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FILM AND THEORIES OF INTERPERSONAL UNDERSTANDING

Abstract

The paper discusses the issue of interpersonal understanding by comparing ordinary and cinematographic experience. Recent theories of interpersonal understanding turn out to be either inconclusive or insufficient to account for the heterogeneous ways in which we get mental and emotional states of other persons. The paper advances a view of the film medium by drawing on Stanley Cavell, which is reinforced by Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's convergent accounts of cinematographic perception. Against this background, interpersonal understanding turns out to be permeated by the expressivity of human appearance – something easily overlooked by the mentioned theories, which is yet brought forward most perspicuously by cinema.

Keywords: interpersonal understanding, human appearance, expressivity, cinematographic experience, Cavell, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty

The notion of interpersonal understanding has been central in the recent development of theories of cognition. The notion is meant to cover the ways in which one gets other persons' mental or emotional states (from intentions to beliefs, from feelings to desires). The mainstream theories of cognition address the issue of interpersonal understanding mostly in the case of ordinary experience. Their question is thus how one understands the mental or emotional states of one's fellows in concrete situations: how I get that the person with whom I am sharing the dinner intends to reach for a glass of wine; how I get that another person is joyous or angry. Theorists of cognition often invoke the works of Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty as valuable resources in the development of their approaches.[1]

The present paper aims at broadening the investigatory field of interpersonal understanding by addressing a comparative case study: cinematographic experience. In cinema, the question persists: How does a spectator get the fear of a film protagonist? How do I empathise or sympathise with the protagonist? Both Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty

address this question in the case of cinematographic experience as well. But their insights thereof are virtually unknown to theorists of cognition, and little explored even by scholars of the two philosophers.[2]

Addressing the issue of interpersonal understanding in both the ordinary and the cinematographic case will turn out to be illuminating in at least two ways. On the one hand, this approach can test some underlying assumptions of theories of cognition. On the other hand, it can shed light on the medium of cinema, and specifically on the ways in which a film spectator engages with a film protagonist. Overall, this paper explores the ways in which cinema can be informative and reformative for accounts of interpersonal understanding more generally.

The itinerary will be as follows. The *first section* will unveil some epistemological assumptions of some theories of cognition that address interpersonal understanding. At the same time, those assumptions will be put into an incipient dialogue with cinema, particularly to its genres. This will enable the view that those theories of cognition rather respond to specific cases of interpersonal understanding, and that they fall short from doing justice to other cases. But one may regard the present approach as an attempt to challenge – by way of fiction – models of interpersonal understanding in the real world. So the *second section* will resort to an account of cinema by focusing on its medium, by drawing on Stanley Cavell's insistence that film is not merely like reality, but is made with bits and pieces of reality, including real people. Thus conceived of, film brings forward certain aspects of the human appearance which theories of cognition may easily underestimate or overlook when addressing the issue of interpersonal understanding. The *third section* will suggest that Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty anticipate and reinforce a Cavellian conception of the cinematographic medium. Against that background, it will turn out that among the crucial aspects of interpersonal understanding are the expressivity of the voice and of the face (drawing on Wittgenstein) and the style of human conduct (drawing on Merleau-Ponty).[3]

1. Theories of Cognition and Genres of Film

Two recent, influential, and mutually competing theories of cognition are the so-called "theory-theory" and "simulation theory". Each of them is informed by diverse experimental work. Here, however, I do not aim at discussing their empirical support, but rather their epistemological

assumptions when it comes to their addressing the issue of interpersonal understanding. A further recent and equally influential paradigm, meant to challenge the aforementioned theories, is the so-called "4E-cognition": cognition as embodied, embedded, enactive and extended. A closer focus on these models is in order.

The focus I propose is somewhat unusual. The debate on interpersonal understanding has been long carried out in the field of ordinary experience. Whereas I want to look at these theories through the lens of cinema, that is, by first appealing to genres of film. Such an approach presents those theories in a new light, namely, as responding to specific instances of interpersonal understanding. In doing so, theorists turn out to easily overlook the specificity of the instances informing their models. And thus, they may easily take, as it were, the exception for the rule. In their turn, film genres can also be understood as addressing specific instances of interpersonal understanding and misunderstanding. However, by contrast to theories, film genres acknowledge the specificity of those instances. Indeed, they give significance to exceptionality.

Theory-theory and the cinema of suspicion

The model of theory-theory approaches the issue of interpersonal understanding as a primarily intellectual or rational relation between persons. The model is equally informed by cognitive and developmental psychology, thus aiming at explaining also the ways in which children evolve in getting the mental and emotional states of the grownups around them. This is not merely a scientific model, but further, one which addresses interpersonal relations in ordinary experience *as if* they were scientific practices. Indeed, proponents of theory-theory regard not only grownups but already children as a sort of scientists who develop various paradigms regarding the minds of others. Thus, children and grownups would revise those paradigms throughout their lives pretty much in the way in which scientific revolutions refine or replace older insights with new ones. The basic assumption is that each of us entertains a sort of theory about the mental and emotional states of other persons. A theory informed by previous interactions with others, a theory which can be revised in light of novel interactions.[4]

Now, theory-theory seems to mould interpersonal understanding in the shape of the instance of interpersonal suspicion. That is the instance of my scrutinizing the other and bargaining with myself regarding, for

example, the clues of fear given by his or her behaviour. As if the last word regarding others' mental and emotional states does not really belong to them, but to me. So theory-theory at work would render us not that much as everyday scientists, but detectives in restless action. This manner of relating to one another is consecrated by the masters of suspicion in the cinema. Alfred Hitchcock may immediately come to one's mind, with his crime and detective stories emblematic for the English tradition. Or his French rival, Henri-Georges Clouzot, who explores suspicion not only as the stance of the professional investigator, but also as permeating relations of friendship and marriage.[5]

One lesson to be drawn regarding suspicion from its masters in the cinema is that it feeds not so much interpersonal understanding, as interpersonal suspense. Against this background, if theory-theory indeed accounted for our basic relation to others, it would mean we rarely really understand one another. I could merely suspect that my friend is angry or afraid, but would rarely be quite sure of it. The others could merely give me clues of their feelings and intentions, and I would constantly take those clues as potentially misleading. I would charge the others with the endless possibilities open by my own inferences. So I would end up – in the final analysis of theory-theory – not with understanding the other, but with understanding too much. Perhaps understanding to much of myself, if I further inquired into why I think what I think about the other.

