

The Four Elements of Ecocinema

A Phenomenological Approach to Cinematic Aesthetics

May 03, 2016

Ludo de Roo (mq# 43879268)

Master of Research Candidate

Supervisor: Robert Sinnerbrink

Department of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts

Macquarie University, Sydney

Abstract

In the context of ecocinema theory and phenomenological aesthetics, this cross-disciplinary thesis is the first that proposes a film theory of the four natural elements – earth, air, water and fire. Much like Pre-Socratic cosmogony, these four natural elements are the basic material to create almost any filmworld. Thinking through earth, air, water and fire in film – be it 1960 art house cinema or the newest CGI-loaded blockbuster – reveals forgotten philosophical meaning and the essential role the natural elements play in imagining the world.

Drawing on phenomenological and aesthetic theories of cinematic experience, this new way of thinking these elements through film involves a threefold exploration. First, it investigates how the elements matter on this most fundamental level – how they help creating an expressive filmworld that engages the spectator on a phenomenological level of experience. Secondly, it considers how the explicit depiction of earth, air, water and/or fire is meaningful *before* its narrative-symbolical significance: in the phenomenological film experience, cinema's 'elemental images' are *directly* experienced as very concrete manifestations of the filmworld's materiality. This, thirdly, opens up a new sensitivity to the environment: in short, my claim is that *all* films have this ecological potential; it is actually intrinsic to cinema's technological nature that the spectator may experience an original relation to the natural world.

Author's Declaration

This essay has not been previously submitted, in full or in part, for a Higher Degree at any other university or institution.

All work not of my own composition which appears in this thesis has been properly cited.

Ludo de Roo

Abstract	2
Author's Declaration.....	3
Introduction: Ecological Thinking	5
Arguments of this Thesis.....	7
0.2 Ecocinema.....	8
0.3 Material Imagination	12
0.4 Film-Phenomenology.....	14
Chapter 1: Thinking about the World: A Question of the Elements	
1.1 Deserted Ideas	16
1.2 Philosophy's Remembering of the Elements.....	19
1.3 Do the Elements Matter?.....	24
1.4 Media Studies and the Elements.....	28
1.5 The Sub-Discipline of Film-Philosophy.....	30
Chapter 2: Shorelines of Spectatorship: Cinematic Engagement and the Filmworld's Elemental Landscape	
2.1 Earth revealed.....	33
2.2 From Phenomenology to Film-Intentionality	35
2.3 Filmworlds	42
2.4 Cinegeography	46
Chapter 3: From Element to Elemental: Ecocinema and Ecological Thinking	
3.1 The Eclipse of a Filmworld.....	55
3.2 From the Element to the Elemental.....	63
3.3 Concrete Metaphor and Environmental Thinking	69
Concusion	
Bibliography	80
Filmography	90

Introduction

Ecological Thinking • Ecocinema • Material Imagination and Film-Phenomenology

0.1 Ecological Thinking

While there is little traditional plot to *Le Quattro Volte* (Michelangelo Frammartino 2010), this Italian art film is most profoundly about life and death. Based on Pythagoras' idea of 'metempsychosis,' it tells a story of four life cycles in a small rural town in Calabria, southern Italy.¹ The film shows the last days of an old goatherd's life; his burial is followed by the birth and life of a young goat that gradually discovers the world, then loses its flock and finally dies under a fir tree; then, autumn and winter pass over the tree – in spring the villagers fell the tall tree and display it in the town square as part of an annual festival; after these festivities, the tree is chopped into logs that are carefully crafted into a smoking mound – an image reflecting the opening scene of the film.

While to some, this film might be a practice in patience – scarce dialogue and little 'character development' (in the usual sense at least) – others praise this piece of slow cinema: despite its emphasis on mortality, *Le Quattro Volte* offers new thoughts on humanity in relation to animality or the interdependence of life and the environment. In the absence of a clear-cut storyline and the film's evasion of a moral message, its Kairos-like rhythm and careful, observing photography dare the viewer to see the world differently and even to think philosophically about nature, without ever becoming didactic.²

¹ The film loosely employs Pythagoras' idea that the immortal soul transmigrates through four realms of life: from human life to animal form, through the realm of plants into the mineral world.

² Two renowned, popular film critics weren't afraid to voice the film's philosophical charm. Robert Ebert (2011), for instance, starts his review with "[h]ere is a film that invites philosophical musing" and continues his reviews with various reflections about life and nature in this world. For Philip French (*The Guardian*) too, "[i]t is (...) a spiritual exploration of time and place, [...] designed to make us think about the world around us and our place in it" (French, 2011). While they agree about the philosophizing invitation of this film, their contemplations float in different reactions.

Perhaps even more than Pythagoras' idea of the immortality of the soul, the genuine philosophical provocation of the film is to reinvent *ecological thinking*: life on earth is reduced to its bare material, to its simplest forms. It is a "hybrid tale of the cosmic interconnectedness of all things," writes Benjamin Mercer, presenting "life as a cycle and the earth as a circuit" (2011 [no pag.]). But as Mercer also perceptively notes, the film is not merely *representing* successive life phases; rather, the film's *material* too is a combined cycle of the elements:

the smoke that closes out *Le Quattro Volte* memorializes the goat herder, the goat, and the tree under which the animal once took refuge, but it's also composed of them, elements dissipated, for a moment, before their next constitution (*ibid.*)

The precise composition of this film thus seems to invite the spectator to contemplate the material nature of his or her own existence, the ecosystems we live within and the interconnected order of the cosmos that environs us. In so doing, it is a point in case for combining 'ecocinema' and 'film-philosophy' – the two scholarly paradigms to which this thesis aims to contribute.

On the one hand, *Le Quattro Volte* is a typical case study for studying how cinema can express environmental insights and even arguments.³ As I sketch in the second part of this Introduction, in times of mass-consumption, global warming and ecological crisis, ecocinema scholars acclaim cinema as offering an opportunity to awaken environmental mindfulness through the filmic form. However, while ecocinema is an important contribution to the humanities at large, this discipline often remains fairly conservative in discerning what qualifies exactly as 'eco' in the chosen group of films: can not *all* films offer environmental thought?

Alternatively, if the film-philosophical approach is fully embraced, as I do in this thesis, it will become apparent that *all* film may evoke new thoughts.⁴ While I draft a wider picture of this film-philosophical context in

³ A key publication in this field is the edited collection *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (Rust et al 2013); other significant bundles are *Framing the World* (Willoquet-Maricondi 2010) and *Moving Environments* (Weik von Mossner 2014).

⁴ Here the most insightful overviews and different stances in this debate are given in the compilations *Film as Philosophy* (Read et al 2005), *Thinking through Cinema* (Smith and Wartenberg 2006), and *New Takes in Film-Philosophy* (Carel et al 2011).

Chapter 1, it is important to emphasize that I take film offers, potentially, material that stimulate philosophical reflection: on my film-philosophical approach, any film has the potential to contribute genuine philosophical insight, and in some case (explored in this thesis), can contribute to a genuine ecological thinking.

Arguments of this Thesis

More specifically, this thesis explores how cinematic entertainment reconnects us to the world through the precise use of the four natural elements – earth, water, air and fire. Much like Pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus and Empedocles wondered about the origin and order of the universe, and despite the modern sciences' advances in theorizing nature, our thinking about the world (i.e., both the fictional filmworld as much as the natural world) is still largely constituted through the fourfold of earth, air, water and fire. In a world where one of the four elements is absent, life will wither.

What is more, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, earth, air, water and fire are not only the 'building blocks' of a filmworld; we are able to become *immersed* in the filmworld *because* of the specific use of these four natural elements. In other words, it is argued that by virtue of cinema's technological nature – projecting moving audiovisual images of an expressive filmworld, directly apprehended and experienced by the spectator – that our consciousness is inherently connected *to* the filmworld. I argue that, much like *Le Quattro Volte*, many other films invite ecological thought, because filmworlds and cinematic engagement more generally is not possible without this fourfold of material elements.

The aim, in short, is to explore the role and philosophical meaning of the natural elements in cinema. The thesis' investigation is threefold. Chapter 1 discusses in more detail the conditional questions of this research: why the elements matter, how philosophy has remembered them, and why they are studied through cinema. Secondly, I explore how the elements matter on the most basic level of film experience – in creating an expressive filmworld that engages the spectator on a phenomenological level. Chapter 3 investigate how each of the elements become more thematically or metaphorically

expressive and how the aesthetics of earth and air, water and fire may also sensitize the spectator towards a more receptive, or enhanced environmental awareness of this world.

Such is the general structure of this thesis; the rest of this introduction an overview of the research context to which my thesis intendeds to contribute. I close this introduction with an account of the film-philosophical methodology that I use wherever I venture into descriptive film analysis.⁵ But before that, it is perhaps more important for to sketch a background describing the different stances of ecocinema: it is not only a field that perhaps few philosophers are familiar with, it is the discipline that decisively shapes the research of this thesis – how *all* film's use of the elements can evoke ecological thought.

0.2 Ecocinema

At large, this new paradigm can be understood as an interdisciplinary, 'eco' approach to cinema that established itself in the early 2000s. Inspired by literary ecocriticism of the 1960s onwards, the first academic books were directed toward analyzing specific 'green' themes.⁶ Generally speaking, these pioneering works look at the way the medium of film *represents* evident instances of non-human nature, an approach built around a clear-cut opposition between human culture and the non-human or wild 'nature.' This restricts most early ecocinema criticism to a rather conventional *evaluating* the relative success or 'truthfulness' of cinematic representation of 'nature' on screen.⁷

Much like the revisionist second wave in *literary* ecocriticism, also more recent *cinematic* eco-theory demonstrates an expanding and theoretically

⁵ This thesis has a phenomenological approach: this philosophical thought is a recurrent – perhaps somewhat dispersed – theme throughout the whole work. This Introduction closes off with a methodology for film analysis; Chapter 1 discusses phenomenologist's interest in nature and the elements, and is referred to in the context of film-philosophy; finally, Chapter 2 folds three phenomenology's key notions (enworlded consciousness; pre-reflective or phenomenal experience; and intentionality) into a film-philosophical concept.

⁶ Particularly cinema's representation of wildlife proved a rich inspiration, such as *Reel Nature* (Mitman 1999) and *Wildlife Films* (Bousé 2000); cf. also the slightly more recent *Watching Wildlife* (Chris 2006). Other books in early ecocinema carried specifically 'green' titles, such as *Green Cultural Studies* (Hochmann 1999) or the more influential *Green Screen* by David Ingram (2000).

⁷ Adrian Ivakhiv (2008) insightfully compares this form of ecocriticism with film criticism from feminist and queer perspectives, where gender roles may or may not be adequately represented.

deepening move towards self-definition.⁸ Environmentally oriented film scholars became aware of the need to critically define their theoretical positions. This has resulted in a variety of perspectives on what ecocinema is or should do. Five general approaches can be distinguished, subdivided in two general clusters.

Recycling Ecology

The most dominant approach takes the 'eco' in ecocinema as something *inherent to a specific film genre*, either nature- or wildlife documentary or popular fiction film with explicit environmental themes.⁹ Paula Willoquet-Maricondi defines this type as 'environmentalist film' and additionally argues that films of this kind usually have overt consciousness-raising or even activist purposes (2010: 45). Such a restricted scope implies that *only* films with overt environmental themes are to be regarded as ecocinema. This leaves out a whole set of films with ecocritical potential simply because they lack obvious green content or do not have apparent activist intentions.

For the second subgroup it is rather a specific *cinematic aesthetics* regarding filmed nature that makes some films inherently ecological. Hence, Scott MacDonald (2004; 2013) argues that the form of experimental nature films may provoke "new kinds of cinematic experience" that can "help nurture a more environmentally progressive mindset" (2013: 20). For MacDonald, a film's static shots of natural landscapes open up another sense of nature and perhaps even a greater environmental awareness.¹⁰ However, as optimistic as his claim of the mind-changing potential may be, his thesis is nowhere theoretically justified. Here lies a serious challenge for ecocinema theory.

⁸ Cf. Buell (2005: 1-29) for the distinction between 'first wave' and 'second wave' literary ecocriticism. For a concise historical overview of literary ecocriticism, cf. Garrard (2011: 18-36)

⁹ Think for example of *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim 2006), or *Erin Brockovich* (Steven Soderbergh 2000). All recent major ecocinema anthologies (Willoquet-Maricondi 2010; Rust *et al* 2013; Weik von Mossner 2014) devote the majority of their chapters to such explicit ecocinema with guaranteed eco-content.

¹⁰ Lovingly dubbing the genre 'slow cinema', MacDonald thinks of landscape films such as *13 Lakes* (James Benning 2004) – a 135-minute film consisting of only 13 stationary shots of 13 lakes across the United States. With this important stress on the relation of affective experience and cinematic form, MacDonald however seems only concerned with analysing the unhurried, nature of filmed landscapes. As with environmentalist ecocinema, also this meditative 'eco-aesthetic' should be expanded with other, less lyrical, cinematic forms.

The third subgroup partially answers to this call: they approach ecocinema exclusively from a cognitive perspective. For instance, David Ingram (2013) directly replies MacDonald's thesis by suggesting two additional aesthetic styles: 'immoral counter-aesthetics' and the 'aesthetics of rupture and shock' (2013: 56).¹¹ Ingram specifically looks at how each style may help to create *cognitive* meaning and ecological understanding. Also Alexa Weik von Mossner (2012) calls for more empirical research to theorize the environmentalist effect. Partially drawing on audience research studies, she points out the relative (short-term) effect on the audience's environmental awareness of a Hollywood-blockbuster such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich 2004). In the subgroup 'cognitive ecocinema,' then, empirically given theories of *cognitive processes* seem to qualify an eco-effect in any type of film. Nevertheless, this group usually draws more on established general cognitive film theories than on actual audience research: these analyses often do not much more than reconstruct in more empiricist terms how an anticipated eco-effect is 'created' through diverse aesthetic styles.

In all these three key ecocinema subgroups, ecocritical film analysis seems to be driven and distinguished by a certain 'given': if not an obvious green filmworld or slow cinema's specific aesthetics, it is the assumed cognitive effect that directs such ecocinema analysis. But taking films with assumed eco-content and analyzing 'how it is done' from a chosen critical angle not only limits what qualifies as ecocinema – more importantly, it has a very important methodological disadvantage: the analysis remains largely *evaluative*.

At most, scholars in this first cluster of ecocinema theory thus *recycle* environmental themes through cinema by evaluating the relative success of the filmic representation. It mainly depends on the purposefully chosen case studies and the uncritically accepted 'given' subject-matter. Yet merely pointing out *where* nature is located in eco-friendly films and weighing *how* this is represented does not result in surprising scholarship. Serious film

¹¹ Ingram's use of the 'aesthetics of rupture and shock' is based on Steven Shapiro's idea 'accelerationist aesthetics' in his *Post-Cinematic Affect* (cf. Shaviro 2010).

criticism can go further than plotting self-evident content and pre-given eco-intentions with cinematic strategies in any given film.

Revealing Environment

The second large cluster of ecocinema theory is more generous. Here it is assumed that *all* film genres can be seen as ecological; instead of a given definition of ecology, it is the *interpretation* of the films that makes them instances of 'ecocinema' (cf. Rust *et al* 2013: 3). The advantage of this pluralist approach is that *all* genres of cinema are potentially ecological in significance. This large, miscellaneous group has many different conceptions of ecocinema; any of these readings prove that some ecological process is going on in virtually *every* type of film.¹²

Most scholars in this group then start with an 'implicit' idea of ecocinema and define the ecological relevance *through* the analysis of films. This *a posteriori* defining the ecological in any cinema is a refreshingly open, unprejudiced approach to ecocinema. Furthermore, critically pointing out the ecological issues at and under cinema's surface also links the environmentalism to several levels of engagement: at one level, the natural given environment of a mainstream film is both the practical surface of our daily encounters with the world, yet this is also – at another, more fundamental level – revealed as the environment without which life would not flourish. This gradually moves us into the territory of a more philosophical theorization of ecocinema. A small group of scholars adopt an explicitly film-philosophical stance: they argue that film *qua* film has ecological potential and it is in regard to this subgroup of scholars that my thesis aims to contribute.

One important contribution to this philosophical ecocinema is Adrian Ivakhiv's pathbreaking book *Ecologies of the Moving Image* (2013), in which he draws on process-relational philosophy to argue that film's moving images are *inherently* ecological. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2, he

¹² This larger group has many different approaches. For instance, Sean Cubitt (2005) sees environmental ideas in many different genres, from 1980s British television drama to Japanese animation; Deborah A. Carmichael (2006) focuses on ecological themes in the Western genre; ecocinema might furthermore be sought in national cinema (e.g. Chinese cinema; cf. Lu *et al* 2009); finally, ecology in popular film is studied by Robin Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, with a focus on Hollywood animation (2011) or popular eco-disaster film (2014).

convincingly suggests that cinema is an ‘anthrobiomorphic machine’: an instrument that produces a world “which is material at one end, social at another end, and interperceptual in the middle: a world of subjects, objects and things in between” (2011: 127). Ivakhiv’s notion of anthrobiomorphic machine is however closely modeled after process-relational philosophy; I shall argue that his thesis could benefit from to by being expanded via a more phenomenological approach.¹³

Ilan Safit’s eco-philosophy of film (2014a) compellingly proposes precisely such a phenomenological approach. For him, cinematic experience is a perfect tool for phenomenology’s bringing together world and consciousness, because film “allows us to see the world in ways which we could otherwise not see” (2014a: 219). It is thus the aesthetic features of cinema – the cinematic image – that play an important role the ecological and ethical responses to cinema. While I generally agree with Safit’s model with regards to cinema’s intrinsic phenomenological nature, I shall argue in Chapter 3 that his focus on one particular image of pristine nature seems too narrow.

In line with my argumentation against ‘recycling ecology’ though film, I maintain here too that the eco-potential should not only be sought in select corners of the world of cinema. Instead, I argue that *all* films can evoke ecological thought through their use of the elements – cinematic worlds from very different periods of film-history or from absolutely antipodic places of world cinema. And most challenging of all: to apprehend ecological thinking in all film, preferably from contrasting cinematic traditions and genres.

0.3 Material Imagination

This idea for spreading wider the potential of any artistic genre is partially inspired by the later work of Gaston Bachelard (1938; 1943; 1948). While not an environmental philosopher in the contemporary sense, Bachelard’s

¹³ As I Indicate in Chapter 2, Ivakhiv bases his theory after the American phenomenology of Charles Sanders Pierce and generally disregards the Continental steam of philosophy my own approach is based on.

works on literature's 'material imagination' can be very read as stirring such ecological potential.¹⁴

After an acclaimed career in the philosophy of science and epistemology, he developed a literary poetics of all four natural elements. As his project progresses, he increasingly framed this as an almost Husserlian *phenomenology* of material imagination.¹⁵ Literature's 'material image,' as Bachelard calls it, becomes a phenomenological invitation to subjectively *imagine* in concrete ways the world's objective materiality:

Une image matérielle dynamiquement vécue, passionnément adoptée, patiemment fouillée, est une *ouverture* dans tous les sens du terme (...). [Elle] est un dépassement de l'être immédiat, un approfondissement de l'être superficiel. Et cet approfondissement ouvre une double perspective: vers l'intimité du sujet agissant et dans l'intérieur substantiel de l'objet inerte rencontré par la perception (1948: 33).¹⁶

A writer's expression of matter – i.e., earth, water, air or fire – may thus evoke, for the reader, a dynamic, oneiric opening to the world; in *Air and Dreams*, he evens speaks about the elements as the 'hormones of the imagination' that "put images into action."¹⁷ Each element is thus dynamically lived by the reader in an embodied, engaged manner, and discovers through literature's poetic language a wholly different world in itself.

For Bachelard this poetic imagination remains however essentially rooted in *literature's* 'images'.¹⁸ In our contemporary context – where (moving) images are more than ever before the most popular of all media – this reliance on language, at the expense of (moving) images, is highly surprising. No matter how lively words may describe the world's materiality,

¹⁴ In a certain way, this beautiful work on the literary representation of the four elements can be seen as an early predecessor and inspiration of the present thesis.

¹⁵ For this 'Husserlian character' of Bachelard's phenomenology, cf. Picart 1997.

¹⁶ Unfortunately I could not attain an English translation of this book. I translate the quote as follows: "A dynamically lived material image, passionately adopted and patiently excavated, is an opening in every sense of the word. (...) [It] is surpassing the immediate being, a deepening of the superficial being. And this deepening opens up a double perspective: towards the intimacy of the operating subject and the substantive inner side of the inert object by perception"

¹⁷ My translation of the following passage: "Nous n'avons donc pas tort, croyons-nous, de caractériser les quatre éléments comme *les hormones de l'imagination*. Ils mettent en action des *groupes d'images*. (...)" (1948: 20).

