Introduction: Abbas Kiarostami and Film-Philosophy

Abbas Kiarostami's 1997 film *Taste of Cherry* follows the middle-aged Badii as he drives around the outskirts of Tehran trying to enlist strangers in the task of helping him commit suicide. His plan is to take sleeping pills and lie down to die in a grave he has dug on a hillside. He wants someone to come by the next morning to fill it with earth or, if he is still alive, help him out.

As is quite typical of Kiarostami, the nature of Badii's plan is revealed piecemeal through his conversations with the people he encounters.[1] The first exchange is with a man he overhears on a public telephone haggling over money, and who rebuffs him with a threat before he has time to make his offer (apparently mistaking Badii for someone cruising for sex). Then Badii encounters a man picking through trash for plastic bags to sell, refusing his proposition before really hearing it because, he says, he won't know how to help. The next exchange – which takes place after the opening titles – involves a young Kurdish soldier. Badii picks him up and drives him to show him the hillside on which he wants to die; when they arrive, the soldier runs for it. Badii encounters his next would-be assistant in the form of a security guard watching over what looks to be a quarry; he refuses Badii too, saying he cannot leave his post. Now Badii tries to convince the Afghan guard's friend; the young man – a seminarist – is disturbed by Badii's plan ("My hands do God's justice. What you want wouldn't be just"). A bizarre and unsettling sequence then ensues: Badii steps out of his car and wanders around the quarry, staring with vacant intensity as mounds of dirt are dropped by earth-movers and rocks are conveyed and sorted by large machines, the images and sounds all taking on a strangely sickening material quality.[2] After becoming almost entirely enveloped in a cloud of thick orange dust, Badii returns to his car at the urgings of a worried worker. When he closes the door we are surprised to see him start speaking to a passenger. As we soon realise, however, there has been a startling temporal shift – Badii is no longer at the quarry, but is parked near his grave, and is speaking to a new character, who has agreed to help him die. They discuss the specifics of the plan and come to an agreement regarding payment. But the man also tries to convince Badii not

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to kill himself. He tells Badii that his troubled relationship with his wife once led him to decide on suicide: he travelled out to a mulberry plantation with the intention of hanging himself from a tree, but found his rope wouldn't hold; he climbed the tree in order to retie it, brushing his hand against some mulberries; he tasted them; he looked up to notice the sunrise; he decided not to kill himself. It is unclear what effect the story has on Badii. Later, we see him in his apartment getting dressed to leave, and he heads out to the hillside in a taxi.

As Badii lies in his grave, a storm brews overhead; cloud blocks out the moon and, save the light cast by four flashes of lightning, all goes dark for a minute and a half (yet not all is silent: after forty-five seconds, the rain starts). At some stage during the darkness there is an infamous cut in which film switches to video, and when light returns we find that the scene has changed dramatically. It's greener (as Michael Price points out,[3] the season has changed: now it looks like spring). We see a film crew with cameras and other equipment, and find that Badii is no longer in his grave, but walking up the hill with a cigarette. He hands it to another man who, we soon see, is actually Kiarostami himself. The two engage in what appears to be idle conversation, and we hear Louis Armstrong (it is the only non-diegetic music in the movie). We are then treated to a remarkable handheld sequence mostly featuring soldiers at ease, and which includes the young man who ran in fear. It is like a curtain call, except the movie isn't over: it has just changed in a beguiling way.

I take it as the paradigmatic instance of Kiarostami's characteristic gesture (and in that sense, as a kind of watershed in his artistic development, definitively marking his arrival as a great filmmaker). In such moments, one's claims to knowledge – to tell the difference between the real and the fake, the authentic and the artificial; to claim a basic level of insight into a film's characters, their motivations and eventual destiny; to understand the meaning and dramatic stakes of what one is watching – are paralysed by the emergence of a disorienting reflexivity. Yet this disorientation is not simply a distancing: in certain important respects – and this is part of what is remarkable about it – it draws the viewer more deeply into the films. In the case of *Taste of Cherry*, the 'reveal' at the end does not cancel or even dampen my response to the movie. If Price is right to say that it gets the audience waking from its "two-hour slumber" – that now it "has to rise and account for itself"[4] – then this accounting is no Brechtian chore: with its colour and sudden music, the scene throws new light on the rest of the film; we wake bewildered, but with fresh eyes. There is something affirmative about Kiarostami's gesture, which is especially pronounced given the film's grim plot.[5]

Consider 1990's *Close-Up*. It is about real events: impersonating Mohsen

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Makhmalbaf, Hossein Sabzian conned a Tehrani family into letting him film their domestic life; he was eventually found out, and put in jail under suspicion of planning robbery. Kiarostami not only gained permission to film the trial (and indeed to 'recreate' it afterwards in the court room[6]); he also arranged a re-enactment of the deception that led to it, filming Sabzian in the family's home pretending to be pretending to be Makhmalbaf.[7] In the final scene of the film, the viewer has difficulty finding firm ground: we watch Makhmalbaf and Sabzian meeting from the perspective of what is supposedly a hidden camera; Makhmalbaf is miked up, but the sound cuts out as they ride a motorcycle to the house Sabzian deceivingly entered. Yet the final shot is a close-up of Sabzian's face from an entirely new angle; the 'hidden camera' theatrics are revealed as just that. But this does not take away from the scene, or make Sabzian's gesture – he arrives at the door with a pot of flowers – less striking. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes:

> In this film, what could have been the story of gentle madness or a denunciation of the cinematographic illusion leads to the contrary in the end . . . a return to the real that a progressive fading away of the movie signals . . . a bunch of red flowers, explicitly chosen for their color, stands out against the blue-grey of the noisy street . . . [8]

The complexity of the set-up, in which the real and the artificial nearly become indistinguishable, does not detract from the gesture. Rather, it heightens it (after all, part of the sweetness of the act of giving flowers is bound up with the fact that its status *as a gesture* is so clear).

We could also turn here to the Koker Trilogy.[9] The narrative of 1987's *Where is the Friend's Home?* turns on a mix-up: Ahmad, the eight-year-old protagonist, mistakes his classmate Mohammad's exercise book for his own and takes it home from school. Knowing that Mohammad – who has recently drawn their (authoritarian and cruel) teacher's ire for failing to do his homework – is in danger of expulsion if he fails again to complete it, Ahmad sets off in search of his house in order to return the book. The simplicity of the film is part of its appeal, but it prefigures the crucial problem of Kiarostami's later cinema: the question of the real and its relation to the fake (a relationship complicated by the film's ending, in which Ahmad gets Mohammad off the hook by copying his own work into his book[10]).

On hearing the news of the earthquake that devastated northern Iran in 1990, Kiarostami travelled with his son to the town of Koker – where parts of *Where is the Friend's Home?* were shot – to try and locate his two child actors. Kiarostami was unable to find the boys, but returned some months later

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to make 1992's *Life and Nothing More*, a semi-fictional feature about a director and his son (played by Farhad Kheradmand and Buba Bayour) visiting Koker after the quake in order to track down two child actors.[11] The film is remarkable for its handling of the disaster, which it never sensationalises, and for how it tracks what happens to the ordinary in such exceptional circumstances. One of the film's most interesting scenes involves a young couple who had decided to get married shortly after the earthquake – a scene which then became crucial in 1994's *Through the Olive Trees*. This film depicts the real-life romance that unfolded between the two non-actors during the filming of *Life and Nothing More*. Kiarostami arranges a re-enactment of their courtship featuring one of the original cast members, who plays himself falling in love while playing himself in a fictional romance. Meanwhile the actor who played the director of *Where is the Friend's Home?* in *Life and Nothing More* is now cast as himself playing his original role, while another actor plays the real director of the 1992 film. It is impressive that these reflexive games never collapse into knowing irony or detached, cerebral mannerism: at its heart the film is a story of quixotic love told with tenderness and gentle humour.[12] As Nancy acknowledges, the meta-cinematic element itself only "introduces a new story, neither more nor less effective than the first one, just showing another angle of what is real and therefore many-faceted".[13]

