Making Progress with Wittgenstein and Popular Genre Film

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Short abstract

***Making Progress with Wittgenstein and Popular Genre Film*. Martin Urschel, St John's College, D.Phil, Trinity Term 2018**

This study concerns ways of conceptualising what it means to use genre patterns in narrative film critically and creatively. The introduction begins by analysing the opening scene of a regular episode of a German television crime drama episode, *Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot…* (Germany 2006), directed by Dominik Graf, whose work challenges rigid and narrow definitions of genres and theories in film and genre studies. Before returning to Graf in the last two chapters, the intermediary chapters outline the philosophical and conceptual scaffolding of the investigation: Chapter 2 sets the stage by outlining central concepts of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, which I employ in later chapter for a critical, challenging and pluralistic method of thinking about conventional film forms, genres, and techniques. With help by the Coen brothers and their film *A Serious Man* (USA 2010), chapter 3 acknowledges some ways in which Wittgenstein's method be abused. The film exemplifies ways in which Wittgensteinian approaches to thinking about culture can misfire, and as such contributes to a Wittgensteinian practice of self-reflection. Thus prepared, chapter 4 looks more closely at Dominik Graf's films, challenging existing uses of Wittgenstein's philosophy in genre studies, arguing that defining genre as a family resemblance concept does not sufficiently account for the dynamic and enabling force of genre conventions. Problems can be overcome by turning to Wittgenstein's concept of language-games, which helps to clarify the status of genre rules and brings into view differences between their practical uses in everyday life. The final chapter analyses Graf's *Die Freunde der Freunde* (Germany 2002) by sketching film language games: Various aspects of genre film can be clarified using the concept of grammar. The conclusion then ties the threads of the argument together, reflecting on the potential of Wittgenstein's method for a defense of popular film and as providing a model of criticism that does not subvert itself.

Long abstract

***Making Progress with Wittgenstein and Popular Genre Film*. Martin Urschel, St John's College, D.Phil, Trinity Term 2018**

German film director Dominik Graf decided to go into making crime series for television in the late 1970s, when television was seen as a medium devoid of 'quality'. This was a conscious decision to avoid the pressures of having to 'legitimise' his art: instead, Graf wanted to learn the craftsmanship of genre film. The slightly older 68er generation had decried genre films as conformist and capitalist and had set up the structures of German film funding in such a way that genre films were not supported. Television offered the kind of industrialised production that Graf was looking for in order to challenge himself and to grow as a filmmaker.

This study looks at the ways in which genre film has been conceptualised in Germany and elsewhere and how these conceptions are misused by academics as well as filmmakers in a way that undermines attempts by filmmakers such as Graf and, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Coen brothers to use genres in a more liberated and playful way. For this project, the philosophical method of the later Wittgenstein has provided a useful set of tools and critical vocabulary, the potential of which, as this study argues, has not yet been fully realised by genre film studies. Taking a broader approach to Wittgenstein's philosophical work than any existing studies on genre theory, this study considers the consequences of seeing Wittgenstein as offering a practical method rather than a theory or merely single concepts that might be used separately from each other. Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance has been used in the past to account for the difficulties of defining genres. However, several problems with the concept's application to genre definitions have been noted: it seems too vague, not helpful in deciding when cases do not belong to the group of films considered to form a genre, and it has been criticised for offering a misleading biological metaphor. These arguments are taken up, and a counter-argument is provided in the study, but the main focus lies elsewhere. Other concepts of Wittgenstein's philosophy can be equally useful in discussing genres, and family resemblance needs to be seen in relation to them: language-games, simple objects of comparison, grammar, and aspect-seeing. Through these tools, the status of genre rules can be clarified. Rather than determining their use in advance, genre rules emerge as both potentially enabling and constraining conceptual devices that are abstracted from regular practices. As such, the study sets out to investigate the uses of genre rules and offers close-readings of three films: *Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot…* (Germany, 2006), *Die Freunde der Freunde* (Germany 2002), both directed by Dominik Graf and (co-)written by two of his frequent collaborators, and *A Serious Man* (USA 2010), written and directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. The film by the Coen brothers is analysed along with Ethan Coen's bachelor thesis on the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein: Not only are there certain parallels in themes, but I argue that the film can be taken to provide a critical assessment of certain misreadings of Wittgenstein. The film highlights the problematic consequences of holding dogmatic or relativistic philosophical views – in

particular a passive attitude and the inability to solve problems in practical ways. The characters in the film present certain ways of misreading Wittgenstein or acting in accordance to certain lines of misreading Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture, religion, and mathematics. As such, it might appear as if the film criticises Wittgenstein's philosophy, but closer inspection can reveal that it actually contributes to a Wittgensteinian approach precisely by warning against ways of going wrong in reading Wittgenstein. Building on the understanding of Wittgenstein's method developed in dialogue with the Coen brothers' work, later chapters return to further discussion of Dominik Graf. Approaching the two films by Graf with Wittgenstein's method is useful for showing the richness of his style, i.e. the way he combines and overlays different genres, as well as his *committed playfulness*: His style appears effortless and simple but it can be shown that his films are very precisely designed and critically reflect on their own medium and on their commitment to and inheritance of film history. Stanley Cavell's idea of 'genre as medium' can be used as starting point for both a discussion on the grammar of genre and the grammar of film (as a medium): Importantly, grammar in this sense is concerned with possible uses of genre and of film, and it should not be confused with an overly narrow analogy with word-language. This approach is highly sensitive to the importance of differences between various media and various uses of signs. In particular, I present a discussion of 'obscure' (modernist, abstract, and fantastical) elements in *Die Freunde der Freunde* and investigate their grammar through a discussion of riddles, following work on Wittgensteinian approaches to riddles by Cora Diamond and Stephen Mulhall. This exploration of different uses of film and genre conventions as grammar ultimately contributes to a defence, through Wittgenstein's method, of popular genre film. The grammatical approach to different modes of filmic storytelling (and other uses of film) distinguishes between more and less clear uses of genre conventions and argues for a pluralistic and particularist understanding of making progress (with popular genre film): namely, getting better within a particular practice and therefore progressing towards a particular goal, sensitive to the needs of actual persons in concrete situations. Wittgensteinian conceptual clarification allows us to see critical (self-)reflection as an important part of such learning, which in particular does not require seeking a 'view from nowhere' (the construction of an abstract, universal, and ahistorical perspective onto 'the world' and 'humanity' from the outside and from a distance). Indeed, seeking such an abstract position in order to ground a general theory of progress is a nonsensical and self-undermining endeavour, as chapter 3 argues. The consequences of this particularist and pluralistic critical approach involve the need to re-evaluate quick and ready distinctions between 'high art' films and 'popular' genre films, and it shifts the focus of the critical debate towards making personal and practical changes.

The study is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces Dominik Graf as the main focus of the study, outlining his position within the context of contemporary German filmmaking, his work, and it introduces in particular an episode of a feature-length episode within a German crime drama series in public television that he directed: *Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot…* (Germany, 2006). This episode is used as the backbone of the overarching argument of this study. The chapter goes on to discuss the use of genre conventions in the prologue of this episode and outlines the research questions: what is the status of genre conventions? Do genre rules need to be seen as confining (and is genre-filmmaking therefore a conformist practice, as an established, post-Romantic line of criticism assumes)? The chapter also introduces Wittgenstein's philosophy as a way to approach these questions, which leads to the systematic outline of Wittgenstein's method in chapter 2.

Chapter 2 establishes the key concepts and conceptions relevant for the argument of the later chapters. It locates the place of Wittgenstein's method within philosophical and philological debates about Wittgenstein. Further, the chapter clarifies the concepts of language-games, simple objects of comparison, and perspicuous presentation, and it challenges the notion that Wittgenstein's method leaves 'everything' as it is: instead, the chapter aims to highlight the positive difference the use of Wittgenstein's method can make. Simple objects of comparison clarify the status of ideals: they might be compared to 'lenses' that enable us to see a particular aspect of a complex philosophical problem in order to dissolve it. Rather than projecting ideals 'behind' things into a speculative metaphysical sphere, they are rotated to their appropriate place (like a lens) in the constellation of our investigation. This helps us clarify why seeing different ideals as objects of comparison is useful for different purposes and situations and as such offers a truly pluralistic approach that is capable of dissolving entrenched misunderstanding, between groups that are involved in different forms of life and different shared practices. I argue that many apparent conflicts between different groups of film theorists, and different views of what 'quality' of films consist in, can be resolved in this way, as the later chapters aim to show.

In order to make the concept of 'simple objects of comparison' more concrete in relation to narrative film and conventional storytelling, chapter 3 turns to filmmakers who arguably employ a strongly Wittgensteinian filmic style: the Coen Brothers. In particular, *A Serious Man* (USA 2010) develops a number of themes from Ethan Coen's own Bachelor Thesis on the later Wittgenstein further, such as criticising the problems of metaphysics in religion and mathematics and an interesting discussion of *attitude*, which points towards the discussions on Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture, such as work by Stanley Cavell, Kevin Cahill, and Ben Ware.
The reading of *A Serious Man* takes the following steps: it explores the film's prologue as a key to understanding the film's use of ambiguity and uncertainty. The film offers a critical view of how conventions deal with unpredictability and contrasts religious and traditional culture with rock'n'roll and popular culture (e.g. during the Bar Mitzvah scene). This prepares for a discussion of Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture and the

'problem of life': The film can be seen as a more mature reflection on Wittgenstein's philosophical method that goes beyond Ethan Coen's argument in his thesis.

While *A Serious Man* purposefully remains very vague about its commitments to genres – it references various genre conventions but keeps them ambiguous – chapter 4 turns to genre theory and especially to the discussions about genre as a 'family resemblance' concept: This chapter uses an analysis of Graf's *Er sollte tot...* to argue that a Wittgensteinian approach needs to go beyond concerns with definition and theory-construction. The narrow focus on 'family resemblance' has covered up the potential of Wittgenstein's method to account for, and foster, the dynamic developments and creativity of genre patterns, which I explore through a discussion of the performative force of surprising moments in this film. It is then left to the next chapter to outline how other facets of Wittgenstein's method can clarify a dynamic use of genre rules.

In chapter 5 we turn to Dominik Graf's *Die Freunde der Freunde* (Germany 2002). Having already discussed the Coen Brothers allows me to similarly sketch Graf's approach to filmmaking in terms of an *attitude* rather than (only) trying to pin down what he 'means'. Acknowledging the difference between 'meaning' and 'attitude' here lies in acknowledging the importance of the way in which the films create atmospheres and how they guide the viewers towards themselves posing certain questions. I will discuss Graf's engagement with German and European prejudices against genre films: seeing conventions – and genres – as language-games recognises the kind of dynamics that genre theorists worry might be excluded from the concept of family resemblance. Language-games bring into view the grammatical/ logical rules of the uses within which film makes sense to certain groups of users, and Graf's film even reflects on its own grammar in 'obscure' and fantastical moments that I analyse in detail. By recognising how Graf's moments of self-reflection act as objects of comparison for the clarification of complex and mixed grammar, worries associated with theories about 'realism' and materialistic 'determinism' can arguably be dissolved.

Chapter 6 then offers a conclusive summary of the study. What I hope to show is that the Wittgensteinian method outlined in chapter 2 offers a particular critical approach that avoids self-undermining tendencies of other critical approaches, such as in genre theory and in film theory. However, it proceeds not by replacing existing theories with a super-theory but by clarifying the limits of theoretical overviews. This clarification of *limits* has, counter-intuitively, a liberating effect.

"And how do you pay for ideas? I believe: With courage."
– Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Culture & Value*, p. 60; MS 132 75: 28.9.1946)

I. PREFACE

Before I started reading film and theatre studies at University of Mainz, I was in a sense a strong anti-conventionalist. For instance, I rejected the notion that 'there are genres'. I insisted that highlighting the similarities between the various films that are conventionally described e.g. as crime dramas or science fiction was only a very superficial way of looking at films – a way that tends to overlook all their differences, a way that conflates them. Between films that belong to different genres, I argued, there are often more unacknowledged similarities than there are acknowledgeable similarities between films of the 'same genre'. Therefore, I held, it would be better to be very precise in describing individual films and to resist the urge to quickly label them. It would be better not to speak of genres, I thought, at all. When I myself made a film with friends, and I was asked what kind of film it was, I could not bring myself to put it in line with a single genre tradition. The assumptions that seemed to come with giving it a genre label seemed false: they could not describe my film.

Many years later, my views have changed, but they have also stayed the same. With a number of qualifications, I still believe that genre labels often lead to unfair assumptions about particular films, and I see how deeply ingrained these prejudices are in the public discourse on which films are supposed to be 'good', 'intelligent', or open to be considered as 'art'. 'Art', that 'highest' of labels, that saves the individual film from being open to quick-and-ready judgements – a label that saves a film from being allowed to be waved away without further attention to its project and achievements. Having worked both in film and television, I have experienced first-hand how decision-makers insist on what they assume will be the most reliable way to success, using genre patterns like a 'drawing-by-numbers' sketch that only needs to be filled out with some individualised details for the particular film. Both these decision-makers (including the filmmakers who agree with them) and the quick-and-ready judges of film taste share a rigid and dogmatic view of what genre films supposedly 'are'. Challenging their view is difficult, because it is so deeply ingrained in the way genre films are discussed, and many filmmakers lost their projects because they didn't fit the right boxes, while other promising projects have turned into predictable and boring formulaic products because of the insistence on repeating the genre dogma.

On the other hand, I have come to appreciate genres as useful ways to explain and develop films. Audiences have a much better chance of finding a film that fits their current needs if the film has a 'neighbourhood' (as Christian Petzold and Christoph Hochhäusler once called it, as I will discuss in more detail below).

Having already started working on my DPhil project on genre films, I came across Wittgenstein's philosophy and developed an angle of reading it in regards to genre film that I didn't find reflected in the existing literature. The uses of Wittgenstein's philosophy in genre studies, and more generally in film studies, were often disappointingly narrow, although I did find 'companions', whose reading of Wittgenstein resembled my own in in important ways, including Stanley Cavell, who has written on film and genres but with notably different interests than me, I believe:

Cavell focuses on questions of ontology, whereas I am interested in creative possibilities and the contribution of criticism and reflection to a positive, creative way of *going on* with filmmaking. The following study aims to outline my distinct way of reading Wittgenstein in relation to the qualities of genre filmmaking.

Certainly, many details of my argument might be disagreed with, but there is one core argument of the thesis that I want to highlight at this point: What I really want to say is that genre rules and conventions need to be seen in the context of their use, and it is the particular use of the rules that makes genre rules either liberating and enabling or confining and rigid. This insight allows a highly precise critical approach that draws attention to the responsibilities of anyone who conceptualises genre rules – neither just filmmakers nor just academic genre theorists.

II. CONTENTS

III. TABLE OF FIGURES

IV. ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Wittgenstein

The following abbreviations are used to refer to Wittgenstein's published works (in alphabetical order by abbreviation).

BB Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations," generally known as the Blue and Brown Books, ed. R. Rhees (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

BT The Big Typescript: TS 213. Edited by C. Grant Luckhardt, and Maximilian Aue. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

CV Culture and Value, rev. ed., ed. G. H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman, rev. ed. A. Pichler, trans. P. Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) (= *Vermischte Bemerkungen* in the Suhrkamp Werkausgabe).

LA Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966).

LFM Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics: Cambridge, 1939. From the Notes of R. G. Bosanquet, Norman Malcolm, Rush Rhees, and Yorick Smythies, ed. by Cora Diamond. (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1976).

MWL *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930-1933, from the Notes of GE Moore*. Edited by G. Citron, B. Rogers and D. Stern. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

OC On Certainty, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe and D. Paul (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

PG Philosophical Grammar, ed. by R. Rhees, trans. A. Kenny (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

PI Philosophical Investigations, 4th ed., ed. by G. E. M Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).

PO Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951, ed. by J. Klagge and A. Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993).

PPF Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment. Formerly known as 'Part II' of the *PI*, included in the 4th edition of the *PI*.

PR Philosophical Remarks, ed. by R. Rhees, trans. by R. Hargreaves and R. White (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

RFM Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, rev. ed., ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe, R. Rhees, and G. H. von Wright, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

TLP Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951); trans. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

WWK Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis, hrsg. von B. McGuinness (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967).

Z Zettel, ed. By G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

This German edition was additionally used:

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Rush Rhees, Friedrich Waismann, Brian McGuinness, G. E. M. Anscombe, and G. H. von Wright. *Werkausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993).

Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*

Wittgenstein's Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition, ed. by The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), <http://wittgensteinsource.org/>.

References to the *Nachlass* are by manuscript or typescript number followed by page number (as cited in the von Wright catalogue; see PO, pp. 480-506).

1.

Introduction: Genre conventions and creativity

This introduction focusses on a series of decisions which have played a major role in the filmmaking career of Dominik Graf, a contemporary German filmmaker who despite the extraordinary qualities of his films so far remains internationally unknown. Discussing these decisions will help clarify the sort of questions that I will pursue in this thesis and with which I aim to attain a firm conceptual understanding of what it might mean to *use* genre patterns in narrative film critically and creatively. Before I return to Graf in the last two chapters, I will outline the philosophical and conceptual scaffolding of my investigation: in the second chapter, I turn to Wittgenstein's later philosophy for a critical, challenging, and pluralistic method of thinking about conventional film forms, genres, and techniques. With help by the Coen brothers, I acknowledge in my third chapter some ways in which Wittgenstein's method can be abused or how it might misfire, which helps clarify Wittgenstein's contribution to the philosophy of culture. My fourth and fifth chapters look more closely at Dominik Graf's films, employing them to challenge existing uses of Wittgenstein's philosophy in genre studies. The final chapter argues that Wittgenstein's philosophical method provides a critical way of making progress with genre film, going beyond unnecessarily narrow and rigid theories of film ontology and allowing us to reconceptualise aspects of genre film as 'film language games'.

Genre theories and film philosophy will play a role in this investigation, but I want to start – in a Wittgensteinian spirit – by acknowledging the particular and go into abstractions only later on, when it is useful to do so. Accordingly, before I further outline the background and context of this study, its limits and its structure, I would like to draw attention to the beginning of one of Dominik Graf's works, an ordinary Sunday night television crime drama.

1.1. Generic beginnings

Picture yourself sitting down in front of the television in the evening. You turn it on, and you see a car on a street. It's early morning and foggy. The driver is slouched behind the wheel, blood on his forehead – he is dead but his car is undamaged. There is another car, the driver also dead, the car also undamaged. If you have seen any number of crime dramas, you will be able to make a number of informed guesses about what is going on here.[1] You might infer that you have indeed tuned into a *crime drama*. You might guess

[1] Cf. Thomas Koebner's analysis of the conventional and generic possibilities and decisions involved in beginning a crime drama feature film on German television: Thomas Koebner, *Filmbilder* –

that what you see on the screen is a *crime scene*. Accordingly, these men would have been *murdered*, and *policemen* will soon turn up to investigate and solve the riddle of what happened here and who the murderer was. It's such a conventional and predictable way to tell stories, isn't it?

That is why crime dramas are called genre films: they employ a host of conventional structures, themes, and iconographies. The use of these structures suggests that we can predict how the film is going to play out. This involves *stereotypes*, such as the stereotype that these films begin with a crime scene, which is the starting point of an investigation central to the plot. By using stereotypical set-ups, these films allow us to find our bearings immediately and engage with the story from the outset. The use of stereotypes allows the film to communicate vital narrative information economically: Where is the film set? Is it an abstract fairy-tale or a detailed exploration of contemporary political issues as in a social-realist drama or documentary? Recognising a film as a crime drama, then, to some extent limits the viewer's expectations of it and allows us to make guesses about the development of its plot. We can guess that there will be victims and murderer(s), and we might go on to think about who they are.

The images below are the first shots of Dominik Graf's *Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot…* (Germany, 2006), an episode of the regular Sunday night *Polizeiruf 110* crime series on the German television channel ARD:

Figure 1: The first shot in Er sollte tot*… (directed by Dominik Graf, Germany 2006)*

Sinnbilder: Schriften zum Film (Remscheid: Gardez-Verlag, 2007), Filmstudien, vol. 50 (Mainz, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany), pp.142-155.

Figure 2: The third shot in Er sollte tot*…*

Even if we had missed the generic title sequence featuring bodies, police, and suspicious glances by stereotypical detectives, we would still know immediately that we are watching a crime mystery as soon as we see the moody second shot of the driver's bloodied body. The shots appear ordinary: the first one a bit random, the others typical of the genre – nothing extraordinary. We think that we know what to expect because of this, but as it turns out, these three shots are a sort of trap, not for the dead men but for the audience and especially for the cynics who claim to always be able to tell the whole story in advance as soon as they start watching a genre film – 'because they all work the same', supposedly.[2] The film has caught them, us, by surprise. None of these shots really are what they initially seem to be, even while the themes of the film, and its use of styles and genres, are plainly in sight.

Let us analyse what is plainly in sight and how we are guided towards certain predictions, before revealing how the film works to surprise us. The first shot sets up an atmosphere, a time of day and the colour palette for the scene: blue with nuances of red and yellow. It also defines the aesthetic of the film: we see a minimalist composition, the empty space of the blue sky across which the small plane moves diagonally from right to left, while a street lamp shines its light in the left bottom corner. The shot is very simply composed, feels incidental, nothing seems out of place. It's just a plane in the sky, but it contributes to the early-morning atmosphere: the plane's diagonal movement tears through the blue space of the sky and creates tension. The plane and the street lamp introduce graphic elements with recognisable silhouettes. With its photographic, grainy quality, and the way it pans slightly to the left to track the plane, the image follows a realist aesthetic, the camera movement

[2] This is one of e.g. Peter Greenaway's favourite complaints about narrative film in general.

resembling a spontaneous, even slightly sloppy manner of filming and thus suggesting objectivity - with great attention to the incidental details found in the exterior world but also with subtle attention to composition.

The next shot is foggier and slightly more blurred. The graphic detail of the blood dripping down the side of the car points to the crime mystery cliché of violence, murder, and the breach of the society's contract not to hurt one another.[3] Society's order has been disturbed, and justice needs to be restored, at least in the sense that the violence needs to be accounted for. Nobody will be brought back from the dead, at least not in this genre. We know that we are not watching a horror or fantasy film, even though there might be a slight family resemblance in the eery, early morning atmosphere. The film's opening clearly signposts that we are watching a crime mystery, and in this genre, order can and will probably be restored by solving the mystery of 'whodunnit', by catching the criminal and by – somehow – bringing the criminal to justice. These are some of the genre conventions we have learned from other films, from books, and possibly from talking with friends and family before, while, or after watching films like this. There is a very good chance that this is not the first crime mystery we are watching, so we expect regularities congruent to other films, but we also expect surprising twists.

Figure 3. What 'really happened'. The first shots turn out to be a mere illustration of a story told while playing billiards.

[3] Sources on crime drama, e.g. Knut Hickethier, Katja Schumann (eds.), *Filmgenres Kriminalfilm,* in the selection: *Filmgenres*, series ed. by Thomas Koebner (Stuttgart: Reclam 2005). Norbert Grob (2008a), 'Kino der Verdammnis', in *Filmgenres Film Noir*, ed. by Ders. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008), pp.9-54.

Soon after we have grasped the situation, not even half a minute into the film, the situation is turned upside down by a narrator's voice describing the situation we have just seen. The voice belongs to Mr Kruppke, one of two investigators playing a game of billiards. The two dead men in cars are not at all connected to the crime case to follow. The film's opening shots playfully introduce a hypothetical situation, a thought experiment, in which the two detectives seek to clarify and distinguish the concepts of 'murder' and 'accident': The younger colleague, Mr Tauber, who is missing an arm, answers his colleague's question whether the above scene was a crime: if it was an accident, and if there was no murderer, it was not a crime. Mr Kruppke cheers and elaborates: the two men had been leaning out of their cars while driving in the early morning fog and theycollided with their heads, which killed them both: a comically random accident, a highly unlikely but possible story, the older man playfully suggests. Two billiard balls colliding in the same moment illustrate the two heads hitting each other. The scene described above, then, is not a crime scene but the location of an absurd accident. From this point on, the film takes an unusual route which is, however, quite typical of Graf's way of making genre films and which led some critics to doubt whether he can even be thought of as a director of genre films.[4] It investigates the differences between committing a crime, which requires admitting guilt and taking responsibility for one's actions, as opposed to finding oneself in the middle of an accident without responsibility for the damage.

The opening of Graf's film exemplifies a number of problems with the reception of genre conventions and stereotypes, belying the notion that genre films are predictable or that genre stereotypes, like stereotypes in public discourse, tend to reinforce unhelpful preconceptions about groups and individuals. As this argument goes, viewers feel encouraged to carry on making guesses when they encounter these groups outside of the fictionalised context of genre film. But does this automatically rule out the possibility of using simple conventions, stereotypes and generic patterns of storytelling and iconography in a non-generalising way?[5] Does it *have to be* generalising and harmful?

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[4] A detailed discussion of this follows in chapter 5, building e.g. on the following texts by and about Graf: Jörn Glasenapp, Dominik Graf (München: Edition Text & Kritik, 2015). Christoph Huber, Olaf Möller, Dominik Graf (Wien: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2013). Graf, Dominik, ‚Das Grauen ... das Grauen!', Zeit Online, 27 April 2012, <http://www.zeit.de/2012/18/Deutscher-Filmpreis/seite-1> [accessed 28th September 2015]. Graf, Dominik, Johannes Sievert, and Julia von Vietinghoff, Im Angesicht des Verbrechens: Die Entstehung einer deutschen Fernsehserie (Berlin: Alexander Verlag 2010). Graf, Dominik, 'Unerlebte Filme, in Schnitt, 43 (2006), pp. 62-65. Graf, Dominik, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Christian Petzold, Ein Gespräch via e-mail über die ‚Neue Berliner Schule' (Berlin: DFFB 2006), or in *Revolver 16* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2007), or here: <http://www.revolver-film.de/Inhalte/Rev16/html/Berliner.htm> [accessed 30 September 2015]. Wahl, Chris, Marco Abel, Jesko Jockenhövel und Michael Wedel (ed.), *Im Angesicht des Fernsehens: Der Filmemacher Dominik Graf* (München: Edition Text & Kritik, 2012)

[5] For a good overview oft he various lines of argument against stereotypes and conventions, cf. Schweinitz, Jörg. *Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011.

