Skepticism films: Knowing and doubting the world in contemporary cinema
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“Into the great wide open
Under them skies of blue
Out in the great wide open
A rebel without a clue”
Tom Petty, “Into the Great Wide Open”

“Soll ich sagen, der Glaube ist ein Farbton der Gedanken?
Woher diese Idee? Nun, es gibt einen Tonfall des Glaubens,
wie des Zweifels”
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophische Untersuchungen
(Wittgenstein 2005: §578)

6 A Cinema for Believers. Trust, Belief, and the Expulsion from the Paradise of Childhood

6.1 Prelude: When the Bell Tolls
Giancaldo, Sicilia, in the late 1940s. The Second World War is over, but not all soldiers have yet returned to the small Sicilian town close to Palermo. The strade and piazze are predominantly populated by older men, young and old women, and a bunch of little children. The social centre of the community is not the church, but the local cinema – no coincidence it is thus that the external and external structure of the building is highly reminiscent of the house of God. And no coincidence it is that the padre Adelfio (Leopoldo Trieste) dutifully, and most certainly willingly, examines each new film arrival, censoring profane and un-Christian film scenes before the movie is allowed to boost the townsfolk’s’ morale, ringing his little bell every time a couple is seen kissing on the screen. Alfredo (Philippe Noiret), the projectionist, then marks the illicit film scenes to be cut out on the reel, shaking his head sarcastically as he goes along.

Among the many illiterate cinéphiles of the town – for the Giancaldoans of the late 1940s are mostly fishermen, peasants, craftsmen or small farmers – the most enthusiastic of them all is the little boy Salvatore, called Totò by everyone, like the most popular Italian cine-comedians of them all. Alongside his fellow townspeople, Totò lolls in front of the screen almost every afternoon and night, marvelling at it with eyes and mouth wide open, his posture a perfect illustration of the stereotypical emotionally involved child-spectator (or, as Deleuze would perhaps call him, child-seer; see fig. 6.1-6.4).

In the accompanying text of a German DVD release version, the journalist Harald Pauli semi-ironically plays with an alliteration allowed by the German language: He claims that in CINEMA PARADISO the four “k” of the Italian Catholic small-town-community – Kirche, Küche, Kinder, i.e.: Church, Kitchen, Children, or chiesa, cucina, bambini – are enhanced by a fourth “k”: Kino. Verbatim, Pauli writes: “Zu den drei Ks der katholischen Kleingesellschaft kommt neben Kirche, Küche und Kindern noch ein viertes: das Kino. Dort wird geweint und gelacht, mitgefeiert und erschrocken weggeschaut, laut kommentiert und leise geträumt.” (Pauli 2007)
Even more than the moving sounding images projected on the screen, however, Totò loves the projection booth. He is utterly fascinated by the source of the beam of light emitted from the mouth of a lion face at the theatre’s back wall (see fig. 6.5). Peeking through the pigeonhole or sneaking into the projection booth itself, he attentively observes how Alfredo loads the projector with the reel, silently memorising every hand movement performed by the older man and excitedly looking at the film strips left on the cutting table (see fig. 6.6). Here is a boy who certainly loves the cinema.

The film that presents all these small stories of a cinéphile life is, of course, Giuseppe Tornatore’s award-winning NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO (Tornatore, 1989), a nostalgic Italian melodrama which seems to be a cinematic transformation of Stanley Cavell’s aphorism in The World Viewed that “memories of movies are strand over strand
with memories of my life” (Cavell 1979a: xix). 30 years after he left his hometown, the famous film director Salvatore di Vita (Jacques Perrin) returns to Giancaldo in order to attend the funeral for his old friend Alfredo. This visit turns into a stroll down memory lane: Salvatore remembers his childhood and youth at the Cinema Paradiso, whose projectionist he becomes as a little boy when Alfredo goes blind due to injuries sustained during a fatal fire in the old building (during the fire, little Totò saves Alfredo’s life by pulling him out of the burning projection booth). The memories Salvatore is haunted by are not only those of the movies (which are of a rather fond, innocent, happy nature), but also memories of his first love lost, Elena (Agnese Nano), the daughter of a wealthy banker. The young couple lost contact when her parents forced her to move away with them to Tuscany and Salvatore subsequently decided to try his luck in the movie business in Rome.

As much as Cinema Paradiso is a film about the life-changing power of cinema and about unrequited love, it is on a deeper level a film about the consequences of a life lived with and within the cinema. Neither Totò nor Alfredo become really happy in their lives, even though one could say that both of them live, in different ways, fulfilled lives: Day in and day out, Alfredo watches life – the lives screened and the lives lived – passing by in front of his projection booth which faces the screening room as well as Giancaldo’s main square, while he himself does not seem to participate in it. In his place, Totò moves on into the whole wide world and makes his mentor’s dreams come true: to witness the now grown-up boy on the cinema screen instead of in front of it. (However, tragically, Alfredo cannot see Totò or his films anymore after he became blind; he can only hear him). But even Totò does not find real happiness – too grey, too worn is the impression of the aged Salvatore di Vita’s face (played by Jacques Perrin). The sad, even depressed face of adult Salvatore poses a stark contrast to the excited and impish face of little Totò (Salvatore Cascio) and the intense, melancholic face of teenage Totò (Marco Leonardi) (compare fig. 6.1 to 6.4, 6.7 and 6.8).

So, in a way the cinema paradiso (as a Stellvertreter for cinema in toto) has not been kind to either of them: It leaves the older protagonist blinded and scarred (“you end up with egg on your face,” Alfredo says, timecode: 01:02:26), and the younger one has not

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184 Giancaldo is a fictional town supposedly reminiscent of Tornatore’s hometown Bagheria. The film was shot across several small villages in the region of Palermo, Palazzo Adriano being the main location.

185 As the attentive cinéphile knows, Alfredo plays his part in the outcome of these events, refraining from telling Totò that his girlfriend came by the projectionist’s booth to leave an address just before she moved away. The original theatrical release does not explicitly reintroduce Elena after her sudden disappearance; here, Totò can be said to have lost her for the rest of his life (even though in the credit sequence she can be spotted standing among the congregation of mourners during the funeral service for Alfredo, leaving open the possibility that they might spot each other). The director’s cut, however, adds an entire 30-minute-long sequence, in which Totò finds Elena again after he returns to Giancaldo. Now a mother of two children, Elena lives a satisfied though not entirely happy life as the wife of a local politician, one of Totò’s former classmates and mutual rival for Elena’s heart. Their temporary reunion results in a passionate love night and in their mutual discovery that Alfredo has, by lying to both of them, hindered their last teenage reunion for the sake of Totò’s shining future as a famous filmmaker. Even though Elena claims to share Alfredo’s sentiment that with her, he would never have become the filmmaker he is, it is clear that for both of them their lives have, in an important sense, not entirely been lived, because it was a life lived without the other. A conversation between Alfredo and Totò shortly before the boy’s decision to return to seek fame in Rome reveals the reasoning behind Alfredo’s deception to the spectator. The old man says that “each of us has a star to follow” (timecode: 01:52:01), implying that it is the unfulfilled desires or dreams that keep a man going to reach other things in his life (as if in passing).

186 Alfredo, of course, knows this. In the deciding conversation he uses to convince Totò to find his happiness in Rome instead of on the island, he says: “I don’t want to hear you anymore. I want to hear about you!” (timecode 01:54:50)
found happiness in the movie business, running from one woman he does not love to the next, always trying to find in them the one woman he has lost. For both of them, Alfredo’s penultimate lesson rings true: “Life is not what you see in films. Life is much harder” (timecode: 01:54:33). Cinema may stir up dreams, incite them, nourish them, but at the end of the day (and at the end of life) a life lived in and with the movies has the bitter-sweet taste of escapism; it does not seem to be a life fully lived.  

This theme of cinema’s ambivalence is at the heart of the present chapter on Deleuze’s well-known thesis that “[r]estoring our belief in the world […] is the power of modern cinema” (Deleuze 1989: 166). The preceding reflections on Tornatore’s NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO will form the background for assessing Deleuze’s thesis, and I will repeatedly return to discussing aspects of the film.