¹⁸ While Bachelard writes that his is "a century of the image" (1948: 7), Bachelard usually underlines that it is the lively *language* of a writer that creates poetic images (cf. 1943: 7-11) – wordy images of earth, air, water or fire that inspire that dynamic, rejuvenating reverie entitled material imagination

our vivid imagination of, and dynamically lived embodied relation to the world is principally *non-verbal*; as I will discuss in chapter 2, cinema is a very powerful medium for re-creating this dynamic, perceptual-phenomenological experience of the world.

Bachelard's philosophy on literature's poetic images therefore needs to be complemented with a study of the way cinematic images evoke precisely such a creative imagination of the materiality of the world. By embracing such material imagination that sustains all perceptual, affective and cognitive investing in the world, also ecocinema's restricted ecological potential can be broadened by an open, unbiased curiosity about the world's matter and the artistic expression of our universe.

0.4 Film-Phenomenology

If the whole thesis aims to open up the limited scope of ecocinema and capture in *all* film genres those rich, reverberating images of ecological thinking, it needs to specify how this film-philosophical potential for new thought can be seized. From the many different theoretical stances within film-philosophy (cf. Carel *et al* 2006), this thesis generally follows a phenomenological approach. As I argue in detail in Chapter 2, this *approach* is best suited for describing our pre-reflective (film) experience – the phase where we first encounter the materiality of the filmworld.

Moreover, it is specifically 'the phenomenological *method*' (adapted from Spiegelberg, 1965: I, 653-701; Ihde 1986: 32-41; Sokolowski 2000: 42-65; Gallagher *et al* 2012: 23-31) that proves most helpful for systematically analyzing the process of cinematic engagement at this pre-reflective level (Chapter 2), as well as revealing the more metaphorical meaning of the elemental images (Chapter 3). For phenomenological analysis is a step-by-step process that methodologically describes the concrete *experience* of a cinematic moment.¹⁹

More concretely, in analyzing a cinematic moment this research project first adopts (1) the *phenomenological attitude* by 'suspending' (as much as

¹⁹ It should be noted that I focus specifically on particular film scenes (in chapter 1 I use the term 'cinematic moments') rather than whole films. Although I usually *refer* to the larger plot of the film, the actual description and thematic analysis is focused on such a scene only.

possible) many contextual features of the film experience: accepted ways of thinking, logical frameworks, and prejudices are 'bracketed' in favour of an exclusive focus on the 'givenness' of the film experience. The second step of this method (2) *describes the film experience* – from direct experience. This bracketed thick description links the subjective experience to the formal features of object: it is noted *when* and *how* experience becomes directed towards the projected world of film, and how this is sensed or lived through. Then (3) these *descriptions are interpreted* – still within this phenomenological attitude – to observe the salient structures of the given descriptions. Only in the fourth step, (4) the *thematization of the interpretations*, brings this interpreted pattern into dialogue with current scholarly literature (from phenomenological philosophy and film theory, as well as philosophy and ecocinema). Finally, these different theoretically embedded thematizations are connected and interwoven into a sustained argumentation.

[1] Thinking about the World: a Question of the Elements

Introducing Research Problem of the Thesis • The Four Elements in Philosophy and Media Studies • Between Film Theory and Film-Philosophy

1.1 Deserted Ideas

Out of the vibrating desert air, Omar Sharif's Arab horseman assumes form. In this celebrated scene halfway David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), a mirage hides the trembling, distant, almost liquid horizon from which Sharif's character Sherif Ali comes forth. A distant gunshot kills Lawrence's Bedouin guide. The horseman rides very slowly over the desert ground, calmly imposing himself on the small piece of dry earth shared by a stunned Lawrence, two thirsty camels and a dead Bedouin guide. Underneath this arid land lies Ali's well. As Ali comments upon arrival, Bedouin people should not drink water from other people's wells without permission.

In our imaginary theatre of myriad loved film experiences, cinema replays such intense *cinematic moments*, lived experiences we dwell within – rather than abstract narrative developments of the plot or fabricated interpretations of a scene.²⁰ And in the valued memory of such cinematic moments, this very cinematic landscape falls back on that thick and dense, pulsating air Ali's horse traverses: here, the deadly gunshot enlivens the reimagined scene just as much as our lived cinematic retention becomes animated by that dry land; finally, that quasi-concealed wellspring the scene ends with what is also the vibrant source nourishing the subsequent stories of Lawrence's life in the Arabian desert.

Here, amidst the trembling air of this peculiar scene in *Lawrence of Arabia*, several different stories beg to be told: from the layered (inter-)cultural and (post-)colonial histories within and written about the film

²⁰ Besides the emphasis on 'lived experience' typical to the phenomenological approach, this particular idea of the 'cinematic moment' is furthermore inspired by Murray Pomerance's work on film. He embraces the experience of film over against the 'piecemeal analysis' of many analytic film scholars: "Engaged with film (...), wrapped up in watching it, we find it built not of shots but of moments. (...) The moment, inevitably, is what we remember and retain, what we possess of the screen and incorporate into ourselves and our worlds" (2008: 6).

scene (that even resonate with the contemporary turmoil in the Arabic world), or trivia about the filming and casting, to the different film theoretical interpretations of Lawrence's gender, sexual and cultural identity to the wonderful adventurous life as set on screen by David Lean. [ref's?]

This particular scene in *Lawrence of Arabia* appears, however, before everything else, to *first* depend on the richness of the simple fourfold of the natural elements. That is, *before* the different narrative layers and diverse symbolic directions may be laid out in each new interpretation, this scene is evoked by a very cinematic way of thinking through the elements. How else is that eerie world recreated but through this fourfold, reconstructed through the basic materials of our world? This leads us in the direction of questioning the role of the four elements in film; as I will argue in this chapter, this is an important question that not only seems largely forgotten in the history of film theory, contemporary philosophers also neglect to give it the attention it deserves in times of ecological crisis.

Moreover, if our collective-subjective recollection of this particular film scene is sustained and supported by an acute use of the four natural elements, these cinematic moments depend more on this fourfold than initially appeared. In fact, *Lawrence of Arabia*, with its rich, suggestive symbolic connotations, is *driven by* and *built on* that generous materiality of the four natural elements: it is impossible to experience and think about this film without reference to earth, water and air. And as for fire – could Lawrence's story ever be told without that miraculous metaphoric matchstick-transition, quickly changing the void of a blown out flame for an Oriental landscape burning in the desert sunrise? Our attention lingers in this single tangible, concrete image – a carefully blown out flame; but the crafty use of *fire* in this transition also suggests the Promethean appeal to cinema's defining technology (i.e., editing: experiencing a transformation of time and place) – amongst other metaphorical connotations.²¹

²¹ This is a prime example of what I call in Chapter 3 'concrete metaphor', where the cinematic image of an element is both very concrete and direct (on that level, it already engages us with the filmworld) yet also inherently metaphorical, precisely experienced on this level of concrete palpability.

Therefore, one of chief motivations behind this research thesis is the idea that it is almost impossible to think about any world without earth and air, water and fire. They are essential for constructing *any* fictive world; we understand the environment through these elements, we make our world meaningful by thinking through these elements of the filmworld.²² For instance, in one of the very first film scenes ever filmed, *Le Repas de Bébé* ([aka *Feeding the Baby*] Louis Lumière 1895), Auguste Lumière feeds his baby daughter. What the audience at the time found most impressive in this spectacular entertainment was the way the leaves at the background gently moved in the wind: that kinetic, lively energy in the background was something different from photography. After one of the first projected worlds of film became animated by a brief thrust of wind, cinema left the confined spaces of the studio recording and explored the open airs; it thrived on the late 19th Century curiosity about the world, presenting and making present various geographic and natural locations of our earth, via the technical realm of cinema.²³

Indeed, since this almost tangible liveliness of age-old moving air, cinema's technology may have changed; but in its nature it has pretty much stayed the same: rather than expressed in literary or theatrical art forms, the kinesis of moving winds is something truly *cinematic*. The wind gusting over Federico Fellini's beaches of his youth, or the sense of spirituality animating some of Andrei Tarkovsky's landscapes are concrete examples of something that could never be done with an art form that is not as much alive as cinema.

Arguments of this Chapter

Whilst wind – like earth, water and fire – often lingers in the background of our lives (and cinematic experience), the main objective of this thesis is to reconsider these natural elements through cinematic analysis: they are not sheer environmental reminders of the ecological system we live in (and

²² On a careful note, I should acknowledge that there are also a few genres of film (e.g., comedy or melodrama) where the thematic use of the elements usually is more marginal. Hence, my thesis does not hold for *all* films; it is not essentialist. Nonetheless, the range of discussed genres is purposefully left wide open.

²³ Recently Early Cinema – and especially the 'travelogue' genre – has attracted new scholarly attention that revealed the importance of themes as location, setting and landscape (see e.g., Rohdie 2001; Rhodes *et al* 2011).

effectively are); earth and air, water and fire matter much more than mere backdrop. Hence, taking the elements out of their peripheral role, this thesis explores them with the philosophical rigour they deserve.

Accordingly, this first chapter opens up the exploration of the elements in philosophy and film – how both disciplines have thought about this fourfold. It queries why, in cosmogonic thinking, we count only four elements. It also argues why these four elements should be analyzed and theorized *through* cinema and, finally, just how that is a philosophical endeavor. With its broader claims, this first chapter sketches the context for the research set out in the subsequent chapters; the subsequent chapters gradually support these larger claims with more expanded film analyses, and also allow to develop more deeply the diverse specific themes related or provoked by the analysis of an elemental cinema.

However, the goal for this opening chapter is to explore the question of the elements in their widest contexts.²⁴ Let me therefore start with a brief historical consideration how ancient thinkers have previously considered the four natural elements.

1.2 Philosophy's Remembering of the Elements

The four natural elements of earth, air, water and fire are central to the first of Western philosophies, written around the 600-500 BCE. Various thinkers now grouped together as Pre-Socratic philosophers tell thought provoking myths about the origin and *logos* of the world: they speculated about the *archē* (the first or fundamental principle or source) underlying the structure of the cosmos (cf. Waterfield 2000: 14; Macauley 2010: 13; Curd 2012). These very early precedents of elemental thinking in Western Philosophy appear to many as an anecdotal annotation to the history of philosophy, yet they mark the origins of a philosophical approach to understanding nature and the cosmos that still shapes our horizons of knowledge today. Indeed, 20th Century phenomenological philosophy gradually picked up their original insights; moreover, in times of contemporary environmental crisis, these

²⁴ While there are several brief film descriptions, the focus of this chapter is rather to sketch the philosophical context. More extended, in-depth phenomenological descriptions and analyses are used in Chapter 2 and 3.

ancient ideas of cosmos and archē seem not too far away from scientific notions as ecosystems and vital materialism – they are even promising, in ethical terms, for ecological discourses in film-philosophy.

Pre-Socratic Philosophy

Thales, the first of these elemental philosophers, suggested that *water* was the principal element, the sole matter on which the other elements rest (he said that the earth rests on water like wooden ships drift on rivers) and from all the elements the only substance that *gives* life (all that grows, grows from water). Later came Anaximenes, who imagined on the contrary that the prime matter of the world was *air*: “it is the source of everything and everything is dissolved back into it” (Aëtius in Waterfield 2000: 18). According to Heraclitus, though, all things are modifications or manifestations of *fire*: fire transforms into water, then into dry earth, then into thunderstorm (air).

Empedocles, one of the later Pre-Socratic writers and the thinker most associated with elemental thinking, enlarged Heraclitus’ cyclic thought into a model of six principles (cf. Macauley 2010: 103-117 and Waterfield 2010: 133-140). Instead of singling out one element as the primary matter ordering the cosmos, he imagined each of the four elements (earth, air, water, fire) as four eternal *rhizomata* or ‘roots’ of the world, each governed by different immortal major or minor gods. Moreover, Empedocles added two forces to order the cosmos: *love* brings the four cosmic roots together into elemental admixtures whereas *strife* separates or disperses these proportioned fusions, creating chaos.

From a 21st Century point of view, these early thinkers were obviously exploring the line separating myth from logic. Not long after Homer’s legends, these speculative ancient stories marveled about the origin and structure of the universe; yet they gradually transformed poetry and pantheistic mythology into philosophical appeal to reason and proto-empirical science. With their poetic frames of mind these natural thinkers created the first analytic methodologies to study the structures *ordering* the world that finally gave way to the more empirical Aristotelian approach to

science and hence much of Western thought.²⁵ These early philosophers tried to understand the world; they told stories in order to understand the cosmos.²⁶

The point here is less to evaluate the methodological impact or the scientific rigor of Pre-Socratic philosophy. Rather, I wish to underline that this early thinking about the world is the first (in Western philosophy at least) that tries to see a fundamental or underlying order in the cosmos. In other words, I refer to the elemental cosmogony of Pre-Socratic philosophy in order to accentuate how these first natural philosophers constructed stories about the world's origin and structure precisely by seeing the world *through* its basic material: how the world, before all, is structured through earth, air, water and fire. Here, these four elements are a means to understand the structure of the universe: they sustain the narratives of the world, spark the human imagination, they keep together the soul and wonder about universe.

However, after this initial curiosity in the elements as *archē* of the world, science proceeded in different directions: in each new era, a cosmic logic was expressed in differently framed narratives. As time progressed, advancing scientific curiosity struggled more and more with religious dogmas about the divine origin of the world; in the early modern period, the Christian geocentric model was replaced by a heliocentric perspective of the cosmos.²⁷ Most of the philosophy and science in this intermediate period disregarded the modest fourfold of an elemental framework. At best, the idea

²⁵ For more on Aristotelian philosophy and his framing of the four natural elements, I refer to David Macauley's excellent *Elemental Philosophy* (2010: Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

²⁶ What unites these various philosophers, Robin Waterfield suggests, is that they replaced 'primitive' thinking (an outward projection of awe and fear about the world) with a proto-scientific model that believes there is systematic order in the world: "it is precisely because it is ordered that it can be comprehended by the human mind" (Waterfield 2010: xxiii).

²⁷ This Copernican Revolution – to which also the astrological observations of Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilee significantly contributed – was of course one of the greatest steps establishing the empirical sciences; however, interesting enough, in this scientific revolution one might also recognize early precedents of a move 'beyond' the human. Many scholars in contemporary environmental thought – especially in Heideggerian approaches and followers of Arne Naess' deep ecology – call for replacing the anthropocentric worldview with a perspective that take the earth as ecosystem, and the universe as cosmic, holistic model (cf. Buell *et al* 2011: 432; Garrard 2011: 21-36; see also Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought* [2010]).

of four elements as *archē* was reduced to a theory of humorism;²⁸ at worst, elemental thinking was done away with as part of prescientific nature religions.²⁹ Only halfway into the previous century, water and earth, air and fire returned to the works of major philosophers.

Phenomenology: Material Imagination and Cinematic *Poēsis*

Phenomenologically inclined, existential thinkers rediscovered a sensibility for the four natural elements. Besides Maurice Merleau-Ponty's more general openness to the natural world, one may also think of the thick elemental worlds Albert Camus recounts of the youth the philosopher spent between the Mediterranean Sea and the Algerian desert. A more well-known example of elemental thinking would be Jean-Paul Sartre's key scene in his 1938 novel *Nausea*, where Roquentin is overtaken by disgust for the bursting life at the surface of a park's soil. Thirdly, contemporary phenomenologist Edward Casey praised the role of earth and land in the pictorial arts (and land art); each time an artist creates an artwork, s/he *scapes* the earth and land in different expressions of being-in-the-world (Casey 2002a and 2004).³⁰

But the phenomenologist who rediscovered in the elements a new form of thinking is Martin Heidegger. He not only returned explicitly to Pre-Socratic philosophy – moreover, in his later work (after 'The Turning') Heidegger's philosophy becomes increasingly based on a re-thinking of earth.³¹ His 'The Origin of the Work of Art' is exemplary: a description of Vincent van Gogh's painting *A Pair of Shoes* (1885) reveals *earth* as something the *world* strives to surmount; "the earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there" (1971: 48). Furthermore, in his idea of 'fourfold' [*das Geviert*] – the unity of earth and sky, divinities and mortals as poetic dwelling – we may even find a prototypical version of much contemporary ethical-ecological thought.³²

²⁸ In this medieval model (dating back to the Greek philosopher and father of Western medicine Hippocrates, and used well into the 19th Century), the human body is filled with four basic substances; each natural element thus corresponds to a vital organ in the human body.

²⁹ Science moved away from the sensuously perceivable elements (air, earth, water, fire) to their underlying imperceptible 'essences' (e.g., atoms and forces, etc.).

³⁰ I return to Casey's distinguishing land from earth and world in Chapter 2.

³¹ For 'The Turning,' see Heidegger 1977: 36-49; for his 'Work of Art'-essay, see Heidegger 1971: 17-86.

³² This key idea prevailing over Heidegger's later thought is most clearly worked out in 'Building Dwelling Thought' and 'The Thing,' both printed in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971: 143-159; 163-180). If space

Despite varying interpretations of the fundamental role of earth and the other elements, these existential phenomenologists share a great deal: besides their shared philosophical approach and mutual interest to return to elemental thinking, they also look at ‘the arts’ to express or find expression of the significance of the natural elements.³³ To a certain extent, it holds middle ground between philosophy and art: just like Pre-Socratic cosmic poetics, these 20th Century philosophers often express their philosophical idea of being-in-the-world *through* the artistic expression of one particular element. Art and philosophy join forces to let an elemental world appear. This is precisely the challenge for this thesis in film-philosophy: to think the elements *through* film.

Let us return to Heidegger’s idea of ‘poetic thinking’ as starting point to frame such an approach. Of course, Heidegger’s disapproval of cinema and other modern representational media is noted; in rare essays like ‘The Age of The World Picture,’ Heidegger argued that ‘framed’ reality becomes degraded as representational resource, ready at hand for consumption (cf. 1977: 115-154). Yet, despite this apparent discontent with cinema, Robert Sinnerbrink (2006 and 2014), amongst others,³⁴ has indicated how cinema can be instead seen as a Heideggerian world-revealing *poēisis* precisely *because* of its cinematic technology (understood as *technē*). The virtue of cinema is its

revealing or bringing-forth of complex virtual worlds; the technologically mediated projection and disclosure of a world through audio-visual images. Cinematic *poēisis* articulates film’s ‘truth-disclosing’ power to present-time, capture movement, express meaning, or reveals aspects of our experience that might otherwise remain obscured or marginalized (2014:79).

It is thus *through* film’s *poēisis* that we can experience such intense instants I referred to above as ‘cinematic moments;’ Moreover, it is the film-philosophical approach that best appreciates these cherished moments we

were permitted, Heidegger’s ‘fourfold’ should be critically compared with the idea of the natural elements as unity-in-four – i.e., as challenge for re-thinking our relation with the earth.

³³ Naturally, Camus and Sartre were major novelists of their age; and while Merleau-Ponty’s appeal to the arts is only found in more peripheral work (on artists like Matisse), the pictorial arts are foregrounded in Casey’s work.

³⁴ Within film-philosophy there is a small sub-group of scholars delineating a Heideggerian approach to cinema – ranging from rather critical to quite optimistic – very often in tandem with analysing the work of Terrence Malick. See e.g., Critchley 2002; Woessner 2011 and Safit 2014a.

temporarily dwelled in our film experience; that is, film-philosophy sees in them an opportunity to think the world *through* cinema.³⁵

This Heideggerian orientation to cinema is a valuable base to challenge and complement Gaston Bachelard's *literary* 'material imagination' with a truly cinematic thinking. As indicated in my Introduction, Bachelard's poetics offers an ambiguous challenge. On the one hand, of all phenomenologists,³⁶ he remains the philosopher who most explicitly argued that the classical elements – fire and air, water and earth – evoke another sense of thinking about the world. On the other hand, I must also repeat here that Bachelard – despite his writing of 'imagination' in (as he himself indicated) a 'century of the image' (1948: 7) – hardly referred to the pictorial arts, let alone cinema's audio-visual technological art form. My thesis therefore attempts to complement Bachelard's 'literary' thinking about the elements, with a new phenomenology concerning cinema's elemental thinking. For cinema is very well capable of evoking thought-provoking questions about the significance of the four natural elements.

1.3 Do the Elements Matter?

In his most recent science-fiction movie, director Ridley Scott pictures Matt Damon as a forgotten astronaut on Mars, considered lost and dead by his NASA colleagues – a colossal, extra-terrestrial dust storm forced them to flee from this little, distant Earth-like planet. For the forgotten space traveller there is but one thing left to survive: in order to get home with the next NASA-mission, he has to create *life* in this far-away planet.

