

## CAN FILM BE A PHILOSOPHICAL MEDIUM?

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### I.

A recent panel at the annual meetings of the *American Society for Aesthetics* had the title “Can films philosophize?” The answer is, obviously, no, if we take this question literally. But books can’t philosophize either, in this sense. People philosophize, and they generally use natural language as the medium in which they carry out this activity. So our question is, can film serve as a philosophical medium in the ways, or in some of the ways, that language does? To answer this question, we must first ask in what ways *language* functions as a philosophical medium. At a very general level, the answer to this question is fairly straightforward, if uninteresting. Language functions as a philosophical medium in that we use language to identify, articulate, clarify, and inter-relate what are viewed as philosophical issues, and to deepen our understanding of these issues and of the things that others say about them. What we take to be the significant philosophical issues, however, and what we take to be a contribution to deepening our understanding of these issues, may differ according to the philosophical tradition in which we work. If, for example, we think that the most fundamental philosophical issue is asking the question of Being, then our judgment as to when the linguistic medium is being used to ‘do philosophy’ is likely to differ substantially from the judgment we would make if we think that philosophers are best occupied analyzing everyday discourse or tending the separate gardens of the sciences.

Perhaps for this reason, philosophers working in the historically related but currently bifurcated traditions broadly characterised as ‘phenomenological’ and ‘analytic’ approach very differently our question as to whether film can be a philosophical medium. In the phenomenological tradition, this possibility has been warmly embraced by many. Indeed, some philosophers working in this tradition have maintained that film is uniquely suited to ‘do philosophy’ since the very medium exemplifies the issue of most fundamental philosophical concern<sup>1</sup>. Other philosophers working in the phenomenological tradition have found the exploration of distinctively philosophical questions to be central to the work of particular film-makers. There are, for example, Heideggerian, Merleau-Pontian, and even Nietzschean readings of Terrence Malick’s films, partly encouraged by his phenomenological training but also by the overtly philosophical musings in the disembodied voice-overs in his later films and the polysemic nature of his cinematic style.<sup>2</sup> In such cases, the polysemy might be thought to provide a resource for exploring philosophical themes that embodies the possibility of questioning, dialogue and commentary characteristic of some philosophical writing in the phenomenological traditions.

## II.

My interest in this paper, however, is in the treatment of these matters in the analytic tradition. Here, a tradition of scepticism concerning the cognitive value of the arts in general has proved to be a hostile environment for the idea that film not only has cognitive value but may serve as a medium for philosophizing. Knowledge in general, the sceptic reminds us, requires not merely belief but belief that is grounded either in reasons that we can furnish or in a reliable method of belief-formation. Art, on the other hand, it is claimed, moves us not by reasons but by its seductive manifolds, be they visual or verbal, and is of dubious epistemic reliability. The focus has for the most part been upon the narrative arts - literature, for the most part, but also film - where, so the cognitivist maintains, we can acquire certain understandings of the world in general through engaging with fictional narratives. This claim has been subject to a number of objections, most of which find their most forthright expressions in Jerome Stolnitz’s paper “On the cognitive triviality of art”.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Cavell 1979 and others influenced by Cavell, such as Mulhall 2002 and Furstenuau and Macavoy 2003.

<sup>2</sup> For a survey of the relevant literature on Malick and for examples of papers arguing for such readings, see the introduction to, and the papers contained in, my 2008.

Stolnitz raises a number of distinct challenges to cognitivist claims about literature, but we need only concern ourselves with one of these here. This is a variant on what Noel Carroll<sup>8</sup> terms the ‘no-evidence’ argument: even if there are truths, particular or general, contained in literary fictions, the fictions themselves provide us with no good reasons to accept those truths. Art, Stolnitz maintains, never ‘confirms’ its ‘truths’. In the case of general principles that might be extracted, as ‘thematic meanings’, from the fictional narratives of literary works, the supposed ‘evidence’ for the ‘reality’ of these principles is flawed in three ways: (a) the work cites no actual cases, (b) it relies on a single example, and (c) it is gerrymandered to support such principles, having been carefully designed to exemplify them. While sceptics such as Stolnitz have focused on literature as a narrative art, the arguments seem to transfer *mutatis mutandis* to film.<sup>3</sup> And such skepticism concerning the general cognitive value of narrative artworks, if justified, will surely infect the claim that such works can afford us philosophical insight.