1.2. Context and approach

Dominik Graf's *Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot…* caught my attention both because the film itself uses genre conventions in surprising and critical ways and because Graf is an outspoken critic of the way in which generalised negative preconceptions about the value of genre films shape German filmmaking on a large, systematic scale. For instance, in a published email conversation with filmmakers Christoph Hochhäusler and Christian Petzold, he reflects on genre filmmaking in this way:

> In genre, plot is the backbone you need, so that you do not, first of all, drown; it is like a floating board on a river and the most important thing now is that you learn to let the river carry you. Just as in Blues: It has three harmonies, and you can play it as you learn in school, and that's OK and very gratifying for many. But if you are able to play guitar like Peter Green from the old Fleetwood Mac, people do not even recognize it as a Blues. It is pure music. (...)
>
> The beauty in genre is that you don't have to keep legitimising your movie, that you do not need to explain what an extraordinary story it is that you want to tell, and how necessary this story is for everybody just now, and how great it is emotionally, and how mainstream, and anyways, all this 'content' crap and self-promotion. Instead, there is a simple agreement with the audience, and then you are off.
>
> The producer and author of BUFFY, and of the beautiful sci-fi-Western series FIREFLY, Joss Whedon, has once said a very good thing in the 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung' in an interview: "I find it interesting how much of genre still is ghettoised. Every time you do something really neat in genre, someone comes along and says: this work really transcends the genre. I think that science fiction provides us great opportunities. Those who have created the genre made it explode each time. That's what it's for. [6]

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[6] Graf/ Hochhäusler/ Petzold, p.6. My translation. Original text: 'Der Plot im Genre ist doch das Rückgrat, das man eben braucht wie ein Brett, um auf dem Fluss überhaupt erst mal nicht unterzugehen, und das Wichtigste an der ganzen Sache ist dann, dass man lernt, sich vom Fluss tragen zu lassen. Wie beim Blues, der hat drei Harmonien, und Du kannst ihn schulmäßig runterspielen, das ist dann OK und für viele sehr erfreulich; wenn Du aber Gitarre spielen kannst wie Peter Green von den alten Fleetwood Mac, dann erkennt man gar nicht mehr, dass das ein Blues ist. Es ist pure Musik. (...)

Das Schöne beim Genre ist ja, dass Du nicht dauernd Deinen Film legtimieren musst, dass Du nicht darlegen musst, was Du da für eine außerordentliche Geschichte erzählst und wie notwendig diese Geschichte gerade jetzt für alle ist, die sie sehen, und wie emotional und wie massentauglich und überhaupt diese ganze Inhaltskacke und Eigenwerbung. Sondern es gibt stattdessen eine einfache Übereinkunft mit dem Publikum und dann legt man los.

Der Produzent und Autor von BUFFY und der schönen Sci-Fi-Western-Serie FIREFLY Joss Whedon, der hat in der FAZ im Interview mal was sehr Gutes gesagt: "Ich finde es interessant, wie sehr das Genre immer noch ghettoisiert und gullyisiert ist. Jedesmal, wenn man im Genre etwas wirklich Hübsches macht, kommt jemand und sagt: Diese Arbeit sprengt wirklich das Genre. Ich glaube, dass die

A simple agreement between the film and its audience – and we are off. To talk about genre in this way - as a helpful convention, an agreement, a tool - quickly exemplifies how using genres can be far from limiting, a charge against which Graf has had to defend genre all his working life. This conception of genre clearly goes beyond the concerns of many genre theorists: it includes notions about what it means to make films normatively better or worse: 'That's what it's for' means that Whedon defines the *purpose* of using genre in this way. The quote opens a number of complex questions: What is genre? How to avoid getting trapped in an unnecessarily rigid or narrow definition of genre, while also remaining precise and critical of problematic aspects of genre films? Are there non-genre films? Do artistic innovation and conventional storytelling cancel each other out or is there a way for them to flourish together? My reading of genre theory in chapter 4 and 5 will focus precisely on this dynamic element, and ways of thinking it through without losing the analytic rigour of clear definitions.

At this point I want to say something more about the context in which Graf works and writes, which helps to explain why the questions about the *status* of genre matters so much to the actual practice of filmmakers.

Since 1981, very early in his career, Dominik Graf has worked continuously in German television. Some of his best work has taken the form of television feature films (which were often awarded with the German Grimme prize for excellence in television). This makes him the rare case of a filmmaker who has chosen to move back and forth between cinema and television, even though he gets more recognition by the broader public for his cinematic work such as his historical epic about Schiller, *Die geliebten Schwestern* (Germany 2014), that was selected as the German application to the Oscars.[7] Between his first short film at the film school HFF Munich in 1975, *Carlas Briefe* (Germany 1975), and *Die geliebten Schwestern*, he has made more than 50 films, most of them for television, many as part of a television series such as *Köberle kommt* (Germany 1983), *Der Fahnder* (Germany 1985-1993), *Tatort* (Germany, various episodes since 1986), and *Polizeiruf 110* (Germany, various episodes since 2005). The move into the restricting, less prestigious, and more anonymous forms of genre TV was a conscious choice he made at the end of the 1970s, at a time when Jacques Derrida famously declared that genres were a 'law', a matter of 'do' and 'do not', flawed by their claim of purity, and therefore to be transgressed by 'a law of impurity or a principle of contamination'.[8] John Frow, in a comprehensive overview of genre theory, points out the assumption on which this conception is built: 'to put the matter this way is to suppose that genre is, in the first place, and however much it is from the very beginning

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Sciencefiction uns großartige Möglichkeiten eröffnet. Diejenigen, die das Genre geschaffen haben, haben es jedes Mal gesprengt. Dazu ist es ja da.'

[7] (no author), '"Die Geliebten Schwestern" ist Deutscher Oscar-Beitrag."', ZEIT ONLINE, 27th August 2014, http://www.zeit.de/kultur/film/2014-08/oscar-nicht-englischsprachiger-film-die-geliebten-schwestern [accessed 30th September 2015]

[8] Derrida, Jacques, and Avital Ronell. "The Law of Genre." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative, University of Chicago Press (Autumn, 1980), p.57.

undermined, a matter of law. Against its limits, its closure, its injunction to purity is then set the wildness of literature, of writings, like the Blanchot story Derrida reads in the rest of his essay, which set the schematic classifications of genre theory spinning. But all this depends on the initial decision to view genre as a principle of taxonomic purity'.[9] Going beyond Frow's analysis, it might be remarked that even if one considers genre rules as a form of law, it is not immediately clear that from this follows the sort of 'taxonomic purity' and rigidity that Derrida worries about (as I will argue in chapter 5). Wittgenstein offers a contrasting view that avoids some of the pitfalls mentioned here but requires us to pay attention not to fall into other hasty generalisations. Graf certainly sees working in genre as creatively challenging and liberating. This is the aspect of Graf's work that the following study will focus on. As a whole, this study sets out to investigate the possibilities – and what it would mean – to make progress with Wittgenstein and popular genre film. It will focus on a critical account of popular genre films, the ways of conceptualising them, of making them, and of viewing and criticising them.

Graf's choice to work in the ordinary forms of television genre patterns is combined with a thematic focus on the everyday in his films, which often trace the procedures of crime investigation, interwoven with forms of ordinary life in contemporary Germany. Graf's embrace of the ordinary and everyday, in both form and content, is the point of connection between his films and the philosophy of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, which I want to explore in this study. Not only do the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, henceforth '*PI*', see abbreviations) pay close attention to the many aspects of ordinary uses of language, they also provide a philosophical method that *both challenges and enables critical and creative thinking*: The challenge consists in rigorously questioning overly quick *assumptions* about the everyday forms of our lives with language (I count film as language in this case, while also giving the necessary attention to the differences between film forms and word-language in later chapters), which lead us into dogmatic blindness. This is the critical aspect of Wittgenstein's method, which might be seen to aggressively attack complacency and dishonesty. However, Wittgenstein's philosophy equally defends and supports *creative ways of going on* by allowing for a certain kind of *stability*, while it is also flexible and dynamic in finding and addressing 'our real need' (PI §108). Wittgenstein's defence of ordinary forms of language, as I will argue, can be extended to a defence of the ordinary forms of genre filmmaking, increasing the flexibility of thinking about genre films, while retaining the rigour and crystalline clarity of logical thinking. This argument builds on my own way of reading Wittgenstein, which I outline in detail and in relation to existing scholarship in chapter, explaining the relevant concepts.

Wittgenstein already holds a place within genre studies and, as a result, in *genre film* studies, but so far, the use of Wittgenstein's philosophy has been too narrow: Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance has been employed to *define* (film) genres. In contrast, my own critical account of both Wittgenstein and genre film is

[9] Frow, John. *Genre*, Abingdon: Routledge 2015, p.28.

interested in 'learning processes' in genre film – pluralistic ways of getting better, which do not require a metaphysical or general theory of progress.[10] One goal of my overall argument is to provide a defence, via Wittgenstein's method, of popular culture and genre film against the charge that they can in general be considered banal, of lower worth or quality. Another goal is to show Wittgenstein's philosophical method in practice as a critical method to demonstrate what it contributes to thinking about and through genre film and how it *makes a difference*. As such, I am interested in an interventionist presentation of Wittgenstein's philosophy here, contrasting the widely held perception of him as a quietist. To do so, I will be focussing my investigation on three main areas, which I will use to illuminate each other:

(i) Wittgenstein's philosophical method as a critical and creative method
(ii) The filmmaking of the Coen brothers and their criticism of Wittgensteinian thinking
(iii) The filmmaking of Dominik Graf and his collaborators in the context of contemporary German film

In the broadest terms, my Wittgensteinian investigation into the uses of genre by Graf and the Coen brothers is a hermeneutical study of film, in which theories and philosophical methods are used to clarify different *aspects* (in Wittgenstein's sense, explained in chapter 2) of films, their meaning, and why they matter to people.[11] The status of theories themselves will have to be clarified later on, because Wittgenstein promotes a form of thinking without theories, theses, or dogmas, as we will see. This does not mean, however, that genre theory, film theory, and thinking along those lines were not valuable – there is no need to burn books, as Oskari Kuusela remarks.[12] Rather comprehensive approaches to the issues surrounding generic conventions and stereotypes are provided in the studies by John Frow, Jörg Schweinitz, and Rick Altman – I will be arguing in response to these.[13] This study argues that the philosophical method of the later Wittgenstein, and in particular his idea of 'objects of comparison', offers a way to think about genre that avoids some of the difficulties of existing approaches. In addition to outlining the value of Wittgenstein's method for the study of genre, I will argue that we can learn more about Wittgenstein's method by juxtaposing it with the close study of genre films, and, at the same time, a deeper and

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[10] For the concept of 'learning processes' and their relation to the concept of 'progress', see: Habermas, Jürgen. *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen*. Frankfurt Am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988, p.393.

[11] I follow the film-hermeneutical approach outlined by Knut Hickethier (who provides a rigorously systematic account) and, more personally and poetically, Thomas Koebner: Hickethier, Knut. *Film- und Fernsehanalyse*. 5. Aktualisierte und erweiterte Auflage. Stuttgart, 2012. Koebner, Thomas. *Filmbilder – Sinnbilder: Schriften zum Film*. Remscheid, 2007. Print. Filmstudien (Mainz, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany); Band 50. Especially the chapter: 'Zarte Empirie'.

[12] Kuusela, Oskari. *Logic as the Method of Philosophy: Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Logic in Relation to Frege, Russell, and Carnap, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Quoted from manuscript (epilogue).

[13] Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Pub., 1999. Frow, John. *Genre*, Abingdon 2015. Schweinitz, Jörg. *Film and Stereotype*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

more contextualised reading of Wittgenstein helps us to move beyond some of the problems that critics of Wittgensteinian approaches to genre theory rightly point out. The films that I have chosen are particularly good examples insofar as they complicate preconceptions about European arthouse cinema as opposed to Hollywood genre cinema; they provide mixed and ambiguous cases that can be fruitfully contrasted.[14] My work is ultimately a combination of empirical research, which provides new data, and the philosophical work of conceptual clarification, which does not add new information but contributes to understanding of the relevant data by offering a perspicuous presentation.[15]

1.2.1. Genre filmmaking, creative influences, and auteurism

Besides Graf, I will turn to the Coen brothers, in part because their use of genres can be compared to Graf's: all three filmmakers are not confined by genres either as taxonomic categories or as sets of laws or rules (even while using the rules). Instead, genres in their work showcase a liberating and enabling function, as Graf spells out so clearly in the above quote. Of course, many other filmmakers could equally be considered as examples of a free and playful use of genre – many of Graf's idols would come to mind: Paul Schrader, Sam Peckinpah, Nicolas Roeg, Sam Fuller, Klaus Lemke, and early Martin Scorsese.[16] Filmmakers like Stanley Kubrick, David Lynch, or Quentin Tarantino might be said to transgress and redefine the rules of the genres they employ more deeply than Graf. What is interesting about Graf, in contrast, is his commitment to genre and his curious decision to go into television at a time when television and genre were not fashionable. His films are 'invisible', as Marco Abel says, because they commit themselves to an *ordinary film language*, which cannot be appreciated if one mechanically applies the usual standards of measurement for quality of films:[17] They are not 'more' avantgardistic, or realistic, or psychological, or excessive than films by the other filmmakers just mentioned – they do not strive for 'purity' according to any particular standard of measurement but combine different qualities in a mutually enriching way. Their value lies in striking a fine balance between different styles, intensities, and qualities, their 'committed playfulness' as I will call it in chapter 5. They are highly critical of the systems in which they are made and viewed, but they do not imagine themselves as separate from these systems and instead work for change from within, from an embedded position. Graf really is a singular case of a genre filmmaker for his devotion and humility in the face of the almost total absence in Germany of an

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[14] Cf. Bordwell, David: 'Art Cinema as a mode of film practice', 1979, *Film Criticism* 4.1 (Fall 1979): pp.56-64.

[15] Cf. for a clear outline of the Wittgensteinian argument taken up in this sentence: Hacker, P.M.S.. 'Philosophy: a contribution, not to human knowledge, but to human understanding' in: Anthony O'Hear (ed.). *The Nature of Philosophy, in Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures,* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010), pp.219-54.

[16] For a discussion of influences on Graf, see e.g. Abel, Marco. 'The Yearning for Genre: The Films of Dominik Graf'. In Fisher, Jaimey. *Generic Histories of German Cinema: Genre and its Deviations.* Columbia, MD, 2013, p. 265. Huber/ Möller, pp.10f.

[17] Ibid.

industrial structure of film production.[18] As we will see, in this very concrete way of making films, the use of genre rules is radically different from the rigid and narrow implementation of a 'law of genre' as envisioned by Derrida and others, who participate in a wider 'post-Romantic resistance to genre understood as a prescriptive taxonomy and as a constraint on textual energy', not to mention prestige and distinction.[19]

Since his move to television, Graf has worked in many different genres and formats, but he has dedicated a particular amount of time to the *Polizeifilm*, mixing elements of murder mysteries, thriller, action, and crime procedurals as related and overlapping (sub-) genres. In films such as *Die Freunde der Freunde* (2002) and *Kalter Frühling* (2004), he offers melodramas, another genre from which he often draws elements, even when superficially making a crime mystery, such as in his contribution to the collaborative project *Dreileben*. He has made several essayistic and very personal documentaries such as *Denk ich an Deutschland – Das Wispern im Berg der Dinge* (2000) about his father, the actor Robert Graf, *München – Geheimnisse einer Stadt* (2000) about his home city, and *Was heißt hier Ende?* (2015) about his friend, the recently deceased film critic Michael Althen. Time and again, his films revisit the urban underworld to offer brutal visions of the dark underbelly of society, full of violence, human trafficking, loneliness, and drugs, often located behind the clean surface of the German middle-class or at least naively overlooked by it. Alongside making films, he also continuously writes about film, in film-historical books and newspapers.[20] Through his writing, he gets involved in the cultural politics that shapes German filmmaking: according to Graf, cultural politics constrains the potential of German filmmakers. He once attacked the supposedly anti-conventional, modernist 'Berlin School' movement in an opinion piece, which led to an email conversation with directors Christian Petzold and Christoph Hochhäusler that was published in *Revolver* magazine, and resulted in their collaboration, the trilogy of films set in the shared storytelling universe *Dreileben*.[21] In their email conversation he makes a few highly condensed points about genre as a tool for filmmaking, which articulate, in very short form, a position that challenges the established consensus in the German public discourse on how genre works, including the passage on 'exploding genre' that I quoted above. On his decision to make genre films in television, Graf says:

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[18] Cf. Abel for a detailed argument on the absence of industrial structures in Germany.

[19] Frow, p.28.

[20] A collection of some of his writings on film has been published by Michael Althen: Graf, Dominik. *Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen: Texte zum Film*. Berlin: Alexander-Verl., 2009.

[21] Graf's initial attack on the 'Berlin School' (a title not coined by the filmmakers associated with it, who never intended to be part of a movement and themselves saw more divergence than similitude) can be be found in: Graf, Dominik. *Unerlebte Filme*, in: *Schnitt*. Vol 43, 2006, p.62-65. Print.

The email conversation was published in two diverging editions in print: Dominik Graf in Graf/ Hochhäusler/ Petzold, *Ein Gespräch via e-mail über die „Neue Berliner Schule"*, Berlin: DFFB 2006, and in *Revolver* 16, Frankfurt/ Main: Verlag der Autoren 2007, p. 6-40. Both versions are shortened, and yet another portion was consequently published online: URL: http://www.revolver-film.de/Inhalte/Rev16/html/Berliner.htm (Accessed 30.09.2015)

> I remember wanting the fast pace, and how heavily it was bearing on my soul that my other films had been influenced so strongly by the [German version of the cinema/ theory of] auteurs. By that I mean an attitude of presenting oneself as a film artist, which was not to my taste because I didn't want to realise myself thematically. In [the series] *Köberle kommt* it dawned on me: to work with mass produced fare but to craft it really well – that's what I want.[22]

Despite his often-repeated disagreement with the assumptions of 'Autorenfilm' and the wider tradition of viewing directors as the real *auteur* of a film, most studies of his work have tried to point out that he 'really' is, after all, an auteur and that his films are substantially different from 'normal' television. The move to describe his individualistic *écriture* in order to call him an auteur and justify considering his work as the *oeuvre* of an artist can be found in several German monographs and essays.[23] Huber tries to resolve the 'paradox' of the craftsman-as-artist in this way:

> In the mud of contemporary German television, of all places, Graf has become the poster boy director of popular genres, despite varying degrees of success in terms of ratings, plastered with more Grimme awards than anyone else. [...] Is Dominik Graf the auteur in German commercial film production? The question can only be answered with an emphatic 'yes!', despite the fact that Graf has preferred to argue towards a contrary conclusion.[24]

In contrast, this study does not in the first place assume that there is a conflict between craftsmanship and art, genre filmmaking and the personal style and world-view typical

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[22] Dominik Graf as quoted in: Huber, Christoph, Olaf Möller. *Dominik Graf*. Wien: Österreichisches Filmmuseum 2013, p. 105. My translation.

[23] The monographs:

Huber/ Möller 2013, as mentioned above. This includes a scholarly discussion of his development as an auteur, a long interview with him, and short sketches of all his films.

A collection of texts and interviews with Graf and his collaborators on the TV series *Im Angesicht des Verbrechens*, documenting its inception and reflecting on its achievements:

Graf, Dominik, Johannes Sievert, and Julia von Vietinghoff. *Im Angesicht des Verbrechens: Die Entstehung einer deutschen Fernsehserie*. Berlin: Alexander, 2010.

Essays include:

Norbert Grob, *Dominik Graf,* in: *Filmregisseure*, edited by Thomas Koebner (Stuttgart: Reclam 2008), p.287-290. A short overview of his themes, style, and development.

Wahl, Chris, Marco Abel, Jesko Jockenhövel und Michael Wedel (ed.), *Im Angesicht des Fernsehens: Der Filmemacher Dominik Graf* (München: Edition Text & Kritik, 2012). This is a collection of essays on Graf.

Glasenapp, Jörn (ed.). *Dominik Graf*. München: Edition Text & Kritik, 2015. This is a collection of essays on Graf.

[24] Huber/ Möller, p.10.

of an auteur.[25] Television does not need to be conceived as generally lacking quality.[26] Equally, I hold that it is possible to analyse films grouped together because they were directed by the same filmmaker without disregarding the aspects of teamwork and the important contributions made by the many collaborators. The Coen brothers write their own screenplays but certainly rely on collaborators in myriad ways. Graf in contrast only rarely writes his screenplays: More often, he works with a small number of regular writers, as he did with Ralf Basedow in the case of *Er sollte tot*, or, in some cases co-writes the screenplays, as with Markus Busch on *Die Freunde der Freunde*. The primary reason for the Coen brothers to be included in this study is their connection with Wittgenstein's philosophy, which I will discuss in chapter 3, but the discussion of *A Serious Man* also sets up a particular focus on Graf highlighting the mixedness of his genre alliances, the ways his films foster attitudes in viewers, the notion of making progress, and the focus on a filmic style of self-criticism with and without self-subversion.

In summary, Graf can be taken to challenge preconceptions about genre filmmaking. To understand Graf's uses of genres, I will rely on Wittgenstein's philosophical method. The relevance of Wittgenstein to thinking in and about cultural practices and film will then be explored by turning to the Coen brother's film *A Serious Man*, which, I argue, itself criticises certain varieties of Wittgensteinian thinking.

1.2.2. Why Wittgenstein?

The main advantage of proceeding inductively in my argument is not just that such reasoning allows me to draw attention to the way specific examples—in the case at hand, Graf's episode of *Polizeiruf*—complicate preconceptions about the uses of genre film in a tangible and direct way. Rather, by proceeding from close readings of film language to abstraction, I aim also to challenge predominant conceptions of the relationship between abstract theory and concrete practice. For this, Wittgenstein's philosophical method is most helpful, because it investigates this relationship through conceptual clarification. At this point, I want to make a few important first distinctions: my reading of Wittgenstein is sympathetic to the 'ordinary' reading provided e.g. by Toril Moi, which she argues is relevant in a number of ways to literary studies.[27] Her work takes a sharply critical position to the assumption that Wittgenstein's philosophy can be conflated with some kind of social constructivism or turned into a postmodern

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[25] In this, I follow, for instance: Ritzer I. (2016) Genre- und Autorentheorie. In: Stiglegger M. (eds) Handbuch Filmgenre. Springer Reference Geisteswissenschaften. Springer VS, Wiesbaden.

[26] I agree on this e.g. with Jason Mittell, although the German landscape of television works differently from the American one that Mittell describes. Cf. Mittell (2010), Jason, *Television and American Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2010). Mittell (2011a), Jason, *The Qualities of Complexity: Aesthetic Evaluation in Contemporary Television*, 15th March 2011, <http://justtv.wordpress.com/2011/12/15/the-qualities-of-complexity-aesthetic-evaluation-in-contemporary-television/> [accessed 8th July 2012]. Mittell (2011b), Jason, *Serial Orientations*, 14th November 2011, <http://justtv.wordpress.com/2011/11/14/serial-orientations/> [accessed 23rd July 2012]

[27] Moi, Toril. *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell*. Chicago, 2018.

theory.[28] I am grateful for her wide-ranging argument, which emphasises the powerful liberating spirit of Wittgenstein's, as well as Austin's and Cavell's, work. In particular, her opposition to a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' resonates with my concerns, by which she means the dogmatic assumption that texts 'hide' something the scholarly reader sets out to inquisitorially unveil by applying theories. Moi charges that this leads mostly to very predictable results rather than insights.[29] Instead, she encourages a more personal approach, at the risk of attracting criticism:

> To read—and to find the words in which to express one's reading—is to stake one's claims on one's own perceptions, on one's own experience of the text. There is no recipe—no method—for how to do this. The most perceptive, the most attentive, the most learned, and the most knowledgeable critic will do the best job. We fear that when we voice our view, we will discover that we are alone, maybe mad, certainly cast out.[30]

This somewhat resembles Thomas Koebner's method of film analysis, borrowing from Goethe's morphological method (which also influenced Wittgenstein): Koebner describes his hermeneutical approach as an intimate and tender process of assimilating the style of critical writing to the style of the film that is to be analysed. Goethe calls for an approach called 'zarte Empirie' (tender empiricism), which in Koebner's examples consists in surrounding the close description of particular moments in films with comparisons to other films, to certain similar and dissimilar artworks, pointing out – in an essayistic manner – developments of iconographic or narrative development in film history, or between film and theatre, or between film and other realms of personal or public life.[31] Both Moi and Koebner are somewhat defensive about the potential problems of their approach. Koebner characterises his 'method' as 'hinfließende Einfühlung' (a kind of empathy that flows towards the object to be studied), a kind of 'exploratory voyage into the unknown' which then yields the basis of 'cautious conclusions', but he acknowledges that it hinges on the analyst's sufficiently wide-ranging knowledge of art, history, etc..[32] I agree that to study film is from the outset a personal endeavour, and this personal dimension of the research however does not have to negatively impede the rigour of the analysis, nor lead to merely subjective opinions. When it is well done, it should offer a good basis for intersubjective communication about different ways of viewing and experiencing a film (rather than e.g. merely restating its contents). Moi's approach to employing Wittgenstein is not completely identical with mine: she takes the 'ordinary' reading to be aligned with 'ordinary language philosophy' in a certain sense and argues that it

[28] Moi, p.7.
[29] Moi, p. 175.
[30] Moi, p.195.
[31] Koebner 2007, pp.7-19.
[32] Koebner 2007, p.8.

takes Wittgenstein to not provide the reader with a theory and neither with a 'method'.[33] In contrast, my overall project is very much concerned with outlining the consequences of what I take to be Wittgenstein's method for the study of popular genre film. Gadamer's point that the study of art requires different heuristic tools than science and therefore something different than a 'method' might have been what Moi had in mind, but the next chapter should make clear that Wittgenstein's method is highly aware of the need to approach different objects of study in different ways, rather than impose science on everything.[34] In this respect I align myself with the excellent philological and philosophical work by Oskari Kuusela, whose nuanced reading of Wittgenstein aims to go beyond the often-heated divisions between different schools of reading Wittgenstein. Moi pointedly remarks about exactly these divisions of scholarship: 'The closer the overlap in interests, the more likely it is that the differences will be difficult to gauge, and easy to either exaggerate or overlook.'[35] In this spirit, I want to acknowledge her helpful contribution, despite my markedly different approach to Wittgenstein.

1.2.3. A Wittgensteinian defense of popular culture and genre film

As the argument develops, I will return in a number of different ways to the puzzle that was my starting point: how can creativity take place within and through conventional filmmaking, such as in conventional genre films?

There has been, as far as I am aware, no attempt to *defend* popular culture and genre film by relying mainly on Wittgenstein's method. A number of philosophers have taken a variety of more or less Wittgensteinian approaches to discussing *film as philosophy*, including most famously Stanley Cavell.[36] Here, the focus was to argue that one can find something worthy of being called philosophy in films, including in popular genre cinema. I sympathise and take this view for granted, but it is different from what I am attempting to argue here: I use Wittgenstein to attack certain prejudiced and generalised assumptions often brought up in discussions about 'the quality' of this or that film, which impact the making and evaluation of so-called 'genre films' in the most detrimental ways: Wittgenstein makes us aware of the empty generalisation in assuming that there is just one standard according to which 'quality' of films might be discussed, and, I believe, he offers a rigorous but pluralistic alternative. It does indeed make sense to speak of particular qualities of film, as long as one is aware that this discussion of quality is tied into a language-game, i.e. a particular practice of *using films*

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[33] Moi, pp.1f.

[34] Cf. Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed., (Sheed and Ward, 1979). On Wittgenstein's criticism of scientism as a threat to other areas of understanding than science as well as to science itself cf. Beale, Jonathan, and Ian James Kidd. *Wittgenstein and Scientism*. (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[35] Moi, p.11.