Just as in David Lean's masterpiece, also *The Martian* (Ridley Scott 2015) can be seen from many perspectives. As a big-budget blockbuster with, at its heart, a scene about growing potatoes using the red earth of Mars, it entertained the idea that water can be created by burning air, and thus seems

³⁵ While this Heideggerian argument runs underneath this whole thesis – it is a philosophical orientation – I intentionally left it outside the main research question of this thesis; I plan to develop this theme in the follow-up to this thesis.

³⁶ After an esteemed career as epistemologist and philosopher of science, Bachelard's philosophical orientation moved – through Jungian psychoanalytic philosophy, – to a convinced phenomenological thinking (with some mythical, metaphysical touches) in his later career. For more on the phenomenological character of Bachelard's later philosophy, cf. Picart 1997.

not that far removed from Pre-Socratic philosophy.³⁷ Furthermore, as in many popular science-fiction films about space travelling (we will encounter a few in this thesis) this movie is able to reflect on human existence by making an envoy of humanity float in mid-air, alone somewhere in the universe. That is to say, while this genre is usually considered as obsessed with technology, these films characteristically offer a concrete scene where the astronaut's access to technologically contained oxygen is cut off: while 'air' and 'spirit' have been metaphorically connected since time immemorial, this breakdown of technology is perhaps cinema's least-spiritual, most direct 'technological' way to provoke elemental thoughts about what it means to 'exist'.

We thus encounter in this popular film precisely what I described above as an elemental *poēisis* expressed through cinema's *technē*. In other words, *The Martian* evokes precisely that poetic imagination Bachelard ascribed to literature, yet in a very cinematic way: on the one hand, through its haptic cinematography the film arouses a sort of affective or visceral understanding of the fierce storm or the burning heat on this planet, as well as of the bare life Matt Damon's astronaut lives there; on the other hand, in *The Martian's* narrative stress on each of the four elements (especially the astronaut's creation of air from water), the film thematizes earth and air, water and fire in a very concrete way. In such a sci-fi scene, the obvious given-ness of the world suddenly stands out: when each of the elements becomes manifestly framed through cinematic storytelling, it remains difficult to suppress a brief reflection on the sheer materiality of the world. This film description suggests – in a vital, fundamental way – how unavoidable it appears, or how essential it is, to ask the “question of elements”. New, elemental questions unexpectedly appear: Is it even possible to imagine life without the four elements? How do these basic natural

³⁷ In the mountains of Hawaii NASA created 'sMars', a simulated space exploration analogue to the harsh conditions on Mars – including a virtual 30 minutes delay for Skyping with Houston. Health science officer and crew journalist Sheyna Gifford writes on these conditions: “Life on sMars, like on Mars itself, is elemental. Our chief concerns revolve around sun, air, water and rock – specifically, what we can and can't do with those four basics in the right combinations.” (Gifford 2016)

components matter to us as humans? How does film make them meaningful? In what way does cinema express earth, fire, air and water?

The Question of the Elements

As opposed to the more scientifically specified, chemical elements of the rationalized periodic system, in our everyday life we generally use but these four elements speak about the world.³⁸ They are the basic stuff the natural world is made of. And while a small number of non-Western cultures count their elements differently, their models even resemble the western fourfold. For instance, Australian Indigenous peoples' cosmogony generally is made up of three elements – a flat earth, surrounded by water, and vaulted with an eternal Sky-World (to some Aboriginal groups, trees give access to this dome) – whereas various Asian traditions name five elements (water, fire, wood, metal and earth in Chinese cultures; earth, water, fire, wind, and void in traditional Japan).³⁹

So, apart from these alternative cultural-religious traditions, only slightly deviating from model of the four elements, there is a shared pattern in this cultural experience and expression of the natural world: in these pre-modern, non-Western traditions, the mythical and religious contexts are effectively transformed through the poetic thinking of the world. While much modern Western science may dismiss this poetic thinking as non-rational and unscientific, our obsession with the world in rationalized models derives essentially from a Pre-Socratic cosmic curiosity. This fourfold of earth and air, water and fire, may, therefore, be considered as virtually one of the universal, guiding principles for how human beings have made sense of the world.

Cinema and the Elements

From mythological thinking, to everyday speech and a prototypical scientific worldview, the fourfold model of earth and air, water and fire plays a key role

³⁸ With 'world,' I mean first the natural world of earth, water, fire and air. However, this primal, elemental world that sustains our lives is often concealed by the cultural world. A good example of this interchange (Michelangelo Antonioni's end scene of *L'Eclisse* [1962]) opens Chapter 3.

³⁹ A more lengthy entry on Aboriginal cosmogony is available in Johnson 2014: 21-37; for the cosmology of Asian cultures, and a more extensive evaluation of the cultural views of the elements in other cultures, cf. Macauley 2010: 74-81.

in understanding the world. And cinema's poetic technology might be considered precisely such a modern-mythological way of reflecting on the elemental nature of the living in the world.⁴⁰ The cinematic representation of the elements can be considered at two levels. This can be demonstrated by mentioning a couple quick examples without thick description and further thematic interpretation. Think, for instance, of the stretched deserted landscapes of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone 1969), the endless seas of *Life of Pi* (Ang Lee 2012), *Magnolia's* sky filled with falling frogs (Paul Thomas Anderson 1999) or, finally, the burning Civil War in *Gone With the Wind's* southern Atlanta (Victor Flemming *et al* 1939).

In the first two of these examples the elements are essential at the most basic level of film experience; here, they are the expressive material that constitute these filmworlds. As I will argue in Chapter 2, it is *through* them that a particular expressive world is built; it is because of the elemental nature of a particular filmworld that we temporarily leave behind our bodily being in the cinema theatre and mentally take it with us as we dwell in the projected world of film. Sometimes, they are essentially linked to genre clichés (e.g., the empty lands of the Western, or the rainy nightscapes of Film Noir); other times filmmakers are inventive to create an elemental world – a world dominated by one element – to express an existential theme.

In the other two examples, filmmakers concentrate their evocation of the elements in one or a few powerful scenes charged with an elemental theme. In Chapter 3 these film scenes will be interpreted as evoking a 'concrete metaphor' that is experienced at two levels: one apprehends the different metaphorical connotations of this single image, yet – at the same time – it is still always at a primary, more concrete level of direct sensuous perception and audio-visual fascination with the elemental world where one is engaged by the world of film.

Because, to be sure, cinema is (on both levels) distinctly different from other arts: in literature, an elemental world can be left imprecisely described; cinema, on the contrary, gives the spectator a world to be *directly*

⁴⁰ Irving Singer (2008) has argued that cinema can be understood as a poetic-philosophical form of mythmaking.

experienced though one or more of the elements. Although the elements are not as vital to every cinematic genre, it is however rare to be given an entirely 'worldless' film.⁴¹

All the different brief examples in this chapter are meant to illustrate the central idea of this thesis: the difficulty of thinking about a world of film *without* the natural elements. This is where this thesis in film-philosophy aims to make its biggest contribution.

1.4 Media Studies and the Elements

Intriguingly enough, within film studies there appears to be no substantial research done on the cinematic representation of the four natural elements. At most, there are incidental speculations about the role of the elements. For instance, there might be some work done on for example Akira Kurosawa's use of *rain* in his paradigmatic fighting scenes, or the importance of *earth* in Italy's national cinematic imagination.⁴² Alternatively, one of the first film-philosophers (Gilles Deleuze) may have speculated on the themes of water imagery in 1920s French poetic cinema, but never fully developed its rich thematic layers.⁴³ But this sort of work never approaches a systematic analysis of the representation of any of the four natural elements, let alone the four natural elements as integrated 'four-fold' or amalgamated theme.

Nevertheless, and only very recently, a few scholars working in the wider discipline of media studies and media theory have shown to be sensitive to the importance of the question of the elements.⁴⁴ Let me give two examples of this trend that appears to be influenced by German Media

⁴¹ Of course there are marginal exceptions: in *THX 1138*, an early film of George Lucas (1971), the protagonists end up in an abstract white spaceless place (or placeless space), much like Neo later in the first *Matrix*-film (Andy and Larry Wachowski 2001). However, it may be argued that such 'unspecific' cinematic worlds are presented as the polar opposite of the material given-ness of the earth – as a science fiction thought experiment.

⁴² For an interpretation of Kurosawa's rain-metaphor, see Urios-Aparisi 2016: 70ff; for an interpretation of the earth in landscapes of post-fascist Italian cinema, cf. Minghelli 2013.

⁴³ Deleuze contrasts the moving 'liquid perception' of cineastes like Jean Epstein, the early Jean Renoir and Jean Vigo, with the solid, fixed movement on earth (cf. 1986: 77ff).

⁴⁴ A few other recent studies touch the thematization of elements in cinema, but never profoundly analyse them. See for instance Sean Cubitt's *Ecomedia* (2005), with its special sensibility for water and earth; Adrian Ivakhiv (2013) gives earth an important role in his eco-philosophical model of cinema (I will return to this in the next chapter); Kristi McKim's *Cinema as Weather* (2013) briefly touches on air and water as an expression of the emotional state of a film's protagonists; and lastly, Nicole Starosielski's article 'Beyond Fluidity' (2013:148-168) is, to my knowledge, the first in-depth film study of the representation of water; her focus is, however, exclusively on 'cinema under water,' i.e., films about the deep sea under the surface.

Theory. In his recent media archaeology of the future, the Finish theorist Jussi Parikka opens up in *A Geology of Media* (2015) a 'deep time' sense of the physical *materiality* of contemporary media: for example, if the mobile phones and ultra-thin laptops we now use are made of refabricated millennia-old earth minerals and heavy metals, they will persist long after we are dead – they are the 'fossils of the future'.

Another example of recent attention to the elements in media theory might be found in the work of the American communication theorist John Durham Peters, who has recently developed a 'philosophy of elemental media.' Hence, in *The Marvelous Clouds* (2015) Peters discusses many different types of media – from the first telephones and sonar-navigation to radio and Internet browsers; the overall argument is that these various *media* essentially *connect* us to the environment: like radio- and soundwaves move through the air, all these media mediate *through* our elemental environment. In other words, while dolphins and whales use water they are surrounded by as their medium, according to Peters we humans also use the elements (literally or metaphorically) to understand the world around us in communicating across or *through* it; the significant difference is, however, that we have technologies to *change* this elemental environment.

Both studies are very interesting for their original take on the question of the elements as well as their metaphorical or literal role of earth or water, air or fire in contemporary media forms. For both authors, speaking about the materiality of the elements proves to be a thought-provoking way to speak about media in general. However, with their broad scope – usually analyzing *media* as a whole rather than a specific form of media – the medium of cinema necessarily remains on the margin of their research. For this reason alone, a broader exploration of the relation between the representation of the elements and cinema's medium specificity is needed.

Elemental Cinema?

While the film scenes mentioned in this chapter are more illustration than detailed case study, the different films discussed in the next chapters will increasingly qualify cinema as a special form of 'phenomenological art': as indicated earlier in this chapter, it is the contention of this thesis that it is

precisely through the technological art form of cinema – arguably still the most popular art form of our age – that we may analyse how important the four natural elements are in our daily engagement with and reliance on the world. That is, it is through cinema’s manner of world building, in its narrative forms of emotional engagement, and by film’s technological nature of projecting a world that may be experienced concretely and directly (phenomenologically speaking) – in short, it is through these typical cinematic features that the spectator engages with both an artistically fabricated world as well as the direct representation of the real world. And, as I will argue in Chapter 2, the vital role of the elements on that important level of engagement with the world of film should not be ignored.

Accordingly, in the field of media studies at large, this thesis aims to contribute a new theoretical perspective that specifically analyses the elements in relation the medium of film. Additionally, it is also the first in-depth study that looks at earth and water, fire and air as organizing or uniting aesthetic and meaningful forms for many films. Thirdly, it is also the first time sustained attention has been given to the way cinema thinks *through* the four natural elements, in the building of a filmworld that is necessary for cinematic storytelling. Let me close this chapter off with a few words on this philosophical context and explain how the choice for this context bears on the methodological stance in working out this thesis.

1.5 The Sub-Discipline of Film-Philosophy

Since the early 2000s, various philosophers have developed different stances in the cross-discipline of ‘film-philosophy’.⁴⁵ Film-philosophy is a minor stream within the larger discipline ‘philosophy of film’ – the broader theoretical paradigm that more largely is concerned with *what* cinema or film is (just like one could write a philosophy *of* art, or a philosophy *of* science).

⁴⁵ Stephen Mulhall (2001/2008), Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough (Read *et al* 2005), John Mullarkey (2007), Thomas Wartenberg (2007) and Robert Sinnerbrink (2011 and 2016) are the major film-philosophers that (in varying degrees) subscribe to the thesis that film *can* philosophize; major philosophers that are more sceptic of this idea are Murray Smith (2008) and Paisley Livingston (2009). Besides, many of these film-philosophers graciously admit to be inspired by the *Cinema*-works of Gilles Deleuze (1985 and 1989) and Stanley Cavell’s books on film (1979, 1981 and 1996).

However, the sub-discipline of film-philosophy should be significantly distinguished from many other philosophies *of* film.

First of all, philosophers *of* film seem to have a somewhat distanced stance towards cinema; they usually try to theorize it ‘impartially.’ Inspired by the piecemeal theorizing propagated by cognitivist film theorist David Bordwell and analytic philosopher Noël Carroll (1996), philosophers of film avoid subjectivist approaches to cinema and propose objectively testable philosophical hypotheses, often drawing in empirical research, and analyze these claims *through* the film. Film here seems ‘the object of study’ and is as such “reduced to a thing placed under pre-existing and fully-developed philosophical gaze” (Carel and Tuck 2011: 2). On the contrary, film-philosophers emphasize that the aesthetic experience of film has an intrinsic philosophical value that cannot be excluded from theoretical analysis. In this cinematic experience, film may generate new thoughts that are perhaps not possible with language. For them, the intrinsic philosophical potential of film can thus only be approached by careful and systematic self-reflective analysis – rather than reservedly testing to what degree a film’s formal, narrative or thematic qualities ‘meets’ a given philosophical hypothesis.

Hence, a second important argument for film-philosophy is to avoid projecting or applying ready-made, pre-conceived philosophical concepts to a film in order to ‘tap’ the meaning from the film to support a general philosophy *of* film. Quite the reverse, film-philosophers often try to put philosophy ‘in dialogue’ with film: Robert Sinnerbrink described it as ‘an alternative way of thinking’ (Sinnerbrink 2011: 7); it is a film-philosophical exploration that aims to release those cinematic thoughts intrinsic to film, while also critically interpreting them against (more established) scholarly work, predominantly within film theory and academic philosophy.

Herein lies a third argument to distinguish film-philosophy from philosophers *of* film. While film-philosophers might debate over the degree of philosophy a film can perform,⁴⁶ they nevertheless share the conviction that film has the ability to positively contribute something *to* philosophy

⁴⁶ A good introduction to the different positions is given in Havi Carel and Greg Tuck’s edited *New Takes in Film-Philosophy* (2011).

(instead of the other way around, as many philosophers *of* film argue). In other words, cinema is not something that merely needs age-old wisdom to be comprehended or accepted theoretical concepts to be explained; on the contrary, film-philosophers allow cinema's surprising narratives and controversial aesthetic styles to occasionally challenge philosophy's accepted ideas and provoke new ways of thinking.

So far, there has been much debate within film-philosophy about the degree of cinema's philosophizing potential. But in their focus on determining their relative positions, none of the philosophers involved has paid specific attention to the role of nature and ecology, or the four natural elements.⁴⁷ Capturing this new way of filmic thinking about the elements, or the elemental thinking in film – that is the chief motivation in the research of this thesis. The guiding hypothesis explored here is that there is an inherently cinematic way of thinking about the elements. Therefore, the aim is to allow precisely that cinematic thinking on the elements to appear through performing a film-philosophical dialogue *with* film.

~

Against the broader background of this film-philosophical debate, I will continue my research on cinema's remembering of the natural elements with a specifically phenomenological approach. As I will argue in the next chapter, important for my methodological orientation is phenomenology's general emphasis on the lived experience *in* the world – as consciously embodied – as well as its openness to the phenomenal or pre-reflective experience. This level of the pre-reflective, lived experience is important for analyzing film: it is here where the spectator first dwells in a projected world of film, as I will demonstrate later in this work, usually *because* of the directly lived encounter *with* the elemental world.

⁴⁷ There are two exceptions. One is Adrian Ivakhiv's work in ecocinema, to which I refer in the introduction and in Chapter 2. It appears he would generally agree with the film-philosophy thesis, but presents his claims usually more in a philosophy *of* film framework. Secondly, Ilan Safit's eco-film-phenomenology is an important recent contribution. While he explicitly indicates that the cinematic image can offer new thought (other than linguistic argumentation [2014a: 223]), he has yet to take central position in the main film-philosophical debate. See also Chapter 3.

[2] Shorelines of Spectatorship: Cinematic Engagement and the Filmworld's Elemental Landscapes

Film-Phenomenology • The Role of the Elements in the Engagement of the Spectator • Film-Intentionality and Filmworlds • Cinegeography

2.1 Earth revealed

After the introduction credits have reeled off, and their bold black capitals over a pale brick wall have disappeared, a title card defines the setting: TEXAS, 1868. Three years after the Civil War, the opening of a prairie home door in the middle of the desert reveals the colorful landscape of Monument Valley. Filmed from the inside, the framing discloses a woman opening the door; the camera follows her closely as she walks out. Amongst the next various shots, all filmed as colorful, sunny images, the woman's subjective view gives a particular mood to this whole first scene; the melancholic non-diegetic tune drops a couple of notes at the moment her point of view reveals a lone horse rider approaching their home. The uncomfortable feeling is set in obscure contrast with the happy reactions of the family, to see their uncle, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), return.

The few other moments that follow in this iconic opening sequence of *The Searchers* (John Ford 1956) all remain haunted by this doubtful mood. Though never exact, the suppressed conversation insinuates suspicion around Ethan Edward's delayed return. Simultaneously the house becomes defined as a family home with a warm fireplace, communal supper, and non-diegetic melancholic music. Before long, this homely atmosphere of the Edwards is set in effective contrast with the brute outside world of Monument Valley: dramaturgically, repeatedly invaded by various people — most strikingly by the Native Americans' attack in a suspenseful sunset-scene; visually, with the dramatic dusk lights penetrating even the cracks of the wooden house. The family's home thus becomes an endangered sheltering place for the brute wilderness outside. What is shown of Monument Valley, of the outside world, is nothing but distressing wilderness,

dangerous wasteland of rocky mountains, only inhabited by violent, revengeful Native Americans – in a word, an emotionally charged landscape as understood from inside world the sole civilized home on the plains of the West.

Arguments of This Chapter

This description of the opening sequence of John Ford's classic film undoubtedly demonstrates already a handful of the widely accepted Western-clichés.⁴⁸ But my account here also aptly introduces the three major themes structuring this chapter. First of all, the description illustrates a less-often theorized aspect of film spectatorship – how a spectator becomes involved with the projected world of film. Drawing on concepts from phenomenological philosophy, I focus on the dense, pre-reflective phase of experiencing film and suggest the notion 'film-intentionality' to refer to the spectator's *directedness* towards the film's world. This chapter then merges two recent versions of the film-philosophical concept 'filmworld' (cf. Yacavone 2008, 2014; Ivakhiv 2013) into a concept called 'cinegeography' that emphasizes the expressive geography of such a cinematic world. In the third part, this idea is developed by exploring cinema's *literal* representation of *land* on the silver screen.

These three correlated major ideas not only jointly structure this chapter; together they also support the main argument of this second part of the thesis. The key claim of this chapter is that the four natural elements play an important, even essential, role in cinema: water, air, fire and earth are fundamental for constructing, and engaging the spectator with, a dense and polysemous, projected filmworld; my claim is that before one properly *reflects* on these various symbolic meanings, one is already engaged in a cinematic thinking through the elements.

⁴⁸ Much has been written on the Western genre. For diverse extended essays, I refer to the following classical introductions: Bazin [1955] 1998; Kiteses [1969] 1998; Neale 2000; Saunders 2001; Warshow [1954] 1998.

2.2 From Phenomenology to Film-Intentionality

In his silent comedy film *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) Buster Keaton plays a nameless movie theater-employee who dreams himself onto the film's screen. While this projectionist dozes away to the rattling sound of the film projector, the burlesque film shows in a continuous shot (through double exposure of the film stock) how the hero is absorbed by the world of film. Keaton's protagonist is at two places at once: the dreamy film operator is left behind in the projection booth while the somnambulist walks towards the silver screen, climbs onto the stage, and enters the film screen. There, through acrobatic gags and visual humor, the protagonist of *Sherlock Jr.* is effectively thrown about as he is projected from one fictional world to another: after climbing a front porch in daytime, he suddenly finds himself in a romantic nocturnal garden; if he sits down on the park bench, he is suddenly thrown into hasty city life, then climbs a deserted mountain range; in the next short, he sits on a solitary rock amidst coastal tides, or survives in a western-like plain on a railway track; in the African steppe he is attacked by wild lions escapes to the snowy plains of the cold North, until he is back to the nocturnal garden where this cinematic dream started.

