Cavellian Meditations[1]

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1. Film and Philosophy

Stanley Cavell's coming to philosophy was inspired, as he recounts, by the contingent encounter between philosophical and non-philosophical texts. He singles out Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, as one that "staked its teaching on showing that we do not know, or make ourselves forget, what reading is."[2] He also names three films — Bergman's *Sommarnattens leende* (*Smiles of a Summer Night*, 1955), Resnais and Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), and Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) — that suggested to him what philosophy might become should it re-orient itself towards different modes of thought.[3] These three films, for Cavell, not only altered American perceptions of what "foreign" (indeed "Continental") films could do, they also opened up the question of what constitutes "a medium of thought." Indeed, they were films that served "to alter the iconography of intellectual conversation,"[4] not least the possibility that film might be a partner to philosophy, or that some kind of marriage between the two might be possible.

I take Cavell's anecdote to be significant for understanding the possibilities of our philosophical engagement with film. It raises the question of how we should approach film-philosophy, understood as a distinctive way of writing philosophically about film that Cavell, more than most, has made intelligible. By "film-philosophy" I mean aesthetically-receptive writing that develops philosophical insights from our experience of film rather than by applying to film the traditional problems or techni-

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2. Cavell, "The Future of Possibility," in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (New York: Routledge, 2006), 28.

3. Ibid., 29.

4. Ibid.

cal concepts of philosophy. A sceptical reader might ask whether such a project is viable, or even makes sense, since it would surely be difficult to find two "media" as disparate, seemingly, as philosophy and cinema. Cavell's response to this question is perhaps what still puts his work, despite enjoying increasing recognition, on the far side of the philosophical mainstream. For film and philosophy, Cavell often remarks, are "made for each other."[5] Indeed, despite philosophy's curious lack of curiosity about film (until recent decades), the arresting and productive encounter between them was, so to speak, destined to happen. This is so, Cavell maintains, despite philosophy's traditional indifference towards cinema, and cinema's seeming distance from the concerns of (academic) philosophy. The question is why this should be so, and what the significance of the film-philosophy encounter could be, especially considering the aloofness that has traditionally characterised philosophy's reception of film.

Cavell takes this difficulty, however, as a deliberate avoidance reflecting an underlying attraction rather than a motivated neglect deriving from a failure of recognition. As Cavell remarks, on the one hand there is philosophy's persistent avoidance of film, as though philosophy were aware of film's power to challenge it;[6] on the other, as remarked, there is the idea that film and philosophy were made for each other, in the sense that they both confront, in different ways, the (cultural-philosophical) problem of scepticism: the difficulty of knowing whether we can relate to the world, to others, and to ourselves, with a sense of conviction or certainty, despite the standing threat to this knowledge posed by radical subjectivism or our existential disconnection from the world. Despite their apparent differences, film and philosophy share, Cavell claims, in this ongoing cultural task of engaging with the problem of scepticism, both philosophical and cultural; the one presenting an audio-visual or "moving image of skepticism" that the other attempts to analyse and dispel through argument.[7] Here again, Cavell's strong stance on the inherent kinship between film and philosophy—both confronting the problem of scepticism, albeit by dif-

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5. "Reflections on a Life of Philosophy: Interview with Stanley Cavell," *Harvard Journal of Philosophy* VII (1999): 25.

6. Cavell, "Foreword: On Eyal Peretz's *Becoming Visionary*," in Eryat Peretz, *Becoming Visionary: Brian de Palma's Cinematic Education of the Senses* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007), xiv.

7. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film,* 2nd enl. Edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188-189.

ferent means and with different results — sets him apart from both mainstream philosophers of film as well as film theorists engaging with philosophy. So how to make sense of Cavell's claim that the "marriage" between film and philosophy is grounded in their responses to scepticism? It is not that the one or the other provides a "solution" to the problem so much as they both show different ways in which the problem can be experienced, understood, and thereby "worked through" (though not entirely dissolved). Film and philosophy, audiovisually and conceptually, engage with the sceptical *problématique* in a manner that both enacts and undoes its more pernicious effects, teaching us how to "live with skepticism": to acknowledge its force and persistence, yet not allow ourselves to become debilitated by it. Or put differently, film offers an aesthetically rich way of experiencing and engaging with the kind of scepticism that philosophy conceptualises and attempts to dispel through argument. This gets a bit closer to why Cavell believes that film and philosophy were "made for each other," though it does not clarify in what precise ways their relationship is to be understood. Indeed, the relationship between film and philosophy itself remains a question in Cavell's thinking on (and with) film, one that I shall explore and elaborate in what follows. I want to suggest that film-philosophy, practised in the "Cavellian" manner, offers a philosophical reflection on what film gives us — aesthetically and cinematically — to think, yet one which benefits from having philosophy serve as a mediator or "go-between" translating thought between image and concept.

The difficulty of this kind of mediation between film and philosophy raises a number of questions. Is philosophy required to "explain" what film evokes though moving images but cannot conceptualise by its own means? Does cinema provide a way of sensuously depicting or aesthetically enriching a philosophy that would otherwise seem abstract or alienating? Any attempt to reflect upon Cavell's film-philosophy will be confronted by such questions, which reflect the inherent difficulties posed by the film and philosophy relationship, for this is a relationship that has the potential to alter how we understand and experience each of its terms. Indeed, the encounter between film and philosophy, however ambivalent between avoidance and acknowledgment, should not just mean that philosophy can now rejuvenate itself by appropriating film as an interesting theoretical object. Nor that we can now bolster the intellectual prestige of cinema by expatiating on its conceptual puzzles or intellectual significance. The point, rather, is to show how the opening up of

philosophy to non-philosophy, and of non-philosophy to philosophy, potentially transforms how philosophy and film might be experienced and understood. It expands how we might imagine thinking to occur, revealing film as a medium of thought that accompanies but also questions philosophy, and inviting us to transform our means of philosophical expression in light of what film allows us to feel and to think. Cavell intimates as much in pointing to these three films as having been decisive not only for his own experience as a philosopher but for transforming the possibilities of "intellectual conversation" between different media, not least that *between* philosophy and film.

Cavell's anecdote concerning the encounter of philosophy and film is timely, for it poses the question of understanding and communicating how thinking might happen: the media it may employ, the manner of its expression, and its transformative effects upon us. What happens to philosophy and the way we think, which is to say write, once philosophy opens itself to an encounter with film? What happens to our experience of film once we approach it as a philosophically creative medium of communication? In what follows I offer some fragmentary remarks in response to these questions, suggesting that we can find a more robust and meaningful way of understanding Cavell's claims concerning the kinship between film and philosophy by entertaining the possibility that both stand to be transformed by their mutual engagement.

2. Cavell as Film Philosopher

If film and philosophy share more than an arbitrary or accidental relationship, if they are both ways of engaging with problems of scepticism, then how is their relationship to be understood as one that is genuinely "equal"? The temptation, particularly from the side of philosophy, is to assume that one partner is dominant (more knowledgeable and authoritative) in relation to the other (more passive and less rational). One is the active revealer of knowledge, the other a passive object of theoretical analysis (albeit one that is expressive, yet ignorant of its own nature). This rather stereotypical image of the relationship between philosophy and its other (in this case, film) is well-known, but also open to critical questioning. Must we assume a hierarchy between

philosophy and cinema? What assumptions are in play here concerning the meaning of "philosophy" and "cinema"? How can film and philosophy relate to each other in a more egalitarian, mutually acknowledging, manner?