So the question is clear: how do these techniques – which in theory should produce distancing, alienation, *ostrananie*, *Verfremdungseffekt*, etc. – manage to draw us further into the films? How is it that, in Chris Lippard's phrase,[14] the real in Kiarostami is both disappearing into the distance and getting closer all the time? And what does this say about the so-called 'suspension of disbelief' and its alleged role in our absorption in movies? As I show in this book, asking these questions opens fundamental problems in the philosophy of cinema. What is film's connection to the real world? What happens to reality when we screen it? How does film create problems of knowledge? Might it help us solve them? How can film make moral or political claims on us? What is the difference between documentary and fiction? How do fictional films move us, when we know that happens in them isn't real? What is a film genre, and what does it mean to claim a film as a member of one? What does it mean to say that a film is 'philosophical'? Is there a way of supporting the idea that films can do philosophical work? As I hope to show, thinking through Kiarostami's recent movies will allow us to shed new light on these questions. This book uses philosophy and the films of Kiarostami for their mutual illumination, turning to the Iranian director in an attempt at finding and clarifying a form of cinematic thinking.[15]

Stanley Cavell's writings on the philosophical (and cinematic) problems

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of scepticism will play an important role here. His best-known book – *The Claim of Reason* – is remarkable for the obsessive way in which it follows up on these problems, yet it does so without the intent of solving them. Part of the uniqueness of Cavell's work (although he is also indebted to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger on this) consists in this very particular understanding of the nature and function of philosophy: unlike so many of his Anglo-American contemporaries, Cavell does not think it should be concerned primarily with the task of defending sets of beliefs about how it is with the world, or trying to justify our claims to know it. Instead he takes the task of philosophy to be a therapeutic one. The implications of this are difficult and far-reaching, but what's particularly relevant for us is the connection between philosophical therapy and the problems of modern scepticism, which Cavell sees as running more deeply into 'ordinary' or 'non-philosophical' life than we tend to assume. Cavell is following the later Wittgenstein, but in a way that complicates him. Here is a passage from the *Philosophical Investigations*:

> But can't I imagine that the people around me are automata, lack consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as usual? – If I imagine it now – alone in my room – I see people with fixed looks (as in a trance) going about their business – the idea is perhaps a little uncanny. But just try to keep hold of this idea in the midst of your ordinary intercourse with others, in the street say! Say to yourself, for example: 'The children over there are mere automata; all their liveliness is mere automatism.' And you will either find these words becoming quite meaningless; or you will produce in yourself some kind of uncanny feeling . . . [16]

Wittgenstein is right: we tend to forget such sceptical worries in ordinary life. But the uncertainty that makes it impossible for a philosopher simply to dismiss such a sceptical problem plays itself out in far more mundane situations: in the fear and feeling of being unintelligible to another, such that one's words do not mean what one thinks they do, or do not mean at all; in the feeling that another self can be or become opaque to one, such that the other is unintelligible and/or impossible to respond to rightly; in the possibility that the way one takes the world, and so the way one lives, could be misguided or fantasmatic in some fundamental sense; in the potential for insanity that subsists within some or all of us (insanity is actually internal to philosophy for Cavell, and Wittgenstein too: not through the blunt claim that philosophy is insane, but in the sense that it is haunted by a sort of linguistic madness). Crucially, these can all be framed as problems of knowledge, experiences of not being able to know.

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Obviously Descartes is important here (the above quote from the *Investigations* chimes, I presume deliberately, with the Second Meditation's worry about hats and cloaks covering clockwork machines[17]). And of course, Descartes does reach certainty after negotiating his sceptical quagmires, famously finding his Archimedean point in the indisputable fact of his own existence. He goes on to try and save the rest of our knowledge by proving the existence of God. Descartes's idea is that God is good, and wouldn't subject us to life in a world where our claims to knowledge are ungrounded. Yet of course, if we think the ontological proof of God fails, then we are left in a difficult spot. We get the self – the one certainty of the Cartesian system – but without all the extra claims that would 'reconnect' that self to the world and other selves outside it. One might say, then, that the certainty that Descartes gave us was ambiguous. He found us a little piece of firm epistemological ground, but in doing as he bequeathed to us (or discovered for us) a potential for absolute isolation, for entrapment in subjectivity (to push the above metaphor a bit too far, we might say that we've been marooned on little Cartesian islands). As Cavell puts it: "At some point the unhinging of our consciousness from the world interposed our subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world. Then our subjectivity became what is present to us, individuality became isolation."[18] As this passage makes clear, Cavell sees this problem as inherent in modernity, as the age in which the criterion of knowledge takes on new significance. It is as though we find ourselves trapped by the demand for certainty it sparks. He says we have suffered a

> fall into skepticism, together with its efforts to recover itself, events recorded variously in Descartes and Hume and Kant and Emerson and Nietzsche and Heidegger and Wittgenstein . . . It is in modern philosophical skepticism . . . that our relation to the things of the world came to be felt to hang by a thread of sensuous immediacy, hence to be snapped by a doubt. The wish to defeat skepticism, or to disparage it, has been close to philosophy's heart ever since.[19]

To summarise a little violently, for Cavell, modern philosophical scepticism is simultaneously correct and confused: correct because it intuits that the human relation to the world is epistemically unassured; confused because it takes this as a problem to be solved. The former claim is ontological; it is what Cavell calls the "truth of scepticism".[20] The latter claim is historical; it is that philosophical modernity is characterised by a rage to know. This rage sees us distort the truth of scepticism: by raging against it, we fail to acknowledge it; we come to take it as a deficit in our knowledge. This is why the philosophical

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task for Cavell is not to solve the problems of scepticism, but to reorient us in relation to them, to loosen their grip by transforming our sense of them. The task is to own up to the fact that "the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing".[21]

What is the relevance of this for film? Cavell sees it as both alleviating and exasperating scepticism. The key claim in *The World Viewed*, which was Cavell's first monograph and which, as William Rothman and Marian Keane point out,[22] can be strikingly inexplicit in its treatment of these issues, is that film is a "moving image of scepticism".[23] What Cavell means is that film draws part of its power from the sceptical threat: film finds itself naturally drawn to the depiction of (the implications of) our lack of epistemic assurance.[24] If this is true, it is not just in virtue of film's purported status as 'the' modern art form, but because of how the camera can seem to take on the basic standpoint of the sceptical theorist, viewing the world from a detached position, recording events happening before it in a way that makes its own connection to those events seem ambiguous (yet at the same time, raising a nearly unshakable thought: that what happens in front of it just *is* 'real' in some sense of the word). On the one hand, photography, film, and video seem to be indexical: we *use* them to tell us things about what happens (think of CCTV, footage from which can happily stand in court). We tend to feel that this ability to record the real is a function of the automatism of photographic apparatuses: the fact that they – unlike say, paintbrushes – produce images of the world the nature of which is wholly or strongly dependent on what actually happens in it, rather than on what their makers want to depict.[25] On the other hand, coming up with a successful philosophical account of this feature of photographic media is very difficult.[26] For isn't our sense of a particular image or scene's bearing a direct relationship to the real a function of artistic or directorial fiat as much as of its having automatically reproduced reality? Doesn't this undermine the key condition we had in mind: that photographic apparatuses record what happens regardless of the wills of their human users? What about the case of digital video files, which are not the results of literal imprints of light on film, and which can be manipulated easily with computer software? And of course, from bitter experience we know that being surrounded by images of the real does not bolster as much as undermine our conviction in it (think of arriving at a tourist destination only to find it appears less vibrant than in the images you saw of it online). This is part of why Cavell can read the films of the Hollywood golden age as working in a sceptical register – arguing for instance that "the overcoming of skeptical doubt can be found in all remarriage comedy . . ."[27] – and finding in them real philosophical depth: this is the case in virtue of the tendencies of the medium. For Cavell, we go to the movies to

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experience a reconnection to the world, a connection we feel has been severed in modernity. Cinema simultaneously screens the world before and from the viewer; it presents an uncannily literal version of the truth of scepticism. Film allows us to *view the world*, to take views of it. Film toys with, undermines, and restores our confidence in it. As Cavell writes: "The basis of film's drama, or the latent anxiety in viewing its drama, lies in its persistent demonstration that we do not know what our conviction in reality turns upon."[28]

Think here of Walter Benjamin's understanding of the experiential effects of technologies of reproduction, which stems from broader quasi-Marxist claims regarding the historicity of not only experience but sense perception as well. Benjamin puts it clearly:

> *Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception*. The way in which human perception is organized – the medium in which it occurs, is conditioned not only by nature but by history.[29]