6.2 Trust or Belief in the World in and Through Cinema

In Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema, the decoupling of impressions or perceptions from their correlated sensory-motor reactions and actions is constitutive for the emergence of the so-called time-image – a kind of cinematic expression in which time no longer follows actions (in the world, understood as movements) but becomes an isomorphic expression of its own:

“‘Time is out of joint’: it is off the hinges assigned to it by behavior in the world, but also by movements in the world. It is no longer time that depends on movement; it is aberrant movement that depends on time.” (Deleuze 1989: 39)

On the level of narrative, film characters cease to be agents and become “pure seers” (Deleuze 1989: 39) instead. As Robert Sinnerbrink puts it in New Philosophies of Film, a “new cinema of ‘the seer’ replaces the old cinema of the agent” (Sinnerbrink 2011: 96; he refers to formulations in Deleuze 1989: 2)  

Deleuze discusses a variety of real-life and cinematic examples for the time-image. Among them are filmic situations which involve dream states, near-death states, lack of focus – in all of them the (alleged) direct link between a living (and experiencing) human being and the world (out there) is distorted, disrupted or even broken (see Deleuze 1989: chapter 3), and which are presented in cinema in many different forms. From that

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187 Again, Tornatore faces his audience explicitly with the issue of love lost and found. During a conversation late into the film, his mother tells adult Totò why she did not remarry – being still young and a beautiful woman – after her first husband’s death: “I remained faithful, first to your father, and then to you and Lia [Totò’s younger sister, PS]. It’s the way I am, what can I do? And you’re like me. You’re too attached to the past. I am not sure if it’s a good thing. Fidelity brings loneliness. [...] When I phone you, it’s a different woman every time. [...] But I haven’t yet heard the voice of someone who really loves you. I can tell, you know. All the same, I’d like to see you settling down, in love with someone. But your life is there [in Rome]. Here there are only ghosts. Let go, Totò” (timecode: 02:13:33-02:18:20) Needless to say that in the next scene Totò goes to Elena’s house and manages to meet her again.

188 A note of caution: This chapter does not aim at an exegesis of Deleuze’s “kinematic philosophy” (Mullarkey 2009: 78); rather, it uses snippets of it as a source of inspiration for reflecting on the theme of trust or belief in the world in the context of the present inquiry into skepticism films and into the general issue of film and (as) philosophy. I am not a trained Deleuze scholar and therefore not in command of the vast amount of research in Deleuze studies. Therefore I dare the reader to read this chapter as a kind of prolegomenon for future skepticism and skepticism films-related inquiries into Deleuze’s work on cinema as restoring, qua croyance, the link between man and world.

189 In chapter 2 of his monograph Deleuze and World Cinemas, David Martin-Jones writes extensively on the child-seer in Deleuze’s cinema books (see Martin-Jones 2011). A reinterpretation of the child-seer in contemporary Italian cinema can be found in Paul Sutton’s article “The Bambino Negato or Missing Child of Contemporary Italian cinema” (Sutton 2005).
perspective, I suggest, the time-image can be characterised as an anomaly of ordinary human life in at least two respects. Not only do the forms of the time-image constitute direct “presentations of time” (Deleuze 1989: 39), which, as Deleuze repeatedly claims, is possible in this form only in cinema, it also means that the cinematic time-image is an anomaly as compared to ordinary experience. This resonates with a formulation by Jean-Louis Schefer Deleuze explicitly refers to: “[C]inema is the sole experience where time is given to me as a perception” (Deleuze 1989: 35).

Time-image situations are also situations that do not correspond to the ‘worldly’ sensory-motor schema: For instance, in dreams the dreamer experiences situations to which she (qua dreaming state) believes to actually react – but in fact she is lying asleep in her bed, moving only involuntarily. This is a situation Deleuze pays a great deal of attention to. Dying people, too, are not entirely ‘of’ or ‘in’ this world anymore but instead moving through a Netherlands to which none of the still living has access to.¹⁹⁰

In short, as a “direct” presentation of duration the time-image is anomalous, and it is anomalous because what is presented with it is anomalous in regard to “ordinary” waking life situations.¹⁹¹

The reason for marking the time-image as anomalous (and not as a normal state of the world) is that this allows understanding it as an ambivalent image form of cinema. Deleuze claims that it is modern cinema – his source of examples for time-images par excellence – and not simply cinema per se that is able to restore belief in the world. And because of that the ambivalence of the time-image can be applied to the medium’s restorative capacities as well. As an anomaly, the time-image’s restoration of belief in the world is also ambivalent because what it restores belief in is a state of (or at least perception of) the world to which the spectator is not able to return after leaving the movie theatre. This is one of the reasons why the cinema paradiso helps neither Totò nor Alfredo much in finding happiness in ‘real’ life. And Deleuze makes clear that life, and love, is of crucial importance for him:

“To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but

¹⁹⁰ Even though Deleuze distinctly locates the appearance of the time-image in the emergence of what he calls modern cinema (the cinema of Godard, Resnais, Ozu, and others), he states clearly that the "direct time-image is the phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom" (Deleuze 1989: 42). Sinnerbrink insightfully recognises that Deleuze’s notions about the “difference between pre- and post-War cinema” echo earlier remarks by Cavell on the "end of myths" in cinema after the Second World War, which by Cavell is described in terms of a “loss of conviction in our presentness to the world.” (Sinnerbrink 2011: 113). On the influence of the 1968 revolution on Deleuze’s exclusive attention to film pre-1968, see Mullarkey 2009: 104ff. Curiously, Cavell and Deleuze share a selective approach: Cavell’s film body of reference mainly derives from the film-historical period of so-called “Classical Hollywood Cinema”.

¹⁹¹ Deleuze repeatedly claims that modern cinema “implies the collapse of the sensory-motor schema” (Deleuze 1989: 233, see also ibid.: 122ff., 167ff., 192, 205f., 221): “Now, from its first appearances, something different happens in what is called modern cinema [...] What has happened is that the sensory-motor schema is no longer in operation, but at the same time it is not overtaken or overcome. It is shattered from the inside. That is, perceptions and actions ceased to be linked together, and spaces are now neither coordinated nor filled [as is the case in the movement-image, PS]. Some characters, caught in certain pure optical and sound situations, find themselves condemned to wander about or go off on a trip. These are pure seers, who no longer exist except in the interval of movement […] ‘Time is out of joint’: […] It is no longer time that depends on movement; it is aberrant movement that depends on time. The relation, sensory-motor situation -> indirect image of time is replaced by a non-localizable relation, pure optical and sound situation -> direct time-image. Opsigns and sonsigns are direct presentations of time.” (Deleuze 1989: 39; my emphases, PS). For a definition of opsigns and sonsigns, see appendix B of Pisters 2003: 231.
be thought [...] It is this belief that makes the unthought the specific power of the absurd, by virtue of the absurd” (Deleuze 1989: 164)¹⁹²

Ironically, for Deleuze modern cinema simultaneously constitutes the rupturing in the link between man and world, replacing it by a ‘mere’ belief in the world: “modern cinema develops new relations with thought from three points of view[, among them]: [...] the erasure of the unity of man and the world, in favour of a break which now leaves us with only a belief in this world.” (Deleuze 1989: 181) Modern cinema puts on display in the very first place the existential wound it then promises to heal. Nota bene: Belief in the world qua cinema here is described by Deleuze as a belief in a link between man and the world, which amounts to saying: We may not know that there is a link between the two, but we are led to believe that it is so.¹⁹³

The thesis put to the test in this chapter is that one can understand the broken link between man and world – this specifically Deleuzian loss of belief which allegedly only cinema is able to restore – as a kind of anomaly of ordinary life, which in the cinema is, first, put on display, i.e. screened, but which is, second, precisely because of its anomalous character something that can be healed, or only temporary.¹⁹⁴ Tied back to the problem of skepticism investigated in the preceding chapters: While the Cartesian or some other skepticist walk through life burdened with a fundamental suspicion against the human position in or against the world, and while they distil their skepticist lament from this mistrust, the Deleuzian loss of belief is, as it were, a passing thing – just like Hume, Deleuze’s early intellectual sparring partner, left his skepticist musings at the desk in order to join Edinburgh’s or London’s vibrant social life. Cinema’s Deleuzian restoration of belief in the world is thus not, literally speaking, an anti-skepticist move, because the broken link is not seen as an intrinsic part of the condition humaine.

Returning once again to NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO, the film seems to take up the ambivalence outlined above. It allows two apparently counter-directional perspectives on the way in which the cinema can restore (or, in a weaker formulation, establish) a link between man and world: One way is the perspective of the child, which at the movies gains a kind of belief in the world that is directed at the possibilities (adult) life and the world in general hold in store for it. Metaphorically speaking, the cinema paradiso (the institution as well as the medium) is a kind of cavern to which the (now grown-up) child returns after its expulsion from the paradise of childhood – only to see that the cinema, too, has aged with the child, has grown old and grey, dusty and fragile – and yet the (cinematic) paradise of childhood lives on in some of the favourite past films scenes as an emotionally involving memory image. The latter point constitutes the second perspective of the adult whose belief in the world has been shaken or shattered, and who regains, or hopes to regain, his or her belief in the world by returning to the (memories of) cinema.

¹⁹² This actually leaves open whether the world fulfils whatever cinema makes believe.
¹⁹³ In The Neuro-Image, Patricia Pisters analyses how David Hume’s probabilistic epistemology of knowledge as matters of degree influences Deleuze’s own approach. Deleuze effectively champions an “epistemology of probabilities”. See Pisters 2012: chapter 5. On Deleuze’s incorporation of Hume in his philosophy, see also Jeffrey Bell’s study Deleuze’s Hume (Bell 2009).
¹⁹⁴ From this perspective, mainstream cinema’s tendency towards happy endings does not appear all too surprising.
These are exactly the movements undertaken in NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO: the cinéphile (Totò) returns to the quintessential site of his childhood as an aging man, only to find this site in ruins, covered by cobwebs and dust. The once growling lion in front of the projection booth has turned into a shattered dusty remnant (compare fig. 6.9 and 6.10), the eroticism of Brigitte Bardot in ET DIEU ... CRÉA LA FEMME (Vadim, 1956) has given way to soft-pornographic “trasgressioni erotiche” (compare fig. 6.11 and 6.12), and the little boy in short pants, who had to balance on a chair while trying to peek into the projection booth, has grown into an aging adult man wearing a grey trench coat (compare fig. 6.13 and 6.14).

