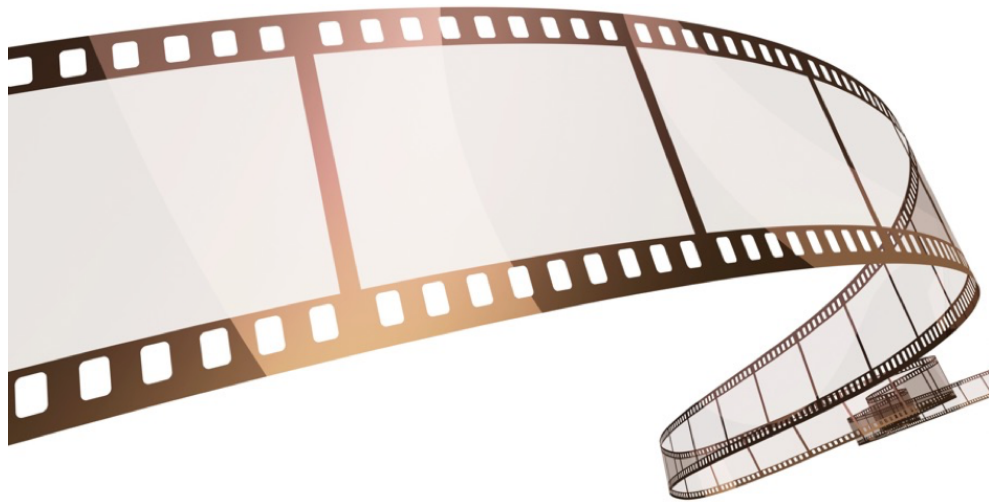


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## *Police, Adjective* and Attunement to the Significance of Things

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**Abstract:** In this paper I consider Corneliu Porumboiu's *Police, Adjective* (Romania, 2009) as an instance of a puzzling work of art. Part of what is puzzling about it is the range of extreme responses to it, both positively and negatively. I make sense of this puzzlement and work to alleviate it, while considering the film alongside Ludwig Wittgenstein's arguably puzzling 'Lectures on Aesthetics' (from 1938). I use each work to illuminate possible understandings of the other. The upshot is that it is plausible to regard both as engaged, in part, in preparing us to make sense both of themselves, and then also of other works.

## INTRODUCTION

Some works of art are, it seems fair to say, especially suited to puzzling people. I myself have reacted various ways to this kind of puzzlement. It certainly has simply frustrated me, or alienated me from a work. But then there are cases where there's something about a work that induces me to figure out why I'm puzzled, and this often involves addressing questions about meaning. It's relatively easy to find examples of art that can play a role like this for people, especially if we focus on work from the early-20th century on. Consider a recent discussion of Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), on the occasion of an 80th-anniversary exhibition of it at the National Picasso Museum in Paris. It seems part of the work's significance and of its value, that we are, collectively, still discussing 'the work's contradictions', and sorting through the possible meanings of the bull and the horse.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I want to say a few things about another work that has puzzled (admittedly fewer) people – Corneliu Porumboiu's *Police, Adjective* (Romania, 2009) – and I want to make some suggestions about why spending time with it might be worthwhile (which then would speak to part of the meaning and/or significance of the film). For it could of course be the case that my being puzzled by this film and your being puzzled by this film, for instance, could just be a consequence of its being a mediocre or even bad work of art, and thus there might then be nothing terribly interesting to say.

An English-language trailer for the film describes itself succinctly via a definition: 'Police, adjective: a novel or film involving criminal happenings resolved through the ingenuity of a police officer.'<sup>2</sup> I'll elaborate on this slightly. The 'criminal happenings' here involve teenagers using drugs. A good portion of the film involves lengthy scenes (and lengthy takes) of a police officer named Cristi on stakeouts, which are efforts to obtain evidence about the drug use. The best candidate for a police officer's 'ingenuity' is surely what a number of critics have in fact identified as the climax of the film: extended readings of definitions from a dictionary during a meeting between Cristi and his boss.