This comes in 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', where Benjamin famously claims that "what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura"[30] (where 'aura' is something like the authentic presence of the original, and its being embedded in a fabric of tradition). The idea is that our ability to make copies of artworks rips them from their social contexts, which allows for their wider dissemination while simultaneously undermining our faith in originals and the very idea of authenticity. I want to make a quasi-phenomenological point in order to connect this to Cavell's claims about film. It is that one's memories of events can be infiltrated by the images we produce of them. I have had the experience of finding that some of my vivid 'memories' are not really memories at all. It is the experience of going through family photos or videos, or perhaps of looking at photographs of a holiday: one realises that something one has taken as a memory is actually a memory of a photograph or video recording. This isn't to say that there is no real memory, but rather that one's memory has been infiltrated and even supplanted, and cannot be accessed without the mediation of that image. The media of photography, film, and/or video can get inside one's experience in this way (I also think here of the studies which have shown that people who grew up in the age of black and white film reported dreaming in black and white, while more recently people have reported dreaming in colour[31]). In *Vertigo*, W. G. Sebald writes of Stendhal's shock when he came to realise that one of his most vivid memories had been infiltrated like this:

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> Beyle writes that for years he lived in the conviction that he could remember every detail of that ride, and particularly of the town of Ivrea, which he beheld for the first time from some three-quarters of a mile away, in light that was already fading. There it lay, to the right, where the valley gradually opens out into the plain, while on the left, in the far distance, the mountains arose . . . It was a severe disappointment, Beyle writes, when some years ago, looking through old chapters, he came across an engraving entitled *Prospetto d'Ivrea* and was obliged to concede that his recollected picture of the town in the evening sun was nothing but a copy of that very engraving. This being so, Beyle's advice is not to purchase engravings of fine views and prospects seen on one's travels, since before very long they will displace our memories completely, indeed one might say they destroy them.[32]

With characteristic scholastic horror, Sebald hits here on a common experience, and perhaps we could say that in the twentieth century this problem became endemic (and that now it is practically impossible for us to avoid it by refusing to purchase engravings of fine views). Of course, the problem also works in reverse (this is the sense that most interests Benjamin): seeing an image of something before actually encountering it can influence our experience of, and distance us from, the object in question. The easy example is the *Mona Lisa*: one might say that it is now impossible really to see this painting (this is almost literally true, in that it attracts massive crowds of tourists, many of whom, interestingly, will be taking photos of the painting), that there is a disappointment that comes with encountering it, a feeling of not having encountered the real thing. Photographic and cinematic reproductions of reality have a paradoxical effect on us: they simultaneously offer us views of reality, of the world as it is in itself, while also working to remove those things from us, making an unmediated experience of reality impossible. The ubiquity of images characteristic of our culture is both a cause of and response to our desire for reality; in being given what we want, we are distanced from it. The pleasures and anxieties of film and photography are bound up with how they purport to solve problems of knowledge while simultaneously exasperating them.

These understandings of philosophy and film allow me to pitch the idea of 'film as philosophy' in a particular way. Like Paisley Livingston, I think there are reasons to be dubious of certain of the claims that have been made for film-philosophy. I am unconvinced, for instance, of the full philosophical usefulness (if not the accuracy) of the idea one finds, for example, in Julian Baggini[33] and Jerry Goodenough[34] (and also with a more pedagogical slant in works by Chris Falzon[35] and Mary Litch and Amy Karofsky[36]): because of

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its imagistic, narrative, sonic, and other powers, film is able to present ideas with greater affective force than written texts have often been able to achieve; thus films can provide an important supplement to philosophical argument, helping to illustrate – or even provide a certain kind of experiential evidence for[37] – philosophical theses. This notion (which often relies on a rough and ready version of Wittgenstein's say/show distinction[38]) is itself somewhat Platonic, relying as it does on an opposition between artistic *mythos* and philosophical *logos* (even as it gives it the contrary evaluative spin, regarding the affective powers of cinema as something to be welcomed rather than rejected[39]); thus it flirts with admitting that the medium specific propensity of film is just to provide an affective accompaniment to 'real', in principle discursively paraphrasable, philosophical work, and so maintaining the distinction between thinking and feeling that film-philosophy, in its most compelling moments, has promised to overcome. Unlike Livingston[40] (and others such as Thomas Wartenberg[41]), however, I am also wary of the idea that a film's philosophical interest is to be found in the ideas or problems with which its directors and/or writers have imbued it.[42] First and most obviously, such intentionalist theories tend to raise problems of authorship (problems that are particularly intense in the case of the inherently collaborative process of filmmaking); secondly, and as Damian Cox and Michael Levine point out,[43] restricting ourselves to this notion effectively shuts down the possibilities that arise as a direct result of what *exceeds* authorial intention, those aspects of a film which call out for philosophical reflection not because but *in spite* of what a director or writer may have intended (*Taste of Cherry* actually presents a useful example: given the film's title and Kiarostami's handling of Badii's conversation with him, it may be plausible to imagine the director himself 'sides with' the man who tells the humanistic story about mulberries – yet this is perhaps not the most interesting way of understanding what the film has to say and show philosophically); third and most importantly, this understanding of the film-philosophy relationship does not get at the *specifically cinematic* nature of cinematic thinking (as Livingston himself is very happy to acknowledge). To put all this another way: I want to regard film as having more than the mere capacity to illustrate – or provide an affective (or simply more entertaining) supplement to – philosophy, yet I want to resist the notion that film's philosophical power consists in its ability to present theoretical content that could itself be fully paraphrased in written philosophical discourse. Cinematic thinking is a specific kind of thinking (and it really is thinking).

This would seem to commit me to what Livingston has influentially called the 'bold thesis' in the philosophy of film: "the conjunction of the idea that films can make an original contribution in philosophy, and the idea that this

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contribution can be achieved primarily if not entirely through means exclusive to the cinematic medium".[44] And this would, in turn, seem to pin me on the horns of the dilemma he claims it raises:

> either support for the bold thesis depends on a claim about a cinematic contribution that cannot be paraphrased and so can be reasonably doubted, or it rests on a contribution that can be paraphrased, in which case the clause about medium specificity is betrayed.[45]

For Livingston, the idea that has been so attractive to film-philosophers – that cinema has a special propensity for thought – is actually the Achilles heel of their entire programme. If the thinking that goes on in film is specific to the capacities of the medium, then how could it be made discursive? And if it can't be made discursive, then what use is it to philosophy, whose medium is language? The film-philosopher who wants to insist on medium specificity will end up committing himself to a kind of obscurantism, insisting on some ineffable experience of thinking that takes place exclusively in films. And as Livingston says, "it is fair to ask whether such appeals to experience can offer good grounds for believing that a significantly new idea, general thesis, or argument has emerged".[46]

Yet of course, it is possible to question Livingston's characterisation of the 'bold thesis', which smacks of philosophical entrapment. One of his explicit targets here is Stephen Mulhall, whose *On Film* is in some ways a foundational text for the programme of film-philosophy, at least as it has been practised over the past decade. Perhaps the first thing to note is that Mulhall does not formulate his own understanding of film-philosophy quite as 'boldly' as Livingston implies he does. Here is one such formulation from Mulhall's book (and which Livingston himself quotes):

> I do not look to these films as handy or popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the ways that philosophers do. Such films are not philosophy's raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action—film as philosophizing.[47]

It is a provocative passage, but look at the descriptions of film-philosophical practice: Mulhall writes of film as 'evaluating' and 'reflecting on' philosophy, as 'thinking seriously and systematically', and of 'philosophy in action'.