A Phenomenology of Cinematic Engagement

This cleverly edited sequence of shots, with its constant shifts and sudden changes of cinematic landscape might seem but an entertaining prelude to the actual intrigue of Keaton's burlesque detective film, where Keaton's Sherlock is subsequently largely troubled by theft of jewelry and novice detectives. Yet if this dreamy film projector literally falls from one natural scene to another, it might just as well be described that he is *literally* thrown from one natural mise-en-scene to another filmic environment. This being thrown into a series of natural filmworlds, ultimately, demands to be interpreted in at least two different but interrelated ways.

On the one hand, it must be highlighted that there seems to be a structural presence of the natural elements in the different cinematic landscapes where the dreaming projectionist lands: still dusty from the 1920s inner-city traffic, the little man soon becomes drenched in salty,

oceanic waves; as spectators, we might almost feel the dry polar air of the snow landscape, or truthfully imagine Keaton's damp transpiration amidst those western tracks. By Keaton's effective bodily theatre and his clever, cinematic trickery, this highly self-referential film thus demonstrates that the spectator directly assesses the filmic world.⁴⁹ First through its elemental atmosphere, and only *then* the narrative situation, the film draws the spectator to its represented worlds. The role of nature in each rapid scene suggests how very dominant a role the elements earth, air and water play in imaginatively involving the spectator in these filmic landscapes. This theme will be developed later in this chapter.

But before that, I want to develop here, as a second interpretative theme from this film description, the *phenomenal rapidity* of the spectator's engagement. Because just like this projected detective directly assesses each new environment, so too do *Sherlock Jr.*'s actual spectators: you and me in the cinema theatre. All get swiftly immersed with each different cinematic-natural scene. And to occupy the whole mind of a spectator – even momentarily – *that* is one of the true virtues of cinema.⁵⁰ For, when watching film, we generally disregard how our body is held: just as in daily life we tend to forget to reflect on the way we gesticulate in conversations, or hardly think about our healthy body breathing the air we need, in the cinema too, the spectator's intentional structure of experience is *not* directed towards him- or herself. Instead of becoming aware of the mental involvement with the projected world of film, one's consciousness is engaged in a lived experience of that cinematic world – one thereby temporarily forgets his or her own body schema.

Three Phenomenological Concepts

Out of the wide diversity of phenomenological concepts, three principles help to theorize precisely this structure of cinematic engagement. The first key idea in phenomenological philosophy is the idea that *consciousness and world*

⁴⁹ In this short interpretation, even an additional theme shines through: it seems that the engaging role of the natural elements is directly linked to technological artifice; it thus seems to be precisely the trickeries of the modern medium that connects the spectator to this natural setting.

⁵⁰ I acknowledge here that no film experience really absorbs the spectator for the full duration of the film; it usually is a vibrant moving back-and-forth of degrees of attention. Nevertheless, successful films *do* take hold of the spectator's attention.

are fundamentally inseparable; the life-world that surrounds us is both the precondition and the limit of any experience (Gallagher *et al* 2012: 138; Beyer 2015: §7). Our *subjective* experience is thus always also essentially situated *in* this *objective* world: it is however always from within this positioned first-person, subjective perspective that we have access to the objects in our environment. Therefore, phenomenology embraces this direct, first-person experience *of* the object. In phenomenological analysis, all received or external knowledge is 'bracketed out;' by this *epoché* (the suspension, or deferring, of general beliefs and established facts) the structure or appearance of the objects in the world is described and interpreted from *within* the experience – how objects present themselves as phenomena.

The second key principle is thus that all phenomenological research starts from within 'pre-reflective experience': the phase *preceding* conscious reflection.⁵¹ It is in this first, direct encounter *with* the environment where consciousness and world meet – provokingly demonstrated by referring to Keaton's series of different natural mise-en-scenes: here, both protagonist and film spectator (one literally, the other mentally) apprehend the natural environment the character is thrown into. It is, then, this swift assessing of the world one is surrounded with which can now be described as the pre-reflective engagement with the filmworld. In *all* film experience, then, it is precisely this pre-reflective, direct experience that is the essential first phase that structures further engagement with the projected world on the screen; it establishes all further film experience (i.e., narrative understanding or emotional involvement).⁵²

⁵¹ Later phenomenologist philosophers (following, but also diverting from, Husserl's groundwork) develop alternative version of this concept, each according to their own idiosyncratic phenomenological philosophies. For example, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the 'pre-personal' while Sartre discusses it as the 'irreflexive' or 'non-thetic conscious'. In this thesis I have chosen to generally refer to this important phase with the more neutral term 'pre-reflective experience' (cf. Bakker 1966: 30; van Manen 2005).

⁵² To be sure, my phenomenological theory developed in this chapter thus explicitly concerns this direct, primary or initial structure of film experience – rather than the post-reflexive processes involved in cognitive-emotionally responding to and thoughtfully understanding the projected world of film. With my choice for a phenomenological approach I do however not intent to reject cognitive research on film spectatorship. On the contrary, I think both theories can learn a lot from each other. Recently, interesting work is done in bringing together both approaches; cf. for instance Stadler 2008, Sinnerbrink 2011 and, from an ecocinema perspective, Weik von Mossner 2014.

If we can describe with this concept precisely that phenomenal phase of consciousness in which the film spectator becomes absorbed in the filmworld, a reasonable next step is inquiring into *how* exactly one's pre-reflective experience becomes engaged with this natural world of film. In phenomenology, the structure of *how* a subject's consciousness becomes 'directed' towards an object is expressed with the key concept of 'intentionality.' As Don Ihde points out:

Husserl's claim was that *intentionality* was precisely that structure and precisely that feature of experience overall, which makes possible the way in which phenomena can and do appear (1986: 41 – emphasis by Ihde).

In other words, the term 'intentionality' (the third key principle) emphasizes the *interaction* between both object and subject: consciousness *grasps* or *stretches out* towards the perceived object – it 'intends' the object – which means that the consciousness is not merely located in the subject, but instead is a consciousness *of* something in the world; consciousness is defined by its 'directedness' towards something.⁵³ This reversibility between the subject and the object, therefore, is a very important idea for starting to theorize the spectator's engagement with the projected world of film.⁵⁴

Film-Phenomenology

The central question is now *how* each cinematic filmworld engages the spectator in this pre-reflective phase of film experience. As will be argued in the latter half of this chapter, the earth-bound 'elementality' of the cinematic landscapes plays a central role in this process. But in order properly situate this theory of the immersive role of the elements I first need to sketch a little bit more of context of this relatively new phenomenological film-philosophy.

In the history of film theory, the phenomenology of cinematic engagement has remained largely under-theorized.⁵⁵ One exception from the early 1970s is American aesthetician Alexander Sesonske, who implicitly

⁵³ To be sure, *intentionality* should not be confused with 'having an intention to' in the sense of 'meaning' something; instead, it is a concept indicating the *directedness* towards something. It is not a qualitative judgment, rather an indication of the subject's qualitative quantity of attention to an object.

⁵⁴ For more on Husserl's use, cf. Spiegelberg 1965: I, 107-112; for a more general introduction and other phenomenologist's use of this concept, see Sokolowski 2000: 8-16.

⁵⁵ Film theoreticians generally refer to this concept as 'immersion', but there appears to be a lack of extended theories on this subject; Jan Holmberg's study of immersion techniques in Early Cinema (2003) is one of the few studies that attempt to treat the concept at length. More recently, new media theorists adopted the concept of 'immersion' in relation to virtual reality of games (cf. Dyson 2009).

refers to this structure of intentionality when he describes cinema as an 'invitation' to persuade spectators to "abandon our ordinary lives and live wholly within the world of film" (1973: 400). His essay eloquently suggests the rich potential of relating intentionality to film, but leaves us grappling to further theorize this part of film experience. From the 1990s onwards, however, a new phenomenological trend started in North-American film and media studies. Roughly speaking, this discipline of film-phenomenology can be subdivided in two general approaches.

One approach, represented here by the work of Allan Casebier (1991), is directly inspired by Husserl's phenomenology.⁵⁶ Casebier argues for the 'transcendental realism of film experience' and suggests that the spectator perceives the intended object *through* the 'sensa' (signs, forms, colors, and meaning) – thus perceiving not the representation but a transcendental reality (1991: 12-19). His arguments imply however that there is no intermediate phase; nothing leads us *into* the bracketed transcendental experience.⁵⁷ If one seems to *immediately* perceive transcendental realism, this phenomenology of cinema then largely rejects the essential question here: Casebier lacks giving an account as for *how* film actually accomplishes this transcendental experience.

Phenomenology of the Film-Body

Vivian Sobchack proved more influential with her 'embodied' methodology (1992 and 2004). She gradually converts Husserl's idea of intentionality into an embodied, corporeal understanding of film spectatorship, drawn from Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology (cf. 1992: 34-73). Sobchack's approach should be understood as theorizing film experience as an intersubjective engagement between the spectator's body *and* the film's 'body' (*ibid*: 128-143; 204-219).⁵⁸ So, against many 1980s psychoanalytic

⁵⁶ More recently, Spencer Shaw (2008) has developed a new Husserlian approach to film, also investigating its similarity to Deleuzian film-philosophy.

⁵⁷ Moreover, by explicitly denying the representational aspect, Casebier's intricate phenomenological framework also eschews explaining how exactly the suspended film experience relates to the world outside this suspended framework.

⁵⁸ Let me emphasize that, for Sobchack, speaking about the film's 'body' is nowhere metaphorical (cf. 1992: xviii; 162ff); It is however not clear just precisely how we should understand this body, as for instance a 'body without organs' (Deleuze 2004a and 2004b) or something close to how philosophers of the extended mind think of the body (e.g. Andy Clark and David Chalmers 1998).

film theories – mistrusting the ‘perversity’ of the body – Sobchack argues instead that we must celebrate the *importance* of the viewer’s body in experiencing film: we understand film, “not despite but *because* of our bodies” (2004: 60).

This approach grew into an important tradition of embodied film-phenomenology.⁵⁹ In this tradition, Jennifer M. Barker is one of the few scholars explicitly considering the concept of *intentionality*.⁶⁰ In her Sobchackian-inspired model film is also enacting an *embodied* structure similar to the human spectator’s body.⁶¹ Intentionality is here articulated as an embodied relationship of *reversibility* between the ‘bodies’ of film viewer and film (*ibid*: 19). When the spectator is fully immersed by the film, (s)he becomes ‘doubly situated’, Barker writes, with “the distinct feeling of being in two places at once, even if *we never literally leave our seats*” (2009: 84 [emphasis added–LdR]). Now, this quotation – with its added italics – indicates that the embodied metaphor is here taken too far: although the spectator’s intentional directedness includes a forgetting of his or her bodily schema, intentionality nonetheless also is an evident mental structure: a *consciousness* directed towards the filmworld.

Film-Intentionality

For many *embodied* film-phenomenologists, then, film experience (and by extension, intentionality) becomes interpreted *merely* in embodied terms. Certainly, the body should never be denied theoretical consideration. But neither should film-phenomenology be reduced to this sensuous focus on subjectively lived, embodied film-experience. Maintaining such a ‘strong-embodied’ model effectively would eventually risk an almost willful denying of precisely the ‘enworlded’ character of consciousness. It involuntarily brings to the mind the desolate death of George Clooney’s character Matthew

⁵⁹ Besides Jennifer Barker (2009), discussed here, Sobchack’s work is usually combined with a Deleuze-inspired theory of affect by Laura M. Marks (2000; 2002), Martine Beugnet (2007) and Elena del Río (2008); see also Hezekiah (2010) and Chamarette (2012).

⁶⁰ In the next chapter I discuss the innovative work of Ilan Safit (2014a) – an eco-phenomenological model built around intentionality. Although Safit bases his ideas mostly on the embodied phenomenologies of Merleau-Ponty and Sobchack, he does not downplay the active role of consciousness and (ethical) thought.

⁶¹ The three chapters of her interesting book discuss consecutively the film’s and viewer’s *skin*, its *musculature*, and its *viscera*. Strangely enough, these seem to be bodies without brains or a central nervous system.

Kowalsky in *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón 2013): a body, floating in space. On the contrary, our sensuous bodies are necessarily *in* a world, consciously connected *to* a world.

Indeed, in an interesting reading of *Gravity*, film philosophers Peter Krämer and Rupert Read give a tempting interpretation of the film as a strong call for reconsidering our connection with the earth: the film's protagonist, space-agent Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) *does* return to the earth; her

floating in space is the result precisely of being tethered to Earth by the planet's gravity. Rather than drifting off into empty space, she continues to be connected to Mother Earth by a kind of ethereal umbilical cord (2014 [no pag.]).

As so often, underneath the technology-driven blockbuster entertainment also this science-fiction film offers an elemental lesson: we cannot live without *earth*; our embodied consciousness *yearns* for solid ground. After all, one of the most important insights from (Husserl's) phenomenological philosophy is that our experience is always located *in* the world. It is exactly this *mental* connection of world-consciousness and body, so richly theorized in phenomenological philosophy (expressed with the concept of *intentionality*) that is also central and pre-requisite to any film experience at all.

Combining thus against this background all three phenomenological ideas – a) world and consciousness, b) pre-reflective experience, and c) intentionality – I suggest therefore the concept of 'film-intentionality' to describe the viewer's process of becoming engaged by the filmworld. My concept of 'film-intentionality' expresses precisely that practical and essential moment in watching a film, where – still in the pre-reflective experience of the film – the spectator's mind *in* his or her body becomes directed to the projected world of film: the spectator becomes momentarily enworlded in film.

Much like waves washing ashore, then, at different intervals and with various intensities, our conscious-embodied attention becomes (and repeatedly stays) engaged with to these rich cinematic landscapes and intensely connected to those dense filmworlds. When the film does not

succeed in catching the spectator's mental attention, the spectator's film-intentionality is weak and confused; yet if the film is successful, film-intentionality anchors spectators in the cinematically expressed world.

2.3 Filmworlds

When the spectator's film-intentionality appears to be such an important theme for film experience, this does not only indicate the profound openness of the mind to be subjectively involved with an external object. Furthermore, it also suggests the powerful attraction cinema still holds today. That is to say, one of the chief fascinations of film spectatorship – both in the early days and still in the massively successful IMAX-projected 3D-experience of our days – is to open up each time another cinematic expression of a filmworld. Because each time when the rectangular frame lights up, another vision is given of the world's horizon – in each possible way.⁶²

Like cinematic engagement, also the intuitive idea of filmworld has long been left under-theorized. It took a philosopher to perceive the intimate ontological relation between *film* and *world*: in *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell defined cinema as 'automatic world projections' (1979: 72), producing the world we are absent from, so that we can perceive it 'unseen' (*ibid*: 40). His venture nonetheless remains an investigation in ontological *relation* – rather than considering what it means to speak of a 'filmworld.' Recently the idea of filmworlds has attracted new interest as a film-theoretical concept; two philosophers, Adrian Ivakhiv and Daniel Yacavone, have even devoted full-length books to the idea of filmworld.⁶³ The challenge is to combine these intricate theoretical models with my precise focus on the pre-reflective experience *of* the filmworld.

⁶² This holds not only for theatrically screened cinema; also watching short clips of a cinematically expressed world on YouTube opens up the same, fascinating dimension of the world (perhaps only on a different scale).

⁶³ Both books are expansions of previously published, relatively short film-philosophical articles (Ivakhiv 2008 and 2011; Yacavone 2008); for an alternative brief article, cf. also Yates 2006.

Yacavone's model of Film Worlds

Daniel Yacavone's *Film Worlds* (2014) is probably the first monograph dedicated to the notion of filmworlds.⁶⁴ At the outset, Yacavone distinguishes 'the world-*in* film' (what in film theory is referred to as 'the diegetic world') from his major concept, 'the world-*of* film.' Hence, his theory on the world *of* film is thus primarily concerned with the way film *presents* worlds qua artwork – and less with what it *re*-presents (2014: 33). Building on Nelson Goodman's idea of art as 'ways of world-making' enables Yacavone to emphasize the cognitive-symbolic processes involved in re-creating worlds of film (*ibid*: 85ff). Film becomes a cognitive-symbolic expression of a profilmic world, a reality that necessarily already exists and becomes cinematically expressed as a meaningful filmworld (cf. *ibid*: 55).

This idea of filmworlds is embedded in a second philosophical structure, innovatively combining here Mikel Dufrenne's philosophy of aesthetic experience with established cognitivist film theories of emotion and affect. He argues that our total film experience is essentially about how the film *expresses* a filmworld. This global 'cine-aesthetic expression' or overall 'world-feeling' of any film consists of three basic types of local expression: sensory-affective, cognitive-diegetic, and formal-artistic forms of local expression (*ibid*: 161-171).

This overall cine-aesthetic expression of the filmworld is tied onto the artistic, individual style and personality of the filmmaker (*ibid*: 218). This auteurist stance is the basis for a third philosophical plane – Gadamer's existential-hermeneutic philosophy of art – reconciling the two other philosophical frameworks: the spectator may interpret or understands the filmworld as a *whole*, combining his or her affective-emotional experience as well as his or her cognitive-symbolic understanding. In sum:

(...) every cinematic work-world involves a three-way 'conversation' between certain extrawork realities [i.e., the profilmic world], their artistic presentation as mediated by the intentions and creativity of filmmakers, and the viewer, not only as perceiving and imagining subject but also as a cultural and historically situated 'self' (*ibid*: 255).

⁶⁴ Throughout this thesis, I consistently use the non-spaced term 'filmworld' to refer to the world of film – also for discussing Yacavone's concept, which he notes down as 'film worlds'.

This hermeneutic synthesis of Yacavone's model plays an important role in relating the filmworld to the spectator *in* the real world *outside* the filmworld. Such a holistic model is rare in film theory.

Although Yacavone's work seems directly inspired by Dufrenne's phenomenology, his idea of filmworlds appears quite exclusively framed as a cognitive-symbolic phenomenon. Unfortunate for my own framework is his weakly developed conceptualization of *affective-emotional immersion*; immersion seems, in his account, more a cognitive process of emotional involvement than a phenomenologically dense structure of affective immersion. Yet before and underneath this dense, meaningful symbolic filmworld Yacavone successfully theorizes, we are engaged on a deeper, primordial level with the filmworld. It is a serious limitation to ignore the role the elements play at this level of world-building.

Cinema as 'Anthropobiogeomorphic Machine'

Adrian Ivakhiv proposes another triadic model to interpret cinema's as a world-building – cinema is here even a world-transforming art form. Molding Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotics into a dynamic film-philosophy of film experience,⁶⁵ film experience becomes divided up into three categories called 'three ecologies' (after Félix Guattari).⁶⁶ Cinema is, in its firstness, a spectacular object presenting filmworlds, as mere material. In this 'material ecology', the spectator affectively relates to the film's sheer spectacle. In the second 'narrative' ecology, the internal interrelations become clear; film becomes a narrative experience about human subjects one can socially relate to, with discursive identities that also pertains to the external world.⁶⁷ As thirdness, in its exoreferentiality, the film experience becomes fully

⁶⁵ This system is based on American semiotic phenomenologist Charles Sanders Pierce's three categories of experience and amalgamated with the process-relational thought of American Alfred North Whitehead. To be sure, this 'American' phenomenology (mainly associated with the semiotic work of Pierce) is not related to the 'European' phenomenological movement started by Husserl.

⁶⁶ In an insightful appendix (*ibid*: 341ff), Ivakhiv clearly indicates these different circles of his theory: filmworld (firstness); film experience (secondness); and film interpretation or exoreferentiality (thirdness). In my overview, for reasons of brevity I have merged the categories of film experience and its exoreferentiality.

⁶⁷ In Ivakhiv's book, filmworlds are referred to as the hyphenated 'film-worlds'; again, for the sake of consistency I continue to use my own 'filmworlds', without necessarily distancing from Ivakhiv's concept of filmworlds.

meaningful, i.e., symbolically interpreted, with respect to the outside world or the reality external to the filmworld (2013: 37-42).⁶⁸

Ivakhiv's three ecologies of film experience also have three related registers in the creation, or morphology, of filmworlds as well as how the filmworld relate to the external world. The first, 'material' ecology pertain to the materiality of the world: film transforms the natural world, its cosmopolitan or environmental spatiality as well as its specific locations; they become cinematically expressed in what Ivakhiv calls the *geomorphic* dimension (*ibid*: 69-77). The secondness of the filmworld is an intermediary, *biomorphic* register, and connects both firstness and thirdness in an interperceptual whole; it indicates the film's experiential heart, its liveliness – that what is heard, seen and felt *of* the filmworld (*ibid*: 195). Finally, film becomes *anthropomorphic*: in the third ecology of the filmworld, the sheer matter of the earth becomes populated humans; the spectator relates to the filmworld because of its social dimension (*ibid*: 142-143). Hence, cinema links humans to the world (through the givenness of the world's matter) exactly by relating the people's place on this earth.