I want to try to make sense of these features I've highlighted: i) the fact that much of the film involves the viewer's watching what people are inclined to call 'nothing,' (or alternately, 'everything' as one reviewer put it<sup>3</sup>) and ii) how the climax of the film is reading from a dictionary. We can see many examples of people being puzzled by the film, expressed in the form of film criticism. Criticism is useful as concrete records of people saying what the film is, saying 'what the film means', and evaluating it positively or negatively. The features I've highlighted are surely at least part of why professional and amateur critics alike have written that they 'fell asleep twice during viewing',<sup>4</sup> and that it's 'the worst foreign film I've ever seen in my life ... Nothing happens. Nothing.'<sup>5</sup> I want to give a plausible account of why this film might have these features, that is, how they might figure in the meaning of the film (or better, how they might figure in an aspect of the meaningfulness

of the film): because at the same time, critics have also said rather glowing things, such as that the film is ‘utterly plain . . . and marvelously rich’.<sup>6</sup> *Film Quarterly* named it its 2009 Best Film of the Year, and it won the ‘Jury Prize – Un Certain Regard’ at Cannes in that year. Thus I would also like to come to some understanding of how this film could provoke these different responses.

My aim here is ‘critical’, in something like Arthur Danto’s sense.<sup>7</sup> By saying this, I mean that I want to say something about what *this film* might be, why it might have the features that it does, and, thus, how it could indeed be seen as ‘marvelously rich’ or ‘so extraordinary’.<sup>8</sup> This will amount to giving plausible reasons. I do not mean to exclude other possible characterisations of the film, why it is as it is, or indeed assessments of its significance. (I am not actually sure how any characterisation could do that, since the film ‘belongs to the world’.<sup>9</sup>) I want to note that it seems appropriate to describe the ‘giving of plausible reasons’ (critical practice) as a social activity. I say this because the standard for ‘plausibility’ here is something like ‘it makes (some) sense of the feature(s) under discussion’, and we typically say someone has ‘made-sense-of’ something when others are led to understand things better. (Or at least, we can see how this would happen.)

‘Understanding things better’ is a goal then for good criticism. A typical way I come to think another’s words have made sense of something, is that I (and others) take up those words. And a good justification for my doing so is that what they’ve said points to specific features of the work, so that I am readily able to assess whether the words seem apt.

Now in addition to discussing the film, I will also present some things that Ludwig Wittgenstein says related to ‘aesthetic explanations’ in his ‘Lectures on Aesthetics’ from 1938.<sup>10</sup> My reason for this is to juxtapose another work that I find I want to say similar things about, as I find they provoke me, or work on me, similarly as a viewer/reader. My hope is that each might illuminate the other, for purposes of making sense of the two works’ features – and consequently also for saying something about why spending time with them might be worthwhile. I will return to this idea below, but for now I’ll just suggest that the Wittgenstein text and *Police, Adjective* are on a par with each other as puzzling works-to-be-made-sense-of.

## I. THE RULES OF THE GAME

I want to begin by discussing a scene from the very beginning of the film, as it turns out to be one of the few scenes not treating the investigation directly.<sup>11</sup> As it comes so early, it is more puzzling in retrospect, especially given the scenes position in the structure of the film. The scene involves a conversation between the main police officer, Cristi, and a coworker who shows up at his office. The coworker is looking for Cristi’s officemate, who is not there. Since

Cristi is there, however, his coworker seizes the opportunity to ask about the foot-tennis club he plays in. He's looking to lose some weight, and he gets bored when running. Cristi is clearly not interested. The matches he plays in are more serious than this. The coworker is persistent though. Cristi asserts that he won't be up to their level of play; the coworker wants to know how Cristi knows he won't play well. Cristi then suggests that 'if you're weak at football, you're weak at foot-tennis.' How does he know this? Is it written down somewhere, he's asked? 'No, but it's still a law.' The coworker is offended: 'Serious game, this foot-tennis.'

Obviously a film about a police investigation is going to involve the law in various ways. This 'law of foot-tennis' is surely not what we would expect however. So what is the point? What we are given, at the beginning of the film (and so perhaps as a kind of preparation for what follows), are two possible conceptions of a law: one is that a law could be something that is explicitly stated/written, another is that it's something we come to know because of experience with the subject matter. Presumably Cristi knows this law because he's played or seen foot-tennis played by people who were not good at football to begin with. So he's induced this generalisation. And given that this group of players has certain expectations about their matches, the coworker is not a good fit.