It turns out that there are many ways of doing so, reflecting not so much the divide between analytic and Continental philosophy as the complicated border — discontinuous, porous, and shifting — between "rationalist" and "romanticist" approaches to film.[8] From this point of view, we can make a useful distinction between two ways of doing "film and philosophy": 1) the more traditional and recognisable *philosophy of film*, a theoretical or explanatory approach to analysing and conceptualising the nature of film and our experience of it (e.g., Noël Carroll's work, contemporary cognitivist approaches, and so on); and 2) *film-philosophy*, a more aesthetic, self-reflective, interpretative approach that puts philosophy in dialogue with film as an alternative way of thinking (Cavell's way of writing on film, for example). In the "philosophy of X" approach, philosophy analyses and theorises its object, precisely because the latter cannot engage in such conceptual self-reflection. Philosophy of film is a traditional philosophical "theory of X" that seeks to provide, variously, a conceptual definition of, empirical investigation into, or philosophical criticism aiming at theories claiming to account for X (where "X" means film, motion pictures, moving images, and so on).

The alternative position, "film-philosophy," questions the common tendency to philosophically privilege conceptual theorisation over film aesthetics. Film-philosophy is a particular way of practising philosophical film theory, one that does not simply apply given philosophical theories to films but stages an encounter between film and philosophy that has the potential to alter how we understand both. We might define the term "film-philosophy" as "a way of thinking at the intersection between film and philosophy, linking the two in a shared enterprise that seeks to illuminate the one by means of the other."[9] Inspired by the work of Cavell and Deleuze, film philosophers claim that film and philosophy are intimately related, sharing problems to which they respond in distinctive ways, and thereby opening up new possibilities of thought. Film-philosophy is a style or "genre" of philosophical film theory

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8. See Robert Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

9. Ibid., 207.

that seeks to explore the relationship between philosophy and film in a non-reductive, mutually productive manner, and thus overlaps with, but is not reducible to, more traditional philosophy of film.[10]

Cavell draws a similar distinction in his Preface to Eryat Peretz's *Becoming Visionary* (2007), which offers original philosophical readings of some of Brian de Palma's films. He writes:

> A way to put the difference in what I might like to see become the field of Film and Philosophy, anyway in how I have conceived my writing on film to be motivated philosophically, is that it takes the fact of film itself to become a challenge for philosophy.[11]

"Film and Philosophy," according to Cavell, is distinguished by the manner in which the "fact of film" — not only its cultural existence, or its technical properties, but its artistic potentials and philosophical possibilities — pose a challenge to philosophy's claims to knowledge and self-knowledge. Cavell contrasts this with the more conventional, pedagogically-oriented "Philosophy and Film," which uses films as examples of established problems and arguments, whether from the history of philosophy or from "recent analytical philosophy arranged by topic."[12] Cavell's imagined field of "Film and Philosophy," which his work has helped inspire, shape, and define, takes film to pose questions to philosophy; to challenge philosophy's claims to best articulate what art — or the art of moving images — endeavours to show. Cinema enacts a more vivid disclosure of aspects of experience than philosophy can do by means of argumentative discourse alone. It can disclose the everyday in ways that bring to our attention the unfamiliarity of the familiar, the difficulty of acknowledging others, the problem of our sense of reality, the meaning of being human, the question of scepticism or nihilism, the meaning of love — all things that philosophy has traditionally asked about, and that film has now rediscovered and reanimated in its own ways. It is not that film, like other mature arts, has for that reason begun to explore perennial philosophical themes, or that philosophy, in a kind of intellectual mid-life crisis, has

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10. Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film*, 207.
11. Cavell, "Foreword," xiv.
12. Ibid., xiv.

suddenly discovered the rejuvenating powers of the cinema. Rather, film and philosophy begin to intersect and engage as different ways of thinking through issues — aesthetically and conceptually — that concern both philosophers and artists, or indeed any thinking human being. They respond to shared questions and problems that open up a cultural space of engagement that brings together aesthetic experience and conceptual reflection. It is in this sense that Cavell can claim a common ground for cinema and philosophy as different yet complementary ways of confronting skepticism, retrieving the ordinary, re-enchanting the world, and transforming the self, in ways that deploy both aesthetic and conceptual means. As he writes in the Preface to *Contesting Tears*, in a well-known, but not immediately obvious passage:

> to my way of thinking the creation of film was as if meant for philosophy — meant to reorient everything philosophy has said about reality and its representation, about art and imitation, about greatness and conventionality, about judgment and pleasure, about scepticism and transcendence, about language and expression.[13]

This passage is often taken as a statement of Cavell's theoretical "position" on the film-philosophy relationship, as though this encounter were simply an opportunity to renovate philosophy's traditional arsenal of problems and arguments. Cavell means more than this, however, couching his comment about film and philosophy in the hypothetical, as though to indicate the possibility of an idealised relationship between them. Indeed, his suggestion is that some of the received problems of philosophy — above all the problem of skepticism — are transfigured and revealed anew thanks to philosophy's encounter with cinema, provided that philosophy is open to being transformed through this encounter. What is at stake here is a reorientation of philosophy by film, as well as a reorientation of what we understand film to be or be capable of, thanks to philosophy. The invention of film is an event of thought, an audiovisual technology and artistic medium capable of exploring, in its own way, those very problems, questions, and situations that have traditionally preoccupied philosophy. And this reorientation not only concerns how we think but the means of expression or communication in which

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13. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*: *The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), xii.

thinking can happen. It implies a reorientation in the way one does or communicates philosophical thought. This is the moral perfectionist aspect, one could say, of an ethics of philosophical writing: striving to attain an unattainable philosophical self, one that seeks to overcome the alienation between image and concept, between film and philosophy, uncovering in the process their elective affinities.

At the same time, Cavell's remarks give an indication of the intimate relationship that exists between film and philosophy. It is a relationship that opens up the question of style: how writing about film prompts philosophers to examine how they write; how this writing may or may not do justice to the kind of experience that film affords; how it might prompt the receptive film-philosopher to alter the register or modulate the dynamics of her theoretical discourse. Far from serving as a reservoir of colourful examples, Cavell draws attention to the importance of his experience of film for the development of his prose style. As he remarks on the occasion of the publication of *La projection du monde*, the French translation of *The World Viewed*:

> the effect of thinking about film on my ambitions for philosophical prose — I have in mind particularly the necessity to become evocative in capturing the moods of faces and motions and settings, in their double existence as transient and as permanent — has proved to leave permanent marks, as I judge it, on the way I write. It was, I believe, more than any other ambition I held, a basis of freedom from the guarded rhythms of philosophy as I had inherited it.[14]

This fascinating comment makes explicit the intimate link between the experience of cinema and question of style in Cavell's philosophical prose. Attending to the evocations of mood, whether of faces, movements, or places, to capture both the transience and permanence of what is depicted on screen, is both a philosophical inspiration and a writerly challenge: how to capture this complexity of experience, this paradoxical condition between transience and permanence that defines the temporal quality of our experience of cinema? How to render it in prose capable of evoking the mood of aesthetic and moral receptivity conducive to original philosophical reflection? And more personally, how might the experience of cinema liberate a philosopher finding

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14. Cavell, "Concluding Remarks on *La Projection du monde*," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 282.

his or her way out from the constraining controls, the 'guarded rhythms', of conventional academic prose?

Cavell addresses these questions by taking much the same view of Wittgenstein's style, another exemplary case of philosophical prose in which matter and manner coincide. Discussing a lecture course on the *Investigations* that he co-taught with Hilary Putnam, Cavell describes how his lectures aimed

> to move more systematically towards an articulation of Wittgenstein's manner, the sheer sense of the deliberateness and beauty of his writing, as internal to the sense of his philosophical aims, than I had ever tried before.[15]

