

The Meeting of Film and Philosophy: A 'Deep-structure' Perspective

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For my Father

Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Meeting of ‘Philosophy in Film’

1. ‘Philosophy in film’	1
1.1 Film illustrating philosophy	2
1.2 Film containing philosophy	3
1.3 Film doing/being philosophy	4
2. Theorizing the meeting	5
2.1 A meeting in philosophical techniques	5
2.2 A meeting in philosophical ‘deep-structure’	7
3. Discourse Archaeology and philosophical ‘deep-structure’	9
4. Aims and method	13

Chapter 2

An Overview of Theoretical Tools

1. Introduction	17
2. Key theory	18
2.1 Philosophical key-formulas	18
2.2 Film and philosophical key-formulas	20
2.3 Philosophical- versus narrative key-formulas	20
2.4 Further technical details	21

3. Macro-motives	22
3.1 Characteristics of macro-motives	22
3.2 Macro-analysis: Important considerations	24
3.2.1 Basic macro versions	24
3.2.2 Implicit- versus leading macros	25
3.2.3 Ideological- versus normalized macros	25
3.2.4 Inter-macro appropriation	26
3.2.5 Macro interactions	26
3.2.6 Macro complexes	27
3.3 Further technical details	28
4. A figurative semiotics ('Metaphor theory')	28
4.1 Figurativity	28
4.2 Multiple figurative 'layering'	29
4.3 Figurative forms as ground concepts: Conceptual metaphor	30
4.4 Further technical details	31
5. Ideology theory	32
5.1 Ideology as value- or discursive domination	32
5.2 The ideological landscape of modernity	33
5.3 Ideological framing of deep-structures	34
6. Postural theory	35
6.1 Ethical postures	35
6.2 Postural relations, interactions and evaluations	37
6.3 Postural profiling	38

Chapter 3

Macro-Motives I: *The Man who shot Liberty Valance*

1. Introduction	39
-----------------	----

2. Nature and Culture in <i>Liberty Valance</i>	40
2.1 Nature and Culture in settings	42
2.2 Nature and Culture in characters	43
3. <i>Liberty Valance</i> as a critique of progress	45
4. <i>Liberty Valance</i> as a ‘deconstruction’	48
5. <i>Liberty Valance</i> , negative liberty and value pluralism	51
6. <i>Liberty Valance</i> and the Platonic just soul	53
7. Conclusion	58

Chapter 4

Macro-Motives II: *Brokeback Mountain*

1. Introduction	61
2. Growing expressions: Nature and Social powers in conflict	62
2.1 <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> the short story	63
2.2 <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> the screenplay	68
2.3 <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> the film	75
2.3.1 The boxed-in framing	80
2.3.2 The framed picture	80
2.3.3 The window	82
2.4 Conclusion	88
3. Postscript: Macro-motives and worldview	90

Chapter 5

Metaphor Theory: *Modern Times*

1. Introduction	92
2. 'Life in the factory': The machine	92
3. 'Life beyond the factory': The social 'machine'	100
4. Freedom and pursuing 'happiness'	111
5. Postscript: A criticism of Wartenberg	113

Chapter 6

Postural Theory: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

1. Introduction	116
2. An overview of <i>Eternal Sunshine</i>	117
3. A postural reading of <i>Eternal Sunshine</i>	119
3.1 Basic postural profile	119
3.2 Postural relations and interactions	123
3.3 Postural evaluations	124
3.4 Conclusion: Postural claims in <i>Eternal Sunshine</i>	128
4. Narratological interpretations	129
4.1 Narrative meta-spaces	129
4.2 Spaces of suffering	130
4.3 Clementine and suffering	131
4.4 Concluding thoughts	134
5. Postures and filmic representation	135

6. Subject and Self in <i>Eternal Sunshine</i>	139
------------------------------------------------	-----

Chapter 7

Key Theory: *The Matrix*

1. Introduction: <i>The Matrix</i> as philosophical ‘Rorschach test’	143
2. Wartenberg and <i>The Matrix</i> as skeptical thought experiment	144
3. The reality claim of <i>The Matrix</i>	147
3.1 Descartes’ ‘evil demon’ and the ‘brain in a vat’	149
3.2 Plato’s cave	150
3.3 Berkeley’s idealism	152
3.4 Kant’s structures of mind	153
3.5 Critical theory and ideology	154
3.6 Baudrillard’s <i>Simulacra and Simulation</i>	157
3.7 Media and representation	158
3.8 Concluding remarks	159
4. Postscript: Further systematic considerations	160
4.1 Philosophical type, ideological frameworks	160
4.2 <i>The Matrix</i> and ‘philosophical genre’	163

Chapter 8

Conclusions, criticisms and prospects

1. A tale of two ‘meetings’	167
2. DA and the meeting of film and philosophy	168
3. Strengths of DA’s deep-structure perspective	171
3.1 A meta-philosophical perspective	171
3.2 A pre-textual, conceptual focus	171

3.3 A recognition of philosophy as aspect	172
3.4 A wider notion of philosophical contribution	173
3.5 Against philosophy as ‘authorial intent’	173
4. Some criticisms	174
5. Prospects: DA and film	175
Bibliography	178
Filmography	188
Abstract	190

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Meeting of ‘Philosophy in Film’

1. ‘Philosophy in film’

This study aims to *propose* and *explore* a distinct perspective on the relationship between film and philosophy. The still expanding field of ‘philosophy of film’, dealing with matters relating to the nature of film, film narration, emotional engagement, authorship and film’s interaction with its societal contexts, also includes the intriguingly self-reflective issue of film’s relation to philosophy itself (Wartenberg 2008). I will refer to this as the ‘meeting’ of film and philosophy. The last decade and a half has seen a steady increase in philosophers turning their attention to the philosophical aspects of specifically popular cinema. Engaging with the potential philosophical content of films has become a way of doing philosophy. Yet as Thomas Wartenberg (2005:270, 272) points out, there has not been sufficient scrutiny of the *grounds* upon which this practice is based. In the midst of an ever-growing tendency to make quick and easy transitions between film and philosophy, our understanding of the *enabling relationships* between them – the nature of their meeting – becomes an increasingly pressing issue. Is there even any significant meeting between film and philosophy? And if there is, what is the nature of this meeting?

The meeting of film and philosophy can be viewed as a matter of two different types of discourse which find their way ‘into’ each another. On the one hand, it is reasonably commonplace to see film enter into the realm of philosophy – meaning that film (or a specific film) appears within a certain philosophical discourse as the ‘object’ at which the philosophy is interpretatively aimed. We can call this a meeting of ‘film in philosophy’. Yet it is the controversial possibility of the inverse ‘meeting’ which attracts the most attention: in what ways does *philosophy*, if any, *find its way into film*? What I shall refer to as the meeting of ‘philosophy in film’ evokes a range of pressing questions which include the following:¹

- How can films embody philosophy, if at all?
- Can a film make a philosophical claim or point?
- Can a film be a work of philosophy?
- In what sense are films capable of doing philosophy?
- Can a film be a source of philosophical knowledge?

¹ See, for instance, Smith and Wartenberg (2006:2), Wartenberg (2006:19), Wartenberg (2007:2), Wartenberg (2008), Shaw (2006:111) and Livingston (2006:11).

- Can films make a creative contribution to philosophy?
- What are the genuine philosophical capacities of the filmic medium?

Opinions on the extent to which films can ‘house’ philosophy are wide ranging: at the one extreme people see films as merely useful illustrations of philosophical theories, or perhaps as a means to philosophizing, while others on the contrary, argue that some films can do philosophy, that a film can actually be philosophy in action (Wartenberg 2007:2). I shall elaborate briefly on these rough typifications of the meeting of ‘philosophy in film’ as, on the one hand, (a) film *illustrating* philosophy, the area in-between as (b) film *containing* philosophy to varying degrees and the furthest end of the spectrum as (c) film *doing/being* philosophy.

1.1 Film illustrating philosophy

The weakest meeting between film and philosophy is regarded as film *illustrating* philosophy. In fact, this type of meeting hardly requires any real ‘contact’ between the fields. The idea is that, although a film does not explicitly use or presuppose a certain philosophical position, it may nevertheless present concrete scenarios which can be *used* to illustrate and discuss philosophical issues (Falzon 2007:15). Philosophy therefore *appropriates* film. It is a meeting in which philosophy is the dominant partner – the illustrative film only serves as the *vehicle* for the philosopher’s intentions. These intentions mostly take the form of pop-philosophical ‘PR exercises’ whereby the discipline is introduced and made more accessible to a wider audience. This is often pedagogically motivated, as the use of film can be a helpful means of making philosophical issues relevant to present-day students (Wartenberg 2005:271-272). A well-known example is Christopher Falzon’s *Philosophy goes to the Movies* (2007). He describes the work as an introduction to philosophy that turns to ‘cinematic material’ for the illustration and discussion of philosophical themes. The films dealt with in the book can also be used as a teaching resource for philosophy lectures and class discussions (2007:3, 16).

Yet, for many people, the point is that *this* is as far as the meeting between film and philosophy goes – film can at best only have this subservient heuristic role in relation to philosophy. For these skeptics it is precisely the concrete narrative qualities that allow film to be illustrative which preclude it from interacting with philosophy in any further significant sense of the word (Wartenberg 2008).

1.2 Film containing philosophy

Between the two extremes of film merely illustrating philosophy and film actually doing philosophy, lies a vast middle ground of approaches to film as somehow *containing* philosophy. As a result philosophers seek to interpret the philosophical themes, contents and presuppositions that specific films hold (Carrol 2008:2; Smith & Wartenberg 2006:3). This is typically done by pairing the film with a philosophical theory or principle which enables a deeper understanding and appreciation of the film itself (Shaw 2006:111-112). This means that although philosophy, in this construal of their meeting, remains the privileged perspective, the domain of film is nevertheless granted *more weight* in relation to it, because films, in themselves, are considered to *house* philosophy to various degrees.

In a weaker sense films contain philosophy by inevitably making certain philosophical assumptions (Smith & Wartenberg 2006:2; Falzon 2007:7, 15). Philosophers may utilize these understated contents of a film as a point of departure for exploring more general philosophical themes that the film in this way suggests (Grau 2009:3; Wartenberg 2006:19). Implied philosophical presuppositions may therefore allow a film to be a *forum* for philosophical discussion and exploration. It can even do so by merely raising problems or questions related to philosophical issues.

Yet, in granting the means for exploring certain ideas, some films may go further by also offering a certain philosophical position on them. Such films are considered to not only raise philosophical questions but also to suggest answers to those questions (Grau 2006:119; 2009:3). Since its position is not conveyed by explicit argument, however, philosophical arguments and theories are required to disclose the implicit points of view that the film presents (Grau 2006:119, 128-129).

The strongest, most literal sense in which film can contain philosophy is seen in films that self-consciously and intentionally present an established piece of philosophy (Shaw 2006:111-112). Such a film may explicitly draw on and portray aspects of philosophy, make open reference to philosophical ideas or positions, or even take as its subject matter particular philosophers, their lives and their work (Falzon 2007:7, 15).

1.3 Film doing/being philosophy

According to this interpretation, the meeting of ‘philosophy in film’ is possibly so direct that some films do not merely illustrate or contain philosophy but, in fact, *become* philosophy. The controversial idea is that such films can actually *do* philosophy, meaning that they engage in a kind of *philosophizing* (Carrol 2008:3; Falzon 2007:7). In his hotly debated book, *On film*, Stephen Mulhall (2002:2) vehemently endorses this position:

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

It is thus by virtue of films embodying philosophical reflection that they can do philosophy; they are seen as being able to inhabit the same territory of human self-reflection as philosophy does (Smith 2006:33). However, for many the qualification for films engaging in philosophical activity is not so much their capacity to question assumptions, problematize issues and single out objects of skepticism, but that they rather offer significant insights and make ‘real contributions’ to philosophy (Carrol 2008:3; Mulhall 2002:2). Shaw (2006:113), for example, claims that Woody Allen’s *Husbands and wives* (1992) is philosophical in that it accurately depicts Sartre’s challenging views on love in a convincing fashion, but it cannot be seen to be *doing* philosophy since “... *it does not ask deeper questions or propose new concepts or perspectives that Sartre had not himself formulated previously.*” Yet there are films that ask profound questions and offer their own perspectives on them, without being dependent on the ‘guidance’ of a specific philosophical theory (Shaw 2006). If anything, the opposite could apply as the film may, in distinct ways, supplement the theory. Apart from a film achieving this through its narrative contents, there is also the arguable view that the uniqueness of the medium gives film certain exclusive capacities to make genuine and independent contributions to philosophy (Livingston 2006). The filmic medium can therefore explore phenomena along paths where other discourse-types cannot tread.²

² Livingston (2006) explains this stance, abstracted into its most extreme form, as the ‘bold epistemic thesis’. It holds that exclusive capacities of the cinematic medium make a special and independent contribution to philosophy. Despite the possibility of it amounting to a ‘straw man’, Livingston nevertheless considers the bold thesis to be “*conceptually salient and worthy of consideration*”

2. Theorizing the meeting

This wide spectrum of views on the extent to which philosophy can be ‘in’ film does, however, not necessarily address the more fundamental question of how the two fields actually ‘meet’. It seems that debates get caught up in disputing what the *end-product* of ‘philosophy in film’ should be rather than hunting for the possible ‘trails’ whereby philosophy could enter the realm of film in the first place. Surely we need to deal with first things first. Irrespective of whether film illustrates, contains, or does philosophy, we should ideally set off by first establishing a more comprehensive understanding of what the likely *grounds* are which serve as the *condition* for any form of philosophy to manifest itself in film. As already mentioned this remains a neglected aspect of the debate.³ What are the actual ‘*points of contact*’ that enable film and philosophy to meet in whatever way? What is the *basis* upon which we discern the varying degrees of philosophy in a film? The field is therefore in need of more explicit theorizing on the potential *links* that *constitute* the numerous forms of interaction between film and philosophy.

2.1 A meeting in philosophical techniques

Thomas Wartenberg is a prominent philosopher of film who has called attention frequently to the abovementioned lack in the field (2005:270, 272; 2006:19). In a sober, careful manner, he has looked for such connections between film and philosophy. His *Thinking on screen: Film as philosophy* (2007) represents a convergence of these efforts. In this work Wartenberg (2007:2) cautiously defends a moderate form of the position that films can do philosophy – that is, some films not only raise philosophical issues but also make contributions to philosophy itself. Yet there needs to be a common ground that enables film to ‘screen’ philosophy. Wartenberg sees this as being made possible through the two fields intersecting in (discursive-) ‘*techniques*’ which are characteristic of philosophy (2007:9). He therefore proceeds by examining how specific philosophical techniques are employed by films to actually do philosophy. Films are shown to not only *illustrate* philosophical ideas in ways that provide new insights on them, but also to make *arguments*, act as *thought experiments*, offer *counterexamples* to philosophical claims and even present novel philosophical *theories* of their own. “*Their ability to do these things justifies*

(2006:12 n3).” He furthermore holds that some theorists “*come pretty close to promoting this thesis* (2006:12 n3).” His intention, however, is to highlight serious logical inconsistencies within this position. The ‘problem of paraphrase’, for example, indicates that if the supposedly discursively distinctive philosophical contribution of a film can be paraphrased, then it is not exclusive to film. Yet, if it cannot be paraphrased, how can we in any way value it as a contribution to the field of philosophy (Smith & Wartenberg 2006:3; Livingston 2006:12)?

³ Wartenberg (2006:19) notes that “... *the general tendency has been for philosophers to use film as a springboard for discussions of subjects of philosophical interest while paying only scant attention to the theoretical issues generated by this practice.*”

claiming that, in those specific instances where they do these things, they are doing philosophy (Wartenberg 2007:9).”

A necessary side-remark: in his earlier work Wartenberg (2005:270) claims that a film *illustrating* philosophy is the most basic way in which a film and philosophy can intersect. In *Thinking on screen* (2007) he admits to *illustration* not being a ‘philosophical technique’ but argues that it is nevertheless a legitimate way for a film to do philosophy. He maintains that the contrast between films doing philosophy and merely illustrating philosophy presupposes an under-theorized dichotomy which forces the matter into an oversimplified ‘either-or’ choice (2007:54). Among other things he points out that “... *it is a mistake to conclude that, just because something is an illustration, it is not original or illuminating* (2007:44).” In illustrating a philosophical theory a film can at the same time offer insightful interpretations of it. This is the result of films, more generally, offering vivid and unique *concretizations* of essentially *abstract* philosophical theories (2007:4-8, 53).

On the whole, however, it is through a “*methodological characterization*” of philosophy that Wartenberg identifies a commonality whereby film and philosophy meet (2007:31). While acknowledging other conceptions of philosophy, such as addressing ‘eternal questions’ of basic human concern, or being an interdisciplinary ‘meta-science’, he rejects such specifications of philosophy anchored in *subject matter* and instead opts for one based on its *form, methods* or *techniques*. The likes of arguments, thought experiments and counterexamples are specific and characteristic ways in which philosophical discourse addresses various issues. In as far as films can ‘screen’ such techniques, they can be said to do philosophy (2007:29-31).⁴ Yet, although we refer to them as *philosophical* techniques, Wartenberg (2007:30-31) himself points out that the techniques – although characteristic of philosophy – are by no means exclusive to philosophy. In analysis they have to be supplemented with subject-centered definitions of philosophy that provide the *content* which qualifies these techniques as being ones which are specifically engaged with philosophical themes (2007:31).

Wartenberg (2007:28, 134) is critical of the ‘grand theoretical’ kind of approaches which seek to offer global, universal or *a priori* explanations of how film and philosophy meet. He sees his own approach as more *local, particular* and *empirical*, since he investigates *specific* philosophical techniques which link the two fields within *individual* films. In doing so, he formulates a series

⁴ Wartenberg (2007:12-13) uses the notion of ‘screening’ to refer to a specifically cinematic manner of presenting philosophical issues (or in his case particular philosophical techniques). It is thus a manner of presentation that depends on inherent features of the filmic medium itself.

of specific and relatively independent connections which, as a mutually supporting collective, provide us with an understanding of how philosophy can manifest in film. He claims that a central advantage of this approach is its revealing of a “*plurality of connections*” between film and philosophy: “As C.S. Peirce pointed out long ago, cables that are made of many interlocking fibers are much stronger than a chain composed of only a series of links because a break in one of the multiple fibers will not affect the effectiveness of the cable (Wartenberg 2007:31).” He therefore leaves us with a multiplicity of mutually supportive arguments which position certain philosophical techniques as the ‘interlocking fibers’ which enable a meeting of film and philosophy (2007:31, 133). For him this integrated account of their relationship does not favor either domain but explicates them both as interrelated in various ways (2007:140).

2.2 A meeting in philosophical ‘deep-structure’

This study is not set against Wartenberg’s views *per se*. If anything, this research takes its place alongside that of Wartenberg as an extension of his project to find certain ‘meeting points’ between film and philosophy. If Wartenberg’s work points towards one way in which film and philosophy connect, my intention is to pursue *further* – and perhaps more fundamental – ways in which the fields meet one another. In light of the possible presence of philosophy in popular cinema, the quest remains of wanting to arrive at a richer and deeper understanding of the likely common groundwork that makes the meeting of film and philosophy possible. In this regard, my aim is to put another such perspective on the table.

As a general point of departure my inquiries will take the view that the meeting of film and philosophy is one firstly based on *concepts*, as opposed to discursive *forms* or *-techniques*.⁵ In formulating possible common grounds between the fields I wish therefore to focus on the *contents* of philosophy, and not, as Wartenberg does, on its characteristic *methods*. More specifically, my concern will be with the deep-seated *conceptual groundwork* (‘deep-structure’) upon which philosophical discourse invariably rests. It is my contention that it is first and foremost through its ability to embody *philosophically relevant concepts* that film can engage with philosophy.

Naturally, the discipline of philosophy resists any quick-fix definitions; hence, as we have seen, Wartenberg deliberately uses a ‘methodological characterization’ of philosophy to analyze its

⁵ This general stance can be roughly compared to Mieke Bal’s (2002:5) call for interdisciplinary studies in the Humanities to proceed on the basis of shared (or ‘travelling’) *concepts*, not *methods*.

convergences with film. For him, insofar as a film gives form to the methods or techniques of philosophical reflection – by making arguments, conducting thought experiments, etc. – it can be said to do philosophy. But after Wartenberg (2007:31) has narrowed philosophy down to a more manageable methodological description, he is forced to again acknowledge the need for ‘subject matter’ definitions of philosophy that grant such general methods the status of dealing with philosophical issues specifically. For this reason I believe that a concept-based approach – and more generally one that takes ‘philosophy’ as dealing with a certain subject matter, not as a kind of activity – should take precedence over one based on method or technique. This is because a particular philosophical method (a claim, argument, thought experiment or presentation of a theory) has to, one way or another, *work with something* as its ‘raw material’. Since philosophical activity proceeds on the grounds of some presupposed ‘philosophical material’, the contents of philosophy can be said to in a way ‘precede’ its forms of articulation. A methodological commonality between film and philosophy, with no overlapping content would be no meeting at all. Hence an inquiry into how film and philosophy meet through characteristic contents of philosophy should arguably expose deeper connections than those of philosophy’s characteristic methods.

However, the mere view that the meeting of ‘philosophy in film’ takes place in the ‘contents’ of philosophy does not hold much promise for further unravelling the nature of their meeting. But if one works with a conception of the ‘contents’ of philosophy as fundamentally made up by philosophically significant *concepts*, one’s line of inquiry becomes not only clearer but, I believe, a great deal more rewarding. I will therefore avoid the complicated quest of demarcating philosophy’s varied themes or subject matter by focusing instead on the conceptual underpinnings which make philosophical discourse, as such, possible i.e. those *grounding concepts* and concurrent *structures of thought* which not only ‘furnish’ philosophy, but more fundamentally make up the *‘deep-structures’* which inform philosophical discourse. As a result I will proceed from the understanding that it is primarily these *conceptual ‘building blocks’* which are *mobilized* when a film exhibits some form of ‘philosophy’.

Film and philosophy’s meeting will thus be considered as taking place through concepts, as a ‘dialogue’ conducted on a conceptual plane. This is however a deep-seated level of philosophically relevant conceptual elements which serve as a philosophical ‘deep-structure’ upon which a particular discourse is built. A guiding assumption will be that this kind of conceptual element can ‘travel’ between the different discourse-types of film and philosophy.⁶

⁶ I am indebted to Mieke Bal (2002) for the useful metaphor of ‘travelling concepts’.

We will therefore arrive at, what is to my mind, a neglected concept of the presence of philosophy in film: film does not, to begin with, give form to an established philosophical claim, argument or theory, nor to a particular philosophical technique, but first of all *embodies philosophically relevant concepts*. And it is on the basis of these general and fundamental conceptual elements, the ‘deep-structure’ which informs the philosophical aspects of a film, that those more specific manifestations of philosophy – claims, arguments, theories – can be discerned in the film.

Wanting to shift attention to the underlying conceptual connections in the meeting of film and philosophy is by no means an earth shattering move, but I nonetheless find it a promising trail that has by and large been disregarded by philosophers of film. One reason may be that the underlying presence of philosophical conceptions in a film is considered a weak or insignificant sense in which film and philosophy meet. A second reason could be that a meeting in underlying concepts apparently leaves the philosopher of film directionless in a theoretical wasteland where ‘concepts’ are as plentiful and painfully ordinary as the desert sands. The concept-based approach in itself, stipulates no obvious lines of analytical investigation. How does one arrive at such concepts? And if one does, how can one meaningfully relate them to each another so that a ‘deep-structure’ meeting between film and philosophy amounts to more than a haphazard concept here and there? My hope is that, in the process of offering sorely needed resolutions to the *second* dilemma, the theoretical apparatus that I am to introduce in this study will also gradually reveal the mistakenness of the *first*.

3. Discourse Archaeology and philosophical ‘deep-structure’

If we assume that film and philosophy do meet on a fundamental conceptual plane, where does one start in pinpointing the kind of conceptual arrangements that are most likely to facilitate the presence of philosophy in a film?

This study will seek to investigate such conceptual ‘deep-structures’ within the framework of ‘Discourse Archaeology’ (DA), a theoretical system researched and taught over the last decade and a half at the Philosophy Department of the University of the Free State. Although DA in its entirety comprises of nineteen sub-theories, I will limit my investigations here to only five well established sub-theories which are best suited to our current need: to offer various *systematic means* for ‘unearthing’ the grounding conceptual arrangements which allow a meeting of film and philosophy. The first of these, the theory of logosemantics, or simply ‘Key theory’, seeks to

formulate those structures that invariably inform the interrelations between concepts that a philosophical discourse may assert. Secondly, a figurative semiotics ('Metaphor theory'), helps to identify 'figurative concepts' (signs, metaphors, metonymies, tropes, etc.) which a discourse may utilize in making a philosophical claim. Thirdly, DA's Ideology theory allows for critical evaluations on how other dominating discourses may frame and ideologically 'taint' the conceptual arrangements that a philosophical discourse espouses. Fourthly, Macro-motive theory identifies a group of ultimate values which not only direct socio-cultural development across various historical- and cultural contexts but also fundamentally inform the possible thematic contours of a given philosophical discourse. Finally a theory of 'ethical postures' attempts to describe a series of elemental replies to the primordial ethical question, 'What am I to do?', and in doing so, depict certain core themes of the human condition.

As will become increasingly clear, each of these sub-theories probes a different facet of what I call the philosophical 'deep-structure' of a discourse. Such a philosophical 'deep-structure' essentially comprises a *selection* of certain entities, functions or aspects of reality – which form the *grounding concepts* of the discourse – that are configured in certain *relations* to one another. As its underlying root-logic, such a 'deep-structure' reveals the ontological, ideological and ethical *presuppositions* upon which the philosophical discourse is based, the conceptual *conditions* which make its articulation possible. And, analogously to the deep-structures in early Chomskyan linguistics, from which the term is borrowed, the philosophical 'deep-structure' is assumed to *generate* all the philosophically relevant ('surface-') expressions of the discourse involved.⁷

The sub-theories of DA used in this study can thus be treated as a set of theoretical 'tools' which enable us to spell out a range of ground concepts and their typical interactions which are mobilized in the philosophical 'deep-structures' of discourse. These ground concepts are essentially of a *meta-philosophical* nature. They not only constitute different aspects of philosophical discourse itself, but also have a recurring presence cutting across different philosophical texts. I am, of course, not implying that such ground concepts straightforwardly 'inhabit' discourses that are obviously socially and historically divergent. Naturally they are concretized within, or 'translated' into, the unique concerns that are typical of a particular socio-historical or philosophical context. Yet their status as *theoretical abstractions* nevertheless

⁷ DA uses the appropriated notion of 'deep-structure' as a technical term to refer to the complex of interrelated structures (or particular ground concepts and arrangements as part thereof) that is shown in analysis to underlie an array of corresponding 'surface' structures. Although Noam Chomsky's influential distinction between 'deep-' and 'surface structures' has long since been dropped in generative linguistics, it has nevertheless seeped into the collective academic consciousness and, much like Thomas Kuhn's famous term 'paradigm', still retains a heuristic value (Personal communication with P.J Visagie, 16 November 2011).

allows us to recognize them as the same ‘travelling’ conceptualizations that are subject to different individual discourses.⁸

The ‘deep-structures’ that DA theories probe are however not limited to philosophical discourse. They can analyze discourses of various intentions (those of other disciplines, literature, poetry, everyday conversations, etc.) insofar as they contain pronouncements of a philosophical nature. Since DA is concerned with discursive ‘surface expressions’ of underlying *conceptual* arrangements, it is furthermore not burdened by having to deal with verbal or written discourses alone. It can also trace how certain philosophical moments in visual, musical or multimedia texts may result from determining deep-structure commitments.⁹ The conceptual arrangements that DA identifies can therefore travel far beyond what is traditionally regarded as ‘philosophical’ discourses – they can be found in other ‘non-philosophical’ texts and may even exert their influence in a predominantly visual medium such as film.

In terms of film, which is, of course, our concern here, the theoretical tools of DA can thus ‘excavate’ various ground concepts and structures which, akin to their role in a ‘full-blown’ philosophical discourse, constitute different *philosophical aspects* of a film. These conceptual arrangements similarly make up the film’s ‘philosophical deep-structure’ that generates various philosophically relevant expressions in its narrative, visuals, music, etc. Note should be taken, however, of the fact that many of the film’s aspects (technical-filmic, narrative, etc.) will be intentionally ‘bypassed’ by the analyst as the aim of such a ground-conceptual analysis is to focus specifically on philosophical presuppositions that guide the film. Hence this ‘deep-structure’ perspective on film can obviously not pretend to say everything there is to say about a particular film (or any other kind of text for that matter).¹⁰ Essentially it only aims at the ‘originating’ discursive levels, on the basis of which the film gives unique expression to a group of apparently trans-discursive, or travelling, philosophical ground concepts. So while DA does allow one to tap into certain constitutive philosophical aspects of a film, it nevertheless remains *a perspective* on those aspects and therefore does not reduce the film – with a variety of other (more primary) qualities and goals – to a mere object of philosophical knowledge.

⁸ Considering the fundamental ontological, epistemological and ethical grounds that these ‘deep-structure’ conceptualizations cover, as well as their continuous historical recurrence, it is not unreasonable to suggest that their presence in philosophical discourse is unavoidable.

⁹ This has been proven by substantive studies in the recent past which saw aspects of DA venturing into the fields of visual culture and musicology. See De Villiers Human (1999), Visagie (2000), De Villiers Human and Visagie (2002), Viljoen (2002), Visagie (2005) as well as Viljoen and Visagie (2010).

¹⁰ In fact, no philosophical account of a film can claim to be exhaustive since its philosophical dimension is but one of a spectrum of possible aspects of the film, whether narrative, technical-filmic, perceptual, aesthetic or even poetic. Much like classic philosophical writings might be also be perceived as having literary, narrative or aesthetic qualities.

In DA we therefore have a set of discourse-analytical tools primarily designed to reconstruct the deep-structure philosophical claims made in ‘out-and-out’ philosophy, but which can also identify similar core-philosophical impulses in a film. Since they are able to deal with these two different types of discourses in similar conceptual terms, these tools are particularly applicable to the question of how film and philosophy meet. Their ability to ‘excavate’ discursive formations which are shared by both philosophy and film, points toward certain deep-seated ‘links’ along which the two fields interact. Both philosophy and film, in their own respective ways, call upon the kind of abstracted ground conceptualizations which DA describes. What the reader will come to know as ‘key-formulas’, ‘figurative concepts’, ‘ideological frames’, ‘macro-motives’ and ethical ‘postures’, do not belong exclusively to either of the two fields, but rather ‘travel’ between them, and thereby form the grounds upon which film and philosophy may meet. You may go as far as saying that they meet within these concepts themselves. But instead of merely dishing up an arbitrary handful of such concepts the sub-theories of DA are geared towards specific facets of philosophical deep-structure and therefore present us with systematically defined groupings or classes of conceptual elements. So they do not just illustrate how film and philosophy meet in concepts, or even ‘deep-structure concepts’, but how they, more generally, meet around distinct deep-structural *axes* where distinct *kinds* of philosophical ground concepts can be found. Each of DA’s sub-theories therefore formulates a general, deep-structural passage through which various specific conceptual connections between film and philosophy can be investigated.

DA as a deep-structure perspective, offers an alternative and, to my mind, an altogether new paradigm for evaluating the relationship between film and philosophy – particularly the question of how philosophy can find its way into film. I believe that this paradigm holds definite advantages for theorizing about the nature of this relationship. Although DA cannot pretend to not be philosophy, it is nevertheless self-consciously meta-philosophical in its descriptive scope. It therefore presents something of a ‘neutral’ analytical space from which both philosophy and film can be taken concurrently into view. This, in a sense, levels the playing field as films are now not interpreted from a ‘privileged’ philosophical point of view, but rather from a more constitutive discursive level which is mutual to both.

The DA vantage point in turn shows us that the presence of philosophy in film relies on film’s ability to call upon the same ground concepts and -structures as philosophy does. Our attention is drawn to how philosophical discourse comprises certain elemental concepts and how when we ‘see’ a philosophical claim, argument or theory in a film, it has to be on the basis of the film mobilizing those selfsame concepts. It is mostly not the philosophical theory, in itself, which the

film presents, but rather that which enables comparisons with the theory or, more generally, a dialogue with it. DA therefore accounts for the (conceptual) conditions of possibility in detecting traces of some philosophy in a film. This runs counter to the general tendency among philosophers of film: ‘philosophy in film’ does not primarily give form to ‘canonized’ philosophical theories and perspectives, but rather those mobilized ground concepts that the film may share with such philosophies.

A last benefit of the DA paradigm that I wish to point out is that it identifies a locus of the meeting that is in a sense ‘pre-textual’ or ‘pre-discursive’. By this I mean that the deep-structures targeted by DA are conceptual pre-conditions to philosophical claims in a discourse and as abstractions stand *prior* to their concrete discursive articulation in either a philosophical text or a particular film. Problems relating to the dissimilar natures of philosophical discourse and films thus become less of an obstacle. Critics often point out that certain qualities of the filmic medium make it inherently inhospitable to philosophical content: it is a predominantly visual medium that generally relates narratives, as opposed to verbally based philosophical texts which express explicit arguments; and films are furthermore claimed to serve entirely different goals from that of philosophy (Wartenberg 2006:19-20). DA, however, does not seek to unite film and philosophy in their disparate forms of expressions (nor the uses to which they are put) but in the conceptual foundations that precede and deeply guide those expressions. In this way the deep-structure approach also allows one to, at least initially, ‘bypass’ troublesome debates on the nature and extent of the presence of philosophy in film. Irrespective of whether some film discourse *is* philosophy, *contains* philosophy or merely *illustrates* philosophy, it can only do so on the basis of certain pre-discursive conceptual material that it activates for those purposes. The elemental forms of ‘philosophy in film’ that DA depicts can thus serve as a basis from which different degrees of film and philosophy’s meeting can be further theorized.

4. Aims and method

The overall aim of this study is twofold. My first and more basic aim is to simply introduce Discourse Archaeology as a framework for the philosophical analysis and interpretation of films. The study in fact marks the first time that the ‘tools’ of DA are applied to the field of film – a pairing I believe could be richly rewarding to any film theorist. The significance of the kind of film analyses performed here are however not limited to ‘philosophy of film’, as it may be equally useful to a variety of related fields such as film- and media studies, narrative theory,

critical theory and aesthetics. As I have explained, however, the distinctly deep-structural ‘spaces’ which DA analyses typically probe almost inadvertently point towards certain untried conceptual pathways that connect philosophy and film. My second and slightly more ambitious aim will therefore be to contextualize the film analyses of this study within questions surrounding the presence of philosophy in film. Each of the analyses will therefore in some way also demonstrate how the different ground conceptualizations identified by DA serve as foundational contact points where film and philosophy can meet. By drawing out certain implications of the DA-approach, I will in effect sketch an alternative paradigm for ‘philosophy in film’ which can hopefully enrich current understandings of this often under-theorized relationship.

Yet as stated at the beginning of this chapter, this study cannot claim to be more than an *exploratory* work. My intention is to explore the kind of film analyses which DA offers to the film-philosopher and what, at the same time, they suggest about the nature of the meeting of film and philosophy. I am not suggesting that the ‘deep-structure’ route is *the way* to understand their meeting, nor that there is even one true or essential way in which film and philosophy interact (the latter of which is really underscored by the *variety* of sub-theories that will be used). I do, however, find the possible role of fundamental travelling concepts to be overlooked by theorists and with this work seek to establish it as an additional perspective on how film may relate to philosophy. It would thus best be seen as the *opening up* of a new and previously uncharted deep-structure landscape which demands further exploration by philosophers of film.

In staying true to such exploratory aspirations the study will be conducted through five relatively independent case studies on how different DA sub-theories could be applied in probing the deep-structures that allow philosophy to be ‘in’ a particular film. The five analyses will be restricted to what can be called ‘popular fiction films’: *The Man who shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford 1962), *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee 2005), *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin 1936), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry 2004) and *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski 1999). Each of these case studies will double up as a depth-philosophical analysis of the film, on the one hand, and a presentation of certain insights on ‘philosophy in film’ on the other. In an attempt to investigate different theoretical avenues and possibilities, each chapter of analysis will also see a particular sub-theory taking ‘centre stage’, and as a result will have its own unique exploratory aims and procedures. There will consequently be no overarching or unified manner in which DA will be applied, as the analytical course of each separate essay will be individually guided by both the nature of the film and the specific film-philosophical issues under consideration.

The five DA-analyses in Chapters 3 to 7 are consequently relatively self-contained essays and need not be read in any particular order – barring perhaps the analysis of *Liberty Valance* (Chapter 3) which does lay a basis for that of *Brokeback Mountain* in Chapter 4. (In fact, each chapter is compiled in such a way that it could even be of value completely outside of the context formulated in this introduction.) For the sake of efficiency Chapter 2 is intended to first familiarize the reader with the five DA sub-theories that are used, allowing ensuing chapters to focus on the analysis of the films. The chapters of analysis will therefore contain as little formal explanation and elaboration of the DA-tools as possible. Chapter 8 will be reserved for overall conclusions – in particular what the DA paradigm (as evinced by the collection of preceding analyses) tells us about the meeting of film and philosophy, and more specifically, film’s ability to embody different forms of philosophy. Problems with some positions that theorists endorse in this regard will be elaborated upon along with a critical reflection on certain limitations in my own viewpoint. I will close with a comment on a few of the future prospects which DA holds for the study of film-philosophy.

In seeking to anchor this study in active and ongoing debate, each of the analyses (apart from that of *Brokeback Mountain*) will also seek to establish some form of dialogue with Thomas Wartenberg’s analyses in *Thinking on screen: Film as philosophy* (2007). So in addition to the aims set out above, four of the case studies could therefore also be seen as ‘DA-replies’ to aspects of Wartenberg’s work on exactly the same films. Why Wartenberg? Apart from being a well-respected philosopher of film, he is, to my mind, one of few who has pertinently called for the need to theorize more explicitly on an often taken-for-granted relationship between film and philosophy (Cf. 2005:270, 272; 2006:19). His *Thinking on screen* generally represents the outcome of his own efforts to indeed do so and has, in various ways, inspired the approach that I will adopt here. For a start, I see my own ‘deep-structure’ perspective as a participation in his stated project of giving more theoretical grounding to film-philosophical interactions. In a similar spirit to his investigations, this study proceeds on the basis of “*careful investigations of individual films* (2007:9).” And like Wartenberg (2007:31) this study will also seek to establish “*plurality of connections*” between film and philosophy – even if they are connections of a distinctly different kind. What I will offer in this study is a reply to Wartenberg by showing how the selfsame *objectives* which he enunciated can yield new and further results within an alternative framework that DA offers. At times his views serve only as points of departure in analysis while at others they are the target of more direct criticism. My overall purpose, however, is that, wherever this study does initiate some form of ‘dialogue’ with Wartenberg’s work, it will synergistically

stimulate reflection and debate which will add increasing depth (in all 'archaeological' senses of the term) to what we perceive as the meeting of film and philosophy.

Chapter 2

An Overview of Theoretical Tools

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will give an overview of the sub-theories of Discourse Archaeology (DA) that will be used in this study. While DA's multi-modal approach puts a total of nineteen sub-theories at the disposal of its practitioners, the analyses that follow will only make use of five of its most central 'departments': (a) Key theory, (b) Macro-motive theory, (c) a figurative semiotics, (d) a theory of ideology and (e) Postural theory. These theoretical tools are used to 'excavate' (extract, abstract, reconstruct) different aspects of philosophical deep-structures. To be more exact, they analyze specific kinds of *grounding concepts* and *-arrangements* that make up such deep-structures (see Chapter 1, Section 3). Their pursuit of abstractive depth allows them to isolate what can be regarded as the originating grounds, conceptual conditions and the guiding principles of philosophically significant utterances in a text. The 'generative' paradigm of early Chomskyan linguistics serves as a useful model in this regard: these theories help us identify the generalizations that govern the philosophical aspects of a given discourse; and by reconstructing the philosophical 'deep-structure' of a text, an array of its 'surface' expressions can be traced back to the unifying ground arrangement which generates them.^{11 12} The assumption is that a potentially infinite number of discursive manifestations can be accounted for by the *root-inspiration* of the finite system of ground concepts and -structures that DA describes. The chapters that follow will explore the constitutive presence of these ground elements in film. And in the course of this exploration it will become clear that their archaeological disclosure offers more than an original approach to the philosophical interpretation of film since it also lays bare the deep-conceptual grounds upon which film and philosophy can meet.

The summary of each sub-theory will include an outline of important details, some methods of application and necessary modifications for the analysis of film. Elaborate (albeit relevant) technical and terminological issues will, as far as possible, be limited to this chapter. In the spirit of the subject matter at hand, I will also offer an assortment of 'previews' of how the different theories will feature in the respective chapters.

¹¹ Please see in Footnote 7, Chapter 1, how DA uses the originally Chomskyan notion of 'deep-structures'.

¹² Another way of putting it is that all the theories are sensitive to the difference between linguistic- and conceptual structures: they look beyond the busy structures of surface 'languages' to the conceptual structures that give rise to them. Yet they do not deal with ordinary concepts (like the denotative meaning of a word) at all – only broad and unifying grounding conceptions that also direct the plain concepts enclosed by linguistic structures.

2. Key theory

‘Key theory’, more formally known as the theory of logosemantics, describes *the form in which deep-structure concepts are arranged*. There is a characteristic way of combining ground concepts whenever we ‘speak’ philosophy. These combinations are identified in the form of underlying logosemantic propositions or ‘key-formulas’ which are reconstructed from the philosophical discourses that they drive and sustain (Visagie 2003:5; 1998a:342-344).

2.1 Philosophical key-formulas

The basic premise of Key theory is that the grounding arrangements of philosophical discourse can be studied in the same way as we would study the syntactic structure of ordinary language (Visagie 1998a:342). A philosophical ‘key-formula’ – the deep-structure kernel proposition that constitutes a particular philosophical discourse, or the philosophical aspects of it – thus takes on a basic subject-verb-object form. These three conceptual categories within a key-formula are technically referred to as the ‘subject’, ‘operator’ and ‘domain’. They will be notated as such:

Subject operator → Domain

The subject-category or ‘head’ of the key-formula contains that particular function, entity, process or part of reality which stands in an explanatory relation to the rest of reality; the discourse isolates it as that important thing that, in some way, determines another part (or the whole) of reality (Visagie 1998a:343). The key-subject can be anything from the Platonic Forms or the Greek-Christian Logos to the Kantian reason or, more recently, the Foucauldian notion of power. The ‘head’ of a formula is expressed syntactically in noun form.

The domain or ‘tail’, also expressed in noun form, denotes those parts of reality that are in some way dependent upon the indicated subject. In the aforementioned Logos example, all of reality would be the domain, as it relies on the Logos as the key-subject. In many cases only one sector of reality, for example knowledge, is the dependent domain in a key-formula. This happens to be the case in Foucault’s view of the relationship between power and knowledge.

The operator of a key-formula functions in verb form and indicates the precise action performed by the subject over the domain. For example, 'Power *determines* → Knowledge'. The operator can be selected from a reasonably established range of possibilities, the most important of which include 'determine', 'cause', 'rule', 'structure', 'ground', 'precede', 'enclose', 'transcend' and 'unify'. One should thus bear in mind that a certain relationship of domination is at work within any key-formula. Since one entity operates on another entity by means of causing, grounding or transcending it, the 'head' necessarily gains primacy and, in one sense or another, dominates the 'tail' (Visagie 2003:6).

The basic subject-operator-domain form that Key theory extracts can undergo a variety of extensions. The most common way is the addition of attributes (in adjective form) to the subject and domain of the formula. Although any attribute is allowed, a surprisingly small set of attributes repeatedly comes to the fore: an entity is often qualified as being one or many (simple or complex), finite or infinite, constant or changing, knowable or unknowable, universal or individual, necessary or contingent (Visagie 2003:7). In Berkeley's metaphysical key-formula in Chapter 7 (Section 3.3), the subject, 'Spirit', can be elaborated upon by attributes like 'single', 'constant' and 'infinite'. 'Simulacra' as key-subject in Baudrillard's media philosophy (Chapter 7, Section 3.6) arguably also selects the attribute of infinity but otherwise opts for opposing attributes like 'complex' and 'changing'. Considerations of key-attributes will, however, for the most part, fall outside of the scope of this study.

A key-formula can also be extended by an additional kernel proposition that is at work *within* its subject or domain. The series of 'reality creating' key-formulas that are investigated in Chapter 7 all have the same extended structure: in every one an 'internal' key-formula forms the 'head' of a larger key-formula. In the case of Plato, such a 'reality claim' reads: '[Senses → Appearance] → Material reality'. This extended key-structure, which always has some kind of 'reality' as its domain, will be argued to be central to the impressive ability of *The Matrix* to accommodate a diversity of philosophical readings.

As a 'grammar' of philosophical conceptualization, Key theory holds that no philosophical paradigm can evade some form of key-formulaic reasoning. It identifies an elemental conceptual form to which any significant philosophical claim necessarily resorts. Following Visagie (2003:6; 1998a:347), one can even speculate that this kind of conceptualization forms part of a specialized modular capacity in the human mind for constructing theoretical-explanatory relations.

2.2 Film and philosophical key-formulas

The use of Key theory in film analysis supposes that, although films are not explicit philosophical texts, they nevertheless exhibit philosophical aspects that could just as well be described in terms of an extracted key-formula. So akin to any other philosophical discourse, a certain key-formula may constitute the *philosophical* deep-structure of a film and accordingly generate philosophically relevant ‘surface’ features of the film-narrative. A striking example of this is found in *Modern Times* (Chapter 5). The entire ‘First Act’ of the film gives form to a single ground principle, which in key-theoretical terms reads ‘Technology → Personhood’. Amounting to a philosophical key-formula, this deep-structure proposition finds expression in nearly everything that we encounter in this section of the film. A particular arrangement of grounding concepts thus forms a ‘kernel-narrative’ which generates the narrative events, visual compositions and even sound effects of the First Act. It will, furthermore, be argued that a more foundational key-formula, ‘Power → Personhood’, anchors *Modern Times* in its entirety.

2.3 Philosophical- versus narrative key-formulas

In Chapter 7 I will conduct a wide ranging investigation into the deep-structure grounds which enable *The Matrix* to be seemingly whatever its philosophical interpreters wish it to be. In doing so, I deviate from standard key-theoretical practice by identifying what I will call ‘narrative key-formulas’. Here the assumption is that the conceptual mechanics identified by Key theory not only drives theoretical- or philosophical discourse, but also more ordinary forms of discourse such as, in this case, the narrative. Hence certain aspects of a narrative universe can be expressed in general key-theoretical terms. The resultant ‘narrative key-formula’ does not single out implied and abstract philosophical themes that shape the narrative universe, but rather explicitly narrated elements of the narrative world and how they relate to one another. It seeks to capture different possible relationships between the actors, events, spaces and things that make up a narrative.

I will therefore distinguish between ‘philosophical key-formulas’, delineating relations between abstract philosophical entities, and ‘narrative key-formulas’, comprising concrete narrative elements. This distinction does not mean, however, that these two types of key-formulas do not intersect in various ways. One may be that a narrative key-formula is a function of a deeper, more general philosophical key. The narrative key-formula that may be extracted from Plato’s

parable of the cave, for instance, is a figurative reflection of a deeper philosophical key within the discourse (see Chapter 7, Section 3.2).¹³ It can also be that a narrative- and philosophical key-formula, although comprised of essentially different kinds of ‘contents’, nevertheless share the same key-structure. In my study of *The Matrix*, it will be shown how the film and various philosophical discourses embody structurally similar ‘reality claims’. The reality claims made by the philosophies are based on *philosophical* key-formulas while that of the film is a *narrative* one. It is nonetheless the corresponding ‘reality creating’ *structure* of these different kinds of key-formulas that allows them to be interpretatively related to one another.

2.4 Further technical details

Considering that key-analysis can easily descend into extensive technical formalisms, I should point out that in my application of the theory will be intentionally loose and informal. Necessary technical features will only be raised according to what a particular moment of analysis demands.

In many cases I will not be concerned with the exact operator that is used by a key-formula. It may also be that more than one operator applies to the same formula. In these cases the operator category will simply be indicated with a solitary arrow (\rightarrow). On the rare occasion that an ‘attribute’ features within a key-formula, it will be written in round brackets before the subject- or domain concept involved. For example, ‘(infinite) Spirit creates, perceives \rightarrow Ideas’. In the more detailed notation used in Chapter 5 (*Modern Times*), figurative ‘sources’ of the subject and domain of a key-formula will be indicated within a ‘box’ underneath that concept (e.g. | ‘machine’ |). The ideological frame within which the key functions will be placed within squared brackets (e.g. <Technological power>).

Although the identification of underlying key-formulas gives the analyst a powerful *critical* handle on a particular discourse, this study will only deal with Key theory in an analytical, descriptive and deep-hermeneutic capacity.

¹³ Certain narrative key-formulas can therefore be seen as summarizing figurative expressions of a corresponding philosophical key-formula. See Section 4 in this chapter for details on the ‘figurative’ expression of deep-structure entities.

3. Macro-motives

Macro-motive theory identifies a handful of trans-historical ‘ultimate values’ that form *a recurring set of grounding concepts in philosophical deep-structures* (Visagie 1996a; 1999a; 2007:45-50). Considering the sheer ‘ontological stature’ of these encompassing themes, they inevitably underpin discourses of various kinds and often present themselves as the contents of philosophical ‘key-formulas’ (see Section 2). The five most salient macro-motives are Nature, Knowledge, Power (including Culture and History), Personhood and Society.

3.1 Characteristics of macro-motives

Macro-motives (or simply ‘macros’), as a set of ultimate values or ‘super-ideologies’, point to a group of phenomena that, throughout history and across cultures, have always been the focus of humanity’s utmost admiration and awe, their idealizations, their work and aspirations. The likes of Nature, Knowledge, Power, Personhood and Society not only inspire and motivate individuals, but also provide patterns of collective (social, intellectual, artistic) behavior and cultural concerns of an epochal nature. These pervasive themes are consequently not restricted to Western modernity – in addition to giving foundational direction to Greek antiquity and the Middle Ages, even Eastern discourses throughout history are equally dominated by them (Visagie 1996a:129; 2007:46).