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Compare this with Livingston's query as to how, given the condition of medium specificity and the problem of paraphrase, we could ever really know whether a film presents a 'new idea', 'general thesis', or 'argument'. Livingston, as is clear enough, is working with a relatively traditional idea of philosophical work, understood as the articulation of arguments regarding how it is with the world: philosophy as theory building. Mulhall, on the other hand – and this is part of his own inheritance from Cavell – has a broader and in many ways subtler notion of it.[48] In the reply to his critics included in the most recent edition of *On Film*, he asks: "must our acknowledgment of reason's claims on us always take the specific form of giving reasons in support of our opinions or our 'symbolic representations' (which I take to mean something like our 'view' or 'vision') of the world?"[49]

Now we can see the ambiguity in Livingston's term 'original contribution'. If an original contribution is a new theory or argument for a particular view of the way things are, then it is pretty easy to see how the bold thesis founders; however, things are far less obvious if 'contribution' could mean, say, an instance of therapeutic philosophical practice founded on "the wager . . . that we can inhabit our life of and with language otherwise".[50] Here it is worth invoking Mulhall's useful distinction between philosophy understood as the provision and assessment of reasons for and against particular views, and philosophy understood as reflection on the very "shared space of thought" in which disagreements arise in the first place. "Sometimes", he writes,

> we want to, or need to, or simply do, reconceive that space, by finding a new way of thinking about the topic – one that reorients both participants to the dispute by altering their sense of what stances are available to them with respect to its topic.[51]

Such a conception of philosophy should deflate the bold thesis and shift the terms of the debate on cinematic thinking. The problem of paraphrase will no longer seem so intractable, as we are no longer committed with the same force to the idea that there is some philosophical 'content' to be found in a particular film (a content that will have to be 'translated' into language in order to become properly philosophical), the previously so intuitive notion that a philosophical film must been seen as proposing new ideas or theses that it is the film-philosopher's job to discover and somehow translate. Yet we can remain committed to a version of the thesis of medium specificity, holding that the kind of thinking that can happen in films remains specifically cinematic – and indeed that this is precisely why it is of such interest to philosophy, why the creation of film somehow seems to have been "meant for

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philosophy".[52] I should emphasise that this must be understood as a type of philosophical practice: the therapeutic contribution of a film is not a content to be extracted and paraphrased but something the film *does*, something it achieves on and with us. Bringing this out in philosophical writing is a matter of attentive description: rather than capture in language the new idea or theory a film has put forward, the task is to give an elucidatory account of the work the film has done on one in provoking, rebuking, and deflating sceptical theorising.

This is not to deny the importance of narrative and character; nor is it to ignore the political and cultural contexts of films. It is simply to say that these are not the domains in which the medium specific philosophical propensity of film does its work. And this, of course, is not to deny that these domains can be philosophically salient. It is just to say that when they are, this salience is not medium specific (because of how it deploys narrative and character, some novels have profound philosophical significance, but they are less equipped for the type of philosophical work that films can carry out).[53] In the following pages, then, I will make a number of arguments regarding the philosophical salience of narrative and character, as well as the political and cultural contexts of Kiarostami's films. My claim will be that, by following up on the connection between film and problems of knowledge, Kiarostami is able to draw a particular kind of philosophical significance out of narrative and character, and to undo philosophical commitments and fantasies with significant political and cultural purchase. This requires interpretive accounts of narrative and character, as well as philosophically attentive description of a film's philosophical effect. (The exception that proves the rule here is *Five*, which does away with narrative and character, thus isolating the anti-theoretical philosophical propensity of film with particular clarity.)

It may seem that saying film has a medium specific philosophical propensity born of its relationship to reality implies accepting old-fashioned and/or implausible claims regarding the nature of cinema. In particular it may seem to require accepting a strong claim regarding the essence of film, of the necessary and sufficient conditions of something's being a film – necessary and sufficient conditions which, moreover, would have to be located in the physical nature of the cinematographic apparatus (whether in cameras, film stock, or whatever), and its attendant capacity to record what happens automatically.[54] But my account of the philosophical propensity of film relies on no such claim. It relies on our beliefs and practices regarding film and its relationship to reality. More specifically, it relies on the fact that film has a problematic relationship to reality: that we (sometimes) treat cinematic images as though they possess an indexical relationship to what happens, yet cannot come to

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a convincing general account of precisely how and why. Imagine a world where our beliefs and practices regarding cinematic images have changed so substantially that we no longer regard them as bearing any significant relationship to reality, any tendency to record what happens in it (though I would suggest it is more difficult than many seem to think, perhaps one can imagine such a state of affairs emerging out of the pressure of digital technologies). In such a world, there would not be film-philosophy in my sense, because film would not provoke sceptical or anti-sceptical theorising. So this account relies on the *tension* between film and reality, such that if the tension were to be released, it would no longer stand. This is why I do not take this account to trouble my claim to be doing anti-theoretical philosophy. The account does not require a convincing overarching theory of the relationship between film and reality. On the contrary, it relies on there being no such theory.

Some may wonder what is left for philosophy if it pulls out of the game of theory building. And to certain ears, the above claims about how it can reorient us, transform our sense of the possible, or open up new paths for thinking may sound a bit romantic, woolly, or even empty. Part of what I want to demonstrate in this book, then, is exactly what an explicitly anti-theoretical film-philosophy *can* do. Kiarostami's films do not really present a "systematic vision of the world".[55] Rather, the thinking we can bring out of them is deflationary or even destructive: it wants to get us reflecting on our very desire for an overarching vision (and, one might say, get us *looking* instead). I will not be trying to unearth a robust philosophy from Kiarostami's films as a whole or any of his films in particular; instead I want to think with his films about the practice of philosophising itself, about what it can and can't achieve. Throughout this book, I want to remain open to the possibility that film may actually challenge or even rival philosophy, and thus – like any true rival – that it could provoke philosophy into changing itself. The philosophical significance of film consists less in its ability to make a positive contribution to philosophical theorising than in how it challenges, beguiles, goads, and resists it. And this general tendency or power of cinema, I hope to show, has been exploited in a fascinating, charming, and often devastating way by Kiarostami.[56]

I say 'devastating' in part because philosophical therapy carried out in the spirit of Wittgenstein must be distinguished from what could be called *consolation*. It is very easy to caricature (whether intentionally or otherwise, whether as a detractor or supporter) the motivations and stakes of philosophical therapy. To console is to give solace – to soothe or to comfort – and especially to alleviate grief or disappointment. Kiarostami's films are not consoling in this way. Indeed the films achieve what they do precisely in virtue of

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their *capacity to disappoint*, setting us up with a desire they end up liquidating. Yet they do not simply show us how to come to terms with our epistemological limitedness, or how to adjust to the fact that we will never find the philosophical peace we seek, or whatever. The disappointment in question is not simply the result of having what we want withheld – our being shown that we're not going to get it – but of a demonstration that we didn't really know what we wanted, because what we (thought we) wanted was always already chimerical. It is not that we do not need or can do without the purchase on reality we were seeking (that we should happily remain sceptics, or at least get used to it), but that it is unclear what it would mean to get such purchase in the first place, and so that the sceptic's words (and those of his opponent) do not make the sense he thinks they do. This explains why the destruction is enlivening and freeing. At the risk of paradox, we could describe it as a destruction that destroys by not destroying, or in Wittgenstein's terms, as a destruction that destroys only *Luftgebäude* (literally: air-buildings).[57] In this context, the problem with consolation is that it leaves intact – assumes the meaningfulness and solidity of – the structures in which it offers solace.

What does it mean to say the sceptic's words do not make the sense he thinks they do, or that philosophical therapy works by destroying what we had wrongly thought was meaningful? There is a tradition in Wittgensteinian philosophy in which claims like this are deployed with great self-assurance, where philosophers become something rather like nonsense cops, bent on policing authoritatively the border between sense and meaninglessness. In his attack on Cavell – which, it should perhaps be said, appears not to have been made in bad faith – Malcolm Turvey takes the philosopher to task for his understanding of Wittgenstein. Specifically the critique centres on Cavell's claims about scepticism, which Turvey says he sets up as "an underlying principle of *all* of Wittgenstein's later philosophy".[58] Now in a certain sense Turvey is perfectly correct, as Cavell does think problems of scepticism are basic for the later Wittgenstein. But this is not necessarily the same thing as saying, as Turvey wants to say Cavell does, that it is an *Urphänomen* in Wittgenstein's own sense of the term: a "preconceived idea that takes possession"[59] of the person using it, such that it comes to "describe any and all phenomena, whether or not such phenomena are suitable candidates for such a description".[60] For Turvey, Cavell's fixation on problems of scepticism actually demonstrates just how untrue to Wittgenstein he is, for the aim of his later philosophy was to break our attachments to full-blown theorising of this sort. Now this is roughly fair, as far as it goes, as an account of the later Wittgenstein, but it is not fair to Cavell.