[36] On film as philosophy cf. Mulhall, Stephen, *On Film*, 3rd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp.85-103; as well as: Read, Rupert J., and Jerry Goodenough, *Film as Philosophy: Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

(and film forms) as filmmakers, film viewers, and film critics, which can be made explicit by analysing what I will call the *grammar* of a film (or a scene, or a genre).
That Wittgenstein has not so far been employed in this way might have something to do with the perception of Wittgenstein as a severely austere thinker with strong, and often bitingly negative, opinions on art and culture, and so, it might be assumed, he would frown upon the suggestion that pop can be and even should be taken seriously. Turning to Wittgenstein, the most obvious place to look for notes on culture would be his collected private notes from diaries in *Culture & Value*, which suggest Wittgenstein as a rather conservative proponent of *Kulturkritik*, but these may well be misleading, as Kevin Cahill has argued.[37] Going more into depth, it is possible to sketch a properly Wittgensteinian philosophy of (popular) culture, which suggests a more methodical and rigorous way beyond the rather prejudiced and narrow views in *Culture & Value*. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter 3, but ultimately, Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture is not the end point or target of my argument. The language-game method allows me to address the varieties of uses of film in a way that goes beyond a compulsive attachment to austerity as a requirement for 'good art'. As I will argue, however, this does not, suggest that Wittgenstein's method gives popular genre film an easy pass. The defence of pop and genre film that I outline is based on holding *all* films to the highest standards, but it points out that there is not one unifying standard appropriate for judging all art or even all films – and criticism equally has to take responsibility for its own assumptions and the consequences of those assumptions.
Quite contrary to the opinion that Wittgenstein supposedly argues that one group cannot at all understand another (i.e. Wittgenstein as an enabler of quietism, fideism etc.), Wittgenstein points out that if something can at all be understood, then understanding is concerned with seeing regularities of some kind. And these regularities, which Wittgenstein calls *grammar* (but, as Kuusela argues, Wittgenstein often uses 'grammar' and '*logic*' synonymously) can be made explicit, can be investigated, shown, explained, etc.[38] However, Wittgenstein is extremely careful not to jump to conclusions overly quickly: different rules apply in different contexts, and it is problematic to assume that there is – or could be – one all-encompassing system into which all rules could be integrated or translated. Still, it should be *possible* to learn them if they are rules. This does not guarantee that rules can be learned easily or quickly, and in the case of genre filmmaking this might involve e.g. a vast amount of film historical knowledge as well as, possibly, a degree of practical experience of film craftsmanship, to be able to differentiate between similar situations that are still relevantly different.
Wittgenstein's heuristic method, involving the important concepts of 'language games' and 'forms of life', can be used to foster awareness of unquestioned assumptions (that might then be questioned, if it is useful to do so) and to (dis)solve certain

[37] Cahill, Kevin (2011). *The Fate of Wonder: Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity*. Columbia University Press.
[38] Kuusela 2018, manuscript, introduction.

disagreements. This methodology has recently been applied in interreligious dialogue, for instance, but I argue that it also offers a way of reconciling what appear to be irreconcilable theoretical positions such as competing accounts of genre as a taxonomic system or as cultural techniques, or theories of media determinism and filmic realism. This in turn does not only matter to academic and theoretical debates – as we will see, theories and general assumptions shape everyday activities just as much. And in this way, I arrive at a point where I argue that Wittgenstein's methodology helps us see more clearly how there can be a healthy interaction and coexistence of tradition with change, convention with innovation, and immersive film viewing with critical scrutiny in genre filmmaking: As chapters 4 and 5 discuss, genres are based on regularities. These recognisable regularities and repetitions of similar patterns, styles, tropes, characters, situations, and problems are what enable us to talk about genre conventions. As we will see, the status of these regularities (sometimes described as 'genre rules') is often unclear and, indeed, varies between different contexts: it makes a difference whether a film viewer speaks about such rules, a film historian traces them historically, or a film producer asks a writer or director to make use of them. The way we speak about genres matters, and therefore clarifying these different ways of using the concept of genres is helpful. In this study I will mostly focus on the uses of genre patterns by filmmakers *as they can be traced in their films*. This focus should not be understood as altogether separate from the everyday practices of film production and the demands on genre concepts, motivated by economic considerations. However, to study this background in depth requires a different focus (namely the sociological study of production culture) and lies beyond the scope of this study.[39]

This much should be said as a matter of introduction of the themes, questions and methodology of this study. All that is left to do now, before we can turn to the actual argument, is to give an overview of the structure and division into chapters.

1.3. Overview of the structure of this study

Chapter 2 establishes the key concepts and conceptions relevant for the argument of the later chapters. My own methodological approach depends on locating the place of Wittgenstein's method within philosophical and philological debates about Wittgenstein. Further, the chapter clarifies the concepts of language-games, simple objects of comparison, and perspicuous presentation and challenges the notion that Wittgenstein's method leaves 'everything' as it is, instead focusing on the difference that using Wittgenstein's method makes.

In order to make the concept of 'simple objects of comparison' more concrete in relation to narrative film and conventional storytelling, I turn in chapter 3 to filmmakers who arguably employ a strongly Wittgensteinian filmic style: the Coen

[39] Cf. Caldwell, John Thornton. *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. Durham, N.C. ; London, 2008. Print. Console-ing Passions.

Brothers. Their films show great awareness of genre contexts and they use genre conventions both freely and in order to reflect back on their limits. *A Serious Man* (USA 2010) develops further a number of themes from Ethan Coen's own Bachelor Thesis on the later Wittgenstein, such as metaphysics in religion and mathematics, and the concept of *attitude*, which points toward the discussions around Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture.[40] Working with this film helps me build my argument beyond Ben Ware's recent work on Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture, questioning some of its conclusions, especially his assessment that Wittgenstein's method leads to a kind of 'passive nihilism'.[41]

My reading of *A Serious Man* takes the following steps: it explores the film's prologue, which can be compared to the prologue scene discussed above, as a key to the film. The film offers a critical view of how conventions deal with unpredictability and contrasts religious and traditional culture with rock'n'roll and popular culture (e.g. during the Bar Mitzvah scene). This prepares for a discussion of Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture and the 'problem of life': the film can be seen as a more mature reflection on Wittgenstein's philosophical method that goes beyond Ethan Coen's argument in his thesis.

While *A Serious Man* purposefully remains very vague about its commitments to genres – it references various genre conventions but keeps them ambiguous – chapter 4 turns to genre theory and especially to discussions about genre as a 'family resemblance' concept: This chapter uses an analysis of Graf's *Er sollte tot...* to argue that a Wittgensteinian approach needs to go beyond concerns with definition and theory-construction. The narrow focus on 'family resemblance' has covered up the potential of Wittgenstein's method to account for, and foster, the dynamic developments and creativity of genre patterns.

In chapter 5 we turn to Dominik Graf's *Die Freunde der Freunde* (Germany 2002). Having already discussed the Coen Brothers allows me to similarly sketch Graf's approach to filmmaking in terms of an *attitude* rather than (only) trying to pin down what he 'means'. I will discuss Graf's engagement with German and European prejudices against genre films: seeing conventions – and genres – as language-games recognises the kind of dynamics that genre theorists worry might be excluded from the concept of family resemblance; at the same time, it avoids the problematic biological resonances of the concept of 'genre hybridity'. Language-games bring into view the grammatical/ logical, conventional/ implicit rules with which film makes sense. By recognising how Graf's moments of self-reflection act as objects of comparison for the clarification of complex and mixed grammar, worries associated with theories about 'realism' and materialistic 'determinism' can arguably be dissolved.

Chapter 6 concludes the argument of the study. What I hope to show is that the Wittgensteinian method outlined in chapter 2 offers a critical approach which avoids

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[40] Coen, Ethan. *Two Views of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*. Undergraduate Thesis at Princeton University, 1979.

[41] Ware, Ben. *Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the Tractatus and Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, pp.93f.

self-undermining tendencies of other critical approaches, such as in genre film theory. However, Wittgenstein's method does not proceed by replacing existing theories with a super-theory but by clarifying their limits. This clarification of *limits* has, counter-intuitively, a liberating effect.

2.

The Consequences of Wittgenstein's Method

The point of approaching film studies without general theories, through Wittgensteinian method, is to keep the critical rigour of the thinking that went into theoretical approaches but increase our flexibility in answering to the actual, particular needs of particular situations: What I want to attack are the harmful forms of rigid (self-)censorship that arise from attempts at determining in advance and in *general* what film *is* and what it *should ideally* do. Wittgenstein's method, as I understand it, has both a critical side, attacking *our attachment* to such tendencies towards generalisation, and a constructively defensive side, allowing us to go on with whatever picture is actually useful but only after clarifying the limits of its actual usefulness. Chapter 3 will illustrate this form of critical approach by showing that such problematic attachments to pictures come in many forms, and are very much part of everyday life, rather than a purely academic matter. Chapters 4 and 5 then turn to the use of generalising pictures of genre films inherent in many attempts to *define genre*, and the potential that Wittgenstein's method holds out for (genre) film studies.

This chapter will outline the central techniques of Wittgenstein's method, and I will clarify my own position within the field of Wittgenstein exegesis. In order to do this, I will first explain the aims of my own exegetical reading of Wittgenstein against the backdrop of existing research (2.1.), before explaining the special position of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) in comparison to Wittgenstein's other writing, including his only book published during his lifetime, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922). The next section (2.2.) argues for reading Wittgenstein as providing a method for undogmatic thinking without general theories, theses, or doctrines, by providing a close-reading of the opening of the *Investigations* and pointing out its use of caricature and staging. Building on this, I investigate why there is no definition of 'language' in the book (which already invites us to stretch and project Wittgenstein's comments on language beyond a narrow concern with word-language to the unique forms of film). I argue that his avoidance of such a definition is a feature of his philosophical method that can be explained in connection to the concepts of 'language-games', 'objects of comparison' and the decidedly visual notion of 'perspicuous presentation'. Finally (in 2.3.), I sketch quite generally what I mean by seeing art as an object of comparison, before turning to concrete examples in the next chapter.

2.1. Why studying film with Wittgenstein's method is not Wittgensteinian film theory

It is difficult to summarise Wittgenstein's thinking, and there is a danger of making his method appear mechanical, when its greatest potential really lies in its flexibility and sensitivity to context and to what the particular reader brings to their personal

interaction with the *Investigations*. There is no uniform structure in Wittgenstein's thinking that one could simply apply to new fields over and over again. Still, as a highly demanding method, it has consistency and critical rigour, while allowing for pluralistic differences. In this section, I show this by situating the method broadly within the historical context in which it was developed, presenting as clearly as possible the particular strand of Wittgensteinian scholarship on which I build my argument.

2.1.1. Different strands of reading Wittgenstein

Generally, I align my reading with a family of interpretations of the Late Wittgenstein that can be considered an 'alternative strand' in reading Wittgenstein, even while they are becoming increasingly influential.[42] These interpretations are associated with the philosophers Gordon Baker (in his late life), Oskari Kuusela, and, to some degree, David Stern.[43] Their exegetical work has influenced my own reading, so I will position myself against the backdrop of their existing work. Each of them has a slightly different way of reading Wittgenstein, but they are fundamentally compatible. They overlap in some respects with the interpretations developed by a group of mostly American philosophers associated with the so-called 'New Wittgenstein' debates (and a book of the same title): The New Wittgensteinians include such philosophers as Cora Diamond, James Conant, and Stanley Cavell.[44] They differ from Kuusela, Baker and Stern mainly by taking a particular position towards the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), arguing that the whole book should be read as 'nonsense', since failing to do so would, in the words of Diamond, amount to 'chickening out'.[45] A connected point of divergence between Baker and Kuusela, on the one hand, and Stern and the New Wittgensteinians, on the other, is the question of 'Pyrrhonism'. For Stern, as for Kuusela and Baker, it is important not to approach Wittgenstein with the automatic assumption that there are theories to be extracted from Wittgenstein's writing:

> For this reason, [the *Investigations*] is best read by discussing the questions it raises, rather than beginning by trying to formulate a consistent theory about what its author must have meant. This is not to deny that it is possible to do so. However, 'the author' and 'what he must have meant' are themselves just the sort of problematic

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[42] Citron, Gabriel. 2012. 'Simple objects of comparison for complex grammars: An alternative strand in Wittgenstein's later remarks on religion.' In *Philosophical Investigations* 35(1), p.18ff.

[43] Baker, Gordon P. 2004. *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects. Essays on Wittgenstein*. Ed. by Katherine J. Morris. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers; Kuusela, Oskari. 2008. *The Struggle against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the concept of philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Stern, David G. 2004. *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[44] Crary, Alice, and Rupert J. Read. *The New Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge, 2000.

[45] Diamond, Cora. 1991. *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, p.181.

> philosophical concepts that the *Philosophical Investigations* places in question.[46]

David Stern addresses the disagreement whether or to what degree Wittgenstein's method 'ends' philosophy or reshapes it:

> Wittgenstein aimed to end philosophy, yet in doing so, he was continually struggling with philosophical problems. In order to understand the *Investigations*, we have to see that the tension between philosophy as a therapy and philosophy as constructive argument operates here in a number of different ways.[47]

To conceive of Wittgenstein as aiming to end philosophy, as Stern himself eventually does by leaning towards a 'Pyrrhonian' reading, however, amounts to attributing to Wittgenstein a dogmatic position (alas a negative one), which was precisely the kind of preconception that Stern set out to avoid, in order to see the text's richness more clearly.[48] Like Stern, I would like to address the importance of Wittgenstein's style, which allows one to see the text as a set of tools. Unlike Stern – and unlike the New Wittgensteinians – I will emphasise the text's dynamic usefulness for various different needs by focusing, with Kuusela and Baker, on the central importance, and potential, of 'objects of comparisons' in Wittgenstein's method as it can be encountered in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Its particular form allows the individual reader to learn a technique, a method. At the same time, this turn away from general theories does not automatically mean that philosophy turns into a negative project either—instead it is possible to conceive of it as a careful positive project of conceptual clarification.[49] What I will outline below is therefore neither an immanent reading (with reference to the author's supposed 'intentions'), nor a genetic reading.[50] Instead, my interest lies in outlining how Wittgenstein's method works. In a sense this is a dramaturgical question: How does Wittgenstein engage the readers? How can the readers themselves make decisions and interact with the text? How do the structures, themes, the conceptual tools, and their ordering in the text shape this interaction, what do they leave open, what do they guide more firmly? The term 'dramaturgical structure' is never used by the writers I discuss. However, I think it best captures the difference between a reading that focuses on Wittgenstein's method and other available readings, including 'Pyrrhonian' readings. Baker and Kuusela show the kind of interactions that the text allows the reader to develop with it, rather than trying to limit and break down its ambiguities into a single 'correct' interpretation. The historical person, Ludwig

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[46] Stern, p.55.
[47] Stern, p.53f.
[48] Stern, pp.46-55.
[49] For Kuusela, Wittgenstein's method leads positively to conceptual clarification, cf. Kuusela 2008, p. 26.
[50] Cf. for definitions of these terms: Stern, p.56.

Wittgenstein, plays only a small role here. As Stern outlines, there are a (possibly infinite) number of ways to read the *Investigations*, and they engage each reader in a unique dialogue informed by their interests, beliefs, and projects; indeed, Wittgenstein himself notes: 'I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.'[51]

As such, my 'dramaturgical reading' focuses on the way the text encourages the readers to a *particular* engagement rather than trying to dissolve ambiguities that cannot be resolved without oneself falling into the trap of dogmatism. As we will see, such a reading fits with Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a learnable practical *skill*. The aim of this technique for thinking is to clarify conceptions for the solution of concrete problems and worries.

Different versions of Wittgenstein's method have become very influential beyond immediate philosophical concerns in a variety of other disciplines, including in psychology, interreligious dialogue, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, art criticism, and film studies.[52] In the following chapters I will engage with some of the Wittgensteinian approaches taken in these disciplines, trying to highlight also some inter-disciplinary connections. For example, Wittgenstein's philosophical method offers a way beyond unnecessary forms of antagonism, based merely on misunderstanding the other school's 'grammar', between different 'schools' in film studies and within the humanities more generally.[53] This is different from reconstructing a historically informed argument about Wittgenstein's opinions on film or culture, or arguing for a Wittgensteinian film theory. To make this point clearly, I will address the contrast between the consequences of Wittgenstein's method and some of his personal opinions at various points in his life in chapter 3. There have been attempts to develop Wittgensteinian approaches to film theory, which are useful as contributions to the theoretical discourse, but they take Wittgenstein to offer a kind of 'super-theory' that should replace existing theories, which radically contrasts the reading of Wittgenstein's method that I will develop in this chapter: as a method that neither can be reduced to theories, nor one that is in the business of replacing any theories.[54] Cavell has long argued for seeing Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture, and there have been several books on the matter, which I will briefly discuss in later

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[51] *PI*, p.4e.

[52] An exhaustive list of references is impossible to provide here. Some of these influences will however be discussed in later chapters in some detail.

[53] This has similarly been suggested by Kuusela (cf. in Kuusela 2008, pp.4/5) in regard to his approach to undogmatic philosophy, which is used e.g. by Andrejc and Citron working on interreligious dialogue:

Andrejc, Gorazd. 2016. *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement: A Philosophical and Theological Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Citron, Gabriel. 2012. 'Simple objects of comparison for complex grammars: An alternative strand in Wittgenstein's later remarks on religion.' In *Philosophical Investigations* 35(1): 18–42.

[54] Cf. Allen, Richard. *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Branigan, Edward. *Projecting a Camera: Language-games in Film Theory*. London: Routledge, 2006.

chapters (mainly chapter 3).[55] Cavell similarly takes Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture to be distinct from the prejudices about forms of cultural 'decline' that can be found in his private notes.[56] In contrast to Cavell's view that takes the *Investigations* to provide a view of 'our times', and a similar position outlined by Ben Ware, I focus on a way of reading Wittgenstein's late writings in a non-dogmatic way as a critical intervention geared towards helping us disentangle the confusions of 'our time'. According to this conception, the *Investigations* teaches a way of thinking without theses, theories, or doctrines. Kuusela suggests that because Wittgenstein has been taken to hold theoretical positions typical of many analytical philosophers, much of the potential of his method has remained unexplored.[57] For instance, his method can be taken well out of the realm of the sort of themes that Wittgenstein himself wrote about.[58] Wittgenstein offers a radically critical method for conceptual clarification that brings into focus unsustainable generalisations and one-sided prejudices by providing what I will argue is ultimately a creative method for finding new or neglected perspectives that allow us to see things differently. Therefore, Wittgenstein's own opinions, on matters he clearly did not consider thoroughly, should not be taken as the final word.[59] Contrary to Ware's argument that Wittgenstein's 'views' amount to a form of nihilism, I will argue in chapter 3 that Wittgenstein's method is deeply ethical (which will to some degree involve clarifying the differences between Wittgenstein's views on culture as evident in his diaries and the consequences of his method as presented in his writing prepared for publication).[60] Later chapters trace how these consequences play out in concrete and contemporary cases, in order to clarify the way in which this method remains relevant and works outside the narrow focus of linguistic arguments about the uses of words, to which a clichéd view of Wittgenstein's philosophy takes his considerations to be constrained.

2.1.2. An overview of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical publications in context

It is important to note the special status of the *Investigations* in comparison to other published writing by Wittgenstein. While he never sent it off to the publisher, it is the final form that he gave to the philosophical approach he developed through many intermediary texts, which have since been published under titles he considered for the project at various stages, such as *Philosophical Grammar* and *Philosophical Remarks*. While studying the developments between these versions can be illuminating and has

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[55] Cahill, Kevin M. *The Fate of Wonder: Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity*. New York; Chichester: Columbia UP, 2011. Cavell, Stanley. 2013. *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Stern, David G., and Béla Szabados. 2004. *Wittgenstein reads Weininger*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press; Ware, Ben. 2015. *Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the Tractatus and Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

[56] Cavell, Stanley. 'Declining Decline' in Cavell 2013, pp.29-75.

[57] Kuusela 2008, pp.4/5.

[58] Kuusela 2008, p.4.

[59] Cf. quotes on cinema in *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (*CV*), pp.455f.

[60] Cf. Ware, p.94.

given rise to a whole branch of philological research, the preliminary versions were in each case withdrawn from circulation by Wittgenstein, whereas the *Investigations* was finished several years before its author's death and then left to his will's executors for publication.[61] I treat the *Investigations* therefore as Wittgenstein's final word on his method of philosophy, but I take the other texts into account as helpful context. The only other book he wrote and *finished* is *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, published under the Latin title (mostly for marketing reasons), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* which became famous world-wide as simply 'the Tractatus'.[62] The book is very short and has an austere, minimalistic style. It consists of seven main propositions and dozens of hierarchically organised lower propositions that further explain the higher proposition, numbered and ordered in an elaborate system.

Focusing on Wittgenstein's method, and its consequences, as I will do, means taking into account the *style* of the *Investigations* more than some commentators have done.[63] Wittgenstein's later philosophy takes the form of more or less connected remarks, investigations of different lengths, sometimes connected over several paragraphs, sometimes jumping from theme to theme. As he describes it in the preface, '[the form he adopts in writing] compels us to travel criss-cross in every direction over a wide field of thought'.[64] The writing style therefore never settles into a simple, orderly system, which would give us a sense of a complete image or a complete overview. Instead, the paragraphs offer aspects, posing questions, and in this way they discourage a passive attitude in the readers. Thus, the *Investigations*, instead of imposing a doctrine, are written to enable the reader to develop their own philosophical project; we train ourselves as readers to be critical of generalising 'pictures' that can hold us 'captive' (PI §115) and which arise from the ways we use language.

Today, more than 60 years after the publication of the *Investigations*, there is still considerable controversy about the book. David Stern wrote in his 'introduction' to the *Investigations*:

> We have seen that the *Philosophical Investigations*' wide-ranging appeal arises out of its unusual combination of an open-ended and conversational way of writing, which invites a multiplicity of interpretations, and its quite specific argumentative structure.[65]

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[61] For the history of the *PI*: Editorial preface in the fourth edition of the *PI* by Hacker and Schulte. On the development of the style of the *PI*: Pichler, Alois. *Wittgensteins Philosophische Untersuchungen: Vom Buch zum Album*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, especially on the question of editing and publication: pp.40-56.

[62] Monk, pp.137-191.

[63] Commentators dismissing the relevance of Wittgenstein's style as merely an inability to express himself clearly are listed by Pichler 2004, pp.22-39.

[64] *PI*, p.3e.

[65] Stern, p.186.

As Kuusela writes about this open-endedness of the book's style: '[...] the fact that philosophy does not force anybody to accept anything does not imply that philosophy loses its strength in any way. (Its true strength does not lie in a capacity to force anyone to accept anything, but in not needing to do so, one might say.) In particular, this does not open the door to an "anything goes" attitude or to irrationalism.'[66] So having established a first overview over the place of the *Investigations* in Wittgenstein's development, how does Wittgenstein's method *work*? And what is its purpose?

2.2. A method for undogmatic thinking without general theories

Oskari Kuusela argues in his book *The Struggle Against Dogmatism* that Wittgenstein worked during his whole life towards a philosophy that does not rely on any 'philosophical doctrines, theses, or theories'.[67] This view takes Wittgenstein himself at his word, as we can see from Wittgenstein's own methodological statements:

> [...] we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light—that is to say, its purpose—from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these workings are recognized—*despite* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language. (PI §109)

Possible critical responses to this approach without theories, doctrines, or theses, following Kuusela and Wittgenstein's own radical remarks, can include:

> [...] Does the view that there are no theses (and so on) in philosophy imply that we should abandon the fruits of the 2,500 and more years of labor by philosophers? [...] Maybe this assertion really amounts to a declaration of the alleged superiority of its asserter's philosophical perspective, a contention that his views are somehow beyond dispute, not to be debated but simply to be accepted? This would make the claim that there are no doctrines, theses or theories not only arrogant but dishonest.[68]

[66] Kuusela 2008, p.239.
[67] Kuusela 2008, p.2.
[68] Kuusela 2008, p.2.

With support from Kuusela, Baker, and Stern, I argue that Wittgenstein's method of conceptual clarification offers an alternative to the employment of philosophical theories that does not culminate in a super-theory. Wittgenstein's method, as I will argue, does not *replace* the philosophy that came before it (including, notably, the *Tractatus*) but clarifies the status of philosophical remarks and in this way puts them to new uses, which allows us to keep everything that *worked* (Kuusela goes into quite some detail explaining how he thinks the *Tractatus* should be seen as presenting a useful conception of logic for particular purposes in light of the *Investigations*)[69]. As such, this method is intrinsically *cooperative* and *open-ended*. Kuusela's book takes great care to trace the development of Wittgenstein's thought. It outlines his many different attempts to counter the human urge to generalise by conflating *factual statements* with *statements of necessity*: 'the roots of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy might be said to lie in his emphasis on the difference between true or false statements and expressions of exceptionless necessity. The failure to distinguish between these two types of statements constitutes, according to Wittgenstein, a fundamental confusion in philosophy, which gives rise to metaphysics as a study of necessary truths pertaining to reality.'[70]

In his early philosophy, Wittgenstein failed to achieve this goal of a philosophy without theories, doctrines or theses because he implicitly put forth a general theory about the *necessary* form of *all* propositions and thereby became attached to a kind of unsustainable generalisation. This approach does not succeed in coming up with a truly *undogmatic* approach to philosophical thinking, insofar as it relies on what turns out to be a general theory of the form of all propositions. Building an argument on such a general theory implies that once one finds even a single exception to this general theory, the authority of the whole theory collapses together with any arguments built on it.[71] According to Holm Tetens, Wittgenstein later came to realise that he ignored the actual varieties of language and its forms. He had narrowly chosen only descriptive propositions as examples, neglecting e.g. the difference between descriptive and normative sentences.[72]

Kuusela shows how Wittgenstein later tried to get past the kinds of problems that the conception of language in the Tractatus produces.[73] Wittgenstein attempted to create a complete system of possible uses of sentences that shows the different possible uses of words in different contexts, but eventually he gave up as he realised that there can be no such complete system.[74] The *Philosophical Investigations* take another approach, which does not offer, nor aim to offer, a complete system or overview. So what else

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[69] For an overview of Kuusela's position on the *Tractatus*, see his introduction, Kuusela 2008, pp.8-11.

[70] Kuusela 2008, p.3

[71] Kuusela 2008, pp.108-111. Kuusela argues that Wittgenstein attempted to come up with such a truly undogmatic approach his whole life, the failed attempt of the *Tractatus* included.

[72] Tetens, Holm. *Wittgensteins "Tractatus": Ein Kommentar*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2009, pp.150f.

[73] Kuusela 2008, pp.27-30.

[74] Kuusela 2008, pp.120-148 on 'Wittgenstein's Turn'. Uffelmann, Sarah Anna. *Vom System zum Gebrauch: Eine genetisch-philosophische Untersuchung des Grammatikbegriffs bei Wittgenstein*. De Gruyter, 2018.

does this approach achieve, if not a theory, nor a system, nor a complete overview? In order to outline the specifics of this method, I will now address why Wittgenstein does not deliver a theory of language. My arguments prepare the ground for taking Wittgenstein into debates within media and film studies (especially their concern with the relevance of non-verbal communication) in later chapters.