Although macro-motives are, as Visagie (2007:46) indicates, elemental forms of ideology (in the sense of being dominating, overriding values), they nevertheless represent *major segments of reality*. In neutral or ‘de-ideologized’ form they can therefore be approached as an *ontology* of sorts. The motive of *Nature* encompasses anything from the material constitution of things and natural forces to environmental nature, earthly nature and the physical universe as a whole. More primordially it confronts us as “... *the great pre-cultural world in which our personal lives take on the significance of dust* (Visagie 1996a:130).” A foundational differentiation in the motive is that it either inspires as an objective, rational or scientifically disclosed nature or a mysteriously secretive, mythical or even poetic nature – the latter of which we tend to encounter in *Brokeback Mountain* (Chapter 4). There is a similar distinction in the *Knowledge* motive: it generally exerts its influence as a glorification of rational, analytical or scientific knowledge or more subjectivist, esoteric forms of knowledge instead. The deep appeal of Knowledge results from the demystifying insight that it gives into the likes of nature, culture, history and art; its resistance

against the decay of time; and how it constitutes our entire world of experience – to such an extent that it even brings order to nature (Visagie 1996a:133-135). *Power*, the one thing that constantly creates, binds, drives and changes, can best be described as reign or rule itself. The idea of purposeful action stands central to *Power* – it is a force which is only actualized in relation to human goals and projects and is therefore not a blind force like the forces of nature (Visagie 1996a:136). This essence of purposeful action is reproduced in three fundamental ‘versions’ of the macro: *pure Power*, *Power in the form of Culture* and *Power as History*. The *Personhood* motive involves the person firstly being understood in terms of the structure or form of human nature – the human as a separate entity from nature – or secondly, in terms of individual subjective experience (Visagie 2007:48).¹⁴ Lastly, the macro-motive of *Society* closely relates to that of *Personhood*, since it is a collectivity or community of persons. At the same time, however, it is more than, and lies beyond, *Personhood* as it too (together with *Nature*, *Knowledge* and *Power*) is a fundamental pre-condition for being fully human.

Macro-motives represent a deep-seated ideological continuity running throughout different historical- and cultural contexts. Yet within each socio-historical framework the universal motives acquire unique profiles as they are ‘translated’ into the distinctive terms and concerns that characterize a particular culture or time frame. Contemporary scientific assessments of the universe, for instance, are undeniably unique and separate from conceptions of the ‘mechanistic universe’ in the Enlightenment or notions of a ‘mythical universe’ in ancient times. Even so, the constant that underlies these developments is still the historically persistent motive of *Nature*, continually undergoing a variety of context-specific manifestations. Macro-motives are always abstractions from the individual contexts where they find concrete expression. Hence the relative individuality of the specific life-world or ideological ‘landscape’ within which they are realized, must be acknowledged. It will, for example, become clear in the analyses of Chapters 3 and 4 that, within the historical discourses and ideological ‘landscape’ of the American West, the motives of *Nature* and *Culture* take on the particular form of a recurring theme in the Western: an untamed *wilderness* in opposition to a restrictive *civilization*. Macro-motives are therefore never newly invented. They remain part of a persistent and surprisingly fixed set of grounding themes that are worked out in different ways at different stages of history (Cf. Morales Vasquez 2000:42-43).

The macro-motives of *Nature*, *Knowledge*, *Power*, *Personhood* and *Society* are admittedly not a closed set, but this identified group of macro-themes makes for quite an exclusive club. For a

¹⁴ A third aspect of *Personhood*, that has its own extensive sub-theory within Macro-motive theory, falls outside the scope of this study. It is the ideal of *personal transformation* (or ‘self stylization’). See Visagie (1999a; 2007:48-50) for more details.

similar value to gain admission, it needs to meet two demands: it needs to have a similar recurrence throughout time and culture; and it needs to evoke the same kind of deep veneration as the recognized macro-motives, which have, throughout history, repeatedly been considered as perfect replacements of God.¹⁵

3.2 Macro-analysis: Important considerations

Both Chapters 3 and 4 will focus on the prominent place of macro-motives in philosophical deep-structures of films. What follows here are a few intricacies that are pertinent to the application of macro-motive analysis in film-narratives. Since the macro-motive analysis of *Brokeback Mountain* in Chapter 4 will focus more on the filmic figuration of macros, many of these considerations will be more explicitly apparent in the Chapter 3 analysis of *The man who shot Liberty Valance*.

3.2.1 Basic macro versions

In my overview of the macro-motives certain rough distinctions between general versions of macros were evident. We differentiate in Nature, Knowledge and Personhood, for example, between an objective, analytical form and a subjective form of the macro. Yet in the practice of analysis these distinctions often do not prove all that necessary. So while the Personhood dealt with in *Liberty Valance* is specifically the individual subjective kind that results in *characters*, and manifestations of Personhood in *Brokeback Mountain* technically involves both its objective- and subjective forms, these specifications have no bearing on the deep-structure interpretations of these films. Hence both analyses will simply make use of a general unspecified notion of Personhood.

The different ‘faces’ of Power – which are arguably much more foundational – can, however, not be done away with that easily. For this reason Culture and History will be treated as macros in their own right. Culture, for instance, which is obviously something different from ‘pure Power’, not only occupies a central position in a film like *Liberty Valance*, but also in the Western genre as a whole.

¹⁵ Visagie (2007:46) points out that the idea of *humanity* should arguably be taken to belong to the identified set of macro-motives.

3.2.2 Implicit- versus leading macros

The analyst needs to distinguish between how macro-motives furnish film-philosophical deep-structures as both ‘implicit macros’ and possible ‘leading macros’. As is pointed out in Chapter 3, all of the macro-motives, simply by virtue of the foundational kind of themes that they are, will necessarily have an *implicit* (or *latent*) presence within any film-narrative. Much as the macro-realities of Nature, Knowledge, Power, Personhood and Society unavoidably constitute our daily life-worlds, so they also form the implied ontological horizons against which represented fictional worlds play out. A film-narrative – comprising different characters, their actions, experiences and all the settings that they occupy – thus gives constant concrete expression to the general macros that it presupposes.

In addition to this, a particular macro (or set of macros) can be mobilized as an openly *leading* macro within a film-narrative. Such an explicitly thematized *motive* fundamentally inspires, drives and gives direction to a variety of aspects within the film. Macro-analysis primarily seeks to hone in on leading motives. Unlike implicit macros they are proper grounding concepts that constitute whatever philosophical leanings a film may have. Leading macros can be seen as taking up a deeper place within a narrative since they also operate through and define implicit macros. In *Liberty Valance*, for instance, the macros of Nature, Knowledge, Power, Personhood and Society have, as in any other film, an implied presence within its narrative world. But the leading motives of Nature and Culture come to typify the film’s two main contexts by ultimately exerting themselves through its implicit macros (see Section 3.2.4). In doing so Nature and Culture defines the contrasting kinds of *society*, *people* and even *culture* which characterize the town of Shinbone, past and present. The overall play of macros within a film therefore arises from the qualities and interactions of its leading macros.

3.2.3 Ideological- versus normalized macros

Mention has been made of how macro-motives, that in essence are fundamental ideological values, can be ‘de-ideologized’ and theoretically dealt with as normalized, neutral themes.

The implicit macros that we discern within any film world are by definition normalized. It will, however, often happen that a film’s thematization of a leading macro (although this does not necessarily have to be the case) tends to exhibit *ideological* dimensions. The hallmark of an

ideological motive is that it breaks out of its normal balance with the rest of the macros. As a dominating value, it then overrides a variety of values, ideals and actions within the narrative and in doing so ultimately also distorts the other macros. The ideological drive of macro-motives therefore typically sees them in conflict with fellow motives that they seek to trump.¹⁶ Although similar arguments could be made for *Liberty Valance*, this is especially apparent in *Brokeback Mountain* where the opposing macros endlessly vie for the final say in the lives of the characters.

While it will not be pursued in this study, leading ideological macros (such as the idealized Nature motive in *Brokeback Mountain*), in particular, beg for critical deconstruction.

3.2.4 Inter-macro appropriation

Because of a complexity of interconnections that exist between macro-motives, it is possible for a macro to find expression in the form of another – the latter thereby becoming a kind of (figurative) model for the former (Cf. Visagie 2007:50). It is mostly the deeper leading macros that appropriate or involve implicit macros in the form in which they then make themselves felt.

This issue will be raised a number of times in the analysis of *Liberty Valance*. It will be shown how an untamed Nature motive and ordered Culture motive respectively frame two eras of the fictional town of Shinbone. The manner in which the leading motives characterize this community is in essence a case of Nature and Culture appropriating and operating in the form of an implicit Society macro (see Chapter 3, Section 2.1). The motives similarly find expression in the film's two protagonists, the one exemplifying the order of Nature and the other that of Culture. This involves the motives functioning through the implicit macro of Personhood. In *Liberty Valance* we even find that Nature and Culture reveals their foremost qualities in terms of other macros which they incorporate: as expressed in the characters, Nature primarily exhibits Power while Culture has Knowledge as a leading feature (see Chapter 3, Section 2.2).

3.2.5 Macro interactions

In addition to the socio-cultural contextualization of macros, a single text may also profile a set of macros in a distinctive manner. The onus is on the analyst to formulate the overwhelming macro-

¹⁶ Visagie (1996a) offers various perspectives on how macro-motives generally contend against each other for the status of being an *arché* or ultimate point of reference.

logic that such a text demonstrates. One way is to identify general qualifying attributes that the macros exhibit. *Liberty Valance*, for instance, presents us with a Nature that is wild, untamed and powerful while Culture is knowing, law-abiding and ordered.

Yet a film's individual macro-profiling is even more a matter of how it aligns macros with one another. Texts rarely thematize macros in isolation, but rather place them within a unique network of macro-relations and -interactions. The investigation of macro-interactions is crucial to the analyses of *Liberty Valance* and *Brokeback Mountain*. Both films exhibit multiple interactions between the same opposing macro pairs. These deep-structure exchanges between macros can be seen as generating a variety of narrative elements and filmic figures. For example, in *Liberty Valance* three salient interactions between Nature and Culture are 'Nature deters Culture', 'Nature empowers Culture' and 'Culture overcomes Nature'. Each of these interactions (captured by a kernel statement) finds a variety of narrative expressions. In *Brokeback Mountain* there are even two counteracting macro-interactions that find mutual expression a single visual motif (see Chapter 4, Section 2.3).

There is thus a certain procedure to the analysis of a film's unique mobilization of macros. Having identified a prominent macro the theorist has to ask herself what other macros the text thematizes. Then the relations existing between them must be identified, in terms of whether this reflects tension, alliance or any other specific interaction. Lastly, identifying some generalizing typology or 'grammar' of macro-interactions will enable the theorist to formulate the ruling macro-logic within the film. In this study the typology of macro-interactions will be in the form of 'deep-structure statements' such as 'Culture overcomes Nature'.

3.2.6 Macro complexes

Macro-motive theory is open to the possibility of grouping together a set of related macros into a 'macro complex', thus enabling the analyst to deal with them as a unified deep-structure entity in analysis. The analysis of *Brokeback Mountain* will feature such a synthesis of Society, Culture and History in a complex of 'Social powers'.

3.3 Further technical details

In order to distinguish macro-motives from the usual meanings that these terms may have, they will be written with capital letters throughout.

For the sake of brevity, I will generally refer to the likes of ‘Nature’ and ‘Culture’ directly. It should, however, be understood that these abstractions are never encountered directly in the film. As I have explained, macros are always concretized in some form, which in this case will be a narrative and the filmic narration thereof. Any straightforward reference to a macro, like ‘Nature’ for instance, should therefore be taken as shorthand for those characters, settings, etc. that are expressive of the macro.

Chapter 3 will explicitly deal with the expression of leading macro-motives though implicit ones. Instead of having to resort to technical formalisms or -diagrams, I will indicate the presence of a macro ‘within’ or in the form of another by referring to the former in adjectival form. For example, the term ‘Natured person’ thus refers to the manifestation of Nature in the Personhood of the character, Tom Doniphon. Likewise Power, as a leading feature of Nature within the character, becomes an additional adjective in the description, ‘Powerful Natured person’.

4. A figurative semiotics (‘Metaphor theory’)

DA’s special semiotics, also informally called ‘Metaphor theory’, engages with the *figurative expression of philosophical deep-structures*.¹⁷ The analysis of a philosophical deep-structure unavoidably involves considerations of its semiotic expression. In a sense, the semiotic articulation is the only ‘tangible’ part of a text’s deep-structure with which the analyst is in contact.

4.1 Figurativity

Metaphor theory acknowledges the extensive ‘encyclopedia’ of phenomena that generally form part of the field of semiotics: image, sign, symbol, metaphor, metonymy, model, narrative, allegory, myth, etc. Whether to a simpler or more complex degree, each of these semiotic forms

¹⁷ For detailed descriptions of various aspects of DA’s figurative semiotics see Visagie (1990; 2000; 2007:28-34).

has some kind of inherent signifier-signified relation in common. The DA analyst is however not so much interested in signification, as such, but more specifically concerns herself with the *figurative aspect* of representation. For this reason Metaphor theory purposefully abstracts from all possible kinds of semiotic forms their shared potential to figuratively inform, shape or affect the concepts which they signify. Finer distinctions between members of the semiotic encyclopedia are thus not as important as the figurative function that they fulfill. The theory is not interested in getting embroiled in definitional nit-picking and detailed arguments on how *exactly* the likes of signs, symbols, metaphors, models and analogies might differ from one another. This means that in Chapter 7, for example, I will not be concerned at all with whether ‘Plato’s cave’ (with reference to *The Matrix*) is technically a ‘narrative’, ‘parable’ or ‘allegory’, but rather with the deeper conceptual arrangement which this figurative form irrespectively articulates.¹⁸

The general notion of the ‘figure’ is used therefore as a *unifying* concept that includes any possible form of representation and transcends the differences that might exist between them. The strength of this approach is that it probes a hermeneutically productive level of abstraction where the unnecessary difficulty of such differences is bypassed in the quest for general *figurativity* in deep-structure. On this level Metaphor theory can engage more productively with the deep-structure elements which the rest of the DA sub-theories identify.

4.2 Multiple figurative ‘layering’

The DA analyst has to work through various ‘layers’ of signs, symbols, metaphors etc. that surround and figurate deep-structure conceptions (Visagie 1990:2). The outermost layer is the *physical ‘surface’ signs* that relate the text to the interpreter. In the case of film these signs are combinations of moving visual images, sound, music and on-screen text. Here we make a distinction between filmic figures of *content* (what is being represented?) and figures of *technical representation* (how is it represented?). But a great deal of figuration already takes place on pre-textual, conceptual levels. Most notably in the popular fiction films that will be analyzed, is the *narrative figuration* of deep-structure. The philosophically relevant ground concepts of a film reveal themselves through a story, meaning that they are concretized in specific characters, settings or events that naturally still ‘precede’ their physical signification in film language.

¹⁸ This, however, does not mean that certain distinctions within the ‘figurative encyclopedia’ might not be useful or even necessary. In my analysis of the ‘First Act’ of *Modern Times* (Chapter 5) the conceptual figure of the ‘machine’ applies as both a *metonymy* and *metaphor* in different parts of the same key-formula.

Alongside the narrative layer there may also be an entire range of *conceptual figures*, like symbols, metonymies or metaphors. This is when two concepts are in a figurative relationship with each other – the one serving as a model or interpretation of the other. It is an entirely conceptual representation which, in turn, can take on a multiplicity of forms in a (film) language (Visagie 2007:28).

Let me briefly refer to the macro-motive of Nature in *Brokeback Mountain* (Chapter 4) as an example of figurative layering around a grounding concept. Bear in mind that we never deal with a macro (or any grounding concept for that matter) in its pure form, but always via signs, symbols, metaphors, etc. In this case the viewer firstly encounters Nature, on the ‘surface’, through various visual images (among other aspects of the filmic medium) of natural scenery. The ‘moment’ of figuration specifically lies in the *manner* of representation: we see vast, monumental mountain ranges of alluring beauty. These filmic representations involve putting into a particular kind and style of ‘language’ a foregoing narrative figuration of Nature. Here Nature not only finds form in a particular narrative world (idyllic pastoral settings in the American West) but also as the force behind most of what befalls the characters.¹⁹ This narrative agency finds expression in a related set of metonymical conceptual figures like weather, the wind and even Brokeback Mountain, which also serves as a symbol for the two men’s ‘Nature-inspired’ affair. We even find that this macro-motive itself becomes a source of figuration for the couple’s love which we come to see as a ‘force of Nature’. The major aim of the analysis, however, is to point out the *unique* figurative contribution that the (often neglected) ‘surface’ filmic medium (involving both figures of content and -technical representation) can, and in fact do, make in the case of *Brokeback Mountain*.

4.3 Figurative forms as ground concepts: Conceptual metaphor

The DA analyst’s dealings with figurative forms are not limited to their only being ‘surrounding layers’ or ‘extensions’ of various ground concepts. For it often happens that the figurative concept itself is just as much a grounding concept which constitutes various features of the discourse at hand (Visagie 2007:28).

¹⁹ We can furthermore abstract from the narrative expression of Nature in the desires, feelings and experiences of the *characters* that, in macro-motive terms exclusively, Nature comes to expression in the form of subjective Personhood.

The Chapter 5 analysis of *Modern Times* brings one such a pervasive conceptual figure under scrutiny: what cognitive science has come to identify as the ‘conceptual metaphor’.²⁰ Contemporary metaphor theory in a way vindicates DA’s broader notion of a ‘conceptual figure’ by claiming, contrary to traditional conventions, that metaphor is essentially a conceptual, thought-based phenomenon; it is not a feature of language.²¹ Metaphor theorists, like the pioneering George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, would therefore show how some series of individual linguistic expressions are all generated by a single conceptual metaphor, which is a general ‘cross-mapping’ of conceptual domains.²² This analysis will illustrate how one such conceptual mapping, the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor, finds unique (non-linguistic) cinematic expression in *Modern Times*. Chaplin’s portrayal of the oppressed Tramp character includes quite a few comical embodiments of this conceptual metaphor, which forms the cognitive pre-condition to these gags making any kind of sense to both actor and audience. So on the one hand the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor is a conceptual figure that supports the film’s deep-structure notion of mechanically dominated personhood. But it is just as much a ground concept in its own right, motivating and specifying various gestures, actions and situations that we encounter in the film. For this reason the conceptual metaphor, central to interpreting some of Chaplin’s antics, is also a hermeneutic axial point to the greater message of the film-narrative.

4.4 Further technical details

While having argued for the unifying semiotic notion of the ‘figure’ in Section 4.1, I will still intuitively resort to different terms like ‘sign’, ‘symbol’ and ‘metaphor’ for reasons pertaining to both convention and rhetoric. It should, however, be understood that it is nevertheless their figurative aspects that are of main concern. They could therefore, just as well all have been called ‘figures’.

²⁰ See Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999; 2003), Lakoff (1993) and Goatly (2007:11-33) for introductory perspectives on conceptual metaphor.

²¹ Furthermore, metaphor, it is claimed, forms part of our *ordinary* conceptual systems, thus undermining the traditional distinction that assumes everyday conventional language to be literal, devoid of metaphor, while metaphor itself is merely a poetic or rhetorical linguistic device (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3-6; Lakoff 1993:204-205). There is thus a certain necessity to various metaphorical systems governing our thought and any expressions thereof.

²² See, for instance, the corresponding range of linguistic expressions of the well-known introductory example, the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:4).

In accordance with standard practice, the set of conceptual mappings which characterize a general conceptual metaphor will be named with a summarizing mnemonic, written in capital letters, like 'LOVE IS A PHYSICAL FORCE' or 'HUMAN IS A MACHINE'.

In the Chapter 5 analysis (*Modern Times*), which will make use of slightly more technical formalisms, any figurative form will be notated within a 'box' that is aligned with the concept (within a key-formula) that it figuratively 'targets'. For instance, the metaphor |'machine'| will be placed below Personhood to indicate its figurative relationship to the concept.

5. Ideology theory

The actual contents of philosophical deep-structures (involving key-formulas, concrete macro-profiles, their figurative forms, etc.) are the products of ideological forces, whether in the form of value sets, paradigms, social movements, schools of thought or even myths (Visagie 1989:viii,12-13). DA's theory of ideology and, in particular, the 'landscape' of ideological discourses that it outlines, enables the analysts to plot the *ideological framing and constitution of deep-structure elements*.

5.1 Ideology as value- or discursive domination

'Ideology', as approached within the critical framework of DA, is a strictly *negative* phenomenon, always involving some form of *domination*. While the theory does recognize a concept of 'ideology' as meaning (symbolic forms) in the service of *social domination* (Cf. Thompson 1990), this study will utilize the opposite half of the theory which views *value- or discursive domination* as its analytical point of departure. 'Ideology', from this latter perspective, refers to the tendency of dominating discourses to unjustifiably elevate certain values (like scientific knowledge, technological progress, ethnicity or self-realization) over other values, goals and norms. As Visagie (1998b:132) explains, ideological imbalances occur because such values become *autonomized*. This results in the domination and invalidation of other values, which deprives them of their own relative autonomy and authority.

Ideological discourses are therefore characterized by the presence some autonomized action, norm or value which is identified as a 'hypernorm' (Visagie & Pretorius 1993:54). A hypernorm

subordinates a host of other norms and values to itself, while it remains the excessively privileged, inviolable perspective from which these values are interrogated. This means that questions such as what constitutes good conduct, sound thinking, meaningful art or justice are decided by invoking criteria that suit the demands of the hypernorm. To take a more specific example, if morality becomes ‘hypernormative’ to an individual then *moralism* adopts a hegemonic position over other equally legitimate values and norms in that person’s life – perhaps things such as truth, aesthetics and inter-personal relationships. The hypernorm is then allowed to penetrate the inner-logic of such norms (the person’s relationships, for instance, may become tied down to excessive moral codes) and, in doing so, violates their individual character and validity.

Although it was not planned as such, *technological power* repeatedly emerges as a hypernorm throughout this study. A clear instance is the hypernormative domination of the ‘letting go’ posture in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (see Chapter 6, Section 3.1).²³ The film tells of a couple who struggles to deal with the pain of their relationship on the rocks. Instead of letting the process of forgetting run its natural course, they resort to a fictional memory erasure process. So what ideally should have been a ‘letting go’ of memories by simply somehow coming to terms with them, becomes a forceful literal ‘letting go’ achieved exclusively by means of a dubious medical technology. It is thus an illustration of how techno-scientific hypernorms can infiltrate and distort this basic aspect of the human condition – much as they colonize various spheres of our daily lives in any case.

5.2 The ideological landscape of modernity

On a broader scale, the theory seeks to identify, on various socio-cultural levels, the actual discourses that make up what may be called modern ‘ideological culture’. The topographic model therefore describes an entire ‘landscape’ of interrelating dominating discourses that characterize Western modernity by mapping the most apparent originating ‘formations’ – each with its own ‘autonomization logic’ – from which ideological discourses spring.²⁴ So while these ideological discourses may be of different statures, they are all characterized by a promotion of certain central ‘hypernorms’ as described above (Visagie 1996b:74-76; 1998b:132).

²³ For more information on ethical ‘postures’, see Section 6 in this chapter.

²⁴ The assumption is that each epoch, in principle, would have its own ‘landscape’ of stratified ideological discourses (Cf. Visagie 1989:15). Furthermore it is assumed that macro-motives (see Section 3) are the elemental common denominators that undercut the historical succession of ideological typographies.

The landscape distinguishes different *levels* of ideological culture. On the highest level are those major formations that give ideological culture its overall structure and direction. These *steering powers* of ideological modernity include most of the ‘usual suspects’ in critical theory: science, technology, economic power, administrative power, political power as well as the modern media. The automization-mechanics (hypernorms) of each individual formation are situated in a network of interactions with its neighboring steering powers. The level just below holds a category of formations that typically serve and support the steering powers through the influential ‘grand narratives’ that they uphold: they are the likes of Nature, Reason, History, Progress, Humanity and Happiness. The middle of the landscape categorizes different ideological levels whereby individuals are integrated into society. Included here are formations “... *like the so-called narcissistic culture of self-expression (selfism) and personal achievement for instance; also formations that involve certain politically powerful automization-logics like liberalism, statism, ethno-nationalism, and so on; further, formations in which the ideological aspects of the social movements (feminism, ecology and so on) come to expression* (Visagie 1996b:75).” Many of the formations also project the ‘counter-formation’ of freedom. This is used to describe cases where *wanting to be free* from certain ideological forces itself takes on hypernormative proportions. Finally, the lowest levels detail formations of different lifestyle- or micro-ideologies in which things like personal power, prestige, money, work, shopping, sex, love or family life can become uniquely crafted ideological ‘havens’ for a community, group or even an individual (Visagie 1996b:75).

5.3 Ideological framing of deep-structures

Ideology theory is used to pinpoint, in terms of the aforementioned landscape, the *ideological framework* within which a philosophical deep-structure functions. Saying that a particular ideological discourse ‘frames’ a deep-structure not only refers to its ideological origin but also highlights the distinctive ideological ‘slanting’ or ‘-coloring’ that its arrangement of ground concepts exhibit. In Chapter 7 I argue that all of the philosophies that ‘recognize’ themselves in *The Matrix* form part of a ‘philosophical type’; they share the same key-formula structure that claims the existence of some illusory reality (see Chapter 7, Section 4.1). But these structurally similar ‘reality claims’ play out within different ideological frames, meaning that everyone’s concern with a false ‘reality’ is inspired by a different set of ideological terms and commitments. Within different discourses the same structural concern therefore gains an assortment of

ideological slants. An equivalent argument holds for the set of films that make structurally similar *narrative* ‘reality claims’ to that of *The Matrix* (see Chapter 7, Section 4.2).

While a film in broad outline will function within an ideological framework, the onus is on the analyst to demonstrate specifically whether it is a ‘symptomatic’ extension of, or a critical reflection on, the ideologies involved. Admittedly, this is not always an easy task. Often such an enquiry will lead to a plurality of competing ideological forces making up the framework. Discerning the hierarchy of ideological discourses thus forms an important part of defining ideological frames.²⁵ On face value, *The Matrix* presents an ideal of *freedom from dominating technology*. Yet underneath the film’s ‘conscious’ theme of emancipation lurks a deeper, seemingly ‘unconscious’, commitment to the *emancipatory power of technology itself* (see Chapter 7, Section 4.1). *Modern Times* (Chapter 5) also exhibits a hierarchical ordering of ideologies. In addition to also parading a compromised freedom motive, it will be shown how hypernormative technology in the film’s ‘First Act’ is ultimately subservient to higher economic-administrative powers. I should add, in passing, that analytical dealings with ideologies, like macro-motives, also allow for the clustering together of discourses into ideological complexes – the ‘economic-administrative’ complex in *Modern Times* being one such case.

6. Postural theory

The guiding intuition of Postural theory is that the primordial ethical question of the Good, ‘What must I do?’, invokes some kind of essential or central reaction. Despite the possibility of raising various issues related to ‘rightness’, ideals, values and priorities, this ‘root-level’ ethics gives a tentatively summarizing answer in the form a series of ‘postures’ – fundamental actions, states and aspirations that represent core themes of the human condition.²⁶ Considering the deeply *universalistic appeal* of these postures, one can be forgiven for referring to them as ‘universals’ of human experience (Visagie 2004). As unavoidable grounding concepts postures *make up an ethical-existential component of philosophical deep-structures*.

²⁵ The identification such a hierarchy should form part of a broader detailing of any systematic interaction (such as alliance, opposition, domination) between ideological values that the text posits.

²⁶ The technical term of (ethical) ‘postures’ has its origin in a range of metaphorical positions that Visagie (1999b) drafted in an intellectual experiment of a ‘spiritual warfare’ (*geestelike krygskuns*). The individual’s responses in a battle against the self were conceived as a series of defensive postures, metaphorically reminiscent of stances in martial arts. As it is used now, the term is simply intended to serve as an evocative metaphor.

6.1 Ethical postures

Postural theory distinguishes between a ‘dark side’ and a ‘light side’ of the human condition. The dark side comprises only three postures: the experience of *meaninglessness*, *suffering* and *guilt*. Each one of these postures is irreducible to the others; the experience thereof is unique and distinguishable. What applies to all postures also applies to the dark ones: while they describe what is arguably a factual condition, each one also has a normative side to it. The normative nature of the dark postures demands that we should let ourselves (on occasion) be in these states. Embracing the dark postures is often necessary to avoid inauthenticity, self-deception or alienation (Visagie 2004:1; 1999b:25).²⁷

The light side starts with a distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, the life of physical activity and the distanced life of rational reflection. The first posture is that of *ordinary-everydayness*, with its main sub-postures of *being at work* and its complement, *being at rest* or *play*. Both these sub-postures give a major answer to what is (and should be regarded as) important: to simply do your everyday work is something that could bring immense fulfillment, while at the same time a regular break away from work to experience rest, amusement, relaxation and entertainment is just as imperative. The posture of *contemplation* involves the retreat from the ordinary and the everyday, when a person reflects on life and its meaning. It can be envisaged as a person literally taking a step back, not only for reflection but also for any form of introspection.²⁸ A next prominent posture is *taking care*, which embraces everything that is usually considered to be the concern of ‘ethics’. We can take care of nature, of the other and of ourselves. Hence it often includes the related ‘gestures’ of *justice* and *love*. Most generally it can assume the form of simply taking care in whatever you do. The posture of *letting go* – giving up things – is a surprisingly recurring theme of human existence. Every person will reach a point where he or she needs to give up something, whether it is a person, a dream, a compulsion or even some form of suffering. *Humility*, or being humble, can be distinguished as a posture of lowering yourself in the face of someone or something.²⁹ Lastly, postural theory acknowledges a

²⁷ The normative nature of these postures also highlights the utmost ethical importance of their ‘projected’ opposites. For instance, meaninglessness shows the necessity and importance of *meaning* in a person’s life; as is the case with *forgiveness* or *amnesty* with respect to the eradication of guilt.

²⁸ At this point we might also include a posture of *ecstatic (spiritual) experience*, but Visagie (2004:2) warns that it should not be confused with forms of mysticism rooted in doubtful worldviews. It is however important to strike a careful balance here. Although less ‘normal’ ecstatic experiences of various kinds should be encouraged, many people tend to associate human spirituality exclusively with such experiences, thereby neglecting the fact that spirituality could just as well include contemplation, being on retreat or engaged in ordinary work and play. These postures could, in a sense, be even more valuable as routine expressions of spirituality (Visagie 2004:2).

²⁹ This posture interestingly highlights the possibility of different postures linking with one another. When this posture is combined with the posture of suffering it yields the darker figure of *humiliation*; while the linking of this posture with taking care (of the other) produces, among other things, the notion of *respect*.

group of postures that deal with the inner states that are valued. The most prominent of these traditional 'spiritual virtues' is the experiencing of *joy, hope and peace (calmness, serenity)*.

Since it is always possible to distinguish some element of human experience that should be added, this collection of postures is obviously open to additions. Each posture must however be independent and irreducible to any of the others. Furthermore, each posture should have the dual function of being both a *description* of the human condition and a *normative guideline* on what is proper, valued or ideal in human life.

6.2 Postural relations, interactions and evaluations

As is the case with macro-motives (Section 3) and ideological discourses (Section 5), different kinds of relations can exist between postures: postures can work together in alliance, be in tension or simply appear and operate in close proximity as a 'cluster'. We can also appraise postures as being more specifically in some kind of *exchange*. Notable here is a general interaction between 'dark' and 'light' postures which usefully lends itself to war imagery: an individual typically experiences a dark posture as an 'attack' and resorts to a light posture as a 'defense' against this attack. When attacked by suffering, for instance, someone may experience hope as a defense. Or under the onslaught of meaninglessness a person may find shelter in work, play or taking care. This 'attack-defense' form of postural interaction comes up in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Chapter 6, Section 3) as the central characters seek to eradicate their emotional suffering through a highly questionable form of letting go.

There is a certain group of concepts that is never too far removed from our *evaluations* of postures. These concepts, that can be imagined as 'orbiting' around the identified set of postures, persistently form part how we characterize our postural pursuits. It seems that the execution of postures can only be evaluated in extreme terms – we either get it *right* or *wrong*. We cannot experience joy in moderation, nor can we 'kind of' take care. It is either a question of *excellence, glory* or '*fullness*' on the one hand or complete *failure, nothingness* or '*emptiness*' on the other. Similarly our defenses against the 'fullness' of the dark postures allow for no half measures: they either succeed or fail. *Redemption* is another evaluative concept that constantly arises in and around ethical postures. The possibility of successful 'postural defense' means that every posture (even the dark ones) can truly *save* someone. The inevitability of postural failure (and the redemption that lies in that failure) will be considered as a central theme in *Eternal Sunshine*.

6.3 Postural profiling

An initial postural analysis will form the basis of my explorations of *Eternal Sunshine* in Chapter 7. Such an analysis targets the individual ‘profile’ of postures mobilized by a text or discourse. It firstly asks what postures the text singles out from the set of ‘universals’ that the theory identifies. It may also be that the text privileges certain postures within an implied hierarchy.³⁰ Secondly, the analyst has to recognize the unique contextualization and characterization of those postures. A significant part of this is, thirdly, to identify different relations and interactions around which the text organizes the postures. Lastly, the analysis should consider any evaluations of postures. The particular deployment of postures in the text thus extends to the respective success and failure that it ascribes to postural alternatives.

The postural ‘profiling’ of *Eternal Sunshine* is intended to show how a film-narrative’s particularization of postural generalities gives it the ability to make philosophically significant claims (Chapter 6, Section 3). An individual actualization of general postural norms necessarily involves a manipulation of postural reality (singling out, privileging, constructing relations, etc.) and thus amounts to a distinct interpretation, understanding and articulation of the human condition. I will also indicate how the ethical-existential claims inherent to *Eternal Sunshine*’s mobilization of postures are not only a question of their narrative concretization but also the unique filmic representation of postures (Chapter 6, Section 5). The postural profile of *Eternal Sunshine* will, furthermore, be shown to be a potent analytic framework for in-depth narratological interpretations (Chapter 6, Section 4) as well as reflections on the film’s valuable construal of selfhood (Chapter 6, Section 6).

³⁰ The theory can therefore be used to critically diagnose narrowed or one-sided postural conceptions in discourses of various kinds (Visagie 2004:1-2). If we take the dark postures, for example, Existentialism has made a lot of the posture of meaninglessness, while mostly neglecting the others; Eastern philosophies tend to over-emphasize on the occurrence and extent of ‘suffering’; whereas the Judeo-Christian tradition gives central importance to the posture of guilt. And while Marxism, on the ‘light side’ of the postural spectrum, idealizes the ordinary posture of work, Neo-Marxists (like Herbert Marcuse) perhaps overcompensate with their fixation on the parallel posture of play. Likewise a narrative will invariably make its ‘pick’ from postural reality. One example being Charles Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (Chapter 5) that, although not explored in postural terms, constantly returns to the postural pairing of being at work and being at home (as the place of play, rest).

Chapter 3

Macro-Motives I: *The Man who shot Liberty Valance*

1. Introduction

It has become commonplace practice for philosophers to view some popular film as representing an established piece of philosophy. We find one example in Wartenberg (2007:4-9) who supports the view that films can be vivid and engaging embodiments of philosophical ideas with a brief analysis of *The man who shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford 1962). He claims that this classic Western tale presents “*its own version*” of Friedrich Nietzsche’s critique of progress – specifically how Hegel overlooks the actual costs of historical ‘advances’ (Wartenberg 2007:5). A “*quite abstract philosophical debate*” such as Nietzsche’s problematization of historical advancement is therefore captured and strikingly expressed in this ironic tale of a changing Wild West (Wartenberg 2007:8). For him, it is not just that it is an illustration of Nietzsche’s views, but that these ideas are uniquely concretized in an engaging film narrative.³¹

On another occasion, however, Wartenberg (2005:270, 272) himself points out that more attention should be given to the grounds upon which these kind of interpretative practices take place. So the purpose of the following analysis is not to dispute Wartenberg’s findings, but rather to explore the *underlying conceptual conditions* that *allow him to identify* in the film what he does. I want to show that his specific interpretation – which sees *Liberty Valance* as expressing a (Nietzschean) critique of the idea of progress – relies on certain *more fundamental* concepts that the narrative is anchored in. I will also consider how the same concepts can accommodate further readings, pointing to the presence of *other* bits of philosophy in the film. The theory of Macro-motives will be used to identify these ground concepts. They form an important part of what can be called the film’s ‘philosophical deep-structure’. I believe that an attempt to systematically elucidate this deep-structure will help us to better understand how different philosophical discourses can all find ‘entry’ into a film like *Liberty Valance*. This analysis will in fact suggest that specific philosophical ideas attributed to the film are not really present in it at all. For the film does not embody a specific philosophical theory or point of view as such, but rather gives form to more general *philosophically relevant concepts*. And whenever *Liberty Valance* is said to ‘illustrate’ some philosophy, it is in fact these concepts that are uniquely ‘mobilized’ and

³¹ I should, however, add that the supposed ‘Nietzschean’ element of Wartenberg’s argument is dealt with in a rather casual fashion. For example, in his brief analysis of how *Liberty Valance* undermines the idea of progress, no reference is made to any work of Nietzsche. So while I do acknowledge his mentioning of Nietzsche, I will nevertheless (much like Wartenberg does) treat the film as only presenting a general *critique of progress* – as opposed to a very specific articulation of certain Nietzschean views.

appropriated by such interpretations. My hope is that these findings will cast a fresh perspective on what it means for philosophy to be ‘in’ a film.

2. Nature and Culture in *Liberty Valance*

A macro-motive analysis such as this requires first that a basic distinction be drawn between two ways in which macros are built into the philosophical deep-structure of a film. To begin with, all the macros can be said have an *implicit* or *latent* presence here: in the same way that these authoritative entities make up our life-worlds, they also unavoidably constitute any narrative-world that a film may present to us. It is therefore impossible for *Liberty Valance*, for example, not to proceed on the basis of the foundational ontological categories that these themes represent. From ‘behind the scenes’, Nature, Knowledge, Power, Personhood and Culture, in this broad sense, find constant and necessary expression in practically everything we encounter in the narrative.

But the deep-structure functioning of macros can also take on the stronger form of decided *motives* in a film. This involves the thematization of certain *leading* macros that give more explicit *direction* to the film’s settings, characters and their actions. Of particular interest is the way in which such macros interact with one another and the consequent ‘logic’ that they evince as a result. These leading macro complexes in a film also typically involve and appropriate implicit macros through which they then exert their influence. It may furthermore be the case that leading macros are not just thematized by the film as *neutral motives*, but as distinctly *ideological motives* which disrupt and undermine their balance with other macros and represent dominant over-idealizations in the narrative. The underlying macro-dynamics of a film therefore primarily revolve around the nature of its leading macros. They are central ground concepts in a deep-structure which not only constitutes the film-narrative itself but also the ways in which we may philosophically reflect on it.

What are the leading macro-motives at play in *Liberty Valance*? I believe that they can be traced back to a much broader typification of the Western as a genre. It is generally accepted that the Western is characterized by an ever recurring struggle between ‘wilderness’ and ‘civilization’, the desert and the garden, the West and the East. The tension between these two forces in the Western tends to find some form of expression in its themes, its definitions of characters and the status of its various settings (Nelmes 2003:63; O’Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008:242-243; Kitses

2004).³² Yet our theoretical tool allows us to rather easily ‘translate’ this continual theme as being a genre-specific manifestation of the motives of Nature in opposition to Culture (as a version of the macro of Power). In saying this one obviously does not want to reduce every single Western to a simple duo of timeless and universal themes. It should rather be seen that, in the Western specifically, these two perennial macro-themes find relatively unique identities, especially in their relation to each another. Here we find Nature as something that is free and boundless, wild, unpredictable, sometimes even erratic and dangerous; in contrast to Culture that brings with it technological development, law and order, but also the dark antithesis of restriction, control and often corruption. Furthermore the faces of these two macros will also shift from one Western to another. The difference between what Slotkin (1998:379) identifies as the ‘town-tamer’- and the ‘outlaw’ Western offers a good example of this.³³ In terms of the conflicting relationship between Nature and Culture, the ‘town-tamer’ gives us a positive estimation of the force of Culture which ensures safety and order in a wild and dangerous Nature. The ‘outlaw’ Western, in contrast, evaluates the advance of Culture as an oppressive encroachment upon the freedom and beauty of Nature and as a result celebrates those ‘outlaws’ who rebel against it. Yet irrespective of the particular thematic accents that different Western tales may have, the root presence of these two foundational macros appears to remain intact.

The man who shot Liberty Valence is certainly no exception to this as Nature and Culture stand central to the ‘groundwork’ that upholds various aspects of this celebrated ‘revisionist Western’. As will be seen, their unique deep-structure presence not only acts as a structuring core to the narrative but also a conceptual centre towards which various philosophical interpretations of the film gravitate. I will proceed by first showing how the contrast between Nature and Culture inspires various tensions witnessed between the (a) two main settings – the town of Shinbone, past and present – and (b) the two leading characters of the film. Then I will investigate how these ground concepts facilitate different philosophical readings of the film.

³² This tension that characterizes fictional Westerns has a close affiliation to (highly questionable) historical discourses of the Western frontier that, for example, claim how ‘civilizing forces’ overcame the ‘savagery’ of Native Americans and conquered the wilderness. More generally this tension possibly springs from a primordial type of worldview which (incorrectly) views cultural advance as inherently opposed to that which is natural and vice versa.

³³ According to Slotkin (1998:379) these are two Western story-forms which address a complex of ‘ideological problems’ relating to social justice. The ‘town tamer’ Western claims that social injustice is imposed by powerful criminals. It is up to the hero to ‘tame the town’: he defeats the enemies, empowers the ‘decent folks’ and brings progress to the frontier. The ‘outlaw’ Western criticizes this point of view by putting the blame on the agents of ‘progress’. This story-type depicts the root of social injustice as lying in the powerful institutions (such as the railroad) which come with societal growth.

2.1 Nature and Culture in settings

In terms of its setting the film mainly deals with the fictional town of Shinbone in two distinct eras: the time *before* and *after* the train arrived. This ‘event’ neatly separates the orders of Nature and Culture that have prevailed over the town.³⁴ The narrative starts and ends in ‘the present day’ Shinbone, the ‘age of the train’. Embedded in between is the tale of ‘the man who shot Liberty Valance’, a long flashback-recounting of the former Shinbone and how it came to see the establishment of the law. The uncultivated and lawless Shinbone of the past is fundamentally characterized by Nature, revealing itself as wild and untamed; while the presence of technology, law and order in the present-day Shinbone is clearly inspired by the motive of Culture. So we have an instance where the leading macro-motives of the film exert themselves via an implicit macro, namely that of Society. These motives disclose themselves respectively in the *kinds* of society that Shinbone has been and therefore typify the two main settings of the film – when considered exclusively in macro-terms – as a ‘Natured society’ and a ‘Cultured society’.

There is a clear contrasting of these two Shinbones, thereby revealing the conflict of the underlying motives which characterize each setting, past and present. In the course of the narrative we see that the ‘Natured society’ is, quite literally, book ended by the image of a steam train and by implication, the era of a ‘Cultured society’ which it represents. It is clear which of these two forces has prevailed: within the context of civilization the wilderness has been reduced to a mere memory.³⁵ Yet despite this the civilized Shinbone cannot fully suppress an unrelenting nostalgia concerning the wilderness that was. In the opening sequences the large steam train brings renowned U.S. senator Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart) and his wife of twenty-five years, Hallie (Vera Miles), into the Shinbone station. Soon Hallie, in conversation with an aged Marshal Appleyard (Andy Devine), reminisces about the changes which she sees around her: “*The place has sure changed. Churches, high school, shops...*” “*Well the railroad done that*”, the Marshal replies, as the howling of the train in the background seems to serve as an intrusive reminder. In this moment of repressed melancholia we again find these two eras (of wilderness and civilization) pitted against one another. “*The desert’s still the same*”, the Marshal adds, thereby implying that the worthless barren earth at least serves as a memory of the Shinbone of old. Hallie comments that the cactus rose is in blossom, whereupon the Marshal suggests that they take a ride out to the desert and, “*maybe take a look around*”. They both, however, understand the purpose of the ride to be a visit to the ruins of Tom Doniphon’s (John Wayne) old

³⁴ The arrival of the ‘iron horse’ has long been accepted as an ‘archetypal’ Western symbol for progress and, more generally, the advancement of civilization.

³⁵ Considering that *Liberty Valance* mostly consists of one character’s flashback narration, Langford (2003:28) notes the significance of a narrative that, in essence, unfolds “*in a few snatched hours between arrival and departure.*”

house – surrounded by wild cactus flowers in full bloom. Once in the wilderness, music is introduced, significantly, for the first time in the narrative. It is also noteworthy, in terms of these two conflicting worlds, that this scene ends with a somewhat abrupt cut (also of the music) to a confined newspaper’s office where Senator Stoddard is talking politics.

The end of the film offers similar contrasts. Back on the train to the East, Hallie tries to console her husband: “*It was once a wilderness, now it’s a garden. Aren’t you proud?*” The irony of this is finally underlined by the train conductor’s praise of the Senator: “*Nothing’s too good for the man who shot Liberty Valance.*” The couple’s stunned expressions reveal the acknowledgement that the ‘world-after-the-train-arrived’ is based on a lie – since it is not the celebrated Senator (but rather, as was eventually revealed, Tom Doniphon) who killed the infamous Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin).³⁶

2.2 Nature and Culture in characters

The Nature-Culture opposition arguably finds its strongest expression in the two protagonists of the film. As Pearson Jr. (2007:24) notes, these characters are “*openly allegorical*” and invite us to “*... scrutinize their motivations and try to understand the implications of their actions.*” It is therefore not hard to see how Tom Doniphon and Ransom Stoddard are each aligned with Nature and Culture respectively, inspiring essential differences that we witness in them. Doniphon, the rough and tough homesteader, is the ‘real cowboy’ and epitomizes a lot of what is typically understood by the ‘Wild West’; in contrast the bright but ‘tenderfoot’ lawyer Stoddard stands for many values of the ‘civilized East’ from where he comes. There is something of an underlying ethos to each of these characters, revealing an allegiance to the ‘logic’ inherent to either Nature or Culture. This can be seen in the following examples:

- When he first comes to Shinbone, Stoddard, fresh out of Law School, is unable to stand up against Liberty Valance as he becomes a victim of the outlaw’s notorious whip. Tom Doniphon, on the other hand, appears to be the only man of whom Liberty Valance is fearful of. On two occasions Doniphon comes to the rescue of Stoddard when confronted by Valance: the first time, less so, in the diner where Stoddard works as a waiter (which

³⁶ Even in Shinbone ‘before the law’ we see this ongoing pattern of elements being structured around Nature in contrast to Culture. (Redding 2007:318). When Ransom Stoddard as a young man first comes to this town somewhere in the American southwest, it is at the center of a political struggle between the lawless cattle barons and the newly arrived population of smaller farmers. We see how the cattle barons rally for the region to remain a free territory in opposition to those who seek more control and regulation under a state. Being aligned with the principles of ‘savage’ Nature the cattle barons seek violence and force to have their way. Hence we find that they exert their intimidation through the ruthless Liberty Valance.

is quite an ‘unmanly’ job in this context). The second time is the standoff between Stoddard and Valence where Doniphon, from the shadows, shoots and kills Liberty Valence without anybody seeing him.

- Early on the idealistic newcomer Stoddard does want to resort to violence and kill Valence – he wants justice done by getting Liberty behind bars. Doniphon reacts by whipping out his gun: “*I know those law books mean a lot to you, but not out here. Out here a man settles his own problems.*” Stoddard is stunned: “*Do you know what you’re saying to me – you’re saying just exactly what Liberty Valence said. What kind of community have I come to? ...the only advice you can give to me is to carry a gun? Well I’m a lawyer! Ransom Stoddard, attorney at law!*”
- Stoddard initially does not want a gun. Later it comes to light that he succumbed to the pressure and has acquired one. But, unlike the real cowboy, he cannot shoot to save his life.
- In contrast to Doniphon, we see in Stoddard an appreciation of and conformance to cultural institutions: Law School has clearly given him a reverence for *justice* and *the law*. He reaches out to the illiterate and starts a small *school* in town – we also see Doniphon interrupting one such meeting, to send his school-going worker, Pompey (Woody Strode), back to work. He strikes an agreement with the local *press* whereby he shares an office with the *Shinbone Star* and works in partnership with the local journalist, Mr. Peabody (Edmond O’Brien). He also agrees to his nomination and election as a delegate for the territorial convention for *statehood*, an opportunity that Doniphon refuses. Stoddard eventually wins the vote for statehood and becomes its first governor.

Doniphon and Stoddard therefore represent the film’s leading macros, Nature and Culture, in the form of two clashing *personalities*. This particular embodiment of the two motives can thus be seen as operating through yet another implicit macro in the film-world: Personhood. In pure macro-terms we may refer to Doniphon (being emblematic of the ‘Natured society’ of the past) as the ‘Natured person’ or ‘-character’ and the out-of-place Stoddard as the ‘Cultured person’, who eventually ushers Shinbone in as a ‘Cultured society’. But it appears that, specifically in the film’s characters, the motives of Nature and Culture gain further distinct *accents* – qualities that can be explained in terms of other macros. Put differently, in their expression through the

characters, these macros gain certain leading features by involving and incorporating other macros in their inner make-up. The intelligent Stoddard brims with knowledge but is physically weak and incompetent; Doniphon evidently has the strength and skill to deal with the challenges of the West, yet he can hardly read. In its particular utilization of the motives of Nature and Culture, *Liberty Valance* therefore calls upon the latent macros of Power and Knowledge to typify what the leading macro-motives in its characters are essentially about. In this narrative we are therefore especially concerned with the *power* inherent in Nature and the *knowledge* indicative of Culture. Hence we can spell out the ground macro-designations of our two heroes as a 'Powerful-Natured person' and a 'Knowledgeable-Cultured person'.

3. *Liberty Valance* as a critique of progress

So far we have seen how the leading macro-motives of Nature and Culture, as the central cogs in *Liberty Valance*'s deep-structure, determine various narrative-thematic aspects of the film. But how can the macro-analysis up to here shed more light on Wartenberg's reading of *Liberty Valance* as a story about *progress*? This question compels us to consider significant *interactions* between the leading macros, as this forms an important part of how films actually construe the macro-themes that they mobilize. It appears that Wartenberg's interpretation relies on the most striking of these interactions in the film: *Culture overcomes Nature*. One order replaces another. We get to know Shinbone 'before-' and 'after-the-train-arrived' and between 'then' and 'now' we witness education brought to the illiterate, the expansion of the press, the demise of the lawless Liberty Valance and eventually an open range territory that becomes a state. We see the "transition from the gun-toting age of Western cowboys and bandits to the civilized order associated with the East and the coming of the law (Wartenberg 2007:5)."

Thinking of progress as moving from a natural state to that of civilization is, of course, not uncommon. In Book III of Plato's *The Laws*, for example, we are given an explanation of human progress as a gradual stage-by-stage movement from a state of simplicity, stripped of all culture and knowledge, to increasingly complex and higher forms of civilization (Nisbet 2009:27-32). And in the likes of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau we find the assumption that civil society exists in contrast to a (hypothetical) 'state of nature'. Perhaps more troublesome is Frederick Jackson Turner's influential definition of American 'development' as the colonization of the Great West, defining its progressing frontier line as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization (Turner 2008:1, 3)."