But there is also a popular response to these analytic challenges to literary or cinematic cognitivism. Fictional narratives, it is claimed, can do serious cognitive work if they function as *thought experiments*.<sup>4</sup> Thought experiments (‘TEs’), which are themselves short fictional narratives, are, it is claimed, an instrument for cognitive advance in various branches of science.<sup>5</sup> So, why shouldn’t the more extended narratives characteristic of literary and cinematic works also, at least on occasion, serve as instruments of cognitive advance? Even more germane in the present context, TEs are also a widely acknowledged philosophical resource, especially within the analytic tradition, and fictional tales of trolley drivers and women biologically linked against their will to famous violinists are treated within that tradition as contributions to answering or better understanding different kinds of philosophical questions.<sup>6</sup> So here in outline is an ‘Ur’ analytic argument for the ‘film as a philosophical medium’ (‘FAPM’) thesis<sup>7</sup>:

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<sup>8</sup> Carroll 2002

<sup>3</sup> For the ‘no-evidence’ argument applied to the cognitive pretensions of cinema, see Russell 2000.

<sup>4</sup> For a critical discussion of this kind of defense of cognitivism concerning literary fictions, see my forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> For a critical discussion of the literature on thought experiments in science, see my 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Carroll 2002.

<sup>7</sup> For this kind of argument as applied to film, see Carroll 2006, and Wartenberg 2007.

- 1) If verbally presented fictional narratives can serve as a legitimate philosophical resource in works of philosophy, why can't they also serve in this way in works of literary fiction?
- 2) And, if they can do this in works of literary fiction, why shouldn't cinematically presented fictional narratives serve a similar function?

The obvious focus for such arguments is mainstream narrative cinema, not the 'art' films that are the principal focus of attention in the phenomenological tradition.

### III.

The first objection has been expressed by a number of critics of artistic cognitivism, and can be found in the contributions of both Paisley Livingston<sup>9</sup> and Murray Smith<sup>10</sup> to current debates over whether film can function as a philosophical medium. The idea is that, even if we can engage with a novel or a film as a piece of philosophy, this is *not* to properly engage with it as a film. To appreciate something as a cinematic work requires that we do one thing, whereas to engage with something as philosophy requires that we do something else. This is in fact an application to cinema of an argument against literary cognitivism developed by Peter Lamarque and Stein Olsen<sup>11</sup> in their attack on what they term the 'Propositional Theory of Literary Truth'. The Propositional Theory holds that, while works of literary fiction 'at the literal level' have only fictional content, at a different 'thematic' level they imply or suggest general propositions about human life whose truth we must assess if we are to properly appreciate the works. It is these propositions that make literature valuable. Such 'thematic statements' may occur explicitly in the literary work, but are more often implicit yet accessible to readers through interpretation. Lamarque and Olsen argue, against the Propositional Theory, that it is not part of the ordinary activity of readers or critics to assess, or inquire into the truth or falsity of, general thematic statements expressed in or by literary fictions, and that this indicates that determining such truth or falsity is not a proper part of literary appreciation. Those who advocate the Propositional Theory misunderstand the function of such general thematic statements in literary fictions, according to Lamarque and Olsen. They are not

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<sup>9</sup> Livingston (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Smith (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Lamarque & Olsen (1994).

properly viewed as conclusions which we are invited to accept as true on the basis of our reading of the work. Rather, they are devices for organizing and producing aesthetically interesting structure in the story's narrative content.

Livingston presents a similar challenge to the idea of film as philosophy, arguing that an interest in a film as a work of art and an interest in a film as philosophy are in conflict. An interest in a film as *art* is an interest in how its themes have been expressed or embodied by its style and by devices specific to the medium. This rarely requires that we bring to bear requisite philosophical background, whereas this is crucial if we view film as philosophy. To take a philosophical interest in a film is to use it as an illustration, without attending to the individuality of the film. But, put in this way, the argument invites two responses. First, an interest in how a film articulates its content surely presupposes some grasp of what that content *is*. If the content is indeed philosophical, then grasping this will surely require some philosophical contextualisation. Second, it isn't clear what justifies the claim that an interest in the philosophical content of a film treats the film as merely an illustration of a philosophical idea. May not the very individuality of the film be crucial to its functioning as a philosophical medium? How this might be the case may become clearer when we turn to Smith's argument.