2.2.1. Why is there no definition of 'language' in the Philosophical Investigations*?*

Wittgenstein is often presented as a philosopher who is narrowly focused on language, which is taken to mean 'word-language'.[75] In order to clarify what Wittgenstein instead offers (and to eventually see how it can be used in regard to genre films), I will return to the famous opening of the *Philosophical Investigations* to investigate why it discusses many different uses of language but never *defines* what language *is*. This is not a coincidence, as we will see. The book begins with a quote by St Augustine:

> When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point it out. This, however, I gathered from their gestures, the natural language of all peoples, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the movements of the limbs and the tone of voice, indicates the affections of the soul when it desires, or clings to, or rejects, or recoils from, something. In this way, little by little, I learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective places in various sentences, signified. And once I got my tongue around these signs, I used them to express my wishes.[76]

Wittgenstein then goes on to dissect the 'view' of language found in this quote:

> These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the words in language name objects — sentences are combinations of such names. — In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.
>
> Augustine does not mention any difference between kinds of word. Someone who describes the learning of language in this way is, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like "table", "chair", "bread", and

[75] Cavell critically engages such readings of Wittgenstein as 'Ordinary Language Philosopher' in: Cavell, Stanley. 2015. *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Especially the essay 'The Availability of the Later Wittgenstein' on drawing distinctions between Wittgenstein and Ordinary Language Philosophy, cf. on p.59.

[76] *PI* §1

> of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself.
>
> Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip of paper marked "five red apples". He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked "apples"; then he looks up the word "red" in a chart and finds a colour sample next to it; then he says the series of elementary number-words — I assume that he knows them by heart — up to the word "five", and for each number-word he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer. — It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words. — "But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?" — Well, I assume that he acts as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere. — But what is the meaning of the word "five"? No such thing was in question here, only how the word "five" is used. (PI §1)

One might remark here, as David Stern does, that Wittgenstein's description really does not do Augustine justice.[77] Whereas Augustine makes no general claims about language, much less producing a general theory of language, Wittgenstein sketches a bizarre, surreal, and complicated scene of someone operating with words, which (falsely) claims to describe *all* of language-use. One might even respond to this description: '*No one* actually uses words like this!'

Wittgenstein's caricature ignores the subtlety with which Augustine's autobiographical description from memory already embeds words within a larger context of human behaviour. That is, Augustine mentions 'bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice'. In Wittgenstein's caricature, the characters behave more like robots that mechanically operate with words without taking into account the complexity of the context and the ways in which the use of the words are connected with *other forms of language* that operate without words.

This use of caricaturing that *seems* to miss some of Augustine's finer points, however, is already part of the method. It renders visible a particular *aspect* that the philosopher wants to focus on, not in order to say that this is how things are but as an *object of comparison* that captures a particular *conception*. The concept of 'objects of comparison' is introduced much later in the *Investigations* (see section 2.2.3 below). Problems arise when either the caricature or Augustine's own description are taken as general theories, supposed to cover all cases of language-use. To see the difference between presenting a conception and a theory, we have to introduce a couple of more

[77] Stern on Augustine: Stern, p.79ff.

concepts (see below). Wittgenstein demonstrates his method simply by providing examples, without prior explanations, definitions, or announcements. Looking back from later passages, the skewed description of Augustine's quote appears as an object of comparison that throws a light on the aspect of varieties of *language-use*. The pluralism of propositions is clarified through a comparison with games, at the same time *ignoring* other aspects, namely the fine distinctions in Augustine – which is unproblematic, because Wittgenstein does not claim to cover all aspects.

David Stern explains that Wittgenstein regularly introduces philosophical debates in a similar way and that the approach taken in the example above is the first of many similar instances in the *PI*. The writing often takes the form of a dialogue. It unfolds in three stages:

a.) First, one voice states a philosophical position that Wittgenstein opposes.[78] The conception of language caricatured in the scene of the buyer and the seller of apples is one such example. Wittgenstein extracts from a concrete description – set by its original author Augustine in a *concrete* context – an *abstract* imaginary scene of how one might imagine language to work *in general*. The imaginary scene highlights some features of how humans sometimes use language or rather how they imagine themselves to use language. The *presentation* is not like a scientific model that aims to offer descriptions that edge closer and closer to stating in detail an empirical truth (e.g. in this case: an empirical truth about how humans use language). Instead, the presentation takes the exaggerated and artificial form of a caricature, so the reader does not feel inclined to accept it wholesale; this is what makes it so useful as an object of comparison. It allows reflection on certain features but the presentation in the story of the apple-sale appears as similar and dissimilar both to Augustine's actual description and actual language-use in our lives. The point of this will become clearer below (in 2.2.3 and 2.2.4).

b.) After this first step in the recurring pattern, there follows a 'description of circumstances in which that position is appropriate'.[79] For example, Wittgenstein goes on in PI §2: 'That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions. But one can also say that it is the idea of a language more primitive than ours.'

c.) This description is succeeded in a third stage by the deflationary observation that these circumstances are quite limited and particular, and that once we clarify this, the description becomes unproblematic:

> 'Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in several cases where the question arises "Will that description do or not?" The answer is: "Yes, it will, but only for this

[78] Stern, pp.10-15.
[79] Stern, p.10.

> narrowly circumscribed area, not for the whole of what you were purporting to describe."
>
> It is as if someone were to say, "Playing a game consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules . . ." and we replied: You seem to be thinking of board-games, but they are not all the games there are. You can rectify your explanation by expressly restricting it to those games.' (PI §3)

Stern traces the different places in which Wittgenstein takes these three steps of 'the method of §2'.[80] Rather than making a single coherent argument, this method draws attention to the way many philosophical investigations are thrown off balance before they have started because the investigations strive for a generality that they cannot sustainably provide. This demonstration in itself explains *why* Wittgenstein himself abstains from general definitions or a theory of language. But that is not all. As mentioned above, one possible approach to interpreting Wittgenstein's starting point would be to make clear both the similarities and the dissimilarities between Wittgenstein's 'Augustinian conception of language' and what Augustine actually describes. As such, a critical assessment of the limits of Wittgenstein's view of Augustine is part of the method. One comes to see more clearly how careful Augustine is with regard to subtleties and how careless and imprecise the view, attributed to him, is — not just in comparison with the subtleties and complexities of interpersonal communication but also in comparison with Augustine's writing. Drawing such comparisons is part of the method, but we do not see yet to what end Wittgenstein sets up the method in this way. Wittgenstein does not explain what the point of his doing philosophy in this way is; instead, he goes ahead and involves the readers in this practice before reflecting on it. The readers are not given the feeling that they have access to a priviledged 'outside view' of the problems at hand but rather are led to adopt an active position from the start.[81] Part of the method is that the readers have to figure out for themselves why Wittgenstein chooses this style of writing and these examples and why they are put into such an order. An initial answer is simply that Wittgenstein's presentation does not require us to assume that there even *can* be an 'outside view' on philosophy, language, or 'the world'. Therefore, the method does not itself need to offer such an impossible overview. Instead, it looks at particular instances without an overarching framework or theoretical system of definitions etc. in place.
As such, it should be recognised that Wittgenstein leaves open the question of 'what language is', not in the sense that he does not at all attempt to delineate the concept but that he does not produce a general theory of language, or make general claims about what it 'is'. Wittgenstein's method is attentive to all sorts of procedures of

[80] Stern, p.11.
[81] E.g. Stern mentions Wittgenstein's critique of the assumption that there can be 'a view from nowhere': Stern, p. 48.

communication, perception, and understanding, beyond the narrow confines of the word-language that is mostly associated with the word 'language'. For instance, Wittgenstein has no problem discussing sense impressions as a form of 'language': 'The point here is not that our sense impressions can lie to us, but that we understand their language. (And this language, like any other, rests on convention.)' (PI §355). As we have seen above, a neglected aspect of Augustine's description already included body language, tone, etc. as a further forms of non-verbal language, which are quite central forms of communication in films.

As Kuusela explains: 'Giving up the search for such a unifying principle, a once-and-for-all determination of the concept of language, Wittgenstein comes to adopt the view of language as a family-resemblance concept.'[82] Wittgenstein employs examples as 'centres of variation' to characterise such family resemblance concepts, as this quote from his manuscripts makes clear:

> If therefore, we asked about the essence of punishment, essence of revolution, of knowledge, of cultural decline or refined sense for music – we should [Wittgenstein inserts: would] not try to give something *common* to all cases, not what they all *really* are, that is, an ideal which is *contained* in them all; but instead of this examples, as it were centres of variation.[83]

The work done by Wittgenstein's series of examples is one of *conceptual clarification*, which does not rely on empirical or theoretical claims about what language 'always' is or 'must be'. The *Investigations* allow us to consider the similarities and dissimilarities between the ways in which words 'work' as part of activities and the way photographs, paintings, and, indeed, moving pictures allow different ways of 'understanding', 'presenting', 'seeing' and 'thinking'. Wittgenstein also considers various different media and how they impact what can be said through them. Philosophical difficulty 'arises when we look at the facts through the medium of a misleading form of expression'.[84] Kuusela notes, 'confusions or misunderstandings similar to philosophical problems might arise in various representational media [...]. In this sense, this kind of problem is not specific to "word language".'[85] On the other hand, pictures and sentences can also sometimes fulfil similar services. In regard to communicating the thought that the soul lives on after the death of the body, Wittgenstein notes: 'After all, pictures of these things have been painted. And why should it not do the *same* service as the spoken doctrine? And it is the service that counts' (PPF iv §23). Word language and visual communication can have overlapping 'services' and therefore arguably overlapping uses, even while they remain distinct.

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[82] Kuusela 2008, p.172. Further explanation of Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance' follows in chapter 4 as part of the discussion of its prominence in genre theory.

[83] Ms152, 16-17; see Ms115, 220; Ms150,6. Quoted after Kuusela 2008, p.173.

[84] BB 31 (also quoted in Kuusela 2008, p.30).

[85] Kuusela 2008, p.293n39.

Wittgenstein offers different examples and with them different conceptions of how varieties of language *work* – not with the aim of making a complete list but with the aim of seeing more clearly how philosophical worries come about and how they can be (dis-)solved. As Wittgenstein notes, the form with which one asks a question is: 'When we approach philosophical problems the first mistake is the question we ask.'[86] Asking a question that cannot be answered can lead to endless thinking without results, so instead of pushing on, one needs to go back and look at the question and assess whether it can even be answered.[87]

As I have shown so far, instead of offering a general theory of language, Wittgenstein gives us dialogues, caricatures, and little scenes such as the apple-shopping. All of these arguably are what Wittgenstein calls 'simple objects of comparison'. This is still a controversial position to take, so I will address my reasons for taking it below. But first, I will present a very famous concept that originates from the *Investigations* and which is closely connected to 'simple objects of comparison': that of 'language-games' – a concept that is central to my argument on genre theories in chapters 4 and 5 and underpins the whole Wittgensteinian approach to intercultural dialogue (between different communities of practice) and (dis-) agreement presented by this study.

2.2.2. What is the relevance of language-games for this philosophical approach?

As with language, Wittgenstein does not offer a definition of language-games and certainly no *theory* of language-games. Instead, Wittgenstein offers examples for comparison:

> We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game.
>
> And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. Think of certain uses that are made of words in games like ring-a-ring-a-roses.
>
> I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a "language-game". (PI §7)

It is important to note that 'language-games' are not presented here unambiguously as a model of what language-use 'is' but as a multifaceted way of conceptualising it. Wittgenstein developed his 'language-game method' from a reading of Goethe's morphological approach.[88] The game metaphor also developed out of Wittgenstein's

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[86] Ms179, 17v, 18r. Also quoted by Kuusela 2008, p.31.
[87] This is also in line with the 'early Wittgenstein' approach: Cf. *TLP* 4.003.
[88] Goethe's influence on Wittgenstein has been shown by Schulte 1990.

various attempts to compare language with a calculus.[89] Language-games are helpful in clarifying our knowledge about language; we use them as 'objects of comparison': as images, which are useful as a method of measurement for comparison, as I will explain in more detail now.[90]

By focusing on the way in which we learn how to use language, Wittgenstein does not frame either Augustine's 'ostensive definition' or his own alternative model of 'meaning-as-use' as the only way of thinking about the way in which language and meaning relate. Ostensive definition is understood as defining names by pointing to objects, whereas 'meaning-as-use' is a concept derived from Wittgenstein's comments on the relevance of the practices of using language in providing relevant context to their meaning: 'For a large class of cases of the employment of the word "meaning" – though not for all – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.' (PI §43). Augustine's description of learning the meaning of names as a child is not false, and it can even itself be seen as a language-game, insofar as PI§7 mentions language-learning as a language-game. By adding several further language-games in the form of quite strange scenes for comparison, Wittgenstein draws up a list of alternate ways of looking at language for comparison. Kuusela and Baker/Hacker agree that the 'Augustinian picture' of language can cause problems if one assumes that all of language has to function in this way, as the author of the *Tractatus* did, like Frege, and Russell.[91] To see more clearly how this relates to the employment of language-games as providing pictures of language-use, a definition of 'picture' in this context can be helpful: 'As for the more precise meaning of "picture" in Wittgenstein, a picture […] can be characterized as a conception or a mode of presenting things or facts, including facts concerning language use.'[92] A picture need not be very detailed, it can be an unacknowledged simile, as Wittgenstein argues:

> A simile that has been absorbed into the forms of our language produces a false appearance which disquiets us. "But *this* isn't how it is!" – we say. "Yet *this* is how it *has to be*!" (PI §112)

Following a problematic 'picture', e.g. a picture of how language works, can lead to a disquietude that causes the person caught up in it to produce ever more elaborate theories, adding more and more facts to make it more complete, while not getting closer to dissolving the disquietude at all, as Kuusela argues:

Schulte, Joachim. 1989. *Wittgenstein: Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: Reclam, p. 108; Schulte, Joachim. 1990. *Chor und Gesetz: Wittgenstein im Kontext*. Frankfurt Am Main: Suhrkamp, pp. 11-42; Baker, G., and P.M.S. Hacker. 2009. *Understanding and Meaning: Volume 1 of An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*. Second Edition ed. by P.M.S. Hacker. (In two parts: 1. Essays, 2. Exegesis.) Oxford: Blackwell, I.1, pp. 316-320; Krämer, Sybille. 2001. *Sprache, Sprechakt, Kommunikation: Sprachtheoretische Positionen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, p. 114.

[89] Baker/ Hacker I.1, pp.45-62.

[90] Krämer, pp. 115-121. Kuusela 2008, p.129.

[91] Baker/ Hacker I.1, 1-28. Kuusela 2008, pp.35-37.

[92] Kuusela 2008, p.36.

> Hence it is crucial, according to Wittgenstein, that one scrutinize the picture and not simply accept it as it stands. One must examine how the picture is to be applied to that which it purports to be a picture of and what it means to represent things this way. An unexamined picture can lead one in the wrong direction just as well as in the right one, and one can only judge the value of a picture if its use is clear.[93]

Language-games therefore offer alternative pictures of how language works for comparison with actual cases in order to clarify language-use for the purpose of dissolving a particular disquietude. Wittgenstein introduces language-games in the PI in a long and open-ended list:

> But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question and command? – There are countless kinds; countless different kinds of use of all the things we call "signs", "words", "sentences". And this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a rough picture of this from the changes in mathematics.)
>
> The word "language-game" is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.
>
> Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others:
>
> Giving orders, and acting on them –
>
> Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements –
>
> Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –
>
> Reporting an event –
>
> Speculating about the event –
>
> Forming and testing a hypothesis –
>
> Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –
>
> Making up a story; and reading one –
>
> Acting in a play –
>
> Singing rounds –

[93] Kuusela 2008, p.37.

> Guessing riddles –
>
> Cracking a joke; telling one –
>
> Solving a problem in applied arithmetic –
>
> Translating from one language into another –
>
> Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. –
>
> It is interesting to compare the diversity of the tools of language and of the ways they are used, the diversity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (This includes the author of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.) (PI §23)

So, language-games are introduced as an ambiguous and broad concept from which we can derive at least two different ways of describing languages-games, as (1.) activities and as (2.) pictures of these activities:

1. Firstly, language-games appear as the *activities* in which types of language are embedded (which means all sorts of communication, as established above) including all their particular contexts – historical, cultural, disciplinary, and so forth. Within these contexts, language-games can be a somewhat conventional or at least repetitive activity with certain discernable regularities employed for a particular purpose. This is the pragmatic aspect of the language-game concept: 'Regard the sentence as an instrument, and its sense as its employment' (*PI* §421; cf. also §569). By making this comparison, Wittgenstein draws attention to how we can get confused when we assume that in all instances 'meaning' has to be conceptualised as being based on the relationship between an expressive sign and the object to which it points (or which it represents). Additionally, there might be an urge to imagine 'meaning' itself as an abstract or ideal 'object' somewhere 'beyond' language and then to project this supposed 'object' onto what one wished to investigate, thereby blinding oneself. This would be to hang on to a 'representational' conception of meaning in the widest sense, which causes a number of problems in contemporary debates about genres and cultural criticism, as we will see in later chapters.[94] Arguably this is also the root of worries about genre patterns as supposedly 'conformist'.
In this way, language-games remind us of the limited applicability of a particular convention; the same word or a sentence or a sign might have a different meaning in a different context. Following the language-game method means developing extreme care in making assumptions about 'what *this* means'. '*This*' can be a sentence spoken by another person, or a gesture, or a much larger case of sign-use such as religious

[94] Wittgenstein's conception of 'meaning' is described in this way e.g. by Krämer, pp.122-125. See also the chapter on 'Meaning and Use' in Baker/Hacker I, pp.129-152, and the corresponding/ alternative account that includes a critique of Baker/Hacker in Kuusela 2008, pp.149-183.

activities, cults, and culture. In his *Remarks on Frazer* Wittgenstein emphasizes the need to be much more careful than Frazer in making rationalistic assumptions about religious and cultish behaviour. One might say that Frazer plays a rationalistic language-game with these signs, so he is not necessarily 'wrong', but still doesn't fully *understand* the activities.[95] There can be no all-encompassing standard to govern all language-games, insofar as language-games appear as practices answering to particular needs, and the practice of regulating or theorising about language-games is itself yet another language-game alongside others, not hierarchically *above* them. At the same time it is important to note that Wittgenstein describes them as constantly developing and fluid (e.g. *PI* §23 quoted above). Therefore a description of a language-game only gives a locally and historically situated view of shared activities that are generally in motion.

To speak of language-games is however not to drop into *relativism* but, on the contrary, to find the kind of stability that allows us in the middle of continuous change to still explain how some limited agreement can and needs to be possible in order to get a logical grasp on a problem. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein describes some kind of reliability as the necessary precondition of a language-game: 'I really want to say that a language-game is only possible if one relies on something. (I have not said: "if one can rely on something".)' (OC §509).[96] Therefore it is not possible to doubt everything, insofar as the activity of doubting itself relies on a language-game (cf. e.g. OC §2).[97]

On the other hand, partners in a communicative process might be completely unaware of someone using the same signs in different ways (in a different language-game), so misunderstanding might arise not just from a kind of disagreement on facts but also from what can be called a grammatical disagreement on the use of a word/ sign – and in order to get clear about the sources of the disagreement, it is then necessary to clarify the different uses of the same concepts, words, or signs etc.[98] Stanley Cavell explains this very clearly:

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals or the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections.[99]

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[95] For a more extensive argument on the problems of rationalism for not purely rational language-games such as religious faith, see the following book, collecting recent research on this area of Wittgenstein's thinking: Andrejc, pp.1-5.

[96] My translation. Anscombe and von Wright translate 'sich verlassen' as 'trust'.

[97] This is clearly a very short summary of *On Certainty*, which does not do the complexity of this work justice. For more commentary on it, see e.g. Moyal-Sharrock, Danièle. *Understanding Wittgenstein's On Certainty*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

[98] Cf. on the topic of grammatical disagreement: Andrejc, p.3.

[99] Cavell 1976, p.48.

Adding to Cavell, I would point out that rule books can be used, with Wittgenstein, as objects of comparison in order to *find* agreement, or to get clear about disagreement (rather than taking rule books to *ground* rules in a way that is somehow beyond debate). So, to sum up, the first view of language-games is to see them as the activities that enable understanding and agreement on the meanings of signs in the first place.

2. Secondly, and more importantly for Wittgenstein's method, language-games are a way of *presenting* all these activities (i.e. a picture) for the purpose of clarifying how language *works* and how, sometimes, it can 'idle'. By placing a description of a simple language-game next to an actual language-use or next to a philosophical puzzle about the 'meaning' of a word, a particular aspect of the language-use can be brought to the attention of the reader. In this way, language-games are not scientific models in that they do not attempt to be as similar to the actual language-use as possible. They can be fictional and extremely simple, like children's games or like caricatures of an ordinary, everyday process such as the apple-buying in *PI* §1, and this simplicity helps in clarifying one aspect or one instance of how language is part of everyday activities. In this way, something that is right before our eyes but unnoticed can be noticed and reflected on in that one comes to see *how* it is part of a communicative activity and what exactly it achieves in this situation. As such, the language-game here is itself viewed as a picture, put up for comparison with other activities. This means that reflexion and cognition are themselves language-games, next to other language-games, not above or below them. Krämer remarks that Habermas's disappointment in Wittgenstein has to do with this non-hierarchical conception of different activities on one level rather than in a hierarchical order.[100] As such, forming a theory (e.g. a scientific hypothesis, as Wittgenstein acknowledges in PI §23, see above) is also another language-game and therefore unable to serve as an ultimate foundation for *all* other activities, although it is possible to build *some* activities on a theory (which then are dependent on the theory's ability to answer 'our real need').[101]
In order to see how language-games fulfil this second function in Wittgenstein's method we need to see them as 'simple objects of comparison'. As we will see in chapter 4, both the concept of language-games and the concept of 'simple objects of comparison' can be used to address the limitations of essentialist conceptions of genres, and as chapter 5 discusses, it also helps us recognise the limits of certain ontological conceptions of film as a 'realist' medium. Building on the two aspects of language-games introduced above, films themselves will be investigated as objects of comparison rather than representations, and the activities that viewers and filmmakers are involved in, by viewing and making the films, will be investigated as language-games (starting in chapter 3). This allows an undogmatic approach that

[100] Cf. Krämer, p.121.
[101] This cannot be argued fully here, but Wittgenstein repeatedly insists that a rule cannot fix another rule, which also has implications for theorising based on rules. Cf. Kuusela 2008, pp. 215-264.

avoids the pitfalls of coming up with yet another film theory, or playing one theory off against the others, while still building on relevant research in these fields.

2.2.3. 'Simple objects of comparison' and the importance of finding an appropriate 'überschaubare Darstellung'

Here is how Wittgenstein, in an often-quoted paragraph, introduces the concept of 'simple objects of comparison':

> Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language — as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as objects of comparison which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language. (PI §130)

> For we can avoid unfairness ['Ungerechtigkeit', or 'injustice'] or vacuity ['Leere', or 'emptiness'] in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison – as a sort of yardstick; not as a preconception to which reality must correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.) (PI §131)

For Baker, as for Kuusela, simple objects of comparison and perspicuous presentation (which I discuss below in 2.2.4) are central to Wittgenstein's philosophical method. One way to help people see things in a *particular* way – as *one* of different ways of conceiving it – is to surround the investigated object with objects for comparison that bring out different *aspects* of the object.[102] We have to find a way of looking at a problem that allows us to dissolve the problem that made us worry in the first place. This can involve an element of tracing the worry back to the point at which an 'enlightening example' became the mode of presentation, 'functioning as a model of the things it exemplifies' but then overshadowing other ways of conceptualising what it exemplifies that are required for other purposes such as thinking about alternatives while being overly attached to a prototype (cf. chapter 4).[103]

The concept of 'simple objects of comparison' has often been overlooked or marginalised by interpreters. Analytic philosophers for instance have often tried to work out what Wittgenstein's *positions* are and how they 'replace' existing, and supposedly less worked-out, positions by other philosophers such as Descartes, Bertrand Russell, and his own positions as the author of the *Tractatus*. One such argument can be found in the famous 'standard interpretation' of Wittgenstein, the four-part 'Analytical Commentary' by Peter Hacker and Gordon Baker (the so-called

[102] Cf. Baker, pp.281-283.
[103] Kuusela 2008, p.106.

'Baker & Hacker' interpretation). Gordon Baker himself very much revised his own view of Wittgenstein in the late 1990s, while Hacker remained in line with the original Baker & Hacker argument.[104] Baker no longer saw Wittgenstein as replacing any other philosophies but rather as a finely empathetic therapist who helps the reader to revise their own 'entrenched' views to question their own dogmatic assumptions on a very radical level.[105] In the evolution of Wittgenstein's philosophical method, one can see how he arrived at the centrality of such concepts as 'simple objects of comparison' and 'perspicuous presentation' as part of a larger project, which I will sketch here only in broad strokes in order to justify my reading.

During the 1930s, Wittgenstein came to see a number of problems in the concept of an ideal logical language that he had sketched in the *Tractatus*. He came to see his own approach as dogmatic insofar as it projected an ideal (namely: an ideal language) into the object of investigation (namely: language). In this way, the *Tractatus* made general claims about the form of all propositions that could only be upheld by 'subliming' the form of propositions into an ideal form 'behind' or 'within' all propositions.[106] As he describes in the PI in passages leading up to the remarks concerning simple objects of comparison:

> The ideal, as we conceive of it, is unshakable. You can't step outside it. You must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe.—How come? The idea is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off. (PI §103)

Criticising ideals in the way described above leads Wittgenstein ultimately to keep the ideal, not as something to which reality 'must' conform but as a standard of measurement, comparable to a measuring stick. In order to not get blinded by this tool for measurement, one needs to be very clear about what it can achieve in a particular context. It does not mark a deeper level of reality but offers a helpful comparison for a particular purpose. Simple objects 'characterize the objects of investigation by way of comparison, noting *both* similarities and differences between the example and the cases modeled on it' to render something understandable – like glasses 'between' the onlooker and the object that needs to be viewed in a particular way in order to be able to perform particular actions with it.[107] The way to counter the feeling that things must be in a particular way is to trace back where this compulsion comes from. As Wittgenstein notes in a manuscript from 1937:

> When you are tempted to make general metaphysical statements, ask yourself (always): What cases am I actually thinking of?—What sort

[104] As described by Hacker: Baker & Hacker I.1, p.xv-xvii.
[105] Cf. Baker, p.45.
[106] Cf. commentary on subliming names in: Stern, pp.99-107.
[107] Kuusela 2008, pp.124f.

