Film as Thought Experiment: A *Happy-Go-Lucky* Case?

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'I am a very lucky lady. I know that'. That's the extraordinary confidence that the exuberant Poppy Cross (Sally Hawkins) expresses in Mike Leigh's *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008). The paper proposes that the subjective feelings of happiness that Poppy Cross experiences and the judgments she subsequently makes are i) sufficient for her individual happiness, despite any unfavorable circumstances she experiences, however ii) her own idiosyncratic behavior as revealed through the narrative, the acting of Sally Hawkins, the costume design and other similar elements of mise-en-scène almost advertise the proposition that 'feel good' happiness comes at the price of a not always lovable eccentricity. Together the two claims challenge the commonsense intuition that having a good-natured disposition is a desirable route for someone to follow in her pursuit of happiness. This has nothing to do with the potential failure of a 'feel good' effort (after all, Poppy Cross seems to succeed in her affairs), but rather with the specific idiosyncratic character build that seems to be embedded in such a viewpoint. The whole setting establishes an interesting thought experiment that introduces an unexpected consequence to the viewpoint of happiness as 'whole life satisfaction'.[2]

Traditionally, a philosophical thought experiment is meant to challenge our intuitions or commonsense assumptions. Descartes introduced the possibility of an evil demon (1641/1988) that systematically misleads ordinary human subjects to experience a world like ours, a proposition that challenged belief in the veracity of perception and reasoning. Locke's (1694/1975) body-swapping practice elucidates issues of personal identity: suppose the soul of a dead prince enters the body of a cobbler, while the latter's soul leaves the body. The resulting person will be a prince in a cobbler's body, provided that the freshly-arrived soul of a prince retains all the memories of royal life. Locke tries to alleviate the surprise his readers may feel for this identification (after all, it is still a cobbler's body): he argues that the being with the same body of a cobbler now and then is still the same biological man, but not the same rational being or person. From these examples to Putnam's Twin Earth case (1975) that investigates the meaning of words using molecularly identical subjects in distinct environments, there are various types of thought experiments that either present a counterexample to a general thesis, confirm the possibility of a case or even help to build a theory that will be experimentally tested.[3] On

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[2] The term is from Feldman 2010: 70ff. See further discussion of happiness concepts in section 2 of the present paper.
[3] Wartenberg (2007: 58-67) discusses at length the different functions philosophical and

the other hand, even though thought experiments may challenge commonly held assumptions, their evaluation depends on the commonsense reasoning/argumentation of their readers, and not on any kind of philosophical expertise.[4]

Those characteristics invite comparison with cinematic efforts. Films may present totally unusual situations, e.g. in a science fiction context, but they will still rely on spectator's intuitive rapport and the conception of certain cinematic situations, characters and propositions as plausible. On the other hand, philosophical thought experiments from Descartes to Putnam do not only unveil a certain philosophical reasoning, but also entertain with their narrative and fictional structure.

Two recent attempts seem to detect deeper similarities between films and philosophical thought experiments. Carroll's (2002) argument for cinematic thought experiments advances the claim that a human personality characteristic is distributed like a fan or wheel in its various manifestations among different persons. Unlike abstract theories of morality that only refer to a single general case of a certain virtue or vice, films can best capture this wheel of virtue feature among different cinematic characters.[5] In Ivory's *Howards End* (1992), for instance, different characters present varied degrees of imagination and practicality in their behavior and life attitudes, and not just two stock and opposing attitudes of romantic idealism vs. pragmatism. In doing so, the film makes this conceptual delineation (imagination vs. practicality) more precise, and provides in turn more secure foundations to test subsequent moral judgments. In a different way, Wartenberg (2007) advocates self-reflection as an essential philosophical and cinematic attribute, and uses the Cartesian evil demon technique also found in *The Matrix* (1999) for that purpose. According to Wartenberg, the film presents the possibility of a deceitful world both to the main character and the spectators: people who see *The Matrix* experience themselves on screen a deceitful world as the real one. This makes them subsequently alert to the same doubts about appearance and reality that the main character

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scientific thought experiments may serve.

[4] Intuition and commonsense reasoning may have its limits. Wilkes (1988) has argued against using intuitions and thought experiments to evaluate situations outside the realm of natural laws, whereas DePaul & Ramsey (1998) raise doubts concerning the generic trustworthiness of intuition. But circumscription of commonsense reasoning within the realm of natural laws is so stringent, that it surpasses in prohibition even the Kantian characterization (1781/2003) of noumena as things we can think about, but can never show. And, as Reid has argued before (1764/1983: 85), doubts concerning trustworthiness can be raised against any rational faculty, not just our preferred rival.