But still, even though for Totò his memories have literally turned to dust, it is not by accident that in the concluding scene of the film it is the “Kissing Reel” that at last gives him back an access to his memories of a childhood past, and which restores a link to his own emotions, his fond relationship to Alfredo and, last but not least, into the power of cinema itself: The Kissing Reel is an edited sequence which contains a number of the kissing scenes Alfredo has to remove at the request of padre Adelfio, some of which little Totò already witnessed on the silver screen in secret while peeking through the curtains of the back entrance (see fig. 6.1).\footnote{It is not without irony that the only persons to witness these innocent erotic transgressions back then, in the}

\textbf{The Kissing Reel}
Even though NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO portrays it as an ambivalent affair, cinema is, then, able to restore the broken link between man and the world, and in this case it is the link between the grown-up boy and his desires, wishes and other emotions which earlier in life incited him to go out and conquer the world.

The choice of such a particular, peculiar sequence – a sequence full of kisses – is, of course, also in a second sense entirely not accidental: The one event that divides childhood from adulthood is the advent of love as the erotic desire of another person, and it is more often than not already preannounced to the child not only in everyday life but by the world of cinema, which is populated by happy and unhappy lovers. This might not always be the case, but for Totò this interpretation rings true because he grows up as a half-orphan who does not even remember his father (who died on the Russian front), as the son of a woman who does not remarry and who grows up in a Catholic society that sanctions public displays of erotic affection. The kissing scenes are, seen from that perspective, yet another announcement of the promises that life beyond childhood holds for the cinéphile child.196

6.3 Cartesianism Revisited: Resonances between Cavell and Deleuze

All the themes touched upon so far resonate in Stanley Cavell’s philosophy of film as well – a philosophy which, as has been claimed in chapter 5 already, is essentially a philosophy of the ontological implications of the experience and memory of films. In the first pages of The World Viewed, Cavell outlines his own expulsion from the paradise of cinema, but in this case it is marked by the moment in which he loosens his experiences and memories of the movies out of their embedding in everyday life and begins reflecting on them philosophically (see Cavell 1979a: xix-xxv). By this, Cavell simultaneously removes the cinema as a ‘natural’ part of his life. Cavell distances himself from cinema through a self-inflicted estrangement, resulting in a broken emotional link between the two. He then goes on asking, pre-sounding many passages we can later find in Deleuze’s second cinema book almost verbatim: “What broke my natural relation to movies? What was that relation, that its loss seemed to demand repairing, or commemorating, by taking thought?” (Cavell 1979a: xix)

For Sinnerbrink, the

“shared problematica [of Deleuze and Cavell] involves the question of the relationship between film and philosophy. For both thinkers, philosophy and film engage with problems – in particular, scepticism and nihilism – that cut across cultural, aesthetic and ethico-political domains. Both thinkers also argue that philosophy cannot merely be

1940s, are a Catholic priest, a ten-year-old-boy, and the quintessentially invisible man of the cinema, the projectionist. The only element left out of the four “k” of Italian small-town society mentioned earlier seems to be the kitchen. However, in one of the censoring scenes an older woman can be seen sweeping the floor, so she can be taken as the figure representing the governess of the kitchen in this reactionary model of society: a housewife.

196 Interestingly, the film’s display of Catholicism once again leads back to Deleuze’s second cinema book, where he declares that there “is a Catholic quality to Cinema” (Deleuze 1989: 165). In Vertrauen in die Welt. Eine Philosophie des Films Josef Früchtl uses Deleuze’s quasi-theological claim as the starting point for his critical re-evaluation of Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema. See Früchtl 2013: chapter 1, in particular 19-22 and 32-37; see also ibid.: 92ff.

197 Indeed, it is an interesting question to determine how familiar Deleuze was with Cavell’s work, since the World Viewed was first published in 1971, while the first Cinema book was published in 1983.
‘applied’ to film as its object; rather, film and philosophy enter into a *transformative* relationship that opens up new ways of thinking.” (Sinnerbrink 2011: 102)

In another summarising statement, Sinnerbrink says that “[c]inema is philosophical, for both Deleuze and Cavell, because of the way it retrieves the ordinary and fosters the creation of new perspectives or modes of existence.” (Sinnerbrink 2011: 90) Cavell and Deleuze, then, both regard the relation between film and philosophy as existential (compare chapter 5).

It is worth the while to highlight the *problematiques* shared by both philosophers by looking closer at some of the reasons for Deleuze’s philosophical appreciation of cinema: his reversal and outright rejection of the Cartesian tradition of modern philosophy.

The beginning of chapter 8 in *Cinema 2*, “Cinema, Body and Brain, Thought,” highlights clearly the gulf that divides Deleuze’s philosophical approach from the Cartesian, rationalist tradition:

“‘Give me a body then’: this is the formula of philosophical reversal. The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life. Life will no longer be made to appear before the categories of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life. The categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures. […] To think is to learn what a non-thinking body is capable of, its capacity, its postures. It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought.” (Deleuze 1989: 182)

Where Godard and de Rougemont say, in chapter 3: give me a hand then, Deleuze claims: Give me a body then. As much as the quoted passage oscillates between clear and obscure formulations, one should highlight four aspects:

First, Deleuze seeks to overcome the body-mind schism so virulent in philosophy, not only in modern philosophy since Descartes, but also already in Plato’s Theory of Forms, which both regard the human body as an obstacle on the road to philosophical truth or wisdom. For Deleuze, *res extensa* and *res cogitans* do not occupy separate metaphysical realms. As Deleuze states it above, “[t]he body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking.”

Deleuze reverses the traditional direction of philosophical thought: The philosopher should not try to get rid of the corporeal as a negligible impediment to philosophical truth, but on the contrary has to find a way to include it in her (way of) thinking. Philosophy is no longer an activity for incorporeal substances (envatted brains, as you will), but something that is done *through* the body (whatever the ‘body’ is, exactly). To freely borrow a well-known catchphrase from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, it is a

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198 Still, however, as claimed in chapter 3.1, Cavell implicitly presupposes the philosopher as the patron of film-as-philosophy.

199 Deleuze’s claim is a direct retort to Plato’s Socrates so influential position that the true aim of the philosopher is to leave his body because it is a mere obstacle on the way to attain pure knowledge (Phaidon, 66e-67e). The attack on Platonism and Rationalism is a constant element in Deleuze’s philosophical thought.
“philosophy in the flesh”. This already precludes the march into a Cartesian egocentric predicament.

Second, this has consequences for the character and purpose of philosophical thought:

“It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Life will no longer be made to appear before the categories of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life.”

The goal is thus no longer a kind of philosophical insight that abstracts from matters of the body, but something that takes the body into account (whatever that precisely means). Deleuze claims that the body per se does not “think” (this is still the task of mental activity), but is nevertheless an indispensable part of processes of thought. For Deleuze, the goal is to reach “the unthought, that is life” (my emphasis). Any philosophy that abstracts from bodily matters is, then, a philosophy unfulfilled.

Third, Deleuze takes care not to present the body as a mere medium of thought in the sense of a mere transparent carrier for mental activity, or as a hierarchically equal but other form of thinking (“It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) […]”). Corporeal factors, in other words, influence the nature of philosophical thought.

Fourth, in this Deleuzian philosophical web of thoughts, cinema assumes a special role for reorienting the character of philosophical thought:

“To think is to learn what a non-thinking body is capable of, its capacity, its postures. It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought.”

The delicate details of Deleuze’s position need not concern here; the important point is that, again, Deleuze repositions the function of the body for philosophical thought: It is no mere transparent carrier for mental activity, but instead kind of retroacts with thinking and thereby influences the character and direction of what is thought. And cinema “forms its alliance […] with thought” through the body. In other words: Cinema in its philosophical mode is, too, not a mere carrier for a kind of spiritual, non-corporeal activity, but uses the body (of its film characters and the affected spectators) as a way of expressing philosophical thought on screen.