> of case, which conception do I have in mind here? Now something in us resists this question for we seem to jeopardize the ideal through it: whereas we are doing it only in order to put it in the place where it belongs. For it is supposed to be a picture with which we compare reality, through which we represent how things are. Not a picture by which we falsify reality.[108]

As we can see here, Wittgenstein does not simply give up on the 'ideal', but he wants to 'put it in the place where it belongs'. The point of the investigation is not to substitute empirical statements for philosophical theses based on ideals. The ideal can still be helpful, but it is necessary to realise how one arrives at the ideal and what one can expect from it. If one thinks of the ideal as some abstract structure 'within' the object, one risks making 'unjust' or 'empty' statements (cf. PI§131 above).[109] Someone trapped in this dogmatic approach will for example be unable to acknowledge the differences between the various objects about which she makes a general claim. Still, this does not simply mean that the person is factually 'wrong', insofar as they correctly point out similarities; it is rather a matter of 'blindness', as I will explain below. Kuusela points out that Wittgenstein sees this aspect-blindness as connected to the formation of 'philosophical parties'.[110] The differences between these parties cannot be overcome by reference to facts, insofar as the facts are immediately subsumed into the dogmatic pattern of facts that each party holds to be the correct one. The point is therefore neither to get rid of pattern-recognition, nor to assume that one kind of pattern-recognition is the only possible approach, which is the fallacy inherent in this sort of metaphysical projection, and, as we will see, quite wide-spread in genre studies. Wittgenstein considered paradigmatic examples – prototypes – as objects of comparison as early as 1931:

> The object of comparison, the object from which this way of conceiving things is derived must be announced so that prejudices do not constantly slip into discussion. Because then we shall willy nilly ascribe what is true of the prototype of the comparison also to the object to which we are applying the examination; & we claim "it must always be. . ."
>
> This comes about because we want to give the prototype's characteristics a foothold in the examination. But since we confuse prototype & object we find ourselves dogmatically conferring on the object properties which only the prototype necessarily possesses. On the other hand we think the examination will lack the generality we want to give it if it really holds of the one case. But the prototype must

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[108] Ms183,163–164/PPO97. Quoted by Kuusela 2008, pp.121/ 122.
[109] The ideas of injustice and emptiness are explained in more detail by Kuusela 2008, pp.126f.
[110] Kuusela 2008, p.126, using a Wittgenstein quote from: Ms111,86;Ts211,50/Ts212,1162/Ts213,420.

> be presented for what it is; as characterizing the whole examination and determining its form. In this way it stands at the head & is generally valid by virtue of determining the form of examination, not by virtue of a claim that everything which is true only of it holds for all the objects to which the examination is applied.[111]

Wittgenstein proposes that we remind ourselves of the concrete examples from which one originally abstracted the 'ideal' pattern for a particular purpose and examine the concrete context within which the pattern was useful to clarify a concept.[112] In this way, one can dissolve the attachment to one particular pattern as 'the' pattern – this matter of organising facts for a particular purpose is what Wittgenstein calls 'perspicuous presentation' and will be discussed in more detail below (in 2.2.4).

Instead of giving up on the ideal, we put it in the place where it belongs in the constellation of our investigation, namely decentralising the ideal and putting its practical validity into the centre of the investigation: Does it help in dissolving the current problem?

It is important to note the consequences of rendering the ideal as an object of comparison in this sense. It allows us e.g. to keep the rigour and clarity of logic as a discipline, while, at the same time, increasing the flexibility with which we can respond to particular contexts or a particular problem.[113] What appeared unsolvable about philosophical problems can in this way be *dissolved* by recognising generalisations of the kind described above, which are solved not by adding new information (such as facts produced through empirical investigation) but by putting the information already available into a particular order. '[...]One might also give the name "philosophy" to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions.' (PI §126). Philosophy is then not the same as 'clever thinking' or even 'solving problems by clever thinking' but the critical recognition of what sort of problems one is faced with and in what way they can actually be solved (e.g. by logical thinking, calculation, or in various practical ways such as by trying new things or making empirical studies etc.). It can also involve in some cases the humble but necessary recognition that a problem cannot be solved (by me, by humans, by philosophers, by thinking, etc.), which means that we can refocus our attention to the next most helpful way of dealing with them – Wittgenstein's method is pragmatic in that way. Thus, it can be described as a method for making 'peaceful progress' in philosophy, as Wittgenstein called it in a section headline of the *Big Typescript*:

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[111] Ms111, 119–120; also in Ms211, 72; Ms212, 745; Ms213, 259r; modified from translation in CV 21–22. Quoted by Kuusela 2008, p.124.

[112] Ms115, 56–57. Quoted by Kuusela 2008, p.122.

[113] This is argued by Kuusela in relation to the 'crystal clarity' of logic in the *TLP* that remains available if one follows Wittgenstein's later conception in his chapter on 'Wittgenstein's Turn', Kuusela 2008, pp.96-148.

> Unrest in philosophy comes from philosophers looking at, seeing, philosophy all wrong, namely, as cut up into (infinite) vertical strips, as it were, rather than into (finite) horizontal strips. This change in understanding creates the *greatest* difficulty. They want to grasp the infinite strip, as it were, and they complain that this is not possible piece by piece. But it is, if one sees a horizontal strip as a whole definite piece. – But then we'll never get finished our work! Certainly not, because it does not have an end.[114]

Here, Wittgenstein presents philosophers as worrying about the infinite. Rather than approaching limited questions that can be solved (the horizontal strips), they get stuck trying to find general answers that are valid in a completely general way. In this way, they also never get finished, but still they reject the approach that tackles limited problems one-by-one because 'then we'll never get finished our work'. Wittgenstein's method is liberating because it ends unnecessary worries of this kind and enables us to move forward. Although Wittgenstein's philosophical development moved beyond the *Big Typescript*, he remained concerned with a method for peaceful thinking that does not bring thoughts into question – this, in my view, counters the notion of Wittgenstein's philosophy as taking a purely Pyrrhonic approach.[115] This is the kind of work that the language-game method described above does. Wittgenstein describes his aim in this way:

> It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such'—whatever that may mean. (The conception of thought as a gaseous medium.) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation,* and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. (PI §109)

[114] BT, p.316e.
[115] Cf. PI§133

Philosophy therefore does not commit itself to any sort of model that can be proven or disproven later, but rather it clarifies our understanding of what we currently know. In this way it dissolves the *urge* for a complete overview of the absolute. It reminds us of the concrete uses of a particular word, concept, or image in a shared activity. The *rules* governing this activity can be made *surveyable* or *perspicuous* (as explained below in 2.2.4.) by offering a simple language-game as an object of comparison; for example a real, or an invented, description of how such conceptions work as part of a shared practice. In this way the second half of PI §1 and the whole of §2 work as objects of comparison that allow us to clarify the concept of language-use extracted from Augustine's text in §1. Wittgenstein surrounds the example in §1 with invented examples of language-use that make particular activities perspicuous. The claims made about Augustine's supposed view of language would indeed be unjust if they were presented as theories about Augustine – but instead they are comparisons that serve as objects of comparison surrounding the case described by Augustine to introduce us to Wittgenstein's method. Wittgenstein's method constantly undercuts what it identifies as a human tendency to generalise by reminding us through language-games of the concrete cases within which one learned a rule as objects of comparison. It allows us to gain and communicate insights without the need for an all-encompassing system or super-theory. It is also invulnerable to counter-examples:

> As my students set other examples *against* examples of the use of a word so as to demonstrate that the word is not used the way I think, the answer is always that these counter-examples are very useful but they do not demonstrate that I have not described the use correctly; for I did not want to say at all that *my* examples show *the use* of the word but only one way of using it. The mistake is the assumption that we wanted to illustrate *the essence* of, say, understanding with these examples and the counter-examples demonstrate that this has not been grasped correctly. As if our aim were to give a theory of understanding that would then have to explain *all* cases of understanding.[116]

By seeing the use of examples in philosophy as objects of comparisons in the way described above, we can understand better what Wittgenstein means by 'bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language' (PI §109). The *Investigations* also include reflections on the rules and regularities that we use in thinking, calculating, and speaking and on the notion of grammar, but I will outline these concepts when I discuss their usefulness for the study of film and particularly genres.
To sum up: The discussion of Wittgenstein's concept of simple objects of comparison has shown the role of ideals and paradigmatic examples in his method. I have established that simple objects of comparison are standards of measurement that

[116]Ms145, 39, 40. Quoted after Kuusela 2008, p.83.

allow us to note both similarities and dissimilarities rather than requiring that all cases have to be exactly like this. They will be useful both in the discussion of genre definitions below and in the discussion of the status of claims in film theory about a 'realistic' tendency that is supposedly 'ontological' and therefore supposedly a standard of measurement applicable to all films and usable in critical debate about (all of) them. As we will see, this causes a number of problems, both (broadly) philosophical and also practical. It is noteworthy that Wittgenstein's use of invented language-games as objects of comparison points to a use of *fiction*: surrounding an object with invented objects of comparison can bring to light a different understanding, e.g. the understanding that things could yet be otherwise. This use of objects of comparison can be taken as a starting point for discussing the relevance of the aesthetic use of distortions of representation, such as simplicity or exaggeration in pop cultural objects (e.g. in generic films, cf. chapter 5).

Next, we need to see how language-games as objects of comparison take their place in an arrangement for a particular purpose: a perspicuous presentation that completely solves a philosophical problem. As I am going to explain in the next segment, Baker and Kuusela offer a way of understanding aspect-seeing in connection with 'perspicuous presentation' that helps us understand what it means to solve philosophical problems in a peaceful way, for concrete purposes in concrete circumstances.

2.2.4. 'Perspicuous presentation': Modelling ways of seeing

While Wittgenstein is sometimes presented as an unsystematic, or even anti-systematic, philosopher, this general view of his method is not completely correct. Wittgenstein argues for something that he calls 'Übersichtliche Darstellung', which can be translated as a 'perspicuous presentation' or 'surveyable presentation':

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we don't have an overview of the use of our words.—Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate links.
>
> The concept of a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us. It characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matters. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?) (PI §122)

I choose to translate the more ambiguous German 'Darstellung' with 'presentation' rather than 'representation' since I am going to argue for Wittgenstein's method as a way of seeing things that radically avoids the problems associated with 'representation' on many levels. Representation has come under a lot of pressure in

media studies and cultural studies, in line with the kind of language-criticism that Wittgenstein also practised.[117]

There is, in Wittgenstein's method, a tendency towards a systematisation that makes inner relations visible and, indeed, surveyable or perspicuous. However, the important point, the one that finally relaxes the drive towards generalisations and allows for 'peace' in philosophy, is that this ordering of facts and knowledge serves a *particular* purpose. Namely, it dissolves a particular philosophical problem and in this way puts a worry to rest:

> We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not *the* order. For this purpose we shall again and again *emphasize* distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it appear as if we saw it as our task to reform language.
>
> Such a reform for particular practical purposes, an improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, may well be possible. But these are not the cases we are dealing with. The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work. (PI §132)

Once more, this is a reminder that Wittgenstein commits thinking, as well as the various communicative activities that make up language, to do some kind of 'work' (cf. the practical aspect of language-games). Rather than accepting philosophical worries as a definitely legitimate intuition that there must be a hidden depth to be unveiled by hard thinking, he attacks the ways language 'idles' in philosophical worrying and confusion. This is not to say that subtle work of something like rhythm or an extended pause (such as the 'empty' frames in *Er sollte tot*, to be discussed in chapter 4) would not count as work here, nor does it exclude non-verbal languages. Instead, it will be necessary to speak more specifically about what counts as working and idling in different concrete cases (in chapters 3 and 4). Equally, it does not follow that philosophical investigation does not achieve anything positively: It can contribute clarity and understanding but only when it avoids the kind of emptiness and injustice, 'idling' and confusion, that arises from asking questions that cannot be answered.[118]

The concept of 'perspicuous presentation' seems to have been one of the major points of dispute between Hacker and Baker when their disagreements over how to read Wittgenstein grew in the 1990s. The main difference is that in the Baker/Hacker

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[117] See chapter 5. Cf. one typical summary of this well-established argument in: Hickethier, Knut. 2003. *Einführung in die Medienwissenschaft*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, pp.87-99.

[118] See above, cf. Kuusela 2008, p.31.

commentary the concept is probed as a way of finding a sort of 'bird's eye view'.[119] This view sees 'perspicuous representation' as a way of 'tabulating the grammar of expressions in a surveyable manner.'[120] The second edition of the *Commentary*, reworked by Hacker alone, sums up Wittgenstein's use of the concept as 'fairly relaxed':

> It evidently allows for a descriptive/ grammatical interpretation – as a specification, typically by means of grammatical propositions, of the salient rules (those necessary for the dispelling of specific conceptual difficulties) for the use of a given problematic expression in a manner that enables one to take them in, organized for the purpose of shedding light upon particular philosophical confusions. But perhaps it also allows for a comparative morphological interpretation and for a comparative language-game one. These alternatives should not be seen as exclusive.[121]

For Baker, language-games such as the discussion of the Augustinian picture of language discussed above are such perspicuous presentations, overall conceptions (rather than limited concepts), an overall way of aspect-seeing, which is in need of being made explicit by a philosopher, so that alternative conceptions can be recognised. As Baker argues, one way to render conceptions understandable is to surround an object with objects of comparison that are distorted.[122] Baker/Hacker do not go further into explaining why they are unwilling to engage with this possibility, even though they acknowledge that this interpretation brings about an apparent contradiction: Wittgenstein writes that 'perspicuous presentation' is of 'fundamental significance' but seems to hardly ever practice it, at least if one only accepts Baker/Hacker's narrow definition.[123] My own interpretation, as mentioned above, aligns more with Baker's later view, which draws on earlier remarks in unpublished manuscripts (mostly TS 220 and *Zettel*) to show how Wittgenstein developed the concept of perspicuous presentation.[124] According to Baker's, Kuusela's, and my interpretation, Wittgenstein's writing constantly presents objects of comparison (rather than theories, theses, or doctrines) to develop new *Übersichten*, different ways of arranging the available information and presenting the logical relations inherent in this or that way of seeing (inherent in this or that aspect).

Baker shows that the concept of *Übersichtlichkeit* for Wittgenstein was connected to both aspect-seeing and conceptions ('Auffassungen').[125] It's important to note that

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[119] Baker presents his former/ their once shared view by reference to the term 'bird's view': Baker, pp.28/29.

[120] Baker/Hacker I, p.333.

[121] Baker/Hacker I, pp. 331f.

[122] Baker on distortions for particular purposes: Baker, p.286.

[123] Acknowledged here: Baker/Hacker I.1, p.333.

[124] Baker traces the development of the concept and contrasts his view with Baker/ Hacker's view in the essay: *Philosophical Investigations §122: Neglected Aspects*. Reprinted in: Baker, pp.22-51.

[125] Baker on perspicuous presentations: Baker, pp.290ff.

conceptions, in this context, are unlike both philosophical theories and local arguments – rather they encompass a whole approach to seeing something.

> Like visual aspects, *Auffassungen* may be invisible to one individual, visible to another. Perhaps more obviously with conceptions than with visual aspects, an *Auffassung* may be invisible to one *generation or culture*, visible and even salient for another. Thus there can be conception-blindness as well as aspect-blindness. One may be unable to notice something, even though it is always before one's eyes and in plain view. [...] Making such a conception visible requires waging war against the habits of a lifetime, and probably against the spirit of the culture in which one lives. [...] The goal is nothing less than effecting a 'radical conversion', a transformation in ways of thinking[126]

By drawing on the concept of aspect-seeing, Baker offers a radically different approach to perspicuous presentations than Baker/Hacker by comparing it to aspect-seeing: Aspect-seeing is not a matter of seeing things rightly or wrongly but rather concerns (at least) two equally fact-based but mutually non-combinable way of seeing things. This means that one might become aware of the potential to see an object such as the famous duck-rabbit picture in two different ways (*as* duck or *as* rabbit), but one cannot see both aspects at the same time. Instead, by becoming aware of aspects, one becomes competent in making a switch from one aspect to the other.

Baker claims that language-games offer perspicuous presentations and, as objects of comparison, provide alternate *views* of what lies open before us by offering fruitful analogies, adding emphasis, etc.[127] In this way, the *Tractatus* is not simply a 'wrong' view advocated by young Wittgenstein to be later replaced by a 'correct' view. Indeed, the method of the *Tractatus* is different than the one of the *Investigations*. But, following Baker's suggestion, it becomes possible to relate the earlier view in a different way to the new views advocated in the *Investigations*: the view of the *Tractatus* was not so much wrong as one-sided. The *Tractatus* provided a pattern, which always appeared to apply, and indeed, it appeared that it *must always* apply. From this perceived compulsion Wittgenstein could only 'cure' himself by providing a kind of therapy (cf. PI §255) transferrable to other cases in which a one-sided, dogmatic, compulsive image holds someone captive: 'There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were.' (Box next to PI §133) Therefore, releasing the grip of a philosophical misconception requires a more radical method than just amassing more facts or a better theory, a more detailed picture, or a better system. Rather, only if one sees and accepts that there are alternative ways of conceiving things, one can break out of what first appeared as a *must*.[128]

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[126] Baker, p.285f.
[127] Baker, p.42.
[128] Cf. PI §131; Baker, p.287

We are now in a position to see that objects of comparison are not meant as falsifiable depictions of how things are. Instead they serve a purpose in a larger organisation of facts for a particular purpose. This is why it can be helpful to use several objects of comparison and why they can be both real and invented, intermediate cases of a conception.

In summary, Baker's argument is to conceive of Wittgenstein's language-games as objects of comparison that allow us to see things under a different aspect for particular purposes: this, according to the late Baker, is what Wittgenstein means by a 'perspicuous presentation'. Insofar as Wittgenstein's conceptions and pictures do not – at least not automatically – exclude other conceptions, they exhibit a certain kind of plurality, which Baker calls 'global pluralism': '[...] no conception has exclusionary claim-rights; no-one can claim *his* conception to be the only possibility. We *can* look at meaning in terms of the Augustinian picture; this does **not exclude** the possibility of our also looking at meaning as *use* (on another occasion) – or vice versa. To acknowledge one conception of meaning does not render illegitimate a different conception of it.'[129]

Kuusela argues that in some cases it is necessary to be aware of several possible conceptions at the same time in order to release a philosophical worry or confusion: Kuusela calls this 'multidimensional logical descriptions'.[130] This explains why Wittgenstein's method is not relativistic; perspicuous presentations are effective when they fully dissolve a philosophical problem:

> What the comparison of the invention of a language with the invention of instruments and games brings to view, therefore, is two different aspects of the concept of language: a sense in which its rules may be arbitrary and a sense in which they may be non-arbitrary. Both these aspects may be important for a clear philosophical understanding of the concept of language in that envisaging language under one aspect only may lead to forcing particular cases of language use into a mould in which they do not fit, and overall constitutes a simplistic conception of language. Equipped with such a simplistic conception one may then remain unable to resolve philosophical problems whose resolution requires the recognition of other aspects too.[131]

This recognition holds a lot of potential for intercultural dialogue, in the broadest possible sense: if different groups are attached to different conceptions, they can benefit from comparing conceptions, if this is done with the necessary care not to fall into the traps of misunderstanding that can emerge when the same sign is used in two

[129] Baker, pp.283f. Emphasis in the original text.
[130] Kuusela 2014, p.74.
[131] Kuusela 2014, p.82.

different language-games (cf. the same gesture used in two different cultures can have very different meanings; different religious groups may have very different conceptions of 'God', or conceptions that overlap in one way but not another). This will be explored in more detail in later chapters that investigate encounters between different groups (even though groups such as 'critics', 'filmmakers', and 'scholars' are not often looked at in terms of intercultural dialogue, this carefulness seems very important when discussing genre films, as we will see; e.g. in genre discourse the shared agreement of what one means by 'genre' seems to depend to a large degree on the shared practices one is involved in).

2.3. The artwork as object of comparison for perspicuous presentation

In this final section, I will sketch some of the consequences of this conception of philosophy, and the method that is demonstrated in Wittgenstein's later writings, for cultural studies, more precisely discussing film as a cultural artefact and its relation to shared cultural practices. As a first step, we need to see how art can be looked at as a form of perspicuous presentation. Baker argues that art might offer a way of discovering unnoticed aspects:

> *Rational persuasion without demonstration*: Solving a picture puzzle, or engaging in 'artistic appreciation', may turn on getting another person to see an aspect to which he is now blind, e.g. the biplanar structure of Monet's Nympheas [...]. This kind of discussion is distinctive; it is a form of rational persuasion without the possibility of proof.
>
> Such non-demonstrative rational persuasion can employ various methods: e.g., surrounding the 'target' with drawings or models of what it is to be seen as (e.g. surrounding the duck-rabbit with pictures of rabbits, some in appropriate 'attitudes'); drawing attention to certain features of the 'target', and de-emphasizing others (e.g. inking in certain lines in a pencil drawing, or partially erasing others; the point is *not* to establish visual facts about the drawing that exclude seeing it as a duck); rearranging, gradually deforming, or distorting various elements in the 'target' (e.g. by producing a series of drawings *intermediate* between the 'target' and what it is to be seen as (famously, a portrait of Louis Philippe and a picture of a pear; more recently, a photograph of a certain American president and one of a chimpanzee)); and so on.[132]

In later chapters I will demonstrate how various concepts used by Wittgenstein for conceptual clarification can be employed in discussions of art. By helping the recipient

[132] Baker, pp.282f.

to discover unnoticed aspects, the work of art can serve as an object of comparison. Language-games, that is shared activities and particular contexts, also shape the discussions about art, as well as providing a way of seeing art as a variety of interlocking language-games. And finally, not just mathematical formulas and graphs and descriptions of word-use can count as perspicuous presentation but also works of art, if they render understandable a conception in depth, that is if they make its inner relations perspicuous for a particular purpose.

To spell out an approach in line with a more sociological, cultural studies view on art, one can integrate Wittgenstein's concepts as follows. Arguably, shared cultural activities often involve artifacts that serve as objects of comparison for providing a perspicuous presentation, such as a film depicting the consequences of a particular 'Weltanschauung' for lived practice. Insofar as these artifacts are not taken to demonstrate the only way of conceptualising these relations, they can be helpful, or even irreplaceable, tools in the process of revising one's own *global* conception. Art can as such remind us of the implicit assumptions underlying the inferences we then go on to make, by making the assumptions explicit as objects of comparison: the underlying patterns that we use to make sense. Often, as we will see, art itself struggles against the dogmatism of such conceptions (e.g. the prevalent conception what counts as 'good' art or what socially permissable ways of handling one's own emotions and drives are). It is therefore not enough to employ films as examples for making a philosophical argument. Instead, films themselves need to be taken seriously as providing and critiquing conceptions.[133]

An approach to critiquing films (or art more generally) as objects of comparison for perspicuous presentation focuses on questions such as:

- What are the benefits and limits of the conception presented in this film?
- How can the particular piece enable a way of seeing/ conceptualising things anew? How can the piece itself be seen/ conceptualised otherwise?
- How does this presentation order knowledge in a particular way, i.e. in which ways is the presentation similar *and* dissimilar to what it presents? What does this achieve?
- How does the piece interact with established language-games such as narrative, rhetorical, or iconographic traditions such as genres?
- How can one conceive of traditions in relation to the individual piece of art? Does inheriting a tradition (and in how far does it) determine the possibilities of a new piece of art?
- How do the various techniques of presentation available in filmmaking work together to promote a 'Weltanschauung' (world-view)? To discuss this means not just approaching film by reconstructing their perceived 'meaning' according

[133] This argument is similarly made in: Read, Rupert J., and Jerry Goodenough. *Film as Philosophy: Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 1-25. Mulhall 2015.

> to some structuralist or hermeneutical approach but by drawing attention to the way in which films highlight certain aspects. This includes taking the importance of rhythm, atmosphere and intensity of acting into account for a full understanding of how films go about offering a particular understanding of a conception. Different ways of adding (more or less subtle) emphasis can render a particular aspect or conception understandable.

The point of such an analysis is not to deliver 'the' ultimate overview of the 'meanings' of the work in question; instead, the approach is more in line with established forms of dramaturgical analysis. The point is to show how the form of presentation allows the audience certain interactions and how it thus shapes the overall experiences that audiences share (or do not share). The viewers of a film might well disagree on meanings but can be brought to see more clearly where and why they diverge by helping them clarify their underlying, implicit paradigms. The point of this method is therefore not to provide an argument that 'proves' anything. There can be no 'QED'. As has been argued by me, in line with Baker and Kuusela, the Wittgensteinian method portrays an attachment to such onesidedness and hastiness as a *weakness*, to be overcome by a more empathetic, courageous openness to what has been so far unnoticed, a way of revising my own prejudices. Such a way of opening up to wisdom might be found in unexpected places, such as low-brow 'pulp fiction', as Wittgenstein once half-jokingly noted in a private letter:

> How people can read [the philosophy journal] *Mind* if they could read [the hard-boiled detective fiction magazine] *Street & Smith* beats me. If philosophy has anything to do with wisdom there's certainly not a grain of that in *Mind*, and quite often a grain in the detective stories. (Letter by Ludwig Wittgenstein to Norman Malcolm, 15.3.1948)

This quote is, of course, not (yet) a philosophical defence of low-brow detective fiction, and just like other private opinions uttered by Wittgenstein, it should be treated carefully. But in this context, it is useful as a bridge to the next chapter, which turns to the use of certain Wittgensteinian themes in *A Serious Man* by the Coen brothers. Even while pop cultural films occasionally take simple forms that make them accessible for large audiences, they can be taken to provide simple objects of comparison that offer in certain cases critical perspicuous presentations of certain 'Weltanschauungen'.

In this way, a simple film can offer multi-faceted ways of outlining the further consequences of Wittgenstein's method for contemporary discussions of genres, quality, and education through pop art, genre filmmaking, and the aesthetic qualities of film more generally.

3.

With Wittgenstein against Wittgenstein: The Coen Brothers as Wittgensteinian filmmakers

> A foolish & naïve American film can in all its foolishness & *by means of* it be instructive. A fatuous, non-naïve English film can teach nothing. I have often drawn a lesson from a foolish American film.
>
> – Wittgenstein (MS 134 89: 2.4.1947)[134]

An empty frame: blue, cloudless sky. Such empty frames turn up repeatedly throughout Ethan and Joel Coen's *A Serious Man* (USA 2009). In this case, a ladder moves into the frame from below and, finding a resting position, gives the frame a graphic structure. After a cut, Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg) stands on his roof. We assume that he has climbed up the ladder. What for? He looks around, and we can see what he sees. An overview of the little houses so typical of American suburbs: green lawns, parking spaces, and a street. In summary, not a very useful overview at all. As we find out, however, this position is useful to Larry, after all: From this roof-top position, he can fix the antenna of his family's notoriously disturbed television set, and he can peak into his neighbour's garden, where a woman likes to sunbathe, fully naked. Is this use of ladders and overviews Wittgensteinian? I will argue that in the context of this film, the use of the ladder and this treatment of overviews can be shown to contain a critical view of the later Wittgenstein's method – and a way of cautioning through filmic narrative against the abuse of his philosophical method. I will not delve into debates about how and under what circumstances film can be considered philosophy, but instead I will more specifically look at the way in which *A Serious Man* employs elements of Wittgensteinian method – such as language-games and scenes of filmic storytelling as objects of comparison.

In this chapter I provide the first detailed analysis of film as an object of comparison, outlining the consequences of Wittgenstein's method within such a concrete context. For this purpose, I chose *A Serious Man* because it offers a presentation of explicitly the same philosophical problems and worries that Wittgenstein sets out to dissolve with his method. The link between the Coen Brothers' film and Wittgenstein's method can be made explicit by turning to Ethan Coen's thesis on Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion and of mathematics.[135] *A Serious Man* tackles philosophical worries associated with philosophy of religion and philosophy of mathematics and poses the question

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[134] Also printed in: CV, p.66.

[135] Coen, Ethan (1979). *Two Views of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*. Undergraduate Thesis at Princeton University.

which guides my research overall: What are the practical consequences of employing Wittgenstein's method, and how do they impact creative and critical approaches to conventional forms in film storytelling?

