

University of Louisville

## ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

5-2013

### Godard and Nietzsche : a case for filmsophy.

Andrew Ronald Jones 1985-  
*University of Louisville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Jones, Andrew Ronald 1985-, "Godard and Nietzsche : a case for filmsophy." (2013). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 707.  
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/707>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact [thinkir@louisville.edu](mailto:thinkir@louisville.edu).

GODARD AND NIETZSCHE: A CASE FOR FILMOSOPHY

By

Andrew Ronald Jones  
B.A., Mercer University 2007  
M. Div., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 2011

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Humanities  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2013



GODARD AND NIETZSCHE: A CASE FOR FILMOSOPHY

By

Andrew Ronald Jones  
B.A., Mercer University, 2007  
M. Div., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

A Thesis Approved on

March 27, 2013

by the following Thesis Committee:

---

John Gibson  
Thesis Director

---

Matthieu Dalle

---

Aaron Jaffe

## ABSTRACT

### GODARD AND NIETZSCHE: A CASE FOR FILMOSOPHY

Andrew Ronald Jones

March 27, 2013

Though film is different from journal articles and philosophy books, in this thesis, I argue that film can be philosophy by examining several arguments against film as philosophy. I also argue that film is a particularly valuable medium for philosophy because of its ability to evoke emotions. I use two examples, both films of Jean-Luc Godard, in order to demonstrate the way in which film can be philosophy. I argue that Godard's *Alphaville* is philosophy in that it builds upon Nietzsche's critique of modernity by affirming several elements of Nietzsche's critique and extending the negative effects of modernity to the loss of true love. I further demonstrate that Godard's *Pierrot le fou* is philosophy in that it builds upon Nietzsche's conception of reality. Both of these films as well as the original arguments as presented by Nietzsche confirm that film can be philosophy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT .....	iii
CHAPTER I: FILM AS PHILOSOPHY .....	1
Film and the Nature of Philosophy .....	3
Philosophy and the Nature of Film .....	16
CHAPTER II: MODERNITY: THE DESTRUCTION OF LOVE .....	31
Nietzsche's Critique of Modernity in Godard's <i>Alphaville</i> .....	35
Godard, Love, and Modernity .....	49
CHAPTER III: NIETZSCHE AND GODARD ON REALITY .....	55
Nietzsche's Conception of Reality in Godard's <i>Pierrot le fou</i> .....	57
Godard's Multilayered Reality .....	71
REFERENCES .....	79
CURRICULUM VITAE .....	82

CHAPTER I  
FILM AS PHILOSOPHY

In the introduction to his provocative book, *On Film*, Stephen Mulhall states that film can be a source of philosophical knowledge, often referred to as filmosophy (2). Two philosophers who disagree, namely Murray Smith and Paisley Livingston, have attempted to refute Mulhall's claim and argue that film in itself can never be a source of philosophical knowledge. In this first chapter, I defend Mulhall's claim by defining more precisely the way in which film can be a source of philosophical knowledge due to its cognitive potential. In later chapters, I demonstrate this cognitive potential with examples of film's historic contribution to philosophical discussion. Though appearing trivial, this debate is profound. Siding with Mulhall means cinema can be valued for its cognitive potential, but siding with Smith and Livingston means cinema can only be valued cognitively in conjunction with verbal interpretations. Though I argue that the spectator plays an important role in the cognitive potential of film, ascribing value to film only in conjunction with verbal interpretations strips film of its true identity as a philosophical voice. I claim that film can have a philosophical voice, by which I mean that films can join philosophy journal articles, philosophy books, and philosophical speeches as another valuable part of the discussion, as a voice. Neither the medium, the

form, nor the content of film prohibits it from being philosophy, because the nature of philosophy and the nature of film are not mutually exclusive.

In elaboration, I argue that film contributes to philosophical discussion as both a formally argumentative medium and as an emotively argumentative medium. In other words, the logically formulated arguments in film are inseparable from emotions, which contribute argumentatively. This inseparability distinguishes film from many other forms of philosophy such as journal articles, which often banish emotions as much as possible. Though emotions can never be completely separated from the human experience, the work of one's imagination while viewing a film evokes emotions much more vividly than reading a journal article or even a book. I argue that in evoking these emotions, film can contribute to philosophical discussion in a way that most of what we consider philosophy cannot, namely as emotive knowledge. Other forms of literature and art also function similarly, but I demonstrate that film is a unique medium even among visual and imaginative art in that film employs both visual and audio material in chronological sequence.

When we speak of filmsophy, film contributing to philosophical discussion, film as a source of philosophical knowledge, and the cognitive value of film, the central claim is that film can be more than an aid to philosophy. Few deny that film can serve as a thought experiment or that film can provoke philosophical reflection, but in these achievements, film is merely stirring up old ideas. On the other hand, many deny that film can contribute anything innovative or unique to philosophy; film has nothing new to bring to philosophy. Apparently, discursive media is more suited for philosophy. Such media can contribute innovative and unique thought to philosophy, but film cannot,



according to the critics. In the first part of this chapter, I contend that film can be of the same importance for philosophy as discursive media. I focus my discussion on the nature of philosophy and explain how that nature does not exclude film. In the second part, I demonstrate that film is also able to contribute innovative thought to philosophical discussion, particularly through evoking emotions though film also uses formal argumentation in conjunction with emotions. I specifically argue that cinematic devices, such as long shots and zooming, which provoke emotions through their use, create a philosophical voice for film that is distinct from that of journal articles, books, and even other forms of art.

### **Film and the Nature of Philosophy**

The current debate concerning the philosophical contribution of film has centered on explanations of how film as a medium is incompatible with the nature of philosophy, as exemplified by Smith and Livingston. Several arguments within this debate take for granted that the reader understands the nature of philosophy without discussion or exposition. This lack of detail given to the nature of philosophy has allowed the opponents of the idea that film can have a philosophical voice to create an idealized standard of philosophy, which much of contemporary and even historical philosophy cannot achieve. The opponents then claim that since film falls short of this standard, we must exclude film from philosophy. However, they fail to acknowledge the works commonly recognized as philosophy, which would also then fail to be philosophy. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that film can function as philosophy by shifting the argument away from the shortcomings of film and focusing on the nature of philosophy. I primarily address the objections that Smith provides against film's ability to function as

philosophy, but I also object to the dilemma Livingston presents against his so-called bold thesis, namely that film can make an innovative contribution to philosophy through specific cinematic devices. Both of these are further explained in detail.

Before addressing the objections to film as philosophy, let us first explore the variety of generally undisputed ways in which one can engage in philosophy. The most obvious work of philosophy today is the journal article. Many professional philosophers publish such articles as philosophy. Another obvious example is that of the book, but not all books qualify as philosophy. Only those books that engage in philosophy qualify as philosophy, such as Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. At this point, the obviousness of that which qualifies as philosophy and that which does not begins to evade us. Such books as Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* could fall into the category of philosophy or literature. However, without discussing those books that we could easily classify outside of philosophy, a wide variation already exists within those books that are without doubt classified as philosophy. Take for example Plato's dialogues, René Descartes' autobiographical work, Immanuel Kant's critiques, and Nietzsche's aphorisms. Though all of these works are philosophy, grouping them into one genre would be difficult due to their great variance in style. Plato wrote his *Meno* as a conversation between Socrates, Meno, and several other participants, while Descartes wrote his *Meditations on First Philosophy* as autobiographical reflection. In attempting to categorize these two works by style, we are at a loss because of their great differences. In addition to the written variety within the field of philosophy, philosophy can also be vocal allowing for even more variety, such as in conference presentations or debates. Therefore, philosophy is not as strictly defined of a field as we might imagine it to be.

The field of philosophy does not appear to limit or restrict the medium through which someone philosophizes, but rather the only classification that seems viable is that philosophy always attempts to put forth some thesis and make that proposition appear reasonable or even true. However, even this classification presents problems, because philosophy is very different from advertising, yet classifying in this way seems to equate the two.

Consequently, whether or not film can be philosophy depends on something other than the nature of film as a form of communication. The medium of film, though different from most works commonly accepted as philosophy, does not limit film's cognitive value, because philosophy exists in a variety of mediums, potentially even an unlimited variety. Films contain dialogue, speech, images, sounds, and even writings, most of which occur simultaneously. Therefore, the experience of a film is different from the experience of a journal article, yet these two experiences can both fit within the classification of philosophy. Philosophy is an enigmatic classification of which boundaries cannot depend solely on the style or form of the work. Written philosophy and spoken philosophy even employ metaphor and figurative language, which evoke images as a currency of communication to convey a point similar to film and other forms of art. Thus, the classification of philosophy does not exclude film.

As part of Smith's argument against the consideration of film as philosophy, he exposes four characteristics of film that disqualify it from being philosophy, namely ambiguity, paradox, objective, and "*dramatic imagining*" (39). Smith claims that philosophy is neither ambiguous nor paradoxical, but that a film necessarily is both ambiguous and paradoxical. Moreover, he argues that philosophy involves a particular

objective and that in contrast, film involves a different objective, and finally he asserts that philosophy requires a certain level of abstractness, while film is always too concerned with imagining and details, which are contradictory to abstractness. Though Smith's argument is valid, it relies upon unfounded premises. As I will demonstrate, philosophy can be ambiguous and paradoxical as well as involve a wide assortment of objectives while engaging the imagination.

Let us begin by addressing the nature of philosophy in terms of its objectives. Smith claims that in order for something to be philosophy that the object or primary purpose of the work must be to philosophize. He argues that though film may intend to create philosophy to some extent, its primary goal is necessarily other than creating philosophy, which disqualifies it from being philosophy. A film may use certain aspects of philosophy as a means to other ends, but even in such a case, identifying it as filmosophy would be false. Therefore, Smith contends that the nature of philosophy is fundamentally inseparable from the primary intention to philosophize and that film as an art form can never have this primary intention.

Two objections stand in opposition to this understanding of the nature of philosophy. The first objection concerns the inseparability of philosophy from the primary purpose of philosophizing, namely that the difficulty in discerning the primary objective of a work obscures the nature of philosophy, if the two are inseparable. More clearly, nothing qualifies as philosophy if by definition philosophy involves a certain intent, because intentions are by nature mysterious. We can never know without doubt that any particular intention is primary, because intentions are not perceptible. We can observe what the author has done and look for clues concerning the author's intentions,

however, the primary purpose of a work will always be unknown. Often several purposes and even several layers of intention lie behind any given work. Did the author create the work for fame, for money, for truth, for something that we cannot even imagine or for some combination of the above? Is the work's primary objective to make people laugh, to inspire, or to present a social critique? These questions only begin to touch the surface of all the different possible objectives of a work, whether a journal article or a film. Although, the author can answer these questions, clues from the work can answer these questions, and even informed spectators can answer these questions, none of these answers allows us to know the actual primary intention, because all of these answers are potentially false, especially concerning works from hundreds or even thousands of years ago. The intention is imperceptible, yet we have no trouble qualifying certain works as philosophy from our limited perspective. A work of philosophy would be indiscernible as long as the nature of philosophy is inseparable from its intended objective. For example, take Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*. Describing the intent of that work is nearly impossible to do succinctly, and even describing it at all presents great difficulty and controversy. However, since we have no difficulty discerning that some works, such as *The Gay Science*, are works of philosophy, we must reject the notion that in order to philosophize, philosophizing must be the primary objective unless we define philosophizing so loosely that it becomes almost meaningless. As an example, the statement I used above, namely that philosophy puts forth a thesis and attempts to demonstrate the rationality of that thesis, could also incorporate advertising as a form of philosophy, which is surely not true. Therefore, intention is not decisive when

determining whether a work counts as philosophical, and consequently, film can be philosophy regardless of the objectives of the film.

The second objection is in relation to Smith's insistence that film cannot have the same purpose as philosophy. Smith does not directly state that this allegation is a fact, but he infers it from his example of Carl Reiner's *All of Me* and from his use of that example to distinguish universally between philosophy and film. The use of this example is a real problem, because Smith bases his universal rejection that film can have the same objective as philosophy on one example. Although he may rightly deny that *All of Me* is philosophy due to its comedic purpose, he cannot then conclude that film, universally, is not philosophy due to its artistic purpose. Furthermore, defining film as something that can never be philosophy is akin to defining a poem as something that can never be instructional. In this argument, we return to the problem of philosophic form and style, which I previously demonstrated to be unlimited. Even if Smith was right in that film is an art form while philosophy is an intention, how could we then claim that a certain form can never have a certain intention? This limitation appears absurd, because form and intention are two separate identities of any given work. Obviously, the form serves the intention, but any form could validly serve any intention. Unless we begin with a definition of film or philosophy that renders the two mutually exclusive from the start, we cannot arrive at such a conclusion.

Smith further denies that film can be philosophy, because philosophy is unambiguous while film is ambiguous. The problem with ambiguity is that it leaves room for multiple interpretations thus destroying the cognitive potential of a particular work. Philosophers strive to be clear, precise, and only leave room for one interpretation

so as to increase the cognitive potential of their work. However, regardless of the cognitive problems of ambiguity, ambiguity is not foreign to philosophy. Not all philosophers aim for clarity, the most notable of whom, Jacques Derrida, seeks to expose the multiplicity of possible interpretations of any given work including philosophy. Additionally, the numerous commentators on historical philosophers who disagree with each other on the proper interpretation of those philosophers reveal that ambiguity does not disqualify a work from being philosophy. Clarity may be a philosophical intention, but many works of philosophy are full of ambiguity. Therefore, even though film is ambiguous, ambiguity does not disqualify film from being philosophy.

Furthermore, Jerry Goodenough describes how the ambiguity of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* is a central tenet of its philosophical voice (13). In *Film as Philosophy*, he defends Mulhall by arguing that film can be philosophy, specifically in reference to *Blade Runner* and Alain Resnais' *L'année dernière à Marienbad*. In reference to *Blade Runner*, Goodenough suggests that the ambiguity concerning the personhood of the replicants adds an important element to the philosophical knowledge conveyed by the film. This suggestion implies not only that ambiguity does not prevent a work from being philosophy, but that perhaps it is even advantageous for its classification as philosophy.

Smith's third claim denies that film can function as philosophy, because film is paradoxical, while philosophy is not. In philosophy, a paradox is often a synonym for a failure to philosophize correctly, which would corroborate Smith's assertion.