Wartenberg (2007:5), in similar vein, points out how the typical American view of the ‘taming of the West’ relies on an implicit idea of progress. And presumably it is this same progress that the film exhibits: the progress of Culture overcoming Nature. It is however crucial to note that this is a very decided definition of progress: ‘progress’ can, after all, also refer to growth of knowledge, rationality or consciousness, technological innovation or moral advancement. But Nature and Culture, as core ‘deep structure’ components, draw tight boundaries around what ‘progress’ can actually mean in *Liberty Valance*. One might even be tempted to say that the film does not depict ‘progress’ as such but a transition from Nature to Culture which in turn can be taken as a story of progress – a restricted, even problematic, kind of progress in this case. Whichever way you look at it, the larger point remains: the film can only depict its ‘version’ of progress on the basis of what these more fundamental concepts offer.

How does this, however, account for the fact that Wartenberg sees *Liberty Valance* not just as a story of progress, but as a (Nietzschean) *questioning* or *critique* of historical advancement? Wartenberg (2007:5) explains:

“In the course of the film, we are led from the dominant view that the spread of the law to the West marked an important advance in human attainments to the contrary perspective: that the replacement of the gun by law resulted in the triumph of less than admirable human capacities, including deception, over some more honorable traits, such as honour and valour. Because the film personifies these two principles in Wayne and Stewart, the story of the defeat of Wayne by Stewart vividly demonstrates the human costs of the so-called civilizing process.”

Here ‘Culture overcoming Nature’ gets a *negative evaluation* in consideration of the ironic (ex)change of fates for the characters who personify these conflicting motives. Stoddard’s rise is coupled with, and is arguably at the expense of, Doniphon’s fall. The key event that initiates this reversal of fortunes is the killing of Liberty Valance. Valance’s death is initially attributed to Stoddard’s lucky shot in a standoff but is later revealed to be result of Doniphon’s bullet from a dark alley. Stoddard is now incorrectly hailed as ‘the man who shot Liberty Valance’, the fame for which enables him to ascend through the political ranks and eventually become a senator. A more immediate result is that he also wins the affection of Doniphon’s fiancée, Hallie. Doniphon’s discovery of *this* leads, in turn, to his steady decline: he succumbs to the bottle,

burns down the house that he built for Hallie and eventually ends up, bootless, in an anonymous coffin.³⁷ The ‘Cultured society’ thus comes to supplant the ‘Natured society’ and the characters that represent these guiding motives neatly reflect the same transition. In the microcosm of these two characters’ lives we see how Nature is eclipsed by Culture, as the wild cowboy is replaced by the ‘tenderfoot’ lawyer. And it all seems so wrong. The real hero is never acknowledged for what he did; and the famous senator’s career is built on the untruth that he killed Liberty Valance. A wilderness left behind; a civilization built on deception.³⁸ To make matters worse, it is the ‘Natured character’ who helps and enables the ‘Cultured character’ to prevail³⁹, yet the entire order that Doniphon stands for falls as a result. This injustice is perhaps also affirmed by the mentioned sense of *loss* suggested in the nostalgic opening and closing sequences of the film. The reign of Culture comes at a definite cost.

In interpreting the narrative as dealing with progress, Wartenberg thus singles out a major interaction between the macros: that of Culture overcoming Nature. His assessment of the film as specifically a *questioning* of progress involves making a certain *judgement of this interaction*: he points out the supposedly tragic exchange between (notably the characters representing) the motives of Nature and Culture, resulting in the irretrievable loss of the goodness associated with Nature.⁴⁰ This conclusion, to my mind, evidences a certain valuing, even idealization, of Nature over Culture. Wartenberg’s description of the establishment of the law as the “*triumph of less than admirable human capacities, including deception, over some more admirable traits, such as honour and valour* (Wartenberg 2007:5)”, perhaps reflects an unjustified contempt for the effects of Culture – a position not shared by more sensitive commentaries on the film. As will still be seen, this is but one way of looking at the course of events. *Liberty Valance* leaves considerable room for additional ways in which the two macros could interrelate.

³⁷ Yawn and Beatty (1996:11) explain in somewhat more ‘universal’ terms how the death of Valance is coupled with Doniphon’s demise: “... *Doniphon’s value is predicated on the existence of men like Liberty Valance. Doniphon is the counterforce to evil in the West, and without Valance, a counterforce is superfluous. In this regard Stoddard is a greater threat to Doniphon than Valance, for under a society civilized by the Stoddards of the world, Doniphon has no place; but in a society characterised by barbarism, Doniphon is needed to effect a sense of equilibrium.*” For this reason *Liberty Valance* could be labeled as an ‘end-of-the-line’ Western, since we have a protagonist, a man of the Wild West, who runs out of time and space in a developing society which cannot accommodate him anymore (Langford 2003:29).

³⁸ This deception is also reaffirmed by the famous line from the newspaper editor who rejects the true version of Senator Stoddard’s rise to fame: “*This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend...*”

³⁹ Doniphon saves Stoddard’s life at least twice: when he finds the battered young lawyer in the desert and when he intervenes in the stand-off with Liberty Valance. By killing Valance he also helps to ‘establish the law’ in Shinbone. Furthermore Doniphon himself pushes the young lawyer into making the most of his misattributed fame and to press on for statehood. See also Redding (2007:319) who notes that at different times Doniphon *willingly and deliberately* concedes power to Stoddard.

⁴⁰ Wartenberg for example also points out how the press in the modern ‘Cultured society’ is more concerned with maintaining myths than exposing the truth – which is in obvious contrast to some courageous journalism that we witness in the ‘Natured society’ earlier on (2007:8).

But here I am not so much interested in the nature of the interpretation as I am in the conceptual conditions that facilitate the interpretation. Macro-motive theory points toward the contrasting motives of Nature and Culture as a conceptual foundation allowing Wartenberg to identify the film as a version of progress criticized. Bearing in mind their deeply formative presence in the narrative as such, these leading motives in many ways determine what any particular instance of ‘philosophy’ recognized in the film will look like. They fundamentally outline how philosophical ideas and procedures will play out in the film. Hence Wartenberg can only find in *Liberty Valance* the kind of progress that its macro-dynamics allow; the film can only articulate ‘progress’ in terms motivated by its deep-structure arrangement of Nature and Culture. Admittedly different philosophical interpretations of the film will be aligned with different elements or moments within this broader deep-structure framework. Wartenberg’s reading specifically calls upon the macro-relation of Culture overcoming Nature, and critically details the costs of this ‘advance’ by focusing only on the honorable features that Nature inspires in the narrative. Other interpretations will again ‘mobilize’ and ‘link up’ with different aspects of the film’s core macro-arrangements. What will nevertheless remain constant, irrespective of different interpretational accents, are the film’s leading motives, laying a conceptual foundation upon which such philosophical engagements with *Liberty Valance* are realized. So let us now consider how these macro-underpinnings could similarly account for further philosophical interpretations of the film.

4. *Liberty Valance* as a ‘deconstruction’

The macro-conflict at the heart of *Liberty Valance* admittedly allows for more nuanced interpretations of their interrelations. One may even conclude the film to be something of a *deconstruction*: a variety of subtle contradictions not only problematizes a rash dualistic distinction between the ‘Natured-’ and ‘Cultured character’, but more significantly points toward a counter-relation that breaks down Culture’s supposed ascendancy over Nature. Yet even close readings that see the film as ‘deconstructing’ certain relations between Nature and Culture remain predicated on the constitutive presence of these two macro-motives in the narrative itself.⁴¹

⁴¹ I am acutely aware of the fact that I am using the notion of ‘deconstruction’ in the loosest, most popular sense possible. And for the sake of a brief argument I would like to keep it at just that. Also note that, among the rich variety of things in the film that arguably begs for ‘deconstruction’, I limit this particular account to the matter at hand – the macro-dichotomy of Nature and Culture.

Redding's (2007) account of the film⁴², for example, makes it clear that the narrative contrast between Nature and Culture is not at all definite and remains ambiguous at best. While acknowledging the film to be "*beautifully structured around the theme of doubles, each symbolically aligned with either 'savagery' or 'civilisation'* (2007:318)", he quickly departs from the temptation to align the film's leading characters with either Nature or Culture *exclusively*. He identifies Tom Doniphon as the classic frontier hero who stands *in-between* a savage wilderness and civilization. Hence he is both savage *and* civilized, a mixture of Nature and Culture, if you like. "*He can read, for example, but not very well. He owns cattle, but his ranch is small. He lives in the desert, but sympathizes with the townsfolk. He can handle a gun, but puts his gun in the service of the law. He brings a wild desert rose to his lover, Hallie* (Redding 2007:319)." It also turns out that Stoddard is not the pure tenderfoot that we so easily would like to make him. "*Nobody fights my fights*", the determined lawyer lashes out at Doniphon after being humiliated in the restaurant. And to tame the West, Stoddard eventually decides to face up to Valence and thereby become a little bit savage himself. The character governed by the motive of Culture eventually becomes infused with Nature (Redding 2007:319; Livingstone 2009:221).⁴³ The film thus rightly avoids exclusive macro-characterizations of its protagonists, since Doniphon's character involves aspects of Culture, just as Stoddard's reveals traces of Nature. In doing so this revisionist Western tears down a *dualistic division* of Nature and Culture to which the genre can easily succumb.

More generally the film can also be taken as deconstructing the supremacy often ascribed to the Culture motive in Western 'myth'. Such a primacy is evident in the deep-structure claim that *Culture overcomes Nature*. Yet in *Liberty Valance* this dominating relation is challenged by a further interaction between its macros: we also see that *Nature empowers Culture*. Ransom Stoddard is, despite his faith in the law, forced to fight the West with the 'law of the West' and thereby concedes that "*civilization depends on a small homeopathic injection of savagery* (Redding 2007:319)." Culture relies on Nature insofar as the Cultured character has to resort to the 'ways' of Nature to bring about a Cultured society. In fact he, very literally, relies on Nature through the interventions of Tom Doniphon. Stoddard does not have what it takes to overcome Liberty Valance. The villain – who personifies the absolute savagery of a lawless Nature – is ultimately defeated by the gun of the 'noble savage' (Ryan 1996:37). Yet this deconstructive moment requires us to consider how the darker side of Nature also finds expression in the

⁴² Redding (2007) describes *Liberty Valance* as a self-conscious undermining of the frontier myth that has so persistently defined the American self-conception. The film "*acknowledges that the frontier struggle between savagery and civilization no longer provides mythic sustenance for the America of the 1960's* (Redding 2007:318)."

⁴³ Redding (2007:319) sees Stoddard's crossing of the line into savagery when, after being ridiculed by a 'shooting lesson', he sucker-punches Doniphon.

admirable Doniphon.⁴⁴ There is nothing noble about the way in which he kills Valance. By shooting Valance from the shadows Doniphon can be said to break a ‘natural law’ that at least grants every man a fair fight (Ryan 1996:37). So it is not just that Culture defeats unbridled savagery with noble savagery, but that it steepens to the same repulsive depths as the enemy whom it defeats. The issue, according to Ryan (1996:37-38), is “... that ‘civilization’ defeats the savage by becoming like the savage, which is to say that the violence that founds ‘civilization’ (and the legal order at its heart) is one that at the same time problematizes the whole distinction between ‘civilization’ and its Other, and problematizes the whole justification for its existence. ‘Civilisation’ cannot recognize this, for to do so would mean no longer recognizing itself.”⁴⁵

Interpreting the film as a ‘deconstructive argument’ involves pointing out that, while the narrative privileges the motive of Culture by positing that ‘Culture overcomes Nature’, this primacy is at one and the same time relativized by a concurrent ground-relation whereby ‘Nature empowers Culture’.⁴⁶ As a result we encounter a ‘Cultured society’ which, at its originating core, hides that selfsame savage order of Nature that it had sought to overcome. Civilization can only be established through that to which it is opposed. This leaves us with an uneasy, ‘blended’ vision of the conflicting forces of Nature and Culture – there is no moral victor between the two, nor can we even clearly distinguish between them. But the philosophical groundwork upon which this kind of ‘close reading’ is negotiated remains unchanged. Irrespective of whether Doniphon, for instance, is the ‘Natured character’ *in contrast* to Culture, or a mixture of Nature *and* Culture, these apparently inescapable ground concepts still constitute the options involved. ‘*Liberty Valance* as a deconstruction’ requires one to look *differently* at the determining macro-themes involved. It requires closer attention to the complexity and reciprocal nature of their interaction. But the point is that you will be looking at *macros* nonetheless. They delineate the grounds upon which the narrative plays out. As a conceptual precondition, Nature and Culture represent central *terms* in which the film can be said to deconstruct.

⁴⁴ Wartenberg (2007:5), referring to Doniphon as “*the real cowboy*” and an “*admirable man*”, explains the establishment of law in *Liberty Valance* as the “*triumph of less than admirable human capacities, including deception, over some more admirable traits, such as honour and valour.*” Yet our Natured hero reveals a ‘shadow side’ which surely draws the moral status of this cowboy into question. Firstly, he disregards the importance of an education for his worker, Pompey, as he interrupts Stoddard’s school session and orders Pompey back to work (Livingstone 2009:222). Secondly, in the company of his love, Hallie, Doniphon tends to reveal a patronizing sexist attitude. (Like for example telling her, “*You’re awful pretty when you get mad.*”). And thirdly, in terms of his sense of justice, Doniphon does not appear to be too troubled by Valance’s crimes. We can also assume that before Stoddard’s arrival, he has done little about the troublesome Valance (Livingstone 2009:221). His primary concerns are to merely go about his horse-trading business and to slowly woo Hallie. These things, of course, make it much harder to adhere to an interpretation of the film as mourning the death of an admirable cowboy hero.

⁴⁵ I should, however, add that Ryan (1996) is not primarily concerned with the Nature-Culture dichotomy. He, more specifically, sees the film’s consistent problematizing of the distinction between the ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ as giving it a “*deconstructive dimension*” (1996:26).

⁴⁶ There is also a different ‘deconstructive route’ whereby the film possibly undermines the primacy of Culture. Despite its obvious defeat, Nature still defies Culture through a lingering, almost haunting, presence in both memory and conscience. It never entirely goes away. This suggests yet another interaction between the film’s leading macros, namely that that aspects of Nature (like the memory of Tom Doniphon) *elude* or even *transcend* Culture.

5. *Liberty Valance*, negative liberty and value pluralism

A third interpretation views *Liberty Valance* as exhibiting certain key ideas of philosopher, political theorist and historian, Isaiah Berlin (O'Neill 2004). Again we will see that the specific viewpoint that the film is claimed to express, does not drift far from its apparent philosophical base – especially, in this case, the role of Nature as a leading motive.

O'Neill (2004:473) notes that around the time John Ford was making *The man who shot Liberty Valance*, Berlin delivered his classic Oxford lecture, titled *Two concepts of liberty*. On the one hand O'Neill (2004:474-475; 479) believes that Berlin's work offers a fruitful perspective on Ford's ideas, that it provides a vocabulary which best expresses Ford's intellectual development. But in turn *Liberty Valance*, in its own way, serves as a unique exhibition of some of Berlin's ideas. The film thus becomes “*a cinematic arena for his ideas to play out* (O'Neill 2004:475).” The two main ideas which are dealt with are those of ‘negative liberty’ and ‘value pluralism’.

For O'Neill Berlin's notion of ‘negative liberty’ can help us to come to terms with the moral ambivalence resulting from the Nature motive in the film. Negative liberty is defined as freedom from, or the absence of, externally imposed constraints. In such a state someone is left to do what he is able to do without the interference of others. A world of perfect negative liberty would be what is generally referred to as a ‘state of nature’ (O'Neill 2004:488). It would thus not be unreasonable to assume this concept of negative liberty to, at root, have an affinity with the macro-motive of Nature. This is perhaps not a straightforward affinity. But when drawn into the context of *Liberty Valance* its potential connections with Nature is easily realized: ‘negative liberty’ is the absolute freedom resulting from a limit-free Nature – the conceptual counterpoint to a restrictive Culture. In having to answer to its unique deep-structure dynamics, this understanding of freedom cannot but ‘enter’ the film-world via the ‘logic of unboundedness’ of its Nature motive.

This allows O'Neill to characterize Shinbone-before-the-law as being in a ‘state of nature’. Of course it cannot literally be so, because it is still a society. But it is a ‘Natured society’ governed by negative liberty. And its negative liberty draws our attention not only to the virtues and vices of such a community, but also to how Nature, more generally, involves both the good and the bad. In the film we encounter *two* ‘Natured characters’. The heroic Doniphon may be said to represent the virtues that thrive under negative liberty. Although he lives outside any law, he is not opposed to the law; he observes something of an unwritten ‘natural law’. “*He is a man of honor*,

and he asks nothing more than to be allowed to run his ranch – and his life – with as little interference as possible (O’Neill 2004:486).” Yet this very same freedom breeds villains such as Liberty Valance. It is precisely the ‘liberty’ which he enjoys that makes Valance the hated character that he is. “*He represents the extreme negative liberty found in a state of nature* (O’Neill 2004:488).” Although it is then clear that such extreme ‘Liberty’ must be killed off, there is still a great ambiguity to the kind of characters inspired by Nature: “...*many different things can flourish side-by-side in a pre-law state of nature – both the flower (Tom Doniphon) and the cactus (Liberty Valance)* (O’Neill 2004:487).”⁴⁷

We are thus left with mixed feelings about Nature’s ensuing fate. For O’Neill this opens the door to the concept of ‘value pluralism’. Whereas ‘monism’, according to Berlin, can be defined as the view that there is ultimately only a single true answer to any problem, ‘pluralism’ posits that two or more answers can exist which are equally valid, yet completely incompatible with one another (O’Neill 2004:474). O’Neill illustrates this by comparing, as many others do, *Liberty Valance* to an earlier John Ford classic, *My Darling Clementine* (1946).⁴⁸ “*My Darling Clementine is a perfect example of what Berlin would characterize as a ‘monist’ view of the world* (O’Neill 2004:485).” In *My Darling Clementine* it is the extreme freedom of the wilderness (Nature) that fosters the likes of the evil Clantons and the goodness of civilization (Culture) is seen as the single, unquestioned answer to this problem. The film presents no ‘down-side’ to the eradication of the Clanton family, as the embodiment of an anarchistic negative liberty – it simply ushers in the peace and progress of civilization into town (O’Neill 2004:485, 489).⁴⁹ The ‘pluralist’ reply of *Liberty Valance*, however, is that “... *the conditions that fostered an extreme state of negative liberty produce not just the evil personified by the Clantons and Liberty Valance, but they also produce the virtues personified by Tom Doniphon* (O’Neill 2004:489).” As the film so poignantly shows, the end of ‘Liberty’ spells the end for both vice and virtue in a lawless Nature. Both the evil- and the good ‘Natured characters’ come to a fall. This is not to say that the negative liberty of Shinbone should have persisted – this ‘Liberty’ had to be defeated. The point is rather that the benefit thereof also came at a sad, inevitable loss.

⁴⁷ But O’Neill is not blind to Doniphon’s flaws and sees him and Valance as not being complete opposites: “*Doniphon, no less than Valance, insists that the rule of law Stoddard is attempting to establish has no relevance for Shinbone. Doniphon, no less than Valance, mocks the law books Stoddard brings from the East. Doniphon, no less than Valance, continually reminds Stoddard that he does not belong in Shinbone...* (O’Neill 2004:489).” Yet their differences – and Doniphon’s virtues – are based in what they do with their liberty: “... *while Liberty Valance uses his negative liberty to terrorize others, Doniphon uses that same negative liberty to pursue a peaceful, productive life* (O’Neill 2004:489).”

⁴⁸ “*At first blush, The man who shot Liberty Valance could be mistaken for a remake of My Darling Clementine. On the surface Ford just substitutes Shinbone for Tombstone, the evil Liberty Valance for the evil Clantons, and lawman Ranse Stoddard for lawman Wyatt Earp... But Liberty Valance has something Clementine lacks: the character of Tom Doniphon... The presence of Tom Doniphon adds layers of complexity to the story.* (O’Neill 2004:486).”

⁴⁹ Incidentally Slotkin (1998:379) identifies *My Darling Clementine*, along with *Dodge City* (Michael Curtiz 1939), as classic examples of the ‘town-tamer’ Western. This Western story-type uncritically presents civilization as a noble force which rids ‘decent folks’ from those tribulations associated with the Wild West.

This, for Berlin, is pluralism's deeply unsettling challenge to the monistic tendency of Western thought: all good things are not necessarily compatible. In terms of the film's guiding motives, we perhaps can say that both the orders of Nature (which allows negative liberty) and Culture (which negates negative liberty) have validity – yet, in representing two incompatible ideals, they remain at odds with one another. “*You not only cannot eliminate the vices of Liberty Valence without losing the virtues of Tom Doniphon; you also cannot establish a modern society without being forced to accept both the pollution of the railroad and the alienation inherent to a community that neither knows nor cares whether Tom Doniphon is dead or alive* (O’Neill 2004:491-492).” Thus, Berlin would conclude, we cannot escape the necessity of choosing (O’Neill 2004:491). And in choosing one good we invariably face the loss of another. It is thus the implications of a value pluralism that results in the tragic choice lying at the heart of *Liberty Valence*. And what is the essence of this choice? It would seem that the persistent philosophical base of the film leaves little scope for digression: either *Nature* with both its virtues and vices or *Culture* that, understandably, leaves no room for either. The ‘cinematic arena’, in which *also* Berlin’s ideas can play out, therefore still seems to stand fast on its deep-structure cornerstones of Nature and Culture.

6. *Liberty Valence* and the Platonic just soul

A final example of how the deep-structure of *Liberty Valence* can mediate philosophical interpretation comes from analyses of Heffernan (1999) and Livingstone (2009). Here *Liberty Valence* is seen as embodying aspects of classical political philosophy – particularly Platonic inspired formulations of justice. Plato famously defined the just individual in terms of the tripartite soul: reason should, through the spirited part of the soul (*thumos*), rule over the appetites. The film does not reflect these parts in a single individual but rather in the interaction of the three main characters. In their dramatic interaction, these characters act as personalized versions of the ‘just soul’: Ransom Stoddard represents reason and the rule of law; Liberty Valence symbolizes unruly passions, someone who gives unrestricted expression to his basic appetites; and Tom Doniphon acts as the ‘spiritedness’ of the soul, the locus of courage, whereby reason exercises its control over the passions (Livingstone 2009:218; Heffernan 1999).

It is useful to think of this comparison in terms of the similar ‘roles’ on both sides. In *Liberty Valence* each of the three characters fulfills a narrative function: Stoddard, like any hero, strives

for something important: 'justice'; the primary opponent of his quest is the villain, Valance; and the narrative 'helper' who enables Stoddard to realize his goal is Doniphon.⁵⁰ If we take the just soul as a kind of 'story', we find that each of its corresponding parts likewise fulfills the same function: reason strives for justice, it is opposed by the passions, and it is assisted by the spirited soul.⁵¹

From the outset of the film the *principal conflict* of 'reason' and 'the passions' (Stoddard versus Valance) is set in place. In the Senator's recounting of his arrival in Shinbone, we find that the young Stoddard and two other passengers are held-up by the infamous Valance and his gang. The retaliating Stoddard exclaims, "*What kind of men are you?*", and it seems appropriate that Valance answers by echoing, "*What kind of man are you, Dude?*" Yet this early confrontation shows the inability of reason to overcome the fierceness of the passions by itself. Although the self-proclaimed attorney lives by a much higher 'law', Valance rips his law books to pieces and uses his whip to teach the young man what he calls the "*Western law*" (Livingstone 2009:219).

Stoddard's appeal to reason and the law is useless in the face of a man whose reason is overrun by his passions. Heffernan (1999) notes that even after the beating, Stoddard still insists on Valance being imprisoned and not being shot – that he should be dealt with by the law. He is then outraged by Doniphon who claims that, "*Out here a man settles his own problems.*" This is 'a law' that is incomprehensible to reason and Stoddard remains defiant: "*Well I'm a lawyer, Ransom Stoddard, attorney at law, and the law is the only...*" At this moment the exhausted Stoddard collapses into the arms of Doniphon, and illustrates a crucial theme of the film: that Doniphon (and the spiritedness for which he stands) fulfills the role of the 'helper'. The entire narrative drifts towards Stoddard realizing that his ways (reason, the law), necessary though they may be, by themselves, not enough to overcome Liberty Valance and establish civil society. This realization reaches its climax when Stoddard faces Valance in a stand-off. He thereby acknowledges that reason alone cannot establish the law. And as events unfold, we see that it is only *by means of* spiritedness – Doniphon's intervention – that 'reason' prevails.

⁵⁰ These distinctions are based on the narrative actantial model of A.J. Greimas (1966). Also see Bal (1997:196-202) and Herman and Vervaeck (2005:52-53). The model suggests that, at the basic level where actors and events intersect, one can distinguish six different agents or 'actants': the subject, object, helper, opponent, sender and receiver. These six actants are the abstract roles or functions of the narrative that characters can fulfill. The subject carries out the (central) action and strives for a certain object. The agent that assists the helper in the quest is the helper, while the opposing or preventing agent is the opponent. Also, on a different conceptual plane, the quest is inspired and provoked by the sender and the agent who benefits from the quest is the receiver. The roles of the 'sender' and 'receiver' are however beyond the scope of my current concerns.

⁵¹ According to Pearson Jr. (2007) *Liberty Valance* presents an argument for the necessity of violence to establish justice and civilization. This view, interestingly, also reflects the same structure of narrative functions. If we see the film as claiming '*Civilization (or law), through violence, achieves justice*', then violence (embodied by Doniphon) still functions as the 'helper' that overcomes lawlessness or injustice. And this 'violence' would, of course, stem from spiritedness – the 'helper' of the just soul.

There are thus various important instances throughout the film where Doniphon comes to the aid of Stoddard – and, more generally, spiritedness stands in the service of reason:

- It is Doniphon who initially finds the battered young lawyer and brings him to Shinbone to be taken care of.
- Shortly after Stoddard's recovery he is confronted by Valance in the local restaurant. Stoddard, determined to continue waiting on tables, gets tripped by Valance – prompting Doniphon to immediately rise to his defense. With hand on holster and a brief exchange of words he apparently scares Valance away.
- During the town meeting Stoddard assumes the role of chairman whereas Doniphon automatically acts as the 'rule enforcer'. For example, he repeatedly enforces the rule that there may be no drinking until the meeting has been formally adjourned: "*You can blame you lawyer friend – he says that's one of the fundamental laws of democracy.*" Once Stoddard declares the meeting legally over it is Doniphon who 'opens the bar'. This situation illustrates beautifully how spiritedness enables reason to rule over 'the appetites' for the benefit of the political community (Livingstone 2009:321).
- In his standoff with Valance, Doniphon secretly comes to Stoddard's rescue by being 'the man who *really* shot Liberty Valance'.⁵²

The point thus made is that to establish justice and thereby a civil society, a combination of force and reason is required. "*In terms of Platonic political philosophy, the spirited part of the soul must work in concert with reason to realize justice. Specifically, spirit must submit to the rule of reason, and, just as important... reason must also recognize its dependence on spirit* (Livingstone 2009:217-218)." It can be argued that the depicted legend of 'the man who shot Liberty Valance' (the one which the newspaper editor refused to change) realizes this ideal combination of reason and spiritedness: the silent heroics of 'spiritedness' make 'reason' attractive and appealing to those that cannot do without its guidance. "*The legend's words combine Stoddard and Doniphon*

⁵² Spirited man's status as the 'helper' in the narrative is further reinforced by his "*ambiguous relation to justice* (Livingstone 2009:217)." Doniphon remains locked in his private interests. At the town meeting he gets nominated for the territorial convention but he turns it down in favor of 'personal business', namely finishing the addition to his house for his bride to be, Hallie. Later we also see that it is only for the sake of Hallie that Doniphon intervenes in the stand-off and protects Stoddard. And, at the territorial convention, he still reveals the same motivation: "*Hallie is your girl now. You taught her to read, now give her something to read about.*" Whereas 'reason' strives for justice as an end in itself, spiritedness only strives for it as a means to a lesser end – in Doniphon's case, it is beauty and love. It is for this reason that Livingstone (2009) cannot accept the widespread view that Doniphon's eclipse is a tragic mistake that somehow negates the foundations of civil society.

*into one being – the man who shot Liberty Valance – and in the eyes of the townsfolk this persona appears both beautiful and good (Livingstone 2009:225).”*⁵³

But how can all of this be accounted for by the film’s philosophical foundation as formulated thus far by Macro-motive theory? Unlike the previous case-studies we have here much more of a *cross-mapping* of parallel macro-arrangements allowing two very divergent discourses to be related to one another. This interpretation is thus allowed by certain deep-structures that the Platonic discourse and the film *share*.

For Plato each part of the soul is associated with a specific desire: reason desires knowledge and truth; spiritedness, as the seat of courage, desires self-preservation, honor and victory; and the appetitive part of the soul desires basic needs such as food, drink and sexual gratification. The appetitive soul can be said to have *natural* needs and hence, as the ‘natural part’ of the soul, to be constituted by the motive of Nature. Reason, and the truth that it desires, is inspired by the macro-motive of Knowledge. The more elusive third element of the soul which Plato identifies by the terms *thumos* and *thumoeides* can include a variety of notions such as anger, indignation, pugnacity, self-preservation, vitality, strength of will, ‘spirit’, ‘mettle’, ‘guts’, ‘heart’, ambition, enterprise and a striving for honor (Lee 1987: 66, 147-149). Yet although the ‘contents’ of *thumos* appears to be manifold, its supposed *function* within the soul clearly springs forth from the macro-motive of Power.⁵⁴ Spiritedness represents the *force* that reason requires, the violence that the soul needs to do to itself to realise justice. So when probed on a deep-structure level, Plato’s theory of the just soul can be thought of as telling us a more general philosophical story. According to its constitutive ‘narrative of macros’, justice is a matter of Knowledge that, through Power, rules over Nature.

The ‘just soul’-interpretation of *Liberty Valance* aims at a similar macro-dynamic underlying the film’s main characters. We have identified Stoddard as the ‘Cultured character’, Doniphon as the good ‘Natured character’ and Valance as the downright evil ‘Natured character’. When it comes to Stoddard and Doniphon, however, this interpretation specifically calls upon the implicit macros that typify *how* the motives of Nature and Culture reveal themselves in these characters (see Section 2.2 above). The primary feature of Culture manifested in Stoddard is captured by Knowledge – hence he was earlier described as the ‘Knowledgeable-Cultured character’. This

⁵³ Heffernan (1999) goes as far as likening Stoddard’s misattributed fame as ‘the man who shot Liberty Valance’ to Plato’s ‘magnificent myth’ or ‘noble lie’. Not only does this lie give the reasonable attorney political ascendancy but Stoddard’s acceptance thereof (that he lives, in the words of the film, as if the legend is a fact) show the dependence of reason on spiritedness in reckoning with the passions.

⁵⁴ This is interestingly reflected in the metaphors of Power that Plato (1987:157) resorts to in explaining its role: spiritedness is seen as ‘fighting’, ‘struggling’, ‘taking up arms for reason’, ‘persevering’ and ‘winning’.

macro complex is not just a matter of Knowledge that is resultant or representative of Culture, but also Knowledge in the *service of* a ‘Cultured society’. In the character of Stoddard we see, much as in Plato’s ideal state, knowledge *for the sake of* justice, law and order. For this reason we read on Stoddard’s school blackboard: “*Education is the basis of the rule of law*”. Then there is Doniphon as the ‘spirited’ source of strength, force, protection in *Liberty Valance*. In him we have also noted the involvement of an implicit macro, as his ‘Naturedness’ primarily reveals itself in forms of Power. But Doniphon is not the only ‘Powerful-Natured character’ in the film. Liberty Valance, in his own malicious way, is characterized by gratuitous expressions of Power. As a result Stoddard, earlier in the narrative, fails to see the difference between their uses of violence.⁵⁵ It does, however, become clear that these two instances of Power are put to different ends – ends dictated by the film’s overall positing of Nature against Culture. Although both characters’ strength is rooted in their qualification as ‘Natured characters’, they nevertheless have *different ‘allegiances’* to the orders of Nature and Culture: Valance uses violence to keep the ‘Natured society’ intact, Doniphon’s violence allows a ‘Cultured society’ to come into being.⁵⁶ Their essential difference lies in *opposing* versus *enabling* not only the order of Culture but, more specifically, Stoddard who represents it.

A consideration of relevant implicit macros in *Liberty Valance* therefore brings us to a ‘narrative of macros’ equivalent to that of Plato’s just soul. Justice is brought about in Shinbone by a ‘*Knowledgeable-Cultured person*’ who, through the help of the ‘*Powerful-Natured person*’, defeats the evil ‘*Natured person*’. In pure macro terms the film posits Knowledge, as a kind of protagonist, *in quest of* a ‘Cultured society’, Nature that *opposes* this pursuit, and Knowledge that prevails through the *assistance* of Power. A dialogue between the film and Plato is thus made possible by a shared ‘root narrative’, the same underlying macros functioning analogously in the two discourses. The parallel presence of certain macros, standing in similar relations, thus forms a foundational ‘bridge’ along which the film and this philosophical discourse can meet.

This Platonic interpretation admittedly succeeds by especially singling out Knowledge and Power as implicit macros in the film. But the roles that they fulfill, allowing comparison with those in Plato’s just soul, are entirely consistent with the film’s larger deep-structure framework of Nature in opposition to Culture. In fact, compared to the other readings considered, the ‘just soul’ interpretation arguably mobilizes the greatest variety of interactions between these motives. The

⁵⁵ “... *for Stoddard... Doniphon and Valance are on the same moral level. Both derive their power from their ability with the gun* (Pearson Jr. 2007:26).” Also compare Livingstone’s (2009:219) assessment: “... *Stoddard cannot see any meaningful difference between a man who might use a gun in self-defense and a man who uses it to rob innocent people of their possessions. To him, they amount to the same bad principle: the unjustified use of force.*”

⁵⁶ Pearson Jr. (2007) hones in on the Power macro in his analysis of *Liberty Valance* as a statement on the legitimate role of violence in establishing justice.

‘Knowledgeable-Cultured’ Stoddard’s weakness against Valance firstly points to a noteworthy interaction not yet mentioned: *Nature deters Culture*. This is not only seen in Valance’s dominance over Stoddard, but even in how Doniphon tends to mock the lawyer and his books. Secondly, Doniphon’s ‘Powerful-Natured’ enablement of Stoddard reflects the contrary deep-structure claim that *Nature empowers Culture*. And, thirdly, the justice established through Stoddard’s assisted defeat of Valance relies on the prominent interaction, *Culture overcomes Nature*. It is ultimately because of these various deep-structure interrelations between Nature and Culture – finding expression in the characters and their interactions – that *Liberty Valance* can also embody the ‘story’ of Plato’s just soul.

7. Conclusion

In the analyses presented here I have made use of macro-motives as a theoretical tool to describe certain philosophical underpinnings of *The man who shot Liberty Valance*. My intention was to explore the *conditions* that allow *Liberty Valance* to be a filmic example of a particular philosophy. The question was what exactly *enables* Wartenberg to see *Liberty Valance* as ‘its own version’ of a critique of progress? And how can it at the same time be a potential deconstructive argument, a ‘cinematic arena’ for Isaiah Berlin and an embodiment of Plato’s just soul?

This was approached through a basic macro-sketching of the film’s philosophical deep-structure. I have investigated four different readings, each of which sees *Liberty Valance* as exhibiting some established philosophical point of view. And it appears that these interpretations are all somehow *negotiated* on the same conceptual ‘foundation’: the macro-motives of Nature in contrast to Culture, including the various relations that the film posits between them.⁵⁷ Since the motives centrally define the settings, characters and important dramatic exchanges of the film itself, it seems that philosophical interpretations have to somehow align themselves with these ground configurations. Our investigations have, however, revealed that this process will not always take the same form. To begin with, different interpretations tend to pick out and engage with different ‘moments’ within *Liberty Valance*’s deep-structure. We have for example seen how Wartenberg’s analysis only draws on the interaction ‘Culture overcomes Nature’ while

⁵⁷ Please note that I am by no means claiming that the identified macro-motives form an *exhaustive* account of the film’s philosophical ‘deep-structure’. There are, for example, issues relating to truth, subjectivity, representation and discourse that lie beyond the philosophical ‘anchoring’ offered by Nature and Culture. But in saying that, I still believe that they do constitute a significant aspect of the film’s philosophical foundation – as is arguably highlighted by the different analyses presented here.

deconstructive readings also emphasize the counter-interaction 'Nature empowers Culture'. Another example is that the recognition of 'negative liberty' in the film focuses more on the motive of Nature than Culture. But perhaps more importantly, the way in which interpretations *mobilize* these deep-structure elements also differ. In the 'critique of progress-' and 'deconstruction' interpretations, the film's macros are, in a way, invited to be part of these philosophical procedures. As a result the motives of Nature and Culture become the specific contents of 'progress' or the target of 'deconstruction'. Such an *incorporation* of its ground concepts allows these approaches to meet the film on its own terms. This 'travelling' character of macro-motives is also evident in the Isaiah Berlin interpretation. One may argue that the Nature macro is in fact mutually present in both the film and Berlin's views without any interpretative relation between the two discourses at all. That would make the macro a *shared* conceptual element, providing the deep-structure grounds for this dialogue with the film. This is no doubt the case in the 'just soul' interpretation. It was shown that the film in fact shares an entire macro-formation with the Platonic philosophy that it is claimed to illustrate. It is thus a *mirroring* or *cross-mapping* of deep-structures that creates the means for such distinctive views about the soul to find its way into *Liberty Valance*.

Liberty Valance and the philosophical discourses by which it was interpreted therefore meet in the *play* of underlying macro motives. They provide the conceptual conditions that make these (differing) interpretations possible. Yes, each individual meeting (the way that a particular discourse finds its way into the film) tends to take on its own form. Because it is not only the film's deep-structure that outlines some fundamental requirements for the philosophy to 'fit in' – the philosophy itself has qualities that dictate what aspects of the film's deep-structure *it* will gravitate towards. Yet all of this still takes place within the larger deep-structure space that Macro-motive theory marks out. On a broader scale the analysis thus points to a *kind* of concept that can facilitate a meeting between film and philosophy. And given the pervasive discursive presence of macros (in both film and philosophy) it would not be unreasonable to presume that they represent a necessary conceptual link between film and philosophy.

This analysis also holds noteworthy implications for how we understand the presence of philosophy in film, what I have called the meeting of 'philosophy in film' (see Chapter 1). It shows that *Liberty Valance* does not embody an accepted or recognized philosophy *per se*, but that it is firstly a narrative rendering of philosophically significant ground concepts. These concepts, that deeply constitute the film itself, in turn allow for different philosophical appropriations of the film; they offer the deep-structure means whereby a specific philosophy can

take hold of, or find access into, the film. The film can therefore only present its own version (as Wartenberg has put it) of ‘a philosophy’ insofar as it provides a unique filmic framework within which the macro-motives of Nature and Culture can play out. What might initially be perceived as an overly simple or ‘reductionist’ account of the film’s ‘philosophy’ turns out to be its descriptive strength, since it is only in those foundational terms that the film can be ‘translated’ and applied to the variety of philosophical contexts that we have considered. This necessitates that we rethink the often taken for granted ability of film to illustrate philosophy. Films, in my view, do not embody established philosophical theories and ideas.⁵⁸ But they do embody deep-seated philosophically significant concepts that, in a variety of ways, can manifest in films and theories alike.

⁵⁸ With this statement I am, of course, excluding any film that may explicitly refer (through dialogue, for example) to some recognized philosophical point of view.

Chapter 4

Macro-Motives II: *Brokeback Mountain*

1. Introduction

In Chapter 3 certain philosophical capacities of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* were explored by identifying the macro-motive deep-structure whereby different philosophical interpretations find access into the film. I claimed that ‘philosophy’ in *Liberty Valance* exists in the form of philosophically significant ground concepts that find unique expressions in its particular narrative framework. What we can call the ‘philosophy of *Liberty Valance*’ thus primarily lies in how the film distinctively mobilizes and construes the inter-discursive, or ‘travelling’, macro concepts of Nature and Culture. My investigation of these motives was, however, limited only to their figuration in the narrative. The concern was mostly with how they manifest in narrative settings, characters, their motivations, lines of conflict, etc. The problem with this is that what we deem as ‘the philosophy’ of the film is not based on anything particularly filmic in nature. One is easily tempted to call it ‘philosophy in *film*’, but it hardly amounts to more than philosophy in a *narrative* – our understanding of its philosophical capacities does not really involve the cinematic medium.

For this reason I want to proceed by exploring how a similar ground-configuration, this time in *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee 2005)⁵⁹, may also come into fully *filmic* expression. We will thus not only be concerned with how macro-motives constitute different narrative-thematic elements, but also with how they ultimately find their way into the *visual narration* of the film. Through a detailed analysis of Anne Proulx’s original short story, the adapted screenplay and the film, I will show how the underlying macro-arrangement is in fact at its *most pronounced in film form*. And I will argue that certain *visual figures* in the film reveal aspects of the macro-dynamics which are not present in the short story or screenplay. The ‘philosophy of *Brokeback Mountain*’ can thus be said to belong to the film in its entirety – not merely to a narrative that could be captured just as well by a screenplay or short story. Finally, in a postscript, I will suggest that one can approach the film’s ‘philosophy’ – its unique deep-structure postulation of macro-motives – as a presentation and critique of *worldviews*.

⁵⁹ Ang Lee’s romantic drama *Brokeback Mountain* is based on a short story by Annie Proulx and follows a romance between a Wyoming ranch hand and a Texas rodeo cowboy spanning over twenty years. Often referred to as ‘the gay cowboy movie’ upon release, *Brokeback Mountain* evoked a whole array of public reaction – ranging from critical praise and devoted fan websites to condemnation and even banning by conservatives – and ultimately triumphed in earning Golden Globe and BAFTA accolades for Best Motion Picture as well as the coveted Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Having had eight Academy Awards nominations the film walked away with three victories (Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Original Score), but controversially missed out on the Oscar for Best Picture (The Internet Movie Database n.d.).

2. Growing expressions: Nature and Social powers in conflict

As was noted in the previous chapter, the Western as a genre tends to play out a deep-seated tension between the forces of ‘wilderness’ and ‘civilisation’ (Nelmes 2003:63; O’Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008:242-243; Kitses 2004). Although one would not want to call *Brokeback Mountain* a full blown ‘Western’, the narrative is nevertheless constructed around a bifurcated geography that reflects something of this arch-conflict classically associated with the West.⁶⁰ What author Proulx (2006a:137) calls its “*two-faced landscape*” can be seen as arising from the root inspiration of macro-motives: this time a mysterious, near magical, Nature on the one side, resisting the constraints of Society, Culture (as a version of Power) and History (yet another ‘face’ of Power) on the other. Since macro-analysis allows for the grouping together of motives in a ‘macro complex’, I will deal with the cooperation of Society, Culture and History under the rubric ‘Social powers’. *Brokeback Mountain*, in many ways, revolves around the conflict between an idealized Nature and harsh, repressive Social powers. Not only are they leading motives in the film, but there is enough to suggest that they moreover function as *ideological* macros. This is seen in how the dualistically opposed counterparts challenge one another for primacy in defining the lives of the protagonists, Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal). An ideological status perhaps applies particularly to the idealized Nature motive. As the supposed ‘heroic’ force it serves as the perspective from which Social powers are vilified, while remaining entirely unquestioned itself.

We, of course, never encounter macro-motives as abstract entities in themselves but as they are concretized in specific (in this case, film-) contexts. The conflict of macros, as a deep-structure ‘backbone’ of *Brokeback Mountain*, is first and foremost revealed in the stark contrast of locations in the film – the idyllic Brokeback Mountain versus the gritty and tough small town life of the Northern plains. But the motives also mark a ‘two-faced landscape’ *within* the leading characters, as they are caught between Nature and Social powers’ equal determination of their experiences, motivations and behaviour. Tuss (2006:244), for example, highlights the “... *disconnect between their upbringing and the upsurge of emotions they encounter on Brokeback Mountain*”, resulting in the clash of a socially acceptable life of denial and a tormenting, albeit passionate, love affair. The course of Ennis and Jack’s interweaving lives is marked by constant reaction to the simultaneous demands of Nature and Social powers. Comments from interviews in *Directing from the heart: Ang Lee* (2005) corroborate the idea of the characters as functions of these opposing motives. Director Lee admits his preference for making “... *dramas which are*

⁶⁰ According to co-screenwriter Larry McMurtry *Brokeback Mountain*, although not a Western, is nevertheless *framed* by the Western (*From script to screen: Interviews with Larry McMurtry & Diana Ossana* 2005).

about conflict... ”, adding that you have “...different ingredients which are in conflict with each other, through which you examine humanity.” Executive producer, Michael Costigan, adds about Lee: “He saw in it what I think you’ve seen in a lot of Ang’s films... these are characters, these are people who are absolute extensions of where they’re from and are the products of their environment.” So whenever I refer to Nature or Social powers it is therefore shorthand for their finding expression in the Personhood of the characters, their life-histories and the life-worlds (like their sexual relationship, domestic family lives, etc.) that they inhabit.⁶¹

It is, however, striking that the narrative’s underlying macro-conflict undergoes a significant expansion from the original short story, through the adapted screenplay, to the eventual film. This is to such an extent that the film harbours certain views on Nature and Social powers that exist in the short story only by implication. I will now turn to the short story, screenplay and film, respectively, in an attempt to trace these developing macro-dynamics in both narrative and narration.

2.1 *Brokeback Mountain* the short story

Whereas the usual laudations of the film adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain* are premised on it being a ‘universal love story’, the original short story by Proulx seems to stem from different intentions and consequently has quite a different tone. According to the author, “‘*Brokeback*’ was constructed on the small but tight idea of a couple of home-grown country kids, opinions and self-knowledge shaped by the world around them, finding themselves in emotional waters of increasing depth (Proulx 2006a:130).” Rather than aiming at a ‘universal love story’ the author set out to deal with “destructive rural homophobia” (Proulx 2006a:130) as “... ‘*Brokeback Mountain*’ began as an examination of homophobia in the land of the pure, noble cowboy (Cohen 2006).” This examination finds a very distinct articulation in the no-nonsense, even brutish, ‘Western voice’ of the omniscient narrator, seen here, for example, in the context of sex:⁶²

⁶¹ In previous chapters I have explained the distinction between *implicit*- and *leading* macros and how leading macros will almost unavoidably appropriate implicit macros through which they express and exert themselves. The concretization of Nature and Social powers in the experiences of the characters is thus (as in *Liberty Valance*) an instance of the leading macros being articulated through the implicit macro of Personhood. (I should add that in *Brokeback Mountain* we deal with this macro in a complex sense involving both objective- and subjective Personhood – objective human figures as distinct from their natural surroundings together with the subjective experience of being human.) Likewise the various lifeworlds of the characters (their love affair, families, rural towns, etc.) are manifestations of Society, hence another implicit macro through which Nature and Social powers, as leading motives, are revealed.

⁶² This is, no doubt, also a result of Proulx’s style of writing, which is described as spare, wire-fence prose – simple lyricism that is tight, precise, evocative and unsentimental, while at the same time incredibly moving (McMurtry 2006:140; Ossana 2006:143, 146). The author herself claims to “... write in a tight, compressed style that needs air and loosening to unfold into art (Proulx 2006a:134).”

- *“Ennis ran full throttle on all roads whether fence mending or money spending, and he wanted none of it when Jack seized his left hand and brought it to his erect cock. Ennis jerked his hand away as though he’d touched fire, got to his knees, unbuckled his belt, shoved his pants down, hauled Jack onto all fours and, with the help of the clear slick and a little spit, entered him, nothing he’d done before but no instruction manual needed. They went at it in silence except for a few sharp intakes of breath and Jack’s choked “gun’s goin off,” then out, down and asleep (Proulx 2006:7).”*
- *“They never talked about the sex, let it happen, at first only in the tent at night, then in the full daylight with the hot sun striking down, and at evening in the fire glow, quick, rough, laughing and snorting, no lack of noises, but saying not a goddamn word except once Ennis said, “I’m not no queer,” and Jack jumped in with “Me neither. A one shot thing. Nobody’s business but ours” (2006:7).”*
- *“They seized each other by the shoulders, hugged mightily, squeezing the breath out of each other, saying, son of a bitch, son of a bitch, then, and easily as the right key turns the lock tumblers, their mouths came together, and hard, Jack’s big teeth bringing blood, his hat falling to the floor, stubble rasping, wet saliva welling, and the door opening and Alma looking out for a few seconds at Ennis’s straining shoulders and shutting the door again and still they clinched, pressing chest and groin and thigh and leg together, treading on each other’s toes until they pulled apart to breathe and Ennis, not big on endearments, said what he said to his horses and daughters, little darlin (2006:10).”*
- *“The room stank of semen and smoke and sweat and whiskey, of old carpet and sour hay, saddle leather, shit and cheap soap. Ennis lay spread-eagled, spent and wet, breathing deep, still half tumescent, Jack blowing forceful cigarette clouds like whale spouts, and Jack said, “Christ, it got a be all that time a yours ahorseback makes it so goddamn good. We got to talk about this. Swear to God I didn’t know we was goin a get into this again – yeah, I did. Why I’m here. I fuckin knew it. Redlined all the way, couldn’t get here fast enough (2006:12).”*
- *“Without getting up he threw deadwood on the fire, the sparks flying up with their truth and lies, a few hot points of fire landing on their hands and faces, not for the first time, and they rolled down into the dirt (2006:20).”*

Unlike rather sensitive portrayals in the film, the short story narrator adopts a hardened and unsentimental attitude towards their relationship and the tragedy into which it unfolds. Compare for instance the frank abruptness of the short story's ending, quoting a statement made earlier by Ennis: "*There was some open space between what he knew and what he tried to believe, but nothing could be done about it, and if you can't fix it, you've got to stand it* (2006:28)."

Yet, irrespective of the seemingly 'unromantic' voice through which their affair is focalized, there remains enough evidence to suggest that their love reflects the enigmatic workings of Nature. Although still quite understated, there are traces of a fundamental agency ascribed to Nature as a powerful, overwhelming, even mystical, force. This is captured from the outset by the figure of the wind, as ostensible catalyst and symbol of the characters' *Natural* passions. The wind, referred to twelve times in the twenty eight page narrative, finds expression in the very first sentence of the opening cursive paragraph which is incidentally dropped in the screenplay. An aged Ennis Del Mar wakes up around five in the morning, with "*wind rocking the trailer*" (2006:1), and it is revealed that he had a dream about Jack Twist. As the two characters first embark up Brokeback it is into the "*great flowery meadows and the coursing endless wind* (2006:4)." A "*flinty wind worked over the meadow* (2006:6)" in the early evening that led to their first sexual encounter. As they part after that first summer, the "*wind was gusting hard and cold* (2006:8)", also tumbling an empty feed bag down the street upon final greetings. Four years later, as Ennis awaits Jack's visit, it is said that the "*... day was hot and clear in the morning, but by noon the clouds had pushed up out of the west rolling a little sultry air before them* (2006:10)", and as Jack arrives we even find "*thunder growling* (2006:10)". Then, upon them "*jouncing a bed*" in the motel, a "*... few handfuls of hail rattled against the window followed by rain and slippery wind banging the unsecured door of the next room then and through the night* (2006:11)." The droning wind also makes its appearance as Ennis, about sixteen years later in a telephone booth, is speaking to Jack's estranged wife about his unexpected death (2006:23). Weather acting in unison with character experience is a very common narrative device. What makes it significant here though is that it opens the way for the more explicit valorization of Nature that we find in the film adaptation.