The analysis is meant to provide an intermediate step between my discussion of the Wittgensteinian philosophical method as presented in chapter 2 and the discussion of creativity in generic contexts in chapters 4 and 5. The anxieties that drag down the protagonist in *A Serious Man* might be taken to be typical of forms of self-censorship that are fundamentally opposed to creative work. The chapter investigates whether Wittgenstein's method enables its user to overcome such self-subversion, or whether it fosters a neurotic tendency to start over again and again. The philosophical worries of the main character in *A Serious Man* already turn up in Ethan Coen's Bachelor's thesis on the late Wittgenstein's philosophy. By comparing these academic arguments to the film's way of dealing with the same problems, I will show how the film's more mature treatment of the same themes takes a Wittgensteinian form. As we will see, the film can be argued to employ its audio-visual film language to provide philosophical 'pictures' in a Wittgensteinian sense that are used as objects of comparison.

My larger claim is that the film as a whole constitutes an attack on certain problematically mechanical, and therefore dogmatic, versions of using Wittgensteinian method. Importantly, the attitudes can be connected to certain readings of Wittgenstein's philosophy, which Ethan Coen already attacked in his Bachelor's thesis. Ethan Coen's undergrad thesis at Princeton, as we will see in more detail later, is concerned precisely with the two strands of philosophy that so haunt Larry Gopnik in *A Serious Man*: philosophy of religion and philosophy of mathematics. The thesis focuses on the Wittgensteinian tradition and discusses John Wisdom on philosophy of religion as well as Michael Dummett on philosophy of mathematics. Coen uses these two philosophers, whom he calls Wittgenstein's 'epigones', as a backdrop to more clearly outline what he takes to be Wittgenstein's position and, finally, his – Coen's – own view as a religious non-believer. *A Serious Man* overlaps with some of the strongest parts of the argument of the thesis but at the same time goes beyond it, providing a more differentiated and ultimately *clearer* view on the struggles of a person turning to metaphysical pictures as answers to his questions.

The film is not an illustration of Wittgenstein's philosophy, but showcases an interest in similar issues, which it both illustrates as issues that its protagonist worries about, and issues that it hands over to the viewer to puzzle out. There is also a convergence in the approach to solving these issues: they trace philosophical confusions to generalisations and conflations surrounding uses of words, signs, and concepts. I'm interested in how the works of both Wittgenstein and the Coen Brothers shine a light on *each other* without assuming a hierarchy between these two 'texts'. Seeing the Coen Brothers as Wittgensteinians is notably different from seeing them as 'postmodernists', even though there are some overlaps with typical postmodern stylistic elements (such as the use of irony, ambiguity, and scepticism about the authority of 'grand narratives'). This in return helps clarify how Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture cannot properly be described as 'postmodernist relativism'. The method of multidimensional

presentation that I have introduced in chapter 2 allows for complexity and pluralism without at the same time falling into relativism, as this chapter will show.

3.1. *A Serious Man* and attitude

The film begins with a highly ambiguous prologue, which I will discuss below, and then moves towards the night sky and, in a slow tracking shot, through a vast darkness. The audience might assume this darkness to be outer space, but it turns out to be 'inner space'. When the camera finally reaches a mysterious circle of light, the darkness is revealed as the inside of the ear of Larry's son, Danny (Aaron Wolff), who is listening to a song. The circle of light is the earplug of the headphones. The song we heard while moving through darkness is *Somebody to Love*, covered by *Jefferson Airplane.* While one might have assumed until now that this is simply extra-diegetic score, not part of the narrative world, it now turns out to be the song that Danny secretly listens to during Torah school. Importantly, the lyrics of the song explicitly address what could be seen as a clash of pop music and Torah school as models on how to deal with life's problems:

When the truth is found
To be lies
And all the joy
Within you dies

Don't you want somebody to love?
Don't you need somebody to love?
Wouldn't you love somebody to love?
You better find somebody to love
Love

The lyrics first present what might be described as a deeply sceptical view – 'when the truth is found to be lies' – only to then offer as solution the typical suggestion of pop songs, 'you better find somebody to love'. I will return to the relevance of the song in section 3.2.3, which is concerned with the encounter between Danny and Rabbi Marshak who quotes the above lyrics. In relation to the story at this point, these lyrics, so prominently placed, pose the question what counts as 'truth' and what constitutes 'lies' – a question that resonates with the prologue as we shall see.

In *A Serious Man* the question of whether God remains silent or constantly speaks in riddles, signs, and wonders remains open to the viewers to decide throughout. The film tells the story of Larry Gopnik who is both a professor of mathematics and a practising Jew based in the Minneapolis area in 1967. We meet Larry while he awaits notification on whether he will be given tenure, and he also awaits another notification, by his doctor, as to whether he might have some intestinal illness that – one can speculate – might be cancer. During this time of uncertainty, his wife wants a divorce in order to get married to another man, and Larry is supposed to pay for it. This might be taken to be a modern retelling of the Book of Job, addressing the question: "Why does God allow

bad things to happen to good people?"[136] However, it is not clear that Larry is indeed such a 'good person'. He regularly repeats the sentence 'I have done nothing' as if to plead his own innocence, but it might be argued that his very passivity itself is a vice. The film presents such ethical questions without giving a clear answer. Instead of, or in addition to, linking Larry to Job, it is possible to see Larry as an updated version of an established recurring figure of Jewish folklore and (often comical) literature: the *Schlemiel*, 'the eternal loser' whose misfortune is linked both to his character and 'throws into focus [his] environment's grotesque nature'.[137] The twist in this updated version of the Schlemiel narrative is that Larry's passivity is connected to the many paradoxes that shape his life – situations that he does not and cannot understand, and his facing decisions where there does not appear to be a clear right or wrong answer, to the point that he even has a nightmare, in which he mathematically proves that 'we can never know anything'.

In the next stages of my argument (i.e. the subsections of 3.1.) I argue that the film takes up a number of philosophical themes that Ethan Coen already discussed in his Undergraduate Thesis. I will make this argument in three steps: First, I will summarise the argument made by Ethan Coen in 1979 (in 3.1.1.). Secondly, I will discuss Wittgenstein's notion of 'attitude' as presented by Coen (in 3.1.2.) and will highlight how Coen's argument here gets into trouble that his film deals with in a more developed and nuanced way. And thirdly, I will discuss how the loose ends of this argument reappear in the film, made thirty years later. This will set the stage for further discussion of what it might mean, and whether it is possible, to 'make progress' while using Wittgenstein's method and Wittgensteinian philosophy of culture in 3.2.

3.1.1. Ethan Coen on Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion in 1979

Ethan Coen's Undergraduate Thesis on *Two Views on Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy* is interested in logical paradoxes in the fields of philosophy of religion and philosophy of mathematics. The thesis criticises texts by Wittgensteinian philosophers such as John Wisdom and Michael Dummett in order to argue that these 'epigones' fall short of Wittgenstein's more radical and at the same time more subtle approach.[138] Coen particularly takes issue with those parts of Wisdom's and Dummett's arguments in which they all-too-quickly assume that they have resolved their problems. I will first discuss Coen's views on Wisdom and philosophy of religion, before turning to *A Serious Man.* My discussion of the film includes further discussion of Wisdom, as well as a few notes on Coen's discussion of Dummett (and how Wittgenstein's philosophy of

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[136] This interpretation is e.g. in the foreground of the chapter by K.L. Evans on *A Serious Man* in Conard 2012, pp.289-305.

[137] Cf. Majer, Krzysztof. "Receive with Simplicity Everything That Happens to You": Schlemiel (Meta)Physics in the Coens' *A Serious Man*." *Text Matters*, vol. 5, no. 1, Jan. 2015, doi:10.1515/texmat-2015-0007. Quote from p.81.

[138] The texts discussed by Coen are: John Wisdom (1970). *Paradox and Discovery*. Berkeley. John Wisdom (1969). 'Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis'. Berkeley. Michael Dummett (1968). 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics'. In: George Pitcher (ed.). *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*. Notre Dame, pp.420-447.

mathematics can be related to genre theory). Specifically, in both his thesis and the film Coen attacks any tendency towards relativism. Coen's criticism first deals with attempts to use Wittgenstein's philosophy to argue that 'anything goes'. He additionally addresses some forms of quietism that he, Coen, particularly disagrees with:

> Wittgenstein's statement
>
> > Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a "proto-phenomenon". That is, where we ought to have said, this language-game is played (PI §654)
>
> can easily become a slogan for the most uninformative sort of philosophical okayism.[139]

Coen criticises Wisdom for failing to see the danger of falling into such 'okayism', although Wisdom at least attacks the 'notion of disjoint realms' between science and religion. By the 'notion of disjoint realms' Coen means the notion that science and religion can neither talk to, nor understand each other. This is, according to Coen, a 'poisonous picture' that is 'popular [...] among many of Wittgenstein's epigones'.[140] The problem, according to Coen, is that the philosophers are too quick to excuse religious people from having to justify their views as rigorously as philosophers or scientists. Wisdom attempts to solve this by arguing that scientific and religious talk are different language-games but with similar focus. However, Coen objects to Wisdom' emphasis on the parallels between religion and science: Wisdom calls them similar 'attempts to come at the truth' that belong to a family.[141] According to him, one might use one member of the family to throw 'light on the character of the other members of that vast family'.[142] To this, Coen responds:

> My fundamental complaint with Wisdom is that he is ever-ready to regard a parallel in expression as a sign of a parallel in fact. He is more eager to fudge distinctions for the sake of a pleasing assimilation than he is to do justice to the messy facts.[143]

For Coen, to take religious talk to offer something parallel to science is a mistake in the first place: 'If religion looks like science (or can to some extent be made to), it looks like bad science.'[144] Coen insists that family resemblance is a tool to make fine distinctions, rather than emphasising similarities, and therefore it is misused by Wisdom. Coen's understanding is, on this point, overly one-sided, as we can see by turning to Kuusela's

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[139] Coen, pp.5f.
[140] Coen, p.5.
[141] Coen, p.21.
[142] PD p.5, as quoted in Coen, p.21.
[143] Coen, p.22.
[144] Coen, p.16.

discussion of Wittgenstein's use of family resemblance: examples are used as 'simple objects of comparison', arranged around centres of variation, to see *both* similarities and dissimilarities between a philosophical model and actual cases.[145] Still, Coen's argument might be modified by pointing out that religious pictures *sometimes* serve different uses than pictures of facts, such as the pictures drawn up by scientific hypotheses and theories. At this point it's useful to remind ourselves of Kuusela's definition of Wittgensteinian 'picture' (quoted and discussed in chapter 2): 'a picture in the relevant sense can be characterized as a conception or a mode of presenting things or facts'.[146] As such, pictures can have different uses and take different positions in the investigation. They can be a way of seeing certain relations between facts before rational clarification, in which a certain attitude towards facts is embedded that can be clarified, but having a 'picture of the facts' might also be similar to having a belief about the facts, as opposed to an attitude. I will explain below (in 3.2.) how these uses of religious, scientific, and pop-cultural pictures need to be differentiated – a distinction worked out in helpful clarity in *A Serious Man*.

More fundamentally, the problem with Coen's argument at this point is that Coen would like to say that religious people *in any case* would not accept that their views are at all related to philosophical pictures that might be arranged in perspicuous presentation. Supposedly, a believer would fear that their views would become subject to relativism in the process. This points to a fundamental lack of understanding of what perspicuous presentation achieves and what its consequences for believers accordingly are. I will be challenging this assumption in the next section, using the notion of *attitude* that Coen introduces but does not develop more fully, and I will then show how *A Serious Man* goes beyond it.

3.1.2. Wittgenstein's notion of 'attitude' and Coen's appropriation of it

As outlined, Coen argues that in many cases disagreements between believers and non-believers do not result from factual disagreements at all, and therefore misunderstandings between them are not disagreements on facts and reasons. Therefore, they are not a matter of exchanging one picture of the facts with another – they originate from disagreements about *attitudes*:

> But there is a great difference between deciding that certain familiar facts have this sort of face, and having an attitude toward the facts that is an attitude toward this sort of face. The decision is posterior to reasons; it is made on account of them. The attitude is prior to reasons (which is not to say that it is prior to causes); the reasons are cooked up on account of it. (And there is the difference between what we call "reasons" and what we call "rationalization".)[147]

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[145] Cf. Kuusela, p.124-126, and see the explanation of objects of comparison in chapter 2 above.
[146] Kuusela 2008, p.36.
[147] Coen, p.13.

In order to illustrate this, Coen engages with an example quoted by Norman Malcolm:

> Wittgenstein imagined a tribe of people who had the idea that their slaves had no feelings, no souls--that they were automatons--despite the fact that the slaves had human bodies, behaved like their masters, and even spoke the same language. Wittgenstein undertook to try to give sense to that idea. [...] So what could it mean to say that they had the idea that the slaves were automatons? Well, they would look at the slaves in a peculiar way. [...] They would discard them when they were worn and useless like machines. If a slave received a mortal injury and twisted and screamed in agony, no master would avert his gaze in horror or prevent his children from observing the scene, any more than he would if the ceiling fell on a printing press. Here is a difference in 'attitude' that is not a matter of believing or expecting different facts.
>
> So in the Investigations, Wittgenstein says, "My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul" (p. 178).[148]

Coen is interested in this example because it outlines a case of disagreement that cannot be settled with reference to reasons, and therefore there can be no argument: 'why do I say that it is "logically impossible" for me to persuade him? Well, the premise is that the tribe member will agree with everything that I say about the slave except that he has a soul.'[149] But if it is only the *attitudes towards the facts* that are at the centre of disagreement between people playing the scientific language-game and people playing a religious language-game, then they are not different ways of establishing facts; what is at stake are not different facts but rather different ways of *seeing* the facts. According to Coen, Wisdom goes wrong by assuming that the believer is a kind of 'primitive philosopher advancing primitive philosophical or quasi-scientific theories about the nature of the world. But that gives a distorted picture of religious life. Rather, Wittgenstein wants to say, the religious believer has a picture which is for him always in the foreground, according with which his attitude towards the world is arranged.'[150] Here, in my view, Coen makes a mistake in that he criticises Wittgenstein for failing to see that 'his relativism would appall [sic!] the believer'.[151] For Coen, the fundamental and inevitable clash between the Wittgensteinian philosopher and the believer has to come about when the believer insists on the authority of their picture and their attitude

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[148] Coen, p.10, quoting from: Norman Malcolm. *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations.* In: Pitcher, p.90. Cf. PI §22.
[149] Coen, p.10.
[150] Coen, pp. 14f.
[151] Coen, p.19.

as the one and only correct picture and attitude.[152] The mistake lies in Coen remaining overly attached to the notion that it matters in philosophy to have the 'correct' picture, namely a sceptical and *scientific* one, so in the end, Coen wants to reduce philosophy to a matter of empiricism.

Coen's discussion of attitude offers a way beyond this unnecessarily narrow view, but Coen does not follow up on it. One might refer to Wittgenstein's note: '(All that philosophy can do is destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one — as in "absence of an idol.")'[153] This clarifies the treatment of pictures in Wittgenstein's critical method, including the religious pictures discussed by Coen. The pictures are not abolished or replaced, but their status is changed. More precisely, what one needs to change in order to break the problematic 'bewitchment of our intelligence/ understanding' (PI §109) through such an 'idol' (or 'false god'; *Götze*) is not the picture but the relationship between the user of the picture and the picture itself. Alternately, one might say that the problem is not 'in' the picture but lies in the *authority* a person or community attributes to the picture. The very point of assembling different examples, different pictures as different objects of comparison – the point of putting them next to each other and organising them in different ways – is to claim neither that they are all equally 'correct' nor that correctness does not matter in *any* case (which would be relativism). Instead, what this method deals with are confusions that arise from a compulsive *attitude* towards the picture I am attached to, arising from a confusion between different uses of pictures (e.g. confusing a religious picture that should be used to clarify an attitude for a factual picture of how things empirically are).[154] Therefore, as a first step, it is not the picture that needs changing but the attitude. To destroy an idol in this way means to destroy *not* the idol itself but the compulsive relationship towards it.[155] Once the picture no longer holds me captive it will not be necessary to attack the picture any more (no iconoclasm or relativism); it merely gets rotated to its proper place as an object of comparison, like a lens that makes a particular way of looking explicit.[156] Coen is right that in such a way certain pictures might fall away because they turn out to be useless, but clinging to a particular picture would not be an act of faith at all, according to Wittgenstein: 'Religious faith &

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[152] Coen, pp.19f.

[153] Ts-213,413r[8] '(Alles, was die Philosophie tun kann ist, Götzen zerstören. Und das heißt, keinen neuen — etwa in der "Abwesenheit eines Götzen" — zu schaffen.)'

[154] Coen was interested in cases in which the facts were not disputed. Nevertheless, there might be religious pictures (beliefs) that *are* falsifiable. For a nuanced discussion cf. Citron, Gabriel. 'Belief in a Good and Loving God: a Case Study in the Varieties of a Religious Belief'. In *God, Mind, & Knowledge*, ed. Andrew Moore, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014, pp.67-86.

[155] Cf. Klaus von Stosch on idols: 'Der Philosoph als Fremdenführer. Anmerkungen zur Selbstbezüglichkeit von Wittgensteins Philosophieren'. In: Rudolf Haller/ Klaus Puhl (Hg.), *Wittgenstein and the future of philosophy. A reassessment after 50 Years. Vol. 2*, Kirchberg 2001 (Contributions of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society; IX/ 2), pp.357-363.

[156] Cf. Kuusela on the notion of rotating the object of comparison to its appropriate place: Kuusela 2008, pp.133/140.

superstition are quite different. The one springs from *fear* & is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting.'[157]

Here, Wittgenstein makes the distinction between superstition and faith precisely along the lines of different attitudes, which could also be described as different motivations for taking a particular position. In changing one's attitude, one does not necessarily change one's position. If faith, for Wittgenstein, is about an attitude of trusting and not about facts at all, then the attitude towards the pictures of religious language must also be one of trust. Insofar as an attitude of trust is the starting point, there seems to be a general willingness to give up any *unsustainable* claims to being 'right'. In this way, Wittgenstein's distinction between the attitudes of faith and superstition addresses Ethan Coen's objection that believers would be afraid of Wittgenstein's perspicuous presentation because it might lead them to give up the generalising claims about the authority of their picture. Indeed, such a letting go of unhelpful and unsustainable claims of authority seems possible as one consequence of using Wittgenstein's method. Contrary to Coen's claim that Wittgenstein's method and religious faith contradict each other, the attitude of trusting that characterises faith should necessarily be open to philosophical questioning: to be opposed to criticism seems to involve a fearful attitude that worries about the belief being too weak to *hold up* when critically questioned. It is noteworthy that Wittgenstein's characterisation of faith, here and elsewhere, is to some degree indeed normative rather than merely descriptive in an anthropological manner.[158] Although it leaves open the *content* of the pictures used in faith, it arguably puts very high expectations on the sorts of attitudes it counts and accepts as faith. This might enable a further distinction between faith and religious practice.

> Unshakable faith. (E.g. in a promise.) Is it less certain than being convinced of a mathematical truth?—(But does that make the language games any more alike!) MS 137 70b: 7.7.1948 (CV 84)

These two language games, as well as Larry's attempts to gain faith in religion and mathematics, are at stake in *A Serious* Man. Ethan Coen moved from academic philosophy as a means of considering the authority of such pictures to the making of moving pictures. Thirty years after his Bachelor thesis, these same themes of uncertainty, metaphysics in religion and mathematics, and the relevance of attitude turn up in the film *A Serious Man*.

3.1.3. The prologue of A Serious Man: Uncertainty and the attitude of faith

In order to conclude my argument about attitude, I will briefly look at the opening scene of *A Serious Man*. This scene offers a highly condensed presentation of some of the key issues of the film and can be used to explain the style of storytelling that is

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[157] CV p. 82; MS 137: 48b, 4.6.1948

[158] Cf. Andrejc, pp.50-60.

employed throughout the film. The relation between this scene and the rest of the film remains ambiguous. It is set on another continent (Eastern Europe, not the USA where the rest of the film is set), in another time (possibly the 19th century, not in 1967 when the rest of the film is set), and in a notably different, much darker aesthetic style, ambiguously invoking the genre conventions of fairy tales and horror films. There are three characters in the scene: friendly and trusting Velvel, his anxious and superstitious wife Dora, and the Reb Traitle Groshkover, who might or might not be dead. As the scene unfolds, we learn that Velvel, who arrives home after travelling through the snowstorm with his horse, has received help from Reb Traitle Groshkover. Velvel's wife Dora tells Velvel that she has heard that Reb Traitle has died three years ago. Therefore, she is convinced that Velvel has met a *Dybbuk*, an undead spirit from Jewish folklore.

Figure 4: Dora stabs something in a bucket, as Velvel arrives home.

The scene uses a different, almost square aspect ratio that connects the prologue with the early days of cinema before 16:9 and even wider aspect ratios became the norm. It is unclear if any of the characters from the main storyline have any relation to any of the characters in the prologue – the Gopniks might be American descendants of Velvel and Dora, but there is very little in the film to build a case for this line of interpretation beyond the fact that both the characters in the prologue and the characters in the main storyline are Jews with Eastern European names. The prologue and the main storyline are additionally connected by a number of themes. Instead of trying to reduce this ambiguity somehow by speculating or filling out these gaps, I will argue for the merits

of seeing this scene as a simple object of comparison in Wittgenstein's sense, acknowledging these ambiguities and their consequences for the possible experiences of film viewers. By employing Wittgenstein's method in this way, I can show how the disquieting, apparently irresolvable 'mysteries' and ambiguities enable the audience to make a number of moves that are in themselves philosophically interesting and arguably related to Wittgenstein's method. It is important to notice that these ambiguities are not merely a form of vague storytelling but deliberately placed. Part of the ambiguity originates from ambiguous framing: the frame provided by the prologue becomes an essential context that determines the status of what follows.

Even before the prologue, the film superimposes a motto, very much like the titles that are superimposed later on that seem to mark the beginning of passages in the film, like chapter titles: 'Receive in simplicity everything that happens to you – Rashi' (later titles include: 'The First Rabbi', 'The Second Rabbi', 'Marshak'). Since the motto is placed here, at the very beginning, it frames everything that comes afterwards, both the prologue and the main storyline. But in what sense? We will return to this motto and its relation to both the prologue as well as to the film as a whole after discussing the prologue itself (in 3.2.).

The prologue is centred around a discussion of what signs or evidence there are to determine whether Reb Traitle Groshkover is undead or alive. But it is impossible to decide which account of what happens is correct based solely on the scene, and this introduces the uncertainty that will shake the other characters throughout the rest of the film as well. It is important for the scene that *in a film* Traitle could be a Dybbuk. The genre remains ambiguous (is this horror, realism, historical, fairy tale?) and underpins the ambiguity of evidence. The shot, in which Traitle Groshkover is revealed is staged – in terms of starkly contrasting lighting, but also acting – like a shot from a horror film, but verging on the comedic insofar as its exaggerated style can be taken as ironic.

Figure 5: Reb Traitle Groshkover arrives with an ambiguous look on his face: Stern or smiling?

Traitle turns down the offer of soup, to which Dora replies: 'I'm not surprised.' Traitle does not take offense at her cold attitude towards him but jokes about his own belly already being too fat. But Dora pushes on, and so Velvel intervenes, explaining that Dora thinks that Traitle is a Dybbuk. But he, Velvel, is a 'rational man' and therefore does not believe her. What follows could be seen as a kind of court scene, in which Velvel plays the role of the judge who has to decide which interpretation of the facts to follow. Both Dora and Traitle make their cases by providing different types of proof.
Dora tries to build her case by explaining that Traitle's corpse after his death was left unattended for a while, and this was when 'the Evil One' got into his corpse to turn him into a Dybbuk. To prove her point empirically, she stabs the Reb with the instrument she used for cooking before. However, the experiment ends inconclusively: Traitle keeps laughing in a way that can be seen as a kind of demonic laughter or otherwise as a painful attempt to underplay his pain. He refutes Dora's interpretation that he is unharmed by her attack, saying that he feels weak. Traitle only then starts bleeding and asks Velvel to judge for himself if he, Traitle, is a Dybbuk or whether it is not her, Dora, who is possessed by evil spirits. Then he leaves, exclaiming: 'One knows when one is not wanted'.

Figure 6: Reb Traitle Groshkover, having been stabbed, leaves into the night.

The opening scene can thus be seen in at least two ways, which are built into the scene and identified with the two main characters. Seen with Velvel's wife, the scene shows a pious Jewish family haunted by something evil, ultimately striking back against it. Seen with Velvel, who calls himself a 'rational man', his wife has stabbed and potentially murdered an innocent man out of unfounded prejudice. The scene itself does not deliver conclusive evidence one way or the other, but allows the viewers to investigate the way in which perception and attitude depend on another. Perhaps more importantly, the scene also opens the question of what the consequences of either attitude are in dealing with uncertain situations, which action one takes, and how decisions are made.

It is also not clear how it relates to the rest of the film: Since it is placed before the main storyline of the film begins, it might be assumed that it is set in the same story-world and that there may be causal connections between the prologue and the rest of the film. However, there is little evidence to make the case for this assumption. Nor is there much evidence against it. Perhaps the characters in the prologue are Larry's ancestors? If so, one might argue that there is a curse on the family, which haunts them. This would explain the almost unbroken chain of unfortunate turns of events that Larry faces in the main storyline. Then again, this explanation raises the same sort of objections as the explanations by Traitle's wife. To accept the very notion of a curse that haunts Larry because of his (potential) family history as a valid explanation hinges on leaving the realm of evidence-based argument, and it ignores the doubtful sources of Dora's

argument – and whether this seems acceptable might for a viewer also have something to do with the (not necessarily conscious) decision by the viewer which generic expectations they project onto the scene. Insofar as the film does not resolve the ambiguity by giving a definite account of 'what happened', the individual audience member is challenged to reflect on how they see this scene and its connections with the rest of the film. Any discussion of 'what did happen in the prologue', e.g. after a shared viewing, leads towards reflecting on the choices the individual viewers make at this point. Whose explanation do they trust (more)? How do they connect the dots? The film encourages the audience to look for connections between the prologue and the rest of the film by the very placement of the scene in front of the film that suggests the scene sets the stage and will somehow be important. This very kind of assumption becomes the centre of attention in the rest of the film: assumptions made out of habit and convention – which, in this case, also have to do with the assumptions made by the audience about what genre this scene inherits. The film picks up certain themes from this prologue, such as the question whether Jewish folklore and theology carries deep and hidden knowledge, and the question of how to deal with what is presented as general 'uncertainty' in a nightmarish dream sequence to be discussed below.

3.1.4. Filmic style and Wittgensteinian philosophical method in A Serious Man

A Serious Man presents a story about faith and superstition by presenting a number of scenes that show characters dealing with everyday versions of the sort of worries that Ethan Coen already dealt with in his Bachelor thesis. The film goes further than the thesis. It avoids explicitly taking sides and instead presents the case both as embedded in concrete ordinary life situations and in a way that might be characterised as multi-aspectual. The thesis tries to make the case against religious belief both as an attitude and as a number of nonsensical pictures about how things are. In contrast, the film simply presents scenes of human interactions as objects of comparison in order to present different aspects and angles and leaving it to the viewer to puzzle out the consequences of taking a religious world-view. The scenes can be compared to each other and to (my/ your) actual worries about doing the right thing in uncertain situations and the place of seeking divine guidance within such worrying. I will explore how the film, like Ethan Coen's Thesis, and arguably like the *Investigations*, presents a critical method of questioning particular and widely shared pictures of how facts can be organised. Radical questioning along these lines does not amount to relativism, quietism, or 'okayism'. The film achieves this without making generalising claims and instead presents the case to the viewers so that they can work it out for themselves. In this way the film challenges preconceptions, putting pressure on the inconsistencies of dogmatic – and, I would add, *fearful* – attitudes.