Here the process of *geomorphy* is particularly helpful. It is cinema's transformation of *earth* into a meaningful base that becomes the elemental, vibrant background for secondness and thirdness. As Ivakhiv writes elsewhere, referring to the 'worlding' in Martin Heidegger's philosophy: "Beneath and behind them [the worlded worlds] is a generative openness that he [Heidegger] called 'earth', which subsists, subtends, and renders possible any and all worlding" (2015: 130). In other words, cinema's world-making fundamentally *starts* with the element *earth*: only by transforming this firstness, by subjectively relating humans to this sheer givenness of matter, cinema becomes meaningful in the second- and the third sense.

Towards a Phenomenological theory of Filmworlds

As both theorists have convincingly argued, cinema is a world-making art; the brilliance of each rich filmworld lies precisely in its powerfully transforming the profilmic landscapes into expressive settings for further

⁶⁸ Ivakhiv emphasizes that each category is also made up of three sub-categories (e.g. the secondness of the firstness; etc.; cf. *ibid*: 41); he discusses them in each chapters devoted to one ecology of the moving image.

storytelling. Consequently, by combining the emphasized *geomorphy* of Ivakhiv's system with Yacavone's idea of film as symbolic *expression* helps to highlight cinema's *expressive act* of transforming the given *natural elements* into a symbolic whole – the filmworld projected on the silver screen. The spectator's film-intentionality becomes directed toward the filmworld, precisely because cinema is an *expressive geomorphy* of the profilmic landscapes. Hence, filmworlds are affectively rich, cinematic alterations of real-world sceneries.⁶⁹

It is important to note here that my combined idea of filmworld emphasizes that each cinematic world functions as the basis, the foundation, or the ground of all further film experience. In other words, all that follows *after* experiencing this vivid filmworld – i.e., the various layers of what can be called 'reflective' film experience (e.g., narrative, or exoreferential, character identification, etc.), as well as the diverse meaning-making processes of the total film experience (thus globally understanding and interpreting film, theorized in whatever hermeneutic framework) – all this is effectively *rooted* in the direct, pre-reflective experience of the filmworld, that itself is *grounded* in the idiosyncratic way in which each profilmic reality has been transformed, moulded or morphed into an expressive, elemental filmworld.

2.4 Cinegeography

So far, this chapter has sketched how the total film experience starts with the spectator's film-intentionality *to* the filmworld, itself situated in the pre-reflective and direct experience of the film. I have also indicated how the filmworld may be understood as an *expressive geomorphy* of the given landscapes of the world and the ones that can be created or further transformed by CGI. It is therefore all the more necessary to conclude this chapter with a final section that 'grounds' this theoretical sketch of my idea of a filmworld.

⁶⁹ This not only hold for traditional 'photographic' cinema, but even more so for modern filmmaking that depends heavily on digital creation and transformation of computer generated imagery [CGI]). The exciting question *how* these varying technical means *affect* the creation – or *alter* the experience – of a filmworld is something that requires further detailed research.

What needs to be discussed, finally, is *what* this filmworld comprises, what this expressive rendition of the profilmic world really is made of. First, a discussion emphasizing the geography role of cinematic landscapes leads to a film-phenomenological uncovering what ‘anchors’ the film-intentionality to cinematic ground. This significant newfound base, however, provokes a challenging question that can be posed to philosophy itself.

Geography, Film, Landscape

Within the discipline of human and cultural geography, scholarly attention to the use of landscape in films began as early as the 1940s. Over time, film geography grew into a substantial, interdisciplinary subfield.⁷⁰ The more the paradigm became established in academia, the more it began to conceptualize the role of the medium in ideological terms.⁷¹ For instance, in a special number of the journal *Erdkunde* (October-December 2006 [cf. Bendix *et al* 2006]), various film geographers anticipated future themes central to the new discipline; just about all of the suggested topics (e.g., globalization, identity, mobility, networks, spatiality) are framed with ideologically inspired agenda (see Aitken *et al* 2006; Lukinbeal *et al* 2006). Accordingly, most of the central claims in modern film geography give the impression to be politically driven: landscapes, spaces and places in cinema abound with sheer political power.⁷²

This sensitivity to the question of representation is valuable; certainly, the ideological power of cinema can hardly be denied. Yet spectatorship and the study of film experience should not be restricted to this approach. Moreover, ideological analyses of cinematic landscape tend to ignore *lived practice* – that previously indicated phenomenal and pre-reflective

⁷⁰ The work of geographers on film is a little known field in mainstream English-language media- and film studies as well as philosophy of film. For a good introduction, see Aitken *et al* 1994 and Cresswell *et al* 2002; for a historical overview, cf. Meinig 1979; Esher 2006; Lukinbeal *et al* 2006.

⁷¹ For example, a frequently maintained film geographical distinction between the ‘reel’ and the ‘real’ distinguishes the subversive ideological power of representation from the filmed landscape (coined in Cresswell *et al* 2002: 1-10).

⁷² Besides, it is even more curious that – even in the 21st Century – these political and ideological critiques are very rarely accompanied by an environmental critique, whereas many environmentalist scholars in ecocinema and literary studies *do* use political arguments to inspire change at different cultural levels.

experience that *precedes* any other experience.⁷³ Indeed, by shifting focus to the *experience* of this cinematic world – as created and expressed by the film’s geography – one also becomes sensitized to the *aesthetic qualities* of cinema’s treatment of the cinematic landscape. The filmed cinematic spaces, locations and places could then rightly be seen as a scopophilic and/or topophilic spectacle (cf. Lukinbeal 2005: 11) – in short, as an *aesthetic event* as such. This opens up a consideration of the thematic use of landscape *within* the narrative film itself.

Moreover, my critique on the input of film geographers does not mean that the baby should be thrown out with the bathwater: on the contrary, we can learn from film geographers’ work that film’s *geography* often plays an important role in building a meaningful filmworld. To complement the rather politically-oriented research in film geography, I suggest therefore further expanding the ‘thematic’ aspect of a film’s geography: in effect, the landscapes of cinema already express rich thematic layers that are experienced pre-reflectively – i.e., well before the narrative use of landscape.

Autonomous landscape

To just how a film’s landscape is already dense with expressive themes before we engage with it narratively, I suggest first taking a close look at Alejandro González Iñárritu’s mosaic film *Babel* (2006). In a crucial sequence in the middle of the film, two young American children get lost with their Mexican nanny Amelia in the nightly desert between the United States and Mexico. The next day, three scenes later in the film, Amelia leaves the children in the shade of a tree and walks into the wasteland, searching for help. In this second scene, the film’s previous interest in her passionate *facial* expression is gradually replaced by evocative geographical camerawork: tilted, narrow shots of Amelia walking over dry dirt and close ups of her red dress getting stuck in the desert’s prickly vegetation are mixed with very wide shots of the exhausted woman walking across the isolated plain. Instead of her tearful face, the capricious earth now seems superior to convey her

⁷³ In the aforementioned special issue of *Erdkunde*, only Stuart Aitken and Deborah Dixon subtly propose, at the very end of their article, to turn future research towards the ‘lived experience’ of the filmic landscapes (cf. Aitken *et al* 2006: 335).

utmost despair. Note that these two separate scenes of Amelia are acutely intercut with two parallel storylines in other global locations: the two scenes are separated by the key moment in this mosaic narrative, where the thin yet decisive bond between the separated plots is exposed as veritably linked through this sudden appearance of earth.⁷⁴

In Iñárritu's *Babel*, then, the geographic form remains *concealed* by the narrative just up to the moment of geopolitical expression. Here the film's progression essentially *uncovers* the filmed landscape: the earth itself suddenly becomes a character. The landscape quite suddenly stands out as spatially expressive form – as hostile landscape but also as a globalizing sphere. The film's narrative trope is thus preceded by a dramatic geopolitical theme 'written' in the *earth*: the formalist game of mosaics suddenly makes narrative sense in ascribing onto the earth's surface the interconnected course of events.⁷⁵ The separated locations initially seemed mere *settings* for a mosaic plot, but Iñárritu's aesthetic choices (cinematography and editing) swiftly change the way the landscape is looked at within this film.

From the wide selection of literature on cinematic landscapes, film theorist Martin Lefebvre (2006 and 2011) is original to put exceptional emphasis on this shift in *perception* of the landscape.⁷⁶ As Lefebvre accounts from his own experience, "[l]andscape appears when (...) I turn my gaze toward space and contemplate it in and of itself" (2006: 48).⁷⁷ In such instances, the scenery is no longer subordinated to a dramatic action (2011: 64). It is particularly persistent in the work of modernist filmmakers (e.g., Michelangelo Antonioni or Andrei Tarkovsky), but also *Babel's* sudden

⁷⁴ In Morocco an American couple (the parents of the children, also lost in the desert) have gotten hurt by the unintentional game two Moroccan boys play with a rifle – a gun given to their father by a travelling Japanese businessman in Morocco. The two scenes separating night from day in the Mexican desert show this important narrative link: first, the gun the Moroccan boys used appears on a photograph on the wall behind the daughter of the Japanese businessman. In the second scene, in Morocco, the national police kill one of the Moroccan boys, suspecting him of a terrorist attack on the Americans. For Iñárritu, this unlikely chain of events becomes probable in the context of increasing globalization: this dramatic (and political) coherence is at the core of most his films, but never so intrinsically inscribed on the globe's surface.

⁷⁵ From a film-philosophical perspective, it must be ascertained that this geopolitical theme of 'globalization' truthfully appears from the film's phenomenological analysis itself.

⁷⁶ In film studies, exceptional landscapes are usually interpreted as something *symbolic* for the protagonist's psychological state (see e.g., Melbye 2010). Besides Lefebvre (discussed here), P. Adams Sitney (1993) is one of the few film scholars giving a good overview of the *aesthetics* of the cinematic landscape.

⁷⁷ He delineates this thematic use of cinematic landscapes back to the rise of landscape painting in the 19th Century, where the natural landscape becomes 'emancipated' into an 'autonomous landscape'.

appearance of the barren earth aptly fits this cultural history of the revealing of the landscape: the narrative thread seems to make way for the 'spectacle' of the cinematic expressive form of landscape, to be perceived and gazed at. As Lefebvre indicates, the 'setting' of a narrative film morphs into a more contemplative use of scenery; the 'spectacular landscape' becomes an aesthetic space "freed from eventhood" (*ibid*: 22). Hence, this so-called 'landscaping gaze' (*ibid*: 47) is a transformation of the way the spectator looks at the filmed landscape: instead of backdrop to action, it has become something expressive to be aesthetically experienced.

Cinegeography

Lefebvre's theorization thus resonates here with Yacavone's idea of the expressed filmworld as a whole as well as with Ivakhiv's notion of geomorphy of the profilmic landscapes. Against this background, *Babel*'s cinematic aesthetics emphasize the landscape as *autonomous figure* or an aesthetic event. Here, it is the earth and land of the world that is projected that first engages us. This outer layer of the earth's outer shell can be now further interpreted as an audiovisual 'surface' of the filmworld is for cinematic storytelling. It is the land itself, the earth in the landscape that becomes thematically expressive; the cinematic ground, as well as regularly its skyline or waterways, seem to be literally 'writing' a moving filmworld on the film's screen.

I suggest on the basis of this analysis that we should take the film's *geography* literally.⁷⁸ Thus by critically combining both theories of filmworld and the idea of the autonomous landscape, I propose the term 'cinegeography' for this evocative use of landscapes in cinema. In film's gathering of the world's cosmogenic material (earth, air, water and fire), the world's outer layer – the landscape – becomes an expressive, spatial form. While it is thus cinema's intrinsic technological nature (editing and mise-en-scene in Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.*; mise-en-scene and cinematography in *The Searchers*; and *Babel* effectively combines all three) that constitutes this cinegeography, it is however at our direct, phenomenal experience of this

⁷⁸ This literal use of a 'concrete metaphor' is a concept I work out in the next chapter.

expressive landscape that we are immersed in the overall filmworld. This film-intentionality or the spectator's directedness towards the filmworld is, finally, constituted by this cinegeography.

After all, each film has at least one elemental world that engages us at this primary level: as in *Babel*, earth engages the spectator; otherwise it the thematic use of airy horizons – or the lack thereof (e.g., in *Gravity*) that draws us in; cinema can captivate the spectator by offering gigantic bursts of fire (in the next chapter); or, finally, film immerses the spectator by vast worlds of water – as we shall see presently.

The Land between Earth and World

In Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), NASA-pilot Joseph Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) lands his flying capsule on an extraterrestrial planet: "Miller's planet", as they call it, is an ocean world with, as far as the aerial shot allows us to see, nothing but lapping water. After a brief conversation filmed inside the cockpit, the astronauts go outside in order to find Dr. Miller's ship, lost on a previous mission. Outside, Dr. Amelia Brand (Anna Hathaway) sets her foot in knee-high, grey water and carefully finds balance on the invisible ground under the softly splashing water; she tries to orient herself in a world of water. Their ambulant robot vehicle indicates the way. The small group walks off, now filmed from above. This aerial shot seems almost a cut back to the previous mid-air perspective, but this time without a horizon and, therefore, gives a different feeling: the dwarfed heroes plough through an immeasurable mass of endless ripples of waves.

Seemingly, this high perspective, with its wide view on those calmly flowing currents, provides for us spectators a tangible way to position these people in this vastly liquid place in space; a vastness, moreover, that is temporally punctuated by an almost imperceptibly increasing clock-like ticking. This brief aerial shot should give a feeling for the actual size of this oceanic planet. Yet instead of reassuring the spectator, it seems to give an uneasy sense of space's absurdity, if not anxiety for the unfeasibility of searching a lost astronaut on a planet filled with unstable water.

This scene in *Interstellar* may have been filmed on a far-away lake, in a far-off corner of Iceland, and later slightly reworked through CGI.⁷⁹ But even when (factually speaking) filmed at a place on our actual earth, phenomenologically speaking, that vague, eerie sense of otherworldliness still suggests something odd about the filmworld in this particular sequence.

Actually, in the pre-reflective experience one is both immersed with this liquid planet while also increasingly ill at ease, as if one cannot place or orient oneself within this peculiar filmworld. This seems mostly because of the very high angle shot in the second half of the described scene: usually, such a wide perspective (like an establishing shot in classic cinema) gives us an overview so as to *assess* the situation. In *Interstellar*, however, the high perspective seems to *distance* the spectator from the actual events. It is difficult to properly judge the planet's surface; vastness is here much more abstract than in many Western films. Moreover, *Interstellar's* quick editing actually avoids establishing the vast space: instead, the spaceship's landing in the first part of the described sequence is very quickly cut, as if to avoid to properly 'ground' the scene; also in intercutting the fairly detailed, partly blocked shots – from inside the cockpit to another outside view (the protagonist's wading through the knee-high water) – the film seems to avoid giving a full overview of the planet.

So, first of all, the spacecraft's landing, and the astronaut's stepping onto earth are largely disguised through the filmworld's cinegeography of wave-like water. And secondly, when an overall perspective is given in the second instance, one senses a disorienting, if not inhospitable feeling because of the absence of earth. In short, this estranging scene suggests the theme of a missing of land in the landscape: this unwelcoming planet has no land to stand on, as is expressed in the filmworld's cinegeography concealing of the 'landing'.

⁷⁹ Film director Christopher Nolan emphasized that he needed to film sense of interplanetary traveling as much as possible on natural settings (Giardina 2014). Of course, the film also complements this footage with CGI, for instance in the gigantic waves later in the same sequence or, more scientifically challenged, the depiction of the so-called black hole towards the end of *Interstellar*.

Land as Lacking Middle Term

There is thus much to say that, as many science-fiction films (like *Gravity*'s pull to earth and the agricultural inventiveness of *The Martian*) suggest, *Interstellar*'s overarching theme too seems to express an essential 'search for hospitable lands' in other parts of the galaxy. Besides other earth-driven film genres like the Western and Road Movies, this additional hypothetical quest of a restless humanity essentially emphasizes the need of 'land' on *earth* to root further thinking – through philosophy, film or both. In fact, phenomenologist Edward S. Casey (2002b) has singled out 'land' as an omitted term in the history of philosophy. He indicates that in Ancient Greek philosophy, *land* has no proper name; up until in our times, even the revolutionary earth-bound Martin Heidegger seemed to have overlooked this term in his rigorous attention to either earth and world.

Against this philosophical forgetfulness, Casey underlines that is important to use precisely the notion of 'land' as a term mediating *between* earth and world:

Land is a liminal concept, it is both literally liminal – a *limen*, or threshold, between earth and sky in our direct perceptual experience – and liminal in the more expanded sense that it is the arena in which earth turns toward world and thereby gains a face, a *facies* or surface (2002b: 6).

This useful philosophical amplification of *land* as a 'third' term covers the phenomenological sense of despair when land is absent, demonstrated in my interpretation of this particular sequence of *Interstellar*. On the one hand, what I described as an inhospitable place in Miller's Planet might now be rephrased as a (sur)face-less place; the filmworld's expressive denial of land as intermediate ground reveals this landscape as an undisclosed world. But more importantly, in the spectator's pre-reflective experience, the nonexistence of a surface between earth and sky first gave an eerie feeling, and then appeared to confuse the inner need to ground the perceived world; when Cooper realizes that this planet is a world of water – "Those are not mountains, they are waves!" – this confusion turns into fear, even a feeling of the sublime (for the spectator). And fear of the lack of something is in many ways one of the best phenomenological confirmations of a particular phenomenon's importance.

~

All things considered, a precise and creative use of the means of language suggested to the significance of land as necessary mediating term in philosophy; it is, furthermore, the complementary phenomenological analyses of film – as indicated, from a phenomenally direct, audiovisual experience – that further reveals and supports this philosophical problem. If Casey ends his essay with an open question inquiring how land relates to landscape (*ibid*: 16), cinema's direct audiovisual experience might be one the most relevant contemporary art forms to start answering this question.⁸⁰

Yet, for the purposes of this thesis, this chapter has provided sufficient ground to apprehend the structure of the spectator's engagement: land in cinematic landscapes plays a fundamental role in evoking a spectator's film-intentional directedness towards the expressive cinegeography of a filmworld. This elemental structure is the base for any further film experience – narrative understanding or emotional engagement. Yet, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, even before those cognitive levels of engagement, the elements still hold more metaphors and meaning.

⁸⁰ If more space were permitted elsewhere, I would venture into these various subterranean investigation and unearth the metaphoric layers of thinking distinguishing between earth, ground, soil – and land.

[3] From Element to Elemental: Ecocinema and Ecological Thinking

Revealing of the Natural World • Elemental Image • Cinematic Metaphor

3.1 The Eclipse of a Filmworld

Michelangelo Antonioni ends *L'Eclisse* (1962) with a seven minute sequence: an almost experimental series of subtly edited, strikingly abstract images – abstract at the least in the sense of preventing a narrative closure to the film's plot. *L'Eclisse*'s coda shows life in the modern suburb where the film's protagonist Vittoria (Monica Vitti) lives: beautifully shot details from Vittoria's urban environment. All pictured locations have been shown previously in the film; all reflect previous occasions where Vittoria's affair with stockbroker Piero (Alain Delon) was deferred or in various ways delayed.

In the final sequence, the building we see across the street is still not built up; the recurring pedestrian crossings on a deserted *strada* seem to be anticipating an inhabited future. Some evening buses dash through the suburban neighborhood; people quickly walk home. Then once more a close-up of that gritty curb corner with the old oil barrel filled with rainwater wherein some wood and old cigarettes packages float. Sometimes we see tall trees stirred by the wind, or witness intermezzos of spaciouly designed parks where children play and, somewhat later, observe how the park's watering system is being switched off. Night slowly falls over this suburban neighborhood. Throughout, the depiction of human figures becomes progressively replaced by detailed shots of these common objects in public spaces. Moreover, the various places are often filmed in detailed close up; relating them geometrically seems less important than evoking a sense of an impressionist, cubist sense of the neighborhood. Only the gentle temporal movement of a summer evening dawning over this modern urban space provides a subtle coherence.

Aurally, the visual rhythm is sometimes subtly punctuated by non-diegetic music: soft, sluggish jazzy piano, organ and trumpet tunes; yet at

times also overpowered by strong diegetic sound, when sudden on-screen movement is aided by this aural stimulus. The more this sequence falls into its audiovisual rhythm, the more one feels accustomed to these locations. The slightly sinister atmosphere haunting the building under construction slowly dissolves as the reed mats on the scaffolds are regularly stirred by the wind in a second and third shot of this building; in the last shot of this building, at complete sundown, the building seems to finally be at rest. Infrequent and unexpected encounters with unacquainted people on the quiet street give another rhythm to this neighborhood, just like the bus's loud screech when tearing around the corner, setting soon some new people onto the streets. Finally, a repeated rush of wind through the trees can be heard, the sudden silence after switching off the clattering rattle of the park's watering system or another dusk's breeze through the reed mats with, somewhat later, the reassuring rushing of water from the now leaking barrel at the gritty corner – feeding a stream of water gently rushing downhill, visually partly reflecting the evening sky, water finding its way over the unworked soil.