[5] This relates to the general film-as-philosophy 'concretization' thesis. This is the claim that film can express philosophical claims more concretely, by means of varied cinematic characters and situations that embody different (but at the same time particular) settings. See e.g. Litch (2002), Rowlands (2003), whereas Goodenaugh (2005:1-28) distinguishes between films that merely illustrate philosophical themes from films that can act as philosophical in themselves. Those who reject concretization (Mullarkey 2009: 15-28, 123ff, Barnett 2007) argue that the latter horn of the distinction itself collapses into being a mere cinematic illustration of philosophical themes.

faces.

However, the immediate objection that clouds these attempts is the charge of 'as-if' philosophical content (see Smith 2006; Russell 2006, 2008). Even though some films may deceptively look like thought experiments, they are only vehicles for entertainment and the various 'statements' they make can must be interpreted in the context of film enjoyment. Although spectators may prefer to watch non-ordinary cinematic situations, they only do so because of the entertainment that lies in predicting the film's narrative development. This preference is not *ipso facto* a silent endorsement of these cinematic situations as true or possibly true. Smith (2006:40) even finds lack of logical consistency in films like the comedy *All of Me* (1984). The personal identity switch theme employed in the Steve Martin comedy is only used for entertainment purposes, and violates the rules of logic when entertainment calls. Philosophers or film theorists can still conduct research on the relationship between film and philosophical issues, but they need to bear in mind that the films themselves are not thought experiments. Even when complex, reflective and rich in relevant philosophical details, films do not confer philosophical knowledge in their own right: they only function to subserve entertainment, and they have to be judged accordingly.

The entertainment objection is not the only one proposed against the conception of film as thought experiment. Russell (2006: 390) appeals to cinematic ontology and states that 'imaginary situations cannot supply real data'. Sorensen (1992: 222-223) states that fictional experiments only register, at best, 'a systematic and observable change of an independent variable that is not part of an attempt to raise or answer the observer's question'. However, and regardless of the reality of cinematic situations (see Kania 2009, for a review), philosophical thought experiments themselves present imaginary situations,[6] and it still seems unclear whether even the famous Socratic method of elenchus in Platonic dialogues intends to solve philosophical problems or only to expose the faults of Socrates's adversaries.[7]

Nevertheless, the present paper sets out to answer the entertainment objection for cinematic thought experiments. It argues that a challenging philosophical claim can have its genuine source in a film if this claim arises through an equally challenging emotional detachment. It states that there are times when the character actively repels spectator engagement by means of his/her actions (and, therefore, inactivates an important source of

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[6] Readers of John Locke's (1694/1975) thought experiment on personal identity need to assume the existence of a world similar to their actual world, which *additionally* involves soul transference between different bodies (prince and cobbler). Readers of Descartes' *Meditations* assume the existence of a phenomenally similar world to the actual one, plus the existence of an evil demon responsible for its creation, and this assumption helps them follow the cogito reasoning.

[7] Vlastos (1982) initiated a spirited defense of the contrary claim.

entertainment). Due to this emotive disengagement, spectators can detect an equally challenging philosophical claim behind an initially commonsensical attitude. This seems to be the case behind the version of happiness as whole life satisfaction promoted in *Happy-Go-Lucky* .

A Happy-Go-Lucky Film

In Mike Leigh's *Happy-Go-Lucky*, Poppy Cross (Sally Hawkins) is a 30-year-old teacher in London. Her constant joy and willingness not to let problems get in her way seems either pretentious or incomprehensible to Zoe, her flatmate, and other film characters, including her relatives and friends. Moreover, Poppy faces situations that command her attention (such as school bullying that involves one of her pupils), and at some point she seems to lead herself into a dangerous night incident with a homeless person. Her driving lessons with the gloomy Scott (Eddie Marsan) put more pressure on her. Still, Poppy looks as happy as ever until the end of the film.