Cavell's aim here, of concern throughout his career, was to acknowledge the philosophical significance of the literary qualities of texts like the *Philosophical Investigations*; to move beyond the traditional dismissal of style as merely decorative, "as a kind of ornament of the contemporary, or near contemporary, scene of professional philosophy," hence as something "that no longer demands philosophical accounting."[16] On the contrary, what is a philosopher to do, Cavell asks, if "you do not wish to deny argumentation, or something of the sort, as internal to philosophy," yet want to acknowledge the role of the literariness of certain styles of philosophical prose as integral to their meaning and purpose.[17] Such a dilemma will, of course, make it difficult to accept, but just as difficult to lose, the "demand for some philosophical accounting" of texts that are philosophical and literary at once. And because Cavell can find no standing aesthetic theory that would help us understand the *Investigations'* literariness, he writes of the text's "everyday aesthetics of itself" as a way of capturing the "literary conditions of its philosophical aims," conditions that the text itself enables the attentive reader to understand and appreciate. It is not a question here of seeking an "aesthetics" within the text, but rather an acknowledgement that an 'aesthetic concern of the text" is not "separate from its central work." This coincidence of aesthetic and philosophical concerns, much like "the sense of moral or religious fervor" that pervades the *Investigations*, is one that Cavell will read using Wittgenstein's

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15. Cavell, "Epilogue: *The Investigations'* Everyday Aesthetics of Itself," in *The Cavell Reader,* ed. Stephen Mulhall (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 370.

16. Ibid., 376.

17. Ibid.

concept of "perspicuous presentation."[18] Much the same could be said of Cavell's texts, whose style also manifests an "everyday aesthetics of itself": a fusion of aesthetic, moral, and philosophical concerns evident in their "perspicuous presentation," written using a unique voice and singular style that strives to do justice the complexity of the moving images they interpret and reflect.

3. Cavell's Style

As exemplary cases of film-philosophy, Cavell's writings on film combine, in a personal and recursive voice, aesthetic receptivity with philosophical reflection. Whether via close readings of individual films, or essays reflecting specific topics, it is a form of writing always deeply concerned with how style is related to thought in the encounter between philosophy and film. Indeed, film-philosophy, for Cavell, is not simply a matter of framing arguments, undertaking analyses, or debating theoretical claims; it is a matter, rather, of aesthetic experience and its rhetorical presentation, of how philosophical insight is married to literary expression. How can philosophy think (with) film? What happens to philosophy once it opens itself up to being transformed through its encounter with film?

Cavell has addressed such questions as much in his manner of writing as in the claims that his prose makes upon the reader. In an interview with James Conant, for example, he remarks that philosophy without theory implies the need to attend to style; to how one says, that is to say writes, what it is that film gives one to think. Style in philosophical writing becomes particularly important when one eschews the kind of *theoreticist* view of philosophy that currently dominates, for example, mainstream aesthetics and film theory. By this I mean the foregrounding of more or less explanatory forms of theory to analyse and account conceptually for the general features of, or causal processes underlying, the complex aesthetic experience of the cinema. And such theories have proven to be remarkably fruitful in explaining and thus deepening our understanding of film, especially with regard to more traditional problems associated with aesthetics or the philosophy of art. Nonetheless, Cavell eschews

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18. Ibid., 377.

such a theoretical approach in favour of a more reflective approach that seeks to pro-vide conceptual and hermeneutic insights that might enable us to make philosophical meaning out of our aesthetic experience of film. This is not to deny the obvious over-lap between the "rationalist" explanatory approaches of traditional philosophy of film, and the more "romanticist" critical-hermeneutic approach practised by Cavell. Rather, it is to suggest that the latter complements the former by providing an alter-native way of understanding cinema that seeks to open up new ways of thinking with and through it that complement and question the kind of explanatory approaches that prevail in contemporary film theory.