Smith argues that the aims and purposes of cinematic narratives undermine their ability to function as philosophy. He rightly notes that, whereas philosophical (and indeed scientific) TEs involve narratively sparse fictions, with a minimum of detail, fictional narratives, whether literary or cinematic, are lush in detail. He then suggests that this difference reflects a difference in narrative purpose. He compares a philosophical TE presented by Bernard Williams, which is intended to get us to think more clearly about the role of a particular mode of embodiment in the constitution of personal identity, with the film *All of Me*, which entertains a similar kind of hypothetical scenario, one in which we imagine individuals 'swapping' bodies. The narrative of the film is much more detailed than the philosophical TE, and the details sustain what might strike one as a more nuanced philosophical exploration of the issue. But Smith argues with some plausibility that the tensions within the cinematic narrative are best explained not in terms of philosophical nuancing but in terms of a different primary purpose, namely, to entertain and amuse the reader. The film is then primarily a vehicle of comedy, not a vehicle of philosophical thought, and the

‘nuances’ are in fact internal inconsistencies in respect of the philosophical issues that are tolerated in the interests of achieving this primary purpose.

However plausible this may be as a reading of *All of Me*, it is much less plausible when we turn to the kinds of narrative films that are cited by proponents of the FAPM thesis. *Blade Runner*, for example, which Stephen Mulhall<sup>12</sup> takes to be an example of “philosophy in action” explicitly concerned with what it is to be a human being, shares this philosophical preoccupation not only with Philip K. Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* from which the story is taken but also with one of Hilary Putnam’s lesser known papers, “Robots: machines or artificially created life?”. Here it seems that the philosophical issue is not merely a vehicle for the amusement or entertainment of an audience, but the driving force in the construction of the fictional narrative. Like Putnam’s much sparser and dryer philosophical TE, the point of reflecting on the status of ‘replicants’ that simulate our physical and cognitive capacities is to get us to think more clearly about our understanding of ourselves as human agents.

But what, in this case, is the significance of the much greater narrative detail in the artistic fiction? Drawing on a distinction made by Richard Moran,<sup>13</sup> Smith suggests that philosophical and artistic fictions are intended to elicit different kinds of imaginings - ‘hypothetical’ and ‘dramatic’ respectively. To hypothetically imagine something is to entertain a counter-factual in an abstract way, whereas to dramatically imagine something is, as he puts it, to ‘try’ on the hypothesis, to imagine inhabiting it, or to explore its implications rather than philosophically engage with it. The detail in fictional narratives is intended to promote dramatic imagining, in order to serve what are primarily non-philosophical purposes. For the purposes of philosophy, it is ‘hypothetical imagining’ that is required.

But it isn’t clear why dramatic imagining may not also serve a properly philosophical function. In the case of *Blade Runner*, for example, the greater narrative detail provides a richer analysis of our ways of interacting with other cognitive agents, which bears crucially on the philosophical issues. The central contention of Putnam’s paper is that we resolve the question whether robots are conscious by making “a decision, not a discovery”, but the paper in no way explores or clarifies what this involves and what import it has. Scott’s film, like Dick’s novel provides much greater

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<sup>13</sup> Moran (1994), p. 105.

illumination as to what is involved in making such a decision, and, correspondingly, what is at stake in the philosophical debates about the relative status of persons and of artificial forms of life. To treat an entity as conscious is to admit it to one's moral community, to hold it responsible for its conduct, to feel both with it and for it, and these aspects of our embodied engagement with other cognitive agents are not clear in the dry presentation of Putnam's TE. In this case, dramatic imagining is necessary in order to deepen our understanding as to what the philosophical issues are, and it is in virtue of this deeper understanding that our responses to the TE are placed on a firmer rational foundation. Interestingly, the idea that the detail in literary and cinematic TEs serves to foster a dramatic imagining that serves philosophical purposes resonates with Putnam's own account of these matters in his "Literature, Science, and Reflection". What we learn from reading a work like Celine's *Journey to the End of Night*, he argues, is what it would be to 'inhabit' the kind of view of human nature endorsed by the narrator of that novel. It is only through such a 'dramatic imagining' of this view of human nature that we come to realize that it is unacceptable when measured against our experientially-based understanding of human action and interaction.