In his 'Lectures on Aesthetics', Wittgenstein discusses rules at a number of points. There is a scene early on (LA I, 15) where Wittgenstein imagines a kind of tailor's apprenticeship. He proposes in this scene that there are two cases of 'correctness' with respect to rules of tailoring – two ways of acting in accord with rules. (He's thinking here about how one makes one's way into some kind of aesthetic practice; it could be painting, drawing, etc., though again his immediate example is, interestingly, tailoring.) One learns all the rules first by being told them by the person teaching him. In this way, doing the correct thing is simply doing what one has been told, doing what the rules say to do. 'This is how long a coat is to be, how wide the sleeve must be, etc.' (LA I, 15).

But then there is a second way of acting in a 'correct way': 'I develop a feeling for the rules,' Wittgenstein says. Then I can do something that is not in explicit agreement with the rules as taught, but in fact does agree with my understanding of what we might call the point of the rules. This is typically something we can learn by experience; Wittgenstein suggests our understanding of the rules can get more refined as time goes on.

This section of the 'Lectures on Aesthetics' parallels the film for a few reasons, but for now I want to highlight that Wittgenstein is describing a way in which we can come to understand how to do something well that needn't be part of the explicitly stated rules or instructions for that activity. Wittgenstein calls this a kind of 'aesthetic judgment'. It comes about, if it does, from a certain sensitivity that is honed over time. And it might

even happen that understanding in this sense would lead us to approve of something as ‘correct’ that wouldn’t have counted as such were we to adhere strictly to the rules we were taught.

Now if we compare Wittgenstein’s talking about this tailor to Cristi’s talking about his foot-tennis matches, we can see some similar circumstances. Perhaps Cristi is suggesting he and his friends have a more refined sense of their playing the sport, given their experience doing so. Hence the reluctance to accept someone with a different understanding of the point of playing. Further, in stating his football/foot-tennis law, Cristi is actually giving voice to part of his understanding of the game, which he has acquired in virtue of his experience and in virtue of his conception of the point of playing. Hence why ‘it’s a law, though it’s not written anywhere.’

Something we might say, in virtue of seeing both the tailoring scenario and Cristi’s discussion alongside each other, is that one can adopt different attitudes toward our experiences with things. One may be happy with playing foot-tennis to lose weight; similarly one may be happy with making a coat strictly according to the steps as described by one’s teacher.

Note too that in Wittgenstein’s discussion and in the foot-tennis discussion, there is, as one might put it, a normative component. Or at least, there are ‘(value) judgments’ (in an ordinary sense) that figure in both. Value seems to be an aspect of the attitude brought to the experience. So Cristi is dismissive of his co-worker’s desire to play, and one could imagine the tailor who makes ‘aesthetic judgments’ looking down on one who does not.

This scene also explicitly suggests some of the broad scope or ambition both of the text and of the film. For just as Wittgenstein discusses a tailor in the context of the arts, Porumboiu gives us a discussion of foot-tennis in the context of a criminal investigation. It seems plausible to conclude from each of these pairings that the overall works have – or at least, are intended to have – a wider relevance than it might first seem.

## II. POP POETRY

I want to turn next to another scene in the film, that in which Cristi comes home from work and his wife/partner is listening to a song online.<sup>12</sup> She listens to it over and over again, while we see Cristi prepare and then eat the food she had cooked earlier. The song plays all the way through two times, at a very imposing volume. The effect of this for me was at first mild irritation and alienation, but then I found myself focusing on the song more. Part-way through the third playing, Cristi says finally to his wife, ‘“Anca, this song doesn’t make any sense.”’ The song is, we might say, a melodramatic love song. Cristi quotes the song: ‘“What would the field be without the flower?” “What would the sea be without the sun?” “What else would it be?”’ he says, ‘“It would still be the field and the sea.”’ Her response is: ‘“I haven’t paid that much attention to the lyrics . . .”’ She says she likes it because the

lyrics are like images or symbols. Cristi seems not to understand this at all.

I suggest that we might think of this scene as enacting an instance of criticism. Cristi is puzzled by the song, which he doesn't understand. Anca is enjoying it and would seemingly listen to it indefinitely. He challenges the song's meaningfulness, and what ensues is a discussion of the song and what it might mean.