Nevertheless, the presence of a paradox does not relegate a work from the state of philosophy to some other type of work. A paradox is similar to a contradiction, and thus most seek to avoid paradox. However, philosophers do not avoid paradox whenever the

paradox at hand is necessary and true. Much of life involves paradoxes, and therefore, philosophy welcomes those paradoxes, such as the mind-body problem or the problem of free will and determinism. Some philosophers believe to have a clear-cut answer for those problems, but many philosophers have come to recognize them more as paradoxes. Therefore, whether film incorporates paradox or not, it can still function as philosophy, because philosophy often incorporates paradoxes. Moreover, paradox is useful to philosophy in that it can reveal the error of a certain philosophical position. In other words, a philosophical work may employ paradox with the purpose of denigrating a particular philosophical perspective, and film can use paradox in a similar fashion. Consequently, the presence of paradox within film does not determine that film cannot be philosophy.

Finally, Smith also distinguishes between philosophy and film in terms of imagination. He questions film as philosophy, because film pays too close attention to detail in order to retain the necessary abstractness of philosophy. Furthermore, he alleges that when we experience a film, we become emotionally involved by seeing ourselves in the situation of the characters, while in philosophy we are abstracted from the situation. Neither of these two positions properly understands the abstract nature of philosophy nor do they recognize the cognitive value of emotions. Concerning details, works of philosophy often omit them, because they are unimportant to a particular thought experiment or example. However, this omission does not signify that when a particular person conceives of the example that such a person conceives of the example without those details. On the contrary, that person does conceive of the details, but the nature of the details will be different from person to person, because the color of the particular



house or the shoe size of a particular person within the example is irrelevant. Obviously, the house and the person both have a color and a shoe size respectively. We cannot conceive of a house without a color or a person who still has feet without a shoe size. Therefore, in the philosophical thought experiment or example, the omission of details does not mean the absence of details, but rather the irrelevance of the particular nature of those details. A film, however, cannot omit details as a text can, because only with language can we address a house without addressing its color. In images, the house and the color are inseparable. Consequently, when a film shows details that philosophy often omits, the film is not distancing itself from philosophy by choosing to focus on details that are unimportant philosophically. Instead, film is simply doing what it must do, showing a house with its color. If in a philosophical example, a philosopher described the color of the house, yet that particular color was irrelevant, the addition of the color would not disqualify the work from being philosophy. Similarly, the addition of details within a film that may prove unnecessary philosophically does not prevent that film from philosophizing.

Additionally, the abstract nature of philosophy does not preclude the possibility of emotional involvement or understanding a thought experiment from the perspective of someone within the experiment. In fact, such engagement may even enhance our ability to understand and properly evaluate a philosophical argument, because it brings us closer to our everyday experience. Since we do not experience the world abstractly or in an emotional void, evaluating a philosophical position from within an emotionally engaged acceptance or rejection of that position provides valuable knowledge with regard to the truthfulness of the position in question. Though emotion is often considered the opposite

of rationality, I will demonstrate in the following section of this chapter that this understanding is simply not true. With that in mind, emotional involvement or the presence of emotions does not detract from philosophical knowledge but rather enhances philosophical knowledge with emotive knowledge. This complex form of philosophical knowledge allows us to make better judgments concerning philosophical arguments, because not only do we understand the argument intellectually, but we also understand it emotively. In other words, we know the emotional implications and can better determine its consequences for everyday life. Many thought experiments originate with a personal experience of the philosopher who then abstracts the situation and presents it as a thought experiment for other philosophers to consider. Take Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* as an example. In such cases, the author is convinced of his position not simply based on intellectual arguments but also based on emotional engagement. The thought experiment is meant to convince the reader intellectually as well as emotionally because the emotions have significant cognitive value for both the author and reader. As Rick Anthony Furtack argues, even non-cognitive theories of emotion allow for "intentional content" (51). Film can engage the spectator emotionally as a means of enhancing our philosophical knowledge. The emotional aspect of film does not detract from its cognitive value.

Livingston also argues against film's ability to function as philosophy in anything more than a thought provoking role. His primary argument, the "*First Horn of the Dilemma*" as he calls it, is the problem of paraphrase (12). He states that the philosophical contribution of a film either cannot be paraphrased, and thus does not exist, or can be paraphrased, and thus the contribution is not a specifically cinematic

contribution. Both possible scenarios are problematic. On the one hand, if we grant that there is a sense in which film cannot be paraphrased, we must also acknowledge that there is a sense in which all philosophy cannot be paraphrased. On the other hand, if we grant that film can be paraphrased, just as all philosophy, we must acknowledge that the act of paraphrase does not diminish the value of the initial contribution.

In order to evaluate these positions, let us shift the discussion to the nature of philosophy, questioning whether philosophy is the sort of thing that we can paraphrase. Obviously, many people engage in the paraphrase of philosophy. Even in the previous paragraph, I paraphrase Livingston's philosophical position. However, are paraphrases accurate enough to convey not only the philosophical thoughts from a specific work, but also the innovative contribution to philosophical discussion? A straightforward answer fails to recognize the complexity of this issue. Behind this question lie two very distinct positions. On the one hand, the positive reply presupposes that a philosophical contribution is independent of its form. In other words, the particular words or medium used to convey some philosophical position do not affect or add to the philosophical contribution of the work. The negative reply presupposes that philosophical contribution is inseparable from form, which means that the words chosen or the medium chosen to convey a particular philosophical position are important to the argument at hand.

Livingston implies that we can paraphrase philosophy, and therefore, presupposes that philosophical contribution is independent of form. Starting from this presupposition, Livingston argues that film, if it can be paraphrased, has nothing innovative to offer philosophy. However, Livingston's argument does not hold, because it is circular in that he presupposes philosophical contribution's independence from form in order to argue

that film, as a form, can offer nothing in terms of philosophical contribution. His conclusion is a reiteration of one of his premises. Disregarding Livingston's circular logic, he still raises an important point, namely that our understanding of paraphrase will affect our classification of film. If we affirm that philosophy is the sort of thing that we can paraphrase in its entirety, then we would have reason to exclude film from the possibility of functioning as philosophy, because the medium of paraphrase is limited to words, while the medium of film also involves images. This difference in form prevents a one to one correspondence with regard to film, while written philosophy does have a one to one correspondence with the form of paraphrase. A true paraphrase of film would need more than words to be as accurate as a paraphrase of written philosophy; it would need images. This inequality places film at a disadvantage to written philosophy when considering it in relation to written paraphrase, but if we admit that form is an important aspect of philosophical contribution, then written philosophy as well as film both have a certain distance from paraphrase, although film's distance would be greater due to the similarity between the two written forms. This admission means that there is a sense in which philosophy cannot be paraphrased.

Returning to the question at hand, I claim that form can affect a philosophical argument, because though a paraphrase may be accurate and complete for certain works of philosophy, not all works of philosophy can be properly paraphrased, especially in terms of clearly communicating the innovative contribution to philosophical discussion of a certain work. As evidence in support of this position, take the large number of commentators who disagree as to a particular work's primary contribution to philosophy. If form were unimportant, then these commentators would not have such difficulty in

agreeing, because any one of their paraphrases would adequately represent the original. In addition, consider how philosophers cherish original texts and even learn various languages simply to read the original versions. If a paraphrase were sufficient to capture the whole of an original work, then the original works would be inessential. Although I can paraphrase Plato's *Meno*, I cannot give a complete account of its philosophical arguments and innovative contribution to philosophy without resorting to the text itself. Furthermore, Aaron Smuts argues against Livingston that a paraphrase does not detract from the original work's contribution to philosophy (416). He claims that if Livingston is correct, then a paraphrase of philosophy, whether text or film, becomes the primary philosophical contribution rather than the original work. According to which, Livingston's position is obviously false, because we would never attribute Livingston's philosophical contribution to me, even though I paraphrase it here in this chapter. Therefore, philosophy is the sort of thing that can often be paraphrased, but such paraphrases do not completely disclose the value of the original work. Similarly, film can function as philosophy, even if we cannot properly paraphrase the innovative contribution that film makes to philosophy. These conclusions stem from and, in so far as they accurately represent our use of paraphrase, substantiate the presupposition that form is an important aspect of philosophical contribution.

Therefore, Livingston's problem of paraphrase is no longer a problem. Either we grant that philosophy cannot be paraphrased in such a way as to capture the complete thought and innovative contribution, because form is an important aspect of that contribution, or we loosely define paraphrase leaving open the possibility of a paraphrase of all philosophy, whether text or film. In the first scenario, film cannot be paraphrased,

but it can have a philosophical contribution, just as Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* contributes to philosophy, but cannot be paraphrased either. In the second scenario, film can be paraphrased and retain its innovative contribution to philosophy, just as Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* can be paraphrased and retain its innovative contribution to philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

As I have demonstrated throughout this section, the nature of philosophy does not exclude film. The primary arguments presented against film as philosophy neglect to consider fully the nature of philosophy. In lieu of excluding film, the nature of philosophy provides a home for film. Philosophy can be ambiguous and paradoxical. It is independent of intent and does not require a completely emotionless abstraction. Moreover, the means through which someone communicates a philosophical position does not limit philosophy. The opposite of these positions creates a false standard of philosophy, which would exclude many widely accepted philosophical works from being philosophy. As a result, the reasons for denying film as philosophy due to the nature of film do not hold; film can function as philosophy. Now the question turns to whether or not film is a worthwhile philosophical medium. Journal articles and books are widely established as philosophically worthwhile mediums, but film is a relatively new medium. In the next section, I defend the innovative and unique contribution that film can bring to philosophy.

### **Philosophy and the Nature of Film**

As demonstrated in the previous section, we cannot exclude film as a medium for philosophy, but even more, film participates in philosophical progress through innovation. Turning to the nature of film, we realize that the innovative contribution of film lies in its

---

<sup>1</sup> See Lepore for more on paraphrase

ability to evoke our emotions though it also contributes by formulating verbal arguments similarly to written philosophy. Film can present arguments in a number of ways, such as through dialogue or thought experiment, which can be innovative but only in the same way as other forms of philosophy. The contribution of film distinguishes itself from written philosophical contribution by using specifically cinematic means to evoke emotional responses, which then serve as part of the argument at hand. In this way, film functions as a source of emotive knowledge, which in turn enhances philosophical knowledge. In this section, I first describe the way in which film evokes emotions and then argue that those emotions contribute to philosophical knowledge as emotive knowledge.

As described previously, emotive knowledge is not distinct from philosophical knowledge, but it is a vital part of philosophical knowledge. Emotive knowledge is deeper in that it necessarily affects the way we live. For instance, we may very well know that a mouse will not hurt us, but overtaken by the emotion of fear, we may run from the mouse. This knowledge does not affect the way we live. However, if we have emotive knowledge that a mouse will not hurt us, then our emotions will correspond to our knowledge, and we will not run from the mouse. Within a philosophical argument, this knowledge functions in similar fashion to what Noël Carroll and others call “knowledge of what it would be like” (“Art and Ethical Criticism” 362), because both emotive knowledge and “knowledge of what it would be like” are necessarily associated with a change in behavior by experiencing the world as if we were completely convinced in mind and heart of the truth of the position we entertain.

Before going into more detail about the relationship between film and emotive knowledge, let us begin by understanding how cinematic means evoke our emotions. Any narrative,<sup>2</sup> whether read, heard, seen, or remembered, evokes emotion as we position ourselves in relation to the narrative. Whether we imagine ourselves as a character within the narrative, we position ourselves against some part or person of the narrative, or we engage the narrative in some other way, our interaction with the narrative produces emotion. Similarly, images also evoke emotion, whether photographs, paintings, or other forms of visual art, by triggering our memory, some association, or our imagination. Film mixes narrative and images by showing images moving in a sequence. Therefore, film evokes emotions similarly to narrative and to still images, but it also uniquely creates emotion by blending narrative and images. For example, film can create an emotion of frustration if the sequence of images does not follow a viewer's preconceived pattern. Similar cinematic means such as jump cuts, zooming, and focus can also affect our emotional response to the sequence of images by changing the way in which we view the images and/or the sequence. A narrative void of images or a still image cannot create the same reaction.

Though the emotional affects of cinematic means are evident, the way in which those affected emotions contribute to philosophy is less evident. The nature of emotion is widely debated among philosophers. Some philosophers argue that emotion is incompatible with rationality, notably Jon Elster, which would contradict my claim that emotion can contribute to philosophy. Others, of whom Robert Solomon, argue that emotion and rationality ideally function in harmony. Obviously for film to contribute innovatively to philosophy through evoking emotions, the latter of the two positions must

---

<sup>2</sup> Loosely construed to mean a sequence of events, not necessarily a plot.



be true. In addition to this position, emotions must also be able to play a role in argumentation in order for film's innovative philosophical contribution to be emotive. After defending the rationality of emotions, I will argue this latter point.

Though at times emotion is irrational, this conflict is not indicative of a fundamental opposition between emotion and rationality. To illustrate the conflict between emotions and rationality, consider the following example. A woman waiting to catch her next flight at an airport proceeds to check the flight status on the screen nearest to her. From a distance, she perceives that her flight is cancelled, and she becomes angry. If she does not make it to her next destination on time, then she will miss her connecting flight. As she becomes angry, she considers the fact that it will not be difficult to get another flight. She will eventually make it to her destination even if she is a few hours late. Her anger does not dissipate, yet it is contrary to a rational response. Furthermore, as she continues to struggle with her anger, an announcement comes from the airport authorities claiming that her flight is now boarding. She glances back at the screen and notices that she was mistaken, her flight is not cancelled. She misread the flight number of the cancelled flight. Her anger dissipates, and she boards her plane.

In this case, emotion is problematic to rationality. However, the emotional reaction is not simply irrational, it is mistaken. This problem occurs at times, because emotions arise quickly in response to perception. Empirical evidence can be wrong, because our senses are imperfect, which leads to inappropriate emotional reactions that enter into conflict with rationality. As Bennett Helm remarks, however, this problem is not always the cause of conflict between emotion and rationality (201). On occasion, emotion is irrational even when there is no false perception. For example, in the middle

of the night, a driver comes to an intersection just as the light turns red. The driver stops. Realizing that no one is coming and being able to see a good distance in all directions, the driver considers running the red light. No police officers are anywhere near, no one at all is anywhere near. The driver begins to pull forward slowly but then brings the car to a halt as a feeling of guilt overtakes the driver at the prospect of running the red light. At this point, the driver's emotion and rationality are in conflict, but not because of any error of perception. The emotion is not a wrong emotion in the sense that the driver's perception is wrong. From this instance of conflict, we may deduce that emotion and rationality are not always in conflict due to an emotion based on false perception. Though rationality and emotion are often in conflict, in the following paragraphs, I argue that rationality is not fundamentally opposed to emotion nor is emotion always irrational.

