to take account of the prominent (some would argue, decisive) differences between film-viewing and reading (see Kroeber 2006).

There are very frequent references in the literature on David Lynch's films to banality, sometimes expressed in extremely unfavourable terms.²⁴⁴ David Foster Wallace's description of 'Lynchian' as the "unbelievably grotesque existing in a kind of union with the unbelievably banal" (in Rose 1997), may offer the key. Here the operative words are 'union' (for which, read 'inseparable') and 'unbelievable' (for which, read 'incomprehensible' or 'unimaginable' or 'unexamined'). And 'grotesque' is a general placeholder for a sense of evil as something perverse or demonic but also, in more everyday terms, for cognitively disorienting and painful experiences of wonderment.²⁴⁵ Viewers are confronted with a "disjunctive mixture of demented banality and stark unreality," but in Lynch's oeuvre and apparent worldview this "speaks to the mysteries of everyday life" (Hampton 1993:38-39). His work is so uniquely unsettling because it "disruptively implicates" viewers in subject matter, such as familial sexual abuse, that is simultaneously brutally sickening and an apparently "customary, even banal, feature" of an everyday, middle-class (American) family life (Davenport et al 1993:255-256).

However, Lynch's creative deployment and elevation of banality, Nicola Evans (2011:399-407) argues, is less a process of mystification (a common criticism of Lynch's work), than a challenging manoeuvre to get viewers to rethink and reassess the value of overly familiar, commonplace life stories that do not belong to anybody in particular. Engaged viewers soon enough reach the dead-end, as most interviewers have also done, of Lynch's "implacable banality" (ibid.:404). Even the clues that Lynch offers for interpreting his films "range from the apparently banal to the unanswerable or plain indecipherable" (Odell & Le Blanc 2007:174). In WPTF terms, this points to the insight that even what appears to be banal needs to be deciphered and will always remain in some sense indecipherable.

²⁴⁴ For an introduction to the latter see literary theorist Jeff Johnson's (2003) critical overview of the supposed failings of Lynch's many apologists.

²⁴⁵ See South African philosopher of film Bert Olivier's (1996:86–87) examination of the deep ambivalences, the ludicrous horrors of the grotesque outward forms of human existence that doubly strain, first, for momentary gratification within a world of recurring suffering (in the Schopenhauerian sense) and, second, to gain a measure of control over the alien and demonic aspects of our being. Olivier develops his position via an analysis of Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (1990), but it applies equally and in revealing ways to *Fire Walk* (an unlikely companion piece), which was released only two years later.

Kristin Thompson credits the "uncertainty of tone that forms the basis for the underlying ambiguity" of Lynch's work to the strange "juxtaposition of banal good" (e.g. thoughtless, rule-following piety) and "overblown evil" (e.g. demonic possession) (2003:116). It is within this liminal space, Morton (2004:7-8) argues, that we need to understand evil. First, in terms of the usual motives and banal, 'useful' personality traits that inform normal human lives, and, second, by developing a reflexiveness that reveals how we may ourselves be thought to be evil.²⁴⁶ We are better prepared to avoid evil deeds when we are less easily astonished by being implicated in other people's misery and when we appreciate that we share some deeply reprehensible core human motivations. Herein, the accessible-and-salient-making and saturation-acceptance experiences of eudaimonic viewer-engagement can play its role and its end results may be best referred to as worldview-philosophy-through-film.

In sum, then, the generalisability, implicit-explicit balance, impositional workings and constitutive banality of WPTF reflect sorts or levels of popular philosophical attainment that are significant enough to be worth recognising and cultivating. Yet, it does require an accommodating understanding of the mutable concept of philosophy and a sense that academic philosophy may be gainfully popularised, especially in relation to film.

7.3 Implications for film and for philosophy

WPTF represents an addition to the many mutually beneficial engagements between film and both academic and popular philosophy that have flourished during the past three or four decades. Appreciating the foundational biocultural links between understanding the world, making sense of films and involvement in some form of popular philosophy, is itself a noteworthy support for productive eudaimonic viewing practices.