Any such appeal to TEs might be challenged, as we shall see, by questioning the cognitive value of TEs themselves. In the literature in philosophy of science, for example, we find serious challenges of this kind. But the appeal to TEs is open to two further kinds of challenge if the desired conclusion is that film can serve as a philosophical medium:

- (a) We may ask whether the fictional narratives in literary and cinematic works are indeed analogous to the TEs employed within philosophical or scientific contexts - a major problem here is the greater detail, and the purportedly different goals of the narratives.
- (b) Even if it be granted that fictional literature may serve as a philosophical medium, we may ask whether *visually* presented fictional narratives can bear any independent philosophical weight. I shall address each of these objections in turn.

### III.

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#### IV.

As noted earlier, the first kind of objection to the 'Ur' argument for the FAPM thesis questions whether narrative artworks in general can, qua artworks, serve a philosophical purpose. Even if that objection can be answered, however, we still face a second kind of challenge, developed by Livingston, which focuses upon the difference between literary and the cinematic media. Livingston's argument presents nested dilemmas for proponents of what he terms the 'bold thesis', according to which films can make "creative contributions to philosophical knowledge... by means exclusive to the cinematic medium".<sup>20</sup> The overarching dilemma offers the following alternative ways of cashing out the notion of 'exclusivity' in play here. Either we construe the representational devices that are exclusive to cinema broadly or we construe them narrowly. To construe them broadly would be to include the capacity to record what is in front of the camera, which might be said to be exclusive to cinema on the grounds that only cinema can provide moving images of past events, images that may have distinctive epistemic value. On this broad reading, however, Livingston maintains, the FAPM thesis is trivialised, since an audio-visual recording of a philosopher's lectures will involve an exclusively cinematic resource. But in such a case we may assume that whatever philosophical value resides in the recording resides in the event recorded.

Livingston concludes that, in order to deliver a non-trivial version of the FAPM thesis, the 'exclusive' representational devices of the cinematic medium must be construed narrowly. He characterizes this option as follows:

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<sup>19</sup> Putnam 1976

<sup>20</sup> (2006, p. 11).

The cinematic medium's exclusive capacities involve the possibility of providing an internally articulated, nonlinguistic, visual expression of content, as when some idea is indicated by means of the sequential juxtaposition of two or more visual displays or shots<sup>21</sup>

as in a 'Kuleshov effect'. The exclusively cinematic devices will then include montage or editing, camera movement, selective focus within a shot, and correlations between sound track and moving image.

Now, however, Livingston argues, the proponent of the FAPM thesis faces an insoluble "dilemma of paraphrase" that he sets out as follows:

- 1) If the "exclusively cinematic insight" (2006, p. 12) proposed by the proponent of FAPM cannot be verbally paraphrased, we can reasonably doubt its existence.
- 2) If, on the other hand, it can and must be verbally paraphrased, the philosophical insight is not a purely 'filmic' one, since

linguistic mediation turns out to be constitutive of (our knowledge of) the epistemic contribution a film can make....Even if specifically cinematic devices, such as montage, were essential to a film's philosophical content in the sense that this content could not have been fully articulated in another medium, the successful *philosophical* function of that device remains importantly dependent on linguistically articulated background thoughts that are mobilized in both the creation and interpretation of the film's philosophical significance.<sup>22</sup>

More specifically, according to Livingston, a philosophically oriented interpreter of film must import a 'problematique' "if aspects of the film's thematic and narrative design are to resonate with sufficiently sophisticated and well-articulated theses and arguments....An interpretative context must be established in relation to which features of the film are shown to have some worthwhile philosophical resonance."<sup>23</sup>