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Turvey's critique appears to turn on Cavell's phrase 'the truth of scepticism', which he interprets uncharitably and quite literally to mean something like 'scepticism is true'. But it should be obvious that Cavell does not mean it like this; a better way of understanding it would be to say that Cavell uses 'the truth of scepticism' similarly to someone using a phrase like 'there is truth in every joke' or 'well, there may be a grain of truth in that' (Turvey also writes of Cavell's tendency to refer to scepticism as 'undeniable', once again crudely equating this with 'truth' *tout court*). It is not that 'scepticism is true' is true; rather, it is that scepticism contains a grain of a truth that it ends up distorting, which is that the human relation to the world is epistemically unassured, or (put another way) that our relation to the world *as such* is "not one of knowing"[61] (if you want to push the metaphor further, imagine an oyster which, irritated by a grain of sand, secretes calcium carbonate around it in an attempt at quarantining it: the grain remains, but it has become unrecognisable). If scepticism is *undeniable*, it is not because it is true, but because it is beguiling and (in certain contexts, particularly philosophical contexts) seemingly unshakable – and so impossible to deny satisfactorily. Of course, this is not to say that 'scepticism is false' is true either, for the very attempt to deny that scepticism is true already cedes too much. Turvey writes:

> it is very hard to find anywhere in Wittgenstein's later writings – and certainly in the *Investigations* – where Wittgenstein argues that scepticism is either 'true' or 'false' (or a combination of the two). And the reason why it is so hard, I suspect, is because Wittgenstein's overwhelming and repeatedly stated (and enacted) concern in his later writings is with questions of sense and meaning, *not* with making arguments about what is true or false.[62]

Once again, this is fair enough as an account of Wittgenstein, but all of it is also true of Cavell, whose own overwhelming and repeatedly stated concern is with sense and meaning over truth and falsity, too. The difference between Turvey's Wittgensteinianism and that of Cavell hinges on the nature of this concern: for Turvey, it appears, the task of the therapeutic philosopher is to know the difference between sense and nonsense, and call out the latter when he sees it (hence his own dismissals of Cavell's lapses into alleged senselessness); for Cavell things are more complex. As Conant writes in an article on Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein:

> according to Cavell, what the early Wittgenstein calls the logic of our language and what the later Wittgenstein calls grammar is not the name for a grid

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> of rules we lay over language in order to point out where one or another of its prescriptions are violated.[63]

For Cavell, there is no pre-determinable set of criteria that we can apply to sentences in order to sort the meaningful from the meaningless. Further, we cannot simply dismiss scepticism as nonsense and expect it to go away – in a sense, we have to start by taking it seriously, and in particular by acknowledging the hold it has on us, which cannot be loosened so brusquely. Conant describes the reader of Wittgenstein as moving from "a psychological experience of entertaining what appears to be a fully determinate thought . . . to the experience of having that appearance (the experience of there being any such thought) disintegrate".[64] What Turvey's approach ignores, we might say, is the first stage in this process: the reader has to entertain genuinely a sceptical thought if its disintegration (or as I have termed it, liquidation or destruction) is to have force. This is why Cavell writes in the way he does (and Turvey is not alone in finding him opaque), why he spends so much time in *The Claim of Reason* entertaining thoughts that, by Wittgensteinian lights, we may have to regard as properly meaningless. Yet this is also true of Wittgenstein's own writing, and in particular of the role of the interlocutor in the *Investigations*, who responds again and again to Wittgenstein's statements with incredulity, defiance, and disbelief, never satisfied with the philosopher's procedures. Yet the interlocutor plays a crucial role in the book; he is more than a foil; he gives voice to the disquietudes that grip philosophers, oscillating between certainty and defeat. As an example, consider the interlocutor's exasperation during one of Wittgenstein's famous excurses on the concept 'game' (where he shows that we cannot delimit the set of necessary and sufficient conditions for gamehood): "But if the concept 'game' is uncircumscribed like that", the interlocutor responds, "you don't really know what you mean by a 'game'."[65] The aim, as usual, is that the reader will come to recognise herself in the interlocutor here: that he says precisely what the reader cannot help but think. This is why it is not enough simply to dismiss scepticism as nonsense. The reader must come to see just how seductive nonsense can be, how inclined she is to entertain it. As Mulhall writes, "[w]hat Wittgenstein detects in his interlocutor's impatience is the influence of a false necessity";[66] we need to do something more than simply point out the falsity in order to loosen the sense of necessity. This is what both the *Investigations* and *The Claim of Reason* are designed to achieve. It is also what I take Kiarostami's films to achieve.

To be fair to Turvey, he does identify a potential problem in his attack on Cavell. This is not the place to construct a full defence of Cavell's philosophy, but the problem is worth acknowledging, because it is one that

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could conceivably be raised against my own programme in this book. It is that it is possible to be disingenuous in one's claim to be doing non-doctrinal, anti-theoretical philosophy. This, I take it, is really at the root of Turvey's criticisms of Cavell: for the former, the latter claims to be forgoing theoretical commitments, yet his work – and this may seem especially true of *The Claim of Reason* – appears to advance a theory of scepticism. Obviously very much hangs on just how we interpret the word 'theory' here. Cavell does not claim, and I do not claim, to be doing philosophy without advancing any general claims at all. Indeed, partly following Cavell, I want to advance a number of claims about philosophical scepticism: that it contains a grain of truth; that we have a tendency to deny and, as a result, distort this truth; that this tendency takes a virulent and desperate form in modernity; that film, because of its specific features, has a particular capacity to provoke sceptical theorising; that for this very reason film, at least some of the time, can provide a singularly powerful rebuke to such theorising; that film can thus be regarded as doing real philosophical work. The point is that these are claims about the limits of – and the unacknowledged forces driving – philosophical theorising. Saying that scepticism has a deep hold on us, that sceptical or anti-sceptical theorising leads us to speak or write words that lack purchase on the world, or that film has a special relationship to sceptical problems, is not the same as advancing a full-blown sceptical theory (or a full-blown anti-sceptical theory). This is how I understand Wittgenstein when he writes that "[i]f one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them."[67] The remark strikes as counterintuitive because we are used to philosophers debating each other endlessly; it implies that philosophers who take themselves to be advancing theses are not really doing so at all, and so must instead (unbeknownst to each other, and presumably themselves) be speaking emptily. If this claim is itself a thesis, then it is a thesis about philosophers, not a thesis of the type philosophers mistakenly take themselves to debate – which is to say, not a thesis *in* philosophy. Wittgenstein does not argue against philosophical theses or philosophical claims to truth, but rather wants to show, through philosophical analysis of a different and non-theoretic sort, that they are not substantial enough to debate in the first place, not solid enough to pit oneself against. This is a way of explaining why Mulhall expresses such disappointment in certain of the replies to the first edition of *On Film*, writing that "even those responsive to its concerns tend not to engage in any detail with the specific readings of particular films that make up the bulk of the book itself . . .".[68] If one claims to be doing film-philosophy non-doctrinally – and to have identified in certain films non-doctrinal insights of deep philosophical significance – then the real weight must be placed on

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one's engagements with the films themselves. The proof of the claim, in other words, will be in the doing – and the doing, by its nature, must be attentive to the specificities of the individual case. "It is not that philosophy is to be brought as such to an end", Cavell writes, "but that in each case of its being called for, it brings itself to an end".[69] My readings of Kiarostami's films get their bearings from certain (sceptical) philosophical problems, but they are not meant simply to show how the films illustrate those problems – they are not primarily *interpretive* in quite that way. I want to account philosophically for what happens in them, and for what happens to those problems in them.[70] This means attending to how each film calls for philosophy, and its end, in its own way. The dissolutions of sceptical problems I want to claim these movies achieve will never be fully binding or definitive for philosophy: all they can do is repeatedly bring it to its own limits. Yet this repetition is neither compulsive nor monotonous. By their nature as anti-theoretical, the philosophical achievements of these films are irreducibly specific.