The wind arguably also depicts something of the wild spontaneity of this Nature that exerts its influence over the two characters – that it is specifically an *irrational* kind of Nature that is at stake here. Close to their first passionate 'outburst', Jack is said to have a favourite sad hymn, *Water Walking Jesus*, that he "*... learned from his mother who believed in the Pentecost...* (2006:6)" The Biblical account of Pentecost has clear associations with the wind. What is more

Jack's reference to it anticipates the bewilderment of the 'spiritual outpouring' that the men are about to undergo.

Then it happens. Their first sexual encounter – in a way, literally induced by the cold weather.⁶³ And for the rest of the narrative *this* act of Nature between the two men is symbolized by the mysterious figure of Brokeback Mountain. Four years later Jack declares that, “*Old Brokeback got us good and it sure ain't over* (2006:13).” They are carried away by a force beyond their power. Ennis declares that he and Jack “... *can't hardly be decent together if what happened back there... [their passionate embrace outside Ennis' apartment]... grabs unto us like that.*” Adding that, “*There's no reigns on this one. It scares the piss out a me* (2006:13).” The May before Jack's death, during their final fallout, Jack says, “*I wish I knew how to quit you*”, after telling Ennis that “... *what we got now is Brokeback Mountain. Everything built on that* (2006:21).” Earlier we even find a metaphysical metaphor attached to Brokeback as the narrator states, “*The mountain boiled with demonic energy, glazed with flickering broken-cloud light, the wind combed the grass and drew from the damaged krummholz and slit rock a bestial drone* (2006:8).” This role of the mountain is significantly also present in the author's thinking: “*In my mind isolation and altitude – the fictional Brokeback Mountain, a place both empowering and inimical – began to shape the story. The mountain had to force everything that happened to these two young men* (Proulx 2006a:131).”

The characters are therefore subject to Nature as a powerful, erratic and even spiritual force. We gather this in particular from how the mountain, the wind and weather, as *metonymical figures* of Nature, appear to reflect and even dictate Jack and Ennis' experiences. The primary feature of these experiences is the love birthed between the two men. And considering the mystifying force that is seemingly at work here, their love is framed in a very decided way, evoking conceptual metaphors like the LOVE IS A PHYSICAL FORCE and even the LOVE IS MADNESS metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:49). This underlying metaphorical logic – reflected in statements like 'grabs unto us' and 'no reigns on this one' – further affirms that the characters are at the mercy of a forceful Nature over which they have no control.

These forced effects may lead one to deem Nature as something of an adversary. But the short story, quite to the contrary, offers some indications of an *idealization* and *romanticization* of the Nature motive. Being in nature is alluded to as a transcendent, unaffected and innocent state. In

⁶³ A drunken Ennis decided to rather tend to the sheep the next morning. He fell asleep outside only to wake Jack a bit later that evening with his jaw clacking in the cold. Jack told him to quit it and get inside the tent. “*It was big enough, warm enough, and in a little while they deepened their intimacy considerably* (2006:7).”

the opening passages we are told that the dream about Jack could "... *rewarm that old, cold time on the mountain when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong* (Proulx 2006:1)." During their first summer we are told, "*There were only the two of them on the mountain flying in the euphoric bitter air, looking down on the hawk's back and the crawling lights of vehicles on the plain below, suspended above ordinary affairs and distant from tame ranch dogs barking in the dark hours* (2006:7)." This kind of idealized transcendence is further elaborated upon by Jack's memory of an embrace described in a passage right before we are told of his tragic death: "*What Jack remembered and craved in a way that he could neither help nor understand was the time that distant summer on Brokeback when Ennis had come up behind him and pulled him close, the silent embrace satisfying some shared and sexless hunger* (2006:22)." Later we are told that this embrace "... *solidified in his memory as the single moment of artless, charmed happiness in their separate and difficult lives* (2006:22)." References to this idealized 'naturalism' are however admittedly scant.

Proulx (2006a:129) confesses to be, what she calls, a 'geographical determinist', "... *believing that regional landscapes, climate and topography dictate local cultural traditions and kinds of work, and thereby the events on which (her) stories are built. Landscape is central to this rural fiction.*" Yet in Brokeback Mountain this 'determination' is not only at the hand of the *natural* landscape – as I have shown – but also the *socio-cultural* landscape, resulting in the archetypal clash of love and convention that Proulx's story hinges upon. As the two characters fall into a "*once-in-a-lifetime love*", she "... *strove to give Jack and Ennis depth and complexity and to mirror real life by rasping that love against the societal norms that both men obeyed, both of them marrying and begetting children, both loving their children and, in a way, their wives* (Proulx 2006a:132)." This 'rasping' is mostly against *implicit* norms, values and traditions that structure their customary life-worlds. There is one clear exception to this: Ennis' childhood recollection of his father taking him and his brother to see the body of a viciously murdered gay man (Proulx 2006:15). When Ennis learns of Jack's death, he immediately suspects a similar hate-crime (2006:23); later the suggestion that he had a new male lover leaves Ennis with no doubt that this was indeed Jack's fate (2006:25). Yet on the whole the Social powers that resist their love rather have an *implied* presence in the narrative world. Whereas Nature finds expression in specific symbols that accompany and even compel the men's falling in love, the opposing Social powers remain mostly unseen, operating underneath the surface. They only find generalized expression in the traditions, beliefs, prejudices that one would expect from the conservative rural communities at stake. At best Social powers constitute the implied context within which Natural love surges into the characters' lives.

It is precisely here that we encounter a crucial shift of emphasis in the adapted screenplay and the eventual film: by expanding and detailing the implied Social powers of the short story, the film adaptation presents Social powers as a full-blown counter-determinant to Nature. The adaptation process therefore prompts a development of deep-structure that sees the contrast and conflict of macro-motives intensify.

2.2 *Brokeback Mountain* the screenplay

The adapted screenplay of *Brokeback Mountain* has been praised, not the least by Proulx herself, for being extremely committed to the original story. As adapters, the screenwriting team of Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana did their “... *level best to follow the clear track of the story, augmenting and amplifying, adding texture and substance where necessary* (McMurtry 2006:140).” The short story, as a literary form, did offer room for creative liberties. Ossana (2006:146) explains: “*We did not have to streamline or condense. We had the luxury of using our own imaginations to expand and build upon that blueprint, rounding out characters, creating new scenes, fleshing out existing ones.*”⁶⁴

The screenplay does, however, strongly reinforce certain themes that have a slight and subtle presence in Proulx’s work. Firstly, there is the continuation and elaboration of allusions to Nature as a determining force. In the opening lines we find a cattle truck, near dawn, on a lonely western highway, “... a sprinkle of lights like fallen stars on the vast dark plain (McMurtry & Ossana 2006:1).” Not surprisingly, constant references to the wind persist. A “gentle breeze whistles (2006:1)” as the men meet for the first time and the wind is said to have “picked up considerably (2006:2)” later that same day. As in Proulx’s story, the wind tends to coincide with aroused emotions. There are however a couple of significant formulations that are not present in the short story. One is that the wind is twice described as a constant – “The ever-present wind blowing... (2006:46)”, and, “The wind, as ever, blows (2006:93).” As will be seen, this ever-presence of the Natural, or at least the memory thereof, finds strong expression in the film through certain visual manoeuvres. Another case, again an idea further developed in visual form, is when Jack is equated with the wind, and by implication with Nature. Upon Jack entering Aguirre’s (Randy Quaid) trailer the following

⁶⁴ Proulx (2006:134) also acknowledges that the original story came in a tight framework in which the screenwriters “... *had to invent, enlarge and imagine.*”

summer, to enquire about work and Ennis' whereabouts, a disapproving Aguirre says, "Well, look what the wind blew in (2006:31)."⁶⁵

Likewise there is an elaboration of the Pentecost theme that the short story touches on before the characters first have sex. Here, after singing 'Water walking Jesus', Jack tells Ennis that his mama believed in the Pentecost. Ennis asks what exactly it is, but Jack does not know, saying that his mama never explained it. He ironically adds, "I guess it's when the world ends and fellas like you and me march off to hell." Ennis replies, "Uh, uh, speak for yourself. You may be a sinner but I ain't yet had the opportunity (2006:17)." Their ignorance arguably adds to the incomprehensibility of the 'Pentecost' that will soon be dealt from the hand of Nature.

The screenplay directly adopts almost all statements pertaining to the 'force' of what the characters experience – like "Old Brokeback got us good... (2006:49)"; "... this thing grabs unto us again (2006:52)"; "... no reigns on this one (2006:54)"; and "... what we got now is Brokeback Mountain. Everything built on that (2006:82)." There is also the addition of Jack's confessing, "... sometimes I miss you so bad I can hardly stand it (2006:80)."⁶⁶ And still the weather serves to reflect the wild, irrepensible nature of their love. For instance, before they first leave for Brokeback, Jack tells Ennis that the lightning killed 42 sheep the previous summer, adding, "Aguirre got all over my ass like I'm supposed to control the weather (2006:5)." So in the screenplay, echoing and building upon the short story, we still see how the characters and their love relationship are subject to the uncontrollable workings of Nature.

The most significant additions to the screenplay, however, involve the fleshing out of the two main characters' domestic lives. According to McMurtry, "*The domesticity was suggested, the problems in it were suggested, but we fleshed it out (From script to screen: Interviews with Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana 2005.)*." Whereas marriages, wives, children and homes are mentioned in the short story – almost in passing – the screenplay develops this life-sphere into a full-fledged antithesis to the couple's romance. Additionally developed scenarios include: Ennis and Alma's (Michelle Williams) wedding ceremony; the Del Mars living on a ranch; Jack who shows interest in a male rodeo clown (Tom Carey); Jack meeting his wife-to-be, Lureen (Anne Hathaway), at the rodeo; Alma's work in a grocery store; the Del Mar's life in the apartment

⁶⁵ Later in the same scene the wind hits the trailer "... like a load of dirt coming off a dump truck... (2006:31)."

⁶⁶ In the short story this incidentally reads: "Jack said he was doing all right but he missed Ennis bad enough sometimes to make him whip babies (Proulx 2006:19)."

above the laundromat; Ennis and Alma in the divorce court; Jack's conflicts with his father-in-law (Graham Beckel); Ennis meeting a waitress (Linda Cardellini) in a bar; Jack conversing with the ranch neighbor (David Harbour) with whom we later conclude he had an affair; Ennis taking his daughter, Alma Jr. (Cheyenne Hill), out with his waitress girlfriend; and Alma Jr. (Kate Mara) later visiting Ennis at his trailer with the news of her engagement.

It is inevitable that this fleshing out alters the deep-structure 'profile' of the narrative. Although it will still find its fullest expression in the film, the screenplay's representations of their 'domesticity' (as a product of Social powers) now start to form an *explicitly repressive contrast* to the characters' Natural love:

- This is firstly seen in how their home-lives are depicted. Compare, for instance, the depiction of the Del Mars' life on the ranch: In the screenplay, as Ennis arrives home, we find Jenny "wheezing, coughing, crying", with Alma Jr. toddling out of bed, crying and hugging his leg as Ennis is rocking Jenny. Alma yells from the kitchen, "Could you wipe Alma Jr.'s nose?", with Ennis replying that he could if he had three hands (2006:32-33). The short story depicts this same period briefly in the following passage: "*He was still working there in September when Alma J., as he called his daughter, was born and their bedroom was full of the smell of old blood, milk and baby shit, and the sounds were of squalling and sucking and Alma's sleepy groans, all reassuring of fecundity and life's continuance to one who worked with livestock* (Proulx 2006:9)." Even with the unsavory aromas, this passage gives much less of an impression that Ennis is stressed by his home environment.
- The screenplay gives us a glimpse of Jack and Lureen's first time making out in her father's convertible (not at all in the short story) – and forms in a way the 'unnatural' contrast to the two men's first time (McMurtry & Ossana 2006:40-41). The reason being the seeming control and calculated decision-making that goes along with this encounter. While making out, Lureen, on top of Jack, pulls back and looks at him: "You don't think I'm too fast, do you? Maybe we should put the brakes on." Note the use of 'mechanical' car-imagery in their dialogue. Jack smilingly answers, "It's your call. Fast or slow, I just like the direction you're going in." She thinks about it for a second and then hastily takes off her blouse and unfastens her bra. There is even a very particular 'social power' dictating matters as Jack

exclaims, “I guess you are in a hurry!” and Lureen replies, “My daddy’s the hurry. Expects me home with the car by midnight”, and kisses him.

- In Jack’s domestic life there is the sub-plot of his father-in-law’s belittling attitude towards him. When he forgets the baby-formula he opts for shunting Jack, the proud new father, around: “Oh hell, backseat of the car where I left ‘em. Rodeo can get ‘em (2006:43).” And tosses Jack his keys. Ten years later, at Thanksgiving in Jack’s home, we are again presented with his humiliating attitude. Mr. Newsome takes the knife right out of Jack’s hand: “Whoa, now, Rodeo... the stud duck does the carving around here (2006:65).” This is shortly followed by a fall out (when Newsome again blatantly undermines Jack’s authority, this time with his son) as Jack, seemingly for the first time, stands up to him with the outburst, “Sit down, you old son of a bitch! (2006:66).” The brief references to Lureen’s father in the short story reflect nothing of his *belittling* Jack. In the motel Jack simply says that he has serious money; he does not let Lureen have any of it; and that he hates Jack’s ‘fuckin guts’ (Proulx 2006:12). Later, in telling Ennis about his plan, he adds: “*Lureen’s old man, you bet he’d give me a bunch if I’d get lost. Already more or less said it...* (2006:14)” So again the screenplay seems to add further undesirable aspects to the character’s situation.
- The inclusion of one or two events which are not in the short story further contribute to their ‘domestic lives’ being a negative contrast. For example, as the Del Mar family is enjoying the Fourth of July celebrations two “loud, profane, already drunk” bikers behind them make demeaning remarks about the women in the crowd (McMurtry & Ossana 2006:36). Ennis’ polite request for them to keep it down quickly ends up with his kicking one of them the face, bloodying his nose, leaving him out cold. Alma and the girls are left stunned as “... they have witnessed a kind of fury in him that they have never seen before (2006:38).”
- The manner in which Ennis’ recounting of the murdered gay man is presented stresses the repression inherent to their life-worlds grounded in Social powers. The screenplay calls for a voice-over imposed on ‘flashback’ visuals of him and his brother being led to the scene (2006:53). Later this device recurs when Lureen tells Ennis of Jack’s accident. The script prompts a sharp cut to a short point-of-view shot of Ennis, picturing a man being beaten unmercifully by three assailants, one using a tire iron (2006:87). The screenplay thus urges a much stronger depiction of this deplorable event.

- New references to evil and sin arguably intensify the guilt conferred upon Social powers as the ‘villainous motive’. A notable example is Ennis grieving in an alley over Jack’s departure, a scene that directly cuts to his marriage ceremony with Alma – the first words heard being the congregation’s prayer: “... and forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not in temptation, but deliver us from evil... (2006:29)” Later in the narrative, as Alma suggests to Ennis that they should go to a church social, he replies, “That fire-and-brimstone crowd?” Religious judgment is thus yet another manifestation of Social powers’ constraints on Nature.

We therefore find in the adapted screenplay of *Brokeback Mountain* a tendency towards presenting Nature and Social powers as an out-and-out dualism. The social limitations that mostly remained implicit and unseen in the short story now find form in a detailing of the characters’ ‘domestic lives’. Negative aspects of their domestic worlds seem to be emphasized more. Consequently Social powers become the more overt counter-force which opposes and restricts Nature as the source of Jack and Ennis’ love. The conflict is further heightened by the fact that Ennis and Jack’s relationship is set in a much more idealistic, even beautiful, light. The adaptation does away with many of the coarse, crude descriptions of sex in the short story and presents the men’s affair in much softer, more romantic terms. Take for example, the scene of a tender, loving embrace that the screenplay adds to the proceedings. In presumably the evening after their first sexual encounter, Ennis is sitting outside the tent (2006:20-21):

“...Ennis, pensive, glances over towards the tent. Decides.

Gets up.

Goes to the tent.

INT. BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN, WYOMING: TENT: NIGHT: CONTINUED:

JACK sits atop the bedroll, naked, this shirt draped over his lap. He looks up as ENNIS enters.

ENNIS cautiously steps in. JACK raises his hand to him. ENNIS takes it. JACK pulls him in.

JACK, gentle, reassuring, takes ENNIS' face in his hands.

JACK

It's all right... It's all right.

JACK kisses him.

They lie back. Embrace. Kiss.”

The difference between how this scene and the short story vocalize sex should speak for itself.⁶⁷ There are further indications of this change of tone throughout the screenplay:

- There is a notable alteration when Aguirre sees the men through his binoculars. While the short story states that he watched them for ten minutes, “... *waiting until they'd buttoned up their jeans* (Proulx 2006:7)”, the screenplay describes what he sees as: “TWO MEN pulling off their clothes, out in the middle of nowhere, they play, running, joking (McMurtry & Ossana 2006:21).”
- The characters' emotions are set in a much more romanticized light. As they leave the mountain we are told: “The boys ride together, side by side, each too full of emotion to speak (2006:26).” When the men first go their separate ways the following passage adds to the short story's description of what Ennis feels: “He starts down the street, but before he can get a half a block, Jack's leaving proves too much: he feels like someone's pulling his guts out, hand over hand, a yard at a time. He stumbles into an alley, drops to his knees. Kneels there, silent, as pain, longing, loneliness, overpower ENNIS - emotions stronger than he's ever felt for another person consume him: he feels as bad and confused as he ever has in his life. Conflicted - he is angry at himself, for all that has happened, and for all that he is feeling. Punches the wall, bloodying both his knuckles (2006:28).”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ I should add that the word 'kiss' is not even used in the entire short story – the closest being: “...*and easily as the right key turns the lock tumblers, their mouths came together, and hard, Jack's big teeth bringing blood, his hat falling to the floor, stubble rasping, wet saliva welling* (Proulx 2006:10).”

⁶⁸ Again Proulx's writing proves much more sparing and uninvolved: “*Within a mile Ennis felt like someone was pulling his guts out hand over hand a yard at a time. He stopped at the side of the road and, in the whiling new snow, tried to puke but nothing came up. He felt as bad as he ever had and it took a long time for the feeling to wear off* (2006:9).”

When the characters part for the last time the text reads: “And then... they hug one another, a fierce and desperate embrace... (2006:83)” Ennis drives off and Jack “... watches the pickup truck, and his other half, fade away into the distance... (2006:84)”

- Near the end of the script, when Ennis and his daughter celebrate her engagement, this kind of rhetoric basically descends into melodramatic *cliché*: “But his smile can’t hide his regret and longing, for the one thing that he can’t have. That he will never have (2006:96).”

A lot of what the screenplay adds to the narrative is captured in the ‘Motel scene’ that sees the men’s first reunion after four years.⁶⁹ Once again there is a significant down-toning of rough ‘cowboy language’. Quite a few matters are also left out of the dialogue: some talk of Jack’s bull riding injuries; Ennis asking Jack if he has ‘done it’ with other guys, with Jack seemingly lying in reply⁷⁰; Jack telling Ennis that he suspects Aguirre might have seen them; Ennis’ story of how his dad taught him how to punch his older brother; and Ennis musing whether ‘this’ happens to other people. Also noteworthy is that the screenplay cuts this conversation in half – part of it taking place in the motel and the other as they camp in the mountains. In the short story Jack tells Ennis to call his wife so they can leave for the mountains. In the screenplay this is played out: after Ennis tells Jack that he doubts whether there is anything that they can do about their situation, the film cuts to the next morning with Ennis at his apartment to get his things and say goodbye to his wife. Then the truck makes it way up the mountains to a remote site. The next scene tells of the ‘boys’ racing to a cliff edge, taking off their clothes as they go, and jumping naked into the lake below (2006:51). And only after all of this, in the evening by the campfire, do the characters further take up the ‘Motel conversation’ of the short story. So it is pertinently up in the mountains, out in nature, that Jack suggests that they should start a little ranch, that Ennis reveals his fears (with the imposed visuals of him seeing Earl dead in an irrigation ditch), and that Ennis

⁶⁹ Proulx (2006a:136) points to this event as a major disagreement that she had with the filmmakers: “*In the written short story the motel scene after a four-year hiatus stood as central. During their few hours in the Motel Siesta, Jack’s and Ennis’s paths were irrevocably laid out. In the film that Ang Lee already had shaped in his mind, the emotional surge contained in that scene would be better shifted to a later point and melded with the men’s painful last meeting. I didn’t understand this until I saw the film in September 2005 and recognized the power of this timing. Although I have always known that films and books have different rises and falls, different shapes, it’s easier to know that in the abstract than on the killing ground. At some point I wrote a letter pleading for the motel scene that went for naught. It was out of my hands, no longer my story, but Ang Lee’s film. And so I said goodbye to Jack and Ennis and got on with other work.*”

⁷⁰ “*You know, I was sittin up here all the time tryin to figure out if I was –? I know I ain’t. I mean here we both got wives and kids, right? I like doin it with women, yeah, but Jesus H., ain’t nothing like this. I never had no thoughts a doin it with another guy except I sure wrang it out a hundred times thinkin about you. You do it with other guys? Jack?*” “*Shit no,*” said Jack, who had been riding more than bulls, not rolling his own (Proulx 2006:13).” The screenplay seems to imply – more than the short story – that Jack’s involvement with other men (and his visiting prostitutes in Mexico) resulted from the difficulties of dealing with their relationship. This extract suggests, rather bluntly, that Jack’s motivations were perhaps not as complicated.

tells Jack, “If you can’t fix it Jack... you gotta stand it (2006:54).” Drawing the characters out of the motel into nature to have this discussion, serves to reinforce the contrast of Social powers up against Nature.

2.3 *Brokeback Mountain* the film

In *Brokeback Mountain* the film, under the delicate direction of Ang Lee, the Nature motive as the inspiration behind the characters’ love undoubtedly finds its strongest expression. To begin with, the screenplay’s call for life on Brokeback to consist of “breathtaking views” (2006:6) is, not surprisingly, exceeded by awe-inspiring shots and montages of the characters set against natural settings of monumental proportions (see, for instance, frames 4.1 to 4.4).



(4.1)



(4.2)



(4.3)



(4.4)

Whether this is how the short story presents the natural settings, whether it is as grandiose and radiant as the film presents, is debatable. But it is not unfair to suggest that the original story does *not* devote the same amount of attention to the depiction of beautiful scenery. And Proulx’s original narrative is not at all inclined to the kind of *celebration* of Natural contexts evidenced by the film. As actor Jake Gyllenhaal points out, for director Lee the beauty of the shots was as important as the interaction of the characters (*Directing from the heart: Ang Lee* 2005).

The general portrayal of the characters as subject to vast Natural settings is one way in which the film gives form to the deep-structure claim that Jack and Ennis are functions of Nature. Yet there are specific visual devices that reveal dimensions in the film's deep-structure of which there is hardly a trace in the written versions of the narrative. What makes this significant is that the film expresses some of its unique deep-structure dynamics through the *manner* of filmic representation, not merely *what* it represents. There are thus deep-structure features of the *Brokeback* narrative that are only voiced in *film form*. Nature's determination of the characters is, for instance, subtly articulated by camera movement in the 'Pentecost scene': it opens with a shot of the mountain that tilts downwards to the two characters in their camp, showing Jack as he belts *Water Walking Jesus*. This technique undoubtedly relates the characters to the mountain as a central figure of Nature. It also alludes to Nature as a *transcendent* force that influences them 'from above'.⁷¹ There are however instances where similar filmic devices suggest even more: not only that the characters are *motivated* by Nature but that the couple is *one with*, or an *extension* of, their Natural surroundings. This is for example suggested by a sequence (frames 4.5 to 4.8) that starts with a shot of *two* mountain peaks, then cuts to *two* cans on the fire, and after a shot of Jack yawning (perhaps to make the allusion a bit less forced), the *two* men around the camp fire.



(4.5)



(4.6)

⁷¹ We find such a downward panning shot twice more in the film. One is as they disembark from the mountain, showing the 'cowboys' with the mountain above them moving downwards as we see the herd of sheep moving down the slope. The other is a sequence much later in the narrative (1978 according to the screenplay). Again it opens with a shot of mountains, panning down to reveal the two on their horses. After another shot of them amidst towering trees and mountains we see them riding next to a river, with the mountains reflected, clear as crystal, in the water. In the next shot the characters further 'blend into' these surroundings by passing through the same river.



(4.7)



(4.8)

Their unity with Nature is also communicated through tight plotting and framing during their final dispute twenty years later (frames 4.9 to 4.12). According to cinematographer, Rodrigo Prieto, Lee's work tends to have elements in a specific place, as he likes to guide the eye of the spectator (*Directing from the heart: Ang Lee 2005*). Here the precise placement of the actors on location, and within the shot, neatly aligns them with the mountain range up ahead, their positioning almost emphasising its rise and fall. The same effect is even achieved with the smaller hill just across the water in the medium shot of Jack (frames 4.13 and 4.14).



(4.9)



(4.10)



(4.11)



(4.12)



(4.13)



(4.14)

The agency of Nature is even confirmed outside of the film's boundaries by a striking 'paratextual' reference.⁷² *Brokeback Mountain's* official tagline reads: 'Love is a force of Nature'. The statement in many ways summarizes Nature's role as a 'deep-structure protagonist' of the narrative. And like the abovementioned visual indications, the tagline reveals that also their love is, in essence, a manifestation of Nature. So while the short story and screenplay suggest that Nature *mirrors* the characters' experiences, or even *determines* them, the film goes as far as saying that the *characters in themselves give expression* to Nature. Now you may say that this expression is in the ordinary sense of their *personal-* or *sexual natures*. In this more common sense Nature, as an implicit macro, features right from Proulx's original story – Jack and Ennis have a certain personal nature that results in their love. But from the beginning there has also been an *additional* manifestation of Nature in the form of a leading motive: the apparently transcendent force (symbolized in the weather and the mysterious mountain) that discloses and reflects the workings of Jack and Ennis' inner natures – and increasingly so, the further we move through the adaptation process. So once we reach the film the exquisite Natural surroundings have clearly developed into a glorifying chorus that not only *poeticizes* but also *affirms* and *justifies* the characters' 'natural situation'. The film, however, exhibits such a dominant idealized Nature motive that the characters' normal natures become indistinguishable from it. In the short story and screenplay this mystical Nature and their personal natures still function relatively separately on either a parallel- or interactive basis. Elements of the film's visual representation and 'paratext' on the other hand tell us that the naturalness of their situation is inextricably wrapped up with Nature. The 'force' that is their love is thus not of an ordinary 'nature' anymore. In film-form it has become an extraordinary Natural force.

But, as we know, the men and their love as embodiments of Nature is only half of the story. It is a dramatic imperative that a detrimental antithesis opposes Nature in the lives of the protagonists.

⁷² Gérard Genette uses the term 'paratext' to refer to related discourses surrounding a narrative that have a bearing on how we experience and interpret it. The paratext of a film includes posters, advertisements, previews, reviews, production notes, the director's commentary, etc (Abbott 2002:26-27; 194).

Social powers were identified as filling this villainous role in the *Brokeback Mountain*. We have seen that the screenplay extracts from the short story an explicit contrasting of the two men's love affair (based in Nature) on the one hand with their negative 'domestic lives' (based in Social powers) on the other. And it should come as no surprise that this opposition is also deepened and developed in film form. A more general case in point is the difference in photography between scenes of nature versus domestic spaces. Shots of natural settings, rich and vivid, with luminous greens and the sky boasting an almost royal blue, stand in stark contrast to the gloomy and drained photography that we especially associate with Ennis' social world.⁷³ Through both set-design and photography these towns and communities are presented as struggling, dejected places. According to production designer, Judy Becker (*Sharing the story: the making of Brokeback Mountain* 2005), the filmmakers "...wanted to avoid the notion of the quaint Western town. These were economically depressed towns that these characters inhabited and we wanted to express that in the locations and in the sets and contrast that to the freedom of the mountains."

Here we once again find specific qualities of visual representation that implicate aspects of deep-structure belonging to the film version alone. To be more exact, these visual devices voice certain *macro-interactions* that are not present in the written versions. By the time we reach the film there are already *some* (earlier 'undifferentiated') macro-interactions that have crystallized in the narrative. Firstly there is '*Nature disrupts (or defies) Social powers*', as their unexpected love affair goes against (their own) traditional conventions and upsets their domestic lives in many ways. This is matched by the counter-interaction '*Social powers end Nature*' – in the end literally so as Ennis loses Jack through a hate-crime. Nature and Social powers are thus in conflict in and via the lives of the characters. But the film-specific figures that I have in mind deepen our understanding of this conflict as it reveals further 'sub-interactions' between the two forces: '*Social powers limit, restrict Nature*' countered by '*Nature penetrates and persists in Social powers*'. These interactions find simultaneous expression in the related visual figures of (a) the boxed-in framing, (b) the framed picture and (c) the window. This small film-internal iconography thus appears to co-instantaneously capture both these interactions underlying the characters' domestic lives. On the one hand the set of figures symbolizes how Social powers constrain Nature, the restriction or 'boxing in' of the Natural, while at the same time they signify Nature's ever lingering presence in the characters' life-worlds – there being an untouchable, almost transcendent, part to Nature that Social powers cannot get rid of. The following figures thus indicate that, although Nature initially disrupts Social powers and Social powers

⁷³ See for instance, when the men leave for the weekend upon their first reunion after four years, the drastic change of lighting and colour from Ennis' apartment to the shots of the truck driving up to the mountains, and the two of them free-falling into the water.

consequently end Nature, there is another level to this conflict where both forces remain in an irresolvable double bind.

2.3.1 The boxed-in framing

The earliest traces of the ‘boxed-in framing’ are, not by chance, found as the two characters part for the first time. Here we have clear depictions of Ennis being boxed-in – first by Jack’s rear-view mirror, the walls of the alley and, shortly thereafter, by the door of his and Alma’s first home on a ranch (frames 4.15 to 4.18). Note how natural elements (greenery, skies and clouds) are trapped together with Ennis inside these constructed boundaries. Different instances of such boxing-in thus serve as a visual metaphor for how Social powers *limit* and *restrict* Nature.



(4.15)



(4.16)



(4.17)



(4.18)

2.3.2 The framed picture

The framed picture is an element that constantly turns up on the sets of the characters’ domestic spaces. The understated but persistent presence of these pictures, all depicting some natural setting, conveys a subtle ‘background nostalgia’. They are the memory, the longing for the

Natural, which seeps into their repressed lives and, quite literally, keeps hanging around. The specific occasions upon which these pictures are shown suggest a lot. The first time is when Ennis is attending to his sick and crying children, the shot remaining just long enough for us to notice the picture in the centre of the screen (frame 4.19). When Jack's father-in-law belittlingly sends him off to fetch the baby-formula in the car, a background picture in the passageway is positioned right next to his face (4.20). Like their ranch home, the Del Mar Apartment above the laundry also has a (different) framed picture against the wall (4.22 and 4.23). Likewise two postcards from Jack, finding their way into Ennis' home, have mountains on them – a detail that is not specified as such by the screenplay (4.21 and 4.24). Later, as Ennis's (by now) ex-wife finally confronts him about his relationship with Jack, he loses his temper and storms out of her home. Again, to his left, we see a framed memory against the wall (4.25). Lastly, as the film closes, we are shown Jack's treasured shirt tucked underneath Ennis' and next to it a postcard of Brokeback (4.26).



(4.19)



(4.20)



(4.21)



(4.22)



(4.23)



(4.24)



(4.25)



(4.26)

As actor, Heath Ledger, also confirms, Brokeback Mountain is constantly in the characters' heads (*Directing from the heart: Ang Lee 2005*). This is communicated by the recurring symbolization of Nature through framed pictures in their lives. Much like the 'ever-blowing wind' in the screenplay, the ongoing presence of these pictures shows how Nature *penetrates* and *persists in* the realm based in Social powers. Yet the framed pictures are at the same time also a continuation of the aforementioned 'boxed-in' motif. Hanging in the homes of the characters, these pictures are literally *framed by their domestic spaces* and the hardships that we associate with them. Earlier examples of Ennis' being boxed-in (frames 4.15 to 4.18) thus anticipate the role that the framed picture will still play – it could just as well be Ennis and Jack who are framed in a picture on a wall. Framed pictures are thus equally an expression of the 'Social powers restrict Nature' interaction. In the world forged by Social powers, Nature is boxed-in and restricted – reduced to a detail in the background. Yet it cannot be fully quenched. It forces itself into their domestic lives. Although frustrated, Nature withstands Social powers through its unrelentingly persistent presence.

2.3.3 The window

The dual function of 'framing' in the film extends to a third related figure. The window seems to fulfil both the roles of 'boxing in' *and* signifying persistent remembrance of Nature, on occasion

both at the same time. Examples of how windows restrictively frame the characters (much like frames 4.16 and 4.17 of Ennis in the alley) can be seen in frames 4.27 to 4.30. A primary example is frame 4.28, the POV-shot of Alma seeing the two men kissing outside the Del Mar residence.⁷⁴ The surrounding walls, stairs, rail and the bars of the screen door neatly frame the two men in passionate embrace. Considering all the framed pictures of natural scenes in the film, this shot can be interpreted as yet another ‘picture of Nature’ framed. But the framing is tight and constrictive, suggesting how the characters are suffocated by Social powers that enclose them.



(4.27)



(4.28)



(4.29)



(4.30)

In addition such POV-shots through windows, the surprisingly stylized placement of windows in domestic environments plays a notable role. Whereas the POV-type framing through windows tends to give expression to ‘Social powers restricting Nature’, ordinary windows signify instead the Nature motive’s persistent presence in Social power determined contexts – particularly through memory or remembrance. This visual ‘rhetoric of the window’ is only found in Ennis’ life-world as he and his wife are often placed at a window, generally positioned to the left of the screen (frame 4.31 to 4.40).

⁷⁴ This event is preceded much earlier on by the boss, Aguirre, who watches the bare-chested men wrestling and playing in the wild. The POV-shot through binoculars presents yet another instance of Nature restrained by a type of framing.



(4.31)



(4.32)



(4.33)



(4.34)



(4.35)



(4.36)



(4.37)



(4.38)



(4.39)



(4.40)

This general orientation towards the left is by no means an arbitrary choice. In the prevailing Western tradition of reading from left to right, people are inclined also to perceive images as organized from left to right. And, in evaluating artistic or visual compositions, we tend to ascribe a special weight to the left side over the right. As the station-point from which we evaluate the composition, we not only value the left more, but it can actually carry more weight, without the overall compositional balance seeming out of place (Arnheim 1960:18-19; 1988: 47).⁷⁵

But the window on the left amounts to more than pleasing composition. It is also consistent with certain conceptualizations of time. On a horizontal time-line we associate the left with the *past* and the right with the *future*. The recurring window on the left can therefore represent a view of the past.⁷⁶ And within the context of the larger narrative, this ‘window to the past’ cannot be anything but the memory of Brokeback Mountain and everything that it stands for. Like both the ‘boxed-in’ framing and framed picture, the window too has Nature as its ‘framed content’, and akin to the framed pictures of natural scenery, windows represent the intrusive memory of Nature that permeates Ennis’ life.

The window as a figure pointing to Nature repeatedly finds its place on the ‘favoured’ left side of the screen. This augments the adapted narrative’s drift towards presenting Nature as an idealized ‘heroic’ force, since the film subtly sides with Nature through privileged placement in composition. It is however not only by means of ‘the window’ that Nature develops an allegiance with the stronger left hand side. The very first shot in the film reveals a minuscule truck, engulfed by a “vast dark plain (McMurtry & Ossana 2006:1)”, heading directly leftwards.

⁷⁵ According to Arnheim (1988:47) this tendency can most likely be ascribed to neurophysiology. The right cerebral hemisphere usually favors perceptual organization and “... since by the optical action of the eye lenses the information from the left side is projected onto the right brain, the left side of the visual field is likely to be favoured, to be perceived as more weighty...”

⁷⁶ Another interesting angle, offered by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006:179-185), is that elements on the left of an image are presented as the ‘given’ and those on the right as ‘new’. “For something to be Given means that it is presented as something the viewer already knows, as a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the message. For something to be New means that it is presented as something which is not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer... the meaning of the New is therefore ‘problematic’, ‘contestable’, ‘the information at issue’, while the Given is presented as commonsensical, self-evident (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006:181).”

(This might seem insignificant, but near the end of the film this shot is reproduced with the defeated Ennis heading in exactly the opposite direction.) Having reached Wyoming, Ennis gets off the truck and, again, walks towards the left of screen. This might still be a matter of chance, but when Jack arrives we see the road clearly separating two areas: to the left, green grass and trees, presented dominantly through the slight angle from the left, and to the right some buildings (frame 4.41). Since the left side of the screen carries a special weight, whatever is presented on the left tends to gain primacy: here we have expressions of Nature to the left and Social powers to the right. Arnheim (1960:19) interestingly points out a tendency in theatre for the hero (or whoever the audience should side with) to appear from the left of stage while the villains enter from the right.⁷⁷ The argument could well be made that elements of Nature, with which the audience is supposed to identify, likewise enter the film-world on the left, while buildings resulting from Social powers are on the right. The left-right division in frame 4.41 makes for an interesting comparison with frame 4.42 of the same setting when the two go their separate ways after the summer. Although the elements of Nature and Social powers remain on the same respective sides, the angle of presentation communicates their drastically altered standing at this point in the story. The green is distant to the left, and a dominant perspective from the right foregrounds the (now more imposing) buildings on the right hand side. Nature thus retains the privileged left-hand side but is reduced to the background (much like framed pictures symbolizing Nature) as Social powers loom large from the unsettling right. Once again it is communicated that Nature, although restricted by Social powers, refuses to disappear from sight.



(4.41)



(4.42)

The window on set thus not only reflects the continual presence of memories, ideals and feelings of Nature – its general association with the left also subtly adds to the nostalgic veneration of Nature that increasingly takes hold in the adaptation process. When a mourning Ennis visits Jack’s parents, these internally established codes of the window are used to tremendous effect.

⁷⁷ He cites the traditional English pantomime where the Fairy Queen always appears from the left and the Demon King enters from the prompt side, that is, the audience’s right (1960:19).



(4.43)



(4.44)



(4.45)



(4.46)



(4.47)



(4.48)

In the sequence depicting the ‘confrontation’ with Jack’s father (Peter McRobbie) the window next to Ennis’ face is clearly contrasted with the chair behind the father. As the father recalls Jack’s dream of him and Ennis fixing and running his parents’ ranch, the window in the background is neatly tucked in alongside Ennis (frames 4.43 and 4.44). Even as he tells of the new man that Jack has recently been talking about, the window beside Ennis still persists (frames 4.45 and 4.46). But upon his saying “... *like most of Jack’s ideas it never come to pass*”, we find Ennis caught in a mirroring of the father’s shot: the obstructive outlines of the chair now frame his profile as the window has disappeared from sight (frames 4.47 and 4.48). The chair appears to function as a shadowy and cage-like contrast to the window and its connotations of Nature. Moreover the chair, as a potential metonymical figure of everything that has opposed the men’s love, functions from the unsettling right hand side.

The final shot of the film (frames 4.49 and 4.50) fittingly brings together the visual motifs of (a) the boxed-in framing, (b) the framed picture and (c) the window:



(4.49)



(4.50)

Ennis' daughter has told him of her engagement and she has left. He turns to the two shirts on a hanger, Jack's shirt tucked within his own, with a postcard of Brokeback Mountain (another 'framed picture') thumb-nailed next to it. When Ennis closes the closet and steps away, the camera momentarily stays behind. The window shows us a bleak green horizon, the memory and longing for Jack, for Brokeback, boxed in and constrained by the dark interior of Ennis' trailer. This is how it will be: Nature will remain locked in, but it will never leave his broken world.⁷⁸

2.4 Conclusion

In what sense can we say that some form of philosophy exists in *Brokeback Mountain*? I have followed a concept-based approach: 'philosophy' in *Brokeback Mountain* is primarily based in certain ground concepts (identified, in this case, by Macro-motive theory) and the way that they are utilized by the film. But Nature and Social powers are not the exclusive property of the film. I have shown how they in fact 'travel' right from Anne Proulx's original short story to take their eventual deep-structure place in the film. Philosophical dimensions that arise from these macros are thus not necessarily unique to the film, since they are shared by the entire evolving narrative of *Brokeback Mountain*. So merely identifying Nature and Social powers in the *narrative* of the film means that there is no significant sense in which the *film* divulges the motives; that there is

⁷⁸ Note, however, that here the figure of Nature is ultimately stuck in the 'weaker' right hand side of the screen. One way of looking at this is that the weaker force ends up on the weaker side. Or perhaps Nature's eventual placement on the side that has become associated with villainous Social powers holds a different meaning: that it too becomes a 'villain' of sorts; that Nature is to blame for the life that Ennis is now condemned to. In Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006:179-185) approach (see footnote 76), the final shot's displacement of the window to the right suggests that ultimately the order of Social powers is, and has always been, the self-evident 'given' and that Nature is the 'new' – the mysterious and problematic force that, like the postcard in Ennis' cupboard, remains unseen and unknown.

nothing characteristically ‘filmic’ about how the film construes these philosophically significant concepts. The ‘philosophy’ in the film and its written counterparts would then amount to the same thing.

I have, however, tried to show, by contextualizing this analysis within the broader context of the short story and its film adaptation, that the Nature-Social powers opposition finds its most *explicit* and *elaborated* form in the deep-structure of the *film*.⁷⁹ Firstly, qualities ascribed to Nature and Social powers by the written narratives (especially the screenplay) find much clearer articulation in the film. Photography for example highlights the contrast between dazzling Natural settings and the gloomy, dejected realm of Social Powers. But the film goes further than that: it exhibits features of this deep-structure arrangement of which there is no palpable evidence in the written narratives. These features do not find expression in any new narrative particularities, but in the distinctively *filmic means* of narration. The film’s building out and expansion of themes find direct expression in cinematic manoeuvres like camera movement, editing, framing and placement of details in the *mise-en-scene*. As a result we, for example, see in the film the stronger claim that the characters are in themselves manifestations of Nature, not only functions thereof. Likewise the figures of the boxed-in framing, the framed picture and the window relate to us finer ‘sub-interactions’ between Nature and Social powers that underlie the film. So if the philosophical capacity of *Brokeback Mountain* resides in the deep-structure concepts to which it gives form, we have here a case where this ‘giving form’ goes beyond the mere functional filmic presentations of a narrative. Its unique embodiment of the Nature and Social powers motives extends to *how* the narrative is told in the medium of film. The ‘philosophy of *Brokeback*’ can thus be said to belong to the film as a whole.

I do, however, have two reservations regarding these findings. Firstly, such filmic representations of a philosophical deep-structure are not independent of the narrative involved. I have tried to show that aspects of the film’s underlying philosophy seem to find expression solely in the locus of filmic representation – and this is an important finding for the idea of ‘philosophy in *film*’. But these representations nevertheless remain bound to the context of, and a coherence with, the

⁷⁹ My concern has been with the fact that there *is* a certain development from the short story to the film, that the film offers something, philosophically, that its written counterparts lack. Another obvious line of investigation would involve asking *why* this development actually occurs. There is the intensifying contrast and conflict of Nature and Social powers, coupled with an increasing idealized romanticism attached to Nature. I can only speculate on the reasons for this. One reason may be certain industry pressures on the film to conform to a more mainstream narrative model, where there is a greater need for a ‘villain’ of sorts (Social powers) to overtly oppose the venerable force of Nature. This is closely tied to the need for a successful film to fall within a definite genre – in this case the Western Romance. Another likely cause of the film’s heightened romanticism is the ideological implications involved. The short story confronts prejudices against homosexuality head-on through its not-so-politically-correct focalization and rhetoric. Whether intentionally or unintentionally so, the film’s metamorphosis into ‘universal love story’ softens the blow: it rather legitimates the men’s love by portraying it as a mystical force of Nature. As a result the sensitive issue of ‘gay cowboys’ becomes an easier sell to potentially hostile audiences.

narrative. I am thus not claiming that the medium of film here makes a fully autonomous contribution to our understanding of Nature and Social powers. In many ways the uniquely filmic contribution remains secondary to the narrative figuration of the motives. Secondly, this kind of explicit voicing of ground concepts through film-specific figures cannot be expected from all films. For example, *The man who shot Liberty Valance*, having a similar deep-structure arrangement, does not offer much in terms of a visual- or filmic disclosure of its macro-motives. Direct filmic expressions of philosophical deep-structures, as detailed in this analysis, should more likely be found in films of a ‘formalist’ or ‘expressionist’ bent. The more the filmic means of narration tends to have a life of its own, the more will be the potential for deep-structure elements to be incarnated in specific cinematic devices. Although this happens in an unobtrusive way, it seems, surprisingly, to be the case in *Brokeback Mountain*.

3. Postscript: Macro-motives and worldview⁸⁰

The question of the ‘philosophy’ that a film holds can be approximated as a matter of *worldview*. By ‘worldview’ in this context I mean some comprehensive explanation of how the world works, a kind of ultimate denominator for why things happen. One often finds that films and narratives are appraised as putting forward a particular worldview. The *analysis of macro-motives* operative in a film, however, allows for a *more systematic* approach to identifying and describing the worldview(s) that it may articulate. Not only do these motives mark the core-themes around which the film revolves; you also meet the requisites of theoretical consistency and -economy (doing the most you can with a minimum of theoretical tools) by letting macros define the worldviews at stake.

So if we let ourselves be guided by the macro-dynamics of *Brokeback Mountain* we can see the film as raising a set of fundamental worldviews. From the perspective of Social powers that in various ways seek to restrict and even eliminate Nature, we are presented with a worldview of ‘*traditionalist culturalism*’: an obsession with culture by way of overvaluing certain norms and traditions. From the vantage point of Nature and its defiance of Social powers the film can be said to express a ‘*non-conformist naturalism*’. Jack and Ennis’ relationship is set against everything that they have been raised to be and believe. The inspiration behind this rather inadvertent ‘rebellion’ of the protagonists undoubtedly stems from author Anne Proulx’s ‘*deterministic naturalism*’. The self acclaimed ‘geographic determinist’ tells us that, for her,

⁸⁰ Most of the thoughts presented in this postscript were gained from a personal conversation with P.J Visagie, 21 December 2010.

natural landscapes decide the ways of life of those who occupy it (Proulx 2006a:129). In the film this determination of the characters reaches a point where we almost cannot separate them from Nature any more. Yet the agency of Nature in relation to Social powers also translates into a non-conformist *directive*: following what is Natural offers an escape from the rigid and lifeless dictates of Social powers. This makes Jack, unlike the repressed Ennis, the 'strong natural conformist'. Of the two Jack, much like the weather and wind, is the active agent that on more than one occasion makes contact (in more than one sense) with Ennis. And it is Ennis' refusal to conform fully to their Natural inclinations that eventually drives Jack away.

The conflict between Nature and Social powers can thus be taken as being a conflict of worldviews. We have, however, seen that the film quite unequivocally chooses sides in this battle. Hence we can approach the film as presenting a kind of critique, what can loosely be called a '*cultural anarchism*'. In siding with Nature, the film voices a worldview that interrogates Social powers for the damage that they cause. By portraying Nature as an ineffaceable, benevolent force, it seeks to relativize the absolutization of culture and tradition. This critical worldview echoes that of Proulx insofar as they are both in a sense 'anti-culture'. But Proulx's 'naturalism' should be commended for avoiding what the film is guilty of: a much stricter, dualistic contrasting of Nature and Social powers whereby the latter is uncomplicatedly vilified. The film thus expresses its critique from within its own 'naturalistic' worldview. Yet this critique itself does not rise above criticism, as it bears certain problematic presuppositions characteristic of traditional *Romanticism*. *Brokeback Mountain*'s naturalism emphasizes determinative feelings born from Nature. It idealistically construes Nature as a mysterious and ethereal force. And it counterpoints an innocent Nature with Social powers that are unjustifiably presumed to corrupt, frustrate and estrange people from their Natural selves.

Chapter 5

Metaphor Theory: *Modern Times*

1. Introduction

In this analysis of *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin 1936) I will draw on a combination of sub-theories of Discourse Archaeology in an attempt to detail the deep-structure base in which the film-narrative is rooted. An informal rotation between the perspectives of Key theory, a figurative semiotics (or ‘Metaphor theory’), Macro-motives and Ideology theory will allow for more insight into how *different aspects* of the film’s deep-structure fit together. And since each theoretical ‘tool’ tends to fill out interpretative gaps left by another, they will collectively help us arrive at the philosophical core which holds the film together.

On this occasion, however, Metaphor theory will steal the show, seeing that the identification of a *conceptual metaphor* will prove to be a particularly significant step in the process. As will be illustrated, the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor is something of a deep-structure ‘landmark’ in *Modern Times* and will in many ways guide the course of its interpretation. Moreover, as a ‘travelling’ grounding concept, the metaphor points to a noteworthy conceptual realm where film and philosophy can meet. Hence I have set aside a postscript where this matter is raised with reference to Thomas Wartenberg’s (2007:44-54) Marxist interpretation of *Modern Times*.

2. ‘Life in the factory’: The machine

The standard reading of *Modern Times* more or less sees the film as taking critical stock of the dehumanizing effects of the machine in the Industrial age (Cf. Falzon 2007:181, 195-196). Yet we find this ‘anti-technologist’ theme concentrated in roughly only the first quarter of the film – from the opening montage of workers and a factory up to Charlie’s ‘mental breakdown’. The bulk of the narrative, however, details how Charlie, having regained his sanity, seeks a means of livelihood in a society more broadly plagued by economic depression, poverty and civil unrest – not only the dangers of mechanization. This philosophical analysis is thus also an attempt to arrive at a *more global* interpretation of *Modern Times*. I will, however, proceed on the assumption that Charlie’s mental breakdown is an undeniably significant threshold in the narrative. I will initiate my analysis therefore by first focusing exclusively on the story up to this point (henceforth the ‘First Act’). The ‘First Act’ will then be used as an interpretative gateway

to the rest of the film, allowing us to get a deep-philosophical grip on how Chaplin's charming narrative also construes life *beyond* the factory.

The First Act of *Modern Times* opens with a clock face nearing six o'clock with superimposed credits, followed by a foreword: "*Modern Times.* A story of industry, of individual enterprise – humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness." We cut to a telling sequence, starting with a flock of sheep pushing and shoving in a stream (frame 5.1), followed by factory workers just as hurriedly on their way to work (frame 5.2). The compositions of the next shots are noteworthy: first we see the workplace, a monumental factory that towers above the workers (frame 5.3); a similar halving of the screen is found in the subsequent image where pipe-like metal constructions reign in the upper half over the men inside the factory (frame 5.4). The two following shots emphasize huge industrial machines in the foreground, the sheer stature of which makes the human figures seem like a colony of ants (frames 5.5 and 5.6).