Cristi seems to think that the song is 'meaningless' because the words, taken literally, are at best banal. This would conflict with the melodramatic, grandiose musical context in which they are given to us. And they seem then to be asserting nothing. (E.g., 'The field without the flower would be a field, just without the flower.') Anca is not focusing on the words 'taken literally' in this way, though. She hasn't thought about the lyrics in this way. She likes the imagery, or the potential symbolism of the pairs (the field and flower, the sea and sun) – and therein lies the romantic appeal for her presumably. Their attitudes lead them to disagreement about the song.

Anca is giving voice to her appreciation for the poetic aspects of the song; this is a demonstration of, or an expression of, her taste. In (LA I, 12) Wittgenstein abruptly asks, 'Take the question: How should poetry be read? What is the correct way of reading it?' He suggests that for some poetry stressing the lines differently helps – you understand it differently. That is, the words themselves don't change, but stressing them differently can help to get you to make sense of them. So '[a] man says it ought to be read *this* way and reads it to you. You say: "Oh yes. Now it makes sense".' This underscores the possibility of understanding the same words in different ways. Note that Wittgenstein's example here is from poetry, too. It seems fair to call the song's language use 'poetic' (i.e. in an ordinary sense, 'non-literal').

In (LA I, 25-26) Wittgenstein suggests that expressions of aesthetic judgment, or of taste, 'play a very complicated role . . . in what we call the culture of a period . . . What belongs to a language-game is a whole culture. In describing musical taste you have to describe whether children give concerts, whether women do or whether men only give them, etc. etc.'

If we put these two parts of the 'Lectures on Aesthetics' together alongside the film, we might arrive at something like this: Anca's words about the lyrics are expressions of aesthetic judgment and understanding, and though this departs from what we might be tempted to call the literal meaning of the words, it is hard to know what might be relevant from the rest of the culture for understanding the song better. That it is a romantic, melodramatic pop(-ish) song from the late-20th/early-21st century is probably important for understanding it, along with the 'tradition'<sup>13</sup> or customary practices of this type of music.<sup>14</sup>

So Cristi and Anca are at an impasse. We see no neat resolution for making sense of the song. What might be the purpose of this scene in the film? My proposal, too quickly, is that it is priming us for thinking about the film itself. Perhaps the idea is this: that the film, as an object of criticism,

is analogous to the song. Cristi and Anca are representatives then, of two (I would say ‘natural’) ways of making sense of the film – and thus also of two attitudes we might bring to the film, to its plot and script, its scenes. In a literal way, we see ‘scenes of nothing’ or banalities throughout the film. But if we have paid attention to this scene we are explicitly made aware that understanding what is given to us in these scenes could be something else. So I will turn to these next. In trying to make sense of them I will be in effect trying to say ‘what’s in them’ and that ‘our time spent with them was worthwhile’, to paraphrase Stanley Cavell.<sup>15</sup>

Another comment about the relationship between the film and the Wittgenstein text: In giving us the poetry example, Wittgenstein could also be said to be doing the same thing as I’m proposing for the film. Wittgenstein is priming us for thinking about, for making sense of, what he is saying in his Lectures. Both works then could be seen as preparing the viewer/the reader for engaging in making-sense-of, that is, in criticism. They indicate an attitude and then create work for their (receptive) audience.<sup>16</sup> One reason for some of the negative critical responses to the film could then be that the reviewer might have a lack of receptivity or openness to certain possibilities. Another reason could be that they just do not find these possibilities valuable. And of course yet another could be that what I am saying here is unjustified.

Now if my comparing these two texts is plausible, and if what I’m saying about the film is plausible, then this suggests what Wittgenstein says is plausible too. That is, I’m assuming the standards for either of these works making sense is similar. It is tempting to think of the relationship between a film and a philosophical text as the former being an instance of the ideas in the latter. Certainly that could be the case, but what I find potentially objectionable in this is what amounts to an assumption that the philosophical text somehow justifies what we say about the film, that its plausibility is somehow independently assured. I’ll return to this point at the end of this paper.