3.2. 'The problem of life' and improving circumstances

In this section I will address the way in which *A Serious Man* contributes to clarifying what a Wittgensteinian philosophy of culture looks like. I will look at certain scenes in the film that take up Wittgensteinian puzzles and present them in a highly condensed,

ironic and perspicuous fashion. The film helpfully criticises certain possible readings of Wittgenstein for the underlying threat of promoting a passive attitude as a consequence of the Wittgensteinian method. However, building on the achievements of Kuusela's presentation of Wittgenstein's method, we can show that the *Investigations* both include a dynamic element and that they address the need for first gaining a solid footing in order to get a firm grasp on problems that one wants to address. My argument proceeds by asking the following questions:
- What is the connection between attitude and aspect-change?
- What does Wittgenstein mean by the 'problem of life' and how does this relate to Larry lacking 'courage'?
- Can an attitude of passivity be a consequence of employing Wittgenstein's method?

3.2.1. Rabbi Scott: Aspect-change is not enough

This section looks at the attitude of wonder at the world, which Kevin Cahill describes as an attitude that Wittgenstein promotes. It also addresses the ways in which aspect-seeing and attitudes might be related to each other and how a filmic scene might serve as an object of comparison that makes one or several aspects explicit and perspicuous. 'Everything I thought was one way turns out to be another', says Larry to a family friend, while they both watch his brother childishly plunge into the water of a lake, joined by children. The friend answers: 'Then, it's an opportunity to learn how things really are'. (Note here that learning empirically that things are otherwise than assumed is not what Wittgenstein characterises as aspect-seeing. Instead, aspect-seeing is tied to attitudes towards the facts.) For guidance in troubled times, she directs Larry towards Judaism as a resource of wisdom and suggests he talk to the eminent Rabbi Nachtner (George Wyner). Shortly afterwards Larry goes to see the rabbi, but instead of Nachtner, he gets to see the Junior Rabbi, Scott (Simon Helberg). Prompted by the rabbi, he is not able to explain what seems to be the reason for his wife wanting a divorce. Krzysztof Majer suggests that the problem might be Larry's sexual impotence, perhaps connected to his health issues, but Larry's clueless and uncertain answer here suggests that this is not the case (or that he does not understand the way in which different issues hang together).[159] That things have not been going well is obvious, but Larry has not attempted any sort of analysis of the situation: 'She's normally right about these things', concedes Larry. This sentence is, of course, an example of precisely the kind of nonsense that Larry constantly gets himself entangled in. Since his wife has not divorced him before, there can be no 'normally'. Rather than explaining or stating a state of affairs, the sentence serves to justify not taking any active position in his own life's affairs. As such, he treats his own life – the decisions and emotions involved in living – as a matter of debate, on which he grants others greater authority than himself. It is also clear that Larry has not learned how things actually are by finding out they are different from what he thought. Larry's distress at this point might be described as a generalised anxiety about his life as a whole: He feels unsafe. This anxiety is made

[159] Majer, p.84.

tangible for the viewers by the prologue and the unreliable narrative structure outlined above. The feeling that Larry's happiness depends on finding a position of certainty might be explained as the Coen Brothers' way of presenting another theme central to Wittgenstein's thinking: the 'problem of life'.

In a recently published lecture, Gabriel Citron has argued that the notion of a 'problem of life' is indeed much more central to Wittgenstein's thinking than is generally assumed.[160] I will build on Citron's point but will consider it in regard to culture rather than religious belief, which was Citron's main interest. The 'problem of life' is first mentioned in the *Tractatus*, without any further explanation:

> The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem.
>
> (Is not this the reason why men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted?) (TLP 6.521)

The notion suggests a holistic view of life as either fully meaningful or fully meaningless, and it is connected in Wittgenstein's notes to descriptions of extreme anxiety and the urge to find a position of absolute safety.[161] There is a sense in which Wittgenstein always retained the idea that the solution to the problem of life lies in the disappearance of the problem. That he thought that there may be a few different ways to arrive at such a disappearance does not necessarily negate that, but as his own philosophical method developed, he came to recognise that philosophical problems (including, arguably, the problem of life) require a variety of different methods to dissolve them (cf. box next to *PI* §135) rather than just one, as the *Tractatus* still seems to imply. This particular solution can be seen in relation to the convention of expecting philosophy to deliver sublime, abstract solutions that fit the diversity of all actual cases. According to Kuusela, it's against such an absolute hierarchical picture that Wittgenstein turns in his late philosophy: '[...] according to Wittgenstein, we should not understand the explanations of our terms as constituting hierarchies of more and less fundamental concepts in an absolute sense, but we should view the role of a concept in the hierarchy as relative to the questions that are being asked.'[162]

Larry's questions are concerned with a deep sense of uncertainty. The theme of deep uncertainty is established over and over during the film's first few scenes. The narrative unreliability of the prologue has been discussed above. Within a few quickly paced scenes, we also see close-ups of Larry's and his son's sensory organs, mainly

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[160] Citron, Gabriel. '"The Problem of Life": Later Wittgenstein on the Difficulty of Honest Happiness'. In Burley, Mikel. *Wittgenstein, Religion, and Ethics: New Perspectives from Philosophy and Theology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018, pp.33-47.

[161] Cf. Citron 2018, which lists a good range of examples, in which Wittgenstein discusses the 'problem of life'. The description of a yearning for a position of absolute safety can be found in Wittgenstein's 'Lecture on Ethics' (included in PO).

[162] Kuusela 2008, p.219.

their ears, and Larry's eyes, which are under scrutiny by a doctor. The focus on sensory organs already prefigures the epistemological theme that will become more central later: How does one come to know what is real? Can one trust one's sensory organs? Majer points out that this focus on sensory reception might be connected to the film's motto ('receive with simplicity…').[163] Additionally, even while this might be a regular and ordinary check, it might just as well be the first sign of the impending doom of cancer, which is suggested (but still not confirmed) in the last sequence of the film. Next, we see Larry lecturing on Schroedinger's Cat (which echoes the prologue's rabbi who may or may not be dead), and he gets visited by a student who will for the rest of the film confront Larry with claims that Larry cannot know for sure if the student is trying to bribe him. Much later in the film, the feeling of uncertainty that characterises the problem of life is spelled out in a nightmare. The sequence is not marked as a nightmare from the beginning, and only becomes recognisable as it gets more and more surreal until Larry finally wakes up. (That the film blurs the line between dreams and waking life is yet another way of emphasising Larry's epistemological and existential uncertainty). Larry dreams of teaching in front of an enormous blackboard full of equations. He solves the last equation and turns to his audience: 'The uncertainty principle: It proves we can't ever know what's going on. But even though you can't ever figure anything out, you'll be responsible for it on the midterm.' At this point the nightmare becomes surreal: The students have left and Sy Ableman, the man cheating with Larry's wife, sits in the auditorium.

> Sy: 'I concede that it's subtle, that it's clever, but at the end of the day, is it convincing?'
>
> Larry: 'Yes, it's convincing. It's a proof. It's mathematics.'
>
> Sy: 'No, excuse me. Mathematics is the art of the possible.'

Larry still disagrees but cannot remember what the 'art of the possible' is, if not mathematics. By this time, Sy violently attacks him and tells him two messages: 'I fucked your wife' and 'See Marshak'. Much could be said about the different layers and elements of this scene, but I will first focus on the anxieties about the problem of life, before returning to Larry's attachment to mathematics and religious metaphysics below. The dream shows attempts at resolving the problem of life through mathematics. 'The art of the possible' is, according to a famous quote by Otto von Bismarck, politics; but additionally, the *possible* is a major concern of logic rather than mathematics.[164]

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[163] Majer, p.91.

[164] Interview (11 August 1867) with Friedrich Meyer von Waldeck of the *St. Petersburgische Zeitung*: 'Aus den Erinnerungen eines russischen Publicisten. 2. Ein Stündchen beim Kanzler des norddeutschen Bundes.' In: *Die Gartenlaube* (1876) p. 858. Available online: URL: https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Seite:Die_Gartenlaube_(1876)_858.jpg (accessed on 1st September 2018)

Instead of searching the kind of certainty that is typical of logic and mathematics in the empirical problems of everyday life, what is required to dissolve the problem of life is developing the right kind of attitude. If we follow the argument to be laid out in 3.2.1 that Wittgenstein's philosophical method is geared towards 'work on oneself' and if we also agree to Citron's argument that Wittgenstein placed great importance on the notion of a 'problem of life' throughout his life, then philosophy is a similar activity as the shift in attitude that would be required. Notably, Wittgenstein sees both art and philosophy as providing objects of comparison that model attitudes, as I will argue next. Since my own interest lies in the ways in which the Wittgensteinian method empowers creativity by modelling a creative attitude, my interest in the 'problem of life' lies in delineating how a creative attitude can be compromised by the sort of anxieties outlined by Wittgenstein and how Wittgenstein's method offers a way out. Despite his claim that he had solved all philosophical problems at least in 'essentials' in the *Tractatus*, he also expresses the expectation in the preface that 'the value of this work […] consists in the fact that it shows how little has been done when these problems have been solved'.[165] While Wittgenstein does not link this explicitly to anxieties about the 'problem(s) of life', he later on explicitly claims that these cannot be solved by science: 'We feel that even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all.' (TLP 6.52) Insofar as the work of philosophy is conceptual clarification (as argued in TLP 4.112, and worked out as the central concern of Wittgenstein's method by Kuusela, as I have outlined in chapter 2), philosophy has a different focus than the scientific claims about how things factually are – that is, the concerns of philosophy are clarification of thinking, not producing new knowledge, uncovering new data, etc.[166] Therefore, philosophy, in going beyond positivist concerns that are in line with the concerns of science, can contribute to solving the 'problem of life' by helping along the sort of change in attitude that would be required. Wittgenstein continues thinking about it beyond the *Tractatus*, e.g. in notes from the 1930s:

> If anyone should think he has solved the problem of life & feels like telling himself everything is quite easy now, he need only tell himself, in order to see that he is wrong, that there was a time when this "solution" had not been discovered; but it must have been possible to live then too & the solution which has now been discovered appears in relation to how things were then like an accident. And it is the same for us in logic too. If there were a "solution to the problems of logic (philosophy)" we should only have to caution ourselves that there

[165] TLP, preface.

[166] Cf. Hacker, P.M.S.. 'Philosophy: a contribution, not to human knowledge, but to human understanding' in: Anthony O'Hear (ed.). *The Nature of Philosophy,* in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures,* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010), pp.219-54

> was a time when they had not been solved (and then too it must have been possible to live and think) (MS 108 207: 29.6.1930)

Wittgenstein here seems to argue that such a *general* 'solution' to the problems of logic/ life is not really what is needed after all, since living before the solution had to be possible. This argument is familiar and runs parallel to the approach Wittgenstein regularly takes to typical philosophical worries about generality, as outlined in chapter 2: the real problem lies in our way of asking the question, not in finding the answer – because of the way we pose the question, it cannot be answered, no matter how hard we think about it. Wittgenstein points out that the perpetual failure of philosophical ideas to solve practical problems is not due to them being not worked out in enough detail or depth but because they took the wrong approach in the first place; they try to solve what cannot be solved, at least not by philosophy or thinking.
This seems in line with Wittgenstein's own views on the need to stand strong and unmoving in a world in perpetual movement. For example, he takes a condescending tone in notes on Mendelssohn for being sensitive to changes in his environment.

> Mendelssohn is like a man who is cheerful only when everything is cheerful anyway, or good only when everyone around him is good, & not self-sufficient like a tree that stands firmly in its place, whatever may be going on around it. I too am like that & tend to be so. (MS 107 120 c: 1929 [CV 4])

Wittgenstein attacks Mendelssohn (and himself) in 1929 for not being entirely independent of his environment, as though such independence were possible. The guiding assumption at this point in Wittgenstein's development seems to have been that a cultured person such as a philosopher and, notably, an artist, is to take a firm, independent, unshakable position, unaffected by what is going on around them. This can be seen in relation to the notion that it must be possible to live without a solution (to the problem of life, or 'the' problem of logic). Notably, Wittgenstein's talk of a 'solution' to the problem of life in these cases is ambiguous. Thus, by solving the problem of life he usually means taking up such an attitude to life so that what is problematic disappears. He seems to think that solutions of this sort are indeed possible. But sometimes (as in the passage from MS 108 207) he means solution in the sense of: 'an answer that can be stated that, once you know it, will solve the problem' – and this he thinks is entirely misguided. But it is important that though he rejects solutions to the problem of life and to philosophy in this second sense, he does not reject solutions to them in the former sense.[167] Both philosophy and art, according to Wittgenstein's opinion from the 1930s, can guide their recipients to change their attitude, and this attitude cannot be fully disengaged if one wants to do justice to the

[167] I'm grateful to Gabriel Citron for input on this part of my argument.

object it addresses. To bring out what this means, I will now look at the ways in which *A Serious Man* compares attitudes.

The scene with Rabbi Scott culminates in what I think is a very Wittgensteinian advice and serves to demonstrate how Wittgensteinian method can misfire. Rabbi Scott says he too has lost track of Hashem – of how He works in the world: 'Because we can't see Him, we assume He's not there. But that's not true. You just have to remember *how* to see Him, am I right?' His advice boils down to saying that all problems can be solved by reintroducing a perspective of amazement and wonder at the ordinary: 'Just look at the parking lot, Larry'.

In this way, the scene addresses an abuse of the Wittgensteinian concept of aspect-change, and seen as a whole, the scene offers an overview of how this abuse and confusion unfolds its seductive force. Therefore, the scene serves as an object of comparison that can be usefully compared with other scenes in the film, to philosophical arguments, and even to confusions one might hold as an audience member. As an object of comparison this scene also works to address and compare attitudes, such as the attitude of wonder suggested by the Rabbi (which does not actually solve Larry's problems) and Larry's own attitude of passivity. Both of these attitudes might be argued to be *Wittgensteinian* attitudes. By this I mean that we might take Wittgenstein's method to lead its users to such an attitude. Insofar as the film warns against both of them, it also warns against certain facets of the attitudes that Wittgensteinian philosophical method seems to direct its users towards. I do not mean that the method *necessarily* leads all its users to take up exactly the problematic attitudes shown and put under pressure by the *A Serious Man* but rather that the film puts up warning signs against possible abuse of Wittgenstein's method – and this putting up of warning signs against harmful tendencies in thinking is itself of course very much in Wittgenstein's spirit. So, to sum up: *A Serious Man* presents objects of comparison that give overviews of philosophical puzzles in everyday situations, and in this way the film criticises and mocks particular attitudes towards these puzzles. Wittgenstein also thought that jokes can be philosophically revealing: 'That so & so is ridiculous… shews grammar.' (MWL, p. 321) This quote might be understood and connected to the above argument in this way: The jokes in *A Serious Man* make the philosophical puzzles perspicuous and, in this way, dissolve their seductive attractiveness since we can now see through their mechanisms, which therefore lose their deceptive power.

While the film's method of criticism can itself be described as Wittgensteinian (framing the scenes as objects of comparison as I have done, and by highlighting the ways in which the film presents philosophical worries as entangled in everyday contexts), the film also seems to address ways in which Wittgensteinian method can lead to problematic attitudes. As a next step, I will flesh out further the case that these attitudes are not only related to Wittgenstein's method, but are possible consequences of Wittgenstein's method.

Wittgenstein emphasises an important parallel between philosophy and art: They both can serve to model an attitude, and, by modelling it, they can serve to make this attitude available to others, so that they might take it up if they find it ultimately helpful. It seems to be on such a dimension of attitude that 'the real need' (*PI* §108) is to be found, which we need to locate before we can find appropriate solutions.
Wittgenstein makes this explicit in a diary entry about a conversation with the architect Paul Engelmann from 1930 drawing attention to the comparable perspectives with which art and philosophy operate. The passage offers a distinction between successful and unsuccessful attempts in art to lead the recipient towards a changed way of looking at the ordinary:

> Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing someone who thinks himself unobserved engaged in some quite simple everyday activity. Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up & and we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating himself etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes,—surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful. More wonderful than anything that a playwright could cause to be acted or spoken on the stage. We should be seeing life itself.—But then we do see this every day & it makes not the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from that point of view.—Similarly when E. looks at his writings and finds them splendid (even though he would not care to publish any of the pieces individually) he is seeing his life as God's work of art, & and as such it is certainly worth contemplating, as is every life & everything whatever. But only the artist can represent the individual thing so that it appears to us as a work of art; those manuscripts rightly lose their value if we contemplate them singly & in any case without prejudice, i.e. without being enthusiastic about them in advance. The work of art compels us—as one might say—to see it in the right perspective, but without art the object is a piece of nature like any other & the fact that we may exalt it through our enthusiasm does not give anyone the right to display it to us. (I am always reminded of one of those insipid photographs of a piece of scenery which is interesting to the person who took it because he was there himself, experienced something, but which a third party looks at with justifiable coldness; insofar as it is ever justifiable to look at something with coldness.)
>
> But now it seems to me too that besides the work of the artist there is another through which the world may be captured sub specie æterni. It is—as I believe—the way of thought which as it were flies

> above the world and leaves it the way it is, contemplating it from above in its flight. MS 109 28: 22.8.1930

Wittgenstein remarks that when we see something every day, we see it from a different point of view than if we look at the very same thing but in the framing of 'theatre': framed as an artwork. Next, Wittgenstein considers Engelmann's own writings, which Engelmann himself finds 'splendid' but which hold no value for someone else, who does not have Engelmann's attitude towards this writing. This characterisation of a difference between what Engelmann gets out of his own writing and what others get out of it might be compared to the concept of aspect-seeing, which Wittgenstein only introduced much later in his philosophical development. Despite seeing - apparently - the same visual data, it is possible to see something different when looking at the ordinary procedures of everyday life when they are reframed accordingly. But, as the text then suggests, for Wittgenstein there are distinguishing criteria of whether something successfully works as art. In the described minimalist case, the work of the artist lies in presenting the individual thing in a particular way. By imagining an artwork that is entirely ordinary but still evokes (through its presentation) a feeling of wonder, Wittgenstein teases out the relevance of taking a particular attitude for the recognition and experience of art.

Reading the above passage from its end backwards, Wittgenstein sees art and philosophy as engaged in a similar project: both allow us to find a new angle on the ordinary, which might also be described as discovering another aspect of the ordinary that allows me to regard it with wonder as if I wasn't already so familiar with it as to be almost blind to it.[168] Wittgenstein compares this perception of an ordinary object, such as Engelmann reading his own private writings, with seeing things *sub specie aeternitatis*. Engelmann does not merely see his private writings (which to anyone else will appear unremarkable, as Engelmann himself accepts, according to Wittgenstein's report), but he 'is seeing his life as God's work of art'.[169] So this is a matter of seeing things as inherently valuable from some ultimate perspective. At the same time, art's modelling of an attitude towards an otherwise ordinary object or, as in the beginning of the passage, an everyday scene creates a strictly personal relationship between the person looking and the object looked at. Wittgenstein also marks a distinction between, on the one hand, the successful modelling of such an attitude, which justifies calling an artwork an artwork in the first place and, on the other hand, cases in which the awkward presentation of an object is not successful: the modelling of attitude that is typical of the artwork takes place through a particular technique of presentation that guides the recipient to see the object in a particular way, by framing it, or positioning it, or emphasising a particular aspect or angle.

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[168] Cf. Cahill, Kevin. *The Fate of Wonder: Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity*. Columbia University Press, 2011. This is the main concern of the whole book - for one clear example e.g. pp.66f.

[169] Cf. MS 109 28: 22.8.1930.

This process is ultimately driven by the recipients themselves, rather than the artwork, but the artwork includes certain structural incentives to encourage a particular engagement. Wittgenstein's emphasis on presentation and framing might open a path towards a more detailed analysis of how certain photographers, filmmakers, and theatre-makers indeed successfully lead the viewer to see the ordinary and the everyday in particular ways in order to evoke such experiences of wonder.[170] If we return to *A Serious Man*, however, the inverse is also true: the scene described at the beginning indeed sounds similar to Rabbi Scott's demand to 'look at the parking lot' but to see it differently, namely as God's work of art. However, the film presents this approach as a *failure*. Not only does Larry not actually learn how to see the parking lot, or other parts of his everyday life, in this way, but his actual need is not addressed by this advice at all. While Rabbi Scott himself seems to hold on to the attitude of seeing everything as meaningful and ultimately made well by the creating Godhead, he fails to guide Larry to his way of seeing things. This guiding the other person to see another aspect – as described by the later Baker – is a practice that involves a degree of seduction and openness, a will to let oneself be guided: however, we should here consider that Larry is willing, but the guidance is not just ineffective but ridiculously so. There is no way to ensure that the other person ultimately comes to see things in this way.

> The philosopher says "Look at things like this!"--but first, that is not to say that people will look at things like this, second, he may be altogether too late with his admonition, & it's possible too that such an admonition can achieve absolutely nothing & that the impulse towards such a change in the way things are perceived must come from another direction. For instance it is quite unclear whether Bacon started anything moving, except the surface of his readers' minds. MS 134 143: 13.-14.4.1947

Rabbi Scott indeed seems to be an example of a case in which this approach 'achieve[s] absolutely nothing'. While the scene discusses a failed attempt at guiding Larry to an aspect change, the scene as a whole can also be seen as guiding its audience towards an aspect change, that is, it models a particular attitude. By comparing it with other scenes, we can see how the film promotes a courageous attitude in line with what, according to Wittgenstein, are philosophical virtues and good philosophical practice. Wittgenstein compares philosophy with 'work on oneself', which he takes to be the same as working at one's own attitude:

> Die Arbeit der Philosophie ist – wie vielfach die Arbeit in der Architektur – eigentlich mehr die Arbeit an Einem selbst. An der

[170] Cf. for a reading of these passages specifically concerned with theatre: Schor, Ruth. *Eine alltägliche Tätigkeit: Performing the Everyday in the Avant-garde Theatre Scene of Late Nineteenth-century Berlin* (2016). DPhil Thesis at University of Oxford. PQDT - UK & Ireland.

> eignen Auffassung. Daran, wie man die Dinge sieht. (Und was man von ihnen verlangt.) (VB: 472)

By itself, the meeting with Rabbi Scott exaggerates the difficulties associated with the *generalised* notion that just looking at a problem in a different way would dissolve the problem more effectively than working on its practical solution. This points towards a possible way of misreading Wittgenstein. His characterisation of philosophy as merely descriptive and aiming at thoughts in peace (PI §135) might be taken as promoting just this sort of approach to all sorts of problems: trying to dissolve them as philosophical problems, whereas they demand practical solutions. Even without necessarily taking a metaphysical position, Rabbi Scott's promotion of aspect-change in order to dissolve these problems obviously fails to recognise Larry's real need. As a whole, the scene promotes taking a sharply critical position both towards the kinds of questions Larry asks and the kind of (Wittgensteinian) answers Rabbi Scott offers. As Wittgenstein says, sometimes the difficulty in philosophy is a difficulty of the will.[171] Larry's will, in this case: He does not want to take charge of his life but wants to collapse into being told what to do, like a child. In the end, Wittgenstein suggests, this change needs to be made by each person themselves. Therefore, both philosophical writing and a film on such issues can at best hope to offer guidance and support, eventually allowing the recipients to take the relevant steps themselves. I will return to this point below.

But is Wittgenstein too quick in dismissing some problems as unsolvable? Which cases does he mean by this? Approaching problems in the way described above suggests a strong tendency towards resignation; it seems to come down to not solving them, but accepting them. Indeed, this is the charge of Wittgenstein's 'conservativism'. Supposedly, Wittgenstein does not argue for the solution of problems but towards accepting imperfect conditions, which implies a defeatist stance. Is he giving up too early?[172] More importantly for the interests of this study: does Wittgenstein's method lead its *users* to give up too early? This is often repeated in charges against Wittgenstein's philosophy that warn against its conservativism.[173] I will discuss this further by engaging both with Wittgenstein's critics and by looking at some of his critical remarks on the notions of progress and change of circumstances below. The question needs to be whether Wittgenstein's method promotes a form of passivity (whether this expresses itself as conservativism, or quietism, or relativism) and, if so, in what ways. If this were the case, then Wittgenstein would not be a helpful guide for developing a creative attitude, since employing his method would not lead to finding new and helpful solutions.

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[171] Cf. Kuusela 2008, p.284, who quotes: Ts213, 406, 407/ PO 161; see Ms112, 111v, 112r, 153, 155v. See also Ms174, 6r for a related point.

[172] This is the main criticism by Jaeggi of what she takes to be Wittgenstein's conception of 'forms of life'; cf. Jaeggi, Rahel, *Kritik von Lebensformen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2014).

[173] This is the charge we find in different forms e.g. in Ware, Nyiri, Habermas – a recent overview is offered by Cahill, p. 223n73.

3.2.2. Rabbi Nachtner: Objects of comparison are not enough

This section takes the meeting between Larry and Rabbi Nachtner as the starting point for exploring the way the film takes up the Wittgensteinian theme of the relationship between signs and meaning. I will also be exploring whether Wittgenstein's method fosters an attitude of passivity.

Larry is dissatisfied with the youth of Rabbi Scott and says he would prefer to see Rabbi Nachtner 'with his life experience'. As Larry moves on to the older rabbi, he retells his own story and asks if what happened to him is fair and what it all means. Nachtner answers by telling a mysterious story about a dentist who came to ask Nachtner's advice about some Hebrew letters that he found on the inside of the teeth of a Jewish patient. The dentist who discovers them tries to figure out their meaning. In the process, the mystery seems to deepen, and they appear to be connected to both the Zohar and the Kabbalah, which suggest a numeric code might be derived from the signs on the teeth. Used as a phone number, these numbers lead to a grocery store, which appears to be a dead end in the search for the solution to the mystery. Once the story is finished, Nachtner spells out its point as a strange comparison: 'These questions, Larry, maybe they are like a tooth-ache: Feel them for a while, then they'll go away.'

Larry is not satisfied: 'I don't want it to just go away. I want answers.'

Nachtner's approach to Larry's question can be redescribed as a version of the therapeutic Wittgensteinian use of exaggerated examples as objects of comparison. In this instance, Larry can be compared to the philosopher who is driven by unanswerable questions, which are too general, full of speculation about some 'deeper meaning' that is assumed to be 'necessary'.