(5.1)



(5.2)



(5.3)



(5.4)



(5.5)



(5.6)

In this montage an obvious primacy is given to the likes of factory buildings and gigantic machines which loom over dwarfed human figures. Right from the outset this visual rhetoric sets up the theme which consistently runs throughout most of what unfolds in the First Act, namely the *subjection of people to machines*.⁸¹

Various sound effects also stake their claim early on in this regard. *Modern Times* is Chaplin's final silent film, despite the fact that the technology for 'talkies' was already available to him at the time. Yet the film is only silent insofar as there is no dialogue: while the characters are 'silenced', sounds constantly ring from machines throughout. In fact, human talking is, significantly, only heard through the mediation of machines – the company president's orders on television screens and the recorded sales pitch for the Billows Feeding Machine, are two examples.⁸² So even through the use of sound the machines in the factory are endowed with a great deal of vivacity.

Let us consider this listing of prominent events of the First Act:

- A *horn* prompts the foreman (Sammy Stein) in the 'engine room' to turn the factory machinery on.
- Work done in the factory is supervised by the company president (Al Ernest Garcia) via a *television monitor*.
- The *assembly line* dictates the speed and kind of work that the factory workers do.
- The president, at different stages, controls the speed of production by communicating to his foreman through the *television monitor*.
- The speed and repetitiveness of the *assembly line* leaves Charlie momentarily stuck in his *nut-tightening* motion.

⁸¹ I will offer my explanation for the flock of sheep amidst images dominated by industry and machinery at a later stage.

⁸² The single exception to this, near the end of the film – that sees Charlie singing a song – is for this reason quite significant and will be specifically addressed later on.

- The *television screen* abruptly ends Charlie's smoke break.
- The self-proclaimed '*mechanical salesman*' (on gramophone) presents an *automated feeding machine* for workers to the president.
- Lunch only happens when the *assembly line* stops.
- Charlie appears to be so 'programmed' by his *mechanical work* that he cannot control jerky arm movements (and even tightens buttons on a woman's behind).
- Charlie's lunch is fed to him by the ultimately malfunctioning *Billows feeding machine*.
- In desperation to keep up with its pace, Charlie ends up on the *assembly line* and eventually *gets swallowed by the machine*.
- Charlie's body meanders through a landscape of *gears, wheels and cogs*.
- Charlie emerges from the *machine* and exhibits a *mental breakdown* as he tightens everything in sight (including people's noses) dances around, chases two women, pulls any lever that he can find and squirts people with an oil can.

The same 'philosophical story' repeatedly plays out in what is often a madcap series of events. The 'kernel-narrative' underlying these happenings is that some kind of technology dictates human activities (like work, rest and eating) and states of mind; people take on the image (Charlie, quite literally so) of the machinery which determines their lives. In terms of Key theory the mobilization of concepts involved here can be described as:

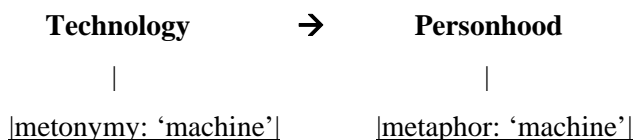
Technology → Personhood⁸³

All the events making up the First Act narrative can thus be seen as a range of '*surface*' *expressions* of this singular underlying deep-structure statement, serving as a kind of conceptual 'grammar', if you like. And, as a root principle of the First Act, this key-formula not only *generates* its narrative events, but even visual compositions (notably in the opening montage) and the role of sound effects therein.⁸⁴

⁸³ I do not specify the arrow (→) since at different times different 'operators' (i.e. the type of 'governing' that technology performs on personhood) may apply – technology could thus 'determine', 'structure', 'rule', 'dominate' or 'come into expression in' personhood. Personhood, in this case, is an inclusive technical term (borrowed from Macro-motive theory) that seeks to capture whatever people are or do.

⁸⁴ This ground-expression of the First Act bears resemblance to the identification of 'actants' (categories or functions of actors) in a narrative, since the relation of the narrative 'subject' (what is generally understood as the protagonist) and 'object' (the aim, focus or product of the protagonist's actions) is also expressed in a similar noun-verb-noun form. See Greimas (1996) and Bal (1997:196-202) in this regard.

The analysis of such a key-formula (whether in a film or not) inevitably involves considerations of its semiotic articulation. This brings into focus the semiotic ‘layering’ surrounding the key-formula that communicates and figurates the deep-structure concepts involved (Visagie 1990:2). One semiotic layer in which ‘Technology → Personhood’ finds expression is, of course, a *narrative*, an extended figurative form which incorporates the range of events listed above. And the signification of the plot through moving visual images, sound and music locates this ground claim in a *film-narrative* specifically. One can also identify, intertwined with the narrative, further semiotic figures which operate on a conceptual or pre-textual level. This involves a *concept* standing in a *figurative relation to another* – such as a metaphor or metonymy – that we derive from different enouncements in the text. The expression of such a conceptual figure in a film thus amounts to a filmic (visual, audible etc.) representation of an underlying or ‘preceding’ conceptual representation (Visagie 2007:28). The ‘head’ and ‘tail’ of a key-formula typically find form in such conceptual figures. In the First Act of *Modern Times* the key-subject, ‘technology’, generally finds *metonymical* expression in the concept ‘machine’, particularly of the robust, industrial kind which repeatedly dominates the *mise-en-scene*. However, I would like to focus on the conceptual figuration of ‘personhood’. In being at the mercy of the ‘machine’ that is technology, the determined key-domain discloses a corresponding *metaphor* of the person as a ‘machine’. With these figurative ‘extensions’ our key-formula now reads as such:



Even our most ordinary understanding of a person as a machine involves a particular *conceptual metaphor*, the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor.⁸⁵ A primary claim of contemporary metaphor theory is that the locus of metaphor is not found in language, but rather in the domain of concepts and thought (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993).⁸⁶ The essence of metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:5). ‘Conceptual metaphor’, in more technical cognitive scientific terms, refers to the inference

⁸⁵ The HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor operates in coherence with related conceptual metaphors such as HUMAN IS A IMPLEMENT/UTENSIL, HUMAN IS AN APPLIANCE, and HUMAN IS A VEHICLE (Goatly 2007:103).

⁸⁶ Metaphors, according to traditional views, are merely figurative and aesthetic forms of language - a device of the poetic imagination. More importantly, metaphor used to be viewed as a characteristic of language alone (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3). Literal or everyday language is seen as being separate from metaphorical language; everyday conventional language has no traces of metaphor and could easily be distinguished from ‘metaphorical language’. Concepts and definitions are also seen as purely literal; therefore it is believed that any subject matter can be comprehended literally (Lakoff 1993). With the rise of the contemporary theory of metaphor together with dramatic developments in the field of cognitive science, these assumptions were soon proven to be false. Lakoff and Johnson’s groundbreaking *Metaphors we live by* (1980) was deeply instrumental in this.

patterns from one conceptual domain whereby we reason about another conceptual domain – a cross-domain ‘mapping’ within a conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:246; Lakoff 1993:203). In the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor, the concept of ‘machine’ thus serves as the source domain that structures how we think and talk about the target domain, ‘human’. A set of correspondences are thus mapped between two conceptual domains. A few examples of linguistic expressions arising from this metaphor include (Goatly 2007:104-106):

- My muscles could *seize up* or I could have a *breakdown* of health.
- As a worker I could be seen as having *input* and *output*.
- People suffer *burnout* or may *run out of steam*.
- Any person can evidently be *turned on*, *turned off*, *switched on*, *switched off*, *maintained*, *mended* or *programmed*.
- Someone might be considered to have her *head screwed on right*.
- An athlete could be deemed *rusty*.
- One’s spouse might be *high maintenance*.
- A colleague might be *running in the fast lane*, operating *at full throttle*, or simply be *on automatic pilot*.

A whole host of such everyday statements are all expressive of a more general conceptual mapping. The HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor governs how humans can be conceptualized in terms of machines and how this can be articulated in a variety of linguistic forms. Individual metaphorical expressions in language are thus secondary to the general conceptual metaphor that sanctions those expressions (Lakoff 1993:208-209).

In much the same way, the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor comes into *cinematic* expression in *Modern Times*. The most prominent instance is the famous scenario where Charlie gets stuck in a state of uncontrollable nut tightening. The high paced, repetitive demands of his assembly line work make Charlie a ‘robot’, a mere extension of the greater machine. This metaphorical understanding is then illustrated by Charlie ‘literally’ acting like a machine. Each twitchy burst of irrepressible nut tightening is a novel comical performance of HUMAN IS A MACHINE and can only be intelligible to us on the basis of this conceptual metaphor. This is however not an isolated case as there are additional *verbal* expressions of the metaphor. When Charlie takes a smoke break, ‘Big Brother’ drops in on the television screen and tells him to quit *stalling*. More significant is when we are later told that Charlie had, in fact, suffered a *nervous breakdown*,

which, of course, involves the MIND IS A MACHINE metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:247), a sub-category of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor.⁸⁷ We can thus appreciate these statements as arising within a broader deep-structure context ('Technology → Personhood') into which the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor is incorporated. This means that expressions such as 'quit stalling' and 'nervous breakdown' do not simply reflect cognition or convention, but also reveal the deeper philosophical groundwork of which the metaphor forms part (Cf. Visagie 1990:16).⁸⁸ In fact, as a conceptual metaphor it does not merely function as an implicit semiotic guise of other deep-structure elements, but as a constitutive *ground concept* in its own right which generates features of the film-narrative (Visagie 2007:28).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980:10-13) explain that the systematic mapping which allows us to understand one concept in terms of another, will simultaneously conceal other aspects of that very concept. Since any single metaphor decidedly frames its target concept (referred to as concurrent 'highlighting' and 'hiding'), we should ask ourselves what the *entailments* are of this machine metaphor which the film calls upon. One crucial implication for our purposes is that the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor hides or obscures aspects of *free will* and *responsibility* in personhood (Goatly 2007:111). When taken too far (or used in isolation from other complementing images), the metaphor depicts a human being as determined or 'automated' with no choice or accountability in what they do. It should therefore be no surprise that the vocabulary of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor contains a significant number of pejorative terms (Goatly 2007:106). Think of someone being labelled as an 'instrument' or a 'tool'. Likewise being a 'robot' is generally not seen as the most praiseworthy of traits. The determinedness and lack of freedom which the metaphor entails can itself be captured by further images such as *servitude* and *slavery*.

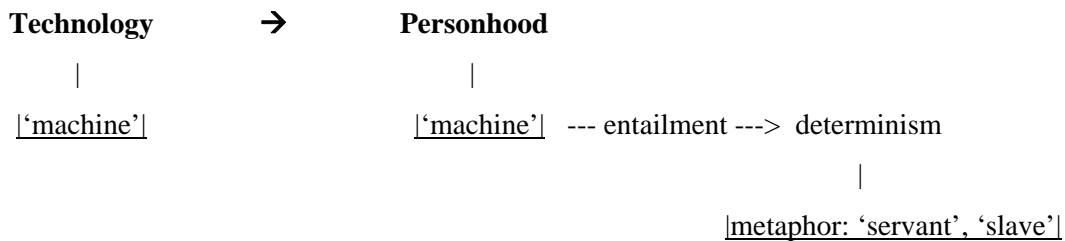
These implications of a person understood as a 'machine' are perfectly congruent with what unfolds in the First Act. We see that *involuntary action* is the most salient feature of the 'machine' metaphor in Charlie. Initially it is simply a lingering nut-tightening reflex. But after being devoured by the assembly line he emerges as a 'machine' gone haywire, exhibiting a mad state of uncontrollable impulses: 'nut-tightening' everything in sight, squirting people with oil and riotous lever-pulling. And in between it all he still punches his time card with automatic diligence. How can *he* be held accountable? With no apparent choice or say in what is happening to him, we perceive him to be a 'mechanized slave' of his circumstances. The

⁸⁷ There is probably a clear branching of BODY IS A MACHINE and MIND IS A MACHINE from the superordinate HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor.

⁸⁸ The conceptual metaphor's embeddedness in the particular deep-structure context of the film is for example evident in how, as Stephens (2011) notes, Charlie's 'breakdown' sparks a literal *breakdown* of the *entire factory system and its machinery*.

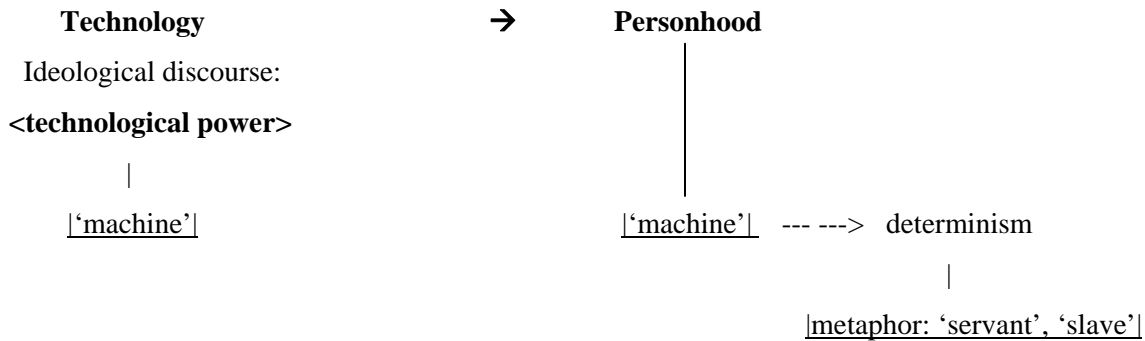
metaphorical logic at work in Charlie’s mental demise also sheds more light on the flock of sheep in the film’s opening sequence. Wartenberg (2007:45) for instance finds that the sheep, “... *being forced up a chute that leads to a slaughterhouse*” (although the shot does not in my view offer enough evidence for this), gives the symbolic message that the factory workers face a similarly dreadful end. Yet when viewed in the light of the overall role of the ‘machine’ in the First Act, the symbolic montage perhaps hints, rather, at the ‘automated’ *mindlessness* of the factory workers’ behaviour – that, like the sheep, they do not act from any *freedom of choice*.

The First Act of *Modern Times* can therefore be interpreted as consistently giving expression to a clear arrangement of underlying ground concepts – expressible as a philosophical key-formula – that operate through certain conceptual figures (among other forms of semiotic articulation) and the entailments that they hold:



This deep-structure interpretation of the First Act can however be supplemented by the perspective of yet another theoretical tool. Ideology theory can help us get a grip on wider socio-historical contexts that constitute the structures and meanings identified in Chaplin’s film. While still only concerned with the First Act, the assumption is that the extended key-formula above must be the product of certain *ideological forces* (see Chapter 2, Section 5). If plotted on Ideology theory’s ‘landscape’ of dominating discourses, the deep-structure complex of the First Act can clearly be seen as springing from *technological power* as one of the ‘steering powers’ of modern ideological culture. In the industrialized ‘modern times’ in which the film is set, and even more so today, technology has become an autonomized power that functions as the means to its own end in circumscribing the nature of society, art, morality and human life as such. Consequently it forms the wider ideological context within which ‘Technology → Personhood’ is embedded. In a similar manner the nature and frequency of metaphors are greatly determined by ideological discourse. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:14) point out that even conceptual metaphors have their basis in both physical- and *cultural* experience. The prevalence and even dominance of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor in Western society – and more locally in

Modern Times – therefore arises from the over-valuing of technology in *ideological* culture (Cf. Visagie 1990:16).⁸⁹



3. 'Life beyond the factory': The social 'machine'

With these philosophical 'excavations' in place we can now take a step backwards to see what the identified ground-structures in the First Act can tell us about the film as a whole. After recovering from his mental breakdown, Charlie leaves the hospital only to be sobered up by the perils that characterised the Great Depression: unemployment, poverty and hunger. The new phase of the film is signalled, as in the beginning, by a montage. This time it consists of obliquely angled shots accompanied by a frenzy of sound: first a heavy duty drill that fades into racing fire wagons, followed by three shots revealing crowds and motor vehicles in rivers of motion.

Most of the ensuing narrative is characterized by *greater societal forces dictating* (or *frustrating*) the activities of the *two main characters* – Charlie, the recuperated factory worker, and the 'street orphan Gamin' (Paulette Goddard) whom he meets along the way.

Again I would like to highlight a prominent dividing-line in the story, this time Charlie and the Gamin's shared dream of an ideal home. Before this sequence both characters, on their separate paths, are repeatedly forced by greater social forces into whatever they do or experience – they do not have much of a choice. After the daydream, they jointly pursue this image of happiness but remain constantly thwarted in their efforts; again at the hand of such forces (Cf. Wartenberg 2007:53). So before the 'dream home' sequence we find events such as the following:

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Goatly (2007:103, 107-110) who indicates how many scientists are prone to 'technologicistic' reductionism by assuming the literal truth of mechanical- or computer models of the human being.

- Charlie accidentally finds himself in a *street protest* and gets arrested.
- The *poverty-stricken* Gamin, who refuses to go hungry, steals food.
- In jail Charlie unknowingly consumes *smuggled* ‘nose-powder’ and demonstrates anything from drunkenness to brute strength and courage.
- The Gamin is orphaned when her father (Stanley Blystone) *dies in a protest*.
- The *law takes charge* of the orphans causing the resolute Gamin to run away.
- Because *the sheriff* sets him free, Charlie is forced to leave the security and provisions afforded by prison.
- The hungry Gamin steals bread.
- Determined to go back to jail, Charlie tries to take the blame for the stolen bread.
- The policeman lets Charlie go and arrests the Gamin as the true culprit.
- Charlie deliberately consumes food and cigars that he cannot pay for and also gets arrested.

After the ‘ideal home’ sequence, the couple actively pursues the dream but their quest is interrupted, frustrated or opposed in a variety of ways:

- A *policeman* interrupts their state of daydreaming.
- *Unemployed ‘burglars’* interfere in Charlie’s night watch as a department store guard – eventually resulting in his getting fired and arrested.
- A rundown version of the couple’s dream – living happily in an old worn shack – is abruptly interrupted by the news that the *factories have re-opened*.
- A *strike* ends Charlie’s work as a mechanic’s assistant.
- Charlie accidentally sparks a confrontation with a snappy *police force* and gets arrested.
- Charlie and the Gamin lose their successful jobs in a restaurant when they have to flee from the *orphanage officials*.

The determinism entailed by the ‘machine’ metaphors in the First Act appears to be carried over to the rest of the narrative as the characters are still ‘slaves’ of their circumstances. Although they are not specifically subjected to machines anymore, the couple nevertheless show the same

signs of *unavoidability*, *lacking free will* and *not being accountable* which earlier resulted from that domination.⁹⁰

It should therefore be no surprise that allusions to, and even clear expressions of, the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor do not cease. The metaphor thereby forms a significant thematic bridge to the rest of Chaplin's film. A striking example is when Charlie, with the goal of going back to jail, opts to 'purchase' goods for which he cannot pay. Firstly, he literally glides along the counter with two packed trays, evoking memories of the assembly line (frames 5.7 and 5.8). After handing himself over to the policeman (who is now trying to make a call), Charlie purchases a cigar and, billowing with smoke, hands out goods to two passing boys, automatically sticking the cigar back into his mouth when the policeman removes it (all of which remind one of Charlie's uncontrollable lever switching in the engine room of the factory). When the policeman removes it once again, Charlie, in a robot like motion, flicks his arm, touches his Derby hat and then tweaks his ear to 'release' a puff of smoke from his mouth (frames 5.9 to 5.12) To reiterate the point, the police wagon which takes him away also leaves a considerable amount of smoke in its wake. This might be denounced as reading too much into things, but the logic of the implicated 'machine' metaphor does match up with what is happening here. Charlie's 'automated' behaviour results from his having no choice but to try desperately to get back into jail. And from the viewer's perspective, at least, he cannot really be held responsible for his actions.



(5.7)



(5.8)

⁹⁰ Compare for instance how Stephens' (2011) description highlights the unavoidability of what happens to Charlie: "*After his breakdown, when released from a hospital, he is swept into a series of misadventures: accused communist leader; a hero who foils a jail-break while (inadvertently) high on cocaine. Then he 'gums the works' in one job after another, inevitably damaging (or pilfering) the merchandise.*"



(5.9)



(5.10)



(5.11)



(5.12)

Further clear references to the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor are found in and around the Gamin and Charlie's work in the restaurant. A week after Charlie's latest imprisonment, the dancing Gamin catches the eye of a restaurant owner. The shot starts with a revolving carousel (frame 5.13) which slowly pans rightward to reveal the Gamin *turning round and round* in a simple dance on the carousel's music (frame 5.14). In what amounts to a similar effect as the sheep-worker juxtaposition in the opening montage, an undeniable relation is established between the Gamin and the machine. (I should add that in the First Act, already, *circular movement* emerges as a prominent visual motif of the 'machine'. The industrial machinery mainly consists of *turning cogs and wheels* and once Charlie goes down the 'throat' of the assembly line he too becomes part of these *rotating motions*. When he emerges from the machine again the Tramp is also in a dancing mood, making elegant little *spins* like a ballet dancer. Then there is also the *circularity* inherent to the nut-tightening motion with which he persists at that stage.)



(5.13)



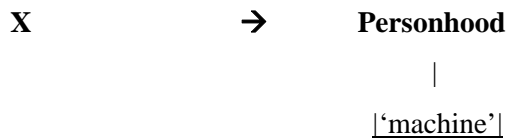
(5.14)

The Gamin is able to arrange a job for Charlie in a restaurant that bears a notable resemblance to life in the factory. Yet here his frantic work results from a ‘machine’ of a different kind. An initial association is the seemingly out-of-place carpenter sawing away in the restaurant kitchen; and Charlie drilling holes in a huge block of cheese to ‘produce’ Swiss cheese. As in the factory, Charlie’s work is also dictated by time pressures since an annoyed customer complains: “*I’ve been waiting an hour for roast duck.*” When Charlie finally brings the customer’s dinner on a tray he gets caught up in a circular stream of people dancing. It is notable that Charlie becomes a ‘turning cog’ in this ‘wheel’ as the slightly elevated shot reveals his tray as rotating while he is drawn around the dance floor. This certainly alludes to Charlie’s entrapped fusion with the inner-workings of the factory machine that swallowed him earlier on (see frame 5.21).

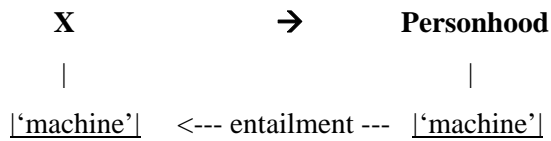
Until the extended restaurant scene (the second last of the film), sounds and noises were only heard from machines and inanimate objects. This setting, however, marks the first time in *Modern Times* where the cheers, laughter and handclapping of *people* can be heard. These sounds can be read as signifying that a social kind of ‘machine’ is at work here. As the evening progresses, Charlie, having had to ‘sell’ himself as a singer, is preparing for his performance. He is preceded by a group of four singing waiters, who enter in a synchronized choreography that includes briefly rotating in a circle: “*We are the singing waiters, we will sing or serve potatoes. We will strive to do our best... We’ll sing the whole night long...*” When Charlie is finally on stage he loses his written lyrics but is left with no choice: he has to sing; the show must go on. The significance of the moment should not be underestimated. Here, for the first and last time ever, the voice of the iconic Tramp character is heard in a film. Yet, if one looks beyond the rather flashy pantomime, one finds that the lyrics are nothing more than a load of French-Italian-Spanish sounding gibberish. The Tramp is in essence only making *a noise*. It could then well be that this nonsensical singing finally underlines Charlie’s being a ‘machine’ in the service of societal demands.

In the light of such examples it would furthermore not be unreasonable to consider any involuntary, spontaneous action as a possible expression of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor. Two good candidates are Charlie's drunken spell in the department store and, as Stephens (2011) calls it, his "*coke-fueled fit of heroism*" in prison (which is preceded by his walking in indicative circular movements, reminiscent of a 'loose cog'). Both instances can be read as a 'machine' malfunctioning because it is running on the wrong 'fuel'.

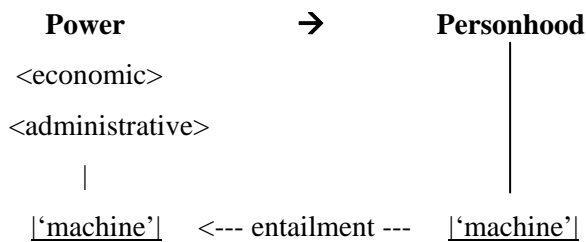
We are in search of a deep-structure interpretation of *Modern Times* that can account for the film as a whole. The aforementioned indications of HUMAN IS A MACHINE means that this culturally pervasive metaphor also does a considerable amount of 'travelling' within the film, often making an appearance beyond the boundaries of the First Act. This finding, coupled with evidence that the main characters are constantly subject to forces beyond their control (that we will denote as 'X' for the time being), therefore warrants the claim that a part of the earlier stated deep-structure 'grammar' of the First Act can be extended to the film in its entirety:



But if we are still presented with a situation wherein people, again, become 'machines' in reaction to their determining circumstances, would it not be possible to also metaphorically denote these circumstantial forces as 'a machine'? The understanding of a human being as a 'machine' which arose with the Enlightenment was, after all, part of a more global shift towards an entire mechanistic worldview. From the sixteenth century we see, among other things, a definite movement away from the medieval view of *society* as a '*body*' to society understood as a '*machine*'. An early example is Thomas Hobbes who, under the influence of Galileo, saw humans as machines and consequently considered society, the 'body politic', as also functioning as a machine (Goatly 2007:102, 363-364). If humans are 'machines' then collectively, by mere logical implication, they must form part of a greater 'machine'. So, although we cannot say that the 'post-First Act' narrative points to *society, per se*, as the entity that makes people 'machines', we have good reason to metaphorically deem this as yet unidentified determining force ('X') as a 'machine'. Much like in the factory, we see still see Charlie taking on the image of some superordinate 'machinery' that determine his life:



This leaves us with the main question: What is 'X'? Once again, we can take our lead from the deep-structure dynamics of the First Act, albeit with the help of yet another theoretical tool. If we evaluate its key-formula, 'Technology → Personhood', in light of Macro-motive theory, it becomes clear that 'technology' is in fact a manifestation of the deeper motive of *Power*. Redrafting this key-formula into macro-terms, namely 'Power → Personhood', thus presents us with a *more fundamental* articulation of a *comprehensive* deep-structure that is constitutive of the film-narrative overall. As we have seen, after the First Act, Charlie and the Gamin are constantly confronted by *authority figures* (in the form of the police and welfare officials) and *socio-economic factors* (like unemployment, strikes and crime) in tandem – the industrial *machinery* from the opening sequences for the most part retreats from sight. While 'Power → Personhood' holds for the narrative as a whole, it is Ideology theory that finally enables us to pinpoint how the unifying macro of Power finds its respective forms in these two parts of the film. Whereas in the First Act the rule of Power can be traced to the ideological domination of *technology*, the remaining narrative rather sets its focus on other steering powers within modern capitalist societies – most notably a complex of *economic* and *administrative powers*. The joint application of Macro-motives and Ideology theory thus brings the ground-content and ideological framing of 'X' to light:



The Power motive has a variety of manifestations within the ideological landscape of modernity. In *Modern Times* the macro wears two of these 'faces': we find a definite shift in its ideological 'slanting' from the First Act, where Power is autonomized technology that reigns supreme as the 'machine', to the ensuing narrative where it takes on the form of economic-administrative powers

that oppressively define the lives of the characters.⁹¹ We therefore have a different ideological expression of the same persistent motive in each of the two sections of the narrative.

One cannot deny that *Modern Times* concerns itself with the dangers of industrial technology. But at the same time the concentration of this theme in its celebrated First Act paves the way for bigger themes that are still to come. So another way of appraising the First Act is that it serves as an *allegorical prologue* to the broader ‘Power → Personhood’ claim that the film makes. Chaplin’s comical view of machines turning people into ‘machines’ is set in place in order to show how people also function as parts of a much more pervasive societal ‘machine’. In the First Act Charlie is a ‘machine’ because of the determining influence of machines; in the narrative overall Charlie is a ‘machine’ because the overwhelming economic-, bureaucratic-, legal- and political systems that determine his life. The ‘literal’ influence of machines in the factory thus plays out figuratively in the wider society outside of it. This is not simply an interpretative ploy – the film itself suggests this by persisting with the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor in contexts where no physical machines are present. The narrative up to Charlie’s mental breakdown can be seen as standing in a figurative relation with what happens thereafter: ‘Life in the factory’ becomes an extended image for ‘Life beyond the factory’.⁹²

If we read the abovementioned figurative relation on an ideological level, it means that economic-administrative powers in the film also *come into expression through* manifestations of technological power – the most prominent of the latter being the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor. There is thus a *hierarchy* in the ideological deep-structure of *Modern Times*: the ideological forces that rule ‘Life beyond the factory’ are determinative of the power that characterizes ‘Life in the factory’; technological power is secondary and subservient to *economic-administrative powers*. Charlie is, after all, not at the mercy of machines as such, but machines in a *factory* serving *economic demands*. The motif of dominant technology in the First act is thus never a matter of technology in and for itself. Every instance of ‘Technology → Personhood’ in the First Act – all the imposing industrial machinery, the speeding assembly line, the surveillance of workers and the Billows feeding machine – answers to the higher dictates of economic-administrative powers.

There is a key symbol that, as a form of technology, captures this relation of ideological powers from the very first image of *Modern Times*: the clock. In regulating human enterprises

⁹¹ There are indications that the latter ideological complex also involves *political power*. As Stephens (2011) rightly remarks, the film depicts a police state that squashes any form of protest.

⁹² This kind of figurative relation between different sections of a narrative can be seen as adding yet another dimension to the earlier mentioned idea of semiotic ‘layering’ around key-formulas in a discourse (Cf. Visagie 1990:2).

collectively, the first automated machine in history came to steer “... *the conception of time away from the rhythms of nature into something far more mechanical and quantitative, an economical necessity for industrial life* (Goatly 2007:64).” The clock, an ultimate accomplice of economic-administrative powers, shows itself at regular intervals in *Modern Times* (see frames 5.15 to 5.20), reminding us that scheduled time plays a foundational role throughout. Much like the industrial machines in the First Act, the clock exerts its influence specifically on *work* and *eating*. As the clock in the opening credits nears six o’ clock, workers are shown on their way to the factory. An anonymous horn prompts the foreman to activate the machinery of the factory. Lunch, in the factory, in prison and later again in a factory (when Charlie’s mechanic boss gets stuck in a machine), takes place strictly in accordance with a siren. When lunch is signalled all machines come to a standstill. Time fatefully dictates Charlie and the Gamin’s ‘home-life’ in the department store, as an obsession with speed rules Charlie’s work in the factory and restaurant.⁹³



(5.15)



(5.16)



(5.17)



(5.18)

⁹³ The recurring theme of eating consistently shows us how ideological forces obscure this basic aspect of humanity. Technological domination is exemplified by the clumsy Billows feeding machine, force-feeding Charlie in a demonstration to the company president. Here food is literally *served* by a manifestation of Power. Likewise, the feast that Charlie and the Gamin help themselves to in the department store is ‘served’ directly by capitalism. It is by and large economic-administrative powers that have some kind of say in every act of ingestion encountered. It often happens that they *disrupt* eating. A clear example is Charlie that runs off in the middle of a meal as the news of new factory jobs breaks. Even a meal which the couple enjoy in a daydream is interrupted by a policeman. Eating is also shown to be subject to strict *time schedules*. An interesting example is the scene where Charlie’s mechanic boss gets stuck in a machine. Stephens (2011) argues that the Tramp manages to re-establish his priorities by taking his lunch break and deciding that feeding the mechanic is more important than breaking him out. While this may represent a reversal of dominant technology, Stephens, however, overlooks that Charlie still instinctively adheres to the *lunch break whistle*. When the whistle sounds, he drops the entire crisis just to fetch his lunch. And once it sounds again, the lunchbox immediately gets closed and he is straight back to work. The ludicrous scenario of a ‘Billows feeding machine’ (which is after all meant to cut costs by ensuring time efficiency) thus offers a foreshadowing allegory of how eating is more generally subservient to the dictates of *the clock*.



(5.19)



(5.20)

Intertitles throughout the film also show a consistent concern with time – often in very exact terms. Notable examples include: “Lunch time”; “As time marches on into the late afternoon”; “The minister and his wife pay their weekly visit”; “I must punch the time clocks”; “Now go to sleep and I’ll wake you up before the store opens”; “The next morning”; “Ten days later”; “One week later”; and “I’ve been waiting an hour for roast duck”

In the light of this, a lot of the supposedly ‘industrial machines’ in *Modern Times* also tend to resemble the inner workings of a clock (see frames 5.21 and 5.22). Likewise the mentioned motif of *circular movement* that is indicative of ‘machine’ symbolism (Charlie’s high on ‘nose-powder’, the dancing Gamin, the restaurant dance floor) applies just as much to the inner- and exterior movements of a clock.



(5.21)



(5.22)

The figure of the clock is therefore the epitome of how, in ‘modern times’, increasingly organized industry exerts its dominance through technology. Furthermore the recurring hegemony of scheduled, clock-driven time in the narrative reaffirms that *Modern Times* primarily concerns itself with oppressive economic-administrative powers – of which slavery to technology is but one symptom.

We are finally in a position to sketch the overall philosophical deep-structure at work in *Modern Times*. In terms of macro-motives we can denote the basic ‘generative’ key-formula operating throughout the film as:

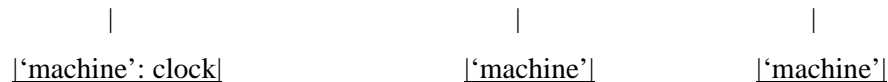
Power → Personhood

Ideology theory helps us specify how a very abstract sense of Power is concretized as definite ideological values. In the First Act Power is most apparent as dominating technology while the broader narrative tends to thematize the motive in the form of economic-administrative powers. Yet these ideological values themselves, we have found, are arranged in a hierarchical, key-formulaic relationship:

[<Economic-administrative powers> → <Technological power>] → Personhood ⁹⁴

This deep-structure construction functions through a few recurring figurative forms. It importantly ends in the central metaphor of people repeatedly behaving like or becoming ‘machines’. This results from an overpowering influence of technology, expressed metonymically as robust industrial machines. In turn, both these machines and the ‘mechanical’ humans that they produce are subject to economic- and administrative powers. Their metaphorical status as a ‘machine’ is mostly a matter of inference: we conceive the system as a machine based on the machinelike determinism evidenced by those trapped within it. It is therefore fitting that the higher, and visually elusive, economic-administrative powers make themselves felt through the narrative agency of ‘the clock’, a *machine* finely set to the demands of a bureaucratized, profit-driven society.

[<Economic-administrative powers> → <Technological power>] → Personhood



⁹⁴ Again I leave the arrow (→) in ‘Economic-administrative powers → Technological power’ unspecified since multiple ‘key-operators’ are at play here. Not only do economic-administrative powers ‘precede’, ‘determine’ and ‘enclose’ technological power, but technological development, as we have seen, is also depicted as a manner in which they ‘come into expression’.

4. Freedom and pursuing ‘happiness’

By way of closing this analysis, some attention needs to be given to *Modern Times* as a social commentary. We have seen that *Modern Times* depicts a world where human beings are subject to the control of ‘machines’ of literal and figurative kinds, leaving the people in the ‘machinelike’ position of being deterministically driven into most of what they do or experience.

Obviously the film’s mobilisation of ideological technology and economic-administrative powers is not a mere ‘symptomatic’ veneration of these values but a critical depiction thereof. The film gains its critical and satirical thrust, in part, by portraying most instances of ‘Power → Personhood’ in comically exaggerated and overdone ways. But, arising from another ideological plane, we also witness in our heroes a certain (often unconscious or even unintentional) refusal to go along with it all.⁹⁵

This is, of course, pointed out in the opening statement of the film: “*A story of industry, of individual enterprise – humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness.*” The “*individual enterprise*”, a determination not to ‘fit’ into the ‘machine’, is made clear from the first montage wherein we see a single black sheep in the middle of the white flock (frame 5.1). For this reason Stephens (2011) describes the Tramp as “... *the black sheep who breaks norms and demonstrates escape routes from sheepish or machine-like behaviour.*” He tends to stand out in arenas of utmost control: in the factory he, for instance, does not let the chance slip to make the foreman do some of *his* work. The same holds true for the prison, where he is the only inmate who is out of sync, constantly lagging behind the official’s whistle (and later even more so when the ‘nose-powder’ gets the better of him). Likewise the resolute Gamin is first introduced as someone who “*refuses to go hungry*” and in doing so repeatedly defies authority. The characters’ individualism becomes especially apparent after the ‘dream home’ sequence. Up to this point it is more a matter of not quite fitting in with the circumstances which sweep them along. But with the shared dream of an idyllic home-life ahead of them, they show much more purposeful agency in pursuit of their (elusive) ideal.

All the steering powers of ideological culture project an additional ‘counter-formation’ of *freedom*, where freedom from technological-, economic- or administrative power (or any other ideological force, for that matter) becomes an equally ideological and overriding value. In the

⁹⁵ Cf. Falzon (2007:200) who describes the Tramp’s disposition as “*anti-technological individualism*” and Stephens’ (2011) claim that *Modern Times* illustrates how “... *the human spirit can break out of its confinements, providing not only comic relief but utopian models during dystopian times.*”

midst of all the ideological powers with which it deals, *Modern Times* certainly also harbours such a freedom ideal. We can expect it to be characteristically intertwined with other dominant discourses on the ideological landscape of modernity. One option is to see ideological freedom in *Modern Times* as operating through a *revolutionist ideology*.⁹⁶ Yet a much more apparent ideological alliance, in my view, is how the freedom ideal becomes tied up the familiar Western ‘grand narrative’ of *pursuing happiness*. Gaining freedom essentially gets defined as a ‘pursuit of happiness’. It is called by this exact name in the film’s opening statement and later finds form in the couple’s dream of an ideal home-life (which may point to the further involvement of ‘romantic love’ or ‘familial life’ as micro-level, lifestyle ideologies). It is then noticeable how also happiness as an ideological value – and not only technology as many commentators like to point out – redefines the aims and purposes of work. Motivated by their ‘dream home’ fantasy, Charlie valiantly declares: “*I’ll do it! We’ll get a home, even if I have to work for it.*”

We should, however, not overlook that the characters – as authentic, innovative and resolute as they may be – persistently fail in their pursuits. Or, at best, their victories are shortlived. The film-narrative thus puts forward a patently frustrated, hemmed-in ideal of freedom. One may go as far as calling it illusory. As Charlie and the Gamin work to obtain an objective state or destination of ‘happiness’, the freedom-happiness complex nevertheless remains tied down to the imperatives of the economic-administrative ‘machine’: it dictates the *kind of work* (and availability) that has to be done to achieve happiness, it defines the overwhelmingly *consumerist character* of their ‘happiness’ and, above all, it constantly *obstructs their attempts* at acquiring this fleeting happiness. Indicative of those circular movements that characterize the machine they keep ending up where they started. Once *Modern Times* reaches its conclusion their happiness is still not realized. But, as the lonely road stretches out ahead of them, the ever-beckoning promise is still in place.

⁹⁶ In terms of the broader society portrayed, the film bears suggestions of liberation movements and even communist revolt. In the protest that Charlie gets caught up in slogans like ‘Unite’, ‘Liberty’ and ‘Liberty or death’ can be discerned on banners and posters. When it comes to Charlie himself, Stephens (2011) goes as far as claiming that the antics resulting from the Tramp’s mental demise in the factory (the madcap lever switching, oil squirting, etc.) represents an act of *sabotage*; that he emerges from the devouring machine transfigured and ready to undertake his *mission*. In my view the film does not support this reading, since his ‘sabotage’ involves involuntary, unintentional actions resulting from a *mental breakdown* that the narrative gives no reason to question. Stephens also argues that the Billows machine’s abortive attempt to force-feed Charlie captures the film’s ‘revolutionary’ meta-narrative: Charlie, a “*non-industrial man*”, is wired differently from his controlled fellow workers – so it is as if the feeding machine (and by implication a mechanized society) cannot process his “*free spirit*” (Stephens 2011). The point, for me, is that the machine simply fails. A passive Charlie is merely the unfortunate recipient of its failure. If anything, we are rather left to conclude that machines are not perfect. And nor are workers who are made ‘machines’ – as Charlie’s own eventual ‘breakdown’ so aptly illustrates.

5. Postscript: A criticism of Wartenberg

Some of the findings in the foregoing analysis hold important implications for what we understand by the ‘meeting’ of film and philosophy or, more specifically, how exactly a film can illustrate philosophy.

Thomas Wartenberg’s (2007:44-54) Marxist reading of *Modern Times* is quite relevant to all of this. Wartenberg seeks to show how the film illustrates Karl Marx’s theory of worker exploitation and alienation under capitalism and touches on quite a few moments that exemplify Marx’s views. I want to focus on what he takes to be an especially prominent instance, namely the film’s portrayal of the *mechanization of the human being* under the factory system, as claimed by Marx (Wartenberg 2007:49-51). He explains that, for Marx, the alienation of workers inevitably led to their transformation into machines; by accommodating itself to human weakness, the machine can turn weak humans into machines. One achievement of *Modern Times* is that it offers a complete visualization of Marx’s metaphor: “*Although we all have an intuitive sense of what Marx’s metaphor of a person being turned into a machine means, the use of a metaphor seems to render this claim poetic rather than it being a literal claim being made about the conditions of the working class. What would it mean, after all, for a person quite literally to become a machine* (Wartenberg 2007:50)?” Through its comical depictions of Charlie the factory worker getting stuck in mechanical nut-tightening motion (as well as his ensuing ‘breakdown’), the film makes a philosophical contribution by “... *providing a specific interpretation of the mechanization of the human being that Marx attributes to capitalism* (2007:50).” And the fact that Marx did not go into a great deal of detail about what this mechanization entails, makes the film’s creative rendering of a mechanized body, and rigidified mind, all the more significant.

But are we justified in saying that it is ‘Marx’s metaphor’ that is being illustrated here? In my view there is a more foundational concept at stake. In my analysis of *Modern Times* I gave considerable evidence for a *conceptual metaphor* – the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor – that is at work in the film. Charlie’s mechanical comics are unique theatrical expressions of this metaphor that invariably lies at the cognitive base of any manner in which we may see a human in terms of a machine. And it is the same conceptual mapping that is at work when Marx claims that the worker under capitalism has become a ‘machine’. This metaphor, although used for a particular philosophical argument, was not invented by Marx, nor is it unique to him. The rise of Newtonian physics ushered in a mechanistic worldview which promoted the image of the ‘machine’ to an epochal status, thus making it very common, right up to the current digital age, to

describe human beings as some kind of machine.⁹⁷ The HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor is therefore a product of widespread cultural dynamics and, considering its embeddedness in continual technological development witnessed in modernity, appears to be a conception that Western discourses cannot avoid. The way in which it then finds expression in even our most ordinary everyday language (like, ‘Quit stalling!’), importantly tells us that this is *not a novel philosophical metaphor* – as Wartenberg perhaps assumes – but rather a deep seated *metaphorical concept with philosophical relevance*.

I approach the meeting of film and philosophy from the understanding that it is a film’s ability to embody *philosophically relevant concepts* that allows it to ‘take in’ philosophical theories. The film’s harboring of the *same* grounding concepts that constitute a philosophical discourse creates the deep-structure points of contact whereby a dialogue between the two can take place. In this case *metaphor* is the conceptual link between *Modern Times* and a particular piece of Marxist discourse: Wartenberg is able to identify Marx’s views on worker ‘mechanization’ within *Modern Times* because of the common conceptual metaphor on which both discourses rely. The HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor is thus a widely ‘travelling’ ground concept that the film and philosophy *share*. Expressions of the metaphor are secondary to the constitutive concept itself. So whether it is Marx’s writings or Chaplin’s physical humor, the same conceptual metaphor regulates what those expressions can be and how we make sense of them. According to contemporary metaphor theory, this particular kind of ground concept in fact forms the *cognitive precondition* for either Marx’s utterances or Charlie’s robot-like antics making any kind of sense to us at all.⁹⁸

So what on face-value might seem like a straightforward illustration of a philosophical theory is rather the filmic mobilization of a philosophically significant metaphor that has just as much found expression in the earlier work of Marx. I obviously would not want to deny that *Modern Times* was influenced by Marxist discourse. The bigger point, however, remains: both the film and Marx’s mechanization argument draw from a much more widespread and fundamental discursive phenomenon that, although not belonging to either of the two, *unifies* them on a deep-structure level and thereby *constitutes* this particular instance of ‘philosophy in film’. A benefit of this ‘ground-perspective’ is that it bypasses the tediousness of having to prove the possibility that the filmmaker was influenced by Marxism, as Wartenberg (2007:44 n35) apparently feels obliged to do. Chaplin’s depiction of ‘machine’ metaphors in the Industrial Age does not have to

⁹⁷ See Visagie (1990:16-21) for a brief discussion of optical metaphors as a similar example of what he calls ‘epochal master metaphors’.

⁹⁸ As stated earlier in the chapter metaphors should not only be seen as figurative ‘extensions’ of other ground concepts, but can also in themselves serve as the constitutive *origin* of discourses (Visagie 2007:28).

be from a Marxist perspective for it to be philosophically significant or even for it to be in some form of dialogue with Marxism itself. Its philosophical contribution ultimately lies in how the film-text (much like any written philosophical work) can uniquely position and concretize the relevant grounding concepts on which it relies. In this chapter's analysis it became clear how *Modern Times* indeed maintains its 'philosophical independence', since the film departs from 'Marx's metaphor' of worker mechanization by wittily depicting how people also become 'mechanized' under wider economic- and systemic pressures.⁹⁹

These brief reflections, in conclusion, make it clear how metaphor can serve as an underlying conceptual bridge between film and philosophy. Especially what cognitive science has come to define as the 'conceptual metaphor' is, to my mind, a particularly good model of a trans-discursive grounding concept that enables the presence of philosophy in film. I therefore have no doubt that the study of metaphor will prove to be an extremely fruitful perspective on the meeting of film and philosophy and is something which I still intend to explore thoroughly in the future.

⁹⁹ Considering the broader deep-structure framework within which the 'machine' metaphor operates in the film, one might even argue that simply picking out one or two events as illustrative of Marxist thought obscures the larger cohesive claims that the film may make and thereby withholds it from its own *individual* construal of the metaphor.

Chapter 6

Postural Theory: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

1. Introduction

In the analysis that follows I will make use of a theory of ethical postures, or ‘postural theory’, to illustrate ways in which *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry 2004) presents its own philosophically significant perspectives. As a point of departure, I want to place this investigation against the backdrop of a wider concern within philosophy of film: how is it possible for a film to make a philosophical claim? Here the issue, more specifically, is what Wartenberg (2007:76-77) explains as the ‘generality objection’ – the view that fictional film narratives are inherently *particular* and therefore incapable of putting forward the *universal* claims that are characteristic of philosophical arguments. Such a film’s narrative rendering of *specific* characters and situations is thus not ‘*general* enough’ to count as offering a genuinely philosophical perspective.

In his interpretation of *Eternal Sunshine*, Wartenberg (2007:85-91) challenges this objection by presenting the film as a counter-example to the ethical theory of utilitarianism. His argument is that the intrinsically *individual* nature of the film-narrative does not prevent it from being a counter-example to the *general* utilitarianist tenets that the film itself raises. So here the possibility of its being a specific counter-example allows a film to engage with the general nature of philosophical assertions.

My analysis of philosophically relevant themes in *Eternal Sunshine* will put forward another possibility for coming to terms with the ‘generality objection’. The guiding assumption is reasonably straightforward: the particularistic, unique nature of an individual narrative can only be granted if, at the same time, it is accepted that *no* single narrative is *absolutely individual*. Although a particular narrative is obviously individual, the very terms one is forced to use in describing its individuality are inevitably conceptual, categorical universals. Even by merely identifying something as ‘a narrative’ you immediately concede the ‘something general’ that it shares with other narratives. Our theoretical estimations of a film-narrative therefore have to become a finely tuned balancing act: to see the film as disclosing itself in *both* individualities and universals that remain inextricably bound together.

Postural theory, in its application to narratives, is sensitive to this intersection of the individual and the general. Its challenge to the ‘generality objection’ is more specifically this: how you can have any significant *individual* narrative that does not in some way call forth the *general* conditions – postural concerns like suffering, meaninglessness, guilt, working, playing, contemplating, taking care, letting go and experiencing joy, hope and peace – which *characterize human life*? Postural theory thus suggests at least one set of ‘universals’ that a particular narrative unavoidably has to rely on, and draw from. Yet when these postural universals are concretized within the individual narrative, they can be characterized and combined in potentially infinite ways. And, as will be seen, it is precisely in this individual actualization of postural norms that the narrative takes up a decided philosophical position. By singling out certain postures, and by constructing relations, hierarchies and tensions between them, the narrative particularizes postural generalities within its own distinct ‘postural profile’. It is on the basis of this *individual* narrative construal of postural *generalities* that the film-narrative can be seen as articulating its own philosophical claims.

2. An overview of *Eternal Sunshine*

Let us then consider the narrative at hand. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* opens with a seemingly dejected Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) waking up and setting off to work. He is struck by a sudden impulse to ditch work and aimlessly wander around on Montauk beach instead. In Montauk he crosses paths with Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet), a colorful character who on the train trip back strikes up a conversation with him. Despite their admittedly awkward exchange on the train Joel offers her a lift home, they have drinks in her apartment, and the new couple hit it off extraordinarily well. The following evening Clementine takes Joel on a date to the frozen Charles River. Upon arriving back home the following morning, she asks if she could sleep over at Joel’s place. While waiting for Clementine to fetch her toothbrush, a stranger, whom we later get to know as Patrick (Elijah Wood), knocks on the window and for some reason asks Joel, “*Why are you here?*”

After this unusually long opening scene the film cuts to its introductory credits where we see Joel, in his car, crying his eyes out. (The first time viewer will immediately presume that things between Joel and Clem have gone wrong, but in fact the narrative has jumped back in time to the events that lead up to the opening sequence. The twist is that the film has opened with its ending and that Joel and Clem did once know each other before the ‘meeting’ we have just witnessed. It

soon transpires that Joel and Clementine have been in a turbulent relationship for two years. After a particularly stormy breakup Joel found out that Clem had undergone a process whereby he had been erased from her memory. As this is too much for Joel to bear, he decides to have her also erased from his memory. And so he too resorts to Dr. Howard Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson), head of Lacuna Inc. – the small company that offers this rather dodgy service.) When Joel arrives home he opens a new set of pajamas and passes out after drinking sleeping pills. The Lacuna team, initially consisting of Stan (Mark Ruffalo) and Patrick, moves in, sets up their equipment and gets Joel’s erasure procedure underway.