Arguments of this Chapter

In a certain sense, this ending scene closes off the black-and-white filmworld of Antonioni's renowned alienation-trilogy.⁸¹ But while it seems too much to suggest that this final instance is the most thought-provoking sequence of this Italian filmmaker's oeuvre (cf. Rosenbaum 2005: 8), there is much to say that – instead of properly *closing off* Antonioni's triadic narrative – *L'Eclisse's* intense *cinegeography* rather *opens up* a new sensitivity to the enviroing world. Such is the argument of this final chapter: that any narrative film can evoke an environmental sensitivity on the part of the spectator, precisely through its technological artistry.

Of course, it takes much discussion to move from this particular thick description, of this singular film, to a more widely sustained film-philosophical argument. Nonetheless, this chapter brings together the different theoretical backgrounds of the other chapters: the two film-theoretical concepts of this chapter – 'elemental image' and 'concrete

⁸¹ The other films in Antonioni's trilogy are *L'Avventura* (1960) and *La Notte* (1961). Of course, alienation remained a major theme in his subsequent films shot in vivid colours.

metaphor’ – should be understood as essentially elemental ideas revealed by my film-philosophical approach; additionally, these twin and related concepts are necessarily phenomenological in the sense that, *within* the pre-reflective experience of the filmworld, a new receptivity to the natural character of the daily world is disclosed. This film-phenomenological thesis, finally, provides a new perspective in film-theoretical sub-paradigm of ecocinema.⁸² That is, whereas many ecocinema scholars have been predominantly focused on ‘environmental cinema’ (Willoquet-Maricondi 2010: 45), I argue instead that *every film* has an ecological opportunity.

First, however, we need to return to Antonioni’s series of detailed close-ups and consider carefully my description of *L’Eclisse*’s final scene. All the details of this enigmatic coda are carefully edited into an audiovisually striking city symphony; they give the spectator a modern world to contemplate on after leaving the cinema theatre (or shutting down their screening device). Yet *which* modern world is it that one considers? It seems hard to maintain that this final sequence *merely* provokes the spectator to consider the expressed *filmworld* as such (perhaps only to project, somewhere there, the lack of narrative closure). On the contrary, Antonioni’s cinegeographic images of the filmworld also invite the spectator to take a moment where one can ponder sensitively his or her own living environment – the world external to the filmworld.⁸³ If so, are there images or sounds that essentially evoke such an enlarged world-consciousness? The quest of capturing this concrete image is the theme of the first part of this chapter.

Abstraction Revealing Nature

Let us return to my thick description and, following the phenomenological method, attempt interpreting a general theme from such a seemingly fragmented whole. Above all, the repeated emphasis on abstraction suggests one central theme. For a start, this abstraction is woven into *L’Eclisse*’s aural rhythm: the ethereal jazz sound lacks something like a human voice; but there is no personality to ground it in the shown surroundings. Moreover,

⁸² For more on this point, see the section on ecocinema in my Introduction

⁸³ The term ‘cinegeographic’ refers to my concept cinegeography (discussed in the previous chapter), indicating the geographically expressive revealing of a filmworld.

there is an additional, estranging aural interruption by some human-made machines (e.g., buses, the watering installation) or rather strong, acoustic rushes expressing nature's intrusion on the urban setting (e.g., the wind in the trees). And then, visually, the recurring abstraction is even more striking: narrow close-up frames, concrete but context-less fragments of progressively human-less life in the neighborhood; at times it even seems that humans are only *strangers* here.⁸⁴ Indeed, the human form seems becoming more surprising than the otherwise strange, curiously reassuring haptic harmony of natural materials in close-up.

People are thus slowly removed in Antonioni's audio-vision of the neatly designed, urban environment. Of course, other scholars have elaborately interpreted the abstraction of Antonioni's cinema in more detail; Seymour Chatman's monograph *The Surface of the World* (1985) is perhaps the most eloquent example in theorizing this aspect of film the Italian master's film style:

Antonioni makes the contours of visible objects speak to the characters' uncertainty about the new order of things. Seeking whatever certainties it can find, all the camera is sure of is the irregularity of plane geometry. In such moments, the screen ceases to be a window looking into deep space and becomes a nearby surface of uncertain expanse against which characters are flattened (119).

His book gives a rich account of Antonioni's audiovisual style; Seymour is especially knowledgeable in determining the evolving role of cinematography in expressing Antonioni's cinematic worldview. Yet I wish to claim instead that Antonioni's worldview is not as gloomy as Seymour seems to suggest: if the characters are 'flattened' or even abstracted from their environment, if there is indeed an eclipse of humanity in this cinegeographic world, one should genuinely look *underneath* this expressed 'superficial' layers of the filmworld. Maybe there is something inherently rich, reassuring, or relevant under the abstracted surface of appearance.

Therefore, when further interpreting and phenomenologically thematizing the preliminary theme of surficial abstraction, a new question arises: one ought to ask *what replaces* this abstraction of human figures. In

⁸⁴ Cf. Timothy Morton's 'stranger stranger' and 'the mesh'.

other words, if the figure of the person is removed in this cinegeography of the modern urban world, through which sounds or via which images does Antonioni re-frame our audiovisual attention?

Upon reflection, one notices here the experience of haptic harmony, in conjunction with the dominance of perceiving the moving rhythm of the natural elements in this urban environment. From under the sheer appearance of the little things and places in this neighborhood, the scene's prolonged sunset thus appears as heavily rhythmically punctuated: Antonioni's precise, sunset sequence comes quite close to a cinegeographic version of what urban philosopher Henri Lefebvre called a 'rhythmanalysis' (2004): a form of analyzing, from within the lived everyday experience, that social interrelation of space and time. He writes explicitly:

Now look around you at this meadow, this garden, these trees and these houses. They give themselves, they offer themselves to your eyes as in a simultaneity. Now, up to a certain point, this simultaneity is mere appearance, surface spectacle. Go deeper. [...] You at once notice that every plant, every tree has its rhythm. And even several rhythms. (80).

In this sense, Antonioni's rhythmic cinematic description of dusk in a suburban environment invites us to look (and listen) for the inherent rhythm of this modernist neighborhood. Moreover, the filmmaker even emphasizes that subtraction of human figures in a totally constructed, man-made area that, nevertheless, becomes progressively dominated by that lively, life-like, almost tactile movement of light reflection on the water; instead of a human despair, the film subtly but resolutely discloses, especially in these last instances of the trilogy, the powerful idea that *underneath* the urban surface, the natural world nevertheless animates the world we live in.

As if speaking to (the spectator of) these last images of *L'Eclisse*, Lefebvre continues his description of rhythmanalysis in a similar vein:

Do not be afraid to disturb this surface. Be like the wind that shakes these trees. Let your gaze be penetrating [...]. Henceforth you will grasp every being [*chaque être*], every entity [*étant*] and every body, both living and non-living, 'symphonically' or 'polyrhythmically'. You will grasp it in its space-time, in its place and in its approximate becoming: including houses and buildings, towns and landscapes" (*ibid*).

In this powerful cinegeographic rhythmanalysis, then, it appears that life takes its natural course in the neighborhood. From under this abstracted

superficiality, the natural elements – here: wind, water and earth – mingle in this symphony of close ups with fragments of this suburban world.

Antonioni's estranging black-and-white images of the elements thus reveal something of the continuous present-ness of the natural world: from the background, the worldly character uncannily and brilliantly comes to the foreground. This approaches a Heideggerian 'disclosure' of worldliness of the world – "not as a totality never seen beforehand, but as a totality that has continually been seen beforehand in our circumspection. But with this totality the world makes itself known" (Heidegger 1996 [1927]: 70 [74-75]).⁸⁵ Here, Heidegger's central example is the workshop as mode of the world, revealed by the breaking down or *missing* of a hammering tool that is usually at-hand. Similarly, the uncanny *absence* of people in this environment – i.e., what I interpreted here as the abstraction of the filmworld – reveals that natural world underneath the surface: it comes to the foreground, while it has always been present without thematically reflected upon. Through its cinegeography, Antonioni thus flips the 'normal' (i.e., narrative-centered) filmworld thus inside out: the human, person-focused world gradually recedes to the background while the world's natural character is disclosed: in short, the world assumes an existential-ontological dimension. As we shall see in the third part of my chapter, it is this cinematic freeing of the nature underneath the daily world (even in a highly, essentially urbanized filmworld as Antonioni's) that provides film with the opportunity to sensitize the film spectator with an ecological awareness.

A Chronology of a Stream of Shallow Water

To explain this let us consider an example. The most concrete version of this abstracted, almost post-anthropocentric life in Antonioni's early 1960s filmworld is the stream of water, leaking from the old oil barrel: in its reflection the course mirrors the black-and-white blue, summer clouded sky; as the camera slowly tracks down these summer airs and the released water are effectively much more fluid (in the figurative sense) than the earthen

⁸⁵ As Hubert Dreyfus explains in his commentary on *Being and Time*: "The world, i.e., the interlocking practices, equipment, and skills for using them, which provides the basis for using specific items of equipment, is hidden. It is not disguised, but undiscovered" (1991: 99). Hence, the world's 'totality being seen beforehand in circumspection'

land through which the course finds its way. It is in this subtly moving of the deeper layers of the image – the water streaming downward over earth, reflecting the summer evening skies – where Antonioni's filmworld becomes fully expressive.

Indeed, there are many different specific places in this larger seven minute sequence to which this urban symphony returns, but this particular place – the stream of water – stands out for this curious movement of reflection (both in earlier shots of the barrel, as well as when floating down stream; the thematic focus of this last interpretation). Moreover, it is precisely at this rusty oil barrel releasing its contained rain water that, while being both a *human product* as well as incorporating *nature taking its course*, also carries most concretely the thin narrative shadows of Vittoria and Piero's affair – it was at the rusty oil barrel where they made their last appointment. Thanks to Antonioni's fragmented editing, we do not know why the water now leaks from its former vessel – all we see and hear is the attention this stream of water finding its course.

All these slivers of objects and rhythmic situations within this particular filmworld invite further symbolic interpretation or metaphorical reading. My aim, however, is not to present in this limited space an all-inclusive interpretation of Antonioni's work. Instead, it is fruitful for my overall argument to work out here this suddenly ungraspable flow of water, formerly so well held together: above all, water seems to uphold an intrinsic openness to this multitude of thematic interpretations. The theme is so rich that it can even be understood as a dense, elemental motif on its own account.

A Cinematic Motif of the Elements

My point is rather that such a small, concrete course of water can effectively present a revealing richness – in the Heideggerian sense of 'clearing.' To speak of this small, reflective rivulet as a potential film trope opens a stream of associations: since Antonioni's masterful ending of *L'Eclisse*, there is a

whole lineage of philosophically attuned filmmakers that include the same sound-image: water streaming over earth, reflecting the sky.⁸⁶

This motif frequently comes back in the work of Andrei Tarkovsky, as an enigmatic encounter with a temporal ellipsis: for instance, in the third chapter of *Andrei Rublev* (1966), the eponymous icon painter (played by Anatoly Solonitsyn) meets the acclaimed painter Theophanes the Greek (Nikolay Sergejev) in the woods: near a pond, the painters discuss their version of the Passion of the Christ (this is also represented on the screen as an almost contemporary event across the tarn), then Rublev's assistant washes his brushes in a forest's creek so as to transition us back into Rublev's narrative. Or in the final scenes of Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), the sea weed floats in the lake next to the protagonist's home, just as it did in the opening scene; the film's final aerial shot, however, reveals that this house, lake and surrounding nature is merely a replica on the ocean planet Solaris.

Alternatively, in Terrence Malick's cinema, such images of a river's flow figure often as narrative-thematic denouement: consider, from *Days of Heaven* (1979), how Bill (Richard Gere) is shot in (seemingly) the same shallow river bed where he formulated earlier on the devious plan that his girlfriend, Abby (Brooke Adams) would charm the rich, lonely and ill grain farmer (Sam Shepard) into marriage so that they can inherit his money after he dies; or the 15th Century European landing on the shores of Virginia, as reflected in *The New World's* (2005) opening scene; and, thirdly, in *The Tree of Life* (2011), floating shallow water figures not only in the much-discussed dinosaurs-scene (where, along a millennia old creek, one larger dinosaur decides *not* to kill a minor species) but it also surrounds Jack O'Brien (Sean Penn) on his wonderful meditations, pondering over his childhood loss in water perpetually washing ashore.

One final, recent example is Nuri Bilge Ceylan's existential murder-mystery *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011), where from a hill an ill-fated apple rolls down the lands and into the creek, then gently flowing down the

⁸⁶ I do not mean to suggest that Antonioni was the first cineaste to focus on this elemental motif; for instance (as mentioned in Chapter 1) the French filmmakers of Poetic Realism (1920s) have shown an aesthetic interest for filming the flow of water.

stream: here, the men's meandering conversation floats to the background while the apple's course in the water gets all cinegeography's attention – water pushing the apple downstream in dark liquids reflecting the night's sky.

3.2 From the Element to the Elemental

There are at least three ways to work out these varying instances of a stream of water. One way is to interpret this group of fragments as a whole and to read these quite different instances of the same audiovisual image time and again as an intertextual nod from one filmmaker to another. But this meta-theoretical level essentially bypasses a second level of interpretation – an analysis that looks specifically at the expressive narrative-thematic point within the context of each of these films. Once again, however, this second tactic also leaves something out: it sidesteps an even more *concrete, elemental level of the film aesthetics* as well as a significant part of the film experience.

This third interpretative strategy takes one step back and focuses specifically on the *cinematic depiction of the four natural elements*. In fact, it takes the element as meaningful on itself: as will soon become clear, gently unpacking the cinematic representation of the elements means that the elements are not only rich metaphors for other auxiliary meanings; the element itself becomes 'elemental' – powerful *qua* element, evocative of the natural world. And naturally, this is an essential step for building a film-philosophical theory of the elements.

Let us therefore consider Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007). Central to this spectacular film is the sequence in which Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) discovers an oil source, when searching for silver in Southern California, early in the 20th Century. While Plainview's discovery promises terrific prosperity, his adopted son H.W. (Dillon Freasier) unfortunately becomes deaf thanks to a rigging accident. Three separate moments reveal the key theme of this film.

Captivated by Fire

First there is the anticipation of discovering oil. Somewhere in the desert, a pumpjack and large wooden drilling rig tower above a small borehole in the muddy ground. In the second shot, we see how a long cable mechanically pulls up and down, each time digging deeper into the invisible earth. A tracking shot approaches the cable's upward movement: this (relatively closed, but dynamic) medium shot gives just enough space *not* to feel claustrophobic. Aurally, the cable scrapes softly when moving up and down, a distant hammer hammers rhythmically that promising sound of metal on metal; soft squeaks of the wood slowly build up tension as the camera finally looks upwards: then, visually, this moving low angle shows the young H.W. somewhere higher on the tower, his little head looking down into the invisible borehole besides and beneath the camera. In the next shot (a fixed shot, on shoulder-height, medium frame) – at a stone's throw distance of the boring site – Plainview does paperwork in the mess room, with the borehole to background. The distance is expressed acoustically (the metal's hammering is softer now) as well as felt by looking through the distance through dusty glass windows.

Soon the earth starts to shake – and so does the camera's framing; the soundtrack rumbles. At the site in the background, a gusher of wet, dark oil, sprays from the borehole, obviously beyond any human control. With this violent eruption of dirty liquids and high-pressured gas, H.W. is thrown through the air, landing on the roof of an adjacent wooden shed. When we see the kid in close up, all sound is suddenly morphed into a distance (as if we were under water). Visually, the soil keeps on spitting oil, meters in the air and covering the site in showers of the dark, sticky liquid. Plainview picks up his kid and carries him to the mess, once there he barks something to his son, trying to make contact with him. "I can't hear my voice" the boy replies, "I can't hear my voice."

Then, in the background, another huge explosion: the blowout catches fire. Lively white light shoots up, surrounded by dark orange flames climbing up the tower surrounded by dark black clouds of excessive energy blow into the air. Plainview looks outside, leaves his son to the care of an assistant and

hurries towards the fire. Against the sunset, Plainview and his men fight to tame the fire. This takes well into the next morning: the editing cleverly cuts this battle into small slivers of action shot in magic hour and at night, suggesting temporal coherence with thrusting, non-diegetic music. They break the cables that stabilize the tower. Oftentimes the men are just entranced by the enormous burning construction, the flares reflecting in their faces. Even the little H.W. gets up to admire the blaze. The men sometimes run back and forth, around the fire-geyser.

Out of breath, late in the night, Plainview too is mesmerized by the huge fire and snaps to his colleague: "What are you looking so miserable about? There is a whole ocean of oil under our feet! No one can get at it except for me." Then the tower collapses: Plainview seems overly excited by the fire's vicious power. Filmed from a distance in chiaroscuro, the black contours of his ecstatic gestures look trivial against the colossal inferno. Cut back to a medium shot of the faces of the two men, still shimmering in the huge fire. "Is H.W. okay?" asks the colleague in a cautious tone. "No he isn't" Plainview replies, without moving a muscle, staring relentlessly into the fire. Then, the editing ellipses once more: now, somewhere in early morning, Plainview's men attempt to break the fire by riding barrels of dynamite close to the well. After this detonation – adding more fire – the blaze dies down. Only now can Plainview return to his son.

From Greed to Reverse Astrology

This nine minute sequence has three dramatic twists: a) the discovery of oil, spouting out of the borehole; b) the harmed son, moved away from the site; and c) Plainview's return to fire's ongoing, compelling blaze. The emotional core of this dialectical sequence (and of the whole film) is Plainview's terrifying eagerness for oil: the first hour of the film, he strives to *find* it; the rest of the film he tries to *control* this thick material of inner earth, largely ignoring his injured boy.⁸⁷ Indeed, Plainview's greed shows itself as first theme, as is narratively illustrated by his leaving the wounded H.W. to the

⁸⁷ Plainview's struggle for greed is dramatically even more played out by the critique of young local pastor Eli Sunday (Paul Dano), whose family owned the land and sold it to Plainview. While this religious opposition is quite present in *There Will be Blood*, it is only peripherally relevant to my main argument here.

care of others: a greedy man who rather runs back to the huge blaze above the ocean of oil under the earth.

This narrative staple finds further cinegeographic manifestation in the expressive movements to and from the oil well. The vertical movement above the borehole is cinematographically stressed by a dynamic pulling in of the tracking camera; this clashes, secondly, with Plainview's initial distanced attitude at the mess, given in a fixed frame and a *mise-en-scene* that visually and aurally contains this remoteness. Moreover, Plainview's running back and forth between the mess and the drilling rig fountain is again dynamically filmed in frantic tracking shots, expressing a repeated draw towards the spectacular blaze; and again, these horizontal movements are set in contrast again by the relatively stable shots of both the oil outburst and fire's climbing flames: here, the fire is viewed from a distance, in non-mobile shots.

The film's cinegeography – the dynamic horizontal choreography *towards* and *around* that huge vertical fire – thus develops the narrative theme of man's greed and explosion of nature into a deeper idea of the spectacular *attraction* of fire. Fire has here its original sway over man. With an arresting metaphor, Gaston Bachelard interprets this gazing at fire as reverse astrology: a “need to *penetrate*, to go to the *interior* of things, to the *interior* of beings” (1964 [1938]: 40 [emphasis in original]).⁸⁸ According to Bachelard, then, this fascination with fire reconstitutes our archetypal ‘prehistoric conquest’ of that energetic element: man's gazing at fire particularly demonstrates a ‘thermal sympathy’ – a yearning for immersing the warmth of inner *earth* (*ibid.*). *There Will be Blood* thus evolves around this intuitive attraction that fire has on men; an enormous fire in the filmworld captivates all.

In fact, just like Plainview and his men, spectators as well just *gaze* at this fire. Even more insistently, the film's dynamic movement *towards* the fire geyser is, finally, once more contrasted by the different immobile reaction

⁸⁸ Besides, in this ‘Novalis Complex’ (as Bachelard calls this prehistoric longing), fire is symbolic for the desire to penetrate the earth. According to Novalis, this is most aptly embodied in the miner, whose profession he called ‘reverse astrology’. Novalis writes that “the miner has in his veins the inner fire of the earth which excites him to explore its depths” (Novalis in *ibid.*: 41). This comparison is even more compelling in the context of the opening scene of *There Will be Blood*, portraying Plainview's early enterprise as an eager silver-miner.

shots of men staring in the fire: fixed, wider close-ups of the faces of Plainview and his men, captivated by the glare. Indeed, the most vibrant being and entity in these stable shots is the dancing reflection of the energetic flames on their faces, a vibrant little sparkle in their eyes. While the cinegeographic movement freezes at the men's gazing into the fire, that choreography of fire continues on their faces: the men look at the fire and reflect the energetic heat of inner earth, and the energetic fire perpetually sprouting from the earth.