Simulation theory and romantic drama

The competing model of theory-theory is the one of simulation theory. The latter is supposed to counteract the former's alleged over-estimation of intellect and reasoning in interpersonal understanding. Simulation theory is thus meant to accommodate more adequately our understanding of mental states (such as beliefs), and also of emotional states (such as desires). The underlying assumption of this model is that interpersonal understanding involves a form of mutual attunement. That is, in order for me to get my fellow's fear, I need to some extent to feel it as well. I need not think or reason that I need to feel so, but rather my feeling is supposed to be induced by my simply perceiving the other feeling thus and so. The term "simulation" is thus somewhat misleading insofar as it suggests some active work on my part, some attempt to put myself in the shoes of the other. At the same time, the terms also gives in an assumption that some

kind of affective harmony is miraculously established between persons, insofar as they get one another's mental and emotional states.[6]

The stumbling block of simulation theory, I suggest, is the instance of acknowledged, and yet unshared, love. This instance is brought forward most perspicuously by the film genre of romantic drama. From the earliest Hollywood variations on the theme, to the most intricate ones in the cinema of Ingmar Bergman: the dramatic dimension of the romantic drama is precisely that one can well enough get the love of the other without sharing it. A lesson to be drawn from this genre may be the following: if there is something miraculous about feeling love or in love, one's understanding that someone feels so need not wait for the miracle of one's feeling the same.

Perhaps a further, valuable insight that simulation theory could draw from the film genre of romantic drama is that emotional attunement between persons is neither a given, nor an easily achieved, state. And that we need not be emotional mirrors of one another in order to understand emotional states of other persons.

The analogy argument and films with children

The common conceptual root of theory-theory and simulation theory is the so-called "argument from analogy". It was famously articulated by John Stuart Mill and revived in the 20th century by Bertrand Russell.[7] In its initial form, the argument is purely conceptual or logical, thus not a theory informed by empirical investigation. The crux of this line of thought is the possibility that a symmetry be established between the one entertaining a mental or emotional state and the one understanding it. Accordingly, I understand the other's mental state (e.g. anger), by drawing on my own mental state in similar situations. I perceive the other frowning, or even smashing things to pieces. I appeal to such reactions I may have had in the past and to the circumstances in which I had them. I identify a mental or emotional state which accompanied those reactions. And I ascribe that state to the other on the basis of his or her reactions I now witness. The underlying assumption of the argument – which is inherited by both theory-theory and simulation theory – is the robust commensurability of experiences entertained by different persons. Indeed, both that argument and those theories rely on the thought that each and every individual goes, sooner or later, through a series of archetypal circumstances. And that it is in virtue of each of us having responded similarly (mentally and

emotionally) to similar circumstances that we come to understand those states in the first place.

What this underlying assumption does not easily accommodate is precisely the eventuality that our past experiences may be not only dissimilar, but even incompatible. In that respect one challenge for the argument from analogy is intergenerational communication. This instance and its difficulties are emblematically addressed by film makers who employ children as actors. That can be seen most clearly in Andrei Tarkovsky's early films (e.g. *The Steamroller and the Violin* from 1961 or *Ivan's Childhood* from 1962). Such movies give significance to the asymmetry of experience between children and grownups. Indeed, Tarkovsky himself often invokes a trigger of his film making to be the difficulty of passing experience from one generation to another. The difficulty is addressed also by a large part of the filmography of Abbas Kiarostami (esp. his early educational films and his later *Where is the Friend's Home* from 1990). One source of the power of these films is that they recognize and elaborate upon the obstacles towards interpersonal understanding presented by experiential asymmetries between individuals. Our difficulty in getting the children's anger at a world in war. Or their difficulties in getting the anger of grownups, the anger exhibited in situations when children seem to be most well-intended.

4E cognition and cinematographic perception

Like the analogy argument they inherit, theory-theory and simulation theory thus account for interpersonal understanding in a peculiar way. These models turn out to be informed by particular instances of our getting other persons' mental or emotional states and to fall short from doing justice to other instances. Through its genres, cinema in its turn addresses such instances. But it shows *why* and it explores *how* these instances so often present us with difficulties in getting the other's intentions and beliefs, or feelings and desires.

The recent paradigm of 4E cognition emerged as an alternative to the previous models of interpersonal understanding. By contrast to those models, the new paradigm is meant to be holistic, insofar as it invokes a series of factors taken to be equally relevant to our understanding of each other in ordinary life. One is *embodiment*: not just the fact that we all have a body, but that bodily processes accompany and sustain cognitive processes. The second is *embeddedness*: the fact that instances

of interpersonal understanding are situated in the environments and situations we share. The third is *enaction*: among others, the fact that humans understand each other's mental states by engaging in collective actions, be they more obviously active (like protesting) or less so (like sharing a dinner). The fourth is *extension:* facts such as the one that those actions have a more or less sedimented history, being practices we have learned from one another.[8]

It was recently suggested that the 4E paradigm can aptly be applied to cinema, in an attempt to account not for its genres, but already for cinematographic perception. That is, to account for the ways in which a film spectator gets mental and emotional states of film protagonists.[9] However, there are some challenges for such an attempt.