In Chapter 1 I turn to 1999's *The Wind Will Carry Us*, Kiarostami's first (and perhaps best) film after *Taste of Cherry*. This movie – which follows a filmmaker and his crew as they try to make a documentary in Siah Dareh, a village in Iranian Kurdistan – intensifies Kiarostami's trademark reflexivity, following up complexly on the question of what it means to document reality on film, and problematising our desire for the exotic and the authentic. This is an especially interesting move given that Kiarostami was rapidly gaining recognition in 'the West' when he made the movie; it is particularly relevant for me as a white, English-speaking philosopher claiming to have found something important in the work of an Iranian filmmaker. Extending and critiquing Nancy's work on Kiarostami, I argue that the unsettling power of this film stems not from its ability to return us to some (purportedly) pre-modern experience, but from how it undermines modernity's fantasies about itself (and indeed about pre-modernity). It thus provides a subtle but decisive rebuke to orientalist tendencies on display in the international reception of Kiarostami's films, as well as the claims from some Iranian critics – including Hamid Dabashi and Azadeh Farahmand – that they deliberately perform a kind of exoticism. Kiarostami's cinema presents an education in looking, in seeing things differently. It can help us think what it would be to stop wavering between a fantasy of unmediated access to reality and horror at finding it lacking.

After finishing *The Wind Will Carry Us*, Kiarostami made two feature-length movies on video: *ABC Africa* in 2001, and *Ten* in 2002. The films stand out among his works because of how political they are. At the same time, these films are marked by an idiosyncratic blend of the factual and the artificial,

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documentation and experimentation: they are neither 'mockumentaries' nor 'docudramas', yet they are far from being traditional documentaries. *ABC Africa*, to which I turn in Chapter 2, is about the AIDS crisis in Uganda and its devastating effects on children. As I try to show, part of the philosophical interest of the film consists in how it refuses standard tropes of political documentary cinema and the conceptual vocabulary of much of documentary theory. Indeed Kiarostami claims to have discovered the video camera's capacity to record 'absolute truth' while making *ABC Africa* – a surprising claim that I want to make sense of. While deeply reflexive, the movie is not content merely with demonstrating the partiality of the documentarian's claim to truth; rather, it works to dissolve metaphysically inflated oppositions between subjectivity and objectivity, partiality and neutrality. This allows it to evoke a rare kind of solidarity.

I turn to *Ten* in the third chapter. Working through the political complexities of Iranian society via stunning performances from non-actors playing themselves, *Ten* is interested in a particular kind of moral claim: one that emerges out of Kiarostami's crafty handling of questions regarding the reality of what happens in the film. Through a series of intrusive formal techniques, Kiarostami creates a sense of intense realism while troubling the very category, such that the viewer is consistently unable to say whether or not what is conveyed on screen is real or staged. Are we watching people playing roles or going about their daily business? Is what is said scripted or unscripted? Are the situations depicted on screen real, or has Kiarostami arranged them? The film evokes the ordinary with a singular intensity: not through (the pretension of) eliminating artifice, but through a complex foregrounding of it. It can help us clarify the connection between moral claims and propositions, imagination, and belief.

In Chapter 4 I turn to 2003's *Five*. Shot on digital cameras, the movie is split into five episodes, each (or so it seems) consisting of a single long take. At first blush, the film appears to add weight to the canonical reading of Kiarostami as a filmmaker concerned with the dignity and drama of the quotidian. I do not reject this reading, but refine it by following up on the questions *Five* raises about its own status: what was arranged here, and what was genuinely 'discovered'? Further, what is the difference between arrangement and discovery, the staged and the natural? What is contemplation in cinema, and what is its relation to realism? Complicating Roland Barthes's notion of *punctum* and Michael Fried's concept of theatricality, I argue *Five*'s foregrounding of artifice allows it to achieve a certain kind of realism: one attentive to the non-epistemic nature of the claim reality makes on us.

Chapter 5 is about 2008's *Shirin*, the final instalment in the experimental

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period that opened with *ABC Africa*. It consists almost entirely of shots of the faces of women as they appear to watch a film in a cinema. The women seem intently rapt in the film they are apparently watching: an adaptation of the twelfth-century Persian tragedy *Khosrow and Shirin*.[71] Working to clarify how *Shirin* treats absorption, I want to bring out the grounds and stakes of a provocative claim by Fried regarding cinema and theatricality. Connecting Fried's argument to a central idea from Negar Mottahedeh's remarkable study of the visual logic of Iranian cinema – that a significant (albeit unintended!) effect of rules regarding modesty and the depiction of women in Iranian film has been to render it a "woman's cinema"[72] – I develop an account of how *Shirin* upsets sceptical fantasies of voyeuristic spectatorship.

Chapter 6 turns to 2010's *Certified Copy*. This relatively (and deceptively) 'mainstream' film – which begins with a lecture on the importance of reproductions of works of art – raises philosophical questions regarding love, marriage, reality, and artifice. It shows the relationship between these questions and film's connection to problems of scepticism, specifically in this case the problem of other minds. Inviting while simultaneously refusing the possibility of our taking it as a member of what Cavell has called the 'comedy of remarriage', *Certified Copy* also asks what it means for a film to be a member of any particular genre, and of the remarriage comedy in particular. With this reflexive aporia – as well as its deliberate narrative incoherence and refusal to answer basic questions regarding the protagonists – the film leads the viewer into an epistemological impasse. Yet from here we can perhaps be granted a new perspective on scepticism, and the loss it seems to figure.

The final chapter turns to 2012's *Like Someone in Love*. Against Gilles Deleuze's claim that the task of modern cinema is to restore our belief in the world, I suggest that modern scepticism stems not from a lack of belief, but more fundamentally from a kind of belief in belief. Drawing on John McDowell's recent work, I develop an account of cinematic absorption that does not rely on the idea that, to be moved by cinematic images, we must somehow be led to entertain their propositional content. The problem with such a claim is not simply that it falsifies our relationship to cinematic images: it is also that it falsifies our relationship to reality. The film follows a Japanese call girl as she develops an unlikely relationship with a man old enough to be her grandfather. It finishes abruptly. It shows that that our relation to the film image is not primarily one of supposing, believing, imagining, or knowing, but something uncannier.

It was not feasible to treat all of Kiarostami's features, so a word is in order regarding my choice of films. There are three reasons for my decision to focus on his recent cinema. First and least interestingly, it has allowed me

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to write about movies that – simply in virtue of their recentness – have been given less attention in the extant English-language literature on Kiarostami,[73] and which the reader will find easier to obtain. Second, there is the fact that treating films made sequentially – rather than chopping between different moments in Kiarostami's career – allows me to do greater justice to the links between them, and so to the iterative process of inquiry at the heart of the filmmaker's project. I alluded to the aesthetic commitment motivating the third reason earlier in my discussion of *Taste of Cherry*, when I described its infamous coda as a kind of watershed. Without wanting to discount the significance of a masterpiece like *Close-Up*, the films of the Koker Trilogy, interesting works from the 1980s such as such as '83's *Fellow Citizen* or '89's *Homework*, or remarkable pre-Revolutionary films like 1977's *The Report*, it may be worth distinguishing between an 'early' and a 'mature' Kiarostami. By 'early' I have in mind all those works leading up to and including *Through the Olive Trees*; by 'mature' I have in mind those works from *Taste of Cherry* onwards. *Taste of Cherry* can rightly be regarded as crucial not only because of its inherent brilliance and importance but because of the light its coda throws on the filmmaker's wider project. It definitively shows he is interested in something much more than rehashing neo-realism in an Iranian context.[74] Indeed this is why it so divisive: it is an aesthetic point of no return after which we can no longer simply regard his films as poignant studies of the life and struggles of ordinary Iranians. Complicating these tendencies, it shows the depth of Kiarostami's interest in the philosophical enigmas that turn up in the act of filming the world.

Notes

1. The in-car dialogues that form the core of the film were never carried out between the film's actors; rather, the scenes were filmed separately, with Kiarostami himself standing in (or really, sitting in) for Badii or the relevant passenger, working in a partially improvised fashion to lead his interlocutors in conversation (see Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 31–2 and Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 4*, 191–2; Kiarostami would use a similar technique again in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (see Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 36 and the interview with Kiarostami later in the book (111)). Apparently Kiarostami also used another method for the sake of greater naturalness and realism: terrifying the actor playing the young soldier by hiding a gun in the glovebox, before asking him to open it (109). Yet we should probably be a little careful of such stories: in an interview with *Indiewire*

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in 1998, Kiarostami told Anthony Kaufman that he had him discover a knife covered in pomegranate juice! Kiarostami said there:

> Whatever reaction you see from him is a true reaction. Including when I wasn't telling him what we wanted him to do. Including one time where in the dashboard of the car, I told him, "Could you give me a box of chocolates from the dashboard," and there was a knife in there with some pomegranate juice on it, so he thought we had killed someone – so that was how we got the kind of horrified reactions you see from him in the film. ('Abbas Kiarostami Speaks about *Taste of Cherry*')

As Alberto Elena notes (see *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, 13–16), Kiarostami seems to like making misleading – or at least, inconsistent – statements in interviews.