Elemental Image

There Will be Blood thus categorically moves *towards* the image of fire, but once there it stands still and reflects the attraction the blaze has on man. Obviously, this cinegeographic formation *around* fire can be further thematized as a Platonic *mise-en-abyme* of the cinematographic apparatus, where also film's moving lights on a silver screen reflect how men were once captivated by fire's shadow play (think of Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave'). But whereas many scholars in both philosophy and film-theory (often suspiciously) evaluate this association of film and philosophy,⁸⁹ I propose to consider such a cinematic image of fire instead as a compelling film-philosophical *opportunity*: instead of immediately shifting away from the cinematic image of fire into a yet acknowledged philosophical metaphor, it is (prior to any other interpretation) a very spectacular, *concrete image of fire*.

In fact, at times cinema gives us such intense moments where the profound elemental character of water or fire, air or water suddenly stands out. All we experience at such a moment is the concrete presence of earth, water, air or fire perceived in all their 'elementality' – that moment where the filmworld seems briefly phenomenologically concentrated into just natural materiality, when the element dominates the entire cinematic audiovisual image: pure instances of the elements are the burning house towards the end

⁸⁹ Jean-Louis Baudry's concept of 'the cinematic apparatus' (cf. 1986a and 1986b) is the most notorious film-theoretical analogy, where cinema's viewing situation mimics Plato's 'Allegory' and *ideologically* positions the spectator as deceived the illusion of reality. Also in philosophy, Robert Sinnerbrink points out, "[t]he point of the repeated recitation of this observation concerning Plato's cave [...] is less to show the inherent affinity of philosophy and film than their inherent antagonism" (Sinnerbrink, 2011: 34); at most, the 'Cave' association becomes an example of demonstrating 'philosophy *in* film' (cf. Wartenberg 2011: 10ff, *passim*) than a presupposition-less starting point for film-philosophy.

of Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* (aka *Offret* 1986) is hardly contained by the cinematic image; or the air thick with London's fog, in Alfred Hitchcock's early film *The Lodger* (1932); in *Contempt's* (aka *Le Mépris*, Jean-Luc Godard 1963) sudden timeless abstraction of the Mediterranean seascape, seen from Casa Malaparte; or, finally, the intense liveliness of the earth, right before the planet Melancholia crashes into our planet, in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011).

There is in such moments of elementality simply *too much* of the element in one image: it might be understood as what Kristin Thompson called 'cinematic excess', where something inexplicably stands out in cinema; its salience cannot sufficiently be 'motivated' by either the narrative or the filmmaker's style alone (1977: 57).⁹⁰ As cinematic excess, the representation of an element then suddenly becomes *elemental*: here, the audiovisual images of earth, air, water or fire suddenly become a concretized theme in itself, an intense cinematic presentation and 'presencing' of the world's basic material. In short, the mere moving image of one dynamic natural element suddenly evokes a completely other responsiveness to the filmworld.

Such a moving image, in which the world 'elementality' is experienced, is what I call an 'elemental image': in elemental images, cinema arouses a kind of original (i.e., primordial [*ursprünglich*]), existential link – a strong, existential-ontological (re)connection between man and the world precisely *through* this intense experience of a representation of an element. In its almost visceral concreteness, then, it inherently possesses a very potent, basic way of representing our embodied or concrete encounter with the world, prior to more motivated actions or reflective, symbolic meanings: the elemental image is a dense, meaningful connection that actually precedes or outreaches the mere narrative or thematic layers of one particular film.

⁹⁰ While she generously recognizes her debt to Roland Barthes' similar idea (Barthes called it 'the third meaning'; cf. Barthes 1977: 52-68), Thompson decisively departs from his semiological model in order to emphasize excess in Russian Formalist terms as 'counter-narrative'. My own idea of elemental image is not necessarily counter-narrative; at most it 'suspends' the narrative experience – if it not already preceded it.

3.3 Concrete Metaphor and Environmental Thinking

Finally, it is in cinema's cinegeographic expression of this vital connection *with* the world's natural character that we can locate the ecological potential of film experience. Again, it is phenomenological theory that provides a good framework for grounding this claim: developing the quasi-Husserlian model of film-intentionality set out in the previous chapter,⁹¹ we find in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception a philosophical model – as Ilan Safit calls it “a phenomenology of phenomenology” (2014a: 219) – that places this intentional perception as the central locus for sensitizing or enlarging environmental consciousness on the part of the spectator. In slightly adapting and expanding this idea into the notion of ‘concrete metaphor,’ this thesis closes off with connecting both the direct, lived cinematic experience to a profounder, truly ecological thinking through a film's representation of the elements.

Film-Phenomenology and Ecocinema

In his recent article ‘Nature Screened: An Eco-Film-Phenomenology’ (2014a), develops perhaps the first explicit (Continental) phenomenological approach in ecocinema. Safit starts with suggesting that film duplicates the phenomenology of the perception of the world *through* the cinematic image: “they [moving images] offer us precisely the material objectification of sight or of sight's products, images, now standing as separate, distinct, and distanced objects” (2014a: 217). Because they are distanced, objectified, these cinematic images are *external* to us (as opposed to normal perception where the image is internalized *in* perception); they are bracketed in space, as it were.⁹² This spatial distance is however bridged or overcome by our embodied consciousness perceiving these cinematic images on the screen: the cinematic world is ‘brought closer by vision,’ as Safit describes it elsewhere (2014b: 4). We are, in a Merleau-Pontyan sense, *positioned* by this

⁹¹ My term film-intentionality is meant to model how the spectator becomes engaged *with* and *directed at* the projected filmworld.

⁹² In a sort of Cavellian turn of embodied phenomenology, Safit writes that cinema “seperat[es] the image of the things from their body” (*ibid*: 218). For Safit, this further confirms the phenomenological model cinema provides us. The significant difference between his own model and Cavell's, Safit points out, is that our perception of the world is also *in* the projected filmworld: “the silver screen also screen me *in*” (*ibid*: 228n30 – emphasis by Safit).

vision over distance: it brings our consciousness and the world together in the perception of the image (2014a: 228-29).

Film, in short, thus “peel[s]” visibility from the material world” and offers the world at a distance as visibility, i.e., as ‘screened image’ (*ibid*: 218). Now, when these screened images are of a *natural scene*, nature maintains, Safit argues, its pre-utilitarian state. In the positioned perception, it is not yet acted upon or appropriated by humans:

Nature screened, then, if we allow it be or allow ourselves the attentiveness that looks at things in their non-utilitarian visual being, (...) displays the very mode of non-intrusive relationship with the natural world: that it is the *sight* prior to being a field of action (*ibid*: 226).

What is more, nature is seen here in its ecological integrity. Writing specifically about the opening scene of Terrence Malick’s *The New World* (his only case study in this article), where sea, sky and land of the early 17th Century shorelines are an integrated, whole being in ‘one image, a single picture’ (*ibid*: 222).

Malick is, of course, a perfect film-philosophical analysis; this meticulously analyzed example also aptly demonstrates the director’s profound sensibility to the natural world under surficial layers of the cultural realm. Yet, like many scholars in ecocinema writing on wilderness, Safit singles out one image of explicit, if not pristine nature to support his argument.⁹³ As argued in this thesis, however, my own conviction is that environmental sensibility can be provoked by *any* film form – fast-action blockbusters as much as subtle philosophical meanderings in art-house cinema. Despite this minor critique, his analysis overall seems even to approach here quite perfectly my notion of ‘elemental image:’ the elements in this opening image stand out in their elementality – and it is precisely therein, it seems, where Safit positions the source for awakening an ecological connection with the world.

I think therefore that Safit’s phenomenological model should be expanded: instead of solely ‘screened nature’ – explicit images of untouched

⁹³ Safit treats Malick’s *narrative* film as distinct from more explicit ‘environmental cinema’ (*ibid*: 219). While Malick certainly tells profound cinematic stories, his narratives are quite unconventional (to say the least); moreover, Safit’s analysis focuses only on the poetic opening shot of *The New World* and largely leaves out of consideration the actual narrative of the rest of the film.

wilderness – it is those elemental images that evoke an ecological thought on the part of the spectator.

The Givenness of Cinema's Images

Moreover, Safit's phenomenological model is also an important *film-philosophical* contribution to the discipline of ecocinema: unlike many in this academic field, nature is not unreflectively taken as an *a priori* idea and 'applied' to cinema; nature is rather 'discovered' *through* the cinematic image:

Such an image, *this* image, belies the persistent claim made by some analysts of the medium, that film can only *illustrate* ideas already formulated in language, not construct them. (...) And if images, films, can produce concepts, they can philosophize in their unique, visual way (*ibid*: 223).

The cinematic image is thus understood as an instance that can evoke new thoughts in ways that are perhaps not possible in traditional linguistic philosophy. This is because, as I have argued in Chapter 2, cinema can offer a projected filmworld that is directly, pre-reflectively experienced: the audiovisual representation of a for instance a burning house is something significantly different than a verbal rendering of the same image. In other words, cinema is unique in its expressive representation of the materiality of an elemental filmworld – no other art offers such a direct, moving experience.

The classic film-theoretical way to support this argument is to argue, as film-semiologist Christian Metz did, that the *language* of cinema should be understood as different from verbal or written language systems. While classical linguistic semiology radically and essentially *separates* signified and signifier, Metz points out that in cinema "[e]verything is present in the film [...]. The film-maker can express himself by showing us directly the diversity of the world, and in this he differs from the reciter of tales [*locuteur*]" (1974: 69-70). Cinematic art should be thus understood as *cinematic language*, Metz argues, because in film there appears to be no separation between signifier and signified: "in the cinema the distance is too short. The signifier is an image, signified is what the image represents" (*ibid*: 62).⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Here I replaced the out-dated *significate* [translation of the French *signifié*] with the widely accepted contemporary translation *signified*.

From Metz' semiological model we may take then that cinema has its proper language system just as much literature does – it is only significantly different; the distinction between written or verbal and audio-imagistic communication is that cinema gives 'what is symbolized' directly *in* and simultaneously *with* and 'what is conveyed'. This is precisely because film is a non-linguistic medium: it is in cinema's audiovisuality that both fall together.

Concrete Metaphor

These phenomenologically simultaneous but theoretically separate parts of the film experience constitute what I call here 'concrete metaphor.' Only in cinema – the edited stream of audiovisual images – can the experience of the world be so doubly intensified: on the one hand, the elemental image, like Plainview's blaze, is first of all just a lot of fire. The spectator, much like Plainview and his men, is here captivated by this cinematic representation of an elemental image; the same fascination is evoked by the stream of water at the end of Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*. What the elemental image connotes here is, first of all, a very *concrete* depiction of an element. It is directly experienced as such, phenomenologically speaking. But, on the other hand, as I argued in the first part of this chapter, an image of an element also has many other connotations that are either intuited simultaneously in the cinematic experience or analytically construed afterwards.

To compare it again with linguistics, a verbal metaphor can be theoretically split in a 'primary subject' and a 'secondary subject.'⁹⁵ Hence, in Antonioni's cinematic trope or Plainview's fascination with fire, the metaphor's *primary subject* would be depiction of 'water streaming over earth reflecting the sky' or 'fire sprouting from inner earth.' Alternatively, the *secondary subject* should be the different hermeneutic connotations one might give in a full interpretation (this thesis only briefly indicated the possible directions of interpretations).⁹⁶ Now, in describing most (verbal)

⁹⁵ This terminology is based on David Hills' entry 'Metaphor' in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), which discusses various terminologies; I chose this terminology because the 'primary subject' best approaches my idea of a primal, visceral experience of each element represented on film.

⁹⁶ That is, in the first part of this chapter such interpretations were provisionally phrased as 'encounter with temporal ellipsis' for Tarkovsky's fragments, or as 'narrative reflection' for Malick's scenes; in *There Will be Blood*, these images were temporarily interpreted as symbolic for Plainview's greed and later connoted a longing for earth's inner power.

metaphors the emphasis is on the secondary subject: the properties of the secondary subject are attributed to the primary subject; but when one perceives in cinema a concrete metaphor of an element, on the contrary, there is something experientially direct and concrete about the primary subject – the concrete, material depiction of an element.

What we see and hear is, then, on the one hand, the elementality's potentially rich, reverberating metaphorical layers of meaning. At this secondarily level, film can potentially infuse new thought: a rich, metaphorical thinking – preceding and enveloping a film's narrative-thematic contexts – about the relation between humanity and the environment, the kinetic composition of the cosmos, the breath of air that gives and takes life, the circuits of water and the fundamental power earth can give us. But simultaneously, and nowhere contradicting (on the contrary perhaps even increasing) this rich warehouse of different meanings, the perception of an elemental image remains also a very strong, affective and embodied experience: i.e., the (re)presentation is also essentially a very concrete image; water floating over earth, reflecting the sky, the vigorous energy of inner earth's blaze.

~

It is in the dense experience of such cinematic moments that this concrete metaphor is 'lived,' or intensely experienced: the pre-reflective experience *connects* both in a new ecological thinking that arises within this cinematic experience of the four natural elements. In the direct, phenomenologically binding consciousness to the world – while dwelling in the filmworld – this ecological film experience also offers a poetically free thinking, ranging from Pre-Socratic musings about the cycles of life on earth (like in *Le Quattro Volte*) to reflecting the fundamental fourfold of earth, water, air and fire (in a film like *Lawrence of Arabia*), or the dependence on earth and air (in *The Martian*).

Conclusion: The Four Elements of Ecocinema

Against the background of the contemporary environmental crisis, this project explored the role and philosophical potential of rethinking through cinema the fourfold of the natural elements – earth, air, water and fire. Here the thesis combines two specific stances within film theory and philosophy of film: while developing a film-phenomenological approach with regards to methodologically analyzing the question of ‘film immersion,’ this study also extends the restrictive idea of ‘ecocinema’ (a cross-disciplinary paradigm that usually analyzes films with a given ‘green’ subject-matter). While many ecocinema scholars study how so-called ‘environmental films’ can evoke an enlarged environmental awareness on the part of the spectator, their analyses are often restricted by a limited conception of what genres qualify as ‘environmental.’

Against this narrow idea of ecocinema, this thesis demonstrates in its phenomenological descriptive film analyses that, understood in the right way, virtually any film – from Buster Keaton’s classic comedy and the art cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni to Ridley Scott’s most recent sci-fi space-travel blockbuster – has the potential to evoke ecological thinking. That is precisely because of their dependence on natural elements. While water and air, fire and earth usually remain in the background of our daily lives, they actually matter much more than the fleeting thought we generally give them: after all, they are essential for the ecosystem we live in. Similarly in film experience, these elements may initially seem peripheral and inconsequential. Yet, in the analyses of his thesis the elements are gradually revealed as not only *fundamental* for the constitution of a film world and thus for having a film experience at all: the elements have, moreover, in their most concrete representation, significant potential to reimagine our interrelation with the natural environment.

Cinematic Engagement through the Natural Elements

In combining descriptive film analysis with phenomenological theory, this thesis first established that this material fourfold is *essential* for the so-called pre-reflective experience of film (that phase the spectator is first engaged

with the filmworld, preceding narrative comprehension and thematic-symbolic interpretation). Already at this phenomenal level of film experience, the spectator becomes *directed* towards the projected filmworld because of a film's expressive material: in the first instance, through elemental landscapes. Accordingly, 'film-intentionality,' as I coined this process of pre-reflective film immersion, is to a significant extent constituted by the film's material depiction of air, fire, water and earth.

Furthermore, this thesis also ascertained that it is in the filmmaker's effective use of the elements in building a filmworld that cinema's expressive geographic landscapes become so engaging. Hence, in its 'cinegeography,' cinema's landscapes become almost literally *etched* with elemental expression: the cinematography, editing and mise-en-scene work together to create a dense, materially expressive filmworld; once this cinegeographic landscape is apprehended, the spectator has, so to speak, forgotten his or her bodily being and is intentionally directed towards the projected world of film.

Therefore, thirdly, at this pre-reflective level of engagement the spectator's consciousness is already 'enworlded' by the film's effective use of cinegeography. Consciousness is connected to the projected environment because of the material 'elementality' of earth, air, fire and water. In this film-phenomenological theory of cinematic engagement, then, it is established that the film spectator's consciousness momentarily dwells in the filmworld *because* of the embodied apprehension of the elemental fourfold. Moreover, it is from within this direct, lived experience – in fact, the 'ground' for experiencing film *at all* – that film may have further significance for the spectator's environmental awareness.

From the Element to the Elemental

Because on the basis of this fundamental, material level of cinematic engagement, a film's depiction of the elements can also concentrate its expression in particular 'elemental images' – where the moving audiovisual images of water, earth, air and/or fire become a theme in itself, a powerful audiovisual presentation and presencing of the world's basic material. These elemental images thus offer, on the one hand, an increased concretization of

our ontological-existential connection to the natural environment. The element has become 'elemental,' a thematic concentration of sheer elementality, that is deeply 'lived' through as a cinematic moment suspending the narrative development and emotional engagement.

Yet, within this concrete perception of the elemental image, there is also a second level – what have called here 'concrete metaphor.' An elemental image such as a burning house gives us a representation of the captivating power of pyro-kinetic energy; but, at the same time, it also embodies manifold different connotations, both within the narrative logic as well as in the cultural realm (fire as power, as life, as danger, as energy, and so on). Otherwise put, while being inherently metaphorical, such a concrete metaphor is also, always, a very directly experienced sensuous image.

It is at this metaphorical level of a concrete depiction of an elemental image that cinema – in any genre, from whatever decade or with different artistic ambitions – can be considered as having ecological potential. With such an intensified image, we experience the brief suspension of the narrative thread in favor of an expressive moment of material imagination (and therefore still within the pre-reflective phase of experiencing a cinematic moment), where the surplus in eco-philosophical meaning is foregrounded and made explicit in our cinematic experience.

Film-Phenomenology and Ecological Thinking

Besides the context of ecocinema, this inquiry into the cinematic use of the elements also has a significant film-phenomenological component. Not only because of its phenomenological concept of cinematic engagement (e.g., the idea of 'film-intentionality'), but also my phenomenological methodology for descriptive film analysis which helped *foregrounding* the elements in constituting an engaging and immersive filmworld.

Furthermore, this phenomenological stance has also revealed the intrinsic potential for ecological thinking in film: while the spectator is already immersed

Further Research

Given my film-phenomenological approach and methodology – one that carefully averts immediately explaining numerous revealed film-theoretical themes and concepts in lieu of *first* fully *describing* the actual *film as experienced* – I have postponed several relevant themes that came up in the course of my argument. In ending this conclusion, I will thus pick up two significant open ends that I consider productive for developing in further researching this topic.

Ecological Thinking Metaphors and Metaphysics

While most of the descriptive film analyses may have hinted several ‘elemental themes’ (i.e., the trope of a stream of water), actual hermeneutic interpretation of such ecological thinking was repeatedly postponed in favor of the main line of arguments of this thesis. In other words, in this thesis there was little space for substantially interpreting such elemental themes.

Yet, in so doing, this thesis has laid the necessary groundwork for developing that essential inquiry into cinema’s metaphorical representation of the four natural elements: the concept of concrete metaphor needs to be given more weight by actually developing a hermeneutically-developed matrix of different connotations of the elemental image of water, earth, air or fire. This reverberation of different concrete metaphors and elemental themes will gradually lead the research into the realm of proper film-philosophical elemental thinking.

Moreover, such an analysis of cinema’s elemental thinking may also reveal a more metaphysical side to this research on the elements – this has been very implicit throughout *this* thesis. In the captivating image of fire, there seems something more expressed – from our relation to the world to questions about the universe’s fundamental composition. And perhaps studying this metaphysics of the elemental representation might best be done through cinema – an art form derived from optical trickery, developed via virtual movement into the intangible images of digital cinema.

This is closely linked to the second theme for further research – the technological nature of cinematic art. Again, this theme has been implicit throughout the thesis but lack of sufficient space prevented further development. As argued throughout, in cinematic perception, consciousness is directed towards the projected silver screen. This film-intentionality is thus effectively constituted through the technological means of selecting and recording, ordering, and distributing small frames of objectified audiovisual expressions of the world.