The challenge facing Cavell, however, is to find convincing ways of achieving conviction with this more performative mode of writing. How to persuade a reader when we are not dealing with facts or arguments so much as critical readings of, or philosophical ruminations on, particular films? As Cavell observes, if one gives up

something like formal argumentation as the route to conviction in philosophy, and you give up the idea that either scientific evidence or poetic persuasion is the way to philosophical conviction, then the question of what achieves philoso-phical conviction must at all times be on your mind. The obvious answer for me is that it must lie in writing itself. But in *what* about the writing? It isn't that there a rhetorical form, any more than there is an emotional form, in which I expect conviction to happen. But the sense that nothing other than this prose here, as it's passing before our eyes, can carry conviction, is one of the thoughts that drives the shape of what I do. Together with […] the sense that […] if there is any place at which the human spirit allows itself to be under its own question, it is in philosophy; that anything, indeed, that allows that questioning to happen *is* philosophy.[19]

Cavell's comment calls for reflection, a meditation on how one should write (philoso-phically) about film. The most important insight is that it must be one's aesthetic ex-perience of a work that guides the kind of theoretical reflection one undertakes, and that this in turn requires a certain mode of expression in order to do justice to the

19. James Conant, "An Interview with Stanley Cavell," in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 59.

work and to the thought that it both communicates and evokes. It is clear that we are not dealing here with conventional "philosophy of film," which deals precisely with "formal argumentation" and even "scientific evidence" (as in recent analytic-cognitivist approaches). Nor are we dealing with the opposite end of the spectrum, for example in the "cinephilia" movement, where impressionistic "poetic persuasion" may well take the place of more traditional forms of argument. Rather, Cavell points to the possibility of a philosophical writing on film that attempts to steer a course between formal argumentation and lyrical poeticism, achieving philosophical conviction by the combined aesthetic and reflective character of the prose itself. Indeed, philosophy is neither science nor poetry, for Cavell, but exists ambiguously between the two. It involves questioning rather than asserting, reflecting rather than concluding, and does so through a form of philosophical prose that invites the reader to experience and think differently about film rather than providing argumentative reasons to accept or reject particular theoretical views. This is not to say that argumentative reasons are absent, or that one cannot draw upon existing theories, concepts, or debates; it is to emphasise, rather, the manner in which aesthetic experience and philosophical reflection should be grounded in a close engagement with works of art, where the latter are neither passive objects of theoretical analysis nor arbitrary occasions for idiosyncratic philosophical speculation.

As might be obvious this does not quite accord with the orthodox understanding of philosophy. There are many contexts, to be sure, where formal argumentation and scientific evidence play an important role in the enterprise of film theorisation. The impressive development of theoretically articulated philosophies of film in recent decades is a case in point.[20] And while poetic persuasion may capture imagination or arouse our enthusiasm (for a film, an image, an idea), this does not of itself carry "philosophical conviction," by which Cavell presumably means both the philosophical conviction expressed by the prose and that to which it may give rise in the reader. The difficulty of achieving such conviction without relying on formal argumentation or poetic persuasion is that the prose one writes — how one gives voice to thought on film — now takes over the various tasks of engaging, reflecting, persuading, question-

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20. See, e.g., Livingston and Plantinga (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film* (London: Routledge, 2009).

ing, and acknowledging that we might regard as essential to philosophical conversation at its best.

A further challenge when one is writing on film in this vein is that although aesthetic engagement can play an "argumentative" role, these texts may nonetheless fail to carry conviction. Indeed, aesthetic appreciation of film is not a matter of strict argument, but rather a way of seeing, feeling, and reflecting that requires the work of detailed critical interpretation in order to persuade another of the validity of one's point of view. As Cavell remarks of his own writing on romantic comedies of remarriage, which he rates as serious artistic works capable of sustaining genuine criticism:

> Now we are at the heart of the aesthetic matter. Nothing can show this value to you unless it is discovered in your own experience, in the persistent exercise of your own taste, and thence the willingness to challenge your taste as it stands, to form your own artistic conscience, hence nowhere but in the details of your encounter with specific works.[21]