Prima facie, the factors for interpersonal understanding invoked by 4E cognition seem to either not hold, or at least to call for revision and refinement, in the study case of film. Take environmental embeddedness, for instance. On the one hand, the film spectator and the film protagonist cannot be said to share the same environment. At least not in the sense in which members of the audience can be said to share the environment of the cinema house or any other situation where a screening takes place. On the other hand, that the film spectator does get, for instance, the anger or the joy of the protagonist is the very fact established and reinforced by virtually each and every screening.

Or take the factor of collective action. Let us focus on the case of a dangerous situation presented in the cinema. The film protagonist may entertain fear in facing the dangerous situation and take action, for instance by fleeing or fighting back. Now, the film spectator can well get the fear of the protagonist, and even feel it to a greater or lesser extent. But fleeing or fighting back is something that film spectators seldom do. That may be an exceptional case encountered with an audience unfamiliar with movies. Or the exceptional case of some horror films. Generally, however, film spectators get the mental or emotional states of film protagonists without engaging in the latters' actions.

It seems that, in order to get a better grip on our ways of understanding film protagonists, a closer and more fine-grained look at cinema is in order. That is, a focus not merely on the narratives and genres of film, but rather on their medium or media. To this purpose, some valuable insights are made available by Stanley Cavell, an author who shares an equal interest in modalities of interpersonal understanding and in the manners in which cinema may be informative in this respect.

2. The cinematographic medium and the ordinary world

Cavell's book *The World Viewed: Reflections on Ontology of Film*, published first in 1971 and then with an extended addendum in 1979, is a landmark in the philosophy of film. On the one hand, Cavell reconsiders influential accounts of the medium of cinema available to that date. On the other hand, he opens new avenues for investigation, which since then have been developed by various philosophers and theorists of film.

His conception of the medium of film draws on two major resources. According to the art historian Erwin Panofski, "[t]he medium of the movies is physical reality as such."[10] The appeal to reality is at its highest in the film theory of André Bazin: "Cinema is committed to communicate only by way of what is real".[11]

This emphasis on reality seems apt, or rather a move in the right direction. But one may then wonder: How are we to account for the obvious fact that, after all, one cannot, for instance, shake hands with film protagonists? That irrespective of one's reactions to them, they do not react to one's reactions? In light of such facts, the previous inquiries have to be reconsidered. If the medium of movies is reality and if cinema communicates by way of what is real, then the question remains: What happens to reality when projected and screened?

The medium as photographic and its mortal actors

To the above question, Cavell suggests an answer by accounting for the film medium as photographic. That may be understood in at least two ways.

A first way, which I suggest to be misleading, is inspired by the notion of frame-rate in cinema. Traditionally: to each second of film, there correspond 24 frames. On this account, one may say that film has always been made with photographs, even in the case of early movies (some of which had a smaller frame rate, like 16), or the more recent ones (some of which have a higher frame rate, like 60). But this understanding of the medium does not lead very far, for it merely says something about the technology of cinema, or about its mechanics. It is not much informative of the specificity of a medium, since it is reminiscent of the somewhat tautological observations that painting is made with paint, music with sound, literature with words and so on.

A better way to understand the film medium as photographic following Cavell, I suggest, is to give significance to the fact that movies are generally

made with real people. A significant fact about real people is that they are mortal and that they age.[12] Now, a film captures an actor at what may be said to be an absolute age. And the films we see may get old, but irrespective of how many times we see them, it is a fact that the actors in them do not get older; indeed, they do not change at all. But it is also a fact that one cannot make endless films with an actor at the same age. Then one way to understand the medium of film as photographic is to account for it as a view into the ages of actors parading on the screen. Simply put, we may witness, for instance, Max von Sydow getting old through the films in which he appears (and may compare, for example, *The Seventh's Seal* directed by Bergman in 1957 with *Private Confessions* directed by Ullmann in 1996).

The automatism of film

The above conception of the medium of film as photographic suggests a more general sense in which film does not overshadow the world, but is rather of the world, it is made with bits and pieces of the world. It is the sense in which, once the camera is faced either with people or objects, it cannot but shoot. That the camera cannot do otherwise is another way of saying, with Cavell, that the camera "tells no lies […] not because it is perfectly honest but because it is perfectly dumb".[13]

Of course, there is a long tradition accounting for this aspect of the camera. Perhaps the most well-known and discussed account is the one of Walter Benjamin in terms of "mechanical reproduction".[14] And there is an equally long tradition counteracting this aspect, by emphasizing what may be called the subjectivity or the creativity of the ones involved in the production of still and moving pictures. In this respect, we may just think of the whole choreography of choosing the environment, setting up the camera, framing, composing, not to speak – especially in fiction cinema – of script-writing, stage setting, costumes, make-up and so on.

However, I take Cavell to suggest that the idea of the automatism of film does not dismiss the above dimensions of subjectivity or creativity. The idea rather captures what we may call a "mechanical residue" in film making. That no matter which and how many choices are made, there remains the sense in which the camera makes no choice. It is, as it were, put face to face with the real, irrespective of whether the real is raw reality or staged reality. The camera simply ingests the world.[15]

And then, whatever the camera ingests, that is automatically projected on the screen. Which again, does not dismiss the fact of montage. In montage, fragments of reality may be reorganized and transformed. This is one way in which film achieves its own temporality, or sequence of events, which may not go parallel to that of ordinary events. That is the case not only in historical films, but in any film insofar as the time of its narrative does not collapse in the time of the cinema house, or the time that can be checked on the watch by each member of the audience.