Film philosophy à la Deleuze, then, penultimately is about life, but about a life that includes corporeal matters (and not only the realm of purely spiritual, disembodied, perennial ideas). This emphasis on “life” constitutes another area of overlap between Cavell and Deleuze, even though methodologically they differ profoundly in the way they approach their issues (and, despite his idiosyncratic writing style, Cavell does not come along with an overblown metaphysical apparatus like Deleuze does, but is rather firmly rooted in the pragmatist line of thinking so characteristic of ordinary-language philosophy). As has been noted before in chapter 2, in his essay “The Thought of Movies” Cavell understands philosophy

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200 See Lakoff and Johnson 1999.
201 On egocentric predicaments see chapters 4 and 5.
202 Again, this is a direct retort to Plato’s Theory of Forms.
“as a willingness to think not about something other than what ordinary human beings think about, but rather to learn to think undistractedly about things that ordinary human beings cannot help thinking about, or anyway cannot help having occur to them, sometimes in fantasy, sometimes as a flash across a landscape.” (Cavell 2005 [1983]: 92)

Ted Guyer and Paul Cohen add to this, in their introduction to Cavell’s philosophy of film, that

“[w]e take most films seriously, as we take most other forms of art seriously, not just because they demonstrate or manipulate aesthetically intriguing formalisms but because they are about life, the same life that our philosophies and our day-to-day thought is about. And what this life is about is the problem of knowing and acknowledging its own limitations.” (Cohen and Guyer 1993: 6f., my emphasis)

In the introduction of Cities of Words, Cavell highlights his intricate correlation of philosophy and life through the lens of film perhaps most explicitly: “[F]ilm, the latest of the great arts, shows philosophy to be the often invisible accompaniment of the ordinary lives that film is so apt to capture” (Cavell 2004: 6). In a recent essay on cinematic skepticism in the films of Abbas Kiarostami, Matthew Abbott also implicitly outlines the similarities between Cavell and Deleuze:

“For Cavell, we go to the movies to 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 skepticism. Film allows us to view the world, to take views of it. Film toys with, exasperates, undermines, and restores our faith in it.” (Abbott 2013: 171, the first emphasis is mine, PS)\(^\text{223}\)

Hence for both Deleuze and Cavell philosophy is ultimately about life, even though they use the term differently, and cinema is one of the lenses that allow the philosopher to reach through to it. This is also how Patricia Pisters, in her book The Neuro-Image, interprets the Deleuzian position, assigning to Deleuze a vitalistic metaphysics of spiritual choice:

“the alternatives are not between terms (such as good or bad) but between modes of existence of the one who chooses. The true spiritual choice is choosing choice (choosing that you have a choice) or choosing that you have no choice” (Pisters 2012: 32).

As we will see in section 6.4 below, Cavell and Deleuze evaluate the shared \textit{problematique} of the human relation with the world in divergent ways. With Josef Früchtl (and Sinnerbrink) one can claim that in Cavell, this problem is spelt out in terms of \textit{skepticism}, while Deleuze reflects on it as a problem of \textit{nihilism} (Sinnerbrink, see quote above), in short: as a genuinely metaphysical problem (Früchtl 2013: 17, and ibid.: chapter 1). Where for Cavell the crucial concept is “acknowledgment” as a form or quasi-transcendental precondition of knowledge, for Deleuze the crucial concept is “croyance,” belief as a substitute for knowledge, a direct result of the need “to replace the model of knowledge with belief” (Deleuze 1989: 166).

\(^{223}\) This resonates, of course, with the themes of ontological and temporal absence outlined in chapter 5.2ff.
6.4 Four Ways of Restoring “la Croyance au Monde”

Let us take a closer look again at Deleuze’s claim that modern cinema has the power to restore our belief in the world. There is a macroscopic layer and several microscopic layers to this claim: On a macroscopic scale, Deleuze’s strategy of explicating the problematic man-world relation via the time-image results in a recommendation to “follow the skepticist epoché concerning judgments and actions” (Früchtl 2013: 17204).

In contrast, Cavell in an affirmative way advances the “thesis that film is a form of trust, of being in love with the world, insofar as it, on the one hand, […] delivers, specifically as a medium of movement, ‘acknowledgement’ of subjectivity and of the modern era. On the other hand, film as well as the arts in general deliver a kind of acknowledgement, insofar as the aesthetic sentiment of fitting-into-the-world […] is a sentiment, or rather an attitude, or even better: a practice of trust.” (Früchtl 2013: 17205)

Belief vs. trust: While Deleuze presents a heavily metaphysics-infested account; Cavell delivers a pragmatist solution to the problematique of the link between man and world.

Deleuzian belief (croyance) explicitly bears religious undertones; Deleuze marks it as a form of religious belief, or even as a kind of cult, when he writes that “[t]here is a catholic quality to cinema” (Deleuze 1989: 165) and suggests: “Is there not in Catholicism a grand mise-en-scène, but also, in the cinema, a cult which takes over the circuit of the cathedrals, as [the French art historian] Elie Faure said?” (Deleuze 1989: 165) We will get back to this shortly.

In his recent book Vertrauen in die Welt Josef Früchtl develops a philosophy of film that revolves around the formula of trust in the world and thereby critically renegotiates the Deleuzian formula of “croyance au monde,” belief in the world. Roughly, Früchtl aims at a symbiosis of Deleuze’s position with Stanley Cavell’s notion of acknowledgement. Like Deleuze, Früchtl recognises that cinema does not so much convey trust in the world, but trust in the modern world, into Modernity (see Früchtl 2013: 11).

What I am interested in here is the peculiar interrelation between the correlated concepts of belief and trust. As much as both concepts overlap and are entangled with one another, Früchtl’s diagnosis shows that the aphorism of “falling in love with the world” marks the differences between both: Belief or faith is a matter of the subject, in the sense of “I believe in you” or “I believe in something,” an attitude not necessarily directed at a world shared with others, an attitude with (particularly in Deleuze’s formulation) profoundly religious connotations (see above). In fact, even though the English translation of Deleuze’s Cinema books tends to use the term “belief,” what

204 German original text: “der skeptischen Urteils- und Handlungsenthaltung zu folgen”.

205 German original text: “[Am Ende steht] die These, dass der Film insofern eine Form des Vertrauens, der Weltverliebtetheit ist, als er zum einen […] spezifisch als Bewegungsmedium eine „Anerkennung“ von Subjektivität und Moderne leistet, und zum anderen, ebenso wie die Kunst allgemein, eine Anerkennung von Welt leistet, sofern das ästhetische Gefühl des In-die-Welt-Passens […] ein Gefühl oder besser eine Einstellung oder besser noch eine Praxis des Vertrauens ist.”

206 Let it be noted that the concepts of “trust” and “acknowledgement” play an important role in current cultural theory and sociology, such as in Axel Honneth’s studies Kampf um Anerkennung: Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte (Honneth 2010) and Verdinglichung. Eine anerkennungstheoretische Studie (Honneth 2005) and in Martin Hartmanns Die Praxis des Vertrauens (Hartmann 2011). See Früchtl 2013: 203, 218ff.
Deleuze talks about is actually a version of “faith”. Trust, on the other hand, essentially seems to be an attitude directed at a world shared with others, a matter of being-with-someone, or being-with-others. Put prosaically, trust means closing one’s eyes and falling asleep on the passenger seat in the certainty that the driver will steer you safely towards your mutual goal. It is a form of letting go. As such it is an ontological-existential attitude.

As Früchtl argues, the Deleuzian project of cinematic belief-restoration is only possible in the context of the occidental negation of the world, “Weltverneinung” (Früchtl 2013: 11), which is historically influenced by Platonic Idealism, Cartesian Methodological skepticism, and by the experience of a rupture in civilisation (“Zivilisationsbruch[…],” ibid.) during the two world wars. Thus the Deleuzian project depends on the occidental intellectual tradition to which Deleuze is opposed so often (see chapter 6.3): “That cinema can be seen in the perspective of restoring belief in the world – this is only possible because of Christian eschatology and Cartesian epistemology.” (Früchtl 2013: 27) And this attitude of world negation is associated with a way of life: “In this sense, the occidental form of life has not developed a culture of trust” (Früchtl 2013: 12).

Früchtl contrasts this with the “ontological affirmation” (ibid.) strongly elicited in the arts by aesthetic evidence or presence – an experience that there is something we experience, regardless of what exactly its content is. If belief or trust is an attitude (“Einstellung”), and if that attitude (partially?) becomes the model which replaces the concept of knowledge, then – using Früchtl’s terminology once again – the belief or trust conveyed by cinema (and other arts) functions not so much as an ontological-epistemological bridge across the gap between man and world but rather an ontological-existential one. In knowledge there is no choice, one either knows or doesn’t. In epistemological models, accepting or rejecting knowledge is a secondary step: One may decide to refuse to know only with the knowledge that in fact one does know (or does not know). But if knowledge is replaced by belief or trust, then attitude (as “Einstellung”) becomes the relevant factor. For Früchtl, trust in the world can assume the form of an as if attitude, and thereby becomes an aesthetic attitude: “Trust in the world is […] an as if attitude. Aesthetic experiences affirm our ways of behaving as if we can have trust in the world. This is their ontological merit.” (Früchtl 2013: 14) We behave as if we can have trust in the world. This is a more precise reformulation as well as development of Deleuze’s thesis.

Roughly following Deleuze, Früchtl distinguishes at least four possibilities according to which cinema might be able to “restore” the lost belief in the world: First, to present the relation between humans and the world as one of endless conjunctions of things in the world – even though the intrinsic link between them is broken, they can enter
“infinite” (Früchtl 2013: 33) connections (think of the innovative conjunctions of kissing scenes in NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO).