²⁴⁶ A large part of Morton's case is based on endorsements and critical disagreements with political theorist Hannah Arendt's famous perspective on the "banality of evil" (1964).

In the interdependent meeting point of film production and reception, filmmakers have opportunities to produce innovative mass art films that challenge and edify a broader, multicultural, global, digitally interconnected and equipped, suitably prepared and empowered audience base. Both the film industry, in its endless quest for 'new' audiences, and the viewing public, in its endless quest for 'new' material, have much to gain from the accessible-and-salient-making of the philosophical capacities of film and its unfurling in the history of cinema. Widespread eudaimonic viewing practices, which are in their infancy, appear to be exceptionally responsive to and have profound implications for the rapidly shifting, technological media environment. Whatever the potentials for enlightenment via the moving-image are, it is certainly going to require enlightened forms of entertainment. Films that resist easy, single-viewing consumption and filmmakers who embrace the opportunity to make films that are allowed not to make sense, seem to be ideally positioned to contribute to the main trends of global film-viewing practices.

Overall, this may add momentum to the ongoing (and often called for) rebalancing of the 'entertainment' industry towards more eudaimonically valuable material that taps the more constructive aspects and potentials of film as a mass art.²⁴⁷ In fact, David Lynch's late-career projects may be viewed and gleaned as literal (e.g. *Mulholland Drive*) and indirect (e.g. in terms of the interpretive activities they inspire) critiques of the limitations of overly conventional narrative cinemas. As the philosophical value of film becomes more fully appreciated and exploited, the intellectual disenfranchisement of both mainstream cinema and of the general viewing public may be further abated. Furthermore, the roles of filmmakers as philosophers may achieve the refinement and recognition to which Ingmar Bergman – a renowned figurehead of both philosophical cinema and impossible puzzle films – famously aspired.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ This may, of course, be contextualised and taken further from the perspectives of critical theory (as has often been done), of American pragmatism (which is underexploited), or of African philosophy (where the first steps have barely been taken; see Afolayan 2017).

²⁴⁸ See Devlin and Biderman for a set of freewheeling popular philosophical essays based on the idea that "Lynch presents to his audience his own distinct philosophical account of reality, the human being, and human issues" (2011:2). It links Lynch's work to many familiar issues in Western philosophy and also to the traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism. For a harsh contrast see Livingston's (2009) collection of critical essays on bold forms of film-as-

For philosophers, WPTF and the increase in philosophically-minded, eudaimonic viewers should provide even more opportunities to use films to teach philosophy and to teach philosophy to future filmmakers, to contribute to the popularisation of academic philosophy, and to raising the already excellent quality of publications and audio-visual material in the sphere of popular philosophy. The growing recognition of the viability of film-as-philosophy, alongside other similar changes, will necessarily have implications for how philosophy is understood and understands itself. Whether defending or critiquing the philosophical potential of films (or, even, better, seriously engaging with puzzle cinema), philosophers are likely to find their sense of the discipline expanded and refined. Furthermore, global mass art films may be an attractive catalyst for increased contact between different philosophical schools and engagement with other wisdom traditions.

In sum, the accessible-and-salient-making of the limitations of different styles of philosophy may provide a common ground for constructive, dialectical criticism, selective realignment and for shared methodological innovations and renewed relevance to real-world issues. The ideal would be to shift unduly narrow, self-incapacitating views of philosophy while also garnering the resources of the overlap between film and philosophy to reinforce philosophical aesthetics and ultimately to make significant contributions to the overall field. New alternatives for ideology critique and collaborative social scientific research projects or endeavours in experimental philosophy (e.g. empirically testing viewers mental responses to disconfirm or enhance this conception of WPTF) are two notably interesting and valuable general areas, in addition to those that I have mentioned before, for further research.

philosophy, as well as his partial intentionalist treatment of Ingmar Bergman's philosophically oriented and exploratory works, and their unrecognised filmic uptake of (Finnish positivist) Eino Kaila's 1930s philosophical psychology treatise on topics like inauthenticity, motivated irrationality, moral judgement, and genuine self-understanding.