While this description involuntarily brings to mind Heidegger's pejorative view of modern technology, it is paradoxically also through the double sense of *technē* (also indicated by Heidegger) that cinema can just well be described as a poetic art form – poetic in the sense of truth-revealing or the 'bringing-forth' of entities. That is to say, while in the 21st Century cinema has evolved into an art form that depends as much on CGI images of virtual worlds, it still succeeds as no other art form to connect us with this non-existent, projected filmworld precisely because of these technologically created images of nature.

CGI-dependent films like *The Day After Tomorrow* or *The Martian*, for example, can give us, thanks to their cinematic *technē*, directly lived experiences of the natural world (or universe) that are virtually impossible in the real world. As argued in this thesis, such films can even evoke an increased environmental sensibility on the part of the spectator. Despite appearances, it seems, therefore, that precisely such highly technological audiovisual entertainment have the provocative, poetic power of reconnecting us with the elemental world.

~

Ultimately, it is reassuring that, in a century where our earth's ecological crisis seems almost inevitable, even blockbuster narratives explicitly offer such 'ecological' themes to their spectators. Let me refer back to my analysis of *Gravity*, Cuarón's spectacular sci-fi allegory about space-agent Ryan Stone's cosmic return to and rebirth on our earth. While the extended opening images of this film (in all their technological bravura) show the

spacemen and women suspended in an ungraspable black universe, several minutes later this film offers an intense cinematic moment. Suddenly, from the side of the frame, the camera discloses the earth. This is an exceptional instance of an elemental image; a sphere with earth, water, air and alive deep inside with fire.

Is this not, as Heidegger might have put it, pernicious instance of the 'age of the world picture' revisited? On the contrary, seeing our fragile, living globe from such a distance, perhaps even if 'objectified' in Heidegger's sense, does not necessarily dissociate or alienate us from the world. On the contrary: it can also deeply connect us to our world because of realization, mediated via cinema, that we have only one planet where life is possible, and that our very survival as human beings depends upon finding our way thanks to fire, air, water, and earth.

Bibliography

- Aitken, Stuart C. and Deborah P. Dixon. "Imagining Geographies of Film." *Erdkunde* 60, no. 4 (October - December 2006).
- Aitken, Stuart C. and Leo Zonn, eds. *Place, Power, Situation, Spectacle: A Geography of Film*. Lanham (Md): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*. Translated by Alan C. M. Ross. London (UK): Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964. Originally published as *La Psychanalyse du Feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).
- . *L'air Et Les Songes: Essai Sur L'imagination Du Mouvement*. Paris: José Corti, 1943.
- . *La Terre Et Les Rêveries De La Volonté*. Paris: José Corti, 1948.
- Bakker, Reinout. *De Geschiedenis Van Het Fenomenologisch Denken [the History of Phenomenological Thinking]*. Aula-Series. Utrecht (NL): Spectrum, 1966.
- Barker, Jennifer. *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. Berkeley (Ca) [etc.]: University of California Press, 2009.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills." In *Image, Music, Text*. Edited and translated by Stephen Heath, 52-68. London (UK): Fontana Press, 1977.
- Baudry, Jean-Louis. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, edited by Philip Rosen, 286-98. New York (NY) [etc.]: Columbia University Press, 1986a.
- . "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema." In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, edited by Philip Rosen, 299-318. New York (NY) [etc.]: Columbia University Press, 1986b.
- Bendix, Jörg, Hans Heinrich Blotevogel, Richard Dikau, Hermann Kreutzmann, Wilfried Schenk, and Harald Zepp, eds. *Erdkunde* 60, no. 4 (October - December 2006).
- Beugnet, Martine. *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*. Edinburgh (UK) [etc.]: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Beyer, Christian. "Edmund Husserl." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (First Published 2003; Revised and Updated in Summer 2015). Accessed February 11, 2016.
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/husserl/>>.

- Bordwell, David and Noël Carroll. *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Madison (Wi) [etc.]: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- Bousé, Derek. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia (Pa): University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
- Buell, Lawrence, Ursula K. Heise, and Karen Thornber. "Literature and Environment." *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36 (2011): 417-40.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Critical Manifestos. Malden (Ma) [etc.]: Blackwell, 2005.
- Carel, Havi and Greg Tuck. *New Takes in Film-Philosophy*. Basingstroke (UK): Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Casebier, Allan. *Film and Phenomenology: Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation*. Cambridge (UK) [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Casey, Edward. *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps*. Minneapolis (Mn): University of Minnesota Press, 2002a.
- . "Earth, World, and Land: The Story of the Missing Term". Dallas: Unpublished Lecture, Transcribed by Lissa McCullough, 2002b.
- . "Mapping the Earth in Works of Art." In *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Bruce V. Foltz and Robert Frodeman, 260-69. Bloomington (In) [etc.]: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Enlarged edition. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1979.
- . *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1981.
- . *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago (Il) [etc.]: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Chamarette, Jenny. *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema*. Basingstroke (UK) [etc.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Antonioni, or, the Surface of the World*. Berkeley (Ca): University of California Press, 1985.
- Chris, Cynthia. *Watching Wildlife*. Minneapolis (Mn) [etc.]: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

- Clark, Andy and David Chalmers. "The Extended Mind." *Analysis* 58, no. 1 (1998): 7-19.
- Cresswell, Tim and Deborah P. Dixon, eds. *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity*. Lanham (Md) [etc.]: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.
- Critchley, Simon. "Calm: On Terrence Malick's *the Thin Red Line*." *Film-Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2002): 1-15.
- Cubitt, Sean. *Eco Media*. Contemporary Cinema. Amsterdam (NL) [etc.]: Rodopi, 2005.
- Curd, Patricia. "Presocratic Philosophy." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012). Accessed December 24, 2015.
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/presocratics/>>.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guatarri. *Anti-Œdipus*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 1. London (UK) [etc.]: Continuum, 2004a. Originally published as *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972).
- . *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 2. London (UK) [etc.]: Continuum, 2004b. Originally published as *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980).
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis (Mn): Minnesota University Press, 1986. Originally published as *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983).
- . *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galatea. Minneapolis (Mn): Minnesota University Press, 1989. Originally published as *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*. Cambridge (Ma): MIT Press, 1991.
- Dyson, Frances. *Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture*. Berkely (Ca) [etc.]: University of California Press, 2009.
- Ebert, Roger. "Le Quattro Volte [Review]." *RogerEbert.com* (June 15, 2011). Accessed April 21, 2016. <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/le-quattro-volte-2011>>.

- French, Philip. "Le Quattro Volte - Review." *The Guardian* (May 28, 2011). Accessed April 21, 2016 <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/may/29/le-quattro-volte-michelangelo-frammartino>>.
- Gallagher, Shaun and Dan Zahavi. *The Phenomenological Mind*. 2nd and Updated ed. Abingdon (UK): Routledge, 2012.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 2nd. ed. London (UK): Routledge, 2011.
- Giardana, Carolyn. "'Interstellar' Cinematographer Dishes on Joining Christopher Nolan, Shooting in Iceland." Guggenheim Media's Entertainment Group. Last modified February 11, 2014. Accessed February 29, 2016. <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/interstellar-cinematographer-dishes-joining-christopher-751398>>.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Staumbaugh. Albany (NY): SUNY, 1996. Originally published as *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1953 [1927]).
- . "Building Dwelling Thinking." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Edited and translated by Albert Hofstadter, 143-59. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. Reprint, New York: Perennial Classics.
- . "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Edited and translated by Albert Hofstadter, 17-86. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. Reprint, New York: Perennial Classics, 2001.
- . "The Turning." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Edited and translated by Albert Hofstadter, 163-80. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. Reprint, New York: Perennial Classics, 2001.
- Hezekiah, Gabrielle Andrée. *Phenomenology's Material Presence: Video, Vision and Experience*. Bristol (UK) [etc.]: Intellect, 2010.
- Hills, David. "Metaphor." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012). Accessed March 15, 2016. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/metaphor/>.
- Hochmann, Jhan. *Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel and Theory*. Moscow (Id): University of Idaho Press, 1999.
- Holmberg, Jan. "Ideals of Immersion in Early Cinema." *Cinémas: Revue d'études cinématographiques [Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies]* 14, no. 1 (2003): 129-47.

- Ihde, Don. *Experimental Phenomenology [Second Edition]*. Second Edition. Albany (NY): State University of New York Press, 1977. Reprint, 1986.
- Ingram, David. *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter [UK]: University of Exeter Press, 2000.
- . "The Aesthetics and Ethics of Eco-Film Criticism." In *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, edited by Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, Afi Film Readers, 43-61. New York (NY): Routledge, 2013.
- Ivakhiv, Adrian. "Green Film Criticism and Its Futures." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 1-28.
- . "The Anthropobiogeomorphic Machine: Stalking the Zone of Cinema." *Film-Philosophy* 15, 1 (2011): 118-39.
- . *Ecologies of the Moving Image*. Environmental Humanities. Waterloo (On): Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013.
- . "The Age of the World Motion Picture: Cosmic Visions in the Post-Earthrise Era." In *The Changing World Religion Map*, edited by Stanley D. Brunn, vol 1, 129-44. Dordrecht (NL): Springer, 2015.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore. London (UK) [etc.]: Continuum, 2004. Originally published as *Éléments de Rhythmanalyse* (Paris: Éditions de Syllepse, 1992).
- Lefebvre, Martin. "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema." In *Landscape and Film*, edited by Martin Lefebvre, Afi Film Readers, 19-59. New York (NY) [etc.]: Routledge, 2006.
- . "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies [Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques]* 20, no. 1 (Spring [Printemps] 2011): 61-78.
- Livingston, Paisley. *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman: On Film as Philosophy*. Oxford (UK) [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Lukinbeal, Chris and Stefan Zimmerman. "Film Geography: A New Subfield." *Erdkunde* 60, no. 4 (October - December 2006): 315-25. Esher, Anton. "The Geography of Cinema: A Cinematic World." *Erdkunde* 60, no. 4 (October - December 2006): 307-14.

- Lukinbeal, Chris. "Cinematic Landscapes." *Journal of Cultural Geography* 23, no. 1 (2005): 3-22.
- Macauley, David. *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire and Water as Elemental Ideas*. Suny Series in Environmental Philosophy and Ethics, edited by J. Baird Callicot and John van Buren. Albany (NY): State University of New York Press, 2010.
- MacDonald, Scott. "Toward and Eco-Cinema." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 107-32.
- . "The Ecocinema Experience." In *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, edited by Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, Afi Film Readers, 17-41. New York (NY) [etc.]: Routledge, 2013.
- Manen, Max van. "Fenomenologie: Een Kwalitatieve Stroming Met Een Verscheidenheid Aan Tradities [Phenomenology: A Qualitative Movement with a Diversity of Traditions]." *Kwalon* 10, no. 1 (2005): 30-36.
- Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham (NC) [etc.]: Duke University Press, 2000.
- . *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis (Mn): University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- McKim, Kristi. *Cinema as Weather: Stylistic Screens and Atmospheric Change*. New York (NY) [etc.]: Routledge, 2013.
- Meinig, Donald William. "Reading the Landscape: An Appreciation of W.G. Hopkins and J.B. Jackson." In *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes. Geographical Essays* edited by Donald William Meinig. New York [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Melbye, David. *Landscape Allegory and Cinema: From Wilderness to Wasteland*. New York [NY]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Mercer, Benjamin. "Dust to Dust [Review of *Le Quattro Volte*]." *Reverse Shot [Museum of the Moving Image]* (March 25, 2011). Accessed April 21, 2016. <http://reverseshot.org/reviews/entry/961/le_quattro_volte>
- Metz, Christian. "The Cinema: Language or Language System?" In *Film Language*, 31-91. Translated by Michael Taylor. New York (NY): Oxford University Press, 1974. Originally published as 'Le cinéma: langue ou langage'. In: *Communications* (No. 4, 1964: 52-90).

- Minghelli, Giuliana. *Landscape and Memory in Post-Fascist Italian Film: Cinema Year Zeo*. Routledge Advances in Film Studies New York (NY) [etc.]: Routledge, 2013.
- Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge (Mass.) [etc.]: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Mulhall, Stephen. *On Film*. 2nd edition. Abingdon (UK): Routledge, 2008.
- Mullarkey, John. *Philosophy and the Moving Image: Refractions of Reality*. London (UK) [etc.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Electronic Meditations. Minneapolis (Mn) [etc.]: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Peters, John Durham. *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*. Chicago (Il) [etc.]: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Picart, Caroline Joan S. "Metaphysics in Gaston Bachelard's "Reverie"." *Human Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 1997): 59-73.
- Pomerance, Murray. *The Horse Who Drank the Sky: Film Experience Beyond Narrative and Theory*. New Brunswick (NJ) [etc.]: Rutgers University Press, 2008.
- Read, Rupert and Jerry Goodenough, eds. *Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*. Basingstoke (UK) [etc.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Rhodes, John David and Elena Gorfinkel, eds. *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*. Minneapolis (Mi): Minnesota University Press, 2011.
- Río, Elena del. *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*. Edinburgh (UK): University of Edinburgh Press, 2008.
- Rohdie, Sam. *Promised Lands: Cinema, Geography, Modernism*. London (UK): British Film Institute, 2001.
- Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "A Vigilance of Desire: Antonioni's *L'eclisse*." *L'Eclisse DVD Booklet*, Criterion Collection 2005.
- Rust, Stephen, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, eds. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*. Edited by Edward Branigan and Charles Wolfe, Afi Film Readers. New York (NY) [etc.]: Routledge, 2013.

- Safit, Ilan. "Nature Screened: An Eco-Film-Philosophy." *Environmental Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (2014a): 211-35.
- . "Posthuman Lessons of the Televisual: Science Fiction and the Praxis of Techno-Humanity." *Humanities and Technology Review* 33 (2014b): 1-33.
- Sesonke, Alexander. "Cinema Space." In *Explorations in Phenomenology: Papers of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* edited by David Carr and Edward S. Casey, vol 4, 399-409. The Hague (NL): Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1973.
- Shaviri, Steven. *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Ropley (UK): Zero Books, 2010.
- Shaw, Spencer. *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze*. Jefferson (NC) [etc.]: McFarland and Company, 2008.
- Singer, Irving. *Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film*. Cambridge (Ma) [etc.]: MIT Press, 2008.
- Sinnerbrink, Robert. "A Heideggerian Cinema? On Terrence Malick's *the Thin Red Line*." *Film-Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (2006): 26-37.
- . *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images*. London (UK) [etc.]: Continuum, 2011.
- . "Technē and Poēsis: On Heidegger and Film Theory." In *Technē/Technology: Researching Cinema and Media Technologies - Their Development, Use and Impact*, edited by Annie van den Oever, 67-82. Amsterdam (NL): Amsterdam University Press, 2014.
- . *Cinematic Ethics: Exploring Ethical Experience through Film*. Abingdon (UK) [etc.]: Routledge, 2016.
- Sitney, P. Adams. "Landscape in the Cinema: The Rhythms of the World and the Camera." In *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, edited by Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, 103-26. New York [NY]: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Smith, Murray and Thomas E. Wartenberg, eds. *Thinking through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*. Malden (MA): Blackwell, 2006.
- Smith, Murray. "Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity." In *Thinking through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*, edited by Murray Smith and Thomas Wartenberg, 33-42. Malden (Ma): Blackwell, 2006.

- Sobchack, Vivian. *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1992.
- . *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley (Ca) [etc.]: University of California Press, 2004.
- Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge (Ma) [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Spiegelberg, Herbert. *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historic Introduction*. 2 vols. 2nd edition. Phaenomenologica. The Hague (NL): Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1965.
- Stadler, Janet. *Pulling Focus: Intersubjective Experience, Narrative Film, and Ethics*. New York [NY]: Continuum, 2008.
- Starosielki, Nicole. "Beyond Fluidity: A Cultural History of Cinema under Water." In *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, edited by Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, 149-68. New York (NY) [etc.]: Routledge, 2013.
- Thompson, Kristin. "The Concept of Cinematic Excess." *Ciné-Tracts* 1, no. 1-2 (Summer 1977): 54-63.
- Urios-Aparisi, Eduardo. "Stormy Weather: An Intercultural Approach to the Water Metaphor in Cinema." In *Embodied Metaphors in Film, Television, and Video Games: Cognitive Approaches*, edited by Kathrin Fahlenbach, 67-81. New York (NY) [etc.]: Routledge, 2016.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. "On the Possibility of Cinematic Philosophy." In *New Takes in Film Philosophy*, edited by Havi Carel and Greg Tuck. Basingstroke (UK): Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Wartenberg, Thomas. *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy*. London (UK) [etc.]: Routledge, 2007.
- Waterfield, Robin. *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford (UK) [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 2000.

- Weik von Mossner, Alexa. "Facing the Day after Tomorrow: Filmed Disaster, Emotional Engagement, and Climate Risk Perception." In *American Environments: Climate, Cultures, Catastrophe*, edited by Christof and Sylvia Mayer Mauch, 97-115. Heidelberg: Winter, 2012.
- Weik von Mossner, Alexa, ed. *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film*, Environmental Humanities. Waterloo (On): Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014.
- Willoquet-Maricondi, Paula, ed. *Framing the World: Exploration in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville [etc.]: University of Virginia Press, 2010.
- Woessner, Martin. "What Is Heideggerian Cinema? Film, Philosophy and Cultural Mobility." *New German Critique* 38, no. 2 (2011): 129-57.
- Yacavone, Daniel. "Towards a Theory of Film Worlds." *Film-Philosophy* 12, 2 (September 2008): 83-108.
- . *Filmwords: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema*. New York [etc.]: Colombia University Press, 2014.

Filmography

13 Lakes. Directed by Benning, James. United States: James Benning, 2004.

An Inconvenient Truth. Directed by Gugenheim, David. United States: Paramount Classics, 2006.

Andrei Rublev. Directed by Tarkovsky, Andrei. USSR: Mosfilm, 1966.

Avventura, L'. Directed by Antonioni, Michelangelo. Italy: Cino del Luca, 1960.

Babel. Directed by Iñárritu, Alejandro González. United States, Mexico and France: Paramount Vantage, 2006.

Day after Tomorrow, The. Directed by Emmerich, Roland. United States: 20th Century Fox, 2004.

Days of Heaven. Directed by Malick, Terrence. Paramount Pictures, 1978.

Eclisse, L'. Directed by Antonioni, Michelangelo. Italy: Cineriz, 1962.

Gone with the Wind. Directed by Flemming, Victor, George Cukor, and Sam Wood. United States: Loew's Inc., 1939.

Gravity. Directed by Cuarón, Alfonso. United Kingdom and United States: Warner Bros., 2013.

Interstellar. Directed by Nolan, Christopher. United States: Paramount Pictures, 2014.

Lawrence of Arabia. Directed by Lean, David. Columbia Pictures: United Kingdom and United States, 1962.

Life of Pi. Directed by Lee, Ang. United States: 20th Century Fox, 2012.

Lodger: A Story of the London Fog, The. Directed by Hitchcock, Alfred. Woolf & Freedman Film Service: United Kingdom, 1927.

Magnolia. Directed by Anderson, Paul Thomas. United States: New Line Cinema, 1999.

Martian, The. Directed by Scott, Ridley. United States: 20th Century Fox, 2015.

Matrix, The. Directed by Wachowski, Andy and Larry Wachowski. Australia and United States: Warner Bros., 1999.

Melancholia. Directed by von Trier, Lars. Nordisk Film Distribution: Denmark, Sweden, France, Italy and Germany, 2011.

Mépris, Le. Directed by Godard, Jean-Luc. France: Les Films Concordia, 1963.

New World, The. Directed by Malick, Terrence. United States: New Line Cinema, 2005.

Notte, La. Directed by Antonioni, Michelangelo. Italy and France: Dino de Laurentiis Distribuzione, 1961.

Offret. [aka *Sacrifice*] Directed by Tarkovsky, Andrei. Sweden, United Kingdom and France: Svenska Filminstitutet, Argos Films, Film Four International, 1986.

Once Upon a Time in Anatolia. Directed by Ceylan, Nuri Bilge. Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina: The Cinema Guild, 2011.

Once Upon a Time in the West. Directed by Leone, Sergio. Italy, Spain and Mexico: Paramount Pictures, 1969.

Quattro Volte, Le. Directed by Frammartino, Michelangelo. Italy, Germany and Switzerland: Cinecittà Luce, 2010.

Repas De Bébé, Le [aka *Feeding the Baby*]. Directed by Lumière, Louis. Lumière: France, 1895.

Searchers, The. Directed by Ford, John. United States: Warner Bros., 1956.

Sherlock Jr. Directed by Keaton, Buster. United States: Metro-Goldwyn Productions, 1924.

Solaris. Directed by Tarkovsky, Andrei. USSR: Mosfilm, 1972.

There Will Be Blood. Directed by Anderson, Paul Thomas. United States: Paramount Vantage, 2007.

Thx 1138. Directed by Lucas, George. United States: Warner Bros., 1971.

Tree of Life, The. Directed by Malick, Terrence. United States: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2011.