Livingston therefore rejects the 'bold' thesis, while allowing that film can play lesser, but still significant, pedagogical and heuristic roles in philosophy: "Films can provide vivid and emotionally engaging illustrations of philosophical issues, and when sufficient background knowledge is in place, reflections about films can

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<sup>21</sup> 2006, p. 12)

<sup>22</sup> 2006, pp. 12-13)

<sup>23</sup> 2006, p. 13)

contribute to the exploration of specific theses and arguments, sometimes yielding enhanced philosophical understanding.”<sup>24</sup>

## V.

To assess Livingston’s argument, we must first examine the ‘exclusivity’ condition that he builds into the bold thesis and uses to structure the overarching dilemma. The reference to an “exclusive cinematic insight” in the formulation of the first horn of the nested dilemma might suggest that what is at issue here is something like the following:

*Content exclusivity:* the FAPM thesis requires that there be philosophical contents articulable in cinema that are not articulable using other media employed for philosophising.

This, however, would surely be an unreasonable requirement, since it seems to assume from the start that verbal media have exclusive rights to all philosophical insights that can be attained through their means. In any case, it seems that Livingston has another kind of exclusivity in mind, which we may term:

*Medium exclusivity:* an interesting version of the FAPM thesis must claim that, in at least some cases, there are philosophical insights articulated in a given film that are articulated by means that are exclusively cinematic.

It is medium exclusivity that is required to set up the overarching dilemma, which rests on the claim that a film can genuinely ‘do philosophy’ only if it relies on resources that are *not* exclusive to cinema, as in the case of the film that simply records a philosophy lecture. Livingston’s overarching dilemma assumes that the only way to avoid this kind of conclusion is to constrain more narrowly the means that can be used in providing the philosophical content of a film. As we have seen, he maintains that when we do this the film can be seen as having philosophical resonance only through verbal mediation that, essentially, injects a verbal representation of elements in the film into a verbally presented philosophical problematic.

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<sup>24</sup> 2006, p. 11

But the choice between ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ construals of exclusivity seems to be a false dilemma. To rule out the ‘filmed lecture’ case, we do not need to restrict the resources of cinema to those individual elements that are unique to cinema, in the manner of medium purists about painting such as Clement Greenberg. Rather, we need to articulate an appropriate conception of medium exclusivity for an essentially mixed art form such as film. Indeed, Livingston acknowledges the importance of the different individual media that collaborate in cinema at the end of his paper, but only does so in arguing for the value of cinema once we have rejected the FAPM thesis. He does not, as he should have, take the mixed nature of cinema as an artform into consideration in characterising a relevant notion of medium exclusivity for the purposes of assessing that thesis.

What would such a notion of medium exclusivity look like? Consider a simple example of an enterprise in which language and other communicative media collaborate in a cognitive endeavour. When we are helping someone to manoeuvre a car into a parking space, we often combine verbal instructions with hand gestures. While verbal communication contributes to the overall articulated content in such cases, the articulated content exceeds the verbal contribution. The total articulated content, we may say, exceeds the total verbally articulated content. More generally, suppose that  $M2$  is a verbal medium that can be used to articulate content of type  $C$ , and that  $M1$  is a mixed medium that incorporates  $M2$  as one of its elements. Then  $M1$  can be rightly viewed as a distinct medium for articulating this type of content iff, for some such content  $C_n$ , an ‘utterance’  $U$  in  $M1$  articulates  $C_n$  and it is not the case that the utterance in  $M2$  contained in  $U$  articulates  $C_n$ .

Using this as a model, we can now propose the following notion of medium exclusivity applicable to the claims of the FAPM theorist: For film to be capable of providing philosophical insights that are medium exclusive relative to the verbal medium, there must be some film  $F$  and some philosophically relevant content  $PC_a$  such that  $F$  articulates  $PC_a$  while it is not the case that  $PC_a$  is articulated by the verbal content of  $F$ . This requirement is clearly violated in the ‘recorded lecture’ example. But it is not difficult to see how a film might satisfy this condition even though it contained, as an element, a recording of a philosopher presenting an argument. Consider, for example, the arguably somewhat hagiographic documentary film about

Jacques Derrida produced by two of his admirers.<sup>8</sup> Suppose that a documentary involving the same interviews had been directed by Nick Broomfield. In such a case, the kinds of distinctively visual cinematic resources incorporated in Livingston's 'narrow' conception of medium exclusivity- other aspects of the visual image, montage, editing, selective focus, etc. - might serve as a critical commentary on what is being said, so that the overall philosophically relevant content articulated by the film differs significantly from the philosophically relevant content articulated verbally.