Second, one may conceptualise the man-world relation as one of a game, expressed in the “as if” attitude outlined above. Just like cinema invites us to make-believe in the fictional world it presents, this attitude can be used for assessing the relation between man and world in general.\footnote{211} The as-if attitude is perhaps most pertinent in little children such as Totò, but it can also be taken up by adults. (Früchtl opens his book with a discussion of the as-if attitude of the main character in Michelangelo Antonioni’s BLOW UP (Antonioni, 1966). See section 6.5 below.)

The third option is to assert the autonomy of the medium against doubt. For Früchtl, Deleuze here refers himself as a “typically modernist aesthetician” (Früchtl 2013: 35) because he assigns modern art with the task of distancing itself from the traditional concept of mimesis

“insofar as this concept is calibrated to the imitation of nature as natura naturata […] In the art of modernity, the relation between I and world is […] neither managed through a third instance (such as similarity) nor through the order of ideas or signs themselves, nor through idealistic subjectivity in its epistemological form” (Früchtl 2013: 35).\footnote{212}

The autonomy solution aims at dissolving reference in favour of self-reference: “The less the I […] leers at the world, the less it emphasizes the dimension of reference, the closer it comes to the world” (Früchtl 2013: 36).\footnote{213} In other words: The third alternative amounts to a retreat from the world in order to get closer to it (since the less significance the question of correspondence between man or the subject and the world assumes, the less it can become a problem). We will come across this dimension of self-reference again in part III, particularly in the comparative analysis of skepticism films about self-knowledge: When doubt becomes self-referential, the alleged gap between man and world falls out of the equation.\footnote{214}

The fourth strategy advanced by Früchtl’s reading of Deleuze (see Früchtl 2013: 32ff.) has been addressed already in chapter 5: Thinking through the problem under the perspective of skepticism, and finding the answer in Cavell’s stance of acknowledgement.

\footnote{211} Here, Früchtl refers to Kendall Walton’s work on mimesis as make-believe (see Früchtl 2013: 34; and Walton 1990).

\footnote{212} German original text: “sofern dieses Konzept auf die Nachahmung der Natur als natura naturata geeicht ist […] Die Beziehung zwischen Ich und Welt wird in der Kunst der Moderne […] weder über eine dritte Instanz (wie zum Beispiel die der Ähnlichkeit) noch über die Ordnung der Ideen oder Zeichen selbst, noch über die idealistische Subjektivität in ihrer epistemologischen Fassung geregelt”.

\footnote{213} German original text: “Je weniger das Ich […] auf die Welt hin schielt, je weniger es die Referenzdimension betont, je mehr es Selbstreferenz betreibt, desto näher kommt ihm die Welt.”

\footnote{214} This option circles around the obvious apparent paradox of (fiction) film: How can an art form that provides us “with the fiction and illusion of a world,” (Früchtl 2013: 22) give back to us belief in the world, or even: give back to us our belief in the world exactly because it provides fictions and illusions of a world (see ibid.)? Früchtl’s Deleuzian answer is based on the assumption that fictions (and pre-eminentely the fictions screened by cinema) function as an antidote to the modern occidental world-negating attitude. They provide ontological affirmation in the face of epistemological negativity. Invoking Deleuze’s second Cinema book again, Früchtl discusses three main venues of cinematic ontological affirmation: Belief in the absurd, belief in the body, and belief through skepsis. The first move is to embrace the very rupture or gap between the subject and the world (see Früchtl 2013: 28f.), and to understand belief as an essentially non-rational attitude. The second move is, broadly speaking, to embrace the (affective) experience provided by cinema (and the arts in general). The third and perhaps most complex way of understanding this belief restoration process is discussed in the present chapter 6.4.
Here, Früchtl again sees a decisive difference between Cavell and Deleuze: The former presents

“a philosophy of cinema [...] which does not call for salvation. Deleuze entirely thinks under the spell of Christianity and Cartesianism. Because of that he must and wants to be delivered [from it]. With Cavell and all the other pragmatists one is able to dismiss this grand gesture.” (Früchtl 2013: 37)

And here we come full circle again: Trust – as a concept associated with sharing a world, as suggested above – is the deciding concept for thinking about the relation between man and world:

“Because we [...] always have to rely on something, even though we do not know whether we can rely on it; since in this sense we always have to believe in the world, film as well as every aesthetic experience presents us the world – a world which has returned from its epistemological split-up – in the ambivalent mode of the as-if. Not more, like Deleuze, the metaphysician of time, wants to have it, but also not less.” (Früchtl 2013: 37)

Thus, Früchtl presses for a basically pragmatist solution to Deleuze’s problem which has no need of the metaphysical burdens inflicted on Deleuze’s own answer.

6.5 **NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO Revisited: The Child’s Expulsion from the Paradise of Cinema**

With this overview of different strategies for cinematic restoration of belief in the world let us return, once again, to the primal scene of NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO; this time in order to understand it better as a recurrent theme of cinema in general: The child in the cinema seat, staring at the screen with eyes and mouth wide open (see fig. 6.1 to 6.4). Cinema history is full of such images of spectators lost in reverie. To name a few: SHERLOCK JR. (Keaton and Arbuckle, 1924), HUGO (Scorsese, 2011), THE CIDER HOUSE RULES (Hallström, 1999), THE MAJESTIC (Darabont, 2001), THE GREEN MILE (Darabont, 1999); all of them films in which huge child’s eyes (or child-like adults) stare secretly or not-secretly at what happens on the screen. All these scenes reveal, again, the ambivalence of cinematically mediated belief in the world: The cinema as the site of cinematic procurement of belief is also a site that is cut off from the rest of the world, from the rest of life, at least during the film screening in a darkened room with closed doors which keep out the noises and lights of everyday life. Film theory’s recurring

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216 German original text: “Da wir uns […] immer auf etwas verlassen müssen, auch wenn wir nicht wissen, ob wir uns darauf verlassen können; da wir in diesem Sinne also immer an die Welt glauben müssen, präsentiert uns der Film, wie jede ästhetische Erfahrung, die aus der epistemologischen Aufspaltung zurückgekehrte Welt im ambivalenten Modus des Als-ob. Nicht mehr, wie Deleuze als Zeitmetaphysiker es möchte, aber auch nicht weniger.”

217 Strikingly, Früchtl’s pragmatist Deleuzian answer shares a family relation with analytic-philosophical attempts at solving the ‘problem’ of skepticism. Particularly Barry Stroud attempts to immunise basic beliefs, i.e. beliefs that are indispensable for the formulation of skepticist doubt at all (see chapter 4). This shows again that the so-called continental and analytic traditions have more in common than usually admitted.

218 However, one should not forget cinema history’s equally numerous traumatic primal scenes: the punishment of Alex in CLOCKWORK ORANGE (Kubrick, 1971), agonic Pre-Cogs witnessing future crimes in MINORITY REPORT (Spielberg, 2002), or the horrifying intra-cerebral snuff films in STRANGE DAYS (Bigelow, 1995).
analogies between the darkened cinema room and the Platonic Cave are not by accident.\footnote{Cinema’s escapist function is a well-established research topic. E.g., for an account of the role of movie theaters in the German ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ era, see Paech and Paech 2000; see also Paech 1985.}

As an aesthetically authoritative film on the power of cinema as a dream factory, NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO carries its title for a good reason: Tornatore’s film can be interpreted, as has been done in the first section of this chapter, as a meditation on the expulsion from the paradise of children’s cinema dreams – the return of the disillusioned protagonist into the cave of his dreams included. This amounts to a specific interpretation (or at least version) of the intellectual trajectory discussed in chapter 6.4: Occidental modernity, understood as the awakening and coming-of-age of human rationality, thereafter finds its link to the world broken, yearning to restore it with the substitute means of belief, which now, however, has been disqualified as a form of knowledge.

Is, then, the screening of a kind of (escapist) paradise from which humans have been expelled a part of the character of cinema – the paradise of dreams screened, the paradise of (imagined) childhood and youth, which the adult spectator hopes to find again, if only for the duration of two hours? Is cinema one of the sites that houses the memories of such a paradise – the memory of first love lost, the memory of the magic of childhood, which has vanished for the adult and which only appears again from time to time as a shadow of a memory?

For many a few children the cinema might have created (and still creates) a kind of trust in the world: The hope that in the end everything will be fine, just like in the movies; the hope that, as soon as the kid has grown into an adult, life will house many adventures for it, just like in the movies. And for the already grown-up adult, who is perhaps a prisoner of his monotonous everyday routines, cinema might convey the (all-too-often delusive) hope that there still is a world beyond the dim horizons of everyday life, a life to which one could walk towards, just like in the movies.

The excited child spectators may not already know it, but their sense of wonder about this new world on the screen, which conveys a premonition of a larger, more beautiful, more reassuring world out there, beyond the confines of the parental house – this sense of wonder is indeed a kind of escapism, a flight from the world. Going to the movies is, on the one hand, a way of discovering the world (and something that, qua stirring up of emotions, temporarily ‘heals’ the broken link between subject and world), but at the same time it is a flight to another world, a world which is not the same in which we happen to live in. This is another facet of cinema’s ambivalence: Because cinema leaves the world as it is outside of the door, it conveys a kind of reconciliation with it.