Now, in his mind, Joel is re-experiencing all the memories related to Clementine as they are brought up for erasure. The procedure systematically starts with the most recent memories and retrogressively works towards the oldest ones. In essence, this becomes a *review* of the relationship (Reeve 2009:20). In the first memories we learn of Joel’s consultations with Lacuna – the recorded interview about his wanting to erase Clementine; and how the Lacuna technicians created a ‘map’ of memories-to-be-deleted with the ‘bagsful’ of ‘Clementine memorabilia’ that Joel had to give them. The creepy experience of *déjà-vu* soon leads Joel to the realization that he is in the process of erasure.

The next string of memories details the couple’s final breakup as well as the deteriorated state of their relationship before that. Yet, as he goes further back, Joel finds that there are precious memories of Clementine which he does not want to give up. We see a sudden change of heart in Joel as he realizes that he will lose Clementine completely. “*I want it called off!*”, the helpless inner Joel screams furiously, hoping that maybe someone on the ‘outside’ might hear him.

Parallel to these depictions of Joel’s mind are scenes of the bungling Lacuna duo, in Joel’s apartment, completely oblivious to his inner turbulence. Patrick tells Stan about his new girlfriend, whom he ‘fell in love with’ when doing a previous erasure job. This news somehow trickles through Joel’s unconscious state, leading Joel to deduce that Patrick’s girlfriend is Clementine, and that Patrick stole Joel’s ‘Clementine stuff’ at Lacuna to manipulatively woo her. The only recourse left to the restrained Joel is to try and hold on to Clementine by ‘running away’ from the erasure. His imaginary projection of Clementine becomes actively involved in this and comes up with a range of suggestions for evading the ‘eraser guys’. Her suggestion that Joel take her ‘somewhere where she does not belong’ ends up with Joel hiding her in his painful childhood memories.

As a result Clementine jumps off the ‘map’ of targeted memories, and Stan has to call up Dr. Mierzwiak to come and help. Meanwhile another colleague, Mary (Kirsten Dunst), has joined in the illicit fun which has been going on in Joel’s apartment. As the doctor steps in, her overblown, flirtatious compliments reveal that she has quite a crush on him. When Stan takes a smoke break outside, Mary tries to kiss the doctor. But when Dr. Mierzwiak’s wife shows up out of the blue, it emerges that Mary and the doctor had an affair in the past and that Mary herself also opted to undergo the erasure procedure.

When the erasure gets back on track, Joel and Clementine’s most valiant attempts to save his memory of her seem to be in vain. Joel can only savor the last memories with his inner Clem. As the final memory of their first acquaintance falls apart, and they say their final I-love-you’s, Clementine whispers in Joel’s ear, “*Meet me in Montauk...*” The morning after Joel’s procedure, we see a repeat of the opening sequence as Joel wakes up and, despite having a ‘spotless mind’, still scurries to catch the train to Montauk. Since he once again ‘meets’ Clementine in Montauk, it appears that his imaginary Clementine’s order somehow made the transition to reality. We now jump back to the point, seen in the beginning, where Joel is waiting in the car for Clementine to fetch her toothbrush. She gets back, opens her mail, and finds a tape. The accompanying letter from Mary explains that she has decided to send all pre-erasure interview tapes from Lacuna back to their rightful owners. When she pops the tape into the stereo, the couple of ‘spotless minds’ find themselves in the extremely confusing situation of hearing all the spiteful things Clem said when she wanted to erase Joel. Joel takes this as a sick joke and tells her to get out. When the distraught Clementine later looks Joel up in the phonebook, she finds him in his apartment listening to his own interview tape. They try to be nonchalant about it all, but the demeaning things voiced by Joel’s tape cause her to leave. Joel however tells her to wait and after an honest exchange they both, amidst smiles and tears, nevertheless say ‘okay’ to giving their ‘new’ relationship another go-around.

3. A postural reading of *Eternal Sunshine*

3.1 Basic postural profile

Let us now, by way of considering the leading postural concerns in the film, put together a basic ‘postural profile’ of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. First we need to ask ourselves: what leading postures come to the fore in the represented life-histories of the characters involved? A

useful distinction to make from the outset is that certain postures (notably suffering, meaninglessness, and guilt) are often experienced as being an *'attack'*, resulting in the taking up of other postures as a reaction to, or *defense* against, the attacking posture.

Eternal Sunshine is clearly set in motion by the experience of *suffering* that emerges as an *'attack'* within the lives of the characters. But, if we are to do the particularity of this narrative any justice, we must do our best at filling out the exact nature of this posture as it manifests itself in the film. There are two aspects of this suffering that particularly deserve our attention. Firstly, nearly all instances of suffering in the film are closely associated with *the other*. Joel and Clementine's respective life-histories meet in the shared life-world of their romantic relationship. It is unavoidable that within various kinds of life-worlds we will experience suffering at the hand of the other. In the deterioration and breakdown of their relationship we understand that Joel and Clementine are not only mutually *hurt* by the other, but also that each one suffers *losing* the other. (The narrative leads us to believe that the past life-world of Mary and Dr. Mierzwiak's romantic affair underwent a similar fate.) Furthermore such inflicted suffering implies, to a lesser or greater degree, a certain *guilt* on the part of the other.¹⁰⁰ A second important aspect of suffering, as represented in *Eternal Sunshine*, is that it mostly resides in *memory*. Memory is intimately related to suffering. In Joel's recollection of their crumbling relationship we witness *his memories of suffering*, but more generally we also come to see the *suffering of his memories* – that his sufferings function through memory, that it is by virtue of having memory that he, like all of us, suffer. The film's vision of suffering is thus decidedly framed by the notions of the other and memory. And we may even go as far as claiming that it is through *memories of the other* that Joel succumbs to the postural *'attack'* of experiencing suffering.

In postural *'defense'* to his suffering we find that Joel, as Clementine before him, and Mary before them, sets out on a *'life-project'* of *letting go*.¹⁰¹ More specifically they choose to let go of

¹⁰⁰ For simplicity's sake I have decided not to fully explore the role of *guilt* as an additional postural *'attack'* on the characters in the film. Yet this should not undermine its potential analytic-interpretative importance. Apart from the obvious measures of guilt at stake in Joel and Clem's broken relationship, the posture takes on a particularly strong presence in the *'sub-plot'* of Dr. Mierzwiak and Mary's extra-marital affair. The experience of guilt typifies the nature of their relationship and casts a dark shadow over especially Dr. Mierzwiak, since it is suggested that he abused his memory-erasure procedure to *'erase'* his own guilt. This context of experiencing guilt, in turn, stakes its own essential claim on what the meaning of *'the spotless mind'* in the film title is. Whereas the promise of a *'spotless mind'* for Joel and Clem, as this analysis will still show, perhaps points *more* towards the *absence of suffering*, Mary's *'spotless mind'* suggests just as much a certain *absence of guilt*. Consider for instance her quotation of Nietzsche, as she haphazardly tries to make conversation with Mierzwiak: *"Blessed are the forgetful, for they get even the better of their blunders."* Then she recites a passage from Alexander's Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* (lines 207 to 210), where the film also gets its title from: *"How happy is the blameless vestal's lot! The world forgetting, by the world forgot. Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind! Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd ..."* The impassioned Eloisa's admiration for the lot of the *'blameless'* Vestal virgin high priestesses of Ancient Rome implies that the spots in her mind, like Mary's, are as much marks of guilt as they are marks of suffering (Edwards 2008:120).

¹⁰¹ There may be the suggestion, as seen in Wartenberg (2007:86-87) for instance, that these characters' quest is rather one of wanting to attain *happiness*. There is the option of *'translating'* happiness into the posture of joy. But are these characters really striving for joy or happiness? On more than one occasion it is made clear that the characters want to simply overcome, or leave behind, the

the memories that their suffering is based on, and in doing that, they let go of the other that is the theme of this suffering. Their reasons for doing so differ.¹⁰² Yet, irrespective of motivations, it has to be emphasized that this is not ‘letting go’ in its normative postural sense. Normally someone’s letting go as a defense to suffering would be ‘letting go’ in a *metaphorical* sense, that is, doing the opposite of clinging onto the suffering. It would involve the individual ‘putting it behind’ him or perhaps ‘learning to live with it’. What makes the scenario in *Eternal Sunshine* different is that these characters resort to an option of *literally* letting go of their suffering – compliments of Lacuna Inc.’s memory erasure procedure. Although many commentators do address what the film has to say about memory and forgetting, scant attention is paid to this particularly warped way in which the characters can intentionally ‘forget’. We can typify this particular instance of letting go as misguided due to the distorting influence of certain (‘narrative internal’) ideological forces. Here ‘letting go’ turned ‘erasure’ is achieved by exclusively technological means. And so, under the force of apparently overriding techno-scientific norms, ‘letting go’ becomes a laughably mechanized, quasi-surgical process left in the supposedly competent hands of strangers in white coats. Moreover, for the characters, the mere fact that science and technology *enables* this memory erasure seems ideologically to *warrant* the questionable procedure by default.¹⁰³ This ideologically distorted act of letting go can, in turn, be said to undermine other normatively necessary postures in the characters’ lives. The clinical decisiveness of their memory erasure, for instance, marks a distinct failure of *taking care* – both of the self and the other.¹⁰⁴ And when letting go becomes artificial forgetting these characters are

suffering that they are faced with. As Dr. Mierzwiak explains to Joel, “Mrs. Kruczynski was not happy and wanted to move on.” Later he also hesitantly reveals to a dumbstruck Mary that, “You wanted the process done... so you can get passed...” Therefore I cannot deem their choice as ‘wanting to be happy’, *per se*, but in the first place as one of wanting to *let go*.

¹⁰² It is significant, for example, that Joel’s aspiration of letting go (erasing Clementine from his memory) is partly reciprocal (Driver 2009:81, 86). It is not only done in defense to his suffering but also in retribution of Clementine’s rash decision to erase him from her memory first. Joel’s act of letting go is thus just as much an attempt at canceling out the particular suffering resulting from his knowing what *she did to him*.

¹⁰³ As Grau (2006:127) notes, *Eternal Sunshine*, unlike the typical science-fiction film, is not in love with the technology that it showcases. In fact it offers quite a comical, tongue in cheek take on what ‘memory erasure technology’ may entail. Yet, despite *how* it is conveyed, there are growing reasons for taking its depiction of technologically infused acts of letting go in a more serious light. Scientists, particularly those specializing in post-traumatic stress disorder, are increasingly pushing for a new science of ‘therapeutic forgetting’. So contrary to trends in memory research, certain ‘memory-diminishing drugs’ are sought after to help people *forget* (Henig 2004; Grau 2006:129). Such potential techniques are far from the ‘zapping’ of targeted memories that we see in *Eternal Sunshine* – they rather involve ‘blunting’ the emotions tied to troublesome memories (Grau 2006:129). Certain studies, for instance, claim that *propranolol*, when taken within six hours of a traumatic event, can dampen the emotional pain associated with its memory. It is also suggested that, by reducing the emotional intensity of the memory, the drug can reduce its factual richness (Kolber 2006:1562). Possible criticisms of the ‘artificial forgetting’ we see in *Eternal Sunshine* could therefore also increasingly apply to *real world counterparts* of the fictional procedure.

¹⁰⁴ Grau (2006) offers an insightful overview of the ways in which the self and other is harmed by the characters’ artificial letting go of memories. In terms of *the self* he explains that, even though the character does not consciously experience a harm, the self suffers a ‘harm that deprives’ – the deprivation of truth (Grau 2006:123). He also evaluates harm of the self in terms of certain Kantian insights: in undergoing the erasure procedure the characters objectify themselves by treating the self as a means to an end. This testifies to a lack of respect of the self as a free rational agent. He notes that “*there is something disturbing about the idea of self-manipulation that parallels the disturbing aspects of manipulating others* (Grau 2006:124).” Memory erasure is thus a contradiction wherein you (ab)use your freedom to eventually limit that very freedom (2006:125). Grau (2006: 123, 125) perceptively adds that this abuse of self can be seen as an extension of already established self-destructive tendencies in the characters: Joel’s depression, Clementine’s alcoholism and Mary’s inclination to be easily influenced. How, on the other hand, does this neglect in taking care harm *the other*? The other is harmed though misrepresentation. Although removing memories is not the same as distorting them, Grau (2006:127) argues that the removal of *all* memories does amount to a form of distortion, akin to a ‘lie by omission’. Consequently he

arguably also robbed of the *normative place of suffering* in their lives. Postural logic dictates that even suffering – or, for the characters, memories causing suffering – is something that we sometimes *should* experience. This is not only, as many commentators suggest, for the sake of learning from our past mistakes (Cf. Grau 2006:120-121; Wartenberg 2007:88-89; Meyer 2008:78), but also to rid us of self-deception, inauthenticity and alienation (Visagie 2004:1; 1999b:25). And perhaps more so: experiencing suffering, simply for its own sake, is part of what makes our lives fully human.

A brief postural survey of *Eternal Sunshine* has thus, in particular, brought to the fore the postural ‘clustering’ of suffering and letting go. The overt pairing of these postures no doubt serves as an essential dramatic axis of the film. Yet more fundamentally these two recurring ethical ‘universals’ also serve as anchoring ground concepts to the very possibility of this individual narrative being meaningful to us. And although the film’s drawing from these postures amounts to a particular articulation of these concepts, this still has to take place within the broader contours of general human experience that these postures typify.

But how does the film’s mobilization of these constitutive postures amount to its making something of a philosophical claim? My position is that the film-narrative unavoidably represents a philosophically relevant position in its *particular concretization* of such concepts. When the realm described by postural theory finds its way into a specific narrative, certain things happen by default: (a) specific postures are in some way singled out from the set that the theory proposes; (b) they are framed and characterised in a distinct way; (c) particular relations and interactions between these postures are put forward and (d) these postures also undergo different evaluations. It is thus in its inadvertent manipulation of postural reality that a narrative construes these core themes of the human condition in its own distinctive way. And in doing so it casts a specific perspective – makes a certain claim – on what is typical, what is important or what is ultimately of consequence in our endeavors.

In the ‘postural profile’ of *Eternal Sunshine* that has been drawn up thus far, I have already considered the postures of suffering and letting go as (a) singled out by the narrative as well as (b) the particular characters that they acquire in the film. In order to appreciate fully the inherent philosophical claims made by the film, we now need to ‘deepen’ this profile by respectively

maintains that the posture of taking care should also involve a *responsibility to remember*. If we are to take care in our reflections (in addition to our actions), we are not only to strive for truthfulness in our perceptions of the world, but also our memories of it (Grau 2006:127). Remembering is thus part of a larger responsibility of *careful reflection*. Driver (2009), however, points out that not remembering only harms someone who has the *desire to be remembered*. Dr. Mierzwiak did not want to Mary to remember their relationship and in fact benefited from her undergoing the erasure. But in Joel’s case, because he apparently desires to be remembered, Clementine’s carelessness causes him considerable harm (Driver 2009:89, 91-92).

investigating (c) relations present between postures and (d) postural-evaluative moments in the narrative.

3.2 Postural relations and interactions

Part of a film's inherent philosophical claim lies in the relationships that are established between postures. A narrative may, for instance, typically arrange different postural commitments in a hierarchical fashion and in that way express a privileging of certain postures.

Another way of approaching postural relations is by exploring *significant interactions* between postures. With *Eternal Sunshine* we have, for example, already considered how the postures of suffering and letting go can be seen as standing in a relation of 'attack' and 'defense'. We also see an interesting 'chain reaction' of postures leading up to the 'retributive' act of Joel having his memories erased: Clementine's *suffering* prompts her to *let go*, the knowledge of which apparently multiplies Joel's *suffering*, resulting in turn in his *letting go* – leaving us to conclude that *his* motivations for doing so are quite a bit more complicated.

One of the most crucial postural interactions, however, is seen in the moving turning point of the narrative, when the helplessly restrained Joel realizes that he does not want to lose (his memories of) Clementine and wants the erasure process stopped. What in fact happens here is that an established relationship of postures, as a cluster, is placed into an entirely new relationship with a 'duplicate' of a posture already present. Up to this point Joel's quest has been the (distorted) letting go of (memory of the other causing) suffering. Yet, as Edwards (2008:3) so poignantly puts it, in doing so one form of grieving becomes substituted by another. So, in relation to the postural complex already in place, a *second* 'higher order' instance of *suffering* steps to the fore. Not the original suffering of a troubled relationship, but that he now *suffers the loss* of Clementine, a *loss of the other*. I consider it of a 'higher order' because *this* suffering now becomes the real crisis. In a dramatic role reversal his initial quest, to let go of his suffering, becomes *an opponent* to his changed outlook, and inflicts upon him the suffering of losing his once-beloved altogether. The 'eternal sunshine' part of the film title turns out to be a sham, since having a 'spotless mind' ironically shifts from being a promise to overcome suffering to being the source of Joel's ultimate suffering. As his project of letting go therefore results in this loss, Joel's new quest becomes the avoidance of that loss. It results in his defensively adapting something of

a new posture. After all, the posture of letting go also implies the opposite possibility of wanting to *hold on*. In so doing, Joel's attempt at retribution is turned into one of restitution.¹⁰⁵

3.3 Postural evaluations

There are certain notions that persistently arise whenever we consider *what happens to* postures in our lives. These concepts can be said to lie at the heart of postural theory as they frequently seem to frame our estimations of postures. The recurring notions of *excellence* and *failure* are of particular interest here. In our typical evaluations of postures it seems that the execution of postures is not merely deemed 'right' or 'wrong'. Nor does it appear that we have much regard for any 'middle ground'. The extents to which we take care, are humble, or experience something like peace, are evaluated, rather, in the extremities of a glorious success (often also understood as 'fullness') in contrast to downright failure ('emptiness' or 'nothingness'). Likewise, in the individual's ability to adopt postures of 'defense', it is unavoidable that the answer to 'What am I to do?' could be realized successfully or will end up in (possibly continual) failure. A further notion that constantly prevails in this postural realm is that of *redemption*. All the postures have a certain potential to be 'redemptive' to someone. This, again, holds especially within the 'attack-defense' framework, when a certain posture offers redemption by eradicating a certain 'attack'.

So, led by these notions, you can trace what happens to particular postures within a film, in an attempt to arrive at certain narrative evaluations of those postures. In *Eternal Sunshine* it is striking that Joel and Clementine's history in fact consists of an *entire series of failures* – all of which are related postural imperatives:

- Joel and Clem's suffering is born out of the *failure of a relationship*.

¹⁰⁵ There is a lot to be made of the fact that Joel's ultimate suffering is specifically one of 'loss'. The notion of loss forms part of an archetypal metaphor sequence that typically symbolizes matters of a deeply existential nature. The sequence 'lose-see-find' (together with another recurring sequence, 'stand-fall-rise') has an amazing habit of figuring in declarations of ultimate beliefs and ethical-existential commitments: a variety of religions and philosophies, for example, may all in their own ways tell of how humanity 'lost' something of importance; that our great quests in life are essentially ones of 'searching'; and how a great event relies on something valuable being 'found'. The prevalence of these metaphors presumably relies on their being so basic to human experience. This is arguably one of the first experiences a child has: a parent goes away and is 'lost' only to be 'found' in reappearing (Lacey 2000:29). As a result this primordial sequence is also essentially characterised by the sort of transformation associated with narrative 'plot': an initial situation ('having'), a change or reversal ('losing') and a striving for resolution ('seeking', 'finding') that somehow marks the change as significant (Culler 2000:80). So in describing Joel's experience as suffering *loss*, we should take heed of how 'existentially loaded' the term may be. Owing to its deeply recurring presence, 'losing something' may well be the richest metaphorical resource we have for grasping our worst suffering. Furthermore the notion of 'loss' can serve as an alternative reference point from which to consider crucial shifts in the film-narrative. Initially it was the 'loss' of his romantic partner, *metaphorically* speaking, that resulted in Joel's original suffering. Yet in realizing that he will *literally* lose Clementine (from his mind and life) Joel encounters a higher suffering. By virtue of 'loss' belonging to a typical narrative sequence, we also see a shift from loss being something desirable to being something undesirable. First Joel 'had' Clementine, but since this caused him considerable pain, he sought to 'lose' her by means of erasure. Yet in realizing that he will literally *lose* her, he in turn resorts to holding on and, as it were, try to 'find' the Clementine that he is losing.

- They both *fail in normatively letting go* (fail in dealing with their suffering).
- In a *failure to take care* they both resort to the ‘distorted letting go’ of memory erasure.
- As agents in Joel’s mind, their failure to evade the trail of memory erasure, despite their valiant efforts, is a *failure to hold on* to Clementine.

Yet this series of failures very significantly ends with another seemingly providential failure: the apparent failure of the memory erasure! Because the morning after the erasure procedure Joel wakes up and for some inexplicable reason runs off to Montauk – only to, again, ‘meet’ Clementine. In a reversal of fortunes our heroes are thus saved by the *failure* of their aspirations to *let go*.

Am I, however, warranted in claiming that the characters ultimately *failed* in the letting go of their suffering, of their memories of one another? On what grounds can we deem the memory erasure procedure a failure? I would like, by way of an ‘intermission’, briefly to stand still at this important interpretative juncture of the film. Because commentators’ interpretations (both explicit and implied) as to whether the memory erasure was successful, do differ. To my mind a careful balance needs to be struck here: although the characters do undoubtedly forget one another, in a mysterious way they also still ‘remember’. The problem is that many authors tend to overemphasize either their forgetting or remembering and hence *make too much* of one at the expense of the other.

Wartenberg (2007: 87-89), for instance, seems to suggest that the *memories were erased absolutely*. For him the ‘failure’ of the procedure lies rather in the fact that the characters end up pursuing the very relationship that they sought to erase. They did completely forget, but Lacuna’s technology takes away the ‘educative function’ of their memory, which leaves them vulnerable to repeating the same mistakes. The implication is that Joel and Clem meet again (and Mary makes passes at Dr. Mierzwia) only because of persisting desires and dispositions. Yet there are various indications in the film that the characters are not simply led by their emotions, but that they do, in a sense, ‘remember’. Wartenberg’s interpretation cannot account for the apparent *urgency* with which Joel sets off to Montauk (as directed by Clementine before her final erasure from his mind) almost immediately after his procedure. On the beach we also see him peeking

into the beach house that he and Clem visited on their first meeting. And when they finally 'meet', Clem tells Joel that he looks familiar. In no time Clementine is also apparently prompted by experiences past to drag Joel to the frozen Charles River (Reeve 2009:19). What's more, earlier on Clementine, having already undergone memory erasure, is strangely reminded and agitated by Patrick's imitations of those experiences that she has had with Joel. Mary evokes similar impressions in the impassioned moment when she tells Mierzwiak that, "*I've loved you for a very long time.*"¹⁰⁶

So these characters "*carry residual traces of their first relationships* (Simmons 2009:2)" and, as Toles (2009:121) puts it, even the successful obliteration of all memories pertaining to their romantic others "*does not deprive the lost figure of a lingering, and even beseeching, shadowy presence in consciousness.*" But why do they 'remember' in this way? A definite possibility is that the *memories were not erased entirely*. According to this view the Lacuna treatment was just not up to the task. In fact, it is doomed to failure because it simply cannot probe the deepest foundations of the memories that it supposedly erases. Compare for example Simmons's (2009:2) assertion that these formations are "*so embedded in our personal, social and cultural experience that they can never be fully erased or eliminated...*" Edwards (2008:4) agrees similarly that intentional forgetting is impossible, since "*our sense of self is too bound up in our memories and past events.*"

Then there is the view that leaves the question of how the characters 'remember' shrouded in mystery. For the likes of Reeve (2009:29) and Toles (2009:116) there is something inevitable, even ordained, about Joel and Clem's reunion in Montauk. What, after all, explains *Clementine's presence* on the beach at that exact time? It is as if the directive given by imaginary Clementine in Joel's mind "*has set off a magical echo in the real Clementine, which has led her to keep the assignation* (Toles 2009:116)." It is thus by some miraculous leap from mind to reality that "*the supposedly erased original continues to reverberate* (Reeve 2009:19)." There are understandably those that implicate *love* as this force that somehow (mystically) transcends the memory erasure (Falzon 2007:87; Reeve 2009:29). In light of this romanticized view, it may be unfair to label the memory erasure as a failure. But it remains clearer than ever that the fated lovers' have still (fortunately) failed in their misguided efforts to let go.

¹⁰⁶ It is also interesting that Mary's has a fascination with quotes that deal with the theme of forgetting. Apart from her claiming that she 'thought it would be appropriate', it may perhaps point to some unconscious 'recollection' that she may have undergone the erasure herself.

In saying all this we must, however, not overlook that, in a more factual sense, these characters still *did forget*. Upon meeting again Joel and Clementine do not know anything about each other – so much so that Joel even lost the obvious Huckleberry Hound associations with Clementine’s name. Likewise learning about her past affair with Mierzwiak is genuinely news to Mary. I feel that this (relative) ‘success’ of the memory erasure is somewhat overlooked in the analyses of Jollimore (2009) and Meyer (2008). Both of them make a lot of the fact that Joel and Clementine’s memories are ‘restored’ by the stolen interview tapes that they receive from Mary. In Jollimore’s (2009:54-56) Nietzschean reading of the ending, the couple’s optimistic exchange of ‘okays’, having just learned of the miserable past that they share, is viewed as a courageous affirmation and endorsement of life. Akin to Nietzsche’s parable of the ‘eternal return’, the couple can confront the ‘true nature’ of their relationship and nevertheless find the strength to say ‘okay’ for another go-around. In Meyer’s (2008:79-81) view, this concluding scene is one of reconciliation as the information on the tapes elicits a flood of apologies. The necessity of memory to forgiveness and reconciliation is central to his estimation of *Eternal Sunshine*. Hence we admire Joel and Clem’s acceptance of their human limits, “*made acute by an unsparing memory of a shared past* (2008:86).” Both authors, however, presuppose more ‘remembering’ than there really is. In receiving the Lacuna tapes Joel and Clementine do not get their memories back and they certainly do not ‘remember’ in any literal sense.¹⁰⁷ They really learn of their painful past ‘second-hand’; their memories are not so much restored as they are merely *acknowledged* (Silvey 2009:2; Driver 2009:84). These two analyses therefore falter in their overestimation of the extent to which the characters come to ‘remember’ again. Although a certain ‘remembering’ does reunite the characters – and thereby constitute the failure of their wanting to let go – we should not lose sight of the fact that it remains a *mysterious exception* to the ‘rule’ of their spotless minds.

We can therefore consider the distorted project of letting go a failure because, although the characters did forget, in a way they still ‘remembered’. Their aim was intentionally to forget one another. Yet the failure coming to the rescue of our heroes is that they do not forget *completely*. It appears that, fortunately for them, having a genuinely ‘spotless mind’ is something of an elusive ideal.

¹⁰⁷ Meyer (2008:87 n19) himself concedes that in Mary’s ‘restoration of their recollection’ they do not regain their memories *as memories*, but rather as quasi-memories, beliefs that may function like memories.

3.4 Conclusion: Postural claims in *Eternal Sunshine*

We have considered how *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* not only ‘picks out’ particular postures to guide its narrative, but also depicts them within distinct relations and shows us whether they succeed or fail. In doing so the film invariably puts forward a decided picture of the human condition. Firstly, the film says something about our ultimately inescapable struggles in dealing with *suffering* – especially dealt from the hands of *the other* and our *memories* of them. Secondly, the characters’ failure in intentionally ‘*letting go*’ emphasizes the normative place of such suffering in their, and our, lives. This is since, thirdly, the success of their distorted aspirations of letting go of hurtful memories would have resulted in a seemingly ‘*higher order suffering*’ – a complete loss of the other.¹⁰⁸ Finally the film also depicts the apparent *inevitability of failure* in our postural pursuits. Yet, thoroughly in line with postural logic, it fittingly reveals a *normative, even redemptive*, side to such failure. There is redemption in the apparent failure of their memory erasure that allows Joel and Clem to reunite. In Mary’s case it is suggested that her version of this failure (the disappointment of finding out about her affair with Dr. Mierzwiak) opens her eyes to the genuine loving attention of her colleague, Stan. And, before all of this, there are many instances of postural failure that acts as the ‘dispatcher’ that sets Joel on an inner journey that, as Reeve (2009) persuasively argues, leaves him changed for the better. It is thus fitting that, in the film’s ‘anxious happy ending’ (Meyer 2008), Joel and Clem say ‘okay’ to the future likelihood of further failures, their resultant sufferings, and even more failures in not being able to let go of these sufferings, because this seemingly bleak prospect nevertheless promises moments of redemption.

This kind of philosophically relevant viewpoint or claim that *Eternal Sunshine* raises is not necessarily explicit. Yet it does offer a possible answer to the question of how an individual narrative can be seen as making claims of a general philosophical nature. I have shown how, in constructing its own ‘postural profile’, a film like *Eternal Sunshine* unavoidably adopts a certain perspective, makes certain judgments and even presents its own claims on our human condition. The so called ‘generality objector’ will, however, argue that this is an *individual* expression that only applies to specific characters and their specific situations. But this individuality cannot be absolute. The film’s representations of suffering and letting go, as *particular* as they may be, can only be meaningfully grasped and described on the basis of postural *universals* as the conditions of their possibility. In presenting an individualized narrative world to us, the film also discloses a

¹⁰⁸ An obvious entailment of this ‘higher’ suffering of loss may be that the characters will repeat their mistakes, as we see in especially Mary’s case. But, perhaps more so, this suffering of memory erasure lies simply in losing the *inherent value* of someone significant.

certain *selection* and *organization* of the general postural themes on which it is predicated. The narrative concretization of a given, general postural ‘realm’ is thus at the same time a definite construal of that aspect of human existence. It is in this way that a film-narrative inadvertently presents certain claims on the nature of our lives.

4. Narratological interpretations

The kind of postural reading of *Eternal Sunshine* just offered can also serve as a fruitful point of departure for a more complex, out and out *narratological analysis* of a film. The example that I will present here – centering on the posture of suffering – is but one of a multitude of possibilities and will hopefully illustrate the increasing depth of interpretation that such an analysis may yield.

I will proceed by first identifying a handful of ‘spaces’ within which the film-narrative of *Eternal Sunshine* plays out. Then I will seek to highlight the way in which the posture of suffering changes in appearance as it ‘travels’ between these spaces. Finally I will investigate specifically Clementine’s role in relation to these different expressions of suffering.

4.1 Narrative meta-spaces

First, I would like to distinguish certain separate ‘spaces’ in which the film functions. These should, however, be distinguished from ‘narrative spaces’, the concrete locations within the world of the narrative. They should rather be deemed *meta-spaces* – abstracted places, periods or phases of the narrative that group related events together.

There is firstly the overall distinction between the ‘Real world’ and the memories and imaginings within ‘Joel’s mind’. In the real world there are the spaces of ‘Pre-erasure’, of which we in fact see very little, and ‘Post-erasure’ in which Joel and Clementine reunite. The space of Joel’s mind, on the whole, contains the happenings which take place inside him during his memory erasure. Here are four ‘sub-spaces’ of note. Firstly, the ‘Deteriorated relationship’ space, which consists of memories of Joel and Clem’s love gone wrong. Secondly, there is ‘Realization of Clem’s worth’, which is the locus of Joel’s change in sentiments. Thirdly, ‘Joel’s Childhood’ is comprised of different memory contexts from Joel’s youth. And lastly, memories of the couple’s

first acquaintances make up the space of ‘First memories’. Here are the narrative meta-spaces, in something of a chronology:

- 1) Real world: Pre-erasure
- 2) Joel’s mind: Deteriorated relationship
- 3) Joel’s mind: Realization of Clem’s worth
- 4) Joel’s mind: Joel’s Childhood
- 5) Joel’s mind: First memories
- 6) Real world: Post-erasure

4.2 Spaces of suffering

We have already considered how the turning point of *Eternal Sunshine* introduces a second appearance of the posture of suffering. Yet the film calls upon the posture in an even more elaborate way. For, as you travel between these meta-spaces of the narrative, you will encounter a *different manifestation* of suffering in each one. I will briefly consider all these instances of suffering as they pertain to the character of Joel.

In the (1) ‘Pre-erasure real world’ we see suffering in Joel, sobbing in his car. This, of course, represents all the suffering rooted in the failure of his relationship with Clementine – of which the viewer will learn in Joel’s reviewing of memories. It is because of this suffering that Joel then goes home and takes the sleeping pills for his procedure – the last event we witness in this space.

In Joel’s mind, the (2) ‘Deteriorated relationship’ space comprises mainly the *memories depicting* the suffering implied in the previous space. These memories not only tell of the couple’s conflicts and eventual breakup but also reveal how Joel’s suffering was amplified on learning that Clementine had ‘erased’ him.

In (3) ‘Realization of Clem’s worth’, it is Joel’s changed experience of the erasure process that introduces a new ‘higher order’ of suffering. Joel is now suffering the loss of his cherished memories of Clementine in an agonizingly measured manner. “*Did you hear me? I want it called off!*”, the tormented inner Joel screams from his helpless position. All of which is aggravated by his realization that Patrick is seducing Clementine with Joel’s mementoes of her.

In the realm of (4) 'Joel's childhood' suffering comes to the fore in memories of *increasing humiliation*. In terms of postural theory, humiliation is a combination of postures; it is the *suffering of humility*. In an attempt to outdo the predetermined trail of memory erasure, Joel takes Clementine into painful recollections of his childhood as 'places where she does not belong'. There are three humiliating memories, or more specifically memory contexts, into which he brings Clem: (a) Joel, as a baby, not receiving enough attention from his mother, (b) Joel, as a teenager, being caught by his mother while masturbating and (c) Joel, as a toddler, being bullied into killing a pigeon with a hammer. It is striking that Joel attempts to escape the suffering introduced in the previous space by trying to hide in the further, more deeply buried, suffering of his past.

The form of suffering in (5) 'First memories' is similar to those of the 'Realization of Clem's worth' space, but now it is both Joel and his projection of Clementine which are the powerless onlookers of Clementine's inevitable erasure. Whereas in earlier scenes there were still attempts to 'run away' or 'hold on' to Clem, this space is marked by the characters having to accept that the process *will go* all the way. All they can do now is to "*enjoy the moment*" in the face of their perceived future 'suffering' of having spotless minds.

In the (6) 'Post-erasure real world' suffering manifests in two different ways. Firstly there is the '*latent suffering*' of Joel and Clementine who do not know each other. Although both these 'spotless minds' come across as being somewhat miserable – perhaps an unconscious mourning – it is nevertheless the viewer who becomes the primary owner of their relationship past and the *loss* that they *unknowingly suffer*.¹⁰⁹ The second appearance of suffering in this space is in the undoubtedly disturbing nature of the characters learning of their prior relationship.

4.3 Clementine and suffering

Let us now look at the role of Clementine in relation to these various expressions of suffering. Across all of the identified meta-spaces there are four 'Clementines' who come to the fore. Each one is made up of a combination of two pairs of options. In the first option Clem is either a *cause of suffering* or a *helper* offering aid to overcome suffering. The second option is between the real Clem and the Clem who is a projection of Joel's mind. A further distinction is needed for the Clementine of Joel's mind. As Reeve (2009:23) points out, Joel's mental review is a work of

¹⁰⁹ I am indebted to Toles' view that, as the characters are missing integral threads to their past connection, the viewer must step in as 'caretaker' and do it for them (2009:143).

both *memory* and *imagination*. So at times ‘Joel’s Clem’ is only a character in Joel’s memory, playing out her ‘role’ as Joel recalls it. At others she becomes an active agent of Joel’s imagination within the context of his memories. It is as this force of the imagination that her status as helper first begins to crystallize. At different times in the film we thus come across each of these four possible combinations of Clementine: the real Clem as cause of suffering, Clem in memory as cause of suffering, imaginary Clem as helper against suffering and eventually the real Clem, in her own way, as such a helper. I will now illustrate these roles within each of the ‘spaces of suffering’.

In the (1) ‘Pre-erasure real world’ Clementine is obviously a *cause of* Joel’s suffering. In crudely calling her ‘the cause’ I am, of course, referring to her role as ‘*accomplice*’ in their failed relationship. Likewise (2) in the ‘Deteriorated relationship’ Clem (as a role player in his memories) is also depicted as a cause of Joel’s suffering, and even *more acutely* so by her impulsive decision to have Joel erased from her mind.

Yet in (3) Joel’s ‘Realization of Clem’s worth’, Clementine is summoned as the narrative helper – an agent of imagination seeking to aid Joel in overcoming different instances of suffering. There is thus a dramatic transition from the Clementine who causes Joel suffering to the Clementine who helps him deal with suffering.¹¹⁰ As the restrained Joel now suffers the loss of his once beloved Clementine, it is *she* who steps to the plate with various *suggestions* for resisting her erasure (Reeve 2009:23). “*Wake yourself up*”, she first tells him, although that particular victory is shortlived. Then, as an attempt to jump the programmed ‘map’ of erasure, she proposes that Joel take her ‘somewhere else’, resulting in their move to the space of Joel’s childhood memories.

In the space of (4) ‘Joel’s childhood’ Clementine fervently persists with plans and suggestions against the erasure. But here, almost as a side-effect of their overall quest, Clementine’s original helping role is extended to *bringing a certain healing* to Joel’s childhood *humiliations* (Reeve 2009:23-26). As an incarnation of Mrs. Hamlyn she (a) plays mother to baby Joel and consoles the distraught infant: “*Don’t cry, baby Joel. Baby Joel, it’s okay.*” Then, as the erasure resumes

¹¹⁰ My description of Clementine as ‘helper’ is roughly inspired by what Greimas (1966) would call the ‘helper actant’ in a narrative. According to his structuralist ‘actantial’ model there are six actants – basic narrative functions or roles – which makes up a plot: there is the (a) ‘subject’ who strives for a specific (b) ‘object’; the (c) ‘sender’ inspires this quest while the (d) ‘receiver’ eventually receives the object or benefits from the pursuit of it; and the agent who frustrates the subject’s aspirations functions as (e) ‘opponent’, while the agent who offers the subject assistance is the (f) ‘helper’ (Bal 1997:196-202; Herman & Vervaeck 2005:52-55). A character’s functioning in this teleological framework will therefore determine which actants it fulfils. If we take Joel as narrative *subject*, Clementine can be seen as initially being the *opponent* to his aspirations of having a fulfilling relationship. But in this space of the narrative she dramatically moves from the *opponent-* to *helper* actant, and henceforth comes to Joel’s aid in the various actantial contexts of different ‘quests’. Also note that an actant is an entire class of actors who share a particular narrative function (Bal 1997:197). So, if Joel and Clem’s relationship is considered as the *subject*, there is the possibility that Joel can also manifest in the helper actant. As I will still indicate, this is indeed what happens at the end of the film.

its course, Clementine asks Joel to hide her in his humiliation. In Joel's (b) embarrassing teenage masturbation episode, Clem does laugh but "...is soon loving and reassuring (Reeve 2009:25)." And in (c) the 'really buried' humiliation of toddler Joel killing the pigeon, Clementine defies the bullies in taking him by the hand: "*Joel! Joely! Get up. Come on, it's not worth it.*" "*I'm so ashamed*", Joel sobs as they walk away. Again humiliation is covered with consolation: "*It's okay. You were a little kid.*" In their taking refuge in Joel's humiliations, Clementine also brings relief to Joel's deeper childhood sufferings. As Toles (2009:149) puts it, she lives up to her name by granting him clemency, and making his transgressions human.

Once they reach the space of (5) 'First memories', Joel and his inner Clementine are left defenseless against Clementine's inevitable disappearance. Yet, even in the face of surrender, Clementine still stands up to suffering by now merely expressing *hope*. In the penultimate memory based in the bookshop Joel wishes that they could give it 'another go-around'. "*Remember me*", Clem replies. "*Try you best. Maybe we can.*" Then in the final memory to be erased – where, upon their first meeting, Clem breaks into a Montauk beach house – this hope appears to inspire one last suggestion amidst their goodbyes. "*Meet me in Montauk...*", she whispers. And somehow, completely congruent with her role so far, the real Clem does show up the next morning at Montauk to once again meet Joel.

With the transition from Joel's mind to the (6) 'Post-erasure real world' Clementine not only miraculously accords with Joel's imaginings by being on Montauk beach but now (although in the real world) she *persists* with her role as helper against their suffering. We have described their suffering here as being latent; they suffer not knowing each other. Yet, in seemingly insignificant ways, Clem again comes to the rescue in her determination to be acknowledged directly and draw the shy stranger, Joel, out of his shell (Toles 2009:115, 136). After seeing Joel on the beach, she acknowledges him in the restaurant, she jokingly waves at him on the platform, and she (repeatedly) strikes up an awkward conversation with him on the train. On one level this is a mere comical meeting between two strangers (which they also happen to be). But on a different level Clementine's trivial *reaching out* to Joel (for whatever reason or motivation) bridges the void left in their quietly suffering minds. In this space, by means of ordinary gestures, Clementine still addresses suffering – the dormant suffering that they unknowingly bear. And even later, when the 'new couple' are upset and confused by hearing Clem's pre-erasure interview tape, it is again Clementine who almost immediately looks up Joel in an apparent attempt to reconcile.

4.4 Concluding thoughts

This kind of narratological analysis, employing postural theory as its basis, can facilitate an increasing depth of interpretation of the narrative itself. In this sample we have seen a variety of perspectives open up on Clementine's dynamic role in the film. Through a retrogression of memories in Joel's mind, he again remembers the worth that Clementine has. As this happens, we have seen, the initial suffering of a failed relationship turns into the suffering of losing Clem. (We have also seen how this prompts an ironic attempt to avoid this suffering by taking refuge in Joel's past sufferings of humiliation.) This shift in the nature of Joel's suffering, however, also prompts a shift in Clementine's role in the narrative. Clementine changes from being a *cause* of suffering to being a *helper* who seeks to surmount suffering.

In relation to suffering Clementine thus emerges as something of a *redemptive figure*. In the penultimate bookshop memory Joel recalls her standard speech: "*Look man, I'm telling you right off the bat, I'm high maintenance. Too many guys think I'm a concept, or I complete them, or I'm gonna make them alive. But I'm just a fucked up girl looking for my own peace of mind. Don't assign me yours.*" And Joel comments: "*I still thought you were going to save my life, even after that.*" Yet travelling through different meta-spaces of the narrative reveals that Clementine comes to Joel's salvation in many shapes and forms. Toles (2009:149) even emphasizes a kind of Christ-like quality to her: as she increasingly expires in Joel's mind the more she cures him, as if her goodness is bound to her dying out. With that, we have seen that the redemptive work which she begins in Joel's mind also *echoes in reality*. Her suggestions and attempts to evade the erasure are echoed in reality by her actually being on Montauk beach, just as Joel's inner Clem said she would. Yet echoes of Clementine's healing hand in Joel's humiliations also seem to find expression in *Joel* himself, as there are indications that he too can now come to their rescue.

It is not entirely the same Joel whom we come to see after the long, eventful inner-journey of his memory erasure (Reeve 2009:28). After their awkward interactions on the train the shy Joel, for example, musters the courage to nevertheless offer Clem a lift. He also promptly obliges in changing his limp description of their Charles River date as "*nice*" to a more suitable "*best fucking night of my entire fucking life*". But more significantly, when the arrival of Lacuna's interview tapes turns their 'new' relationship upside down, Joel finally also comes to the aid of their brittle relationship. In the final scene, as Clementine leaves his apartment, Joel follows her into the passageway. "*Wait!*", he says. "*Just wait.*" For once, he too becomes a helper against their suffering: he calls her back, he *holds on*, if you like. The drift of the narrative as a whole

can only lead us to assume that this change is a manifestation of ‘*Clementine*’s’ curing work two nights before.

Clementine’s helping role is however predominantly based in Joel’s mind. Are we to conclude that Clementine is precisely that – only a *figure* of redemption? Is it Joel that effectively comes to his own rescue? Perhaps. But just as we see imagination echoing in reality, surely reality has to echo in imagination too. Do we, after all, see any drastic differences between Joel’s portrayal of Clem and the real Clem? It is thus more than possible that the imaginary Clem’s helping role is inspired by the real Clem. For example, early on in the erasure we see a memory in which Clementine argued with Joel for not opening up to her. Joel’s imaginary Clem suggesting, later on, that he should take her to the dark depths of his psyche could well be motivated by the original Clem’s discontent with Joel’s reclusive nature. We are most likely seeing echoes of the *real* Clem playing out within Joel’s *imagination*.

Screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (*Eternal Sunshine* DVD commentary track) adds support to this view. For him Joel doing things through Clementine’s voice gives him more of a license to be adventurous, because it comes as her idea. Actor Jim Carrey adds that Clementine is “...*somebody who expresses a side of him that is there but he can’t express because he’s a very withdrawn character. But you can tell by his drawings that this wild stuff is going on inside. Clementine is the outward manifestation of that. She’s the wild thing inside of him that he doesn’t have the guts to bring out (A Look inside Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind 2004).*” So the lively, impulsive qualities of the real Clementine (in contrast to Joel’s shyness and passivity) serves as the impetus for the more daring voice of ‘Clementine’ in Joel’s imaginary inner-workings. It is with the help of this ‘Clementine’ that Joel can face his ordeals. This therefore underscores the person of the *real Clementine* as the *source* of redemption from various instances of suffering encountered by Joel.

5. Postures and filmic representation

Up to this point, we have only dealt with philosophical qualities of *Eternal Sunshine* by virtue of it being a narrative. Wartenberg’s (2007:93) conclusion that “*fiction films can present arguments through their narratives*” only says something about the *fiction* represented and not much about the *medium* through which this happens. How do we therefore arrive at some understanding of *Eternal Sunshine*’s philosophical value, not only as a narrative, but as a *film-narrative*?

Although there are no doubt a great number of ways of addressing this question, my analysis, so far, certainly hints at an obvious direction to be explored: *There are certain philosophically relevant concepts that are mobilized by the narrative. How are they rendered into a uniquely cinematic form?* We have considered postural theory as a way of detailing one such group of concepts that a narrative – one way or another – has to rely on. Yet as much as each film-narrative has its own individual ‘postural profile’, it may also offer its own unique *filmic* depictions of those postures which it calls upon. In doing so, the film may augment and deepen our understanding of them. This is indeed the case with *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

We have seen how the narrative of *Eternal Sunshine* draws from the postural ‘cluster’ of suffering and letting go. It was argued that in its singling out, framing, constructing relations between and evaluating these postures, the film inadvertently takes up its own views on the human condition. Yet this not only holds for the *narrative* mobilization of these concepts, but also how this postural cluster finds its way into *uniquely cinematic medium* through which the narrative is expressed.

Let us begin with the act of the characters’ *letting go*, dominated by ideological technological norms which distort this posture to being an artificially enforced process of ‘forgetting’. The film employs a variety of methods to signify what the erasure of memories ‘looks like’ from within Joel’s mind:

- *The increasing visual blurring or distortion of a shot* – either the entire shot with Joel in the frame or a separate blurring of ‘memory images’ as if it is on a screen behind him.
- *Manipulations of the soundtrack or music*. This happens either through distortion, echo-effects or the sound becoming detached and out of sync with the visuals.
- *Artificial jumps and flickers in the film stock* (Edwards 2008:4). This probably serves to indicate disturbances in Joel’s stream of consciousness.
- *Use of darkness*. The bookstore, for example, is systematically blocked out by darkness. The more frequent technique, however, is the use of a spotlight in shooting, creating a frame increasingly edged with darkness. On one occasion Clementine is literally dragged into such an enveloping darkness.
- *The disappearance of elements out of a shot*. This may be the disappearance of *objects* like furniture, luggage, books, a fence, a movie-screen or even anonymous passersby. We often witness the vanishing of such objects in hurried series. There is also the fading out and disappearance of *writing* – such as on books, signs on the street and Clem’s name

- on a letter. We see the fading of *images*, such as the photo of Clementine on a mug. And *Clementine* herself, of course, disappears numerous times. Sometimes her disappearance is also outside of the shot, creating a spooky ‘hide and seek’ effect.
- *Shelves filled with books gradually turn white.* This unobtrusively happens in the second to last memory of Joel and Clementine in the bookshop. The recurring presence of the bookshop (where Clem works) and rows of bookshelves appear to be symbolic of Joel’s own ‘library’ of catalogued memories (Edwards 2008:4).
 - *Certain characters acquire smudged, featureless non-faces,* notably when Joel tries to revisit already erased memories (Edwards 2008:4).
 - *Breakdowns in spatial logic.* As when Joel walks after Clementine in a street only to stop, look around, and see her walking in the opposite direction.
 - *Locations suddenly becoming decayed and deserted* – either before Joel’s eyes or in a cut which reveals the setting as suddenly deteriorated.
 - *The falling apart of the characters’ world.* Such as a car that, for no apparent reason, drops from the sky, or the ‘beach house memory’ that falls apart and gets flooded by a rising tide.

The loss of memory can, in principle, be captured on film in an infinite amount of ways – each with its own connotations and implications. These specific representations of the memory erasure all seem to suggest that there is something inherently *wrong* with this strained manner of letting go. The erasures have an eerie, unnerving quality from the outset, and as it progresses, the violent and disorientating character of the process escalates. This judgement of the procedure is however deeply intertwined with Joel’s sudden changes of heart. As we have seen, there comes a definite point where this attempt at letting go of suffering itself becomes a *greater suffering* to Joel. Again, there are notable ways in which the filmic medium accentuates this suffering:

- At certain points of panic we see Joel and Clem from *high angles* and in *wide shot*. This is particularly so in the memory contexts of the frozen Charles and the train station. These ‘belittling shots’ present the characters in Joel’s memory as small and helpless against the invasive technology which confronts them (Silvey 2009:4).
- At times Joel’s attempts to hold on to Clem are reminiscent of the classic ‘*chase scene*’ as the couple try to ‘outrun’ the vicious trail of the erasure. Here the editing pace is also quicker than the times when they are able ‘enjoy the moment’ (Silvey 2009:5)

- In one case the suffering of erasure even takes the form of a *drowning experience*. This is when we see Joel and Clem, in an ‘adapted’ childhood memory, taking a bath in a gigantic kitchen sink. The erasure of this specific memory amounts to the bathplug suddenly being pulled, leaving the characters in an anxious struggle to stay afloat.
- Joel’s inner suffering is further emphasized by a strong *discrepancy* between what the erasure looks like in his mind as opposed to what is seen in the real world. On the surface Joel appears to be blissfully asleep. The Lacuna staff-on-duty, carelessly having fun on the job, have no access to the concurrent frenzy that Joel undergoes within. Again, Silvey (2009:5) notes, the scenes in Joel’s mind and in the real world are carefully balanced by the pace of editing, as more ‘serene’ editing rhythms prevail outside of Joel. This discrepancy is also seen in the symbolism of erasure. In the real world the leading symbols of (completed) erasure are various ‘blank slates’ or white spaces – Joel’s white pillow, the blank pages in his diary, the open white sands of Montauk and the frozen landscape of the Charles river (Edwards 2008:3). This stands in clear contrast to darkness and disruptive disappearance as the leading imagery of erasure in Joel’s mind.