Emotion is not necessarily irrational, because even when emotions are wrong, they support a certain form of rationality. For example, in the case of the woman waiting for her plane, were her flight actually to be cancelled, her emotion would not have been irrational, because she does not want to miss her flight. The cancelation of her flight prevents her from achieving her goal, and therefore, she rationally responds with anger. One might object that this anger is irrational, because it will only make her feel bad while she waits for another flight as she can do nothing to fix the problem. Having the emotion does not appear to help her achieve her goal in this situation. However, the anger is useful, because the airline employees are more likely to find her another flight quickly if they know she is angry, in order to prevent any harm done to them, whether that be through verbal abuse, bad publicity, or even a lawsuit. Therefore, the emotion, though wrong because the perception is false, is rational in the sense that slow deliberation, i.e.

rationality, would support her decision to be emotional as a useful reaction. In different situations where the perception creating the emotion is true, the rationality of emotions is even more obvious.

Solomon also defends the potential rationality of emotions by explaining the causes of emotional irrationality (180). In doing so, he shows that emotions can be both rational and irrational and are therefore not necessarily irrational. He claims that an emotion is irrational, when the object of the emotion is incorrect, the circumstances do not warrant the emotion, or the intensity of the emotion is inappropriate. These three elements are major causes of emotional irrationality, but because these elements can be properly satisfied, it is also possible for emotions to be rational. In other words, a rational emotion is based on true perception, the circumstances warrant a rational emotion, and the intensity of a rational emotion is at an appropriate level. For example, after the death of a loved one, sorrow is rational. The circumstances warrant it, and the perception is true. The intensity of the sorrow may vary somewhat, but as an example of evidence of an inappropriate level of sorrow, one may propose extreme behavior or suicidal thoughts. On the opposite extreme, a lack of sorrow in such a situation would even be irrational, because emotion is not contradictory to rationality.

The potential rationality of emotions further exposes that rationality is not fundamentally opposed to emotion. It is commonly accepted that emotions inhibit rationality. For example, a man falls in love with a woman who does not love him in return. The man's love prevents him from thinking rationally. He pursues the woman, expending great amounts of energy and resources on pleasing the woman. Eventually, he ends up bankrupt and broken hearted. His friends and family warned him not to pursue

her, but he did not listen to the voice of reason. In this situation, rationality opposes emotion, but though this situation may occur often, it is not necessary. At times, rationality may even encourage emotion. As an illustration, consider the popular story of a mother mustering enough strength to lift a car in order to save her child trapped underneath. Whether or not this particular story is possible, the physiological changes associated with emotion involve the release of adrenaline, which allows a person to act in ways otherwise inconceivable. Rationality may therefore commend emotion in a situation requiring extra physical strength or stamina, particularly in reference to physical defense or athletic events. Therefore, rationality is not fundamentally opposed to emotion.

Emotion and rationality are often in conflict, but they are not opposites. Although emotion can be irrational, when emotion and rationality function in concert, emotion provides rationality with strength and versatility that it could never achieve on its own. This achievement is particularly true with film, because film displays images in sequence that evoke emotions, which in turn strengthen or weaken a particular argument. A film can do this deceptively, which I address later, but taking for granted now that a film seeks to unveil the truth of a particular position, a film can add strength to an argument by associating rational emotions to that argument through images and narrative. In this way, the spectator gains emotive knowledge by learning to associate the appropriate emotions with experience. For example, while making an ethical argument against violence, a film can simultaneously show images of violence, which cause the viewer to feel disgust and sorrow. The spectator is then forced to feel those negative emotions along with the experience of violence and, consequently, becomes emotively knowledgeable. Emotion,

thus, adds strength to the argument without sacrificing rationality or truth, and by doing so, film contributes innovatively to philosophy.

As mentioned previously in several examples, emotions are often in conflict with rationality in that we feel differently than we ought to feel based on what we know to be true. At times, this conflict occurs, because we do not cultivate our emotive knowledge. Philosophers who argue that film cannot be philosophy, believe that emotive knowledge is a non-essential part of philosophical knowledge and contribute to the gap between our head and our heart. However, I claim that it is not only important to know something intellectually, but it is also important to know it emotively. Cultivating our emotive knowledge allows us to continue to assent intellectually to truth and provides us with proper understanding in order to act in accordance with that truth. Film contributes to our emotive knowledge, and for this reason, film has a vital role to play in philosophical discussions as a source of philosophical knowledge.

However, the contribution of film does also provide for possible manipulation and deceit. Film can use certain emotions alongside certain arguments that have no rational connection. Publicity is an epitome of this form of deceit. While arguing for the superiority of a certain product, a television commercial may show images that evoke emotions of pleasure and joy that are unrelated to the product, and the same can be done through film in support of a philosophical argument. For example, a character that is associated with a particular philosophical position is also a murderer. While viewing such a film, the viewer may associate negative emotions with that particular philosophical position without justification. Deceit and manipulation are possible, but simply because they are possible does not mean that film cannot contribute to philosophy

through the use of emotions. Written philosophy is also susceptible to deceit, albeit a more straightforward deceit, but a deceit nonetheless. This susceptibility does not detract from written philosophy's potential contribution to philosophy. Similarly, film's susceptibility to deceit does not detract from its potential contribution to philosophy.

Film's ability to evoke emotion enhances its contribution to philosophy in a way that written philosophy cannot. Take for example, a film portraying a skeptic as an argument against skepticism versus a philosophical paper attacking skepticism. The philosophical paper will evidently describe the debate in detail and explain the particular arguments that the author thinks are strongest. By reading the paper, some may be intellectually inclined to accept the arguments and agree with the author. On the other hand, the film may present the life of someone living as a skeptic, perhaps with the overall conclusion that such a life drains life of much that we consider good. Perhaps the film will not disprove skepticism as strongly as the paper will, but it will advance a strong case that such a life should not be chosen, approaching the issue from more of an ethical or aesthetic point of view. The emotions evoked along with the film will surely be more persuasive than the emotionless arguments advanced in the paper, because feeling the emptiness of a particular position has more strength than intellectually assenting to the emptiness of that same position. Furthermore, the emotive argument in the film will not only convince the spectator to give intellectual assent to the position, but also to act in accordance with that position or rather in this case, not to act in accordance with a skeptical understanding of the world. In this way, film is not superior to written philosophy, but it does have its own unique contribution to make. This philosophical

contribution is innovative and unique to film, though it may be similar to written works and other art forms.

The emotive contribution of film to philosophy differentiates itself from the contribution of written philosophy, because film invites the viewer to view the world from a particular perspective. Written philosophy, even written narrative, do not call the reader into a particular worldview as film does. Written works espouse and describe the world in a certain way, claiming that a particular understanding of the world is correct and another or others are false. However, film draws the viewer in through images, which not only describe the world in a particular way but also invite the viewer to experience the world directly in that way. This firsthand experience is distinct from the experience into which a written narrative invites the reader, because the experience of the written narrative primarily occurs as imagination rather than direct experience. Even if the author explains every detail down to the color of someone's socks, in a written narrative, the reader must still imagine socks of that color. Conversely, while watching a film, the viewer experiences the socks of that color without recourse to imagination, though imagination still plays a vital role in film. The experience being more direct in film allows the film to have a different effect on the viewer, a more direct effect, which stimulates emotions more. The viewer's role in the experience is more passive with regard to the defining of the experience, and thus more realistic to an actual experience in which the experiencing person defines very little of the experience, which means that film thrusts the viewer into a particular worldview rather than inviting the viewer to imagine being in a certain world. A film does invite the viewer into the worldview, yet this involvement of the imagination is different from that of a written narrative. In film,

one's imagination places the spectator within the narrative, but the visual experience form within that narrative is not left to the imagination. Being thrust into the worldview is of particular importance, because in our everyday lives, we experience the world in this very way. We experience the world as given to us rather than defined by us, and so film is closer to everyday experience than anything written.

Film also distinguishes itself from still images, which similar to film do not involve imagination in the same way as written works. The still images invite the viewer to contemplate that particular image without any other images. Film involves a sequence of images, which typically denies our attempt to focus on any one particular image and pushes us to experience each image as part of a whole. Time is central to this whole, distinguishing one image from the next. The added effect of time makes film a more realistic experience, because we experience the world inseparable from time. Also in this way, film thrusts the viewer into the particular world of the film, a world that is similar to our own as it involves time. On the other hand, still images are timeless and leave the amount of time spent viewing the image to the viewer's discretion. The image itself does not demand to be viewed for a certain period of time. Therefore, film actively produces the experience into which film thrusts the viewer, and this activity on the part of film is absent from still images or written works. Through film's active production, film evokes emotions differently from still images or written works, and these emotions force the viewer to feel from the perspective given by the film. Thus, film contributes innovatively and uniquely to philosophy through the emotions it creates during the viewing process.

These emotions not only strengthen or weaken the argument at hand, but they can often constitute the philosophical argument. In some instances, written or verbal



arguments are present in film through dialogue or written communication, but another kind of argument is also often present, namely emotive arguments. These arguments are different from verbal arguments in that they do not have a clearly stated thesis, but the thesis can nevertheless be easily understood through the spectator's emotional response to the film. As portrayed through the prior example of a film that argues against skepticism, emotion could constitute the principle argument of that film by portraying the skeptic as someone who is plagued by negative emotions. If the film thrusts the viewer into a skeptic worldview through which the viewer feels all sorts of negative emotions, then the film is using cinematic techniques to create negative emotions within the viewer in order to argue against the aesthetic value of skepticism. The philosophical value of an argument consisting of emotion can be questioned, because emotions are not always rational. However, the film would need to present these emotions in such a way as to defend their rationality. If the film fails to ground the rationality of these emotions, then such a film is doing philosophy poorly. Yet even in such a case, the film is still doing philosophy in its attempt to demonstrate the lack of aesthetic value in skepticism. Only if the film manipulates the viewer by contradicting rationality has it left the realm of philosophy.

The role of the spectator in a film's philosophical contribution is undeniable, but this fact does not mean that film only has cognitive value in relationship to verbal interpretations. As humans, we are constantly asking philosophical questions. Granted some of us ask these questions more than others, yet philosophy as a discipline has arisen out of the human experience, part of which involves questioning our existence, our knowledge, and our behavior. Whenever someone creates a film or views a film, these

questions are part of that human experience, whether they are directly addressed or not. The manner in which the film deals with these questions will determine its philosophical contribution, but whether or not it states them specifically does not determine their presence since they are present in human experience. A film director, as a human, also has these questions more or less consciously on his mind, and brings his knowledge of the human experience into the creation of films. Therefore, though film is often less straightforward about the philosophical questions it addresses than philosophical journal articles, we cannot conclude definitively that the importance of film in dealing with these questions is necessarily lessened.

Film contributes innovatively to philosophy through its use of emotions and through its formal argumentation. The emotions present in film are not necessarily irrational or a-rational, but they can function in harmony with rationality. At times, emotions constitute the entire argument, but even then rationality is of central importance. Film's ability to evoke emotions by presenting the world to the viewer from a particular perspective differentiates it from written philosophy and any philosophical contribution that still images might make in that the experience of the film involves less imagination in reference to details. The emotions created through film in conjunction with formal arguments allow film to function as philosophy by giving cognitive value to film. The innovative quality of this cognitive value stems from the emotive knowledge put forth through film, which distinguishes it from other forms of philosophy and creates a unique philosophical medium. Therefore, film has its own philosophical voice bringing insight and contribution to philosophical discussion in general.

Though film does not always contribute innovatively to philosophy, film has the potential to do so. The nature of philosophy does not prohibit film from having this potential, nor does the nature of film. Those who claim that the nature of philosophy and the nature of film are mutually exclusive falsely understand the nature of philosophy. Philosophy does not favor any particular medium as can be seen through the great variety of philosophical works. Even the content of philosophy varies significantly from work to work so as not to exclude ambiguity or paradox. Moreover, any work can philosophize regardless of intent; the intention to philosophize is not prerequisite for philosophy. Though paraphrasing the philosophical contribution to film creates a problem for Livingston, this problem stems from the presupposition that philosophical contribution is independent of form. However, form is an important aspect of any philosophical contribution.

The abstractness of philosophy does not distinguish it from the concreteness of film. In fact, the nature of film provides a unique and innovative contribution to philosophy through its ability to evoke emotions, and this unique contribution adds a new perspective to philosophical discussion by thrusting the viewer into a particular viewpoint. From this viewpoint, the viewer experiences and particularly feels what it is like from that perspective. This feeling allows the viewer then to understand certain philosophical positions from a different perspective than written or any other form of philosophy. Not only does this contribution strengthen or weaken philosophical arguments, but it provides for a new way of argumentation constituted by emotions. Specific cinematic means, such as zooming or focusing, provide for this contribution by provoking emotional responses, which in turn provide the spectator with emotive knowledge. Film, therefore, has

cognitive value. The philosophical voice of film resides in its ability to contribute uniquely and innovatively to philosophical discussion as an emotive medium.

## CHAPTER II

### MODERNITY: THE DESTRUCTION OF LOVE

The films of Jean-Luc Godard find their place among those with a philosophical voice. His films knit together narrative, montage, and acting in such a way as to speak philosophically. As Jean-André Fieschi notes, “[Godard’s] poetry is also metaphysics” (Mussman 68), by which he means that Godard is an artist and a philosopher. Apart from the philosophical quotes, philosophy books, and philosophers found in Godard’s films, he addresses specific philosophical ideas and questions in such a way as to contribute to philosophical discussion. He does so through argumentation created by cinematic devices as well as narrative and dialogue. Moreover, he evokes our emotions and thrusts us into certain philosophical positions from which we can glean philosophical knowledge. In other words, though many films are not philosophy, the films of Godard are.