Aesthetic value is founded in an experience of art, in the formation of one's artistic conscience, which means in the intimate, receptive, and repeated engagement with unique and singular works (in this case, films). It is clear that there must be an aesthetic warrant for any philosophical discussion of film worth having, but this aesthetic justification cannot be "proven" by rational argument or theoretical analysis alone. It relies, rather, on offering persuasive or illuminating interpretations that contribute to a dialogue within a shared community of taste; a hermeneutic context that acknowledges the kind of communicable aesthetic experience or shared cultural conversation within which such discussion, criticism, and appreciation can take place. The difficulty, however, so one might object, is that this does not necessarily provide compelling "reasons" for accepting the validity of a philosophical interpretation of a film. The Cavellian response, we could reply, would be to say that this is bottom an aesthetic or, perhaps, an existential question, rather than one concerning ontology, epistemology, or metaphysics. There are aesthetic experiences that move one to communicate this thinking in ways that might mutually illuminate both film and phi-

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21. Cavell, "The Thought of Movies," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 93.

losophy — and thus broaden or deepen the kinds of experiences and insights these make possible — for a community of those similarly affected or attuned.[22] From this point of view, films that can elicit and sustain artistic criticism will count as works of art; those that can elicit and sustain philosophical criticism will count as philosophically worthwhile. The best "argument" one can offer, from this Cavellian perspective, will consist precisely in the plausibility of the philosophical film theory or criticism that one can produce in dialogue with competing alternatives.

In other words, Cavell proceeds to "collapse" the distinction between theory and criticism that remains definitive of contemporary film theory and philosophy of film. As we know, there are theoretical investigations of recognised problems or debates within the realm of philosophical film theory, and there are canons of critical interpretation concerning the aesthetic value and cultural significance of recognised works of cinematic art. Traditional forms of inquiry maintain a firm boundary between these two methodologically distinct enterprises, even where one might draw on a theoretical discourse in order to interpret a work, or where the interpretation of a work suggests certain philosophical insights. Nonetheless, theoretical claims are understood to require theoretical responses, and aesthetic claims a critical hermeneutic response. Cavell's "method" of aesthetic argumentation, if we want to call it that, is to challenge and undermine this distinction by combining theoretical reflection and critical interpretation, substantiating his broader philosophical claims by way of critical readings of particular films. That this is a risky strategy is borne out by the persistent criticism to which Cavell's "theoretical" as well as "critical" works have been subjected by film theorists and philosophers, the former criticising Cavell's "impressionistic" film readings for remaining at arm's length from scholarly debates, and the latter challenging the philosophical generalities that Cavell seeks to draw from his critical interpretations of particular works. It is in this context, however, that the question of philosophical style becomes important, for it is Cavell's synthesis of "theoretical" and "critical" aspects within one and the same discourse that is supposed to persuade or show the reader how a particular hermeneutic, aesthetic understanding of a film can at the same time have philosophical significance.

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22. The motivation for engaging in philosophy, for that matter, is also not a matter of philosophical or argumentative grounding; hence the invocation of wonder, puzzlement, disappointment, alienation, perplexity, desire, love, and other such affective attunements as classical answers to the question of why one philosophises.

It is film-philosophy performed as an interdisciplinary encounter or mutually enhancing dialogue.

From this Cavellian point of view, we can say that aesthetic experience precedes and informs philosophical reflection, rather than the reverse. Such reflection, in turn, illuminates and broadens one's aesthetic experience, which in turn fosters the kind of transformative thinking that calls for novel means of expression. We could describe this as a virtuous hermeneutic-aesthetic circle. This is why Cavell and other (romantic) film-philosophers can write, indeed philosophise, on film without necessarily regarding themselves as doing conventional "philosophy of film." For such writing is less an adversarial intervention designed to refute or retire the flawed efforts of others than an invitation to think for oneself in relation to a community that remains fragmentary or dispersed. Rather than finding in film a useful object of analysis or raw material for theoretical debate, it demands an effort to do justice — in the way we think and write — to the kind of aesthetic (and philosophical) experience that film affords us. And in doing so, such writing, in combining aesthetic understanding with philosophical reflection, or blurring the rigid boundary between theory and criticism, seeks to enrich our experience of film and expand our philosophical horizons.