By no means does the film offer any lectures on what exactly Joel is experiencing. But in resorting to a variety of distinct cinematic codes it does cast the philosophically significant notions of suffering and letting go in a distinct aesthetic light – and perhaps even yields a certain *aesthetic insight* into their nature. In the visual-auditory landscape of *Eternal Sunshine* we find certain proposals for what the forced letting go of memories may look like and why we (should) consider it problematic. Here we also explore the subjective experience of suffering loss – particularly as a helpless spectator to your own disintegrating memories.¹¹¹ It is thus also in the *film-aesthetic concretization* and *representation* of a particular film (and not only that of its narrative), that our understanding of such notions is enriched in a manner to which theoretical reflection alone would not necessarily lead us. And we have to assume that film, as an independent art form, harbors its own unique capacities in this regard.

¹¹¹ The aesthetic mode of reflection prompted by the film obviously reaches beyond its representation of only postural concerns. See, for example, White (2009:96) who notes that the (cinematically crafted) dismantling of Joel’s rich life-world serves to remind us of the richness of normal perception, in contrast to its artificially depleted opposite.

6. Subject and Self in *Eternal Sunshine*

To bring matters to a close, I wish to point out that throughout this entire analysis of *Eternal Sunshine*, ‘behind the scenes’, a certain concept of the self has been silently at work. Although it may easily go unnoticed, I believe that the film’s subtle and original representation of the self is one of its greatest philosophical achievements.

This concept of the self has been taken for granted all along: in saying that Joel’s memories causes him pain; in saying that Joel adopts a certain posture in reaction to these painful memories by erasing them; and especially in saying that Joel becomes a witness to the destruction of his own memories. Note that all these statements imply a kind of *duality* in our understanding of Joel’s self. Yet, as Jollimore (2009:39) says, my memories are obviously a part of *me*. How can we see Joel as ‘two’ when he is obviously only ‘one’?

In an insightful discussion, Lakoff and Johnson (1999:267-289) refers to this phenomenon as the ‘Subject-Self metaphor’. Our understanding and experience of the self, what they call our ‘inner lives’, is essentially *metaphorical* in nature – since we experience ourselves as split. According to the general Subject-Self metaphor a person is divided into a Subject and one or more Selves (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:269). The Subject is the locus of someone’s conscious experience, reason, will and judgement. It is also the seat of a person’s essence, that ‘something’ which makes us who we truly are. The Subject exists only in the present and is always conceptualized as a person. The Self is the remaining part of a person which the Subject does not claim for itself. It typically includes the body, one’s social roles, past states and actions. The Self may be conceptualized as a person, an object or a location. And in the basic schema of the metaphor the relation between the Subject and the Self is metaphorically construed as a general ‘relationship’. For Lakoff and Johnson (1999:268, 288) the philosophical significance of this metaphorical conception is that it expresses a seemingly universal, and extremely commonplace, experience of the self. It captures an inescapable framework for our coming to terms with our inner-lives. And yet at the same time this fundamental understanding of the self remains inconsistent with what we know scientifically about the mind.

There are many possible permutations of the metaphor under the overall Subject-Self schema. I want to briefly indicate how, in the light of the analysis up to here, *Eternal Sunshine* presents its own take on Subject and Self. In its depiction of Joel’s inner-self, his conscious Subject is revealed in the ‘*person*’ Joel; while the Self predominantly takes on the form of *memories*. In

line with Lakoff and Johnson's description, memories, as part of the Self, manifest as locations, settings or the contexts which the Subject 'Joel' occupies. The relationship between Subject and memories based in the Self also takes on more specific forms. For example:

- Joel's Subject experiences memories by *reliving* them.
- This takes on the form of a *review* as the Subject at times takes the role of commentator.
- The Subject becomes a *witness* to the memories and their erasure.
- The Subject acts as the *judge* of the memories' value.
- Sometimes the Subject *exercises its wills* on a memory in attempts to cling on to it, run away with it, or hide it in other memories.

The play of postures identified in the postural reading of *Eternal Sunshine* is therefore fundamentally framed by the Subject-Self metaphor. From the outset, the characters' adoption of the *letting go* posture, their desire to intentionally forget, implies a Subject that wants to rid itself from troubling aspects of the Self. Certain memories cause Joel's Subject *suffering* by either having Joel's relationship sufferings as their content, or by merely reminding his Subject of the Clementine it cannot have. The memory erasure can thus be seen as 'operating' on Joel's Self – particularly the 'map' of memories related to Clementine. And the Subject becomes empowered by the assistance offered by Lacuna's technology. But soon the Subject's original aspirations turn against itself as one form of grief supplants another. Its suffering caused by the presence of certain memories turns into a *greater suffering* born from the loss of those selfsame memories. Joel's Subject, which once was empowered, is now a helpless spectator forcefully dragged along the trail of erasure. In an attempt to *hold on*, his Subject wills memories of Clem off the 'map', and tries to hide her in other 'uncharted' parts of his Self.

In the narratological analysis of the film, I have elaborated on Clementine's role as helper in addressing this suffering. Yet 'Clementine', we have seen, is mostly an aspect of Joel's mind. Plotting this situation in terms of the Subject and Self reveals how the film inventively elaborates on this grounding metaphor. Until Clementine becomes a helper, she is only a character in Joel's memories and therefore remains based squarely in Joel's Self. Then comes the distinct point where Clem also emerges as an agent of imagination who offers aid to Joel's suffering of loss. But as Clem turns into an active part of Joel's mind, does *she* become the Subject and displace 'Joel'? This is normally the case with the 'Social Self' sub-metaphor where some social relationship metaphorically grounds the interactions of the Subject and Self (Lakoff & Johnson

(1999:278-280). In this case it would mean that the 'Clementine' is the Subject who stands in a relation of care to the Self, 'Joel'. This, however, is not what we see here. Clementine's transition to being an active helper does move her from Self to Subject. But significantly she does not displace 'Joel' as Subject – she becomes *an addition* to the Subject. We therefore come across an instance where the Subject – metaphorically conceived as being separate in relation to the Self – itself becomes a 'relationship' and gains a *dialogical nature*. Both of the characters make up Joel's Subject because their interactions are still within the contexts of memories as 'locations' in Joel's Self. Together they *experience* and *react to* Joel's memories and thus collectively form the Subject which has these relations to the Self. On the unavoidable basis of the Subject-Self metaphor, *Eternal Sunshine* therefore presents a novel conceptualization of self in which the conscious Subject, too, becomes a metaphorical relationship. Furthermore Clementine's presence as a force of *imagination* adds to the possible properties (conscious experience, reason, will, judgement) that Lakoff and Johnson ascribe to the Subject.

As we have asked of the postural dynamics of the *Eternal Sunshine*, we can now also ask how this narrative rendering of Subject and Self is articulated in filmic form; and whether it constitutes a uniquely cinematic contribution to our conceptions of self. There are certain specific filmic techniques used to articulate the Subject's interaction with the Self. One is the occasional use of voice-over narration whereby Joel the Subject comments on memories. There are also two instances where a memory is presented as being a screen behind the figure of Joel.

More generally, however, memories are represented as *concrete settings*, occupied by the 'person' who is the reflective Subject. And we have just seen how the Subject often manifests in 'Joel' and 'Clem' as a pair. Yet whenever they find themselves in memories to be deleted, Joel and Clementine do not cease to be part of those memories. We therefore have a situation where, in the same scene, Joel and Clem act as both *conscious agents* and *mere characters* of that particular memory. They are thus expressions of both the Subject and (memories of) the Self at the same time. This scenario proved to be challenging to capture on film – so much so that the filmmakers seriously considered using *two Joels* on screen (*Eternal Sunshine* DVD commentary track). The solution, however, was for the single person in the memory to rather step 'in and out' of the 'role' dictated by the memory. Notable scenes in this regard are the last two memories which Joel relives – that of the bookstore and their first encounter. Enabled by Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet's thoughtful acting, Joel and Clem constantly switch between being active agents in the memory and simply 'playing out the role' of the memory. At times they stop, reflect and comment on the memory, while at others they (are forced to) go along with the set course of the

memory under erasure. In essence the conscious Subject has to conform to the Self; it has to step into its 'character' as outlined by a memory. *Eternal Sunshine* does therefore not stop with its proposal that the Subject may have a dialogical nature. Here we also see, by virtue of *filmic execution*, that the interaction of Subject with Self is suggested to have something of a *dramaturgical* quality. Furthermore, in steering clear of having two explicit Joels, the film's representation of the self strikes a healthy compromise between a phenomenological and scientific understanding of the self. Mention has been made that the Subject-Self metaphor is deeply at odds with cognitive-scientific perspectives on selfhood. However, the film's sensitive portrayal of an inner life, while still within the unavoidable cast of the Subject-Self metaphor, presents us with a much *more unified vision* of our split selves.

Eternal Sunshine's uniquely cinematic articulation of Subject and Self unavoidably contributes to our philosophical sensibilities. In earlier arguments that our understanding of postural concerns may be enriched by their filmic representation, the skeptic may still question how an aesthetic representation, or even an 'aesthetic insight', may genuinely contribute to these concepts. Yet here we have a much stronger case: a fundamental, unavoidable conception of the self – seemingly grounded in universal human experiences – which we cannot escape, irrespective of whether we are doing philosophy *or* going about with a film. When it comes to the Subject-Self metaphor, one cannot really pit its aesthetic representation against philosophical knowledge thereof, because it precedes and serves as a constitutive framework to both. So any explicit aesthetic articulation of Subject and Self has the potential of adding to the metaphorical resources by which we experience, and philosophize about, ourselves. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* hones in on how we think about our relation to our own memories. What is the experience of my own memories? One perspective that it offers is the possibility of seeing myself as a character in my memories; that I may have the ability to 'step outside of character' so I can interact with my memories. I may take a step back to indulge in the suffering of seeing memories get lost or even to consciously hold on to them. In terms of human cognition, *Eternal Sunshine* and philosophical discourse alike are confined to the deep-set boundaries drawn by the Subject-Self metaphor. Hence any original depiction of this fundamental concept can be a 'philosophical claim' of how we may experience ourselves.

Chapter 7

Key Theory: *The Matrix*

1. Introduction: *The Matrix* as philosophical ‘Rorschach test’

The question has been asked but not often enough: ‘What makes *The Matrix* (Andy & Larry Wachowski 1999) so stimulating to philosophers?’¹¹² ¹¹³ This inquiry is significant, since it forces us to adopt something of a *meta-philosophical* vantage point, one that could potentially unlock important perspectives on the relationship between philosophy and film. The issue, more specifically, is that the film has an extraordinary ability to accommodate a variety of philosophical theories and points-of-view. Name a philosophical ‘ism’ and you can somehow find it in *The Matrix* (Irwin 2002:1). What enables this? In a well-known remark, Slavoj Žižek (1999:11) likens *The Matrix* to a type of ‘Rorschach test’, since each school of thought or theoretical orientation, by means of a ‘universalised’ process of recognition, sees something of itself in the film:

*“Practically every orientation seems to recognize itself in it. My Lacanian friends tell me that the writers must have read Lacan; Frankfurt School partisans see in *The Matrix* the extrapolated embodiment of the Kulturindustrie, the alienated-reified social Substance (of Capital) directly taking over, colonizing our inner life itself, using us as a source of energy; New Agers see in it a source of speculations on how our world is just a mirage generated by the global Mind embodied in the World Wide Web. This series goes back to Plato’s Republic (Žižek 1999:11).”*

The Matrix therefore has some universal, or perhaps highly flexible, trait which allows the film to in a way ‘fit in’ with whatever philosophy might be under discussion. And it is apparently because of *it* that the film can somehow accommodate such an impressive string of diverse philosophical interpretations.

¹¹² Note that I will limit this analysis, as many commentators do, to only the first installment of *The Matrix* trilogy.

¹¹³ *The Matrix*, after all, has a ‘philosophical profile’ that few other films were capable of achieving: while continually sustaining its status as a blockbusting action sci-fi, *The Matrix* succeeded in generating an unsurpassed barrage of academic philosophical discourse in the form of books, journal articles, edited collections, online forums, symposia and even university courses (Falzon 2006:97).

2. Wartenberg and *The Matrix* as skeptical thought experiment

Why does *The Matrix* engender such widespread philosophical appeal? Wartenberg (2007:55-75) seeks to unravel this problem in terms of Cartesian skepticism.¹¹⁴ For him, the philosopher's fascination springs from the film's relationship to Descartes' 'deception hypothesis' – the claim that we might be radically deceived about the nature of our world; that our beliefs about reality might in fact be false (Wartenberg 2007:55).¹¹⁵ Descartes famously formulated this possibility of deception in terms of his 'evil demon' thought experiment. Suppose, Descartes (1988:79) suggests, that “*some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me... and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgement.*” The philosophical significance of *The Matrix*, for Wartenberg (2007:56), lies in its contemporary 'updating' of Descartes' deception hypothesis.¹¹⁶ The film achieves this by offering a *screened* thought experiment analogous to Descartes' evil demon scenario.¹¹⁷

At this point a brief sketch of the film's narrative world is necessary. The central premise of *The Matrix* is that intelligent machines have taken over the world, resulting in the enslavement of humanity. In this dystopian future humans are bred by the machines only to be used as living 'batteries'. Yet they remain oblivious to their exploitation: what people perceive as reality is in fact an illusion – 'the Matrix' – generated by a giant computer system. Each human is hooked up to a network that (by means of neural stimulation) subjectively projects the simulated reality within which all people live their respective lives. While humanity is blissfully immersed in the false world of the Matrix, the machines use the dreaming masses as a source of energy. A minority of human rebels are, however, free of this oppression and continue to fight the machines inside and outside of the Matrix.

The narrative is set in motion as the leading character, Neo (Keanu Reeves), is contacted by the rebel leader, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne). Neo is a computer hacker troubled by the question

¹¹⁴ Falzon (2006:99) rightly observes that epistemological skepticism is one of the best-known philosophical themes associated with the *The Matrix* and has greatly contributed to its reputation as a 'philosophical film'. As a result a whole host of philosophical analysts, like Wartenberg, probe the philosophical resources of *The Matrix* as being organized around the theme of (Cartesian) skepticism. See for example Erion and Smith (2002), Lawrence (2004:20-31), Rowlands (2005:27-56) and Falzon (2007:30-36).

¹¹⁵ Wartenberg (2007:55-56) posits a centrality of the 'deception hypothesis' in modern philosophy. According to him Descartes' endorsement of the deception hypothesis marks the beginning of modern philosophy, where the concern with the mind's access to reality replaces more traditional concerns with the structure of reality. Then, by citing brief examples of Kant, the American pragmatists, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, he affirms that Descartes' hypothesis has continued to fuel epistemological and metaphysical debates in modern philosophy.

¹¹⁶ Falzon (2007:31), likewise, refers to *The Matrix* as an 'updating' of the evil demon scenario. Lawrence (2004:23) describes the computer-simulated dream world of *The Matrix* as a 'technological version' of Descartes' evil demon.

¹¹⁷ *The Matrix* therefore functions as a philosophical thought experiment. As with any other thought experiment viewers are asked to envision an imaginary scenario from which certain conclusions can be drawn (Wartenberg 2007:66-67).

‘What is the Matrix?’ Morpheus is convinced that Neo is ‘the One’ (a messianic redeemer in the war against the machines) and seeks to break Neo out of his Matrix-induced ‘dream state’. In a meeting Morpheus offers Neo the chance to learn the truth about the Matrix. Here Morpheus almost seems to be reciting Descartes’ first Meditation: “*Have you ever had a dream that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?*”^{118 119} He offers Neo a choice between a red pill and a blue pill – the red will lead to Neo knowing the truth; the blue marks a return to the world as he used to know it. Neo chooses the red. Upon his swallowing it, the audience is confronted with a sequence of ‘reality bending’ visuals ending in Neo waking up in the *real world* where his body, connected to wires and tubes, arises from one of thousands of pods in a colossal, tower-like power plant. After his rescue and recuperation Neo learns from Morpheus that the grim reality he has awoken to is not the year 1999, but closer to 2199. Both Neo and the viewer must come to terms with a grand twist: everything up to this point has been an illusion.

The evil demon argument can therefore be easily restated in terms drawn from *The Matrix* (Falzon 2007:32). Most notably by substituting the ‘malicious demon’ with ‘malicious machines’, the film presents a fictional situation in which the deception hypothesis is true. What Descartes wanted to establish as a possibility is represented as the actual situation of the enslaved humans in *The Matrix*. “... *what most of the Matrix’s inhabitants had taken to be real... is shown to be no more than an appearance generated by an interactive computer program, just as Descartes hypothesized that reality might be nothing but an appearance generated by a malign demon* (Wartenberg 2007:70).”

Yet *The Matrix*, for Wartenberg, goes beyond being a mere illustration of Descartes’ evil demon. Since we share in Neo’s initial epistemic limitations, the viewer, to some extent, is taken in by the false reality of the Matrix as much as he is. Then in an astonishing turn of events it is revealed that the narrative world that the viewer took to be ‘real’ is in fact the false appearances of the Matrix. The viewer thus *participates* in the deception and the ensuing removal thereof (Wartenberg 2007:74). Since the film, like Descartes’ evil demon, has succeeded in manipulating the viewer’s beliefs concerning *its* narrative reality, the viewer is naturally led to questioning the beliefs about his or her *own* reality (Wartenberg 2007:73). The viewers of *The*

¹¹⁸ Falzon (2006:99-100) sees these Cartesian-style statements as a deliberate strategy employed by the filmmakers to demand that the film be read in a philosophically significant way.

¹¹⁹ Neo being caught up in the ‘dream world’ of the Matrix is nicely underscored by the fact that he is asleep when we are introduced to the character. In this scene the hacker appears to have fallen asleep in front of his computer only to be woken by his seemingly out of control computer writing messages to him.

Matrix are thus placed in a position where they *also* have to ask what justifies their beliefs that they are not potential victims of a ‘Matrix-like’ situation. And, importantly, this questioning on the part of the viewer is supported by an *experience* analogous to that of Neo (Wartenberg 2007:68).¹²⁰ Hence the film rises above being a sheer analogue of the evil demon. The film itself can *do the same work* as the Descartes-imagined demon – it has the power to deceive viewers about the reality within its narrative. It can even be said that *the film itself* exhibits similar abilities to those of the villainous machines in the film: because both the inhabitants of the Matrix and viewers of *The Matrix* mistake a generated world for the real world (Wartenberg 2007:72).

This leads Wartenberg (2007:74-75) to conclude that *The Matrix* is not simply illustrating philosophy but that it is rather *doing philosophy*. Firstly, the film shows a situation in which skepticism about external reality is justified. Secondly, it supports the possibility of such deception by actually ‘deceiving’ its viewers in a comparable way. By being a thought experiment, *The Matrix* exemplifies a characteristic move of philosophy: it places a person in a position where they are made to question the justification of certain beliefs. But, thirdly, it is not just that the film only presents an analogy with the evil demon. It also, through its own processes of narrative ‘deception’, offers a similar analogy between *film* and the Matrix: as the Matrix determines the experience of its inhabitants, so the filmmakers control our belief in the ‘reality’ of the screen-world (Wartenberg 2007:73). Considering the booming increase of screen mediated representations of reality in our lives, Wartenberg (2007:75) proposes that the film raises skeptical doubts for a *different purpose* from that of Descartes. *The Matrix* prompts us to think about the role that computers, films, videos and all other screen-based devices have come to adopt in our daily living. “*By getting audiences to take seriously the possibility that what we take to be the real world is nothing but a projection of a different reality, the film is asking us to think about how such devices may have screened us from the world rather than allowed the world to be visible on their screens* (Wartenberg 2007:75).” As a philosophical work the film is therefore an *update* of the evil demon thought experiment for a contemporary audience worried about their own receptiveness to virtual realities – by demonstrating its own ability to make us accept its screened ‘reality’ to be real (Wartenberg 2007:75).

¹²⁰ Wartenberg (2007:72) makes much of the fact that the film does not merely employ the typical kind of narrative twist that necessitates viewers to re-evaluate what they have seen earlier on. *The Matrix* goes further in deceiving viewers about their ‘perceptual beliefs’ – they believe themselves to be perceiving ‘reality’ within the film but turn out to be perceiving the illusions of the Matrix. “...as Neo begins to experience disruptions to the regularities of his world, the filmmakers disrupt our experience of the film world as well, providing us viewers with an actual experience (albeit of a fictional world) in which we recognize that our senses have been deceiving us about the nature of reality (Wartenberg 2007:69).” As a result viewers “*have to admit that the deception hypothesis is true, not only in the fictional world of the film but in the real world in which they have been deceived about the world of the film they have been watching* (Wartenberg 2007:74).”

But let us return to the initial question posed: does all of this offer us a satisfactory account of *The Matrix*'s abilities as a 'philosophical inkblot test'? Although I do not have any serious objections to Wartenberg's explanations of how *The Matrix* embodies a skeptical thought experiment, his account struggles to provide an adequate answer to the question that he himself poses at the outset of his analysis. The problem is that Cartesian skepticism, as such, already forms part of the *multiplicity* of philosophical interpretations that the film typically stimulates. You are therefore left stuck within *one* of the 'philosophies' (for lack of a better word) for which you are trying to account. Wartenberg's analysis therefore does not give us enough of a (meta-philosophical) vantage point from which to see how the film can facilitate 'universalised' philosophical recognition. The challenge thus remains: to find an explanation that not only illustrates how *The Matrix* can be appropriated as an 'evil demon', but more generally shows how this interpretation can find its expression alongside a diversity of *other* philosophical perspectives that the film *also* tends to evoke.

3. The reality claim of *The Matrix*

Surely the manifold philosophical perspectives that *The Matrix* yields cannot merely be dismissed as 'imposed' interpretations of different philosophers. We must assume, as Falzon (2006:98-99) notes, that there is a bringing out and amplifying of *something* that is going on in the film.

In trying to capture what this 'something' is, I will not focus my analyses on the entirety of the film-narrative, but rather the central feature of its narrative world: namely that people's perceived reality is in fact a gigantic computer-generated illusion.¹²¹ It can be said that the film's narrative universe is based on a central 'reality claim': the Matrix constitutes a certain reality.¹²² And by borrowing from the theory of logosemantics ('Key theory') the structure of this claim can be depicted as a 'narrative key-formula': 'Matrix → Reality'. The work that the Matrix thus does is to 'create', 'cause', 'determine' or, more generally, 'constitute' reality for those trapped within it. Within the narrative world of *The Matrix* this key-formalized 'reality claim' expresses a point of view from the 'outside' – that is, outside of the Matrix and its illusions. Those on the 'inside' have no way of seeing or knowing that their entire world is a function of some unknown external force (Rowlands 2005:27-28). And, considering that it is the machines that produced and control

¹²¹ I should point out that, based on my own observations, *most* philosophical analyses of *The Matrix* do not deal with its narrative as a whole, but also tend to only probe this central feature of the film from a variety of angles.

¹²² Baggott (2005:7) wittily refers to *The Matrix* as "*the mother of all reality movies*."

the Matrix¹²³, we can further flesh out this narrative key-formulation inherent to the central premise of the film:

[Machines control → Matrix] → Reality¹²⁴

It is this narrative reality claim, and more specifically its structure of conceptualization, that I believe accounts for the supposed ‘Rorschach effect’ of *The Matrix*. And I would like to illustrate how this seemingly unimpressive little scheme tells us something important about the ‘reflective’ abilities of *The Matrix*: that the philosophical appeal of the film is not so much based in its *content*, as it is in its *structure*. Those discourses that generally ‘recognize’ themselves in *The Matrix* tend to be based on similarly configured ‘reality claims’ – whether narrative or philosophical in nature. Moments of recognition typically center on the *analogical potential* of the Matrix: since the Matrix (as defined by the film) involves a system that creates a reality, some phenomenon is deemed ‘a Matrix’ insofar it *also* creates a certain reality. So those discourses that most easily see themselves reflected in *The Matrix* usually posit (a) a powerful agency, an ‘illusionist’, that produces (b) some perceptual or epistemological illusion (acting as ‘a Matrix’) through which (c) a particular reality is brought into being. They tend to conform to a generic formula along the following lines:

[X → ‘Illusion’] → Reality

You will therefore find that the identification of a variety of philosophical claims, theories and thought experiments in the film is based on a *pairing* of the structurally comparable, underlying ‘key-formulas’ at stake. It is upon this commonality that the ‘dialogue’ between *The Matrix* and such philosophical discourses is predicated. The fictional notion of the Matrix acts as an open, even exaggerated, ‘creation of reality’ that invites comparison to similar key-expressions. As a result the philosophical interpreter is enabled, in various ways, to ‘cross-reference’ the *contents* of corresponding key-structures.

¹²³ Lawrence (2004:8) offers a lucid account of the different factors at stake here: “*It is the machines that constructed and control the Matrix. This virtual world is essentially the product or output of an incredible computer system. Like any computer, the Matrix is a combination of hardware and software. And, although it was never depicted in the films, we can suppose that there is a huge mainframe somewhere running the program that creates this virtual world.*”

¹²⁴ I want to reiterate that a ‘narrative key-formula’ should be clearly distinguished from a ‘philosophical key-formula’. See Chapter 2, Section 2.3 for details.

I will now proceed by showing how these deep-structure dynamics come into play in different philosophical interpretations of *The Matrix*. After briefly revisiting Wartenberg's 'evil demon' analysis, I will offer an overview of how a variety of other prominent readings of the film also conform to the key-structural considerations identified above.¹²⁵

3.1 Descartes' 'evil demon' and the 'brain in a vat'

In Wartenberg's analysis we have seen that, by substituting the 'evil demon' with the 'machines', *The Matrix* represents a scenario in which Descartes' deception hypothesis is true. Here we find clear instance of how a pairing of similar reality-creating claims allow for analogical links between their contents.¹²⁶ This is because the underlying conceptual structure of Descartes' 'evil demon' thought experiment – essentially also being a fictional narrative – exhibits the same 'reality-creating structure' as that of *The Matrix*:

[Evil demon → Dream] → Reality

So when matched with '[Machines → Matrix] → Reality', we see that both discourses rely on (a) an illusionist, that through (b) an illusion creates (c) a reality – thereby allowing an easy 'exchange' of their respective contents. Consequently the "evil demon" thought experiment can easily be paraphrased in terms of *The Matrix* and vice versa: one 'illusionist', for example, can analogously fill the 'slot' of another; as is also the case for the respective 'illusions', whether a mind-consuming dream or a virtual reality. The crucial point to note, however, is that the theory of logosemantics helps us to formulate the *corresponding structures of conceptualization* that facilitates such analogies between the narrative scenarios of *The Matrix* and the evil demon hypothesis.

We can also, in terms of such key-formulations, appreciate the more general philosophical assumption that both scenarios are based upon: that 'Mind reveals → Reality'. The delusional dream employed by the supposed evil demon is essentially a certain control of Descartes' *mind* – a mind that exists independently of the body and discloses the external world to him. Descartes'

¹²⁵ I will not critically engage with these philosophical perspectives, but merely seek to elucidate how they find their respective ways 'into' *The Matrix*.

¹²⁶ This underlying 'matching' is therefore *implied* when Wartenberg (2007:70), for example, says: "... what most of the *Matrix*'s inhabitants had taken to be real... is shown to be no more than an appearance generated by an interactive computer program, just as Descartes hypothesized that reality might be nothing but an appearance generated by a malign demon."

skeptical concern is therefore that the *contents of his mind* might just as well be a *function* of some malignant external force – irrespective, perhaps, of whether that may be an evil demon *or* malicious machines.¹²⁷ In another contemporary version of this possibility the role of the ‘unknown external villain’ is played by an evil scientist. The ‘brain in a vat’ thought experiment, as perhaps most famously described by Putnam (1981:5-6), asks us to imagine a scenario in which an evil scientist has removed a person's brain from the body and placed it in a vat of nutrients that keeps the brain alive. The nerve endings are connected to a super-computer that sends and receives electronic impulses between itself and the brain. And so it might be that I am merely a brain in a vat that has the (computer-generated) experience of living a normal human life.¹²⁸ Here, as with the evil demon and *The Matrix*, we have an external force creating a particular reality by determining the contents of an unsuspecting mind. And, again considering the narrative qualities of also this scenario, the ‘brain in a vat’ thought experiment reveals a similar underlying ‘story-structure’ of how a deceptive reality is brought about:

[Evil scientist controls → Mind/Brain] → Reality

3.2 Plato's cave

The Matrix is often claimed to be a depiction of Plato's parable of the cave.¹²⁹ In this famous passage from *The Republic* (1987:514-517), Socrates, the narrator, wants to illustrate that what people take to be true reality is (or can be) an illusion. And he does so by offering, as Lawrence (2004:4) puts it, the first ‘low-tech’ version of the Matrix scenario.

We are asked to picture a cave in which a group of people has been held captive since childhood. They are tied down in such a way that they cannot turn their heads and can only face the wall ahead of them. Behind them, higher up the cave, is a fire burning. Between the prisoners and the fire runs a road in front of which a curtain-wall has been built. Behind the curtain-wall people are carrying artifacts that resemble people and animals. Yet all that the prisoners can see are the projected shadows of these artifacts on the wall. For these lifelong prisoners the shadows are real

¹²⁷ It is possible that we can, in formal logosemantic terms, build this Cartesian *philosophical* key-formula into the identified *narrative* key-formulas of the evil demon and *The Matrix*: [(Demon / Machines → Dream / Matrix) control → Mind] → Reality

¹²⁸ The brain in a vat scenario offers even more direct links with the kind of deception seen in *The Matrix*. Yet instead of just one brain in a vat, we find in the film a situation where all human beings are effectively ‘brains in vats’. Furthermore the machines do not disembodify the brains, but keep the whole human body in a vat of nutrients (acting as a source of power) while it is fed the Matrix simulation through cables connected to the brain (Baggott 2005:105). Morpheus also alludes to the ‘brain in a vat’ when he highlights that the brain lies at the base of our perceptions: “*What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.*”

¹²⁹ See Lawrence (2004:4), Falzon (2007:32) and Baggott (2005:69-82) for typical instances of this comparison.

objects. They have no way of knowing that the shadows are mere reflections of artifacts and, more so, that those artifacts, in turn, represent certain ‘real world’ objects entirely outside of the prison-cave. Much like the prisoners of the Matrix, they are subject to a system of intentional deception that functions through the manipulation of their experience. And, as in *The Matrix*, we find an apparent reality that conceals the true reality that lies beyond it.¹³⁰

Although the parable of the cave is in the first place an illustration of Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology, it can also be seen as a thought experiment that questions our experiences (Falzon 2007:20-21). And, as with the other thought experiments considered, a reality is created insofar as the cave makes up a reality for its prisoners.¹³¹ Analogously to the Matrix, the cave represents a limiting, deceptive illusion. And since the cave is *a prison* the situation at least implies that this illusion also functions at the hand of oppressing illusionists. So similarly to the narratives of *The Matrix*, the ‘evil demon’ and the ‘brain in a vat’, the parable of the cave reveals an underlying structure that posits how a misleading reality is brought into being:

[Prison keepers → Cave] → Reality

Yet this formula should also structurally cohere with the more technical-philosophical Platonic claims that the allegory is intended to illustrate. The character of Socrates, always denouncing the reality of the material world, explains to his interlocutor that the “*realm revealed by sight corresponds to the prison...* (Plato 1987:517).” The cave thus signifies the realm of appearance, as presented to us by the senses. Hence the deeper analogy between Plato and the film: the ‘Matrix’ that essentially confronts us is appearances that stem from sensory knowledge. Yet this comparison can only be made on the basis of a similar reality-creating structure in the Platonic philosophical key-formula:

[Senses → Appearance] → Material reality

In Plato’s thinking the ever-suspect *bodily senses* act as the ‘illusionist’ that produces the ‘illusion’ of appearances. And to claim that something in a changing, decaying material realm is real is to succumb to the deception of the senses. For Plato the unreflective person is thus locked

¹³⁰ The parable continues by telling of the bewilderment and pain that a prisoner would experience should he be let loose to see the fire and eventually the world outside. This can be compared to Neo’s disillusioning experience of waking up to the real world.

¹³¹ In fact, in this scenario the cave makes up a reality in more than way. One can claim that the *entire cave* forms a reality that shuts out the rest of the external world. Or, on a smaller scale, a reality is represented by the shadows projected on the *cave wall*.

up in a prison, a ‘Matrix’, induced by our mortal senses (Baggott 2005:79). True knowledge, however, can solely be gained from the transcendent realm of intelligible Forms – only accessible by *reason* – that lies beyond the physical limitations of matter. As both the cave and the Matrix hide the world at large, the material reality of appearances also obscures the truer reality that transcends it. The corporeal presents a ‘Matrix-like’ barrier that the philosopher must overcome to rationally ‘see’ what is truly real.¹³²

3.3 Berkeley’s idealism

The idealist ontology of George Berkeley posits a ‘Matrix’ so vast that we can hardly speak of any reality beyond its scope. Since we only have access to the inside of our own minds, we have no empirical evidence of what lies beyond it. Berkeley therefore denies the existence of a material substratum to reality. All that we can experience, and have knowledge of, is the perceptions within our minds. So the only things that we can really claim to exist are minds and the ideas that they perceive. Hence, the great empiricist claimed, to be is to be perceived – perception is reality.¹³³

So if all of reality is essentially perceived ideas, what ultimately makes this ‘Matrix’ tick?

Berkeley sees all objects of our perception as God’s ideas.¹³⁴ God thus creates a reality without any recourse to matter – he ‘does it all in the mind’ (Lawrence 2004:135). All things exist because they are ideas in the ‘mind’ of God. Even if no finite mind (spirit) perceives an object, God, the infinite Mind, continually perceives it. This can be expressed in the key-formula:

[(infinite) Spirit creates, perceives → Ideas] → Reality

¹³² It is interesting to note, as a postscript, that the ‘holographic principle’ in theoretical physics turned out to, in a strange way, confirm the Plato’s metaphysical intuitions (Greene 2004:482). The holographic principle suggests that all information about what happens in a particular area of space-time could be coded on the outer surface, or boundary, of that area. It is compared to a two-dimensional surface that can hold a three-dimensional holographic image (Hawking 2001:64, 196-198). The ‘holographic images’ on the ‘walls’ of reality therefore contains all the information needed to describe phenomena in our three-dimensional world. The implication, however, is that what we take as our ‘ordinary 3-D life’ is in fact a holographic illusion projected by physical processes on a distant ‘2-D surface’ (Greene 2004:482-483). Plato was onto something, but had it the wrong way round: it now seems that the ‘wall’ filled with ‘shadows’ is the real reality, and our experience of objects in three-dimensional space, the illusion.

¹³³ As Baggott (2005:100) puts it, “*Our entire world is built out of perception and our perceptions are the only things of which we can ever have knowledge.*”

¹³⁴ His line of reasoning can be summarized as follows: We know minds exist and that minds create ideas. Although we do create ‘ideas of imagination’ we are obviously not the source of all the ‘ideas of sense’ that are present to our minds. Yet these ideas have to be produced by some mind. Since these ideas are consistently present to all finite minds they must have their origin in the infinite mind of God (Lawrence 2004:136).

Reality is thus made up of ideas within the infinite mind of God. For this reason all finite minds collectively perceive this reality as orderly and predictable. Similarly in the virtual world of the Matrix all things that exist are perceptions. And it can thus be said that the Matrix plays an analogous role to God's mind in preserving the existence, consistency and coherence of perceptible objects for its subjects (Litch 2002:28). Again it is certain key-structural parallels that allow such a dialogue between *The Matrix* and Berkeley to exist. But there is a prominent difference: Berkeley's 'Matrix' does not offer much of an 'outside' – this exclusive vantage point literally only being a 'God's eye view'. And perhaps a case could be made that this God plays the 'illusionist'. But, unlike the Matrix, this idealist reality can only very loosely be referred to as an 'illusion'. It hides nothing, given that nothing exceeds the 'Matrix' of God's infinite mind.

3.4 Kant's structures of mind

In terms of Immanuel Kant's 'Copernican revolution' of epistemology, one can say that people are not subject to a deceptive reality from 'outside', but that our experience is rather shaped by a 'Matrix' that naturally resides inside the human mind.¹³⁵ Lawrence (2004:183-187) serves as a good sample of a typical comparison between *The Matrix* and Kant's views.

For Kant, the mind forms a 'Matrix' by actively creating our world of experience. To begin with, the mind organizes our experience of reality through time and space as *forms of intuition*. Time and space are therefore not part of the 'world-in-itself', but intuitions that the mind brings to the world to render our experiences intelligible. Similarly cause-and-effect is one of the *categories of pure understanding* ('pure concepts') through which the mind actively structures and shapes our experiences. The likes of time, space and causality therefore constitute the *a priori form* of our reality, as imposed by the mind – and we cannot experience reality outside of this form. “*So from a Kantian perspective the mind is a Matrix through which the world as it is in-itself is radically altered in order to provide the intelligible world of our experience... We don't know what the world is really like; rather, we only know how it appears to us through the Matrix of our minds.* (Lawrence 2004:187).” As a result Kant draws the distinction between *noumena*, 'things in themselves', and *phenomena*, 'things as we experience them'. The phenomenal realm is thus an enveloping 'created reality' that leaves us 'blind' to the noumenal reality that transcends our necessarily mediated experience:

¹³⁵ Many of Morpheus' pronouncements could serve such a Kantian appropriation of *The Matrix*. For instance: “*Like everyone else you were born into bondage, kept inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste or touch. A prison for your mind.*”

[Mind intuit, structures → Experience] → Phenomenal reality

So, once again the ‘Rorschach effect’ of *The Matrix* is based on it encountering a parallel reality claim that grounds a particular piece of philosophy. Here *structured experience* is the ‘Matrix’ produced by the *mind*, acting as the powerful ‘illusionist’ in Kant’s philosophical tale. And, characteristically, we are again confronted by an ‘apparent reality’ at the cost of a ‘real reality’. Yet for Kant, as Lawrence (2004:187) notes, the phenomenal is the only reality we can ever experience. Much like wearing a pair of irremovable goggles, we are fated to view our world solely through the Matrix projected by the forms and categories of our minds.

3.5 Critical theory and ideology

In addition to it reflecting a range of epistemological concerns, *The Matrix* also represents something of an arch-image of socio-cultural domination.¹³⁶ Consequently there is also a certain line of ‘critical theories’ that exhibits a natural rapport with the film.

In *The Matrix* Morpheus sets out to free Neo from the illusions of a false reality. His artificial world functions at the hand of a hidden force that Neo cannot know or see for himself. ‘Critical theory’ as originally defined by the Frankfurt School is, among other things, aimed at enabling social agents to perceive their *true situation* and *real interests* and is therefore inherently emancipatory. Central to this is the criticism of *ideology*. To be free from social repression the agents must be rid of ideological illusion (Geuss 1981:1-3).¹³⁷ So it would seem that the ‘critical theorist’, much like Morpheus, lives out a calling of ‘waking people up’ from their delusions. By unmasking the various forms of distortion and domination that separate us from a truly emancipated world, one can say that critical theory ultimately seeks to *make aware*.

The parable of the cave is perhaps already the first of such ‘critical theories’ to find expression in *The Matrix* since, as Falzon (2007:23) notes, the allegory can also be seen as a story of *social* ‘imprisonment’. In this context the ‘world of appearances’ is translated from an epistemological concern to a social-critical one. Like the prisoners in the cave, people can be controlled and

¹³⁶ “What is the Matrix?”, Morpheus rhetorically asks Neo. “Control. *The Matrix* is a computer generated dream world built to keep us under control in order to change a human being into this...”, and he comically holds up a coppers battery.

¹³⁷ As Geuss (1981:26) explains, this is not merely a form of ‘moralizing criticism’. Ideology is not in the first place criticized for being immoral, unpleasant or cruel, but for being *false*; for being a form of *delusion*.

manipulated when they mistake the ‘false images’ of politics, culture and the media for reality. Plato’s cave thus tells us how knowledge may liberate by unveiling truth.

In quite similar vein Karl Marx sought to address the ‘false images’ that keep the working class masses in chains. His critical social philosophy depicts ‘false consciousness’ as the ideological ‘Matrix’ that shrouds *capitalist exploitation*. For Marx, people’s thoughts and ideas are not autonomous, but essentially a function of the underlying economic conditions of society.¹³⁸ These forms of consciousness (moral norms, religious beliefs, philosophies, etc.), governed by the prevailing *mode of production* in society, are ‘ideological’ because they distort the nature of class relations – and, consequently, serve the interests of the dominant capitalist class (Thompson 1990:37). These illusory ideologies constitute the ‘false consciousness’ that prevents the working masses from seeing the true extent of their exploitation and suffering.¹³⁹ And, since ideological forms of consciousness cannot be taken at face value, it is the task of Marx’s socio-historical science to unmask their underlying material roots and thereby make the proletariat aware of how they serve capitalist interests (Thompson 1990:39). The underlying structural resemblance to *The Matrix* should be clear to see:

[Class economics → Consciousness] → Reality

The capitalist system (that, in terms of *The Matrix*, fittingly acts as a ‘malicious machine’), or more specifically the class-based economic ‘sub-structure’ of society, generate illusory forms of consciousness (the ‘Matrix’) that define the ideologically distorted reality of the working class masses.¹⁴⁰

Since Marx established ‘ideology criticism’ as a cornerstone of a critical tradition that was to ensue, it is understandable that especially first generation Neo-Marxists, in their attempts at (re)describing ideological ‘Matrixes’, would generally persist with the original conceptual ‘cast’ provided by Marx. The deceptive, illusory nature of ideology remained a central concern. We

¹³⁸ Marxism assumes that underlying material conditions make up the fundamental driving force of history and society. The *mode of production* is therefore the determining foundation (or substructure) to all other social institutions of society (its superstructure). The likes of the state, legal system, religion and education, being ‘built upon’ the economic substratum, reflect its nature, restrictions and demands.

¹³⁹ Here further interesting parallels between Marxism and *The Matrix* come to the fore (Leary 2004): somewhat like the ‘machine’ of capitalism, the machine civilization in the film gets its power (‘value’), quite literally, from human bodies. To ensure effective production, and to avoid revolt, the Matrix is devised as a diversion for the enslaved human ‘batteries’. This way the extraction of ‘surplus value’ is perfected. And the illusory Matrix is “...seen from the outside to be the evidence of the alienation of man’s labour power (Leary 2004).”

¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, when compared to earlier analyses, this ‘false reality’ turns out to conceal that very (economic) reality from which it originated.

see revisions and modifications of *what ideology is* and *what brings it about*, but overall claims of existing ideological realities were still *structured* along equivalent lines. For this reason certain Neo-Marxist approaches also remain open to comparisons with *The Matrix*.¹⁴¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique of the 'culture industry' is a noteworthy instance of this.¹⁴² The Frankfurt School members, significantly, sought to reconsider the nature of ideology in relation to the increasing stature of mass communication within society. The 'culture industry', for Horkheimer and Adorno, refers to the rise of mass entertainment industries that, subject to the dictates of widespread 'systemic powers' (processes of rationalization, bureaucratization and capitalist profit realization), have led to the commodification of culture. The rationalized logic of mass production has thus also invaded the realm of the mass media where standardized and stereotypical cultural forms are churned out in accordance with capitalist aims of profit realization (Thompson 1990:97-99). Furthermore these prevalent cultural forms serve as an ideological 'Matrix' that ensures the systemic *status quo*.¹⁴³ Instead of inspiring authentic flights of the imagination and critical reflection, it rather acts as an outlet for easy gratifications and escapist fantasies, thereby fostering a falsely contented, passivized workers' class. The culture industry thus produces a distracting 'Matrix' that keeps the consumer preoccupied with shallow, predictable forms of entertainment that affirm his or her impoverished reality as the 'norm':

[Systemic powers → Cultural forms] → Reality

This key-formula presents us with a different *cause* and *nature* of ideological illusion, but nevertheless reproduces underlying structural similarities to both that of Marx and *The Matrix*. Here the mass media, absorbed into dominating systemic powers, is the blameworthy 'illusionist' that fabricates a 'Matrix' of ideological cultural forms, the consumption of which reinforces a certain oppressive reality. So also in the critique of the culture industry we again see the critical theorist wanting to make people aware of some "...*world pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth* (Morpheus)."

¹⁴¹ Antonio Gramsci, and later Louis Althusser, for example, rightly expanded Marx's narrow economism and denoted various powerful social institutions (or 'ideological state apparatus') as the ideology-generating agencies of society. For Gramsci capitalism remains entrenched in the 'Matrix' of ideological *hegemonic culture*, whereby the values of the dominant class becomes the 'normal', 'common sense' values of the oppressed. Althusser's 'Matrix' runs much deeper – so much so that there is no clear sense in which the illusion can be distinguished from reality. For him our very *identities* are ideological – since our sense of self, how we see ourselves and our place in the world, reflect and reinforce the interests of those in power (Blackman & Walkerdine 2001:66-69).

¹⁴² See Dodson (2003) as an example of comparing *The Matrix* to aspects of the culture industry.

¹⁴³ Insofar popular culture "...*serves to distract people from the excesses and inequalities of the market... the culture industry is just as much a system of mass deception and control as the virtual world of the Matrix* (Dodson 2003)."

3.6 Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*

Upon first meeting Neo we find him making a black market software deal from his apartment. He retrieves the goods from a hollowed-out book, allowing just a brief glimpse of the title: Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*.¹⁴⁴ ¹⁴⁵ It should thus come as no surprise that Baudrillard's work acts as a chief interpretive grid for *The Matrix* (Lutzka 2006:114).

In these interpretations the Matrix is seen as embodying the order of simulation (as opposed to appearance), where the image no longer has any relation to reality as such (Baudrillard 1994:6). The *simulacrum* is the model of a real without origin or reality, a copy without an original. Modern society, for Baudrillard, is based upon the production, exchange and consumption of such 'groundless' signifiers (Haralambos & Holborn 2000:1071-1072). And now the simulacrum, the imitation, has taken precession, having gained more vitality and integrity than the real (Rovira 2005). Much like Neo, our world is therefore no longer really 'real'. It has instead become 'hyperreal' – a simulation of reality disconnected from any origin and all that was real before.¹⁴⁶ As a result distinctions such as image versus original, fiction versus truth and simulation versus reality, have fallen into obscurity. "*It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real...* (Baudrillard 1994:12-13)" In Baudrillard's pessimistic vision, the supposed absence of the real cannot even be deemed as an illusion. "*The impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible* (Baudrillard 1994:19)."

Although Baudrillard is vague on how exactly this 'post-modern' condition has come about, he does seem to attach special importance to the role of the mass media (Haralambos & Holborn 2000:1072). The underlying conceptual arrangement at stake here can be expressed as:

[Media → Simulacrum/Simulation] → 'Hyperreality'

¹⁴⁴ The fact that the book, much thicker than the actual work, turns out to be empty is not only an anticipation of Neo's 'empty' reality, but also alludes to Baudrillard's concern with cultural simulacra as 'empty' duplicates.

¹⁴⁵ Later Morpheus also quotes from the book by referring to their current dark and barren world as "... *the desert of the real* (Baudrillard 1994:1)."

¹⁴⁶ "*Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal* (Baudrillard 1994:1)."

As this key-formula shows, Baudrillard's relation to *The Matrix* runs much deeper than a couple of direct quotes. They both posit a produced reality that is *detached* from the world of its origin: the self-contained simulacrum of simulations bears no relation to reality; just as the reality of the Matrix has no relation to the real world of 2199. Lutzka (2006), however, argues that such Baudrillardian readings of *The Matrix* are often superficial and even misconstrued.¹⁴⁷ While the film narrative assumes a clear cut distinction between real and unreal, and tells of liberation from a false reality, Baudrillard contends that we cannot even know 'real reality', let alone return to it. In fact, Baudrillard's radical 'Matrix' does not conceal an 'outside', real reality – the reign of simulacra has led to the dissolution of the real. Since the film narrative ventures *outside* of the Matrix, Baudrillard cannot offer an overall interpretation of *The Matrix*. Yet Lutzka (2006:123) concedes that Baudrillard-comparisons do hold when applied solely to someone living *within* the Matrix-simulation.¹⁴⁸ This again underscores how the grounding reality claim, 'Matrix → Reality', serves as a primary locus for philosophical engagement with *The Matrix*.

3.7 Media and representation

In considering the Frankfurt school and Baudrillard, we have already seen that *The Matrix* can also act as a profound parable of the mass media's impact on modern-day society. We take for granted that what we read, hear and see in the media, as our source of information, is a reflection of what our world is like. We assume that there is an external reality and that the media, in a variety of forms, represents that reality to us. But since media representation will invariably be subject to gatekeeping processes, institutional constraints, relations of domination, ideological distortions, bias and selectivity, mass mediated discourse can never offer an objective picture of our world – it offers something of a constructed 'Matrix' instead. And like the dreaming slaves in *The Matrix*, or the prisoners in Plato's cave, we may naively take appearance as truth when confusing a *represented reality* for the *one* that it represents:

[Media → Discourse] → Reality

This understanding of the reality-creating potential of the media leads us, of course, back to Wartenberg's (2007:75) contention that *The Matrix* prompts viewers to think how screen-based

¹⁴⁷ Baudrillard himself denounced references to his ideas in *The Matrix* as stemming from misunderstandings, adding that no movie could ever do justice to the themes of *Simulacra and Simulation* (Staples 2002).

¹⁴⁸ Baudrillard's position could, more specifically, be compared to a person who cannot escape the Matrix even though she is fully aware of her life being simulated (Lutzka 2006:123).

media may ‘screen’ us *from* the world rather than present the world *to* us. The film notably achieves this by, as in the Matrix, duping viewers into accepting *its* fictional reality as ‘real’. In this case, on a much smaller scale, a specific kind of ‘narrative deception’ plays out through the ‘reality’ projected by film: “*Our belief in the ‘reality’ of the (fictional) world that we see on the screen is created and controlled by the filmmakers in an analogous manner to how the experience of the inhabitants of the Matrix is determined by the computers* (Wartenberg 2007:73).”¹⁴⁹ In logosemantic terms, the film-world as a ‘Matrix’, subject to the work of the ‘scheming’ filmmakers, can be stated as:

[Filmmaker → Film] → Fictional reality¹⁵⁰

In putting forward the filmmaker as ‘illusionist’, able to create ‘deceptive realities’ with filmic images¹⁵¹, this final example also fittingly conforms to the recurring key-structure that we have been exploring up to this point.¹⁵²

3.8 Concluding remarks

The Matrix, as a ‘philosophical Rorschach’, has the ability to configure itself to meet the varied hermeneutic needs of its diverse audience (Falzon 2006:98). Yet if such a variety of philosophical positions can all somehow lay claim to *The Matrix*, then surely they must share a common element that enables this. I have tried to show how, at the core of the film narrative, a

¹⁴⁹ Considering widespread acceptance of the so-called ‘death of the author’, associated particularly with structuralist and post-structuralist thought, one could say that the film’s deception of the viewer discloses an *even greater illusion* at play: the assumption that the ‘text’ is autonomous. One would not want to regress back to making the author a near exclusive determinant of the narrative. But surely one has to *also* acknowledge those authorial *intentions* that dictate the narrative deception that the viewer unavoidably undergoes (Personal communication with P.J Visagie, 16 December 2010).