In the final analysis, that which remains, after the intervention of the human hand in all these ways, are bits and pieces of reality – people and objects projected on the screen. We may call this a "residual reality".

Senses of the notion of "frame"

A further point I wish to articulate in the attempt to substantiate the view that film does not overshadow the world, but is rather *of* the world, concerns the notion of "frame". I already mentioned the frame as the technological basis of film, the image in a sequence projected (either analogically or digitally). This is obviously distinct from the frame of the screen, namely, the boundaries of the surface upon which film is projected (again, either analogically or digitally). A third sense of the notion at issue, unveiled by Cavell, is that of the "phenomenological frame".[16] That concerns the boundaries of view allowed into the happenings of film, and it is best understood by contrast with painting.

The phenomenological frame of painting is coextensive with its physical frame. It does not make much sense to ask: What goes on beyond the boundaries of the content we are presented by way of painting.[17] In film, however, it does make sense to ask what is left out by the present shot on the screen, or what goes on beyond and besides it. Simply put, it is not for nothing that we sometimes have the tendency to change viewpoints, as if to see better what the shot seems to leave out. Or that we remain aware of the development of the narrative in the off-screen. In this sense, film spans beyond the boundaries of the screen.

And this gives further weight to the conception of film as an ingestion of reality. By doing so, film functions by way of what it does show, and also by way of what it does not. By way of what it leaves out from a particular shot.

3. The Expressivity of Human Appearance

The above account of the medium of film provides a suitable framework for addressing cinema as a study case of interpersonal understanding. According to a naïve conception of the cinematographic medium, movies belong rather with fiction than with ordinary perception. Accordingly, one may say that they construct a fictional reality whose experience bears very little on the way in which we get mental and emotional states of people in everyday life. A closer attendance to the medium of film, however, unveils a robust kinship between cinematographic experience and ordinary perception. The medium understood as photographic – in terms of automatism, as providing views into the aging of actors, and as having a phenomenological frame which may wax and wane – informs a conception of cinema as a sort of laboratory for studying interpersonal understanding.

In short, cinematographic experience turns out to be more like everyday experience than one may think at first sight. In this light, the challenges for the 4E model of interpersonal understanding, which the first section above started to articulate, are all the more pressing. If the model is understood as putting forward necessary and sufficient conditions for getting the mental and emotional states of other persons, then it is hard to see how it can accommodate the study case of cinematographic experience. Indeed, if sharing an environment is a necessary factor for my getting the anger or the joy of the other, then how come I can well get the anger or the joy of a film protagonist, given that I am not – strictly speaking – situated in the environment of the film narrative? And further, if collective action is another necessary factor for my getting the fear of the other, then how come I can well enough get the fear entertained by a film protagonist without engaging in his or her actions?

Perhaps the difficulty of 4E cognition, just as that of the models it counteracts (theory-theory and simulation-theory) in doing justice to interpersonal understanding is co-dependant with the conception of these models as general theories. That is, theories meant to be applicable in each and every case, without exception. And perhaps, once the field of investigation of interpersonal understanding is extended so as to encompass the study case of cinematographic experience, a more flexible approach is in order.

This section proposes such an approach by drawing on Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of cinema. Wittgenstein is known for his

appeal to ordinary life in order to dissolve philosophical problems that often arise due to over-theorizing. In his turn, Merleau-Ponty is known for his appeal to concrete situations in an attempt to radicalize the existential orientation of philosophy, so as to be able to do justice to the most common instances of everyday life. It is little known, however, that they share an interest in cinematographic experience. And further – which is a further point that the present section advances – that their accounts of cinematographic experience are significantly convergent.[18]

On the one hand, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty reinforce Cavell's notion of the kinship between film and world. On the other hand, they highlight some aspects of interpersonal understanding which 4E cognition may easily underestimate. That is, aspects which cinema brings forward most perspicuously, one may argue. These aspects point out the meaningfulness of the human appearance and of its manifestations. In this respect, Wittgenstein highlights the expressivity of the face and of the voice, and Merleau-Ponty underlies what he calls the style of human conduct.

Wittgenstein on the face and the voice

How does Wittgenstein fit into the picture? He was an enthusiast of cinema. Yet, perhaps unexpectedly for a philosopher, the movies he praised most were American westerns and Fred Astaire musicals. According to his friends, he disliked English and Continental films on reason that in them, the "actors looked dressed-up, unnatural, unconvincing, obviously play-acting"; and the maker "was always intruding himself as if to say 'Look how clever I am'".[19] But Wittgenstein himself suggests in a manuscript from 1947 that these dislikes are not pure matters of taste. That they were rather motivated by a recognition of some films lacking a certain potential. He writes: "The American dumb and naive film can in all its dumbness and *through* it instruct. The idiotic, not naive, affected English film cannot instruct. I have often drawn a lesson from a dumb American film."[20]

The suggestion is, I take it, that straightforward film can teach something about the cinematographic medium and also about interpersonal understanding in the ordinary world. In fact, there are numerous remarks in Wittgenstein's manuscripts between early 1930s and late 1950s where he appeals to photography and cinema, in an attempt to make more palpable various aspects of the expressivity of the human appearance.