Whether this kind of writing carries philosophical conviction for the reader, however, depends upon that reader's own aesthetic and philosophical orientation; his or her openness to the kind of self-questioning that is inherent to philosophy, including the questioning of what he or she understands (or has been taught) that philosophy (or film) should be. This attitude of open questioning, moreover, is more likely to persuade the reader to consider the possibility that the kind of aesthetic experience evoked by a film demands novel or exacting means of expression. And here it is both the philosopher's prose and the film, in felicitous concert, that can carry aesthetic and philosophical conviction — that is, for the kind of viewer or reader who is open to such experience, which means open to entertaining a different way of thinking and feeling. It is precisely this openness to questioning, to having our habitual ways of seeing and thinking put into question, which makes film *philosophical* in the deepest sense. What is it that makes "philosophy philosophy"? Cavell writes:

I understand it as a willingness to think not about something other than what ordinary human beings think about, but rather to learn to think undistractedly about things that ordinary human being cannot help thinking about, or anyway cannot help having occur to them, sometimes in fantasy, sometimes in a flash across a landscape; such things, for example, as whether we can know the world as it is in itself, or whether others really know the nature of one's own experiences, or whether good and bad are relative, or whether we might not now be dreaming that we are awake, or whether modern tyrannies and weapons and spaces and speeds and art are continuous with the past of the human race or discontinuous, and hence whether the learning of the human race is not irrelevant to the problems it has brought before itself. Such thoughts are instances of that characteristic human willingness to allow questions for itself which it cannot answer with satisfaction.[23]

Philosophy, in other words, is an openness to the world that is also an openness to thinking. It is not divorced or alienated from the world of everyday experience but offers, rather, a more intensive, reflective, and critical way of comprehending the meaning of one's experience. Although philosophy involves reason, argument, and critique, it can also encompass intuition, insight, aesthetic responsiveness as well as intellectual reflection. Above all, it requires questioning; and it is here that film and philosophy may find common ground. As Kant once remarked, it may that the desire for metaphysics is deeply rooted in the human being, and that we cannot help but ask such questions, precisely the ones we cannot answer; yet these are also the ones that may give "directions to answers, ways to think, that are worth the time of your life to discover."[24] And there are no good reasons to think that this kind of questioning can happen only in philosophical discourse rather than via the experientially richer mode of aesthetic engagement that movies can provide. Such is the kind of philosophical thinking that is at stake, for Cavell, in the "the thought of movies." Film's philosophical vocation, ordinarily unobtrusive and elusive, becomes luminous in its disclosure of the familiar as unfamiliar, of the everyday as thought-provoking.

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23. Cavell, "Thought," 92.
24. Ibid., 92.

Philosophy, from this point of view, is not restricted to serving as an explanatory theoretical enterprise subordinated to the sciences but is reinvented as a humanistic way of thinking that seeks to transform our understanding through aesthetic and conceptual means. Cavell's thought remains true to this ethical conviction, or to what Bernard Williams called the ideal of philosophy as a humanistic discipline.[25] For Cavell, this means that philosophy, including philosophy of film, cannot be reduced to the natural (or human) sciences, remains committed to the importance of argument and analysis, yet pursues these ends while remaining attentive to meaning, expression, and value — to find words adequate to the experience of what matters to us morally, culturally, and aesthetically. Echoing Harry Frankfurt, for Cavell too, there is a third dimension to philosophy in addition to deciding what we should believe and establishing how we should act: namely, "what to care about."[26] And one of the things that Cavell (and not just Cavell) finds worthy of caring about, which means writing thinking and thoughtfully about, is the marriage between philosophy and film.

25. See Bernard Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, ed. A. W. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 180-199.
26. Harry Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," *Synthese* 53 (1982): 257-272.