Adults, of course, already know all this. This is nicely illustrated in the fifth season of the television series MAD MEN (2007–), in which Don Draper (Jon Hamm), the legendary creative executive, and his other creatively damaged advertising men populate Manhattan’s cinema theatres with increasing frequency in order to have at least two hours of peace among the capitalist madness of Madison Avenue. But instead of giving in to the fascination of cinema in the semi-crowded theatre rooms, they succumb to semi-somnolent states, give blow-jobs or hand-jobs to random co-spectators, or they
start talking – upon running into each other – with colleagues about their current advertisement campaigns.\textsuperscript{223} The original sense of wonder of childhood, the feeling \textit{Geborgenheit} which the cinema is still able to convey to the child – all of this has passed away in \textit{MAD MEN}, it is just a faint echo, which at least is strong enough to lure the adults back into the familiar cave of the cinema theatre from time to time. But the magic has gone. This also is the sentiment that transpires in the closing scenes of \textit{NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO}, when adult Totò is faced with the ruins of his childhood. But just then the film finds a reconciliating ending with the screening of the Kissing Reel. \textit{NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO} is a Deleuzian film insofar as – and only insofar as – it is a film calling for salvation in a double sense: Salvation from our own dreams of cinema, which promise us a world that gives us more than the real world can give; and salvation from the world, which gives (or at least seems to give) so much less than the dreams of cinema have promised.

Most importantly, \textit{NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO} underlines all the more the significance of one’s \textit{experience} of cinema, and of the existential relevance of this experience; an insight which is, as outlined before, the deciding bridge to understand what Cavell is doing when he does film philosophy: He is writing his own filmic autobiography. To quote Cavell’s introduction to \textit{The World Viewed} again: “Memories of movies are strand over strand with memories of my life”. But one should add: It is not the cinema as a medium alone – the films, and the movie theatres constitute these memories, and contribute to cinema’s ambivalent ability to restore belief in the world.

There is another film by an Italian filmmaker which circles around the \textit{problematique} of belief or trust in the world: Michelangelo Antonioni’s \textit{BLOW UP} (Antonioni, 1966). Früchtl uses the concluding scene of this film as the opener of his book \textit{Vertrauen in die Welt}: the main character, the photographer Thomas (David Hemmings), stumbles upon a group of pantomimes while wandering through a park. The artists are playing tennis on a court – \textit{sans} rackets and tennis balls. They merely behave \textit{as if} they were actually swinging a racket and hitting the ball. While Thomas watches, the ball “flies” beyond the area of the court, coming to an (imagined) halt in front of his feet. The pantomimes urge him to throw the ball back at them. Hesitating at first, Thomas then kneels down, picks up the imaginary ball, and throws it back. At the end of the film, the photographer who throughout the film only believes in what he sees with his own eyes, lets himself fall into the gesture of the \textit{as-if} (see the more extensive discussion in Früchtl 2013: 7f.). It is this gesture that brings salvation to Thomas. It is his courage to follow the “invitation to trust” (“\textit{Einladung zum Vertrauen},” Früchtl 2013: 8) that unbans him. And, quite ironically, here it is not the cinema \textit{in} the film, the \textit{as-if} machine par excellence, which brings along this kind of salvation. Thomas is unbanned precisely \textit{because} in this scene he does not hide behind the camera (which in the course of the film has repeatedly impeded him from either knowing his world or establishing trustful relations with it).

\textsuperscript{223} See particularly episode 6 of season 5.
6.6 "...Then It's Done and You Can Gasp!" Digital Cinema and the Neuro-Image

Let’s recapitulate: For Deleuze, cinema is a grand belief restoration machine. As Michael Wedel puts it in his book *Filmgeschichte als Krisengeschichte*, Deleuze even claims that “it is only in cinema that the world as an ontological certainty becomes evident” (Wedel 2011: 403).221 According to the preceding sections of this chapter, this kind of evidence is an ambivalent affair. I now want to conclude the study of Deleuzian cinematic belief restoration by looking at the status of Deleuze’s thesis at the beginning of the 21st century, which is marked by the emergence of digital cinema as a part of a digital screen culture that pervades almost every aspect of our everyday lives.

One reason for putting a special focus on digital cinema is that – like the bulk of Cavell’s philosophy of film – Deleuze’s kinematic philosophy was formulated during the era of analog filmmaking, and also uses epitomic examples from that era (as noted, Deleuze’s range of film examples stops in 1968). Nevertheless, Deleuze already saw possible changes and extensions of the time-image in a time when electronic forms of film making and distribution gave a premonition of changes to come.222 One can ask, then, about the “possibilities of world- and self-access […] which cinema can still grant humans at the beginning of the 21st century.” (Wedel 2011: 408)223 One possible answer was already discussed in chapter 5: For D.N. Rodowick, digital moving-image culture is becoming “the art of synthesizing imaginary worlds” (Rodowick 2007a: 87), resulting in an acceptance rather than overcoming of skepticism. Computated digital media bring into being a corresponding computational ontology, an ontology that to a high degree also depends on interactivity between man and digital interfaces (in the form of video games, control menus, tablets, touchscreen notebooks, smartphones and other haptic audio-visual interactive devices).224

Starting from Rodowick’s position, I want to discuss two possible answers to the challenges posed to Deleuze’s thesis in the 21st century. The first one focuses on the effects of (digital) interactivity on the belief restoration thesis, and on the increasing possibility for users to immerse in digital worlds. In that context, I will analyse a selected film from *TOTAL RECALL* (Wiseman, 2012), a re-adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s short story *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* (see Dick 1991). The film shows how digitalisation, as presented in cinema, reaffirms Deleuze’s attempt to close the mind-body schism, albeit, again, in an ambivalent fashion. The second answer grows naturally out of the first one: In her book *The Neuro-Image*, Patricia Pisters extends Deleuze’s duality of movement- and time-image and introduces the concept of the neuro-image for describing and understanding narrato-aesthetic phenomena in contemporary cinema from a Deleuzian perspective:

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221 German original text: “allein im Kino werde die Welt als ontologische Gewissheit noch evident”.
224 A closer analysis of current and older blockbuster cinema shows a steady occupation with de-humanisation, with attempts to stay human in an increasingly technological world: *METROPOLIS* (Lang, 1927), THX 1138 (Lucas, 1969), the TERMINATOR Series, MINORITY REPORT, A.I. – ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (SPIELBERG, 2001), IRON MAN (Favreau, 2008), TRANSFORMERS (Bay, 2007), or PACIFIC RIM (del Toro, 2013).
“[W]ith the neuro-image we quite literally have moved into the characters’ brain spaces. We no longer see through characters’ eyes, as in the movement-image and the time-image; we are most often instead in their mental worlds.” (Pisters 2012: 14) 225

One can use the neuro-image as a further shift in the understanding of the belief restoration problem: A cinematic projection of the mental world of a character poses the problematique of the relation between man and world in different terms than films that focalise their characters more externally. A neuro-image film implicitly can be understood as consistently screening the world in the way its main character experiences (and not only perceives) it, being kind of an update on the famously infamous film noir LADY IN THE LAKE (Montgomery, 1947). By contrast, non-neuro-image films work with an implicit trajectory between ‘external’ focalisations of events and situations in the film world, and ‘internal’ focalisations of the same, allowing the spectator to speculate more liberally on what is allegedly ‘real’ in the film’s diegetic universe and what is not. This is no option if, a film-as-neuro-image is understood as a consistent projection of a character’s mental world. In neuro-image films, even hallucinatory perceptions of the film world need to be acknowledged “as real agents in the world” (Pisters 2012: 6), because they are part and parcel of what influences the characters’ actions and attitudes. There is no ‘I’ and a world – the ‘I’ generates a world.226

TOTAL RECALL is a dystopian science fiction film. After a devastating global chemical war, there are only two still inhabitable parts of the world at the end of the 21st century: The United Federation of Britain (UFB) in the geographic area of the former United Kingdom, and the ‘Colony’ on the Australian continent. Increasingly unable to provide living space for its population, the UFB wants to take over control of the Colony, which is basically the source of raw materials and workforce for the wealthier UFB region. An interplanetary gravity elevator called “The Fall,” which travels right through the Earth’s core within fifteen minutes, connects both parts of the world.