Beginning in this chapter, I discuss Godard’s films as examples of filmsophy in support of the argument I put forth in the previous chapter. I begin by taking *Alphaville* as such an example, and in the following chapter, I focus on *Pierrot le fou*. I argue that both of these films find their philosophical foundation in Nietzsche. Whether Godard read Nietzsche directly or was indirectly aware of Nietzsche’s philosophy, we know that Nietzsche had some amount of influence on Godard, for he names *Le Gai savoir* after Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*, and he quotes Nietzsche in essays and interviews (Milne

133; Sterritt 130). In the first section of this chapter, I explain how Godard's *Alphaville* begins by applying to his contemporary society elements of Nietzsche's critique of modernity, especially as described in *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT), and then builds upon those elements in order to contribute innovatively to philosophical discussion.

In BT, Nietzsche opposes modernity, predominantly because it falsely denies that art, namely tragedy, can communicate truth. He describes this perspective as the Apollonian worldview, which he distinguishes from the Dionysian worldview. According to Nietzsche, the Apollonian worldview took precedence over the Dionysian when Euripides and Socrates initiated a new understanding of the beautiful, which alienated beautiful art by attributing supreme beauty to knowledge. Beginning with this new understanding, logic, rationality, and ultimately science became the primary epistemological authorities at the expense of mystery, which Nietzsche claims to be an intrinsic characteristic of reality. Nietzsche denies this scientific 'truth,' because he does not believe that it relates to reality and that it is, therefore, actually true.

According to Nietzsche, Socrates laid the groundwork of modernity, perhaps better described as the scientific era, by valuing knowledge as a systematic structure rather than as actually relating to everyday experience. Before describing the manner in which Nietzsche understands Socrates to be initiating modernity, we need to define modernity more precisely. Though the exact beginning of modernity is hard to locate, Descartes, John Locke, and other 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophers of Enlightenment, undisputedly referred to as early modern philosophers, are part of the beginning of modernity. These philosophers had the goal of providing an epistemological foundation for the new science, which had begun with Copernicus and Galileo, and thus science was

an important element within modern philosophy and Enlightenment culture more generally. At this time, universities began to gain in prominence, and with them science as an epistemological authority, particularly in contrast with the church. One could even say that modern philosophy served to further the progress of science, and in some sense became a science itself. Science became the key to all progress and eventually human happiness, for even as Socrates in anticipation of modernity says in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being" (38a). The goal of philosophy in modernity was to ground the ability of science to reveal knowledge, and by doing so philosophy became subservient to science.

Socrates, as explained by Nietzsche, began this transformation of society by presupposing that reality is structured and understandable. This presupposition led Socrates to deny the truth of anything that did not fit within that structured system, and Nietzsche claims that a science-centered culture was simply the fulfillment of that system. Furthermore, Socrates associates the beautiful with the gaining of knowledge, claiming that we find beauty in the philosophical pursuit of knowledge, but that knowledge is only true if it fits within the ideal structure. By doing so, Socrates initiates modern scientific culture, as Douglas Kellner states, "Throughout his work, Nietzsche saw Socratic culture as a formative force of the modern period, also with life-negating results" (80). Nietzsche deplores this horrific transformation of culture. Metaphorically speaking, he places dynamite within the walls of Socrates' structured system and destroys the box within which Socrates was trying to squeeze reality. Nietzsche argues that reality is much more than a simple beautiful system; it is a mysterious, dangerous, metaphysical

will. In later writings, he denies the metaphysical nature of reality, but he always opposes that reality is graspable and structured.

In BT, he further blames Euripides for following Socrates and making art become structured and Apollonian, and in such a way denying the Dionysian aspect of reality, which should be apparent in art. He claims that Euripides, in agreement with Socrates, created a new form of art in which dialogue became superior to action. Nietzsche states that Euripides considered himself as the sober poet among drunkards as if previous artists had failed (BT 12). The poets before him were under the influence of Dionysius, the Greek god representative of tragedy and wine; they did not value dialectics to the same extent as Euripides. Nietzsche describes Euripides's view of this older art as "primal soup," therefore lacking the sophistication and artistic beauty of the discovery of structured truth (BT 12). Euripides' tragedies focused on finding truth through dialogue at the expense of tragic action. In the same way, Socrates sought to unveil truth through conversation. The beautiful for Socrates and Euripides was more related to the discovery of structured knowledge than actually revealing reality. Therefore, Nietzsche states, "aesthetic Socratism is the murderous principle [of the older art]" (BT 12). Socrates and Euripides ushered in a new age, and the age of art ceded to this new scientific view of the world, namely modernity. Kellner confirms, "Nietzsche thus sees a massified culture, perpetuated through both schooling and newspapers, as undermining authentic art and creating a mediocre culture" (81). The impoverishing of art destroys culture and poorly represents reality.

Nietzsche attacks this transition by devaluing scientific truth. For him, the change is detrimental, because it entails a shift in our understanding of art. Art has played a



crucial role in prior human history, but now Socrates relegates art to a secondary position. Therefore, Nietzsche condemns the source of this negative transition: a worldview in which science is the final epistemological authority. Interestingly enough, the beautiful thing that Socrates seeks, he never finds. Instead of discovering truth, which he so passionately seeks, Socrates exposes his lack of knowledge and the lack of knowledge in those to whom he speaks. Nietzsche's critique of truth originates in science's inability to be the only source of truth, as it will never satisfy the desire for truth due to its inability to reveal reality in its entirety. Science and logic can only disclose truth to a certain extent. Nietzsche does not contest the value of science or logic but rather the overvaluation of science as the only source of truth. In the next section of this chapter, I describe the way in which *Alphaville* is also a critique of modernity in the same sense BT is. Both works portray as problematic the unquestioned acceptance of science as the primary source of truth, because it leads to blindness, dullness, meaninglessness, and the destruction of art. In the final section of this chapter, I explain how *Alphaville* goes a step beyond Nietzsche's critique by presenting sincere human affection as a defense against the dehumanizing consequences of the scientific worldview.

### **Nietzsche's Critique of Modernity in Godard's *Alphaville***

Nietzsche is one of the first philosophers to stand in opposition to this modern idea of science, and as previously mentioned, he even attributes the beginning of this modern idea to Socrates and Euripides. As one of his first works, BT launches his critique of modernity as he describes the way in which Socrates and Euripides started the movement toward the scientific era, destroying tragedy, which we so desperately need. His critique can be broken down into five parts, all of which are also present in *Alphaville*.

These five parts are: the critique of scientism, modernity as blinding humanity to reality, modernity's dullness and emotionlessness, modernity's destruction of art, poetry, and tragedy, and modernity's anti-humanism (a poison to what is truly human). *Alphaville* demonstrates each of these elements and then builds upon Nietzsche's foundation. In what follows, I explain each of these points as they are first found in Nietzsche and then supported in *Alphaville*.

The critique of scientism is the foundation of Nietzsche's critique of modernity as found in BT. Though later, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche embraces science, this stage in his intellectual maturity is short lived, and he quickly returns to his repudiation of science as central to philosophy. Therefore, Nietzsche's disdain for science is an important element throughout the whole of his philosophy, and most importantly, it underlies his critique of modernity since he established the root problem in an absolute reliance on science. In BT, Nietzsche retraces this problem to its origin in Socrates and Euripides, Socrates being the instigator, and Euripides, the executor. Euripides' tragedies ushered in a new era for art, in which art had only secondary importance. Nietzsche explains how science had become more important than everything else including art. Socrates' insistence on the importance of knowledge influenced Euripides to make these changes, and they are evident in Euripides' tragedies through his prologue and use of dialogue instead of action. The prologue would establish the truth of the tragedy by invoking a god or some other truth-teller, and then dialogue and dialectics would take precedence over tragic action, because of the importance of truth. Therefore, Nietzsche equates science with dialectics and logic, as the foundation of a new era in which structured knowledge takes precedence over actual knowledge of what is real.

Nietzsche describes Socrates as the founder of science in that Socrates claims that the best way to come to understand reality is through dialectics and logic. In other words, that which is most probable and most logical is what we should take to be real, and the best way to understand reality is through science. Modernity is not a radical transition from this position, but a more thorough application of this position. In modernity, science has fully blossomed and become the foundation of all knowledge. Furthermore, acquiring knowledge leads to happiness, because scientific truth has become the most valued element of any fulfilling life. Nietzsche disagrees with this modern stance and argues that science is not the foundation of all knowledge, because science views reality as intelligible and graspable, but experience proves that reality is otherwise. In *BT*, reality is the metaphysical will, which we cannot even come close to understanding through science. In fact, from a scientific standpoint, understanding anything about the metaphysical will leads to death, because science does not have necessary distance from pure revelation that art has. Therefore, the heart of his critique is that we should not consider science as the primary way to understand reality, and especially not as the only way to understand reality.

In continuity with Nietzsche, Godard applies this critique to his contemporaries in *Alphaville*. He uses a mixture of narrative, dialogue, and cinematic means to depict Nietzsche's critique. In the film, the spectator explores the science fiction city, Alphaville, from the perspective of Lemmy Caution, a secret agent sent from "les pays extérieurs" (the outside lands) to spy on Alphaville. We quickly identify more with the outside lands than with Alphaville, for several reasons including the similarity between the names of contemporary cities and Nueva York, Tokyorama, and other city names

from the outside lands. However, the difference in these names points to an important distinction. The world of the spectator, namely the world of 1965, has already become like Alphaville to a certain extent, while as the outside lands represent the mixture between a new perspective and a historical perspective of contemporary society. James Monaco affirms the historical perspective intended by Godard when he says, “Godard sees Lemmy Caution less as a traveler in the future than as a man from the past visiting in the terrible present” (162). The city names represent a new perspective in the sense that Nueva York is not New York from an earlier period, but still historical in the sense that Nueva York does have a striking similarity to New York. The spectator wants to feel at home in the outside lands but is forced to recognize the striking resemblance between Alphaville and Paris of 1965.

The 1965 spectators were, furthermore, particularly aware that Godard was comparing Alphaville to their contemporary society, because of the prominence of professor von Braun in Alphaville. In the film, the outside lands have banished von Braun, who moved on to Alphaville, where he built the super computer alpha 60, and together they control Alphaville. In 1965, Werner von Braun was a very important scientist as part of the U.S. space mission, and his Nazi background was simply overlooked due to his scientific talent. In this way, Godard creates a critique of the value of science in 1965 by exposing how science was given priority over everything else, even morality. *Alphaville* functions as a thought experiment<sup>3</sup> in that *Alphaville* is an attempt to depict a city in which science has priority in every aspect of life. Perhaps in 1965, the world had not quite come to being Alphaville yet, but Godard seems to want to warn society of what it will become if it continues to make similar decisions as that of ignoring

---

<sup>3</sup> See Carroll’s “The Wheel of Virtue” for more on film and art as thought experiments

von Braun's past because of his scientific talent. In this way, Godard begins his critique of modernity.

Godard further portrays Alphaville as a place where logic and probability govern every decision attesting to the deeper problem, namely that the citizens of Alphaville view reality as void of mystery. The professor von Braun has transformed the whole society of Alphaville so that his super computer alpha 60 makes decisions based on probability and logic, which determine the future of Alphaville and the way citizens must behave. Godard portrays this negatively by removing the humanity of society, which we notice particularly well by the speed and intonation of speech that the citizens of Alphaville use and also used by alpha 60. Speech is no longer human, because the humans are no longer human. They have lost freedom and spontaneity by becoming slaves to an Apollonian worldview as described by Nietzsche. The women in Alphaville are further evidence of this lack of humanity, because they have become robots. And finally, Godard depicts the horrifying nature of Alphaville through von Braun's decision to destroy the outside lands. As the audience is thrust into this new world mixing their perspectives with that of Lemmy, one cannot but be opposed to the scientific progress of Alphaville. Each spectator feels the emotional disgust of the anti-human nature of such a place and associates that disgust with scientism or what Nietzsche would call Socratism.

I explain in much more detail later how *Alphaville* is philosophy, but let us take this small point as an initial example. In *Alphaville*'s depiction of Nietzsche's critique of scientism, *Alphaville* has an innovative philosophical voice in that Godard applies Nietzsche's principle to his contemporaneous situation. This application is philosophically innovative, because it takes a philosophical position original to Nietzsche

and argues, if I may, in defense of Nietzsche's position in relation to society in 1965. Whether Godard intentionally grounds this point on Nietzsche's position is impossible to know, but I believe to have clearly defended making this connection. Godard's argument is not formal in that he does not present a verbal thesis and then defend that thesis with logically formulated arguments. However, Godard still argues by presenting a non-verbal thesis, namely a filmic thesis,<sup>4</sup> which I have made evident, and then supports that thesis with filmic argumentation, using dialogue, narration, and filmic devices, as I have explained. Obviously, my paraphrase and explanation is an incomplete portrayal of his argument, because I am merely using words, while Godard also used images. In order to conclusively agree or disagree with the argument that I am putting forth, one would also have to see the film for oneself, because the emotional aspect of the argument, which is the crux of the innovative contribution of film to philosophy, will only have its full affect while one experiences the film.

In the works of Nietzsche and Godard, the critique of scientism then turns to a critique of those who allow science to have such unchallenged authority. Nietzsche and Godard both attribute this to blindness, or rather that modernity blinds people to reality. As mentioned previously, Nietzsche's critique of scientism stems from science's inadequacy to act as sole revelator of reality. Similarly, modernity blinds people to true reality in that people become convinced that reality is all that science describes. Robert Pippin explains Nietzsche's view of modern people, saying, "they have settled so comfortably into their contented lives that they no longer even realize what they have done, or what else might be possible" (88). Modern people have chosen to impoverish their culture, but they do not even acknowledge the choice that they have made.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Hunt for more on how film can present a thesis

Nietzsche blames Socrates and Euripides for starting the movement that leads people away from a flourishing culture of which Dionysius is a central element towards a purely Apollonian worldview for the sake of structure and beauty. He contrasts modernity to Greek society prior to Socrates and Euripides with this illustration, “The idyllic shepherd of modern man is merely a counterfeit of the sum of educated illusions which modern man takes to be nature; the Dionysian Greek wants truth and nature at full strength – and sees himself transformed into a satyr” (BT 8). In order to understand this distinction, we must first recognize that Nietzsche claims science only displays a portion of reality, therefore “the sum of educated illusions” is treating science as if it portrayed all of reality. For in so doing, one will believe reality is something other than it truly is, and therefore we have an illusion. The Greeks prior to Socrates found reality also in tragedy and in art, and so had a more complete picture of all that is real, even if that picture is still incomplete. Nietzsche’s critique of modernity is also a depiction of modern people as blind in that they would rather change reality to fit their structure than allow their structure to crumble. The Apollonian worldview is lacking, but modernity has embraced it blindly to culture’s detriment.