Many of these remarks are still unpublished and little known. I will thus introduce and discuss some of them.[21]

One lesson to be drawn from film, and particularly from its genre of tragedy (or what we may call "drama") is the following:

> When *I* am gripped by a tragedy (in cinema e.g.), then I always say to myself: no, I would not do it! or: no, it should not be like that. I want to *console* [*trösten*] the protagonist & all the others.[22]

This remark is elucidatory at least in three ways. Firstly, it acts as a reminder that interpersonal understanding is not only about instances like getting the other's joy. Whereas the theories of cognition discussed above seem to pay attention mostly to cases when all is supposed to be well among us.[23] But instances of getting other people's sorrow or sadness need to be equally accommodated. In this respect, cinema may be found to be closer than theories to actual life. Films indeed explore the ups and downs and the vicissitudes of everyday experience without giving overall precedence to some cases over others. And when they indeed to it, they acknowledge the exceptionality of the cases they explore by admitting that the point of view is emblematic for a specific film genre.

Secondly, Wittgenstein's remark brings again into focus the factor of collective action invoked by 4E cognition in the attempt to explain interpersonal understanding. If theorists are prone to focus primarily on happy cases of interpersonal understanding, that sheds some light on their tendency to take one's readiness to act as the other does as crucial in one's understanding the other's mental or emotional states. However, the appeal to cinematographic tragedy is particularly apt in showing that a readiness to engage in the other's actions need not always be the case. Indeed, Wittgenstein suggests that one need not even inhibit a readiness to act as the other person does. On the contrary, my understanding of the other's sorrow may go hand in hand with my acknowledgment that the other should not act as he or she does. That the action already took a wrong track. This is an acknowledgment that things should be or should have been otherwise.

Thirdly, in light of Wittgenstein's remark, this asymmetry – between getting the other's sorrow, while not endorsing the actions which led to it – turns out to be even more far-reaching. It is that which leaves room for my readiness to console the other, to empathise or to sympathise. But

also to possibly regard the other as responsible to a certain extent for his or her mental or emotional state.

The fact that empathy or sympathy need not involve collective action is shown even more clearly by the way we respond to subjects of photography. There we would not be so much inclined to think that we understand their mental or emotional states only insofar as we endorsed or took part in their actions. The case of photography is indeed significant, as it switches the focus from action to the expression of the human appearance. In this respect, Wittgenstein points out that

> one has no difficulty to see in the grey and white of the photograph the human face. – And what does this mean? Now, we watch e.g. a film and follow all the happenings with concern [*Anteilnahme*]; as if we had real people in front of us.[24]

This remark adds a further specification to the photographic medium of film. The medium can be said to be transparent not only in that it allows the ordinary world to be viewed by way of projection. It also brings forward what is perhaps most human about humans, namely, the face. By bracketing action, or freezing it at a certain moment in its unfolding, photography gives significance to the ways in which our response to the face is really a response to its expressions. It is not only that getting the state of mind of the other mostly revolves around attending to the face. It is also that our way of inquiring into that state of mind is by paying particular attention to some key elements of the face, such as the eyes:

> I see a photograph in front of me, the attendants of a dinner. I see thus a square of white, black, grey flecks. I observe it, however, in a very peculiar way, in that I let my gaze ramble from a face to another & not e.g. from a *shoulder* to another. I look the faces mostly in the *eyes* & not primarily at the chin or the ears.[25]

Wittgenstein alludes here to two ways in which one can approach a photograph, particularly a black and white, or so-called greyscale photograph. One way is to focus primarily on its material basis, to the physical properties of the print itself. On this account, the photograph is nothing but a square surface containing flecks of various degrees of grey. The other way to approach the photograph – which is arguably the most common one in ordinary life – is by attending to its subject matter. The

two approaches can also be exemplified in the case of written language. The first one would correspond to starring at strings of signs on a surface, while the second one would correspond to attending to the meaning or the sense of those signs, to the very subject matter of discourse.

Now, these two modalities of approaching a sample of photography or of written language, inform two modalities of approaching the human appearance in ordinary life. One modality would be a piecemeal and somewhat theoretical focus on various elements of the human body, such as the shoulders, the chin, the ears. Such a focus would be more like a scrutiny of the human body in the attempt to identify whether and to what extent various elements of it can convey something of the so-called inner life of a person. The other modality – which is arguably the most common in ordinary life – is the attendance to the human body as an expressive whole, despite its having some more expressive regions (such as the eyes) and some less expressive ones (such as the ears).

The latter modality is clearly the common one not only in responding to persons in photographs. In ordinary life, it would be somewhat inadequate if one tried to understand the other while starring primarily at their shoulders or perhaps the knees. In fact, we do not have to search for what is most expressive in each and every person, but attention turns spontaneously to particular aspects. And we do that not merely by way of sight, but also by way of listening. Which brings us back to cinema. Wittgenstein writes at one point:

> In cinema the sound of speech seems to come from the mouth of the figure on the screen.
>
> What does this experience consist in? For instance, in that we (involuntarily [*unwillkürlich*]) rivet our glance to a determined place – the apparent source of the sound – when we hear a sound. And nobody glances in cinema there where the microphone is mounted.[26]

It is worth noting that sound film is not merely a silent film to which speech, and music, and even noise is added. Image and sound do not merely accompany each other. They rather transform one another in interaction – which is something explored for long by both film makers and film theorists.

What is equally noteworthy is that vision and hearing in their turn inform each other spontaneously. The moment we hear the voice, we ascribe it to the mouth, the face, or the protagonist we see. And the moment

we see a mouth or the protagonist uttering something, we spontaneously perceive it as the source of the speech we hear.

The question raised by this double point – about image and sound, mouth and voice – is how come one can relate to particular visual and aural signs as meaningful expressions of an actual human being. It is as if one reconstructs an interlocutor on the basis of scarce traces of an inner life of the latter. As if a whole of an inner life can be manifested in individual parts visually and aurally perceived.