## VI.

However, it might seem that this has not taken the sting out of the 'paraphrase' argument. For the claim will be that even in this case the film cannot speak for itself philosophically, but requires paraphrase if its 'insights' are to be brought into the arena of philosophical thinking. A key question here is the role that such a paraphrase is supposed to play. Suppose, first, that it is required to verbally communicate the insight gained in watching the film. This surely would not undermine the claim that film can itself make distinctive contributions to philosophical inquiry. For we might say something similar about observations in science, which can be brought to bear on a linguistically encoded scientific hypothesis only if they are themselves linguistically encoded.

Only if the verbal mediation which is a prerequisite for bringing the film into the philosophical arena is not anchored in the watching of the film is the FAPM claim compromised. This seems to be what Livingston is claiming. The problem with saying that cinematic insights can be paraphrased, he maintains, is that such a paraphrase must be an *interpretation* of what is visually presented, in terms of linguistically mediated philosophical background assumptions. As we saw, his claim is that, even if specifically cinematic devices such as montage are essential to a film's philosophical content, the devices can only function philosophically via such linguistic mediation. The film can make no independent philosophical contribution until we import a verbally formulated philosophical 'problematic'. Only when located inside such a problematic can aspects of the film's thematic and narrative design resonate with well-defined philosophical theses and arguments.

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<sup>8</sup> The film *Derrida* (2002) was directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman.

The force of this objection rests on the idea that the philosophical work is done not in our engagement with the film as a visually and aurally presented manifold, but only when we abstract, through verbal paraphrase, some philosophically relevant elements from the film and locate them in a verbally articulated philosophical problematic, where these elements can be put to philosophical use. The objection is therefore of a piece with the ‘no-evidence’ objection to the cognitive claims of literary works - the objection that they provide at best only hypotheses that we must subject to further testing independently of our engagement, as readers, with the literary text. Indeed, as I shall now suggest, it is also of a piece with a ‘deflationary’ view of TEs in science, according to which they themselves are at best either of merely heuristic value or in need of being sheared of their narrative dress to reveal the bare bones of argument underneath.

Philosophers of art who appeal to an analogy between fictional narratives and TEs in science and philosophy have generally paid scant attention to the literature in philosophy of science and in analytic metaphilosophy on the purported cognitive (and philosophical) virtues of TEs themselves. This is slightly ironic, in that, especially in philosophy of science, identifying TEs with fictional narratives is seen not as deproblematizing the cognitive status of fictional narratives, but as problematizing the status of TEs!<sup>9</sup> Some authors - who we may term ‘extreme deflationists’<sup>10</sup> - have simply dismissed TEs as sources of scientific understanding: the best we can get from a TE is a hypothesis that must be subjected to empirical testing before we can have any confidence in the TEs conclusion. A more moderate deflationist view<sup>11</sup> holds that TEs, insofar as they have cognitive value, have it in virtue of being disguised arguments. Our trust in the general conclusion we are invited to draw from the particular fictional example in a scientific TE is, on this view, rationally grounded only to the extent that we are able to reconstruct the TE as a standard deductive or inductive argument. If the generality of the conclusion of the TE is to be legitimized, such a reconstruction must prescind from the narrative details that make TEs so attractive. On either the extreme or the moderate deflationist view, TEs considered in their customary narrative splendour teach us nothing.

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<sup>9</sup> For a much fuller critical overview of the debates about TE’s in the philosophy of science that I outline in the following paragraphs, see my 2007.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Duhem 1914 and Hempel 1965.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Norton 1996.