Aristotle proposed in *Nicomachean Ethics* that no one can be called happy if she is either poor, a slave or if bad things happen to her: 'there is required, as we said, not only complete virtue but also a complete life, since many changes occur in life, and all manner of chances, and the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age, as is told of Priam in the Trojan Cycle; and one who has experienced such chances and has ended wretchedly no one calls happy' (1.10). Even though Aristotle's *eudaimonia* does not pinpoint the same notion as the common conception of happiness (since the former also relates to virtue), his support of 'objective happiness', the claim that happiness results from objective circumstances, is the one that the main character of *Happy-Go-Lucky* sets out to refute. Poppy Cross seems to join an array of modern philosophers (Telfer 1980, von Wright 1996, Sumner 1999) in the view - against the Aristotelian conception – that situations conducive to happiness are not necessary for happiness. [8] Subjective estimations of happiness suffice for happiness: feeling and believing that you are happy can make you happy.

Happy-Go-Lucky seems to have been made just for this purpose, to pursue the theme of subjective feelings of happiness vs. bad incidents. Enlisting a sunlit London as her only ally, Poppy Cross does not only face bad incidents, but is literally thrown into a world of concealed or explicit sadness. From her colleague Tash (Sarah Niles) who complains about a rotten weekend with her mum to her sister Helen (Caroline Martin), who does not seems satisfied with her own life, to the flamenco teacher (Karina Fernandez) who conceals a sad story, Poppy seems to be surrounded by negative attitudes. Even her flatmate, Zoe, views life with a sarcastic

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[8] See Feldman (2010), and Vitrano (2010) for a contemporary review, and discussion of both subjective and objective views of happiness.

attitude. At the same time, Poppy herself faces an array of incidents, from physical back pain (a result of trampoline overexercise) to psychological violence (Scott, her driving instructor, spares no sexist remarks), and finally harassment and bodily violence. Poppy entertains an optimistic and cheerful attitude in spite of all these, and claims to be happy - although more serious incidents take more time in order to 'restore' her original position. The ubiquitous screen presence of Sally Hawkins (she appears in almost every frame), her movements, and even her trademark smiling gesture that advocates cheerfulness for everyone makes feelings of subjective happiness the essence of Poppy Cross. This is a statement that she makes herself in the confrontation scene with her sister Helen. When Helen accuses her of the pretense of happiness, Poppy defends her position: happiness for her means loving her job, having great friends, and acknowledging that hardships are just part of life.

This seems precisely the concept of happiness as whole life satisfaction. Kekes (1982: 358) describes the ordinary commonsense view of a happy person being 'satisfied with his life. He would like it to continue the same way. If asked, he would say that things are going well for him. His most important desires are being satisfied'. Different theoretical positions either support a more cognitive, judgment-like version of this kind of happiness or claim only an emotional aspect ('feeling good') as the defining element of whole life satisfaction. Kekes himself defines happiness not only as the satisfaction of some first-order needs, but as the deliberate personal quest for this satisfaction, essentially a second-order process. His model of happiness as whole life satisfaction involves a person who actively abides by either unconditional, defeasible or even loose commitments, and this may not clearly express Poppy Cross's carefree version of day-to-day happiness. Still, Poppy is far from the version of happiness as exclusively emotional satisfaction:[9] she also defends and judges her own predicament as a satisfying one.

The unwillingness of the main character to follow an objective version of happiness, and her insistence that happiness is just feeling and believing to be happy (without the need to wait for external circumstances to corroborate this estimate), may be brave or even ordinary as one's disposition may go, but it would not make by itself a thought experiment out of *Happy-Go-Lucky*.[10] Worse still, the 'as if' philosophical content and the entertainment objection linger on. Mike Leigh's purpose in portraying the behavior of Poppy Cross may be to provoke a kind of sympathy: spectators can relate to her altruism towards others, coupled with the laughter and joy they may feel due to her unstoppable good attitude.

But Poppy Cross is not the British equivalent of Amélie in Jeunet's

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[9] Feldman (2010: 78) describes Telfer's (1980) view in that way.
[10] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

titular film (2001). If a main source of spectator entertainment is the emotional concern the spectator invests in the character,[11] then *Happy-Go-Lucky* risks failing in that respect. Unlike the good-natured Amélie, who sometimes employs a weird, but ultimately easy to accept behavior, Poppy Cross takes her act to the limit. Starting from her incessant giggling, through the cling clang jewelry sound, and to her made-to-annoy multi-colored underwear, Poppy Cross constantly risks undermining the spectators' patience.[12] In one of the film's first scenes, when Poppy and her female friends return home after clubbing and having fun, she makes some awkwardly explicit cleavage jokes. Her repeated remarks on two and three breast nipples are meant to be funny, but somehow go against the sweetheart, good-natured image she has previously canvassed, even if these are only the result of her drinking and do not repeat afterwards.