This parallel, between the face and the voice on the one hand, and between image and sound on the other hand, is developed further by Merleau-Ponty. Like Wittgenstein, he too confronts cinematographic experience and ordinary practices in an attempt to shed light on both of them.

Merleau-Ponty on styles of persons

Merleau-Ponty articulates a philosophical interest in film in mid 1940s. The text at issue has 4 versions, two of which – short and very similar to each other – were published in 1945 under the title "Cinéma et psychologie", once in *l'Écran français* and once in *Pages françaises*. The other two versions – very similar to each other as well, but expanded from the previous ones – were published under the title "Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie", once in 1947 in *Les Temps Modernes* and once in 1948 in Merleau-Ponty's volume *Sens et non-sens*.[27]

One constant idea in all versions is that cinema is a privileged medium (something like a laboratory) in studying the expressivity of the human appearance. Merleau-Ponty underlines some points of convergence between approaches in cinema around the time of his article, the existential orientation of philosophy – of which he is an advocate – and what he calls the new psychology, or the Gestalt tradition which he finds to reinforce that orientation.

More exactly, cinema would agree with other forms of discourse insofar as they all undergo a turn, which Merleau-Ponty regards as emblematically modern. That turn is a move away from the introspective approach, namely, the attempt to account for our ways of being in the world from the vantage point of a so-called "inner life". In Gestalt psychology, which is one of Merleau-Ponty's main resources, he observes that one had ceased

> to describe anger and jealousy as states of the soul [*états d'âme*] […]. The psychologists of today consider emotion as a conduct [*conduite*], whereof it is about finding the sense or the *raison d'être*.[28]

Now, the novelist from anytime can choose to account for anger or jealousy, as it were, "from within", by *saying* what protagonists feel or how they approach the world. In their turn, film makers tried to *show* that but, maintains Merleau-Ponty, with less success.

Accordingly, in *Premier de cordée* (dir. Louis Daquin, 1943), we would feel much more vividly the vertigo when we were shown the protagonist hanging from the rock and entertaining confused gestures, and not so much when we were shown the view ascribed to him: a landscape that topples and gets blurred. That is, the impression would be stronger when film presented the protagonist as he or she would present themselves to us in the ordinary world, and less so when film tried to put us in the shoes of the other. In *L'Espoir* (co-dir. André Malraux, 1939), we would perceive most obviously that the aviator sees badly when he were shown clumsy and fallible once he took off the plane, but not so much when we were shown, as if from his view point, a veiled landscape. Again, as if film could approximate the view of the aviator, and allow us to glance through his eyes. In *Falbalas* (dir. Jacques Becker, 1944), the delirium of Clarence would be more moving when it appeared on gazes and gestures, but not so much when we were shown that Clarence would see a mannequin that became a woman.

One could object that these statements are mere value judgments, or matters of taste. But Merleau-Ponty concludes the first two versions of his text by emphasizing:

> This totally 'objective' method furthermore goes back to a tradition. There are the grand classical works which approach man from the exterior as do at once cinema, modern psychology and the American novel. […] If cinema, psychology and literature agree in expressing man from the exterior [*l'homme de l'extérieur*], it is not a caprice of fashion there, it is an exigency of the human condition which classical art itself does not ignore.[29]

In the revised two versions of his text, Merleau-Ponty maintains his point about the adequacy of this externalist approach. He further finds it the ground of the agreement of cinema – this time not with classical art – but with the philosophical approach he himself is a an advocate of:

> If therefore philosophy and cinema agree, if reflection and technical work [*la réflexion et le travail technique*] lead to the same sense, it is because the philosopher and the film maker have in common a certain manner / of taking position / [being], a certain view / in face / of the world, which is that / of our / [of a] generation.[30]

After having been found to inherit and develop an older tradition, cinema is now found to agree with, and be expressive of, the manner of being in the world and of viewing the world pertaining to a new generation. The generation at issue is one that finds resources for an existentialist philosophy in the Gestalt psychology contemporary with it and which is qualified as modern.[31]

The account so far makes more palpable one of the central points of Merleau-Ponty, which is:

> The 'inner' life is rendered the more strongly, the more resolutely it is treated as a conduct and the more it appears in the world itself to which, from close or from far, it always relates.[32]

The common denominator of all versions of Merleau-Ponty's text is that we understand less of anger and joy and so on if we assume they are private states of mind, which are hidden from the other. Variations of this assumption are indeed embraced by theory-theory and simulation theory. Because theory-theory conceives of mental states as somewhat private, it faces the difficulty of accounting for the ways in which that which is hidden is somewhat recognized and acknowledged between persons. Indeed, theory-theory tries to show how one can get the private mental states of the other, while unveiling it by of theoretical knowledge. But simulation theory also shares the assumption of the hidden. It only tries to articulate an account of how that which is hidden may still be communicated by way of an interpersonal attunement.

The opposition of 4E cognition to both theory-theory and simulation theory parallels the opposition of Merleau-Ponty to the introspective approach in classical psychology. In other words, it is now clearer why Merleau-Ponty is often invoked by 4E theorists as an anticipator of their approach. Unlike 4E theorists, however, Merleau-Ponty does not resort to a series of explanatory factors of interpersonal understanding. His approach is in this respect more flexible in that it aims at articulating how, in particular situations, particular aspects of human appearance may

sustain interpersonal understanding, even if some alleged explanatory factors are not satisfied.