Godard similarly portrays modern people as blind in *Alphaville*. The citizens of Alphaville, and particularly Natasha von Braun, are not aware that they have slowly been deceived into giving up their humanity. They became robots without even noticing. When Lemmy introduces Natasha to poetry, her blindness is particularly apparent, because Lemmy is able to help her recognize that she has been deceived in many ways. Lemmy helps her begin to rediscover her humanity and her past. In this scene, Godard uses an assortment of narrative, dialogue, and cinematic means to communicate the

transformation of Natasha as she begins to recognize her blindness. Through this scene from within the context of the entire film, Godard creates the argument that giving science complete epistemological authority blinds society from reality. Natasha, as well as Henry Dickson, formerly knew more about reality but when immersed in this computer-governed world, both are deceived into forgetting and giving up on what is actually real. Lemmy is able to resist because of his complete rejection of their way of life, but the citizens of Alphaville and those who have joined their society are clearly blind.

The film further exemplifies the blindness of those who do not reject the complete authority of science through the swimming pool execution scene. In this scene, everyone is blind except for Lemmy and the convicts, because each of the convicts gives a speech that would normally cause some sort of reaction, however, no one reacts. They have even turned executions into a display of beauty with synchronized swimming. Godard is clearly suggesting that if science becomes the ultimate authority in matters of truth and life, then people will no longer understand reality as well as they otherwise could. Culture will be impoverished by becoming a spectacle of insanity. The audience experiencing these two scenes feels the tension between what is happening in Alphaville and the way things should happen, but they also see the absence of tension in the citizens of Alphaville. This absence reveals their blindness, but it is not an innocent blindness, as the viewer realizes when Natasha recognizes her own blindness and turns around and says “tant pis” (too bad). In that moment, Godard reaches the climax of his critique of modernity by declaring through her statement that modern people recognize their blindness and do not even care.



Nietzsche and Godard both extend this critique of modernity to incorporate the lack of emotion even as we encounter in the scene just described. They both criticize modernity, because everything becomes emotionless and dull. Nietzsche primarily describes this through the work of Euripides, whose tragedies, Nietzsche characterizes as dull and lacking emotion. According to Nietzsche, Euripides only paid attention to two spectators, one being himself, and the other Socrates. These two spectators were more concerned with structured truth than anything else, and they thought that the only way to truth was through logic and dialectics. Euripides sees himself as a significant improvement on previous artistic expression, but according to Nietzsche, he is actually making life dull and discrediting the value of emotions. In his tragedies, he begins presenting the state of affairs from the position of a deity or other authoritative figure in order to establish the truth of the tragedy, and he exchanges tragic action for dialogue. Through these changes, he reveals his decision to value dialectics and logic above all else. Nietzsche connects this with the modern placing of science as the foundation of all knowledge, and claims that this makes life dull and emotionless and eventually poisons all of culture.

In *Alphaville*, Godard portrays the citizens and the city itself as dull and emotionless. First, the low lighting during filming creates the appearance of a dark scene, instead of being full of light and energy, and this lighting makes Alphaville appear as a dull place. Large buildings and many cars populate the city, but very few people are present on the screen, which creates an effect of emptiness and inactivity as if the city were lifeless. The interior of buildings have large glass windows and large empty walls, perhaps with the occasional picture of the professor von Braun. The camera shots often

spin, rotate, and even pendulate without moving towards action or activity as if there were nothing to see in Alphaville. No one seems to have any real conversations, except for Lemmy, as if the people have nothing to say to each other or to communicate, because everything is dull and emotionless. Moreover, expressing emotions is forbidden. Several people are executed in one scene, because they have showed emotion such as sorrow at a loved-one's death. In each hotel room, there is a "Bible," which is actually a dictionary, and words are removed from the dictionary every day, because they become too emotionally charged. Through these various elements, Godard leads the spectator to associate dullness and lack of emotion with Alphaville. Therefore, Godard constructs his critique that modernity leads to dullness and emotionlessness by depicting Alphaville as a city in which the supremacy of science has already created a dull and emotionless culture, which it must necessarily sustain in order to prolong science's reign.

As an almost obvious conclusion from the previous elements of critique, we now explore the critique of modernity as the destruction of art. Art loses much of its value when it becomes dull and emotionless, as Nietzsche and Godard attribute to the modern situation, but additionally, modernity takes away art's primary purpose, which is to reveal reality. Nietzsche claims that Socrates initiated this aspect of modernity when he redefined beauty. The beautiful for Socrates helps people come to understand the forms and is, thus, similar in nature to philosophy itself. Accordingly, most art is disqualified from being beautiful, and Socrates even appears to claim that the discovery of propositional or abstract truth is beautiful rather than art. Thus, one could conclude that Socrates sees dialectics as more beautiful than art, which Nietzsche describes as the forerunner of the modern position concerning science. As mentioned previously,

Euripides looked to Socrates when constructing his tragedies and incorporated this concept of the beautiful, while previous artists had a different conception of the beautiful, namely that beauty is more than discovering propositional abstract truth, because reality is more complicated than can be understood by simple propositional and abstract truth. As Nietzsche states, “I fear that, with our current veneration for the natural and the real, we have arrived at the opposite pole to all idealism, and have landed in the region of the waxworks” (BT 7). In other words, restricting reality, beauty, and truth to that which can be understood in propositions and through dialogue creates a perception of reality that is not true, because reality does not always conform to propositions and cannot always be expressed in structured dialogue. Formerly, art had a cultural role that included revealing reality through a mixture of Apollonian and Dionysian elements, which had nothing to do with propositions and dialogue, but “aesthetic Socratism is the murderous principle [of that form of art]” (BT 12). Moreover, Socrates never finds the structured knowledge that he seeks, perhaps because he destroyed any chance he could have had at finding it from the start. Nietzsche argues that modernity destroys art by forcing it to conform to Apollonian beauty.

Godard’s critique is also against the elimination of art by modern science and technology. Godard specifically references poetry as Nietzsche particularly focuses on tragedy. Let us look again to the scene during which Lemmy presents poetry to Natasha for what appears to be the first time, but in actuality, we discover that she had encountered poetry before but had lost all recollection of it. In this scene, Godard argues that modernity has destroyed art by removing emotion and emotional language from society. With science as the only source of truth, emotions are removed from society,

and with it art, because art cannot exist without emotion. For this reason, Lemmy reintroduces Natasha to poetry and emotion simultaneously. He attempts to teach her what love is and does not truly succeed, but he plants a seed that then fully blossoms at the end of the film. It takes time for Natasha to recover, but Godard's main point is that science is the culprit. Due to the modern situation, science must be overcome, and we must accept emotion as an equally important element of humanity.

Finally, we come to the last element of this critique of modernity as described by Nietzsche, the critique that modernity is a destruction of humanity. In later writings, Nietzsche addresses this critique through his imagery of the last man. In BT, he describes art as necessary for human existence. He states, "Art saves him, and through art life saves him – for itself" (BT 7). In this statement, Nietzsche is affirming the life-giving value of art that we lose in modernity. With the rise of science and the fall of art, humanity also changes by losing its humanness. Gazing directly into reality is deadly according to Nietzsche, but humans cannot be human without facing reality. Art allows humans to gaze directly into crude reality without committing suicide, but without art, there is no way to come to terms with reality without death, though most people avoid death by softening their perception of reality. Therefore, the loss of art means the loss of true humanity, namely people who can perceive reality as closely as possible and continue to live. Nietzsche confirms, "for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*" (BT 5). Only through art can we understand existence in a way that allows us truly to live it.

For both Nietzsche and Godard, the study of history is a life-affirming activity, or rather an endeavor capable of restoring humanity to some extent. Kellner explains,

“Believing that modern individuals suffered from a weakened personality, Nietzsche wanted the study of history to be put into the service of creating great personalities, to help make possible a rebirth of a life-affirming culture” (83). The herd mentality of modernity brought the death of individuality, which is part of the height of humanity according to Nietzsche, but through the study of history, great historical individuals could become awakening motivators for modern people. For Godard, love will ultimately be the cure for modern people, but as Kellner confirms for Nietzsche, history can have a curing power.

In *Alphaville*, this element of the critique of modernity is present also. Godard presents the citizens of Alphaville as robots who have lost all autonomy, except for the professor von Braun, who is autonomous, but not entirely human either. He resembles a Hitler type character, which we can describe as anti-human. The society itself is also anti-human since von Braun and alpha 60 control the society. Alpha 60 is the opposite of most contemporary film depictions of robots, which give the robots human characteristics. Alpha 60 has no body, does not talk like a human, and displays no emotion. In fact, it only acts according to what is probable and logical, and it forces everyone in society to do the same. This aspect of the film is particularly apparent through the scene in which alpha 60 questions Lemmy. The people have lost their humanity, because their only purpose is to continue advancing technologically. They do not care about happiness, love, or relationships, and the only reason they care about morality is to weed out anything that presents a threat to the ultimate supremacy of science. This worldview is undeniably anti-human, and the spectators of *Alphaville* feel disdain towards it as they experience the

strange world of Alphaville, but they also inescapably see the resemblance between Alphaville and their own world.

Similar to Nietzsche, the study of history is somewhat of a cure, not for the people of Alphaville, but for those watching *Alphaville*. Richard Brody states, “[...] the emotional failures of the modern world are akin to its failures of historical memory, that the modern world of technology, order, and comfort is regimented like a concentration camp, and that the inability to be true to the dictates of one’s conscience in love is a moral failing at the level of collaboration with a Nazi-like power” (232). In this sense, the forgetfulness of the citizens of Alphaville is a reminder to the spectator to remember. By remembering, we may be able to prevent or reverse some of the dehumanizing elements of modernity. By adding the historical perspective, Godard further corroborates Nietzsche’s thesis.

As described, Godard’s critique parallels that of Nietzsche’s in each of the five elements. Nietzsche and Godard both attack the supremacy of science, claiming that it leads to blindness, emotionlessness, the destruction of art, and ultimately the deterioration of humanity. *Alphaville* serves as an example of how film can parallel philosophy, but it also exemplifies film doing philosophy. Godard’s critique is not simply a summary of Nietzsche’s philosophy, but *Alphaville* is philosophy itself. In one sense, it is philosophy in that it applies Nietzsche’s philosophy to a different historical period, which makes it more than a simple summary, but in another sense, it is philosophy, because it expands upon Nietzsche’s foundation. In the next section, I describe *Alphaville*’s innovative contribution to philosophy.

## **Godard, Love, and Modernity**

Godard and Nietzsche criticize modernity for several reasons, but Nietzsche, in *BT*, does not address the issue that Godard finds of utmost importance, namely the loss of love in modernity. Nietzsche emphasizes the loss of tragedy as the greatest loss, but Godard focuses on love. As I have described, Godard applies Nietzsche's critique to his society throughout the film, but also throughout the film, and particularly at the ending, Godard builds upon Nietzsche's philosophy just as philosophers often do when writing journal articles or books. Godard's unique thesis is that love, being beyond the realm of science, is central to humanness. In other words, with the rise of science in modernity, love loses the value that we should ascribe to it, because love is diminished similarly to art in that they both become secondary to science. He calls us to fight against science, when science attempts to overrule love, and he does this by constructing an argument that is partly based on narration, partly on dialogue, and partly on cinematic techniques. I outline each of those elements in this section, though these elements are not used to form distinct arguments, rather they build upon each other within different scenes. In the following paragraphs, I describe how these elements come together in different scenes in order to produce an argument through film.

Upon his arrival in Alphaville, Lemmy seeks out Henry, and the scene in which he finds him constructs an argument for the centrality of love relationships to being human. Lemmy meets Henry in some sort of apartment complex, and as they leave the lobby together, the attendant reminds Henry that he needs to commit suicide soon. Lemmy and Henry then have a conversation in a circular staircase about Alphaville. Lemmy questions Henry about committing suicide, alpha 60, and other strange things in

Alphaville, and he discovers from Henry that the citizens of Alphaville have become slaves to probability. When Henry speaks of the difficulty of adapting to Alphaville, the screen shows a large building with lots of windows full of light, but no life. The camera seems to pan across the building aimlessly in search of something that it does not find, which creates a sense of being lost and meaninglessness, both of which the spectator automatically ascribe to Alphaville, especially since a beeping noise starts when the spectator sees the building and continues during the following shot of Lemmy and Henry talking. So not only does the beeping noise carrying over between the shots lead us to associate the shots, but the same beeping noise appearing previously during dry and humanless scenes leads the spectator to associate Alphaville with a lack of humanity. Throughout the scene, Henry suffers from loss of memory, inability to concentrate, and other problems related to his mind, which dialogue, narration, and cinematic techniques reveal. The scene culminates in Henry's room, after a woman joins him, while Lemmy hides behind a door. Henry starts to die when he says, "I love you" to the woman with him. As he says those words, he regains consciousness of what true meaning in life should be, and realizing that he has allowed all meaning to escape his life, he dies. By making the climax of the scene the phrase "I love you," Godard portrays love as the salvation from the anti-human world of Alphaville. Love restores humanity and is even necessary for someone to be human. Anything that inhibits love should be fought and destroyed.

About half-way through the film, Godard places an execution scene that also constructs an argument that love relationships are central to being human, and that giving too much authority to science destroys those relationships. In this scene, two short



dialogues within narrative context create part of the argument. These two dialogues are the death speeches of convicted men. They both cry out from the diving platform prior to being shot and then stabbed to death in the water. Natasha presents the first convict to us, because she knows why he is being executed. Apparently, he cried when his wife died. He expressed sorrow, as we would expect, because he lost the woman with whom he was in a love relationship. Neither man fears dying, but both walk boldly toward death and attempt to share a message before dying. The first man says that we must go towards those we love in order to live, exemplifying that he has discovered love relationships to be the most important aspect of life. He would rather die continuing to value love above all else, than deny his love and live. The second man exclaims that those who are not convicted have lost touch with what is true, and that he has discovered the things that are most true of people. He lists several emotions, but love and faith are the first two on his list. These two speeches including the narration of the event show that Godard is arguing in favor of love, especially love relationships as an important element of human existence. He also argues that giving complete authority in matters of truth to science, logic, and probability, destroys love relationships. In the elevator on their way to the execution, the camera zooms in on the “SS” button as Natasha presses it, which represents the basement in French, but also refers to Nazi Germany. This zoom alerts us to the inhumanity that we are about to see. The music is also dark and suspenseful as it is throughout the film. Both of these elements along with other elements make the spectator feel moral outrage at the events happening in the room. Further cinematic techniques also support the argument at hand, notably the swinging back and forth of the camera as Lemmy questions the two men on opposite sides of him, and the swinging back and forth of

Lemmy and Natasha as they talk. That sort of motion is the same as shaking one's head in disdain, but more importantly, it reveals the inhumanity of the scene. The swinging back and forth of the camera presents Lemmy as the only person who truly recognizes what is happening, and the swinging back and forth of Lemmy and Natsha creates a barrier between them as they face away from the other signifying their inability to acknowledge the humanness of the other. Throughout this scene, Godard emphasizes the anti-human nature of denying love and creates an argument against the epistemological supremacy of science because it inhibits love, which is central to being human.