Her altruistic disposition, which develops during the film, does not gain spectators' immediate rapport either. In an outdoor scene at night, Poppy Cross meets a homeless person who babbles and seems evidently unbalanced. She suddenly seems to connect and care about this man, and it is unclear whether her behavior follows from human compassion or she somehow realizes her own loneliness. But whatever explanation one chooses, Poppy's disposition reveals itself to be more ambiguous than the average feel good person. A feeling of compassion in that case would make Poppy an unguarded sentimentalist who risks her own safety. On the other hand, if Poppy suddenly realizes her own loneliness, then she has chosen the least appropriate person to share this fact with; namely a guy that would never even attempt to understand her - and certainly not one of her friends. Neither of those is what one expects of a warm-hearted person. Poppy seems to move constantly upwards from the earth (most of her desires and aspirations are translated into the vocabulary of flying) to meet the lyrics of the Pulp song featured in the film: 'you'll never live like common people'.[13]

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[11] Even though a scholarly consensus may exist concerning the phenomenon of character engagement itself, different psychoanalytic, historically-specific and cognitive models interpret the extent and the exact nature of this empathy with the main character. Prominent among them is the issue of whether 'identification' is the appropriate term to describe this empathy or the less controversial 'engagement' can best refer to this phenomenon. See Coplan (2009) for a review.

[12] Martha Nochimson (2008: 115) reports from a press conference of *Happy-Go-Lucky* (at the 2008 New York Film Festival) that some in the audience "had their teeth set on edge by what they saw as Poppy's 'pollyanna-ish' ways".

[13] In their study of Mike Leigh's work, Carney & Quart (2000: 14-30) make the lack of immediate spectator identification or concern a central element that divides Leigh's directing technique from typical American films. Unlike Hollywood heroes, Leigh's characters do not simply present their intentions in action, but spectators are meant to decipher their whole armature of expressions and mannerisms in order to know what the characters feel and intend. This is a third-person process that extrapolates from social reception of words, facial and bodily gestures to internal states of mind; the spectator acts as a researcher rather than as a fellow traveler who sympathizes with the character's intentions by observing his/her actions alone.

There is a ready-made objection to the above remarks: personal intuitions differ, and emotional sympathies even more. Some spectators favor a certain character disposition, and actively seek this disposition in films, while others detest it. So, unless there is some principled (or even empirical) way to evaluate different intuitions and accompanying spectator concern, the conclusion that spectators are not drawn to Poppy's mannerisms does not necessarily follow.[14] But even if we assume an overwhelming spectator sympathy for Poppy Cross in times of hardship, this may be either the expression of compassion and anger by watching others behaving badly to her, or the expression of sympathy for her own cause, but not for herself as a person.

The first case appears prominently in the scenes when Poppy confronts Scott, her driving instructor, in which she is the subject of alternate psychological and physical abuse.[15] Spectators are made to feel for her, but not because she is physically or psychologically weak: she can use funny rejoinders to vile comments. She does not need overwhelming courage to escape the claustrophobic environment she finds herself in, even though the setting is relentlessly hard. She does not learn to arise from temporary submission to direct confrontation, and her attitude is constant throughout.

The second case for sympathy supports in fact the attitude Poppy advocates, and not her own disposition. Spectators attend to the gloomy philosophical world picture that Scott brings forcefully against Poppy's cause. The claustrophobic cinematography in Scott's car (cameras film the actors from the car's dashboard, and characters are often shot from the shoulder upwards) enhances the impression of a world in which everyone is made to suffer, and subjective feelings do not even influence (let alone determine) subjective happiness. The fatalistic world pictured seems so far fetched and the outcome of conspiracy theories, that Poppy's version of subjective happiness suddenly sounds possible, even if it only applies to her case.

If spectators, then, do get emotionally distanced and challenged by Poppy's disposition while at the same time applauding her cause,[16] is there a

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[14] The growing 'experimental philosophy' field investigates exactly different conceptions among groups of people or even according to different context and framing of different intuitions (see Knobe & Nichols [2008] for an overview). However, this variety of intuitions revealed experimentally may actually be an ally when discussing cinematic thought experiments: differentiated spectator reactions to a film and investigation of the different reasons for those reactions may better enlighten why a proposed conclusion to a thought experiment works or not.