### III. WATCHING AND NOTHINGNESS

There are at least two scenes in *Police, Adjective* which could be the ones alluded to in the Rotten Tomatoes user comment that spoke of ‘nothing’ happening. There are two scenes, of eight and of ten minutes each, in which Cristi silently stands, paces, smokes, and leans against cinder blocks.<sup>17</sup> (See Figure 1.) In terms of the investigation he is conducting, he is watching the boy’s house to see if anything suspicious happens. In terms of our typical expectations of a movie, these scenes are challenging for their duration, first, and also given that after a minute or so, we do not ‘get any new information’ with respect to the plot. Indeed, one could imagine these scenes lasting just a minute or two, and their effect in terms of the storyline of the investigation would be essentially the same. So why include these scenes as 16 % of the

film's length? (There are other such scenes as well, for instance Cristi eating lunch.)



**Figure 1:** Cristi on stakeout.

My assumption is to try to find reasons that suggest why their inclusion might make sense. When I watch eight or ten minute scenes such as these, I glance at and take note of the clock or of the counter on the DVD player, etc. I tend to become aware of the length of the scenes, and then I become aware of watching a lengthy scene. Many other scenes in the film are one or two minutes. These are less likely to make me aware of their length. But in this film, in the context of their being together with those other short scenes, I experience watching a ten-minute scene differently. It seems plausible then that this is one explanation why reviews mention them.

The awareness these scenes can generate coincides then with the awareness of the possibilities for critical interpretation I suggested above regarding the pop song discussion. By becoming aware of watching a lengthy scene in which my filmic expectations are frustrated, I am then more likely to ask, as indeed I did, why those scenes are there. Is there a good reason? That is, I am prompted to engage in a critical exercise that I have also been primed to undertake. The discussion of the song was more 'rational', we might say, while the 'scenes of nothing' are more affective in their prompting, at least initially.<sup>18</sup>

But then when I re-focus my attention on what we do see in these scenes, to try to make sense of them, it's of course not the case that we see *nothing*. For I do see a man standing, leaning, smoking, taking a phone from his pocket, drinking tea, etc. And it is striking perhaps that there is no *acting*, no performance required for the actor to show us these things. The actor



simply does them. This is also perhaps what bothers some viewers. The person we see *is* smoking; he *is* leaning against cinder blocks, etc. These actions then function in a way like a Duchamp ready-made. For one thing, at least, that a ready-made does is to present a supposed ordinary non-art thing as art in an art context, thereby commonly prompting the viewer to question it. Duchamp's *Fountain* still accomplishes this, over 100 years since its being inserted into the art world.<sup>19</sup>

My suggestion is that we can make sense of the work the film is doing if we conceive of it as trying to move the audience toward a goal: it works on the rational and affective fronts to get us to become aware of the very film itself – our watching and experiencing it, and our making sense of it – and to foster a more careful critical attitude to it in order to make better sense of it. All along, it works to undermine a tempting yet simplistic response, namely, that ‘nothing happens’, full-stop, or at least to prevent us from succumbing to this temptation unthinkingly.

#### IV. DINNER AND A DICTIONARY

Prior to the heralded dictionary-reading climax of the movie, there is a brief scene wherein Cristi and Anca are eating a meal.<sup>20</sup> ‘Something between us isn’t working,’ Anca says somewhat abruptly. They have apparently not been eating together as much as they used to. She then mentions having read Cristi’s investigation file, which he had left in the apartment. ‘You made a mistake,’ she says. She then goes on to tell him that the Romanian Academy had changed the spelling of a two-word phrase he used, regarding it now as one word (‘a negative pronominal adjective’).<sup>21</sup> A scene that begins with two people discussing a potential problem with their relationship immediately turns to discussing language, and grammatical rules. Cristi is amazed there are people who think about and make decisions about these things. The conversation then returns to discord when Anca tries to discuss the investigation and whether he will make an arrest. ‘You know I don’t like to talk about work,’ he says.<sup>22</sup>

This scene is sort of a prologue to the extended final scene. The final scene centers on discussing words and their meanings. Why lead into a discussion of language with this particular very brief discussion of language? The pairing in the dinner scene suggests that language relates to how we get along. Recalling Wittgenstein’s comment that ‘what belongs to a language-game is a whole culture’, we can perhaps suggest that ‘language working smoothly’ is tied to our being aware of, and our understanding, relevant parts of the culture. Wittgenstein’s examples after saying this are examples of what people actually do. That is, what’s relevant goes beyond, we might say, ‘mere words’ – what’s relevant is how people live, things they do, how they relate to each other. (So it makes sense that Anca would say that something isn’t working between them, and then that we see a discussion of the Romanian

language.<sup>23</sup>)