The scene in which Godard introduces poetry to Natasha also constructs an argument for the centrality of love relationships. Godard chose to use Paul Éluard's *Capitale de la douleur*, which to summarize simplistically addresses the pain associated with the absence of a loved-one, as the book of poetry that helps Natasha begin to remember. This book also connects the two previous scenes mentioned, because Henry had kept this book under his pillow in his room, and he gives it to Lemmy right before he dies. Furthermore, the speech of the first convicted man is a part of one of the poems. This choice connects all of Godard's previous references and comments to art, poetry, and beauty with love, and shows that ultimately he wants us to understand the great problem in Alphaville as the absence of love, and especially that they do not recognize or feel the pain that they should. Throughout the poetry scene, Natasha slowly begins to grasp what love is, as she remembers her past and recognizes that she is missing something in her life. However, this scene is primarily rising action toward the climax of the final scene of the film in which she fully remembers how to say, "Je vous aime" (I love you). The first of these two scenes reaches its climax when Natasha recognizes her

blindness, but does not care as she exclaims, “tant pis” (too bad). These two scenes together point to Godard’s central argument, which is that if as a society, we rely on science as the sole authority for truth, then we will lose that which is most human about us, namely love. The film powerfully convinces us of this truth just as other works of philosophy convince us of other truths.

The argumentation throughout *Alphaville* is clear and philosophical. He argues through the film that love is a valuable aspect of human existence, and that accepting science as the only source for knowledge destroys love. By doing this, Godard expands upon Nietzsche’s philosophy with his own argument, which adds an element to the critique of modernity. Modernity does not only have the problems of giving science too much authority, blindness, emotionlessness, destroying art, and being anti-human, but also inhibiting love. Godard applies Nietzsche’s critique by strengthening Nietzsche’s arguments using cultural references from 1965 and by using cinematic techniques that did not exist when Nietzsche was alive. On top of this, Godard uses narration, dialogue, and cinematic techniques to construct his own argument, building upon the foundation laid by Nietzsche.

*Alphaville* is an excellent example of film as philosophy, because it incorporates philosophical argumentation previously established as philosophy, and because it builds upon that argumentation in order to construct an innovative contribution to philosophy. *Alphaville* functions similarly to journal articles and books, but the particular medium of film allows *Alphaville* to speak philosophically through emotive knowledge. *Alphaville* is a particularly good example of philosophy, because Godard blends narrative, dialogue, and cinematic techniques to construct arguments that are especially influential due to

their emotional significance. Godard uses camera movements, lighting, speeches, and actions among other things, which provoke emotions and give the audience an emotional understanding of the negative elements of modernity. The main argument of *Alphaville* extends beyond any statement of Nietzsche's in BT by claiming that the ultimate deterioration of modernity is the loss of love relationships. However, a significant portion of Godard's argument parallels that of Nietzsche. The epistemological supremacy of science, which Nietzsche associates with dialectics and logic, is the root of the great disaster of modernity.

Similarly, this problem is a primary factor for those who oppose the idea of film functioning as philosophy, because the argument against filmosophy is that knowledge must come from written or spoken logical argumentation, whereas film as an art form moves beyond traditional formal arguments. Therefore, even the arguments of Nietzsche and Godard support the cognitive value of film in opposition to those who deny film's ability to be philosophy. Both philosophers argue through their work that the loss of art as a means of communicating truth leads to the perception of an illusory world, which confirms not only that film can be philosophy, but that we need to accept film as philosophy in order to have a better understanding of reality. According to Nietzsche and Godard, we need to accept that film can function as philosophy and we need film as philosophy so that we can have a proper understanding of reality and a properly balanced culture.

### CHAPTER III

#### NIETZSCHE AND GODARD ON REALITY

Only several months after the release of *Alphaville*, Godard directed *Pierrot le fou*, and with this film, he provides a second example of film as philosophy. *Pierrot le fou* contributes to philosophical discussion concerning the nature of reality by also building upon Nietzsche's foundation. For Nietzsche, reality is not metaphysical, incomplete, changing, difficultly understood, and better revealed through art than science. In *Pierrot le fou*, Godard expands upon Nietzsche's groundwork by arguing that reality is also multilayered, which as I explain is a move beyond Nietzsche's perspectivism, though it resembles perspectivism to a certain extent. The many layers present in Godard's work are similar to dimensions in the sense that they are separate realities that can never be completely independent since they all participate in the same meta-reality. These layers are further similar to Nietzsche's perspectives in that they provide different ways of seeing the world that are simultaneously true, but they distinguish themselves from the perspectives by representing actual realms rather than points of view. According to Godard, a perspective itself may have several layers. In this chapter, I explain Godard's philosophical contribution through his application of Nietzschean philosophy and innovative addition to Nietzsche's ideas in *Pierrot le fou*.

Nietzsche's understanding of reality gradually changes throughout his philosophical career, so I focus on his later conception of reality as described in *The Gay Science* (GS) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE), but elements of that understanding are present in *Human, All Too Human* (HH), and BT, which I refer to as well. Though Nietzsche's view is not entirely consistent, the gradual changes in Nietzsche's understanding of reality actually affirm continuity in his conception rather than present a contradiction within Nietzsche's own theory of reality, because relativity is a primary characteristic of reality for Nietzsche from the start. Matthew Rampley states, "Despite its immaturity, *The Birth of Tragedy* remains central to Nietzsche's oeuvre, alluding to and introducing themes recurrent throughout his thinking" (79). Nietzsche's views on reality do change after BT, but most of those changes stem from the seeds of Nietzsche's thought present in his earlier writing. In other words, reality, for Nietzsche, is not absolute; it changes, which corroborates his shifting thought rather than undermining it.

Of similar importance, his understanding of reality as ungraspable in its entirety is also an idea that he affirms throughout his life. Accordingly, no one can understand or be fully aware of reality as a complete entity. Reality is impossible to know fully, even in its aspects, but as we saw in the previous chapter, reality is better understood through a mixture of the Dionysian and Apollonian mediums than through a solely Apollonian means. In this sense, Apollo represents structured and formal mediums, while Dionysius represents the lack of structure and form. Applied to the argument of this thesis, Apollo signifies formal argumentation such as a logical argument presented in a journal article, and Dionysius signifies the lack of structure and formal argumentation involved in film. Consequently, some filmic devices together with some structured arguments help us have

the best perspective on reality. However, part of Nietzsche's later conception of reality that differs from his understanding in BT is the idea that reality is not metaphysical, which seems to distance Nietzsche from Dionysius. After careful consideration, I argue that the non-metaphysical nature of reality only confirms the need of a more Dionysian worldview. I explain these and further characteristics of reality in detail in the first section, and I argue that they are also apparent in *Pierrot le fou*. Godard starts from the foundation laid by Nietzsche and moves on to expand upon it. In the second section, I argue that Godard constructs an argument through film, which compellingly demonstrates that reality is multilayered as an extension of Nietzsche's perspectivism.

### **Nietzsche's Conception of Reality in Godard's *Pierrot le fou***

The nature of reality is an important philosophical topic, because our understanding of reality affects the way in which we interact with the world around us. As an example, if we believe that we are in a dream, i.e. an unreal experience, we might respond less ethically than if we believe that our experience is real. Throughout the history of philosophy, philosophers have had many different ideas concerning reality. Nietzsche and Godard fit within this tradition though they also distinguish themselves from other philosophers with their unique contribution. Nietzsche describes reality more in terms of what it is not rather than what it is. He claims that reality is not metaphysical, not absolute, not complete, not easily knowable, and not primarily revealed through science. He does make a few positive claims in conjunction with these negative claims, namely that reality is knowable, at least in part, and with much difficulty, and that it is revealed through a mixture of art and science. Godard builds upon this foundation in *Pierrot le fou*, agreeing with Nietzsche on these assertions. In this section, I first describe

Nietzsche's argument in relation to each of these assertions, and then describe how Godard exemplifies each argument in *Pierrot le fou*.

Though Martin Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche led him to believe that Nietzsche's metaphysical view of reality continues into his later writing, specifically as the will to power, several scholars, including Ciano Aydin, Maudemarie Clark, and Alexander Nehamas have convincingly argued that Nietzsche's notion of the will to power does not necessarily imply a metaphysical understanding of the world. Although our discussion primarily focuses on the characteristics of reality rather than on the significance of the will to power, a short treatment of two explications of the will to power are helpful, because they will prepare us to better comprehend Nietzsche's non-metaphysical characterization of reality. As the first explanation, Clark argues that Nietzsche's strongest argument in favor of reality as the will to power, which is found in aphorism 36 of BGE, is not actually meant to make such an argument (212). Accordingly, Clark argues that Nietzsche never claims that the will to power is an actual reality, but rather that Nietzsche chooses to use the notion of will to power in order to describe the world from his biased perspective. In her own words, she writes, "I have argued that Nietzsche's doctrine of will to power is not a doctrine at all. Although Nietzsche says that life is will to power, he also gives us clues that he does not regard this as a truth or a matter of knowledge, but as a construction of the world from the viewpoint of his values" (227). In other words, even if Nietzsche's notion of will to power implied some sort of metaphysics, Clark states that such an implication would not apply to Nietzsche's conception of reality. Therefore, reality for Nietzsche is not metaphysical.



As a second explanation, Nehamas argues that Nietzsche's will to power actually affirms his rejection of metaphysics rather than forcing him to accept a metaphysical nature of reality as Heidegger argued. Concerning Nietzsche's portrayal of the world as will to power, Nehamas states, "[Nietzsche] wants to show that the world has no ontological structure" (96). According to Nehamas, Nietzsche uses the notion of will to power in order to reveal the non-metaphysical nature of reality by attempting to deny any metaphysical commitments in language, mathematics, or logic. Nehamas claims that Nietzsche refuses to accept that language imposes any type of metaphysics on our perspective of the world. Aydin confirms that Heidegger's reading is incorrect, asserting that Nietzsche does not intend anything metaphysical in his use of the will to power (42). Consequently, though Nietzsche refers to reality as the will to power, this concept does not imply his acceptance of a metaphysical conception of reality.

On the contrary, one of Nietzsche's central claims is that reality is not metaphysical or rather that nothing metaphysical has anything to do with reality. In BT, Nietzsche still believed that reality was metaphysical, but he rejects that idea later in life, through his rejection of Kant's thing-in-itself. In GS 54, Nietzsche claims that appearance is all that is real in contradiction to Kant. Nietzsche states, "To me, appearance is the active and living itself" (GS 54), by which he affirms that the thing-in-itself is the appearance. A reality behind appearance does not exist, and thus, reality is not metaphysical. Reality relates directly to everything that we experience. Clark also refers to this passage in order to argue that Nietzsche's position has changed from the position he had in HH (100). She argues that in GS 54, Nietzsche denies any possible metaphysical world, which he allowed for previously. This connection between GS and

HH, is particularly important, because in HH, we see the important step behind Nietzsche's rejection of everything metaphysical.

In HH, Nietzsche firmly believes that anything we cannot experience, such as Kant's thing-in-itself, has no significance. Nietzsche denies the importance of a metaphysical reality, saying, "Even if the existence of such a world were never so well demonstrated, it is certain that knowledge of it would be the most useless of all knowledge: more useless even than knowledge of the chemical composition of water must be to the sailor in danger of shipwreck" (HH 9). In this passage, Nietzsche communicates his belief that reality is an experienced reality, by conveying its necessary relationship to our experience. Reality has no cognitive significance if it has nothing to do with our experience, as Clark confirms, "HH 9 implies that metaphysics—knowledge of the metaphysical world—would not provide answers that we could find cognitively useful" (98). Something that is not useful does not relate to life, and thus is not a part of our experienced reality. The uselessness of that which we cannot experience eventually leads Nietzsche to argue against the reality of anything that is metaphysical, because it does not relate to the world within which we live.

In *Pierrot le fou*, Godard reasserts Nietzsche's argument concerning the necessary relationship between reality and our experience. He does so using techniques that other film directors often put forth much effort to avoid. *Pierrot le fou* makes its spectators aware of their status as spectators. Godard does not want his spectator's experience of the film to be separate from the reality of that experience, namely that it is a spectator experience. The film is full of devices and techniques that are meant to remind the spectators that they are currently watching a film. He has Ferdinand speak directly to the

audience, a scene appears on screen out of sequence, he uses completely unrealistic props, and an extra even identifies himself as an extra in the film. Similar to Nietzsche, Godard believes that a film would have no relationship to reality if it were completely cut off from the spectator's experience, because reality is by nature experienceable. For Godard, a difference does not exist between cinema and life, as he states in a panel discussion at the University of Southern California, and therefore, he reveals the reality of the spectator experience in his films, particularly *Pierrot le fou* (Sterritt 13). The experience of a film is real, and as I demonstrate in the following section, even fiction is an important element of reality.

Moreover, though much of the narration in *Pierrot le fou* seems to deal with issues completely unrelated to most people's everyday experience such as murder, escaping the police, and living on the beach in an abandoned house, those issues are still issues of life experience and the themes that arise are congruous with more realistic situations. Part of what Godard strives to do is exaggerate in order to reveal aspects of reality that we otherwise ignore. For example, when Ferdinand drives the car into the ocean, this act exaggeratingly portrays the existential freedom that Godard believes we have. Godard comments himself on *Pierrot le fou*, stating that it is a film about life, or an attempt to film life (Milne 214). Just as Nietzsche argues that reality must be directly experienceable, Godard constructs *Pierrot le fou* in such a way as to depict experience as that and only that which is real. In *Pierrot le fou* as in Nietzsche's works, life as it is experienced is real, and non-experienceable concepts, such as that of a metaphysical world, are not real.