2. Hamish Ford ably captures the strange horror of this scene:

> An absolute evacuation of hopefulness and immobilising lack of purpose is suggested, more abstract than embodied despite the always 'real' nature of the entirely unglamorous portrayal of 'being-in-the-world' on screen. The sequence is most centrally suggestive of ruins through an enormous and poetic opening out of the symbolic death imagery already so strong in the film, reaching a point of self-conscious plasticity. Here are a flood of images more clearly than ever now intimating entropy and earthly material burial: the unusually bold and clear shadow-play on the dust-covered quarry wall of Badii's body in spectral form being eaten up by the earth-moving machinery; our observation of his gaze, first from outside then entering it as a point-of-view shot, into a grilled trap through which fall rocks in a seemingly random and 'meaningless' process; the human shadow-figure now explicitly cast across, and therefore associated with, the vertiginous ground of rubble, bars and invisible abyss; the dominance of autumnal oranges and browns thanks to the ubiquitous dusty, 'lifeless' earth; and finally, the almost complete envelopment and gradual disappearance of our human figure as the air fills with yellow dust, coming to erase Badii and then the camera's entire field of vision. ('Driving into the Void', 13)

3. Price, 'Imagining Life'.
4. Price, 'Imagining Life'.
5. As Rosenbaum puts it:

> Though it invites us into the laboratory from which the film sprang and places us on an equal footing with the filmmaker, it does this in a spirit of

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> collective euphoria, suddenly liberating us from the oppressive solitude and darkness of Badii alone in his grave. (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 30)

6. See Elena, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, 87–8.
7. As Dabashi puts it (in a book named after the movie):

> The spectator is . . . put in the bizarrest of situations, a succession of fact and fantasy, in which one knows one is watching a fiction (Kiarostami's *Close-Up*) that is based on fact (Sabzian's real story) that is based on fiction (Sabzian pretending to be Makhmalbaf) that is based on fact (Makhmalbaf as a leading Iranian filmmaker) that is based on fiction (Makhmalbaf making fictional stories in film) that is based on fact (the reality that Makhmalbaf transforms into fiction). (*Close Up*, 67)

8. Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, 22.
9. Though the term is widely used by critics, Kiarostami rejects it. See Elena, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, 107–8; see also Cheshire, 'Taste of Cherry', which notes that Kiarostami sees the grouping as arbitrary because it is based on an "'accident' of place" alone; see also the remark in Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 23.
10. The film presents a number of these ontological mix-ups of type and token. For example, Ahmed also mistakes a pair of trousers on a washing line for an identical pair owned by his friend, and encounters a man who shares his friend's name but turns out not to be his father.
11. Here is Kiarostami on the making of the film:

> In June 1990, an earthquake of catastrophic proportions jolted northern Iran, killing tens of thousands of people and causing unbelievable damage. Immediately, I decided to make my way to the vicinity of Koker, a village where four years earlier I shot *Where Is the Friends House?* My concern was to find out the fate of the two young actors who played in the film but I failed to locate them. However, there was so much else to see . . . I was observing the efforts of people trying to rebuild their lives in spite of their material and emotional sufferings. The enthusiasm for life that I was witnessing gradually changed my perspective. The tragedy of death and destruction grew paler and paler. Towards the end of the trip, I became less and less obsessed by the two boys. What was certain was this: more than 50,000 people had died, some of whom could have been boys of the same age as the two who acted in my film (the two boys at the end of this film may be taken as substitutes for the

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> original pair). Therefore, I needed a stronger motivation to go on with the trip. Finally, I felt that perhaps it was more important to help the survivors who bore no recognizable faces, but were making every effort to start a new life for themselves under very difficult conditions and in the midst of an environment of natural beauty that was going on with its old ways as if nothing had happened. Such is life, it seemed to tell them, go on, seize the days . . . (quoted in Elena, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, 92–3)

12. Elena's wider discussion of the trilogy in *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* is invaluable (see 92–117).
13. Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, 26.
14. Lippard, 'Disappearing into the Distance and Getting Closer All the Time'.
15. I have borrowed this phrase from Robert Sinnerbrink and his excellent *New Philosophies of Film*.
16. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §420; 107e.
17. See Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, 100.
18. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 22. Rothman – who writes on Cavell on film but who is arguably (and perhaps for this reason) one of the most effective interpreters of his philosophy of scepticism – puts it like this:

> The 'unhinging of our consciousness from the world' is a historical event and also a mythical event, like the biblical fall from grace, the social contract (or, for that matter, Jacques Lacan's mirror stage). Picture it as a spiritual and psychological and political cataclysm that presents us with a new fact, or a new consciousness of an old fact, about our condition as human beings. We now feel isolated by our subjectivity. It is our subjectivity, not a world that we objectively apprehend, that appears present to us. ('Film, Modernity, Cavell', 320)

19. Cavell, *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*, 245.
20. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 241.
21. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 241.
22. Rothman and Keane, *Reading Cavell's* The World Viewed, 261.
23. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 188.
24. This chimes with a claim from Philipp Schmerheim: that "the very process of filmmaking as well as the ontological constitution of the film medium already raises questions about the relation between the so-called 'reality' of filmic worlds and the (physical) reality their creator and spectators are a part of" (*Skepticism Films*, 8). Alongside this ontological

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claim, Schmerheim offers another explanation for contemporary manifestations of the sceptical impulse in cinema, arguing they are responses to "the manipulative power of digital technology, computer-generated imagery, and comprehensive control of worldwide information flows" (11).

25. André Bazin gives voice to this intuition in one of his remarks on painting: "No matter how skillful the painter, his work was always in fee to an inescapable subjectivity. The fact that a human hand intervened cast a shadow of doubt over the image" ('The Ontology of the Photographic Image', 12).
26. For a survey of various attempts at developing such an account in the philosophy of photography, see Costello and Phillips, 'Automatism, Causality, and Realism'.
27. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 90.
28. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 189.
29. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', 255 (original emphasis).
30. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', 255.
31. The experimental philosopher Eric Schwitzgebel is interested in the vagaries and inaccuracies of the reports we make of our subjective experiences. In 'Do People still Report Dreaming in Black and White?' Schwitzgebel tried to replicate findings from studies in the 1940s and 1950s which showed people reported dreaming in black and white, and found an increase in reports of coloured dreams. Instead of taking the reports at face value, however, he concludes that subjects must be mistaken about this feature of their dreams. Whether this is right or not, the change calls out for explanation.
32. Sebald, *Vertigo*, 8.
33. Baggini argues for this in 'Alien Ways of Thinking', his sympathetic yet in some ways highly critical review of Mulhall's *On Film*. He writes:

> Film, like philosophy, can represent reality to us truthfully in such a way as to make us understand it better or more accurately than before. Film can achieve this through fictions which can include non-literal modes of representation such as metaphor, whereas philosophy usually achieves the same goal through more literal modes of description.

34. Goodenough develops such an understanding of film-philosophy in his introduction to his *Film as Philosophy* collection. One of his examples is

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Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad*, which he claims refutes Cartesian scepticism "not by *telling* us, not by demonstrating the falsity of a proposition involved or the invalidity of a logical move, but by *showing* us, by showing us solipsism in action" ('A Philosopher Goes to the Cinema', 25).