The next day Cristi is called to meet with his boss, the Captain, as he's not happy with the lack of progress in the investigation. Cristi and his office-mate (who's forced to come along) wait for five minutes in the secretary's office while the Captain reviews Cristi's case dossier. Then they are called in, for what will be the longest scene of the movie.<sup>24</sup>

The Captain, as Cristi well knew days before, wants him to arrest the surveilled teenager for drug possession and perhaps for dealing. Cristi is opposed to this, as he believes laws on drug use will change soon and he doesn't want an inevitable prison sentence to weigh on his conscience. He also doesn't believe the kid is actually a dealer. The Captain then says, in Socratic fashion, 'I think we're talking different languages. Tell me what 'conscience' means for you. Define 'conscience'.<sup>25</sup> Cristi, echoing Augustine, stammers a bit, but settles on 'something within me that stops me from doing something that afterwards I'd regret.' The Captain then orders his secretary to find and to bring a dictionary to his office within five minutes, presumably to settle things.



**Figure 2:** Cristi reading from the dictionary in the Captain's office.

Just before it arrives, the Captain says, 'do you know what we're doing here? . . . Dialectics . . . finding out the truth.' The dictionary arrives and Cristi reads the definition of 'conscience' aloud. (See Figure 2.) It is a 'feeling or intuition' that leads one 'to be sure of not having transgressed moral law or the laws of the state.'<sup>26</sup> It would seem that Cristi is worried about transgressing what the Captain calls 'his own moral law'. So he is told to look up 'moral law', but there is no definition given for it under 'law'. Under 'moral', again, there is no definition of 'moral law'. So the Captain concludes, 'moral law

is something vague that depends on each person ... This leads us to chaos, right?’ Thus we need to return to consider the laws of the state, and as a police officer, the Captain asserts, Cristi must choose to uphold the laws of the State.

Both the dinner scene and the dictionary scene involve instances of arbitrating language. In both cases, people involved are concretely affected by the act of arbitration. (It’s not ‘merely a matter of semantics’ in other words.) And further, second scene gives us a potential reason why arbitration is necessary: otherwise chaos would ensue. However I am sympathetic to Cristi’s position in this scene (I feel bad for the kid), and so I want to say that the chaos-view is surely an exaggeration. That we say things in a world along with others who also say things is enough. And further there is a danger in the chief’s view: people are forced to do things they do not want/do not agree with. The adjudication rejects the other attitude. It is a ‘closed attitude’.

The film presents both types of attitude and leaves it up to us however, as must be the case. Just as with the song. Can the film be said to offer an openness? Or is it instead prompting awareness of the choice? Could it be used in either of these ways?

## V. WHEN ATTITUDES BECOME FORM

I could describe an aspect of Cristi’s character here as the following. As he had concerning foot-tennis, but *not* as he approached the pop song, he has an understanding of what the point of the law is. In his judgment, applying the ‘letter of the law’ in this case would not be in accord with the point of the law (or the ‘spirit of the law’, as we also say). He also gives reasons for his judgment. The Captain is uninterested in these reasons; he is uninterested in Cristi’s judgment about the point of the law. His position is one of his staying true to the letter of the law as he sees it, and he not-unreasonably believes that this is what the police must do. According to the law ‘as written’, the boy committed a crime and can/should be punished for it.

It is of note that Cristi does not exhibit this attitude in the discussion of the song with his wife. We might then worry that this makes Cristi somehow an inconsistent character. But if we assume this scene is playing a meaningful part of the whole film, I would suggest that instead, we can see this as more ‘realistic’ – and by this term I just mean that it makes sense, in that people might very well act this way. When it comes to applying a rule, whether it’s in the case of a law, playing a game, using a word, we have both of these tendencies. So I find both understandable. Poetry and the law may be something like (surely idealised) limiting cases then, in a mathematical sense, on the continuum between adhering to the point of the rule and to the ‘letter of the rule’.