The construction worker Douglas Quaid (Colin Farrell), happily married to Lori (Kate Beckinsale), wants more adventure in his monotonous private life and books a virtual vacation with Rekall, a company that offers their customers fake memories implanted in the brain by a sophisticated virtual reality technology. Quaid books a neuro-adventure trip which is supposed to deliver to him memories of a past life as a secret agent. However, something goes wrong when Quaid undergoes the procedure: Apparently, Quaid already has similar residual memories, which wreak havoc on Rekall’s computer system. All of a sudden, Quaid finds himself chased by government forces. It turns out that his wife is (allegedly) actually an undercover agent trying to uncover Quaid’s hidden identity as a double agent for the UFB who swapped sides in order to

225 See also Pisters 2012: 196f. for another summary.
226 The idea that the things that happen ‘in our heads’ can assume a reality status of their own is deeply rooted in Western culture and not confined to the niche of madness films. For instance, entire generations of readers will be familiar with the idea from the Harry Potter books. In Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, an apparently dead Harry Potter wakes up in a foggy, white Netherland remotely reminiscent of King’s Cross station, where his journey into Hogwarts once started. His deceased headmaster Albus Dumbledore, dressed like Merlin in shining white robes, and a terribly deformed infants wailing underneath a bench are waiting for him there. At the end of their conversation, which solves many of the riddles that troubled Harry, the apprentice asks his master: “Tell me one last thing […]. Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?” Dumbledore replies with his usual mix of serenity and sarcasm: “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?” (Rowling 2007: 579)
support the resistance group of the Colony, a group that tries to sabotage the UFB’s attempts to take over power of the entire planet. In order to hide his former identity, Quaid erased his memory, rendering himself ignorant about his real self. The rest of the film is an extended chase sequence, with Quaid trying to escape the UFB forces while simultaneously unearthing the truth about his identity. The film results in a lethal confrontation between Quaid and UFB chancellor Cohagen (Bryan Cranston). Quaid prevails in the fight and is able to stop the impending invasion of the Colony. TOTAL RECALL concludes in an ambivalent manner: How real are Quaid’s memories and impressions about his identity and actions; which parts of his remembered and experienced life are only derivatives of an implanted memory?

A central scene of the film contains an interesting detail: After Quaid has unsuccessfully mounted the Rekall chair which was supposed to implant him memories of being a spy, a police unit turns up, shooting the staff of the Rekall Company and trying to arrest Quaid. Just when Quaid is held up, he suddenly breaks free and in a succession of fantastically versatile martial arts body moves manages to kill every one of the dozen-or-so officers in the room. He reacts out of pure instinct, his body moves occur as if he has never done anything else. Only when the fight is over, with everyone but Quaid lying dead or unconscious on the floor, he breathes in and literally regains consciousness, staring in disbelief at the massacre he has left behind. Quaid’s body apparently remembered something which his conscious, merely ‘neural’ memory could not.

In a behind-the-scenes interview on the Blu-ray edition of the film, director Len Wiseman remarks on this scene with the words “then it’s done and you can gasp”. As mediocre as the film as a whole might be, it actually quite coherently enacts, performs or puts to motion a recurring thread: If you want to know who you are, it is not only your present actions that count, or an introspection into your feelings and emotions – it is actually what your body tells you, and what your body is able to do (without even thinking consciously). Assuming that at least part of the events in the film are supposed to take place on a level of (fictional) reality, the main guideline for the Quaid character in finding out who he really is, is not what he consciously ‘knows’ or makes himself believe – it is the things his body tell him which can be a guideline to the truth, things that actually (re-)connect him with whoever he really is. So, assuming Quaid’s adventures are not only dreamed-up but (film-fictional) fact, his versatility during the action scenes reveals that he is in fact a double agent who was trained perfectly in all matters of survival. It is not the higher-level cognitive insights that are the link to his life world – it is an awareness of what he is able to do, an awareness of what his body is best suited to do and feel.

Suppose this is so – where does this leave the role of film in re-discovering belief or trust in the world? My attempt at an answer would be: Films, due to their performative character, are much better at transporting such a bodily mediated belief or trust in the world than any philosophical argument, or any elaborate passage in a book of fiction will be able to transport. If film actors, and the coordinated workforce of cinematography, sound and editing department, do their job in the right way, the way they embody such a

\[227\] The amnesiac double-agent is also a central theme of CYPER (Natali, 2002).
character looking for his or her links to the world will be the standard measure for aesthetically conveying what it is that is able to provide belief or trust in the world.

But again, this belief restoration is an ambivalent affair – like at the end of TOTAL RECALL, it is ultimately a matter of belief whether what has been experienced is real or not, bear a link to “the world” or not. But simultaneously, this ending suggests that, at the end of the day, it does not really matter: The problem (so prevalent in classical film theory) of the cinematically rendered illusions of reality has given way to an acknowledgment of the reality (or realities) of illusions. In The Neuro-Image, Patricia Pisters regards this shift as a characteristic contemporary phenomenon. She argues that “contemporary culture has moved from considering images as ‘illusions of reality’ to considering them as ‘realities of illusions’ that operate directly on our brains and therefore as real agents in the world.” (Pisters 2012: 6)

This is the starting point for the second answer to the challenges posed by digital screen culture and TOTAL RECALL: Digitalisation has intensified cinema’s intrusion into the mental worlds of its characters and audiences. Since digitally rendered augmented realities “operate directly on our brains,” as Pisters writes, they become an integral part of our phenomenological life world. TOTAL RECALL is an almost literal example for this: For Quaid, the question whether he is a double-agent or only the victim of implanted fake memories ultimately becomes irrelevant, since whatever he remembers and assumes being influences his actions in his life world, and in turn influence the way others in this life world react towards him. Even though the Rekall memory implants may at first be illusions of reality, they quickly assume their own reality, not the least because they “work on” Quaid’s capabilities and on the cluster of problems he has to deal with.

In effect, TOTAL RECALL can be understood as a projection of Douglas Quaid’s mental world. If this is so, then the film is an example for what Pisters calls the neuro-image, “a new type of cinema belonging to twenty-first-century globalized screen culture” (Pisters 2012: 2). The transformations of audio-visual culture can already be recognised in the massive proliferation of screen technologies in everyday life:

“navigation displays, computer screens, cell phones, television sets, urban screens, and surveillance technology; they are the markers of both a typical twenty-first-century media city and the practices of everyday media use. The neuro-image is part of this networked media practice, related to digital technology’s ubiquity, and engages with these technologies in ‘an internal struggle with informatics.’ [A quote from Deleuze, Cinema 2, PS]” (Pisters 2012: 2f.)

Pisters argues that the neuro-image is a term adequate for this contemporary digital screen culture:

“the third synthesis of time, the dominant temporal dimension of the neuro-image, connects to the logic of digital screen culture. Where the movement-image follows the motor-sensory logic of continuity editing, and the time-image relates to a logic of the irrational cut and the incomprehensibility of the crystals of time, the neuro-image mixes and reorders from all the previous image regimes, ungrounding and serializing according to a digital logic.” (Pisters 2012: 148)

Pisters anchors the category of the neuro-image in the web of Deleuzian philosophy by grounding it in Deleuze’s account of the “passive synthesis of time” (Pisters 2012: 148).
136) in *Repetition and Difference*. This synthesis is basically a way in which human beings (cognitively) embed their experiences in a temporal structure: “on the basis of what we perceive repeatedly in the present, we recall, anticipate, or adapt our expectations in a synthesis of time.” (137) Deleuze distinguishes different levels of this synthesis, which are occupied with the present (first synthesis), the past (second synthesis), and the future (third synthesis). As Pisters explains, the

“first synthesis of time as ‘the living present’ relates to the past and the future as dimensions of the present. In this way the flashback (and the flash-forward) in cinema can be seen as the past and future of the movement-image [which, however, are experienced by the audience, and sometimes by the film characters as well, as taking place in the perceived present, PS]. In the second synthesis of time the past becomes the actual ground, as the synthesis of all time and thus the present and the future become dimensions of the past.”

(Pisters 2012: 138)

Pisters correlates the neuro-image with the third synthesis of time, in which “the present and past are dimensions of the future” (Pisters 2012: 138). Deleuze defines the third synthesis as the “repetition of the future as eternal return” (quoted in Pisters 2012: 138), thereby explicitly referring to Nietzsche’s conception of Eternal Recurrence in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. This third synthesis, if I understand correctly, involves a sense that the things happening in the present, and the things happening in the past are already premonitions of the future – an idea that is actually already pragmatically used by security organisations and insurances which calculate the future behaviour of suspects or potential clients based on patterns of their past and present behaviour. One can also understand the third synthesis as invoking the insight that whatever happens in the present is an actualisation of hitherto ‘virtual’ states of the future. For instance, at the present moment I am writing these sentences in order to finish the chapter. Finishing the chapter will be, in Deleuzian terms, an actualisation of what yet is only a ‘virtual’ possibility.

The crucial step in Pisters’ development of the concept of the neuro-image is the correlation of the syntheses of time with the time- and movement-image in the *Cinema* books (see Pisters 2012: 129ff.): The movement-image is correlated with the first synthesis of time, the time-image is correlated with the second synthesis of time, and, consequently, the neuro-image is a cinematic correlate with the third synthesis of time. This allows her to present the neuro-image as a kind of yet-unoccupied position in Deleuze’s kinematic philosophy, a notion already implied, but not explicated in Deleuze’s body of philosophical work.

Narrato-aesthetically, the main point of the neuro-image is, as indicated at the beginning of this section, that contemporary films no longer tend to merely present the perspective or point of view of their characters (as happens in the time-image), but “literally enter brain-worlds in cinema ([…] *Fight Club*, James Cameron’s *Avatar*, Christopher Nolan’s *Inception*, and Duncan Jones’ *Source Code* are just some of the most recent films of this type)” (Pisters 2012: 27). In the narratological terminology adapted by Edward Branigan to film studies in *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, neuro-image films advance from internal surface focalisation to internal depth.