We now turn to our incomplete knowledge of reality as described by Nietzsche. In the first aphorism of GS, Nietzsche speaks of the impossibility of mocking the individual, or laughing at a person “from *the whole truth*” (GS 1). Nietzsche puts these words in italic, because they represent an impossibility, namely that it is impossible to know the whole truth, by which he means a complete understanding of reality. Were a complete understanding of reality to exist, it would be inaccessible to human beings. This inaccessibility of reality as complete stems from Nietzsche’s provocative assertion of the death of God, which signals the end of all external authoritarian standards (GS 125). Although God had the authority to declare truth and to reveal reality because of his omniscient position, God is now dead. In making this assertion, Nietzsche does not mean that God has literally died. Nietzsche does not believe that God ever existed. Instead, he means that society has stopped functioning as if a god were necessary. People now claim full autonomous authority of their lives, leaving no room for a god. Consequently, humans cannot claim an omniscient perspective or a complete understanding of reality, because we have physical and mental limits; we see the world from our particular perspectives, hence Nietzsche’s often referred to perspectivism. Reality as understood from God’s perspective is ultimate reality, because God supposedly knows everything and can see all things. However, without God or a comparable perspective, reality cannot transcend our limited perspectives. The all-knowing, all-seeing perspective does not exist, we have only human perspectives, but this lack is not something about which to be disappointed. Nietzsche believes that we should rejoice in the experience that we do have and find joy even in our incomplete perspective. In fact, we should not even speak of our perspective as incomplete, because the complete perspective to which we would

compare our perspectives does not exist. Therefore, reality is not some ultimate perspective that we strive for, but can never reach. On the contrary, reality is incomplete in itself.

Nietzsche's perspectivism also plays a role in this attribute of reality, and therefore, needs further elaboration before we continue. Though scholars debate whether Nietzsche's perspectivism is a theory of truth or not, with Rex Welshon, for example, claiming that it is, and Ken Gemes, for example, arguing that it is not, Nietzsche's writing confirms that a person experiences the world through a certain perspective, or perhaps, we should say that one's experience of the world creates a certain perspective. Both of these formulations are grasping at aspects of Nietzsche's perspectivism, but attempting to explain it fully in a few sentences would be absurd. Nietzsche seems to equate perspectives with points of view (GS 233) and later with interpretations (GS 374), but as the debating scholars exemplify, there are differing perspectives on Nietzsche's perspectivism. However, Nietzsche does not affirm that any perspective can be accurate. He speaks of several perspectives, which he believes to be false. For example in GS 354, he argues against the "herd perspective," claiming that it destroys individuality. Clearly, not all perspectives are equal, nor are all perspectives good, even though a standard from which to judge perspectives does not exist. Though difficult to discern, Nietzsche seems to approve of perspectives that promote the greatness of humanity through its individuality, since as we see in GS 354 that he disapproves of perspectives, which restrain the individual or which pressure one to give up individuality, such as the herd perspective.

Godard also argues that reality is incomplete, and he promotes an idea similar to Nietzsche's perspectivism. I will address Godard's notion of reality as multilayered, which bears some resemblance to Nietzsche's perspectivism in the next section, because in this idea, Godard moves beyond Nietzsche. For now, I focus on Godard's description of reality as incomplete, and the elements of Nietzsche's perspectivism that Godard incorporates into his philosophy. In *Pierrot le fou*, Godard uses the characters as well as the spectators to demonstrate that reality is incomplete. Throughout the film, none of the characters has a complete grasp of reality; they all seem to lack knowledge in some manner. Their perspectives are incomplete and often troubling, which causes them to respond poorly at times, which in turn leads to problems. For example, Ferdinand's wife does not realize that her husband is struggling with his identity, and she pushes him to leave her and give up the life he had with her. Her incomplete perspective blinds her, but it is too simplistic to assert that were she to understand Ferdinand's suffering that she could have prevented her own suffering. Consequently, the spectator gets a glimpse of her incomplete perspective from a sort of external authoritarian perspective, but Godard is quick to crush any hopes of that perspective being truly complete. In other words, Godard portrays reality as incomplete from any perspective.

Similarly, Ferdinand does not see that Marianne's brother is actually her lover, and Marianne does not realize how much Ferdinand loves her, and that he feels he has nothing without her. Each of the characters acts as if the reality they experience were complete, but this understanding leads them to create a reality that they would have never chosen. By presenting the characters as such, Godard presents the notion of a complete reality as an absurdity. By believing that reality is complete, we act in contradiction with

our interests. Here, Godard highlights the existential aspect of his argument. Reality is such that it is created by our actions rather than predetermined. Similar to Nietzsche, reality, for Godard, is a becoming. All perspectives of reality are incomplete, because reality itself is incomplete.

Godard further exemplifies this characterization of reality through the perspective of the spectator. Throughout *Pierrot le fou*, the spectator has an incomplete understanding of reality also. Godard constructs *Pierrot le fou* in such a way as to keep the spectator always questioning, always wondering, and rarely knowing. The spectator does not immediately understand what is happening when the scene is occurring out of sequence or when the narration does not seem to align. One even questions whether Godard himself as director knows how everything fits together within his film. The film portrays reality as mysterious and in a sense misunderstood by everyone, not in that there is some ultimate perspective that would clear up the confusion, but rather in that the film itself is not complete. Tying this portrayal together with Godard's intent to film life, we understand that in characterizing reality as incomplete within the film, Godard is making an argument about life, namely that reality is incomplete.

In continuity with the death of God, reality cannot be absolute, as Nietzsche argues. He contends that as a consequence of the death of God and the absence of an omniscient perspective, no one has authority to declare that reality is absolute or unchanging. He conveys beyond this that reality is changing and uncertain. Aydin confirms that reality is in flux according to Nietzsche, when he states, “[for Nietzsche] reality is dynamic in the strongest meaning of the word” (26). The dynamic nature of reality means that truth is also constantly shifting, because truth relates directly to reality.

In GS 307, Nietzsche uses the imagery of shedding skin to portray truth, and thus reality, as constantly changing. The truth we currently affirm is like skin that is necessary and valuable; it corresponds to the reality of that moment. New skin eventually takes the place of this old skin but without invalidating the purpose of the old skin. For Nietzsche, truth is constantly changing like skin, and therefore, something that was once true, can now be false without invalidating its former truthfulness. However, Nietzsche denies that these two contradictories are true at the same time, because it is reality that is ultimately changing. Truth simply corresponds to the reality of the moment, and therefore must change if reality changes. Nietzsche upholds the law of non-contradiction even in his imagery of shedding skin. For the new skin to replace the old skin, one must recognize that the old skin is false (i.e. no longer true). Reality is continually changing, and therefore truth is also.

Godard masterfully demonstrates that reality is constantly changing in *Pierrot le fou*, and consequently that it cannot be absolute. The limits that we place on what can be real are completely shattered while watching *Pierrot le fou*, because we can never predict what will happen, though one might come to expect the unexpected. Early in the film, people talk as if they are making a commercial and the screen is tinted in different colors, which create a completely unrealistic scene. However, this scene speaks realistically to us of the boredom and nonsense of commercialism and materialism. Through this scene, we first experience the shifting nature of reality in *Pierrot le fou*, as an existential commentary on our ability to change the reality in which we live. Marianne represents that change, as she initiates the first great change, Ferdinand's escape from his wife, and several further changes, such as Ferdinand's departure from the house by the sea. Godard



also employs many cinematic devices to express this changing reality, the most notable of which is the non-sequential scene. The day after Ferdinand leaves his wife, he and Marianne must flee. Elements of this scene are shown out of sequence and the narrative voices of Ferdinand and Marianne complete each other's sentences, but these sentences too are out of sequence. Within this scene, reality is no longer sequential; reality has changed.

Once we accept that we cannot know reality as a whole, then without difficulty, we can also affirm with Nietzsche that reality is difficult to understand even as an incomplete entity. Nietzsche contends that in order to know reality, which is synonymous with believing that which is true, we must put forth great effort. The mystery of reality is not straightforward but is a worthy pursuit. Nietzsche exclaims, "Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you seekers of knowledge!" (GS 283) Knowing reality takes robbers and conquerors who may never even attain the treasure or land that they seek. We may be able to come to certain conclusions, but due to the changing nature of reality and reality's incompleteness, those conclusions will always be subject to revision.

In *Pierrot le fou*, reality is similarly difficult to discern. While watching *Pierrot le fou*, a spectator could easily begin to question, "What is real?" Many of the scenes do not conform to our common conception of reality due to jump cuts, unrealistic scenes, actors directly addressing the audience, and other unconventional cinematic devices. Moreover, much of the narrative is a mystery throughout the film and even at the end. For example, we never truly discover who Marianne's brother really is. Obviously, he is not her brother but her lover, and yet, we still know very little of him and might even

question if he could be both her brother and her lover. The crimes in which Marianne is involved, and into which she brings Ferdinand remain mysterious. In addition, several characters appear and disappear mysteriously, such as the insane woman who claims to be queen of Lebanon and the singing man on the dock. The film is full of mystery, which points to our inability to discern what is real. If spectators cling to a notion of reality as static and complete, they will be lost. However, once we acknowledge that reality itself is incomplete and ever changing, then being lost is an idea itself which does not make sense. One can only be lost if one is trying to get somewhere specific. For Godard and Nietzsche, the somewhere specific does not exist, and consequently anyone who tries to get there is foolish.

In continuation of Nietzsche's characterization of reality, let us remember from BT that Nietzsche claims that art is better suited to reveal reality than science. Nietzsche continues to affirm this throughout his life, as is especially clear through his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In that novel, Nietzsche attempts to convey his philosophy through art. Moreover, Nietzsche states, "Only artists, and especially those of the theatre, have given men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each himself is, himself experiences, himself wants" (GS 78). In this aphorism, Nietzsche explains that artists help us understand reality in the sense of what we can become. Without art, we have a perspective of ourselves that is not real, because it lacks our creative ability. The artist teaches us to see the real potential in ourselves that otherwise would be crushed. The world without art makes us feel useless and purposeless, because we can accomplish so little. However, the world of art allows us to believe in our ability to be protagonists who attempt great quests with success, and though this appears to be a lie, the unreal rather

than the real, it is real, because Nietzsche believes that we have the ability to move beyond our constraints and free ourselves from anything others impose upon us. The artists remind us of our existential ability to create reality through our actions, which encourages us to become the individuals that abandon the herd.

In the same way, Godard's *Pierrot le fou* is an attempt to convey reality that Godard believes is better suited to the purpose than science, documentary, or non-fiction. The film begins with a quote from Élie Faure's *Histoire de l'art*, which describes Velasquez' painting from the later part of his life and points to the centrality of art in Godard's attempt to reveal reality. His desire to reveal reality through his films is undeniable, since he confirms that he sees no difference between life and film (Sterritt 13). The text read in the opening scene of *Pierrot le fou* describes how Velasquez has shifted from painting objects clearly and straightforwardly to painting indefinite objects, which testifies to Godard's commitment to the difficulty in understanding reality. The straightforward paintings were not able to portray the truth concerning reality that Velasquez came to understand later in life. Similarly, Godard realizes that reality is best discovered through complex fiction rather than straightforward communication. In fact, the mixture of fiction, documentary, and direct experience possible with film is the perfect medium for Godard, and perhaps even for Nietzsche had cinema existed during his lifetime. This argument further extends to filmosophy for those who agree with Nietzsche and Godard that reality is as complex as they characterize it.

Godard's use of art to reveal reality is further evident in the film itself through the Vietnam War play that Ferdinand and Marianne perform for the Americans. In this play, Godard is using a fictional play to construct a critique against Americans, particularly in

their decision to be at war in Vietnam. Through the play, Godard makes fun of the Americans and their interest in war, as a play about war is the first idea he has of something that Americans would like. In this way, Godard uses art to reveal reality. He continues to use the Vietnam War to demonstrate that his art is a revelation of reality when Ferdinand is spending his days in Toulon at the cinema. On screen, we see documentary images of the Vietnam War that then transition to a scene from Godard's *Le Grand escroc*, which shows Jean Seberg filming and questioning the difference between an imaginary character and a real character. By bringing into question the fiction of documentary within a fictional film, he also brings into question the possible reality of fiction. Godard wants the spectator to realize that fiction is not as far from reality as we might think. In fact, perhaps fiction reveals reality better than non-fiction.

Nietzsche and Godard both emphasize the complex nature of reality. They characterize it as necessarily related to everyday experience yet incomplete, as changing and a challenge to understand, and as better portrayed through art and fiction than through straightforward description. Godard incorporates arguments similar to those of Nietzsche in *Pierrot le fou*, which perhaps are not straightforwardly apparent, but should we not expect such a presentation? Regardless of the spectator's ease in digesting these difficult philosophical ideas from a simple viewing of *Pierrot le fou*, Godard's comments about attempting to film life indicate the meaning with which he attempted to infuse his film. Godard himself believed that he may have failed, but when reality is a becoming, any attempt to portray reality could only be successful for a moment. However, film remains a prime medium for any such attempt, which by nature is obviously philosophical.

## Godard's Multilayered Reality

Not only does Godard agree with Nietzsche concerning many aspects of the nature of reality, but he also moves beyond Nietzsche's philosophy with his multilayered understanding of reality. Nietzsche describes reality through human perspectives, which is similar to Godard's use of layers, but also very different. Nietzsche affirms that several differing perspectives may be true, because the omniscient perspective does not exist, which, if it existed, would serve as a standard for judging the correctness of human perspectives. However, Godard demonstrates that several layers of reality exist even within a particular perspective. The three layers in *Pierrot le fou* that I use to demonstrate this part of Godard's philosophy are the layers of fiction, social critique, and Godard's personal life. All three of these layers are easily visible to the spectator who has some background knowledge of them. These three layers are simultaneously part of the reality of *Pierrot le fou*, even from one same perspective, and through these three layers, Godard demonstrates that reality itself has multiple layers that are simultaneously true.

Godard portrays the first layer, which is that of fiction, through narrative and cinematic techniques. Obviously, the narrative of *Pierrot le fou* is fictional, but the innovative element that Godard employs is that he makes the fictional aspect of *Pierrot le fou* evident. In most films, we mock unrealistic scenes, which reveal the normally hidden reality that the story is not true. However, Godard purposefully uses techniques such as when Ferdinand addresses the audience, in order to keep the fictional aspect of this narrative at the forefront of our minds. By preventing us from exiting our reality and entering the "reality" of the film, he emphasizes his preoccupation with that which is

truly real. He does not want us to leave the realm of reality into fantasy while watching his film, because he wants us to learn that a fictional film can speak to us without tricking us into believing that we are not spectators. In fact, Godard argues that the fictional film is real and plays a vital role in our reality.