[15] In that case, Poppy Cross fares no different from other characters of Mike Leigh in simultaneously experiencing and making spectators experience aspects of the 'traumatic real'. See Watson (2004: 12ff).

[16] The inverse dissociation (concern for a character's fate but no endorsement of her beliefs and ideals) would not constitute a thought experiment. Spectators may sympathize with the main male character of a science fiction film that heroically tends to fight alone against a bunch of armed aliens. However, they will not ordinarily believe his declarations of future

cognitive confusion that they need to unravel? When John Locke feels pressed to explain the unfamiliarity arising from his memory-based (and not soul-based) theory of personal identity, he argues that the existing unfamiliarity is a result of a conceptual confusion. Readers do not distinguish between the terms 'same man' and 'same person'. If they are taught this distinction, they can easily accept that a cobbler with a soul and the memories of a prince is the same person as the prince, even though it continues to be the same (biological) man in cobbler's body.

The conceptual confusion that spectators of *Happy-Go-Lucky* need to disentangle concerns their intuitive conception how easily feel good happiness is spread among people. The main character of *Amélie* is here again the paradigm example: Amélie's disposition forcibly evokes the conclusion that it only suffices to watch someone having a good time to make yourself happy. Unlike versions of objective happiness (in which external circumstances play their decisive part), happiness as an attitude towards whole life satisfaction seems easier to adopt. Especially in versions of feel good happiness, in which only feelings and not beliefs or practical syllogism could determine a happy state, getting imbued with those feelings for a repeated period of life seems sufficient to make one happy (banning pathological cases). Feel good happiness seems so contagious, because it involves less elaborate heuristics about the outcome of choices and preferences, and it can be adopted almost by simulation.

Poppy (and film spectators as well) learn to reject this point. The primary school teacher gradually learns (in a film with ubiquitous learning references) that her condition of subjective happiness is not something everyone would share. Film scenes and their sequence gives clear evidence for that. Each time Poppy is confronted with the driving instructor Scott and suffers in a certain way, the very next shot involves Poppy helping other persons confront their own hardships. It does not involve her preaching how it is possible to have feelings of happiness despite stressful conditions. Possibility of subjective happiness does not translate to mass production of subjective feelings of happiness. Poppy's tactic is to eliminate the bad circumstances, not to infuse her own subjective feelings to others. She seems to know that sufficiency of feeling good for happiness does not guarantee a contagious application of happy feelings.

In the context of the thought experiment, spectators distinguish between the simultaneous familiarity they feel with Poppy's proposition and the unfamiliarity with her character and manners. They learn that the possibility of subjective happiness, which they may like to share, is not a one-size-fits-all situation. The underlying expectation that similar feelings of joy will lead to similar behavior in different persons breaks when it is

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victory, and therefore will not be cognitively challenged by any subsequent cinematic situation.

acknowledged that even this apparently simple heuristic ('feel good when in trouble') makes one eccentric. Then one starts to wonder how far s/he may wants to go defending or following this conception of happiness, and this is the practical value of the thought experiment. It is not a direct refutation of the conception of happiness as whole life satisfaction, but it entails that spectators learn to detect a so far unacknowledged consequence, and they can subsequently choose their preference.

It is interesting that in *Happy-Go-Lucky* Mike Leigh uses the inverse pattern of the one he employed in *Vera Drake* (2004). The middle-aged Vera Drake (Imelda Staunton) is as compassionate as Poppy Cross, and invites spectator concern for her hardships, even though not everyone would agree with her practice to alleviate human suffering by practicing free back room abortion. [17] But this pattern would not function as a thought experiment; even though it may be an emotional challenge to sympathize with a person who performs questionable moral actions, no one is forced to change their views concerning the morality of abortion. If the spectator believes abortion is morally wrong, she can still condemn Vera Drake's behavior, even though she can find exculpations for her actions.