7.4 In conclusion: a brief chapter overview

Chapter 1 introduced the topic of self-motivated, cognitive discomfiture, viewing experiences within the context of the recent proliferation of mass art films and, particularly, puzzle films. Here I also explained and motivated the constructive, piecemeal, mid-level, interdisciplinary, cognitive theory-based perspective with which I addressed the research topic and the use of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* for analyses and illustrative examples.

In Chapter 2 I presented an overview of the main kinds of theories of painful art. Against this background, I discussed Noël Carroll's drama-of-disclosure theory and Aaron Smuts' non-hedonic theory of rich, value-constitutive viewing experiences to generate an integrated, foundational, rich-disclosure framework that accommodates cognitively confusing, negatively valenced, film-viewing experiences. This conceptual framework allowed me to postulate an aesthetic-safe-danger-zone that establishes an experiential realm for cognitively dissonant viewer-engagement practices.

Chapter 3 provided a selective introduction to the history of art cinema that has extended into the recent emergence of mass art films and an accompanying mass cinephilia, fuelled by technological changes that support rewatching and further, extra-textual explorations. I backed this up with related neo-formalist and revisionist theories of a conventional-unconventional filmic continuum that recognises the often-overlooked, cognitive-emotively challenging nature of mainstream film-viewing and viewers' interpretive engagement with implicit and symptomatic levels of filmic meaning. The aforementioned processes have been most clearly expressed in three decades of progress in the puzzle film genre and its more extreme variant, the impossible puzzle film. Initial theorising of the puzzle film started about 20 years ago but only reached levels of sophistication that match the films during the last ten years. However, much about puzzle cinema, including the often-related issue of trauma, remains to be fully addressed.

In Chapter 4 I established the currently dominant biocultural and cognitive turns in film theory as context for Torben Grodal's PEMCA flow model and Noël Carroll's erotetic model of criterial prefocusing, two important, interrelated theories of mass art viewer-engagement. Together with this I expanded the conceptual and explanatory framework to include Panksepp's SEEKING and PLAY systems; cognition-centred, goal-directed, question-and-answer-based viewer-engagement; the folk psychology-based filmmaker-audience loop; asymmetrical, 'twofolded' character engagement and mentalisation; negatively valenced affect; maieutic, appreciation-founded moral engagement; and the accessible-and-salient-making value of narrative practice activities.

Chapter 5 offered a more focused consideration of the frozen PECMA experiences that are typically prompted by impossible puzzle films. This included, against the background of avant-garde cinema, value system-recalibrating experiences of unreality and saturation-acceptance, the search for more permanent, abstract/subjective meanings, as well as upstream access to filmmakers' worldviews.

In Chapter 6 I laid out a two-part transition to the final chapter. The first part positioned movie-made thought experiments within the context of popular philosophy, film-as-philosophy, and resistance to the latter. It included William Charlton's definition of (academic) philosophy as the flip side of my forthcoming descriptive definition of worldview-philosophy-through-film. The second part covered Mark Koltko-Rivera's collated worldview model as a foundation for eudaimonic viewing practices that yield access to and likely refinements of viewers' worldviews.

In this, the final chapter, I integrated the conceptual bulk of the dissertation into a five-part, descriptive definition of worldview-philosophy-through-film. I developed this characterisation of a graded, viewer-centred kind of popular philosophy by reorienting Charlton's definition. Different levels or variants of WPTF (which this study has not categorised) explain different levels and sorts of cognitively disorienting and disquieting viewing experiences of mass art films, with impossible puzzle films being the most challenging.

As an initial effort, my WPTF account of unmitigated, painful viewer-engagement can be radically reworked in the face of forthcoming criticism, but it does reflect significant and valuable trends in film reception and production, as well as philosophers' critical engagements with these trends and, most vitally, with the puzzling films themselves. Everything considered, since having a worldview means that we are all ultimately pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, a cultivated capacity for unresolved and unresolvable puzzlement may be an extremely valuable form of humanity. Maybe this kind of puzzlement is the shared impetus of many of the most life-changing sorts of film and philosophy.

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