35. See *Philosophy Goes to the Movies*, which Falzon bills as "an introduction to philosophy that turns to films in order to illustrate and discuss philosophical ideas and themes" (1).
36. See their *Philosophy through Film*, which introduces a series of problems in philosophy on the basis of the idea that "a film . . . may be used to present philosophical positions and arguments in a way that is both rigorous and entertaining" (2).
37. This is how Baggini understands the philosophical power of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. He claims the film

> demonstrates the possibility of what might, simply described, seem impossible, and in showing it in the context of a story that is all too believable – all-too human in its moral and emotional projection, fallibility, and self-serving bias – it provides evidence that this is actually the way the world is. ('Alien Ways of Thinking')

38. Baggini writes: "Philosophy thus *says* while film *shows*, its form of showing being distinct from more literal forms, such as demonstration" ('Alien Ways of Thinking'). Goodenough puts it similarly in reference to *Blade Runner*:

> Film leads us into the lives of the replicants and the humans, and makes us realise that the former are closer to our real life than the latter, and thus it tells us something about ourselves and *our* world. (It approaches the problem cinematically via Wittgenstein's insistence on showing rather than telling.) ('A Philosopher Goes to the Cinema', 23)

39. This is clear enough in Goodenough's account of *Blade Runner*:

> *Blade Runner* does not just make us intellectually aware that the replicants satisfy many possible conditions for personhood. Rather, by sharing this portion of their lives, by seeing their quest for life, the way they relate to each other, by comparing it with Deckard's job of termination, we must inevitably come to *feel* for them, anger, fear, lust at one particular point, and, at the end, perhaps a profound pity and admiration . . . The film allows us to perceive

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> and to feel, to experience what is happening at a deeper and more persuasive level than any mere written account could manage. ('A Philosopher Goes to the Cinema', 4; original emphasis)

40. For Livingston, "some film-makers indeed use the cinematic medium to express philosophical ideas of sufficient complexity to be of interest in the context of philosophical teaching and research" (*Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman*). He cashes out this claim with a detailed and quite compelling reading of Bergman's project in later chapters (see 125–200). For a powerful critique of Livingston's intentionalism, see Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film*, 129–31.
41. Wartenberg writes: "When I say that a film philosophizes, it is really a shorthand expression for stating that the film's makers are the ones who are actually doing philosophy in/on/through film" (*Thinking on Screen*, 12). However, he also allows that film is capable of carrying out a type of thinking that is specifically cinematic. In particular he argues films have the ability to set up thought experiments, writing for instance of "film's deployment of widely recognized and quite standard philosophical techniques – most notably the thought experiment – to justify seeing the artform as capable of philosophical thinking" (136).
42. In *Philosophy of the Film*, which was written well before the current wave of scholarship on film-philosophy, Ian Jarvie puts this slightly differently. He argues that a film's philosophical content is not to be found on the level of authorial intention but rather in the culturally inherited philosophical presuppositions that are unwittingly installed into it via its makers. He writes:

> Why do writers, directors, etc. put philosophy on to film? The answer is simple: they do not. *Philosophy puts itself in their films*. That is to say, behind such a work there always lurk the personal or cultural presuppositions about reality, morality, etc. implicit in our thought and action. One job of philosophy is to expose and to criticize those presuppositions. (26)

43. See Cox and Levine, *Thinking Through Film*, 13–15.
44. Livingston, *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman*, 4–5.
45. Livingston, *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman*, 5.
46. Livingston, *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman*, 23.
47. Mulhall, *On Film*, 3–4.
48. See Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film*, 141.
49. Mulhall, *On Film*, 89.

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50. Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, 112. Sinnerbrink finds another way out of Livingston's dilemma, insisting (surely with great plausibility) that film-philosophers can be understood not as paraphrasing the philosophical content of films, but as advancing philosophical *interpretations* of them (see *New Philosophies of Film*, 132–5).
51. Mulhall, *On Film*, 90.
52. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, xii.
53. This is a way of differentiating my account of film-philosophy from more expansive and pluralist accounts developed by authors such as Sinnerbrink and Steven Rybin. For Sinnerbrink, resistance to the idea of film-philosophy is indicative of a "too-narrow or reductive conception of what counts as philosophy", and an overly "hierarchical" understanding of the "relationship between philosophy and art" (*New Philosophies of Film*, 117). Following Mulhall, he argues films can contribute to philosophy through

> questioning, reflecting, or disclosing through vivid redescription salient aspects of a situation, problem or experience, typically through the artful use of narrative, performance or cinematic presentation (montage, performance, visual style or metafilmic reflection). Film contributes to questioning or rendering problematic the background assumptions that we draw upon in framing specific arguments or making philosophical claims, whether on generally recognized themes or on what we might understand film to be. (133)

While I find these claims compelling, my account of film-philosophy insists more trenchantly on medium specificity. On Sinnerbrink's account, it appears it is not easy to draw a strong or qualitative distinction between the philosophical contributions of films and the philosophical contributions of (say) novels, insofar as both can "disclose novel aspects of experience, question given elements of our practices, and open up new paths for thinking" (141). This is not to say that Sinnerbrink neglects medium: for him it seems that cinema's immersive and affective qualities grant it particular philosophical powers too, by making its world-disclosures more engaging and so potentially more transformative. Once again, I find nothing to disagree with here (except to say that novels can also be immersive and engaging). But I am arguing that cinema has a *distinctive* philosophical propensity born of its connection to problems of knowledge, and its tendency to provoke and rebuke sceptical theorising: a deflationary propensity that can work in concert with the transformative aesthetic and philosophical potentials of works of art in general.

Rybin develops an account of the philosophical significance of

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Malick's cinema in similar terms. Citing Sinnerbrink's claim that Malick's work calls upon film-philosophers "to experiment with the aesthetic disclosure of alternative ways of thinking and feeling, acting and being, in our relations with nature and culture" (Sinnerbrink, 'Re-enfranchising Film', 43; quoted in Rybin, *Terrence Malick and the Thought of Film*, xix), Rybin writes: "In Malick's films, traces of other possible ways of doing and making, and of thinking and feeling, open up for his dedicated viewers an engagement with the philosophical ways of thinking and feeling and doing and making, that we bring to the screen" (xix). It is notable that, in setting up these claims, Rybin weakens the condition of medium specificity. He writes:

> Works of film-philosophy almost always buttress their analyses of favoured filmmakers with speculation on the nature of the film medium, and philosophical aesthetics, more generally, often aims at situating artistic mediums through their timeless essences. But film, an inherently unstable object, resists such efforts. (xvii)

As I argue in the next paragraph, there should be no problem with making strong claims regarding medium specificity while accepting that media 'essences' are not timeless, stable, or ahistorical.

54. For a fascinating treatment of these and related intuitions, see Doane, 'The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity'. Doane writes:

> indexicality has become today the primary indicator of cinematic specificity, that elusive concept that has played such a dominant role in the history of film theory's elaboration, serving to differentiate film from the other arts (in particular, literature and painting) and to stake out the boundaries of a discipline. (129)

55. Falzon, *Philosophy Goes to the Movies*, 12. In this respect, Kiarostami's films are unlike those of someone like Ingmar Bergman, which (as Livingston shows quite convincingly) can be read as the creations of a filmmaker who was concerned to articulate a particular philosophical worldview (see *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman*, 125–60).
56. This is to say that Kiarostami's movies

> 'resist theory', evoking an experience that is aesthetic and reflective . . . Such films communicate an experience of thinking that resists philosophical translation or paraphrase; thus they are films where we encounter what I am calling

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> *cinematic thinking* in its most intensive and dramatic forms. (Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film*, 142)

57. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §118; 41e.
58. Turvey, 'Is Scepticism a "Natural Possibility" of Language?' 119.
59. Wittgenstein, quoted in Turvey, 'Is Scepticism a "Natural Possibility" of Language?' 118.
60. Turvey, 'Is Scepticism a "Natural Possibility" of Language?' 118.
61. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 45.
62. Turvey, 'Is Scepticism a "Natural Possibility" of Language?' 123.
63. Conant, 'Stanley Cavell's Wittgenstein', 63–4.
64. Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', 423.
65. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §71; 29e.
66. Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 82.
67. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §128; 43e.
68. Mulhall, *On Film*, 88.
69. Cavell, 'Declining Decline', 263.
70. Wittgenstein:

> we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. (*Philosophical Investigations*, §109; 40e)

71. The film had a precedent for Kiarostami: *Where is My Romeo?*, a short he made for the 2007 Cannes-commissioned anthology *To Each his Own Cinema*. This film uses the same technique, yet here the women are apparently watching the final scene from Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*.
72. Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories*, 5.
73. The filmography included in *Abbas Kiarostami*, the book co-authored by Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum, concludes in 2003; the one included in Elena's *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* concludes in 2002; Nancy's study of the Iranian director was completed in January of the year 2000; few academic articles have been published to date on *Shirin* and *Certified Copy*; at the time of writing none have been published focussing on *Five* or *Like Someone in Love*; the only article focussing exclusively on *ABC Africa* was an earlier version of the chapter included in this book.
74. Kiarostami's cinema has often been read in neo-realist terms. For one important recent example, see Weinberger, 'Neorealism, Iranian Style'.

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