This could help us understand why Wittgenstein says that there are two senses of ‘correct’ in the example I began with from the ‘Lectures on Aes-

thetics'. He doesn't seem to give either priority.<sup>27</sup> What is interesting is that it's 'acting in virtue of having internalised a rule and seeing its point' that Wittgenstein wants to say reflects something *aesthetic*. The features of what one has done or made are not then accidental; instead they reflect one having seen a relevant point. (Or the features *can be seen in this way*, even if one had not actually reflected on a relevant point of the activity. For often, surely, an artist for example simply acts.)

And this is why they were not actually engaged in 'dialectics', in any useful sense. The Captain uses the dictionary to solve a philosophical problem. 'Moral law' is vague and depends on each person, since it cannot be found in the dictionary. The dictionary has been used to reveal to us the nature of the moral law. This is obviously too quick, as far as philosophical arguments go. Why this is not a good argument might relate to common criticisms of so-called ordinary language philosophy, which is sometimes portrayed as engaged in something like this kind of activity.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein sometimes is portrayed in this way. But Wittgenstein is in fact interested in reason-giving, as we see in the 'Lectures on Aesthetics' (as well in the PI): what are the various reasons, for example, I want to use this word rather than that to describe a situation?<sup>29</sup> Now if 'dialectics' here is something like the use of conversation – and thus partly of giving reasons to others – to arrive at what's true (in an ordinary sense!), then this is not what happens in the meeting with the Captain. The Captain excludes some reasons from the discussion, and he uses the authority of the dictionary, as well as the power of his social position vis-à-vis Cristi, to do so.

So the meeting involved the exercise of power, using the rhetoric/appearance of 'dialectics'. This is to acknowledge obvious political and moral dimensions of the film however, which are beyond my scope here but which would surely figure into the meaning of this work. What I have been focused on however is the way in which *Police, Adjective* works to get us to think about aspects of criticism, as well as aspects of the language we use for criticism. Secondly, I've been placing Wittgenstein's writing alongside the film – my hope in doing this is that each might illuminate what the other is doing.

A common thread in all this is a kind of preparation for awareness of potential significance, which is brought about both by representations of our relationships with others and by reflection on our talking with others about meaningfulness and significance. We may adopt, wittingly or not, attitudes that are open or closed to other possibilities of meaning.

Each of these works can plausibly be said to be preparing us to understand themselves, and then, too, to go on in a similar way – that is, to make us aware of the attitude we adopt.<sup>30</sup> This aim is well put by O.K. Bouwsma, in his writings aimed at helping the reader come to understand what Wittgenstein is doing (which we might in fact call (philosophical) criticism). In one instance, speaking of the *Investigations* he says: 'What is Wittgenstein doing in this book? This is one way of beginning an answer: He is helping us to an

awareness, a new sensibility, in the matter of our language. There are different ways of going about this ...<sup>31</sup> If we broaden ‘language’ somewhat to mean something like ‘communication’ more generally – an adjustment I find at the very least consistent with Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*-era work – then I propose that we can say that *using film*<sup>32</sup> could be one of those ways of helping to bring about awareness.<sup>33</sup>

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Delistrady 2018. Also note here that I am relying on some version of what I take to be a common distinction between ‘significance’ and ‘meaning’. I will not address this at great length here, but very briefly: these terms, while sometimes interchangeable, are not always so. Here, e.g., I am suggesting that meaning can figure into the significance of the painting – but significance could encompass other aspects of the work (and in this case, it surely does).

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g.: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=UxHIY7yP2Pw>

<sup>3</sup>User ‘Danny A.’, May 16, 2013, Rotten Tomatoes (accessed 1.5.2018): ‘It’s very boring, they filmed everything.’

<sup>4</sup>Kuehner 2012.

<sup>5</sup>User ‘Darren B.’, October 9, 2012, Rotten Tomatoes (accessed 1.5.2018).

<sup>6</sup>Scott 2009.

<sup>7</sup>Danto 2014. But for what I see as similar, complementary conceptions of what criticism can be, see also: Cavell 1976a; Melville 2008; and Elkins 2008. Also see Cavell 2004.

<sup>8</sup>Weissberg 2009.

<sup>9</sup>I am borrowing a phrase here from W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley’s well-known discussion of the intentional fallacy. Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946.