¹⁵⁰ There are well-known parallels between Plato’s ‘picture show’ and the cinema-going experience: in both instances people sit in darkness, removed from reality, seduced by images projected by light onto a blank wall in front of them (Falzon 2007:21). Yet the deep seated resemblances between Plato’s cave and *The Matrix* should make *the film* an equally profound allegory of the cinema. And Wartenberg is not alone in reaching this conclusion. Also Žižek (2002:264), for instance, sees *The Matrix* as self-reflectively symbolizing the position of the cinema viewer: “*Are we all not, when we sit in the cinema, in the position of the humans in The Matrix, tied to chairs, immersed in the spectacle run by a machine?*”

¹⁵¹ Also compare Falzon (2007:36) who, in the context of Descartes’ evil demon, refers to the film director as “... *the arch-deceiver of the watching audience.*”

¹⁵² The theme of ‘illusory realities’ necessitates, by way of closing, a word or two on Eastern religious discourses. For the sake of brevity I will bypass ongoing debate on the actual ‘philosophical status’ of these religions by simply dealing with them as philosophies. It is worth pointing out the central significance that ‘illusory realities’ assume in particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, but also that these two discourses diametrically disagree on the essential root of the illusion. Hinduism takes the ordinary world as being illusory. Because behind this apparently dynamic world is the unchanging Absolute reality, *Brahman*, to which a person is connected through the *atman*, the deeper and ultimate self. Buddhist philosophy, in turn, holds that reality is wholly constituted by ceaseless fluctuation. People suffer the illusion of desiring a constancy that transcends this river of change; the illusion therefore lies in forgetting that everything always changes. So, whereas in Hinduism *change* is the illusion, Buddhism claims the *denial of change* – a ‘grasping’ at constancy – to be the illusion facing humankind (Personal communication with P.J Visagie, 16 December 2010).

certain *created reality* allows for its fellow-feeling with different strands of philosophy. Those philosophical discourses (including certain thought experiments) that typically recognize themselves in the film are based on ‘reality-creating’ key-formulas (deep-seated conceptual arrangements that express how a formed, ‘Matrix’-like phenomenon constitutes a reality) that *structurally* conform to the narrative one posed by the film. This structure, in generic outline, has been identified as ‘[X → ‘Illusion’] → Reality’. And we have seen that it is in the mutual recognition of such similar key-*formations* that the dissimilar elemental *contents* of the film and a philosophical discourse can be interpretatively related to one another.

A somewhat counter-intuitive insight is gained from all of this: the wide philosophical appeal of *The Matrix* does not first of all stem from a complexity of philosophical references and allusions, but rather from a *simple, adaptable ground-claim*, that can be mobilized and manipulated for a variety of philosophical intents. Does this, however, mean that different philosophical perspectives are merely *imposed* on *The Matrix*? Is there no philosophy, as such, *in* the film? This troublesome ‘either-or’ has been avoided by rather trying to establish *what* about the film *allows* one to ‘impose’, or recognize in it, certain strands of philosophy. And it is not as if *any* philosophy could ‘merely be imposed’ on the film. For the constitutive reality claim of the film appears to draw those conceptual outlines that dictate both the *possibility* and *limits* of possible philosophical interpretations.

4. Postscript: Further systematic considerations

4.1 Philosophical type, ideological frameworks

It can be postulated that the collection of discourses, that fundamentally ‘meet’ one another in underlying philosophical ‘reality claims’, analogous to that found in *The Matrix*, make up what can be called a *philosophical type*.¹⁵³ For we have found a rationale that allows for these discourses to be grouped together: they fundamentally share a concern with a *reality based in appearance or illusion*. And it is by virtue of a philosophy belonging to this ‘type’, that it will have natural affinity with *The Matrix*.

¹⁵³ Note however that the thought experiments considered (the evil demon, the brain in a vat and the parable of the cave), like *The Matrix*, are narratives, and do not by themselves form part of this philosophical type. Such a thought experiment relates to this type only in so far it is a *narrative* expression of a more general *philosophical* reality claim (key-formula) at stake.

Not that we want to overlook the dissimilarities between the ‘realities’ that these philosophical discourses describe. In the analyses above there are, for instance, *two basic lines* of reality claims: one being *epistemic-metaphysical* (Plato, Descartes, Berkeley, Kant) and the other *social-critical* (Marx, Frankfurt School, Baudrillard, etc.). Furthermore the ‘realities of appearance’ identified by Plato and Marx were deemed *escapable*; whereas the likes of Berkeley, Kant and Baudrillard each describe the formation of an *inescapable* reality. The escapable reality is *limited*, stands in clear contrast to a *knowable*, true reality and therefore forms part of a *dualism* of real and unreal. Inescapable realities lean towards a kind of *monism* (especially those of Berkeley and Baudrillard), since their all-encompassing, even *infinite*, reach renders the notion of an ‘outside’ *unknowable*, nonsensical or, at best, irrelevant.¹⁵⁴ Yet all these kinds of distinctions can still be seen as finer, sub-typifications within a *larger typological set*. One reason for this is their *collective* ability to engage analogously with *The Matrix*. But, even more so, these discourses can also serve as analogies for *each other*. There is a great degree of interchangeability in the ‘illusionists’ that they depict: think, for instance, of how the ‘roles’ of Plato’s prison keepers, Berkeley’s God, Kant’s structured mind or the systemic powers behind the ‘culture industry’ can all be ‘filled in’ by Descartes’ evil demon. Baudrillard even titled one of his essays, *The Evil Demon of Images* (1987). That divergent notions like ‘prison’, ‘dream’, ‘God’s mind’ and ‘false consciousness’ can each somehow each provide imagery for one another, surely points towards the common key-structural contours that qualify these respective viewpoints as belonging to a single philosophical type.

All the philosophies belonging to this type were, of course, produced in radically *different socio-historical contexts*. And the prevalent values, paradigms or, in short, ‘ideologies’ operating within specific times and places have determined the nature of their respective reality claims. Since a philosophical type is the *same concern* that plays out in a series of ideological frameworks, each of the discourses within such a type will display a unique *ideological slant* – mirroring its originating *Zeitgeist*. So in the case at hand we see that, within different ideological frames, the issue of apparent or false realities is addressed for different *reasons*, in different *ways*, using different *terms*. It is thus still the *same key-formula structure* (belonging to a philosophical

¹⁵⁴ These kinds of distinctions are informed by more detailed key-formulations, as the nature of ‘a reality’ in a key-formula can be described by certain ‘key-attributes’ (See Chapter 2, Section 2.1). The theory allows that any attribute can be used to describe an entity – which is the case in talking of ‘escapable’ and ‘inescapable’ realities. Yet the history of philosophy has amazingly witnessed the ongoing recurrence of quite a limited set of classic attributes: ‘one/many’, ‘finite/infinite’, ‘constant/changing’, ‘universal/individual’, ‘necessary/contingent’, ‘knowable/unknowable’ (Visagie 2003:7; 1998a:343). In light of this the attribute pair ‘escapable/inescapable’ can, for instance, be seen as an extension of the historically more widespread attributes ‘finite/infinite’. Likewise the description of the ‘real reality’, veiled by appearances, as ‘knowable/unknowable’ also draws from this classic set. And whether the real reality is ‘knowable’ or ‘unknowable’ in turn tells us if the false reality creates a clear dualism of realities or leans toward being an exclusive monism. Finally, not only the *nature* but also the exact *relationship* between the *two realities* involved can also be detailed in a key-formula. In the case of Baudrillard, as example, such a ‘key’ would be: (infinite) Hyperreality enclose, end → (unknowable) Real

type), playing out within different frameworks, that therefore gets filled out by with different ideological motivations.

So when Wartenberg (2007:67, 75), for example, claims that *The Matrix* ‘updates’ the evil demon scenario, the implication is rather that the film-narrative expresses this type-structure within a contemporary context.¹⁵⁵ The same logic also applies when Lawrence (2004:4), for instance, claims that Plato’s cave is the first ‘low-tech’ version of the Matrix. Yet modern frameworks – standing in contrast to Plato’s tendencies towards mysticism and the father of modern philosophy’s reliance on religious notions of God and demons – are however not immune to their own ideological inclinations. *The Matrix* is deeply anchored within, among other things, the ideological discourse of *technological power*, giving the *created reality* central to its narrative a distinct ideological ‘coloring’. Although the film, at first sight, appears to articulate primarily a motive of *freedom from* technological domination, there is evidence to the contrary. The film can be said to exhibit a unique *veneration* of technology. Despite essentially being a technologically projected reality, the Matrix is infused with spiritual forces. Neo’s status as a messianic deliverer was prophesied by the Oracle (Gloria Foster), she herself being part of the Matrix. And it is eventually simply by virtue of him being ‘the One’ that Neo prevails with mystical power over his enemies. Also compare Freeland’s (2002) criticism of *The Matrix* as a fantasy of overcoming human limitations: the protagonists, having been freed from the oppressive illusions of the Matrix, almost self-contradictorily return to it as an outlet for endless possibilities where the normal rules do not apply. The Matrix is thus a technologically based realm whereby the characters can transcend their ordinary, flesh-and-blood bodies. So in a narrative “*grounded in the possibilities of computer technology* (Lawrence 2004:16)”, we not only see a reverence for technology to the point of it gaining spiritual significance, but also how it, in a manner characteristic of such ideological discourses, ‘colonizes’ and redefines certain traditional spiritual-existential notions. In *The Matrix* these notions gain a new character and validation: they are ‘reborn’ from the possibilities that *technology* offers.

Like those philosophies that we have investigated, *The Matrix*’s narrative portrayal of an apparent or false reality thus also reveals a unique ideological slanting. And contemporary *interpreters*, seeing *The Matrix* as an ‘update’ of that typological ‘tradition’ of philosophical reality claims, are equally susceptible to the ideological allure of technological ability. It should thus come as no

¹⁵⁵ Also see Lawrence (2004:23), who maintains that the simulated reality of the Matrix is a “*technological version*” of Descartes’ evil demon.

surprise that the likes of Lawrence (2004:24) deem the specifically *technological* deception witnessed in *The Matrix* as “*much more plausible*” than comparable scenarios.¹⁵⁶

4.2 *The Matrix* and ‘philosophical genre’

Although *The Matrix* naturally attracts discourses belonging to the aforementioned philosophical type, the film itself does not form part of it. The film is based on a *narrative* reality claim, ‘[Machines → Matrix] → Reality’, consisting of concrete narrative entities, that only structurally relates to the kind of *philosophical* reality claims (key-formulas) belonging to this type.

Yet, in line with the idea of a philosophical type, it can be speculated that *The Matrix* belongs to a ‘type’ of its own kind. I will tentatively refer to this as a ‘philosophical genre’. Here our focus is not on the film’s relation with different philosophies, but the foundational similarities that it has with *other narratives* – particularly films. Such a ‘philosophical genre’ is a collection of films that is seen as sharing a similar, philosophically relevant concern. It may be made up of films from a wide variety of filmic genres – brought together only by some fundamental claim, commitment or concern of a philosophical nature.¹⁵⁷

The Matrix forms part of a philosophical genre of films that all somehow deal with the issue of an illusory- or false reality. It is thus irrelevant whether *The Matrix* is ‘science fiction’ or even ‘cyberpunk’ – now we are only concerned with how the film, like a range of other films, exhibits a certain reality claim. Films that can roughly be said to also belong in this group include *The Thirteenth Floor* (Josef Rusnak 1999), *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg 1999), *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir 1998), *Wag the Dog* (Barry Levinson 1997), *The Village* (M. Night Shyamalan 2004), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Michael Radford 1984), *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven 1990), *The Game* (David Fincher 1997), *Dark City* (Alex Proyas 1998) and *Inception* (Christopher Nolan 2010). So despite the potentially endless narrative and filmic varieties that these films may present, they all claim, or at least assume, some fabricated reality playing out within their respective narrative worlds.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Compare how the well-known (and perhaps academically more acknowledged) ‘simulation argument’ of Bostrom (2003) – claiming that we are almost certainly living in a computer simulation – also assumes a similar ideological priority of technological progress.

¹⁵⁷ We can therefore distinguish between ‘filmic genre’, the categorising of films on the basis of similar style, narrative structures, etc. and ‘philosophical genre’, the grouping together of films on the basis of them portraying a comparable philosophically relevant issue.

¹⁵⁸ Again, analogous to the earlier posited philosophical type, there are finer distinctions to be made within this overall ‘philosophical genre’. In both *The Truman Show* and *The Game* only one person falls victim to a system of deception, in *The Village* a small

As with *The Matrix* we can also capture these different reality claims in the form of narrative key-formulas. For example, the narrative reality claims of (a) *The Thirteenth Floor*¹⁵⁹, (b) *eXistenZ*¹⁶⁰, (c) *The Truman Show*¹⁶¹, (d) *Wag the Dog*¹⁶², (e) *The Village*¹⁶³, and (f) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*¹⁶⁴ can each be expressed as:

a) [Future civilization → Simulation] → Reality

b) [Game designer → Virtual reality game] → Reality

community, while the likes of *The Matrix*, *The Thirteenth Floor* and *Wag the Dog* depict entire societies as subject to such illusions. Some of these films (*The Matrix*, *The Truman Show*, *The Village*, *The Game* and *Dark City*) present escapable false realities where there is a clear divide between a limited illusion and the reality that it veils – in *The Matrix*, for instance, this is reflected in the ease with which the film eventually clears up its initial skeptical doubts (Litch 2002:16; Falzon 2007:32). Other films, however, present much more radical, inescapable illusions (*The Thirteenth Floor*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) or at least leaves the question of ‘real reality’ unresolved (*Total Recall*, *eXistenZ*, *Inception*).

¹⁵⁹ In *The Thirteenth Floor* computer scientist Hannon Fuller (Armin Mueller-Stahl), on the evening of his murder, leaves a message in his newly completed virtual reality simulation of 1937 Los Angeles. His colleague Douglas Hall (Craig Bierko) becomes a prime suspect and sets out to find the secret that had Hannon’s killed: that they and their own world of 1990s Los Angeles is itself a simulation, one of thousands, that (much like their own creation) has become a dark playing ground for people from a future civilization.

¹⁶⁰ This futuristic thriller opens with Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh), the leading game designer in the world, testing her new virtual reality game, ‘eXistenZ’, with a focus group. Organic game consoles known as ‘game pods’ function through ‘bio-ports’, outlets implanted in players’ spines. The session goes haywire when she falls victim to an attempted assassination and has to escape with security guard, Ted Pikul (Jude Law). She talks Ted into playing the game with her in order to inspect the damage on her treasured game pod. This leads the pair through a series of surreal episodes that increasingly blurs the line between fact and fiction. Yet in a sweeping twist it is revealed that all of these events are part of a virtual reality game called ‘tranCendenZ’, leaving the audience with no apparent end to the dangerous ‘game’ that is being played.

¹⁶¹ Director Peter Weir’s comedy-drama tells of Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) who is unaware of the fact that his entire life is a worldwide 24-hour-a-day hit TV Series, ‘The Truman Show’. As an unwanted baby, Truman was adopted by a TV network that turned his life into a real-time documentary. His fabricated ‘hometown’, Seahaven, is a city-sized domed set, populated by countless actors, hidden cameras, and behind-the-scene crewmembers, allowing the godlike TV producer and mastermind, Christof (Ed Harris), to control every aspect of Truman’s life. But as Truman starts to become increasingly suspicious of his ‘perfect’ existence, Christof has to continually devise new ways of thwarting Truman’s desire to explore and potentially escape.

¹⁶² In *Wag the Dog* an unnamed president of the United States is caught in a sex scandal two weeks before his re-election. In an attempt to save the situation, spin doctor Conrad Brean (Robert DeNiro) concocts a fake war with Albania to deflect media attention and restore the image of the president. With the help of a Hollywood producer named Stanley Motss (Dustin Hoffman), they manufacture a war by creating news footage, raising public support, producing a theme song and even turning an anonymous convict into a ‘war hero’. And so a war existing only in the media saves the president’s campaign.

¹⁶³ *The Village* tells of an isolated 19th century Pennsylvanian community living in fear of mysterious creatures in the woods surrounding their village. Although it is said that the villagers have a truce with the monsters, a barrier of lanterns and watch towers are still constantly manned to guard against “*Those we don’t speak of*”. But an unfortunate turn of events that forces the determined Ivy Walker (Bryce Dallas Howard) to leave the confines of the village for medical supplies leads to a signature revelation from writer-director M. Night Shyamalan: their village is, in fact, located in a present day wildlife preserve, set up by the town’s ‘Elders’ (a group of people who met in a trauma support group) in the 1970’s, in an attempt to live a protected life away from the dangers of the outside world. Taking up a late 19th century way of life was apparently thought to be simpler and more peaceful, while the myth of the creatures in the woods was an attempt to keep their young within the protective enclosure of the village.

¹⁶⁴ In the film adaptation of George Orwell’s 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party worker Winston Smith (John Hurt) lives in the totalitarian state of Oceania under the constant surveillance of an inescapable network of broadcasting ‘telescreens’. Winston mans a small cubicle in the Records Department of the ‘Ministry of Truth’. (Here historical records are modified and rewritten according to the dictates of the Party, lead by the ever-present, yet enigmatic, figure of Big Brother (Bob Flag). The Ministry of Truth ceaselessly broadcasts its information to citizens detailing achievements of the Party, including Oceania’s never-ending exploits on the battlefield. The Party has also just released the 10th edition of the ‘Newspeak’ Dictionary, with the intention of ultimately eradicating any words whereby people can express a feeling against the Party.) Once Winston is caught for having an illicit affair with a fellow party member (Suzanna Hamilton), he is brought to the ‘Ministry of Love’, where he is subjected to a rigorous process of torture and brainwashing. O’Brien (Richard Burton), a high ranking member of the Inner Party, explains to Winston that reality does not exist in the fallibilities of the individual mind, but only in the collective and immortal mind of the Party. Hence Winston is systematically conditioned to willingly deny any self-evident truths (such as that Oceania has obviously *not* always been at war with its enemy Eastasia) which are contrary to this unquestionable reality of the Party. His only prospect now is to disappear from the Party’s regulated reality altogether: “... *when there is nothing left but sorrow and love for Big Brother, we shall lift you clean out of history. We shall turn you into gas and pour you into the stratosphere. Nothing will remain of you. Not a name on a register, not a memory in a living brain. You will be annihilated in the past, as well as in the future.*”

- c) [TV Producer → ‘The Truman Show’] → Reality
- d) [Spin doctors → Media] → Reality
- e) [Elders → Village] → Reality
- f) [The Party → Historical records, Language] → Reality

In the reality claims of each of these films, we once again see the structure identified in *The Matrix* and those philosophies associated with it: that some powerful agent, acting as an ‘illusionist’, produces some form of ‘illusion’ whereby a certain reality is constituted. In this case we may even go further in speculating that all these films are different narrative expressions of a single more general *philosophical key* that characterizes the ‘genre’ as a whole:

[Power determines → Knowledge] constitutes → Reality

Each film in its own unique way presents a powerful actor or group who, in their own interests, limit or manipulate someone’s knowledge (in the widest possible sense of the word, ranging from overall *experience* to knowledge of only *specific facts*) and thereby subject them to a false reality.¹⁶⁵ In this philosophical key-formula we therefore have something of a ‘macro-narrative’ within which a multitude of specific narratives can be generated; it is a single philosophical key-formula that grounds a variety of possible narrative key-formulas.

The underlying structural consistency of this philosophical genre of films is furthermore also called to attention by each film’s ability to be, like *The Matrix*, a *distinctive illustration* of the evil demon scenario considered at the outset of this analysis. In our examples a future civilisation, a totalitarian state, a game designer, a godlike TV director and scheming spin doctors can all take up the role of the ‘evil demon’, allowing each film to offer its own ‘version’ of the evil demon argument – and casting fresh perspectives on the matter along the way.¹⁶⁶ For each of these films

¹⁶⁵ The potential domination implied by ‘Power → Knowledge’ means that this ‘genre’ of films will have a notable bond with the *socio-critical* line of philosophies that were discussed earlier in relation to *The Matrix*. Yet it is interesting that even the epistemological thought experiments considered, for some reason, all posit a powerful villain (e.g. the ‘evil demon’, ‘evil scientist’ or the implied captors in Plato’s cave) – and to that extent can be said to also concern themselves with the social-critical issues that these films gravitate toward.

¹⁶⁶ Films like *The Thirteenth Floor* and *The Village* also display *The Matrix*’s special ability to draw the viewer into the kind of illusory deception that it depicts, and therefore meet Wartenberg’s requirement for them to be considered as actually doing

also represents, as Wartenberg considers *The Matrix*, a certain ‘updating’ of Descartes’ thought experiment.

We have considered how *The Matrix* and related philosophies operate within distinct socio-cultural contexts that determine the nature, intents and reception of their reality claims. Likewise here we have an entire ‘philosophical genre’ of films – unified by similar claims of illusory realities – that function within divergent ideological frameworks. Each film will therefore disclose a certain ideological slanting that determines *how* and *why* the issue of false realities come to the fore in its particular narrative. For example, *The Thirteenth Floor* and *eXistenZ* are, much like *The Matrix*, framed by the ideological discourse of hypernormative technology, resulting in portrayals of highly transcendent, even unfathomable realities functioning at the sole hand of *technological power*.¹⁶⁷ *The Truman Show* and *Wag the Dog* are, in turn, inspired by ideological *media power*, detailing not only how media operations can produce false realities (both physically and discursively in the case of *The Truman Show*), but also how audiences derive distorted meaning and inspiration from these illusions. While the ideological framing of *The Village*¹⁶⁸ and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, produce commentaries on deceptive realities which stand in service of statism or warped *political power*. In this single ‘philosophical genre’ something of Descartes’ original skeptical concern is therefore articulated within various ‘updated’ ideological frameworks. Thinking of these framings as ‘updates’ of the evil demon argument, should, however, not obscure the fact that their respective ideological absolutizations must also be subjected to critical appraisal. Yet the coming together of such competing ideological angles may nevertheless still be regarded as generating a dynamic and intricate ‘*dialogue*’ between these films on the theme of false realities that they have in common. And in similar vein, each of these false realities, because of their distinctive fictional and ideological characters, should also prove to offer their *own unique analogical repositories* when subjected to the considered philosophical interpretations that are typically levelled at their ‘fellow-film’, *The Matrix*.

philosophy. Yet when considering all these related films side by side, it does seem unfair of Wartenberg to attribute a special philosophical significance to what can only be deemed a *form of narration*. While the character-bound narration in some of these films results in the viewer experiencing a similar deception, the omniscient narration of others conveys the presence of a false reality from the outset. Can we thus say that *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ* and *The Village* offers philosophically more than the *Truman Show* or *Wag the Dog* only because they reveal a false reality in a surprising ‘twist’? For, at root, we have a *shared claim* of a false reality, characterizing this group of films, which is merely *revealed* in different ways. The arguably contingent way in which their illusory realities are narrated, should therefore not necessarily detract from any of these film’s ability to be a skeptical thought experiment and to thereby ‘do philosophy’.

¹⁶⁷ One may argue that the shared *ideological framings* of particular films in turn produce *distinct sub-categories* under the general philosophical genre of ‘false reality films’. Many of these films inspired by ideological technological power may for instance belong to what Litch (2002:7) labels as the “*science fiction virtual reality genre*”.

¹⁶⁸ Upon release some commentators labeled *The Village* – in which a community’s leaders create the lie of a threatening enemy to protect their way of life – as a clumsy political allegory of the post 9/11 US ‘war on terror’. Among other things it was pointed out that the choice of surname for the village’s leading elder, Edward Walker, is a reference to the middle name of President George (Walker) Bush.

Chapter 8

Conclusions, criticisms and prospects

1. A tale of two ‘meetings’

As explained at the outset, all of the analyses and arguments presented in this explorative study converge on what I have called the ‘meeting of film and philosophy’. But, in light of the new perspective which I have brought to bear on this theme, we should really distinguish between *two* ‘meetings’ that were central to this process. First and foremost, this was a meeting of *film and Discourse Archaeology (DA)*. In what has been its first formal venture into the field of film, I have shown how prominent sub-theories of this meta-philosophical framework can be applied to the ‘deep-structure’ analysis and interpretation of five individual films. But DA’s unique angle of engagement was at the same time intended to be an exploration of the meeting of *film and the field of philosophy* in general. Each of the case studies therefore addressed some issue pertaining to what I have more specifically identified in Chapter 1 as the meeting of ‘philosophy in film’: In what sense do films embody philosophy? On what grounds are philosophical perspectives discerned in films? And how do films make philosophical claims and contributions? Since DA too has to be taken as ‘a philosophy’, using it to reveal various ground conceptions in films is itself a meeting of ‘philosophy in film’. But by mere virtue of the elemental, travelling kind of conceptions that these are, their deep-structure presence in film is just as much an indication of certain conceptual foundations that unite film and philosophy. It is thus a matter of what the meeting of film and DA can tell us about the general meeting whereby any form of philosophy finds its way into film.

In this concluding chapter I will spell out some important findings and implications of the preceding DA analyses for the relationship between film and philosophy – in particular the presence of philosophy in film. I will identify certain strengths of the paradigm and how they impact on a handful of difficulties in the field, followed by what I consider to be some shortcomings of the approach. The study will end with a few thoughts on what the future still holds for DA and film.

2. DA and the meeting of film and philosophy

Certain assumptions that are at work within DA can be rounded out into an original and illuminating ground-perspective on the relationship between film and philosophy. Their relationship according to this paradigm can best be summarized as such: *film and philosophy meet in and around different kinds of deep-structure elements that the sub-theories of DA identify.*

The metaphor of a ‘meeting’, we have seen, captures quite a few things. Most basically it refers to the fact that philosophy and film can *share* the same ground concepts and structures. Each of the preceding chapters of analysis has illustrated how DA’s theoretical apparatus extracts different kinds of grounding concepts in film. Yet it has become clear that the likes of macros, conceptual figures and key-structures are constitutive deep-structure elements that films can *have in common* with philosophical discourses. They have a trans-discursive, meta-philosophical character – and their broad reach across different philosophical discourses also extends to discourse-types, such as popular film-narratives, that are not normally considered to be ‘philosophy’. A good example is the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor, in Chapter 5, that ‘travels’ between Karl Marx’s writings and *Modern Times*, but cannot be deemed the exclusive property of either. It is a single grounding concept that finds parallel expression in two admittedly related, yet separate, discourses; and in doing so forms a deep-seated dialogical ‘bridge’ between them (see Chapter 5, Section 5). DA therefore enables the film-philosopher to deal with two different types of discourses in the same, unifying, deep-structural terms. And by extracting certain conceptual arrangements that a film and piece of philosophy share, it reveals those arrangements as linking common denominators that allow the two to meet.

The deep-structures that DA specifies also represent a ‘meeting place’ in the sense that they form the *grounds* upon which philosophies engage with film. Yet sharing exactly the same ground arrangements is by no means the only condition for a film’s philosophical interpretation. There are a variety of ways in which deep-structure elements can *facilitate* a specific philosophical inquiry into a film, as the Chapter 3 analysis of such exchanges with *Liberty Valance* made evident. Some of the readings, we have seen, *single out* only certain macros or macro-interactions in the film. Each interpretation also mobilizes these elements in a distinctive manner. The first two perspectives find access into *Liberty Valance* by *assimilating* its leading macros and engaging with the film in its own thematic terms. The last reading seeks out a ‘*mirroring*’ of its own macro-complex in *Liberty Valance*, allowing a deep-structure dialogue between what would otherwise appear to be quite unrelated subjects. An overview of philosophical interactions with

The Matrix (Chapter 7) in turn revealed that it is not corresponding contents but rather the *matching of conceptual structures* that allows for various analogical interrelations between the film and philosophies. Saying that film and philosophy meet in such grounding concepts and -structures therefore also means that they make out the deep-structure *conditions* for various interactions between films and philosophical discourses.

A last important facet of this ‘meeting’ is that films can give their *own expression* to deep-structure elements that travel far beyond the boundaries of recognized philosophy. Their self-sufficient embodiment of philosophically significant concepts allows films to cast their own philosophical perspectives and in this sense meet, overlap with, and even contribute to, philosophy. While they may be explicitly and intentionally dealt with in philosophical discourse, DA maintains that some kind of mobilization of its deep-structure concepts is actually unavoidable. The likes of macro-motives, ideological formations and ethical postures point to certain ultimate, inescapable contexts of our existence that will, one way or another, also find their way into films. But any concretization of these abstract contexts necessarily involves a certain manipulation thereof: a film, for example, *selects* certain macro-motives, *ascribes unique characteristics* to them and configures them in a series of *relations, hierarchies and interactions*. The individually arranged profile of macros that a film may exhibit is thus by default a ‘rearranging’ interpretation of the realities that they stand for. One of my aims in analyzing *Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind* (Chapter 6) was to show how the film, through its individual treatment of postures, adopts a philosophically relevant position involving certain ethical-existential claims. I have furthermore tried to indicate (as with my analysis of *Brokeback Mountain* in Chapter 4) how the specifically *filmic* (and not mere narrative) incarnation of these ethical ground concepts can invite insights and reflections that would not come as naturally to a written text (see Chapter 6, Section 5). Film-narratives therefore also meet philosophy in giving unique forms and expressions to those concepts that philosophical discourses more centrally and explicitly revolve around.

In Chapter 1 I explained that this explorative study forms part of the larger project – notably taken up by Thomas Wartenberg in *Thinking on screen: Film as philosophy* (2007) – of giving more substance to the theoretically neglected relationship between film and philosophy. We need a clearer picture of the links that constitute the diverse interactions that may exist between the two fields. All the preceding case-studies have identified particular grounding concepts or arrangements that bridge individual films and philosophical discourses. Much like the philosophical techniques that Wartenberg has discerned (see Chapter 1, Section 2.1), these

particular links are the result of a more local and empirical engagement with specific examples (Cf. 2007:28). Wartenberg, invoking a metaphor used by C.S. Peirce, argues that such a series of specific links amounts to mutually supporting ‘fibers’ that form a stronger connecting ‘cable’, thereby securing the sense that there are genuine meetings between film and philosophy (2007:31, 131-132). But the mutually supporting arguments offered by *individual examples* do not give us enough of a theoretical grounding of film and philosophy’s meeting. We are ultimately in search of a series of interlocking strands that are sufficiently *generalized*. While DA has proven to be up to the task of picking out its own set of individual connections, these grounding arrangements will always form part of the larger ‘spaces’ that its theories define. And at the end of the day these are the *broader* deep-structure ‘terrains’ in which film and philosophy make contact: key-formulas, macro-motives, conceptual figures, ideological formations and ethical postures, constituting general *kinds of links* between the two.

What makes this deep-structure ‘cable’ that DA postulates special is that its compositive fibers are *in self-conscious systematic interaction*. Although I have tried to deal with the DA tools individually, the ‘surprising twist’ cannot really be held back: the aspects of philosophical deep-structure that they analyze intersect in a variety of systematically describable ways. There is an intricate *coherence* between all the categories of grounding concepts that were dealt with. For instance, all of the ‘*macro-interactions*’ (also referred to as ‘deep-structure statements’ or ‘-claims’) identified are in fact variations of *key-formulas* (Chapters 3 and 4). The central *conceptual metaphor* in Chapter 5 is an extension of *socio-cultural forces* described by Macro-motive and Ideology theory. The *posture* of ‘letting go’ in Chapter 6 cannot be uncoupled from certain *ideological* motivations. Ideology theory, of course, has served as a supplementing, ‘auxiliary’ perspective throughout: Chapter 7 detailed how *key-formulas* must be considered within relevant *ideological frames*. And, finally, the adapted *narrative key-formulas* in the same chapter have often turned out to be ‘key-shaped’ *figurative conceptions* of philosophical key-formulas. DA’s deep-structure perspective is therefore an unapologetically comprehensive and global one. While the general lines of connection that it proposes are clearly distinguishable, they remain intimately related, depending on one another, even presupposing one another. The key-formulaic, figurative, ideological and ethical realms of philosophical deep-structure represent *systematically interacting aspects* of the meeting of film and philosophy. And the deeply foundational character of these aspects forces me to accept that, on the generalized level of abstraction at which DA operates, they represent *necessary, unavoidable connections* between film and philosophy.

3. Strengths of DA's deep-structure perspective

3.1 A meta-philosophical perspective

As a paradigm that in the first place deals with philosophical discourse, DA operates from a meta-philosophical vantage point by design. This gives it an obvious edge in joint appraisals of film and philosophy. One might of course argue that any balanced perspective on their relation – that is, one that does not simply interpret the film in terms of a theory (like in a Marxist reading, for example) – must take on some meta-philosophical quality. Yet, from what I have found, there is a surprising neglect of this important issue in debates. Merely showing that a film exhibits or embodies some philosophical argument or theory is still not a theoretical explanation of how and why this is the case. The problem of how film and philosophy meet can, after all, not be approached from 'within' a standard philosophical theory – only a theory that accounts for philosophical theories. DA makes the presuppositions of such a vantage point systematic and explicit, given that there is arguably no other way of managing such a comprehensive theme. One major advantage in this context is that it offers more 'neutral' grounds from which to evaluate film's relation with philosophy. While DA cannot deny being philosophy, its distinctively meta-philosophical viewpoint avoids privileging a specific philosophical discourse above a film; it rather sees both as relatively equal expressions of relatable deep-structures.

3.2 A pre-textual, conceptual focus

The deep-structural conceptual realms that DA delves for are of a 'pre-textual' or 'pre-discursive' nature. This means that the abstractions that it deals with stand prior to their concrete expression in a single type of discourse with all the particularities that it may have. It is therefore a level of enquiry that is much less hindered by the dissimilar (or even irreconcilable) qualities, aims or uses that film and philosophy may have (Cf. Wartenberg 2006:19-20). A problem like their essential difference in priorities, as pointed out by Smith (2006:39-41), is evaded by an approach that 'tunnels' underneath the barrier that it forms. Likewise the DA perspective succeeds in bypassing complex debates about the exact extent to which films can illustrate, contain or embody philosophy (see Chapter 1, Section 1). Not that these issues are unimportant. But here they do not, as they often do, stand in the way of getting a thorough theoretical grip on film and philosophy's meeting. Much like in theoretical physics, our challenge is to find inventive ways of *unifying* what would otherwise be disparate phenomena.

3.3 A recognition of philosophy as aspect

In claiming some films to be philosophical (or even ‘philosophy’), many philosophers of film (implicitly) endorse a troublesome dualism of ‘philosophical’ versus ‘non-philosophical’ films – one that the DA perspective flatly rejects. It undercuts this untenable distinction by simply dealing with a *philosophical aspect* of films instead.¹⁶⁹ While references or allusions to a philosophical ‘dimension’ of film is not uncommon (Cf. Mulhall 2003; Wartenberg 2005:281; Smith 2006:39; Falzon 2007:6), DA ascribes substantial contents to this aspect in the form of the philosophical deep-structures that it analyzes. This aspectual approach does not run the risk of reducing a film to its epistemic- or philosophical qualities. It acknowledges the philosophical aspect as closely interwoven with an entire spectrum of possible aspects – narrative, technical-filmic, perceptual, cognitive, social, creative, aesthetic or even poetic – from which the analyst purposely abstracts it from. The analysis of philosophical deep-structures can therefore never be an exhaustive explanation of a film. As a mode of enquiry, it brings a *specific concern* to the film, a *certain way of looking*, that cannot denounce or reduce the range of other unique dimensions that the film possesses. At best the deep-structure perspective should *enrich* our understanding of other aspects.

So instead of saying that *some* films are philosophical, the DA paradigm opts for *all* films having a philosophical aspect. Any film-narrative has to in some way call upon the grounding elements that DA describes and, in doing so, acquires a philosophical deep-structure. I therefore have to concede that even the most ordinary of romantic comedies has to somehow, if only implicitly, mobilize philosophically relevant concepts. This makes the philosophical status of films a matter of degree. What people generally take to be a ‘philosophical film’ is rather one that mobilizes its grounding concepts more consciously, explicitly and dynamically. But these films cannot lay exclusive claim to this basic capacity – an unavoidable philosophical aspect is merely more pronounced in them. Falzon (2007:8) echoes something of this in saying that “... *with enough ingenuity any film whatsoever could be made philosophically relevant...*” but, because of their own structure and content, some “... *films suggest themselves more readily in connection with various philosophical themes...*”

¹⁶⁹ To be more exact, DA’s theoretical tools technically describe a *multiplicity* of philosophical aspects in film.

3.4 A wider notion of philosophical contribution

DA's 'democratization' of philosophy in film does not stop with it granting every film a philosophical aspect. It also liberates films from having to specifically deal with recognized, acknowledged philosophical discourses for them to be deemed 'philosophical'. The general assumption seems to be that a film can only contribute to philosophy, or have philosophical value, if it can be related to 'canonical' texts of the institutionalized Western philosophical tradition.¹⁷⁰ DA, however, sees the philosophical dimensions of film-narratives as arising from their ability to embody philosophically relevant concepts. While it is on the basis of these grounding concepts that a film can be related to 'qualified' philosophical theories and arguments, the mere concretization of these concepts, by itself, allows a film to have a more general philosophical relevance as well. Wartenberg (2007:32-54) convincingly argues that filmic depictions of abstract philosophical ideas can contribute to the field; and that the often cited distinction between 'merely illustrating philosophy' and 'doing philosophy' is inadequately theorized. He notes that "... *it is a mistake to conclude that, just because something is an illustration, it is not original or illuminating* (2007:44)." Yet DA builds on this argument in claiming that films primarily provide original expressions of deep-structure concepts, not theories. So even though a film's particular deep-structural arrangements may be in 'dialogue' with recognized philosophical views, they also cast philosophical perspectives of their own. This study has shown how films, independently of any specific philosophy, can inspire philosophical insights by mere virtue of their distinctive manipulation of a set of concepts. Yet, in saying that, only a systematic-analytic approach can make us see how a film's selection and arrangement of various realities can amount to a philosophically significant construal of our world.

3.5 Against philosophy as 'authorial intent'

Philosophers who see films as a form in which philosophy can be done, tend to attribute its 'philosophy' to the input of the filmmaker alone. A good example is Wartenberg's claim that "... *the film's makers are the ones who are actually doing philosophy in/on/through film* (2007:12)." The assumption seems to be that, much like a philosopher expresses his views in a written text, a filmmaker philosophizes through a film. This leads him to the conclusion that, "*Only creator-orientated interpretations of a film can justify the claim that the film itself is*

¹⁷⁰ To take a typical example, Shaw (2006:113) argues that Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives* (1992) is philosophical because it successfully conveys Sartre's challenging ideas. But it does not do philosophy, since "... *it does not ask deeper questions or propose new concepts or perspectives that Sartre had not himself formulated previously.*" So, irrespective of what the film may be, the works of a recognized philosopher has to be the decisive point of reference for its philosophical status.

philosophical (2007:26).” When combined with the abovementioned restriction of film-philosophy to institutionally acknowledged discourses, this view burdens theorists with having to explain how these discourses could have figured in filmmakers’ minds. Regarding his analysis of *Liberty Valance*, for example, Wartenberg explains that director, John Ford, did not had to have Hegel and Nietzsche in mind but that we should recognize “... *that he was thinking about the philosophical views that we can trace back to these great philosophers and that it makes sense to think of him as attempting to respond to one and defend another in the specific context of the Hollywood western* (2007:9).” The DA perspective, however, maintains that the film’s essential philosophical capacities do not rely on the views of Hegel or Nietzsche. These discourses display, rather, shared or compatible core concepts that enables a dialogue between them to exist. And considering the foundational, deeply constitutive nature of these conceptions, it does not have to be on exclusive account of John Ford’s (and *all* other parties involved) *intentions* that the film calls upon them. Unavoidable grounding concepts often operate as ‘unconscious’ philosophical determinants from the deep-structure of a text. This space can thus easily hold a philosophically significant arrangement of concepts that was not intended by a filmmaker or writer. And should a certain deep-structure arrangement be intended, it may turn out to be open to unpredictable readings. The Wachowski brothers may have had their intentions with the ‘reality claim’ that *The Matrix* makes, but those intentions could not possibly have taken account of each and every philosophical reality claim that this malleable deep-structure can be related to (see Chapter 7). Of course philosophers need to pay heed to the creator’s intentions when interpreting a film. But we cannot reduce a film’s philosophical qualities to what its creators had in mind – just as much as we would not want to reduce it solely to interpretative activity. DA makes philosophy in a film relatively independent from both its creators and interpreters: it engages with that ‘something’ going on *in the film itself* that permits it to be philosophical.

4. Some criticisms

Having said all of this, I remain quite aware of definite limitations to the deep-structure perspective that I have proposed here. One problem that I have pointed out a few times is that philosophers of film are guilty of mistaking philosophical qualities of a *narrative* for what they take to be unique to a *film*. Yet what they see as philosophical in a film really amounts to nothing more than what a written version of the same narrative would have achieved. Not enough is made of the *filmic medium* and the unique ways that it can foster philosophical impulses in a narrative. While I have tried to focus on how the distinctly filmic figuration of grounding

concepts can cast them in a novel and thought-provoking light, I feel that my analyses have often struggled to rise above my own criticism. The deep-structure approach is at times just as guilty of treating films as mere narratives. The analyses of *Liberty Valance* (Chapter 3) and *The Matrix* (Chapter 7) do not go beyond the narratives that they convey. An understanding of how the narrative aspect of films interacts with philosophy might be a good start. But it still leaves many questions about their overall meeting unanswered. DA, in general, finds it difficult to comment on peculiar philosophical capacities that the medium may have, because it mainly deals with abstracted conceptual levels in discourse.¹⁷¹ It rightly calls attention to the figurative aspect of the filmic representation of philosophical deep-structures. But there needs to be an elaboration of what makes this particular figurative relation special. So while I have argued that film can give unique ‘aesthetic insights’ into a concept, I admit that much more substance needs to be given to what, exactly, this means.

Another shortcoming is that DA’s deep-structural grasp of film and philosophy does not sufficiently differentiate between different extents of their meeting. In Chapter 1 (Sections 1.1 to 1.3), I roughly distinguished three conceptions of ‘philosophy in film’: film as illustrating philosophy, film as containing philosophy and film as doing/being philosophy. Whether a film illustrates, contains or does philosophy, DA can account for the ground-conceptual basis upon which this takes place. But it is precisely that generalizing and unifying level of operation that withholds it from being able to tell how exactly these lines of distinction should be drawn. The deep-structure approach may still prove to be a useful point of departure for such theorizations. Or we should accept that the descriptive depth of a stronger theoretical perspective can simply render former problems irrelevant. But I doubt whether this view will satisfy those grappling with these questions.

5. Prospects: DA and film

In bringing this study to a close, I want to point out a few promising prospects that still lies ahead for the meeting of DA and film. To begin with, the study has tentatively set up certain *specific projects* that I hope to take up in the future. Perhaps the most exciting of these is the role of conceptual metaphor in the meeting of film and philosophy. On the one hand it represents a fundamental conceptual link between the two fields (as my analysis of *Modern Times* in Chapter 5 has shown) that in itself deserves more exploration. But it also gives film (and other art forms)

¹⁷¹ For this reason it may well be that the general philosophical abilities that DA unearths in film will not differ much from what it would find in literature, poetry or other visual arts.

a remarkable opportunity to contribute to philosophy through novel expressions of those metaphors that fundamentally inform philosophical thought (Cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1999). The example of what *Eternal Sunshine* (Chapter 6) does with the 'Subject-Self metaphor' is, I believe, just the tip of the iceberg. Another theme that I think deserves further attention is the idea of 'philosophical genres' in film raised with reference to *The Matrix* in Chapter 7. In a way this involves an opposite approach to the one adopted here: instead of extracting deep-structure arrangements from an individual film, one would start with a general key-formula or macro-complex and ask how it brings together a set of seemingly unrelated film-narratives in deep-structure 'dialogue'. The emphasis is thus more on the 'travelling concepts' than individual films. Of the wealth of contributions that Key theory can make, I am quite intrigued by how it can be modified into a theory of narrative. Apart from its description of 'narrative key-formulas' which I initiated here, we have also seen how a philosophical key-formula can be seen as 'generating' various features of a film-narrative. This was particularly evident in the keys underlying *Modern Times* in Chapter 5. It may well be that, just as the theory extracts 'philosophical-' or 'kernel narratives' from individual films, it can be used to construct similar 'grammars' for entire genres, like the Western. There is, lastly, still a lot more to be gained from Ideology theory, which has been the somewhat neglected 'tool' of the five. It offers a valuable means for drawing up the ideological profile of a particular 'film-' or 'narrative world' through identifying the (even entirely imaginary) dominating values or 'hypernorms' that it puts forward. I am particularly interested in the dynamic interpretative relations that may exist between such a fictional ideological profile and the broader ideological landscape against which it plays out.

In terms of an overall research program, this study has paved the way for an obvious next step. My intention is to do a follow-up work that will see the *entire* DA framework 'translated' into a compressive philosophical 'archaeology' of film. All nineteen of DA's 'departments' will thus be involved: a theory of belief, Postural theory, a theory of life-histories, Key theory, a figurative semiotics, a theory of knowledge, Ideology theory, Macro-motive theory, 'Life-world' theory, its departments dedicated to rationality, creativity, aesthetics, law and communication, a natural sciences 'faculty', a theory of time, a theory of truth, a philosophical anthropology and lastly its regulative department of theoretical 'uniqueness' and 'coherence'. It will be an explicitly systematic and boldly anti-reductionist description of the general archaeological deep-structures that constitute filmic discourse as a whole. Much like this study, the *model-founded approach* will mark a rejection of prevailing 'impressionistic' practices whereby film interpretations are constructed on the mere basis of structure-less, even casual, observations on the part of the analyst. Yet, unlike in this study, there will be ample opportunity for showcasing DA's natural

gravitations toward *critical analysis*, seeing that it can ‘deconstruct’ various forms of one-sidedness, reductionism, dualism and ideological distortion that may be at work within film and film theory. The self-reflectively pluralist nature of this archaeology will in fact have the potential of ushering in a model-dependent kind of ‘post-deconstructionism’ (if I may dare to call it that). Because, although it only turns to explicit models for the interpretation of a film, each model’s finding is immediately and directly deconstructed by a range of complimentary, equally applicable, models with which it is in a dynamic network of relativizing play. I have no doubt that *such* a perspective can add exhilarating new depths to what we perceive as the meeting between film and philosophy.

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Filmography

Brokeback Mountain. 2005. [DVD] Directed by Ang Lee. Focus Features.

Dark City. 1998. [DVD] Directed by Alex Proyas. New Line.

Directing from the heart: Ang Lee. 2005. [*Brokeback Mountain* DVD Bonus material] Directed by Marian Mansi. New Wave Entertainment DVD.

Dodge City. 1939. [DVD] Directed by Michael Curtiz. Warner Home Video.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. 2004. [DVD] Directed by Michel Gondry. Featuring a commentary track with Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman. Focus Features.

eXistenZ. 1999. [DVD] Directed by David Cronenberg. Alliance Atlantis & Serendipity Point Films.

From script to screen: Interviews with Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana. 2005. [*Brokeback Mountain* DVD Bonus material] Directed by Marian Mansi. New Wave Entertainment DVD.

Game, The. 1997. [DVD] Directed by David Fincher. Universal Pictures.

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Inception. 2010. [DVD] Directed by Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros.

Look inside Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, A. 2004. [*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* DVD Bonus material] Produced by Chris Miller. Focus Features.

Man who shot Liberty Valance, The. 1962. [DVD] Directed by John Ford. Paramount Pictures. Released 2001.

Matrix, The. 1999. [DVD] Directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski. Warner Bros.

Modern Times. 1936. [DVD] Directed by Charles Chaplin. Criterion Collection. Released 2010.

My Darling Clementine. 1946. [DVD] Directed by John Ford. 20th Century Fox. Released 2004.

Nineteen Eighty-Four. 1984. [DVD] Directed by Michael Radford. MGM. Released 2003.

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Thirteenth Floor, The. 1999. [DVD] Directed by Josef Rusnak. Columbia Pictures.

Total Recall. 1990. [DVD] Directed by Paul Verhoeven. Tristar Pictures. Released 2002.

Truman Show, The. 1998. [DVD – Special collector’s edition] Directed by Peter Weir. Paramount. Released 2005.

Village, The. 2004. [DVD] Directed by M. Night Shyamalan. Touchstone Pictures. Released 2005.

Wag the Dog. 1997. [DVD] Directed by Barry Levinson. New Line. Released 1998.

Abstract

Over the past two decades the field of ‘philosophy of film’ has become increasingly concerned with the self-reflective question of what constitutes the relationship between film and philosophy itself. This study proposes and explores a unique ‘deep-structure’ perspective on their relationship. It engages particularly with the question of ‘philosophy in film’ – that is, the ability of film to embody philosophical thought – from within the theoretical framework of Discourse Archaeology (DA), a theoretical system researched and taught at the Department of Philosophy, UFS. Certain assumptions that are at work within DA are explored in order to present an original and illuminating ground-perspective on how film and philosophy meet. Detailed analyses will illustrate how grounding concepts, identified by different sub-theories of DA, represent constitutive deep-structure ‘spaces’ within which film and philosophy interact in a variety of ways. While current approaches to this question tend to lack the meta-philosophical leverage which this question requires, DA’s systematic theories of philosophical discourse (and by implication philosophical ‘moments’ in any other discourse, like film) are illuminating ‘tools’ which allow the film-philosopher to deal with these two kinds of discourse in the same unifying terms.

The study is conducted through five extensive case studies of how different DA sub-theories could be applied in probing the deep-structures that allow philosophy to be ‘in’ a film. The main analyses are of *The Man who shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford 1962), *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee 2005), *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin 1936), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry 2004) and *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski 1999). The DA sub-theories that are employed in analysis are Macro-motive theory, a theory of logosemantics (‘Key theory’), a figurative semiotics (or ‘Metaphor theory’), a theory of ethical ‘postures’ and a theory of ideology. In an attempt to investigate different theoretical avenues and possibilities, each chapter of analysis examines a particular sub-theory and has its own unique exploratory aims and procedures. Yet, to anchor this study in an active and ongoing debate, each of the analyses (apart from that of *Brokeback Mountain*) also seeks to establish some form of dialogue with Thomas Wartenberg’s analyses in *Thinking on screen: Film as philosophy* (2007). Apart from offering new perspectives on ‘philosophy in film’, four of the case-studies could therefore also be seen as ‘DA-replies’ to aspects of Wartenberg’s work on exactly the same films.

Key terms: Discourse Archaeology, philosophy, film, narrative, macro-motives, ideology, logosemantics, Key theory, figurative semiotics, metaphor, ethical postures