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focalisation (for those terms see Branigan 1992: 86ff.), by which “the mental processes of storytelling are being displayed onscreen.” (Pisters 2012: 213) Perhaps it would even be advisable to add another level of narration to Branigan’s scale which delves even deeper into the circuits of their characters’ brains, as exemplified by the freewheeling camera ride through the synaptic structure of a brain in the opening sequence of FIGHT CLUB (Fincher, 1999) (see Pisters 2012: 14ff.). That additional level of narration could be called mental or neural focalisation.

It is, by the way, quite useful to remember the talk about levels of narration here: As Pisters herself repeatedly emphasises, the neuro-image is not a distinct category of its own, but rather a development or intensification of aspects of the time-image which were, partly, already present or incipient in earlier cinema. Neuro-images thus present a recognisable trend in the contemporary use of cinematic means of aesthetic and narrative expression, which may or may not have been fostered by the emergence of new creative possibilities in the era of digital filmmaking. As Pisters writes, “technology is not the cause of aesthetic change, nor the agent of [a] specific film’s aesthetic difference, even though it can be profoundly related to it.” (Pisters 2012: 206) Thus, the concept of the neuro-image can be understood as a proposal for a better understanding of certain tendencies in current filmmaking even if one wishes to proceed without Deleuzian baggage. As Pisters writes: “Calling this new type of image the ‘neuro-image’ is to acknowledge the fact that images now quite literally show us the illusionary and affective realities of the brain.” (Pisters 2012: 26)

What is, then, the neuro-image’s potential for tackling the problematics of restoring belief in the world? One side-effect of the neuro-image as a projection of mental worlds is that it gives rise to a plethora of films which revolve around madness, such as schizophrenia, and around characters with instable mental lives in general (see Pisters 2012: chapter 1). Thus it highlights the importance of neural processes for the constitution of what people call ‘reality’. Additionally, the neuro-image signals the transformation of the ways in which films participate in contemporary digital screen culture: They are not self-sufficient “closed objects” (Pisters 2012: 177) anymore, the themes, stories and motifs of many contemporary moving-image products are dispersed across different media, they “operate more like seeds that grow and spread rhizomatically with other parts of culture” (Pisters 2012: 177).

Pisters analyses the television series LOST (TV series, 2004-2010) as an example of a “transmedial Gesamtkunstwerk” (Pisters 2012: 186). Starting by discussing Hume’s probabilistic theory of knowledge, she argues that LOST “can be seen as a Humian experiment in positioning belief as the basic principle of knowledge” (Pisters 2012: 173), and thus as another instantiation of filmic occupation with knowledge.

In LOST, the survivors of a plane crash end up on a mysterious island in the middle of the ocean. Throughout the six seasons of the series, they must confront a number of mysterious incidents which again and again call into question whether what the

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229 Pisters claims that the neuro-image is a continuation of Deleuzian kinematic philosophy by invoking the cinema of Alain Resnais since the 1950s (see Pisters 2012: 146-148). She introduces Resnais’ films as “neuro-image[s] avant la lettre, or as digital cinema without digits.” (Pisters 2012: 129) Even though these films did not come into being by relying on digital filmmaking technologies, they “demonstrate[...] how the neuro-image can be sensed at its incipience as a will to art and can anticipate aspects of digital culture, such as participatory aesthetics and database logics.” (Pisters 2012: 129) In her analysis of Resnais’ films, Pisters outlines “how the future, as the third synthesis of time, at certain moments transforms the time-image into a neuro-image.” (Pisters 2012: 146)
characters (and the audience) experience is real or only a mind-game of an illusory nature. For instance, the possibility is brought up (but eventually dismissed) that everything going on in LOST is a mere “fantasy” in the head of one of the characters (see Pisters 2012: 174). The audience as well as the characters are constantly forced to choose whether to believe what is happening or not. Therefore, for Pisters, “[w]ith its incredible emphasis on the possibly delirious nature of our perceptions and its questioning of knowledge – proposed as a degree of belief that can never give complete assurance – Lost can be considered as a neuro-image.” (Pisters 2012: 174)

Even though one might decide to believe instead of to doubt, there always remains the possibility that this belief is illusory or in another sense a fabrication of the imagination. No matter how many reasons cinema/ moving-image culture might give us for believing, this belief always ultimately remains ambivalent, at least as long as belief is considered in Hume’s sense of “degrees of belief”. Deleuze sees this ambivalence of cinematically mediated belief clearly: “Surely a true cinema can contribute to giving us back reasons to believe in the world and in vanished bodies. The price to be paid, in cinema as elsewhere, was always a confrontation with madness.” (Quoted in Pisters 2012: 5) Following Pisters, the neuro-image is the most recent instance that very clearly brings into view this deep ambivalence of contemporary screen culture.

6.7 Coda: Fantasy Ain’t a World Apart From Reality

Metaphorically, one could say that the benefit of a Deleuzian stance on cinema’s potential for belief restoration is that it hands over the choice of believing or disbelieving to humans. But this benefit comes at the price of madness as an accepted possible element of the belief model, or as one of the accepted “realities of illusions”:

“[Cinema] has participated in the transformation of the world into an object of belief – even if this belief should prove illusory. It is precisely because everything that I see and hear is capable of being false, the expressions of deceit or trickery, of false oaths and betrayal, that only my belief is capable of connecting with what I see and hear.” (Gregg Lambert, quoted in Pisters 2012: 174.)

In the Bible, Adam and Eve have to pay for their act of choosing choice, i.e., for their choice of eating the apple from the forbidden tree, with the expulsion from Paradise. In NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO, the price Totò pays for moving on into the world is an expulsion from the paradise of (unconditional love for the worlds of) cinema. The theories, themes and films discussed in this chapter share a penultimate desire for salvation, a desire for returning to the paradise once known, in other words: a desire for a better world, even if it might be only of an illusory kind. (As Cypher in MATRIX would say, this is acting on the belief that “ignorance is bliss”).

While Cavell agrees with replacing the (ontological-epistemological) model of knowledge with an (ontological-existential) alternative, he disagrees with the accompanying call for salvation, because it still implies that the nature of our position in

230 Pisters characterises Hume’s inferential epistemology by contrasting belief with certainty: “To think in an empiricist way is [...] not to be certain (of given sense data) but, on the contrary, to believe where we cannot be sure. So here we see how belief becomes the basis of knowledge: different yet similar cases of certain instances are observes and in the imagination (by principles of association) are fused in the mind, coming to constitute a habit. Degrees of belief can then be calculated based on experience and probability.” (Pisters 2012: 159)
the world is deficient. His concept of acknowledgement is, in contrast, more pragmatic and affirmative.  

However, Deleuze, Deleuzian film-philosophy and Cavell agree that it is a mistake to separate dreams, fantasies, even hallucinations from what we believe to know of the world. In The World Viewed, Cavell writes:

“It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with. It is through fantasy that our conviction of the worth of reality is established; to forgo our fantasies would be to forgo our touch with the world”. (Cavell 1979a: 85)

This resonates with Deleuze’s thesis that “cinema can restore our belief in the world” in a more general fashion. Where for Deleuze the shock elicited in the spectator by cinema reassures us in our belief that there is a world, for Cavell fantasy (as storytelling) enables us to assign a value to reality, a worth: Because we can tell stories about the world, we know that we are in “touch with the world” – the world is touched by us, and we are (emotionally) touched by it, just as the Kissing Reel does for Salvatore di Vita, the once little boy who left the ambivalent paradise of a childhood spent at the movies in order to pursue self-fulfilment as a creator of movies.  

Freely invoking Wittgenstein again, Deleuze as well as Cavell assign a special role to belief, but they inject it with different colourings: “Am I to say that belief is a particular colouring of our thoughts? Where does this idea come from? Well, there is a tone of belief, as of doubt.” (Wittgenstein 2005: §578)

There is proof that this chapter’s reflections on a cinema for believers are not entirely theoretical: In a recent piece in the New York Review of Books, “The Persisting Vision: Reading the Language of Cinema,” Martin Scorsese writes about his life with and within the movies, and traces his love of cinema to his early formative experiences at the movies as a little boy. His memories resonate with the current chapter’s emphasis on the ambivalence of a life lived with and within the movies: “I realize now that the warmth of that connection with my family and with the images on the screen gave me something very precious. We were experiencing something fundamental together. We were living through the emotional truths on the screen, often in coded form, which these films from the 1940s and 1950s sometimes expressed in small things: gestures, glances, reactions between the characters, light, shadow. These were things that we normally couldn’t discuss or wouldn’t discuss or even acknowledge in our lives. And that’s actually part of the wonder. Whenever I hear people dismiss movies as ‘fantasy’ and make a hard distinction between film and life, I think to myself that it’s just a way of avoiding the power of cinema. Of course it’s not life—it’s the invocation of life, it’s in an on-going dialogue with life. Frank Capra said, ‘Film is a disease.’ I caught the disease early on.” (Scorsese 2013)