<sup>10</sup>Wittgenstein 1966. Hereafter, I cite these lectures as (LA x, y), where ‘x’ is the lecture number and ‘y’ is the (editor’s) numbered remark.

<sup>11</sup>This scene is roughly at 00:7:00-00:08:00.

<sup>12</sup>The scene is at roughly 00:45:00-00:55:00.

<sup>13</sup>See e.g. (LA I, 26).

<sup>14</sup>This situation is much like our trying to make sense of any work of art. Some supplementary information may be helpful for this task. And one instance of this could well be looking at film criticism or at film history, too, or indeed even at art history. Of course looking at supplementary information wouldn’t *necessarily* help me.

<sup>15</sup>See Cavell 1976b.

<sup>16</sup>Recall Wittgenstein’s characterisation of the text of the *Philosophical Investigations* in his ‘preface’: ‘I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.’ And then a well-known remark written in 1948: ‘anything your reader can do for himself, leave to him’. (Wittgenstein et al. 1984, 77).

<sup>17</sup>These occur at roughly 00:17:00-00:25:00 and at 00:28:00-00:38:00.

<sup>18</sup>My experience, watching this scene a number of times, was one of becoming uncomfortable, and then becoming aware of that feeling. (This is why I want to use the word ‘affective’ here.) Then, I started thinking about what was going on and why. I can well imagine my questioning could have been purely rationally motivated though.

<sup>19</sup>Arthur Danto says something about (certain) artworks in the twentieth century that may be helpful here for understanding some of the critical responses. He says (in Danto 1964) that it is not surprising for someone to mistake the artwork for the (mere) thing it is, since it is in fact that thing.

<sup>20</sup>This scene is roughly 01:19:00-01:22:35.

<sup>21</sup>‘Nici un.’ (01:19:44).

<sup>22</sup>01:20:31.

<sup>23</sup>Cp. Ingmar Bergman’s *Scenes from a Marriage* (Sweden, 1974) for a treatment of a similar point.

<sup>24</sup>This scene begins at roughly 01:22:40 and lasts about twenty-six minutes.

<sup>25</sup>01:33:00.

<sup>26</sup>01:42:21.

<sup>27</sup>I think it is tempting to assume that Wittgenstein views the second sense (involving ‘aesthetic judgment’) as ‘better’ in some way. Given the discussion of deterioration (LA I, 33), I imagine if a student had raised this point, Wittgenstein’s response would have been similar: that he’s simply ‘describing’ and that one could approve or disapprove of it. (Note that he does indicate that the first sense might be necessary for acquiring the second sense, but I believe we can produce various counterexamples to this.)

<sup>28</sup>This then relates to some of the pre-conceptions about ordinary language philosophy that Avner Baz is concerned to counter in his Baz 2012. See e.g., his introduction and chapter 2.

<sup>29</sup>Compare, e.g., (PI 79): ‘say what you please, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing how things are.’

<sup>30</sup>Aside from Wittgenstein’s LA and the *Philosophical Investigations*, this idea is of course found in Cavell’s work. See for in-

stance: Cavell 2004 and 1976a. A more recent instance can be found in Greve and Macha 2016, (see in particular their emphasis on ‘new categories of criticism’, but the notion of our ‘going on’ is really pervasive throughout the work in this collection).

<sup>31</sup>Bouwsma 1982, 1.

<sup>32</sup>In the context of the literature on film and philosophy/film as philosophy/etc., ultimately I agree with Wartenberg 2016 and Mulhall 2008 in their emphases on individual treatments of particular films. This is because that would be the place to focus one’s attention, if we’re interested in saying something about the significance of a film. In my view this is the upshot of, and, or, motivation for, approaching film without theory.

<sup>33</sup>I presented a version of this paper at the ‘Social Experiences of Film / Film Experiences of Sociality’ conference at New Europe College (Bucharest) in 2018. I’m grateful for discussions with the other participants and with its organisers, Mihai Ometita and Christian Ferencz-Flatz. I must also acknowledge the seemingly countless helpful and enjoyable conversations both with Britt Harrison and with Cindy Persinger about various ideas contained and not contained in this paper. Finally, thanks to my University Honors Program students in my courses on Wittgenstein and aesthetics, from whom I learn regularly.

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