Again, Merleau-Ponty emphasises that cinema and philosophy agree insofar as they approach consciousness, not as hidden, but as ejected into the world. That is to say, anger, joy, jealousy approached not as private mental states, but already on the face, in the voice, in the manner of conduct of the other. Above we saw Wittgenstein highlighting the unity of these modalities of expression in the cinema: namely, the unity between the face or mouth on the screen and the voice from the speaker. Merleau-Ponty goes further in accounting for this unity as not being specific to the film experience. It is rather in virtue of it that we get the other's intentions and feelings in the ordinary world.

In order to clarify this, Merleau-Ponty draws on the following experiment with multiple media: subjects are given randomly ordered photographs of faces, samples of handwriting, and recordings of various voices. It turns out that in the majority of cases, the subjects are able to correctly attribute a face, a silhouette, a type of handwriting, and a voice – to the right person.[33]

This means that without attending to the so-called inner life of a particular person, one recognizes in him or her certain manners of manifesting that life. Merleau-Ponty conceives of the unity of these manners in terms of the "style of a person". Now, this has little to do with fashion, with the way someone dresses up or arranges his or her hair. The style of a person rather consists in the ways in which someone inhabits the so-called external world, and the ways in which he or she articulates the so-called inner world.

The above experiment presents style as *person-specific*. That is, a face, a voice, a silhouette and so on, make up a significant whole which can be ascribed to someone, precisely because they are recognizable as belonging to a particular person. Simply put, these aspects amount to what we ordinarily call someone's own way of being, of talking, of walking. But the above experiment also presents style as *interpersonally-commensurable*. The subjects of the experiment reconstruct the puzzle with multiple media rightly in most cases, precisely because they perceive each sample as meaningful. Meaningful, namely, as already revealing something of the other person.

Moreover, it is highly significant that the experiment also presents the style of a person as rightly recognized and ascribed by others without them being given any further clue of the action that the person may be

performing. Or any clue of the environment in which the visual, audio, or textual samples may have been taken.

So just like Wittgenstein's call to attend to the expression of the face and of the voice, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the style of a person is meant to exhibit human appearance as already meaningful, as already revealing intentions and feelings. Neither of them would deny that further factors – such as particular actions or the particular environment in which those actions are unfolded – may further specify those intentions and feelings. But both of them would account for such further factors as already meaningful in their turn. Which is why the presence of some of them can make up for the absence of some others in interpersonal understanding.

The flexibility of Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's approaches to interpersonal understanding is thus meant to do justice not only to the heterogeneity of its various cases. Their approaches can also accommodate the diversity of the very relations between persons. It is indeed a common place that one can understand better or more easily the expression of intentions and feelings entertained by a friend as compared to a stranger. Spending more time with someone provides finer-grained insight into his or her manners of expressing themselves. Thus in some cases, glancing at the eyes of the other may be more than enough in order to get an insight into the other's emotional state. While in other cases, one may indeed need to attend to further manifestations of the other.

The curios fact about cinema, however, is how much, how easily, or how well one may already understand the "inner life" of a protagonist, while spending with him or her barely two hours or so. Is it because film responds so adequately to our expectations, or because we respond so adequately to its mechanisms? Or because film, in a sense, does not after all teach us something radically new, but mostly builds on our ordinary skills to relate to one another? The latter is what Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest towards the end of the two extended versions of his text:

> This is why the expression of the human can be so palpable in cinema: cinema does not give us, as the novel has done for so long, the *thoughts* of the human, it rather gives us its conduct or its behaviour, it offers us directly that special manner of being in the world, of treating the things and the others, which is for us visible in the gestures, the gaze, the mimic [*les gestes, le regard, la mimique*], and which evidently defines each person we know.[34]

Conclusions

The difficulty of theories of interpersonal understanding is to provide a generic framework that could do justice to every instance of one's getting the mental or emotional states of other persons. To this purpose, different theories invoke different factors as decisive for the issue. Thus, theory-theory approaches interpersonal understanding as a primarily intellectual or rational relation. On this view, my getting another's person fear, for instance, is a process closely resembling a scientist's approach to an object of investigation. The above discussion of this model against the background of cinema, however, suggested that the model is too much shaped by the instance of interpersonal suspicion. The competing model of simulation theory is meant to counteract that overemphasis on reason and intellect. This model moulds interpersonal understanding in the shape of an emotional or affective attunement. Yet, by doing so, the expectation of this model is that each instance of my getting the other's joy, for example, is accompanied by my affective mirroring of that state. The stumbling block of the model, as its above discussion in light of the film genre of romantic drama suggested, is precisely the instance of acknowledged, and yet unshared love. Both theory-theory and simulation theory inherit the traditional argument from analogy, whose gist is the assumption that interpersonal understanding involves the establishment of a symmetry between my experience and that of the other. This assumption was questioned against the background of the difficulties of intergenerational communication, by appealing to films that employ children as actors.

Further, 4E cognition, the model which opposes the above two ones, embraces holism in an attempt to do more justice to the variety of available instances of interpersonal communication. However, invoking embodiment, environmental embeddedness, collective actions, and their extension through practices as explanatory factors in this respect is prone to amount to a more generous, yet rigid model. If those factors are meant as necessary and sufficient conditions, it is difficult to see how they can do justice to the heterogeneity of instances of interpersonal communication already in ordinary life, let alone to those presented by the study case of cinematographic experience.

As a preparatory step to expanding the investigatory field of interpersonal understanding to cinematographic experience, an account of the medium of film was introduced by drawing on Stanley Cavell's contributions in this respect. Instead of being meant as an exhaustive

specification of the medium, that account rather paves the way towards an understanding of the kinship between our ways of getting mental and emotional states of persons in the ordinary world and of protagonists of film respectively.