Not every cinematic character needs to invoke spectator concern for his/her actions, and not every case of spectator uneasiness confirms a case of cinematic thought experiment. The deeply repressed Erika Kohut (Isabelle Huppert) in Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher* (2001) constantly repels spectator sympathy, but her games in sadomasochism do not target an intuitive, commonsensical way to live a life, they only express an altogether different conception. For a cinematic thought experiment to arise, a proposition initially straightforward to agree with will be challenged, and will reveal different consequences by means of narrative, acting and the visual setting of the film. Bresson's cold portrait of pickpocket Michel in *Pickpocket* (1959) does not invite sympathy for this character (he is neither poor, nor obviously kleptomaniac, nor glamorously depraved). Still, it is exactly this element that makes spectators challenge their intuitions about theft. In many cases, people intuitively consider theft a morally wrong act, but they can find (justifiably or unjustifiably) exculpations for a particular act of theft. The emotional detachment of the main character in *Pickpocket* precludes such extenuating circumstances in the form of genetic-sociological explanation (poverty, mental disease). On the other hand, even though Michel seems happy to alleviate himself of a future divine retribution, the intuitive conception of theft as a morally wrong act is not overturned. Spectators will reconfirm their proposition about the inherent wrongness of theft, but only after they have themselves been emotionally challenged to abandon their sympathetic exculpations (e.g.

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[17] Whitehead (2007:180) observes that Vera herself does not question the morality of her action, but simply regards it as something that needs to be done.

sociopolitical context) as well as their unquestioned acceptance (e.g. possibility of divine retribution) of theft as a morally wrong act.

If these considerations are correct, then *Happy-Go-Lucky* seems to present a thought experiment about unconsidered so far consequences of theories of subjective happiness (and especially the kind that settles for happiness as a whole life satisfaction). Even though spectators may enjoy her behavior and agree with the beliefs that Poppy Cross defends, they learn that her idiosyncratic disposition is a correlated consequence of that very idea of feel good happiness. And this lesson comes from the emotional detachment between her and the spectators. Spectators learn that feel good happiness is more than merely letting your worries go: it involves a behavior that verges on eccentricity when tackling difficult issues and situations.

The above account of cinematic thought experiment provides a strong role for the film spectator, who is necessary for the cinematic thought experiment to confer knowledge. But, even though the film spectator is not part of the film *per se,* she is not an external philosophical interpreter whose involvement denies the very idea of a *cinematic* thought experiment (*pace* Russell 2006, 2008). Her implicit engagement and the specific type of response she develops has the same functional role as the reader of a philosophical thought experiment: the latter is not part of the argument, yet her implicit participation in its detection and evaluation seems crucial for the thought experiment to confer knowledge. And Descartes, Locke and Putnam in their philosophical thought experiments appeal tacitly or explicitly to readers' intuitive or common sense agreement, and not to philosophically-minded researchers of skepticism, identity or externalism respectively. So, if the film spectator can recognize structured cinematic situations out of the moving image without being an ideal or an expert film interpreter (Bordwell 1985), then that suffices for the film to function as a thought experiment. Especially in the oeuvre of Mike Leigh, where character studies and conflicts (and not a single course of action the main character follows) are the norm, the spectator acquires more responsibility to construct the complete situation out of seemingly uneventful films (Carney & Quart: 2002: 16).

This explanation seems to align with recent accounts on thought experiments in film that either explicitly (Wartenberg 2007) or implicitly (Carroll 2002) rely on the detection of certain features or characteristics by the spectator.[18] But, unlike Wartenberg (2007), who grants a role for spectators as perceivers (the spectators perceive on screen what the character herself faces), and Carroll (2002) who seemingly relies on spectators to detect a morally refined behavior, this account advances

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[18] See also Livingston's (2006) rejection of 'bold thesis', in which the film is said to do philosophy by exclusively cinematic means.

emotional disengagement as a first means to reason and construct further cognitive inferences.

Can the same reasoning pattern be applied to the general 'film-as-philosophy' claim? A philosophical thought experiment tacitly invokes a kind of commonsense reasoning as a condition of its success. Although it usually challenges commonsense conceptions, a thought experiment (unlike a full-fledged philosophical theory) does not have to propose a complete philosophical method (e.g. Derrida's deconstruction or Wittgenstein's philosophical therapy from linguistic confusion) to evaluate the questions it asks. But what if a film employs a certain pattern reminiscent of a systematic philosophical method and thesis? Mulhall (2008) argues that a certain kind of self-reflection in films can accomplish philosophical work. Self-reflection, at least since Descartes' time, is a venerable (if disputed) philosophical method. If it is conceptually possible for self-reflection or any other method to count as philosophical, what is further needed is explanation and further evaluation of this cinematic method as philosophical method, and not an a priori discussion of the impossibilities of doing philosophy by film. After all, as Poppy Cross states, 'There's no harm in trying, isn't it?'[19]

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