If we accept this view of TEs, the prospects for defending even a general cognitivist view of fictional narratives - let alone the idea of film as a philosophical medium - by appeal to the TE analogy seem bleak indeed. For one thing, the much greater detail in artistic narratives seems cognitively unmotivated, since it is irrelevant to the cognitive import of a TE. And the plethora of detail makes the task of extracting the underlying argument extremely difficult. Furthermore, this view of how TEs can be taken to have cognitive virtue is disastrous for any interesting thesis about film as a philosophical medium, since we cannot evade Livingston's objections to this thesis: philosophical work can be done only when we place a suitable verbal paraphrase of the 'message' of the film in a broader philosophical problematic.

Fortunately for literary and cinematic cognitivists, there is a more inflationary view of TEs in science that brings them more closely into line with our intuitive sense of what is going on in TEs in philosophy, which arguably work by mobilising intuitions grounded in our implicit understanding of certain concepts.<sup>12</sup> On what we can term a moderate inflationist view of scientific TE's,<sup>13</sup> they serve a similar function. They cannot be reconstructed as explicit arguments because their power to rationally persuade draws upon cognitive resources we already possess, grounded in our experience of the world, which may not be available to us in any explicitly propositional form. According to Tamar Gendler's very interesting spelling out of this view,<sup>25</sup> the narrative details of the TE may be crucial to its power to convince, since it is the details of the TE that mobilize our intuitions about the world as we experience it. TEs then have cognitive value because they enable us to realize certain things about the world, or (in the philosophical case) about our conceptual equipment, that we would not have been able to grasp without the TE, and this relies essentially upon at least some of the details of the narrative.

This account of the cognitive value of TEs is much more promising for the defender of both literary cognitivism and the idea of film as a philosophical medium. For it makes the 'rational assessment' of the TE, viewed as a reason for accepting a general conclusion, internal to the process of engaging with the TE - or, in the case of fictional narratives presented in literary or filmic fictions, internal to the reading of the novel or the watching of the movie. Our sense of having learned something in reading

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<sup>12</sup> As I spell out in my forthcoming, the 'inflationist' account of TE's in science resonates with some of Carroll's remarks in his 2002.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Mach 1905 and Gendler 1998.

<sup>25</sup> 1998),

a novel or watching a film will be justified to the extent that we have drawn upon genuine cognitive resources already possessed but not otherwise available to us. In the case of a philosophical TE, for example, the relevant philosophical background and the experientially based grasp of concepts is something that the suitably prepared reader brings to her engagement with the Trolley problem or the Chinese Room. Similarly, then, the ‘philosophical problematic’ necessary to engage philosophically with elements in a film and, in that engagement, ‘do philosophy’ will be something that the receiver *brings* to her encounter with the film and that enters into that encounter, not something separate from that encounter into which elements from our cinematic experience have to be imported in order for matters philosophical to be joined.

In closing, however, it is important to note a possible difficulty for this kind of defence of the FAPM thesis. On the ‘moderate inflationist’ account, the person who can be described as learning something as a result of running a TE is not in a position to provide a full justification of what she claims to have learned. This is the obverse of the claim that the TE cannot be reconstructed as an argument. Thus, if we are to talk of knowledge or warranted belief derived from TEs on the moderate inflationist view, it seems this must be from an externalist epistemic perspective. Where readers bring to their engagement with a TE what we regard as legitimate unarticulated cognitive resources, we can take them to be ‘trackers of the truth’ or at least ‘trackers of the warranted’ in their engagement with the TE. But they are in no better a position to justify their convictions by offering reasons than other readers who reach an opposite conclusion based on what we regard as *inadequate* unarticulated cognitive resources.

The question this raises is whether such an ‘externalist’ conception of knowledge can be adequate if film is to be a philosophical medium. For it seems to be central to philosophy as carried on in the analytic tradition that one be able to provide reasons for one’s conclusions - having what may be right ideas is not sufficient. But if I cannot support my claim to have increased my philosophical understanding through watching a film by offering reasons in support of the purported philosophical insights, how can we count my engagement with the film as a way of ‘doing philosophy’? Of course, this line of argument will also apply to the use of literary TEs in philosophy proper. And it might serve to remind us that appeals to shared intuitions play as crucial a role in analytic philosophy as appeals to valid chains of reasoning. I must leave further reflections on this to another occasion, however.

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