The second layer that I address is that of social critique. Godard has a lot to say about his contemporary society through his film, and as mentioned, he wants us to know that he is saying it without deceiving us. Within the first minutes of the film, his critique of society begins when he states that we have now entered “la société du cul” (the society of the butt). Shortly thereafter, during the party scene in which people speak as if they were in a commercial, he mocks materialism and commercialism. The audience immediately senses the awkwardness and unnaturalness of this scene, but Godard adds several elements to make it even more awkward such as everyone’s position up against a wall and the tinted lens making the film look blue, red, yellow, or green. All of this awkwardness leads the audience to laugh at the thought of such absurdity, namely commercialism and materialism, and hopefully seek to eliminate it from society after recognizing its presence. Godard is calling the spectator to act just as Ferdinand rejects the society full of commercialism and materialism in order to start a new life, a life of emotion and action, which, within this scene, Samuel Fuller explains is a film. Godard further engages the morality of the war in Vietnam. He shows contempt for the Americans who are extremely happy to watch a play about the war and clumsy enough to let Ferdinand and Marianne run away with their money. These elements of the film reveal that social critique is a layer of reality within the film, but even further within life as a whole since Godard equates film and life.

The personal life of Godard also infiltrates the film so that it is the third layer of reality. The personal elements are particularly about Godard's relationship with Anna Karina, a theme that one can find in many of his films. In *Pierrot le fou*, the narrative parallels that relationship. The story begins with Ferdinand and Marianne renewing their love for each other and running away on an adventure together. Throughout the adventure, the two argue at times, and enjoy each other at others, but it slowly moves toward separation. The first separation occurs after Marianne's former life as some sort of terrorist comes back to haunt her. After she escapes her attackers, she leaves Ferdinand without notice. Ferdinand almost commits suicide, but then moves to Toulon with the hope of one day finding Marianne. He lives a despairing life waiting for her. Finally, she appears and the relationship is restored, but only to end even worse. Marianne tricks Ferdinand into helping her and her "brother," who later leave Ferdinand taking all of Ferdinand's money to live a romantic life together. Ferdinand, desperate, follows them and kills them both, only then to commit suicide. This story parallels the rocky relationship between Godard and Karina, especially in that Godard hopes to be together with Karina, but reveals through the film that he understands that such a unity would only lead to tragedy.

These three aspects of *Pierrot le fou* are layers in that Godard uses elements, whether narrative elements, filmic devices, or other means simultaneously to play a part in multiple aspects. The connection of a single element with multiple aspects creates the idea of layers. For example, the Vietnam War play that Ferdinand and Marianne perform for the Americans serves all three layers that I have described. The play develops the social critique layer as mentioned above in that it portrays the Americans as bloodthirsty

and clumsy, calling us to action against the war in Vietnam. During the play, the relationship between Marianne and Ferdinand parallels that of Godard and Karina in two distinct ways. First, it presents a joyful moment in their relationship as they work together toward the common goal of making money. They are happy together, and they complement each other well. However, it also parallels Godard and Karina by representing Godard as American and Karina as Vietnamese, which puts them into conflict. This conflict that they experience is compared to a long drawn out conflict that many people want to see come to an end. The Americans or Godard are attempting to achieve the impossible, to subdue the Vietnamese or Karina. In participation with the third layer, this play is of crucial importance for the fictional narrative in that it explains how Ferdinand and Marianne move on to the next stage of their relationship. Godard emphasizes the fictional aspect by exaggerating the portrayal of the simple-minded Americans, by providing plenty of props for Ferdinand and Marianne that they could not have conceivably had, and making their escape seem so easy. Accordingly, this scene joins all three layers in a single element. One could not separate the distinct cinematic devices or narrative elements that contribute individually to the different layers, because the three layers all simultaneously flow from each cinematic device and narrative element.

Godard uses these three layers of reality in the film to argue that reality itself has several layers. He makes this argument particularly clear through his mixture of fiction and non-fiction, since we typically separate those two, fiction being the realm of film and non-fiction being the realm of real life. We recognize the overlap that we experience for example in a documentary, which is a non-fiction film, but we do not readily acknowledge the overlap between fiction and non-fiction in everyday life. Godard seeks



to highlight this overlap, and he does so by showing that the difference between fiction and non-fiction is often only a difference in layer of reality rather than a difference between reality and the imaginary. He argues that fiction is not distinct from reality by portraying it as an aspect of reality. When he directed *Pierrot le fou*, he was creating fiction, but he was not making it in isolation from reality, neither is the product isolated from our reality. He makes this particularly clear by keeping his spectators aware of their act of spectating. In conjunction, by commenting that he sees no difference between film and life, he confirms that the layers within the film also apply to our everyday life. Therefore, he is arguing that reality has several possible layers, one of which is fiction and another non-fiction. This conclusion parallels the fictional narrative layer within *Pierrot le fou* and the non-fictional layers of social critique and Godard's personal life. Just as these two non-fictional layers co-exist with the fictional layer of narrative, so does fiction co-exist with non-fiction as two layers of the reality we experience even when we are not viewing a film. Consequently, Godard presents a philosophically rich discussion of reality as multilayered.

Godard is as much a philosopher as he is a film director. In his two full-length features from 1965, *Alphaville* and *Pierrot le fou*, he makes philosophical arguments through his use of narrative elements and filmic devices. As we have seen in this chapter, *Pierrot le fou* is a film that functions as philosophy. Throughout the film, Godard begins with Nietzsche's understanding of the nature of reality and builds upon that philosophy. Nietzsche and Godard both argue that reality is much more complicated than we typically think, and this argument affirms that film can have a philosophical voice, not only in that *Pierrot le fou* serves as an example, but more importantly in that the argument of *Pierrot*

*le fou* establishes that film is a uniquely valuable medium for doing philosophy. Nietzsche argues that reality is not metaphysical, nor complete, nor absolute, nor easily understood, and consequently art is the perfect medium through which to communicate reality. Godard confirms Nietzsche's argument and adds that reality has several possible layers. These arguments come together to affirm not only that film can function as philosophy, but that we need film as philosophy so that we might have a better comprehension of reality.

Conclusively, film can be a philosophical medium. In the first chapter of this thesis, I defend filmsophy against the arguments that scholars mount against it. Those arguments do not hold, because they too often distort the nature of philosophy to fit their ends or understand the nature of film too poorly. Philosophy itself can be ambiguous, paradoxical, and does not necessarily entail a primary intention to philosophize. Therefore, regardless of whether film is ambiguous, paradoxical, or it entails differing primary intentions, film can be philosophy. Were we to reduce philosophy to that which the critics of filmsophy propose, much philosophy, past and present, would no longer qualify as philosophy, because philosophy is a very fluid discipline that extends beyond most borders with which we might attempt to restrict it. Simply defined, philosophy is an effort to present a thesis as either reasonable or unreasonable, and can be done in many different forms and using very different content.

Film is a particularly well suited form with which to philosophize, because it allows a deeper engagement of the emotions than most other mediums. In the first chapter, I defend this statement abstractly, and then in the second and third chapter, I provide examples in Godard's *Alphaville* and *Pierrot le fou*. Film in conjunction with

imagination allows the spectator to evaluate the reasonableness of a thesis from within a worldview that either accepts or rejects that thesis, whichever of the two is more pertinent to the argument. In *Alphaville*, we experience the world from within a society, which has given science ultimate epistemological authority, and through this experience, Godard demonstrates the unreasonableness of such a society. In *Pierrot le fou*, we experience the world as multilayered, and through this experience, Godard demonstrates that life itself is multilayered. In both situations, the emotional engagement contributes to the philosophical argument.

Furthermore, the philosophical arguments of Nietzsche reasserted by Godard along with the innovative philosophical contributions that Godard makes confirm the legitimacy of filmosophy. Nietzsche and Godard argue that art has a crucial role to play in disclosing reality, and that formal arguments alone leave us with a false perspective of reality. Reality is incomplete and mysterious. Therefore, film as philosophy improves our understanding rather than being a lesser form or even an illegitimate form of philosophy. Treating formal argumentation as superior to informal filmic arguments impoverishes our ability to judge the reasonableness of theses, because in so doing, we unjustifiably undermine the cognitive value of emotions. As I have demonstrated, emotions do not necessarily act against rationality. The two can function in harmony, and when they do, they enhance our philosophical insight.

Though many films exemplify film as philosophy, I chose these two films from 1965, in order to point to their possible implications for French philosophical thought as a whole. While I cannot prove that these films affected the widespread acceptance of Nietzsche's philosophy that occurred throughout the 1960's and later decades in French

philosophical thought, one would be hard-pressed to deny them any possible value in promoting Nietzschean thought in France, especially in light of their reassertion of Nietzsche's philosophy. In the early 1960's, French philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida were beginning to incorporate Nietzsche into their work. In the later 1960's and following decades, these philosophers and others fully identified themselves with Nietzsche's philosophy. Could it be that Godard's films played a role in making Nietzsche's philosophy more reasonable for those philosophers and French society in general? Although we cannot answer that question definitively, the fact that we cannot deny significance in this regard to Godard's films, presents us with the possibility of film not only functioning as philosophy, but as having a historical impact on philosophical thought. This possibility implies that film can contribute to philosophical discussion.

Therefore, film, though different from journal articles and philosophy books, has its place among those forms used for philosophical purposes. Film at times contributes to philosophy through its use of formal arguments in dialogue and writing, but much more often, it contributes innovatively and uniquely through its use of narrative and filmic devices. Consequently, other art forms can also function as philosophy, but film is unique in its emotive contribution. Film employs moving images that often involve narrative, which distinguishes it from still images or written narrative. The specific filmic devices allow film to thrust spectators into a particular worldview from which the emotions they experience allow them to better judge the reasonableness of theses. By doing so, film becomes a unique and innovative form of philosophy, namely filmsophy.

## REFERENCES

- All of Me*. Dir. Carl Reiner. Culver Studios, 1984. Film.
- Alphaville*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. The Criterion Collection, 1998. DVD.
- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Trans. Joe Sachs. Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press, 1999. Print.
- Aydin, Ciano. "Nietzsche on Reality as Will to Power: Toward an Organizational-Struggle Model." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 33 (2007), 25-48. Print.
- Blade Runner*. Dir. Ridley Scott. Warner Brothers Studios, 1982. Film.
- Brody, Richard. *Everything is Cinema*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008. Print.
- Carroll, Noël. "Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research." *Ethics* 110.2 (2000), 350-387. Print.
- . "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60:1 (2002), 3-26. Print.
- Clark, Maudemarie. *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Print.
- Descartes, René. *Méditations métaphysique*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1979. Print.
- Elster, Jon. "Emotional Choice and Rational Choice." *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotions*. Ed. Peter Goldie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 263-282. Print.
- Eluard, Paul. *Capitale de la douleur*. France: Gallimard, 1926. Print.
- Faure, Elie. *Histoire de l'art*. Paris: Les Editions G. Crès & Cie, 1921. Print.
- Furtak, Rick Anthony. "Emotion, the Bodily, and the Cognitive." *Philosophical Explorations* 13.1 (2010), 51-64. Print.
- Gemes, Ken. "Janaway on Perspectivism." *European Journal of Philosophy* 17:1 (2009), 101-112. Print.

- Goodenough, Jerry. "Introduction I: A Philosopher Goes to the Cinema." *Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema After Wittgenstein and Cavell*. Eds. Jerry Goodenough and Rupert Read. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche*. Pfullingen, Germany: Neske, 1961. Print.
- Helm, Bennett W. "Emotions and Practical Reason: Rethinking Evaluation and Motivation." *Noûs* 35.2 (2001): 190-213. Print.
- Hunt, Lester H. "Motion Pictures as a Philosophical Resource." *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*. Eds. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Print.
- Kellner, Douglas. "Nietzsche's Critique of Mass Culture." *International Studies in Philosophy* 31:3 (1999), 77-89. Print.
- L'Année dernière à Marienbad*. Dir. Alain Resnais. Argos Films, 1961. Film.
- Le Gai savoir*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Bavaria Film Studios, 1968. Film.
- Le Grand escroc*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Perf. Jean Seberg. Gaumont, 2010. DVD.
- Lepore, Ernie. "The Heresy of Paraphrase: When the Medium Really Is the Message." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33 (2009), 177-197. Print.
- Livingston, Paisley. "Theses on Cinema as Philosophy." *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 64.1 (2006), 11-18. Print.
- Milne, Tom, and Jean Narboni, eds. *Godard on Godard*. New York: The Viking Press, 1972. Print.
- Monaco, James. *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette*. New York: Harbor Electronic Publishing, 2004. Print.
- Mulhall, Stephen. *On Film*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Mussman, Toby. *Jean-Luc Godard*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968. Print.
- Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985. Print.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Roland Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Print.

- . *Human, All Too Human*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.
- . *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Print.
- . *The Gay Science*. Trans. Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.
- . *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Marion Faber. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.
- Pierrot le fou*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. The Criterion Collection, 2008. DVD.
- Pippin, Robert B. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. Print.
- Plato. "Apology of Socrates." *Texts on Socrates*. Trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998. Print
- . *Meno*. Trans. G. M. A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1981. Print.
- Ramplsey, Matthew. *Nietzsche, Aesthetics, and Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *No Exit*. Trans. Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage International, 1989. Print.
- Smith, Murray. "Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity." *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 64.1 (2006), 33-42. Print.
- Smuts, Aaron. "Film as Philosophy: In Defense of a Bold Thesis." *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 67.4 (2009), 409-420. Print.
- Solomon, Robert C. *True to Our Feelings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Sterritt, David. *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. Print.
- Welshon, Rex. "Saying Yes to Reality: Skepticism, Antirealism, and Perspectivism in Nietzsche's Epistemology." *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 37 (2009), 23-43. Print.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Andrew Ronald Jones

ADDRESS: 119 McArthur Dr. Apt. 1  
Louisville, KY 40207

DOB: Jacksonville, Florida – June 13, 1985

### EDUCATION

& TRAINING: B.A., Philosophy  
Mercer University  
2003-07

M.Div., Theology  
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary  
2008-11