Wittgenstein and Merleau-Pointy reinforce such an understanding of film, and indeed both resort to cinema in the attempt to make modalities of interpersonal understanding more palpable. Significantly, they also share the point – which is easily underestimated by the theories of interpersonal communication at issue – that the human appearance and its manifestations are laden with meaning. Indeed, Wittgenstein's attendance to the face and the voice, and Merleau-Ponty's notion of style, are meant to open a way beyond the rigid opposition of "inner life" *versus* "outer life". That is, an opposition between the assumption that all is hidden, or that nothing is hidden, regarding intentions and feelings of other people. Furthermore, they both contend that film reveals most perspicuously the human appearance as already meaningful, and not as split between an allegedly inexpressive surface (behaviour) and allegedly private on-goings (mental states).

NOTES

1 E.g. cf. D. Hutto, "Enactivism, From A Wittgensteinian Point of View", in *American Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 50, no. 3, 2013, pp. 281-302; V. Loughlin, "Radical Enactivism, Wittgenstein and the Cognitive Gap", in *Adaptive Behavior* vol. 22, iss. 5, 2014, pp. 350-359.

2 Given that Wittgenstein's accounts of cinematographic experience have long been only accessible in manuscript version, a few scholars have merely applied to cinema rather his philosophy of language: cf. E. Branigan, *Projecting a Camera: Language-games in Film Theory*, Routledge, New York, 2006; B. Szabados and C. Stojanova, *Wittgenstein at the Movies: Cinematic Investigations*, Rowman & Littlefield, New York, 2011.

3 The last section of this paper thus explores Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's convergent accounts of *expressive corporeality*. I have addressed the convergence of their accounts of *affective corporeality* in M. Ometiță, "Pain and Space: the Middle Wittgenstein, the early Merleau-Ponty", in *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology*, ed. O. Kuusela, M. Ometiță and T. Uçan, Routledge, New York, 2018.

4 An overview of variations in theory-theory is available in P. Carruthers and P. K. Smith, *Theories of Theories of Mind*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1996.

5 Particularly the male protagonist of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and the male protagonist of Clouzot's *L'Infer* (started in 1964 and left unfinished) is each more attached to a theory than to a woman he thinks he loves. One is absorbed by the vertigo of confirming his theory that a past woman is not really past, the other succumbs to the inferno of confirming his theory that a present woman is not really present.

6 For an account generally regarded as emblematic for simulation theory, cf. A. I. Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading*, Oxford UP, Oxford, 2006.

7 Cf. B. Russell, "Analogy", in idem, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1948.

8 For a prominent account of 4E cognition, cf. S. Gallagher and D. Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*, Routledge, London, 2008.

9 Cf. J. Fingerhut and K. Heimann, "Movies and the Mind: On Our Filmic Body", in *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*, ed. C. Durt, T. Fuchs, and C. Tewes, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2017.

10 E. Panofski, "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures", in *Film*, ed. D. Talbot, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1959, p. 31.

11 A. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, tr. H. Gray, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1967, p. 110.

12 Cf. S. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film (Enlarged Edition)*, Harvard UP, Cambridge MA, 1979, ch. "The World as Mortal: Absolute Age and Youth".

13 S. Cavell, *supra*, p. 185.

14 Cf. W. Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit", in *idem*, *Schriften: Band 1*, ed. T. W. Adorno, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, [1935] 1955.

15 For more on the notion of the camera "ingesting the world", cf. S. Cavell, *supra*, p. 73.

16 Cf. S. Cavell, *supra*, p. 25.

17 Except, perhaps, in some modernist painting, which questions the very traditional idea of a finite presentation in painting.

18 To my knowledge, this is the first attempt to discuss together Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of cinematographic experience.

19 J. King, "Recollections of Wittgenstein", in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. R. Rhees, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1984, p. 71; M. O'C. Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein", in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. R. Rhees, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1984, p. 120.

20 Wittgenstein MS 134, p. 89 [1947].

21 Translations from the German original of Wittgenstein's manuscripts are mine.

22 Wittgenstein MS 183, pp. 88 [1931].

23 In fact, cognitive theories of interpersonal understanding tend to focus primarily on two extreme cases: *either* interpersonal understanding is supposed to be straightforward, successful, complete; *or* interpersonal understanding as obstructed by pathological conditions. Thus a whole range of phenomena ranging between these extreme cases tends to be overlooked.

24 Wittgenstein MS 136, p. 60a [1948].

25 Wittgenstein MS 120, pp. 70v-71r [1938].

26 Wittgenstein MS 119, p. 100 [1937].

27 The 4 versions are collected in F. Albera, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty et le cinema", in *1895. Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze*, no. 70, 2013, pp. 120-153. The pagination of this source is used here by all references to Merleau-Ponty's article.

28 Merleau-Ponty, vers. 1-2 = "Cinéma et psychologie", p. 131.

29 Merleau-Ponty, vers. 1-2 = "Cinéma et psychologie", p. 137.

30 Merleau-Ponty, vers. 3-4 = "Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie", p. 153. The variants between slashes (/3/) belong to the 3rd version, while the ones between square brackets ([4]) belong to the 4th version of the text.

31 For an alternative view that Merleau-Ponty would reserve phenomenology to the study of ordinary experience and Gestalt psychology to the study of cinematographic experience, cf. C. Zernik, "'Un film ne se pense pas,

il se perçoit': Merleau-Ponty et la perception cinématographique", in *Rue Descartes*, no. 3 (53), 2006, 102-109.

32 Merleau-Ponty, vers. 1-2 = "Cinéma et psychologie", p. 137.

33 Merleau-Ponty, vers. 3-4 = "Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie", p. 132.

34 Merleau-Ponty, vers. 3-4 = "Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie", p. 150.

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