What these two rabbis in turn demonstrate are two ways of dealing with philosophical worries about what might be described in line with Wittgenstein's terminology as 'the problem of life'. Rabbi Scott offers the Wittgensteinian notion of an aspect-change as a way to dissolve the problem: if Larry looks at his ordinary life in another way, namely seeing the meaninglessness of a parking lot as inherently meaningful *sub specie aeternitatis*, then his problems will be resolved. Rabbi Nachtner's approach to Larry's worries might be compared to a Wittgensteinian deflationary and therapeutic approach to philosophical problems: he treats them as a disturbance of the intellect, which consists of emotional anxiety mixed into the conceptual confusion. This might be a fair characterisation of Larry's yearning for *metaphysical* - that is absolute and general – safety. What Nachtner – and Larry – seem to miss is that a good part of Larry's problems needs to be described as *pragmatic* problems, e.g. his collapsing relationship with his wife, his student's attempts at manipulating him, Larry's brother exploiting his hospitality, or the constant nagging by his children. These can be intersubjectively described and practically solved. As such, it might be argued that Larry is indeed tempted to look for metaphysical foundations – in religious rules as well as in mathematical abstractions – to provide him with a definite guide: a general root of all the particular problems he faces. The film depicts these two rabbis as Wittgensteinian guides who advise Larry in typically Wittgensteinian ways. They try to steer him away from the worries about metaphysical solutions 'beyond' the material world and

highlight Larry's own and immediate agency to reframe the way he looks at the world (Scott) and the way he attempts to make sense of his situation by attempting to find 'deep meaning' (Nachtner). Nachtner later on gives a speech at Sy Ableman's funeral in which he claims that such a 'serious man' as Ableman 'can't just vanish', but he nevertheless does not offer any alternative where else Ableman might now be if not on earth: Nachtner rejects the picture of a concrete location of heaven, which might be assumed to be beyond the physical world.

Larry, on the other hand, as we have seen in the nightmare mentioned above, upholds mathematics as a realm of certainty, in which his arguments are not just 'subtle' and 'clever' but indeed 'convincing', even irrefutably so – he has 'proof', he claims, even though it is paradoxically proof of the principal uncertainty of everything. Ethan Coen already addressed this tendency to assume that mathematics and its proofs offer a 'realm' of timeless statements of necessity in his Bachelor's Thesis. Here, Coen criticises Dummett's understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics. According to Coen, Wittgensteinian views on the philosophy of mathematics are similarly concerned with a tendency to make unsustainable general claims that Coen characterises as 'metaphysical', just like the religious claims he discussed in the first half of his thesis. The example Coen picks to explain where Dummett arguably goes wrong is a language-game, this time involving mathematics. Dummett imagines a culture in which people 'counted as we do but did not have the concept of addition'.[174] This apparently leads into relativism: 'If "5+7=12" is a mere convention, then it should be possible, without having made a mistake in counting, to reach the number thirteen as the cardinality of an aggregate of five and seven. As Dummett says, this is extremely difficult to swallow.'[175] Coen's answer to this apparent paradox is to argue that if Dummett's tribe really did have no concept of addition, then their way of counting would also be different from ours, and they clearly would not use Arabic numerals.[176] From this, Coen tries to extract a discussion of rules, criteria, and concepts, which remains somewhat underdeveloped and muddled. Coen agrees that mathematics cannot simply be reduced to convention in the relativist way Dummett sketches but disagrees with Dummett on his portrayal of Wittgenstein's view that 'a rule never dictates its own interpretation'.[177] This eventually leads Coen to this dilemma:

> [...] either 1.) Our rules aren't really rules; or 2) This notion of a metaphysical perspective is unintelligible. I don't see how we can avoid drawing one or another of those conclusions. Dummett actually sees the issue clearly. All of his confusions arise from his one mistake of thinking that it is 1.) rather than 2) that Wittgenstein has [been] following.[178]

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[174] Coen, p.25, quoting Dummett, pp.430f.
[175] Coen, p.25.
[176] Coen, p.27.
[177] Coen, p.30.
[178] Coen, p.37.

Here Coen comes close to McDowell's characterisation of 'the picture of rules as rails' that I will take up in the last section: 'If one is wedded to the picture of rules as rails, one will be inclined to think that to reject it is to suggest that, say, in mathematics, anything goes: that we are free to make it up as we go along'.[179] For Coen, this points clearly to a full dismissal of the metaphysical:

> This is the frustration in tracking the metaphysical something, that we feel that it would not be at all difficult to throttle it once we got our hands on it, but the something is so elusive. It simply won't present or suggest itself, and none of its fans and supporters will identify it either. They just say it must be around somewhere. It begins to look so evasive as to be a nothing: it is responsible for our agreement; it is, it is claimed, distinct from it; and if they don't want to fall into one of the two repugnant conclusions (our rules aren't really rules, or else this notion of the something is unintelligible) its fans must say that it is impossible for the something to conflict with our agreement. If you're so sure there is this something that makes mathematics possible, then why can't you say what it is? [180]

Wittgenstein's answer to this supposedly is simply that the agreement in mathematics is a result of our shared training, which Coen sums up with:

> One may indeed say of our training that it grounds our agreement, and that it is logically impossible for it to conflict with our agreement. Logically impossible because if it didn't produce conformity, it wouldn't be "training".[181]

What Coen misses here is that the 'sharpness' of mathematical rules is not only a matter of conventional training, and the notion of training alone does not solve the worry that rules either need to be metaphysically grounded in a 'deep' realm of ideas or become random. Again, I believe, Coen misses the context of Wittgenstein's method. The 'sharpness' of mathematical rules – and the agreement in their application – can be explained as a feature of their particular *mode of presentation*, a mode of looking at a particular puzzle, which remains implicit until made explicit with an object of comparison such as a language-game.[182] To make such a mode of presentation explicit is distinct from claiming mathematics *is* mere training or convention. That would be a philosophical thesis about the nature of mathematics, which Wittgenstein, according

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[179] McDowell, „Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following", pp. 150f., quoted in Cahill, p.116
[180] Coen, p.38.
[181] Coen, p.38.
[182] Cf. chapter 2 above.

to his own claims, wants to avoid. Rather, the worry itself arises from a confusion about the mode of presentation. This might indeed be made explicit by comparing it to other modes of presentation without claiming that all modes of presentation have the same ability to render facts perspicuous. As we will see, *A Serious Man* presents these puzzles in a more careful manner that is more in line with Wittgenstein's method as presented by Baker and Kuusela. Building on this, we can assess Larry's attempts to find certainty that will guide and prop up his actions. He looks both in mathematics and religion, and in both he finds uncertainty.

Nachtner's story for Larry seems to be without a point beyond the advice not to look for a point in everything – a rejection of teleology and projecting metaphysical meaning into random phenomena, treating them as signs. This might also be taken as a pars-pro-toto advice about the way we as audience approach the film: Does the film overall have a point? Is the audience misguided to look for one singular and central 'point' or meaning? The film seems to ask me to consider my own urge to rush towards 'meaning' and the certainty of a single interpretation. Larry's search for metaphysical foundations may be hopeless, but he is nevertheless right to be dissatisfied with Nachtner's rejection of his attempts to do the right thing. Nachtner's story serves as an object of comparison that is meant to exaggerate Larry's mistaken question and in this way lead him to realise that there can be no answer. But this is not enough for Larry, because he needs to act and needs some direction in this project of pragmatic problem-solving. If we see Rabbi Scott and Rabbi Nachtner both as exemplifying typical Wittgensteinian procedures of dissolving philosophical problems, then we might also accept that the film takes a critical position in relation to Wittgenstein's method. The film shows the limits of Wittgenstein's philosophical method by showing cases in which philosophy is not enough. So, if we see different characters as taking up versions of Wittgenstein's method (for critical examination by the viewers), and if Nachtner and Scott do not help Larry, does this amount to an indictment by the film of Wittgenstein's method overall? Does Wittgenstein's method contribute to or foster the attitudes of passivity and resignation that Larry exemplifies throughout the film?

As we have seen, Wittgenstein suggests 'that it must be possible to live without a solution (to the problem of life, or 'the' problem of logic)'; a claim which we might now be in a better position to understand, after looking at the temptation to seek a foundation in mathematics: the worries about logical paradoxes are based on the notion that abstract logical paradoxes threaten concrete applications of logical thinking.

Larry constantly looks for firm foundations upon which he can make unshakably correct decisions, and while Larry is constantly worried by paradoxes undermining his attempts at finding foundations, Wittgenstein's method leads in the opposite direction: Wittgenstein's view that one also had to live before finding solutions points towards a resolute calm in the face of worries, while the language-game method has a pragmatic approach without requiring ultimate foundations (remaining open to make adjustments as new empirical insights come into view). In his *Lectures on the*

Foundations of Mathematics, Wittgenstein remarks: 'Can one find a contradiction in a certain system?—One might say, "It depends on you." One might say, "Finding a contradiction in a system, like finding a germ in an otherwise healthy body, shows that the whole system or body is diseased."—Not at all. The contradiction does not even falsify anything. Let it lie. Do not go there.'[183] Ray Monk clarified in a lecture on these texts that Wittgenstein draws distinctions between mathematics as a set of techniques, which have practical applications according to which they can be right and wrong on the one hand and logics on the other hand: 'Mathematics enables us to calculate things, logics enables us to derive statements from other statements.'[184] Contradictions arise on the level of statements about mathematics but not *in* mathematics. As a set of techniques, mathematics is not in need of any foundations. Insofar as these techniques do not rest on foundations, they are not threatened by paradoxes that appear on more abstract levels of thinking about mathematics. Contradictions turn up in statements about mathematics – because these statements might claim both that something is the case and is not the case at the same time (which is the definition of a contradiction, according to the *Tractatus,* and to Monk). Monk remarks that while it was originally these kinds of paradoxes that drew Wittgenstein to philosophy as a young man, he later came to dismiss them as entirely irrelevant and uninteresting.

Larry is worried about uncertainty in mathematics, which seems connected to the unreliability of knowing if something 'really' is the case.[185] Instead of getting hung up on such a worry, Wittgenstein offers a simpler and more humble approach: he merely describes understanding as seeing connections. While this characterisation, as I have discussed in chapter 2, is both always open to further aspects and still not relativistic, Wittgenstein allows plenty of space for certainty. Indeed, the worries that make certainties appear implausible are to some degree the sort of totalising uses of pictures that Wittgenstein criticises. The technique of conceptual clarification offers an alternative to rigid definitions and essentialism insofar as it can show how rigid definitions can lead one to look at a number of similar but diverse cases and assume that their similarities are more essential than their differences, or vice versa. But taking in the consequences of Wittgenstein's radically undogmatic method, we can also expect that *sometimes* definitions and talk of essential characteristics might be warranted and sometimes not – strictly depending on a particular project.
The story by Rabbi Nachtner and various other scenes in *A Serious Man* challenge the viewers to clarify their own different uses of signifying structures in the process of viewing and trying to understand the film: something might look like a sign, such as the

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[183] LFM, p.138.

[184] Ray Monk. 'Turing and Wittgenstein on Logic and Mathematics'. 18th British Wittgenstein Society Lecture. November 6, 2017, London. Video available online. URL: https://www.britishwittgensteinsociety.org/event/eighteenth-bws-lecture-professor-ray-monk-turing-wittgenstein-logic-mathematics#video (accessed 1st September 2018). Cf. Monk 1991, pp.378f..

[185] Cf. Cavell's and Austin's argument on this problematic use of 'really', as presented in Cavell 1979, pp.49-64.

apparent Hebrew letters on the inside of a person's teeth, but that does not automatically allow me to assume that these apparent signs actually *mean* something. If they do not have a use, or a set of rules that help us figure out how their process of signification links up with any meaning, it remains impossible to say with certainty what meaning they might have – but worrying about their meaning does not help either. Ultimately, Nachtner's story warns about the dangers of getting stuck on such teleological speculation. The story itself offers a structure that hints at a 'mystery' to be resolved, a structure with textures that look like signs that the viewers – and Larry – expect to point at a clear meaning, which will be revealed at the end of the story. But the story only takes up the conventional structure of a journey to show where this search leads: to dead ends. The hints in this scene point to contradictory conclusions, but we simply do not get enough context to decide which conclusion would be correct. *Thinking* about it longer and deeper can only get us to this point, not beyond it. This is not to say that Nachtner's story does not contribute helpfully to understanding the film at all – but it serves as an object of comparison. By comparing this story to Scott's story and the prologue, we can clarify the way in which the tendency to expect meaning and resolution leads to a skewed view of what is actually on display in the scenes. As such, Nachtner's story serves to demonstrate how *understanding* something that looks like a sign might consist in clarifying how there is no solid way (at this point) to attribute clear meaning to it. This will ultimately have a liberating effect, insofar as one can then move on to questions that can be answered. However, judging from Larry's reactions, Nachtner's story ultimately does not actually help Larry. Additionally, even if we accept that conceptual clarification through well-chosen objects of comparison can dissolve the compulsive desire to solve what cannot be solved, this does not also overcome the worry that Wittgenstein's method fosters passivity. Indeed, as many commentators have worried, Wittgenstein might be a conservative, and there is plenty of apparent textual evidence that he was opposed to the notion of 'progress'. As Hans Sluga argues: 'Like Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein lacked an eye for political matters. And when it came to making political choices, he tended, like Schopenhauer (and, indeed, many pessimists), toward conservative conclusions.'[186] An excerpt from *Culture and Value* can serve as an example of such a tendency in Wittgenstein's writing:

> Our civilization is characterized by the word progress. Progress is its form, it is not one of its properties that it makes progress. Typically it constructs. Its activity is to construct a more and more complicated structure. And even clarity is only a means to this end & not an end in itself.
>
> For me on the contrary clarity, transparency, is an end in itself.

[186] Sluga, p.132.

> I am not interested in erecting a building but in having the foundations of possible buildings transparently before me.
>
> So I am aiming at something different than are the scientists & my thoughts move differently than do theirs. (CV 9)

This makes Wittgenstein sound not just critical of the generalising 'picture' of supposed 'progress', which blinds those who are caught up in it. It also seems to characterise him as not interested in or committed to practical solutions such as building a helpful environment (despite his own attacks on theories, doctrines, and dogma). Notably, however, it's quite easy to see how Wittgenstein's investigations don't get into *conflict* with scientific investigations because scientific and philosophical investigations are different projects with different directions – this does not mean that philosophical investigation makes science redundant. Indeed, mutually fruitful discoveries and collaborations appear still possible: Wittgenstein's interest merely in the *possibility* of buildings does not mean that he would be opposed to others building them – this is simply a characterisation of philosophy which aims to set out a task specific to philosophy that does not overstep into other areas of expertise or other methods with different aims.

> Each sentence that I write is trying to say the whole thing, that is, the same thing over and over again & it is as though they were views of one object seen from different angles.
>
> I might say: if the place I want to reach could only be climbed up to by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place to which I really have to go is one that I must actually be at already.
>
> Anything that can be reached with a ladder does not interest me. (CV 9-10)

This quote seems to question the ending of the *Tractatus* (the notion that by leaving behind the claims of the *Tractatus*, one gets to see the world in the right way, cf. TLP 6.54) and has been discussed in detail in regard to its relation to a Wittgensteinian philosophy of Culture, e.g. by Cahill.[187] Like the comments on progress, it might be taken as having a tendency towards resignation. Conversely, it can also be taken as encouraging: we are where we need to be to get started, the situation is already here and there is no need to wait before starting: understood as such, it serves to put an end to neurotic avoidance of taking action.

What can be distilled from these notes might itself be described as an attitude of Wittgenstein's, which he held at a particular point in time: he was – at least up until

[187] Cf. Cahill, chapter 1.

and in the 1930s – intensely uncomfortable feeling dependent on his environment. Arguably the talk of language-games and forms of life in the *Investigations* addresses the many ways in which a language-speaker is inescapably situated within an environment and shared practices, which are just as messy as human life is and offer a contrary view of the thinker: no longer disengaged but involved, even and especially when thinkers believe themselves to be detached from concrete circumstances: the very vocabulary and pictures upon which the activity of thinking builds have not been produced by the thinker but have to be *received* to some degree. At this point, the question might arise (and fuels the debates on Wittgenstein's alleged conservativism): might Wittgenstein's method be turned inwards against itself in regards to this point as well? As Cahill argues, Wittgenstein's engagement with a conservative thinker such as Spengler should not be taken as an endorsement of Spengler's view. Wittgenstein does not simply accept that there is a 'decline' of Western culture as predicted by Spengler. Instead, Wittgenstein sees *both* predictions of 'progress' and 'decline' sceptically, as I will discuss in the next section. But eventually, we need to make a distinction between Wittgenstein as a historical person who constantly struggled with his own prejudices and dogmatic views on the one hand and Wittgenstein's method as a tool for critical reassessment on the other. This is not meant to imply that we should imagine there to be a position in which one does not still have to struggle with one's own prejudices.

In the *Philosophical Investigations* there seems to be space for solving problems from the outside in (i.e. a form of making pragmatic 'progress', as I will argue in the next section). It is Wittgenstein's language-game method that most forcefully presents, by examples, a truly pluralistic alternative to the picture of universal progress without at the same time neglecting the many ways in which improvements are *practically* possible. Wittgenstein's language-game method is introduced right at the beginning of the *Investigations*, whereas in *A Serious Man* it is presented, I argue, by the last rabbi seen in the film: the old and elusive Rabbi Marshak.

3.2.3. Rabbi Marshak: Language-games in pop-culture, love, and religious tradition

Larry Gopnik never gets to meet Rabbi Marshak (Alan Mandell). He gets as far as meeting Marshak's assistant, an elderly lady in front of a big wooden door, who stares at Larry in a condescending fashion. Larry's attempt at justifying his almost existential need to meet Marshal is reminiscent of Kafka's *Vor dem Gesetz*, which also paints a bleak picture of a man trying to get access to justice. Larry attempts to make the case that he is doing his best to be a 'serious man' (including mentioning that he makes 'good breakfast' for his family), but Marshak's assistant turns him down by saying Marshak is 'busy'. We shortly catch a glimpse of Marshak from Larry's point of view, through the door, down a long corridor. Marshak is seen in the distance, sitting motionlessly at his desk. When his assistant returns to Larry, she argues that Marshak is 'thinking' and therefore may not be disturbed. In line with the other rabbis, the Coen brothers use Marshak to present a critical view of philosophers and/ or religious teachers: He thinks

and remains ultimately passive and unhelpful. This is yet another case in which the film subverts audience expectations: Marshak does not give Larry any answers, and Larry does not even get to see him. Instead, his son Danny, who is much less concerned with being a 'serious man' eventually meets Marshak and allows the viewers to hear Marshak speak. Danny, at this point, is high on cannabis and has just undergone his *bar mitzvah*, which is presented as an awkward and somewhat frightening experience by the film: the camera takes Danny's point of view, blurry and slowed down, distorted through wide-angle lenses and looking at the Torah scrolls in skewed angles. While this gives a sense of the unpleasantness of combining drugs and a religious initiation ritual, it does not offer a sense of some kind of spiritual elevation (unlike, e.g. Martin Scorsese's *Silence*, USA 2016, or Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life*, USA 2011, which also give intense first-person views of religious experiences in – more or less – everyday contexts). The scene builds towards Danny's meeting with Rabbi Marshak. Danny enters the long corridor we have seen before, which is full of memorabilia that suggest history. Some of them look like Judaica, such as goblets and plaques with Hebrew letters on them. The space might be seen as a memory space in the sense of Aleida Assmann, but it remains ambiguous whether the history captured in this space is Jewish history or perhaps more widely a history of human cultural endeavours.[188] There are hints of medicine, dentistry, pickled animal corpses, old photographs. This corridor further frames Marshak as very old and a keeper of memories and/ or knowledge (important or obscure, universal or esoteric). When Marshak finally speaks to Danny, he recites the words of Jefferson Airplane's *Somebody to Love*, which we heard during the title sequence. At first, these words here appear to be much deeper and mysterious, laden with meaning: 'When the truth is found to be lies, and all the joy within you dies…' – this *impression* of meaningfulness is emphasised through the performance by actor Alan Mandell. When Marshak finally hands over Danny's pocket radio, we can understand that he has been listening to the pop song. Did he approve of these lines? Did he find them interesting? Does he agree with the simple attempt at resolving these existential worries by pointing the listener to addressing their want for 'somebody to love'?

Again, while these questions cannot ultimately be settled, we can make some helpful comparisons with Wittgenstein's method, which again seems to play a role here. Marshak quotes the lyrics of the pop song, thereby changing their apparent meaning, highlighting the darkness of the first lines, and also transplanting them from a cheerful context in the pop song to the serene and mystical context of his rabbinical study. This transplantation of the same words from one context to another, and the apparent change in meaning might be clarified with reference to Wittgenstein's concept of language-games: 'I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a "language-game"' (PI §7). I have already given some general

[188] Cf. Assmann, Aleida. *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung*. München: C.H. Beck, 2007.

comments on this concept in chapter 2 and will return to it in much more detail below in chapters 4 and 5. At this point we need to merely acknowledge that Wittgenstein's notion of language-games brings into view the ways in which meaning depends on contexts (similarly to what I have discussed above in relation to Nachtner's story as an object of comparison) but that it also brings out more forcefully the importance of practice in relation to philosophy (and that Wittgenstein indeed views philosophy as an activity, not as a set of doctrines). The relationship of language-games with the other concepts referenced in the film might be sketched like this: the notion of attitude as introduced above has already been linked to 1. the Wittgensteinian methodological moves of aspect-seeing and 2. objects of comparison and conceptual clarification, but the question of its practical consequences still lingers on. Rabbi Marshak seems to embody a form of this passivity, but when he speaks he surprises us with a piece of pop-culture rather than e.g. a quote from the Talmud. The reappropriation of pop lyrics here takes a central place in the overall structure of the film, after the film has hinted at the wisdom of this character and after the protagonist has hoped to find resolution by getting access to this knowledge. We might take Marshak quoting Jefferson Airplane to raise questions about the relationship between pop-culture and religious teaching. Does pop-culture take the place of the kind of wisdom that religious teachers (up until 1967 when the film is set?) used to offer? This would confirm theories of 'cultural decline' (cultural change) that argue that the richness and complexity of old traditions are 'threatened' by the superficial answers of pop. But ascribing such a view to the film would ignore the ways in which the film overall celebrates pop culture and criticises religious promises of answers. However, the celebration of pop does not need to be seen as a threat to religious practice at all (although the critical overtones of the film are hard to miss), if we take into account the much more subtle use of Wittgenstein's method by the film when compared to young Ethan Coen's´ attacking religion as an 'attempt[…] to come at the truth'.[189] To make this clearer, I will now turn to Kevin Cahill's presentation of Wittgenstein as a cultural critic who also tackles worries about progress and decline, in order to ultimately question both.

According to Cahill, one central target of Wittgenstein as a cultural critic is a 'disengaged view' in philosophy, which Cahill characterises as 'the conception of rationality underlying the view of rules as rails'[190]: 'the disengaged view is one reflection of a kind of uncritical assumption about and mythological demand on rationality that has often characterized our culture's thinking about progress in science, technology, economics, and morals'.[191] In order to further explain how Wittgenstein's remarks on rules can be seen in connection to the ideas of cultural progress and cultural decline, Cahill engages with Wittgenstein's demand for clarity as a typical instance of what appears to be Wittgenstein's tendency towards a passive attitude:

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[189] Coen, p.21.
[190] Cahill, p.127.
[191] Cahill, p.122

> We saw earlier that the disengaged view demands that language operate presuppositionlessly, that it operate in all eventualities. But because we have no model for what it would look like for language to operate at that level, what seems to be our failure to find an account of meaning and understanding that fulfils the requirement of the disengaged view is not a genuine failure at all. For Wittgenstein, clarity comes in seeing that the level of the totality of contingencies was never one that we needed to be concerned with in the first place.[192]

According to Cahill, letting go of the compulsions that arise from presupposing that we need to take a disengaged view, however, does in the case of Wittgenstein's philosophy not lead us towards a super-theory that replaces the theories about how things are:

> Rather, Wittgenstein's assembling of reminders (§127) in the *Investigations* is intended to help us to look (§66) at the multitude of ways in which our expressions find their place in our given form of life (§23) on the occasions of our various philosophical difficulties. And what we see when we look is not some kind of superlative fact or thesis that could do any philosophical work in advance of a need for the reminders and the looking.[193]

I agree with Cahill's assessment that the remarks on rule-following in the *Investigations* offer a helpful background for clarifying Wittgenstein's remarks on his scepticism towards progress. However, I hesitate to embrace Cahill's conclusion that all of these different sources and remarks can and should be integrated into a single picture, namely the picture that Wittgenstein during all his life fought against versions of what Cahill calls the 'disengaged view'. I do not mean to say that Wittgenstein did not attack what Cahill characterises as the 'disengaged view' either, since I find much of his argument on this convincing, clear, and forceful. Indeed this also fits with Ethan Coen's argument on the metaphysical in connection with Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics. But the tendency to look for one unifying problem, a root cause of all problems associated with 'progress', against which Wittgenstein can be pitted as a life-long fighter, seems questionable since Wittgenstein highlights the diversity of problems in philosophy:

> The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to. — The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question. — Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples,

[192] Cahill, p.120
[193] Cahill, p.121

> and the series of examples can be broken off. — Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem. (PI §133)

Wittgenstein's remarks on rules remind us of how we derive abstract rules in the first place:

> I believe that I faintly perceive a pattern in the segment of the series, a characteristic feature, which needs only an "and so on" in order to reach to infinity. (PI §229)

If this is indeed how we derive rules, it is by lifting 'a characteristic feature' into abstraction and then assuming that it is an unchanging regularity. The problematic aspect of this is to then assume that the limited overview indeed can be made equal to an actual full overview by abstraction and generalisation. As Kuusela points out (cf. chapter 2 above), the apparent linearity and compulsion of mathematical and philosophical rules is an element of the *presentation* of the rule. Building on this view of rules, Wittgenstein is highly sceptical of the human capability to make predictions, which are, of course, based on perceiving regularities and projecting them into the future (which Wittgenstein calls 'and so on' in the quote above). Cahill cites a number of passages spanning over twenty years supporting this argument, of which I will quote only one:

> If we think of the world's future, we always mean the place it will get to if it keeps going as we see it going now and it doesn't occur to us that it is not going in a straight line but in a curve & that its direction is constantly changing. (CV 5)

While we can see Wittgenstein's scepticism about the human capacity to make predictions, this should not be taken as an argument against making predictions in general but rather as an argument for humility and care in making predictions, which Wittgenstein contributes to by clarifying the difference between factual statements and statements of necessity. Wittgenstein's intervention consists in providing his readers with a rigorous method that asks its user to be both very precise and very honest and that involves the user's willingness to open up to other aspects and other ways of understanding and making sense of the available information. This can be clarified in relation to Spengler's predictions already mentioned above. As Cahill convincingly shows, Wittgenstein's interest in Spengler might be seen not as an endorsement of Spengler's views but rather as a fruitful critical engagement. In some ways, Wittgenstein might even be taken to invert Spengler: Spengler assumed that it was possible to use his morphological method to make factual claims about the future, concrete and authoritative predictions (namely, Spengler predicted a 'decline' of 'Western culture`). Wittgenstein, in contrast, questioned that such predictions are possible and put his focus on the confused way in which such predictions are attempted

and how they are bound to lead towards misunderstandings that, until dissolved, make progress on any problems impossible. Cahill takes up research by Rudolf Haller on the ways in which Wittgenstein and Spengler relate:

> Haller is pointing to an idea that is central to the later Wittgenstein's method, what we might call the idea of a "descriptive morphology" of language games. According to Wittgenstein, when particular examples ("prototype" [*Urbild*] or "paradigm" [*Paradigma*]) shape the way we think and talk about things, when they provide the form of our language game, then statements about these examples are not ordinary assertions but rather grammatical remarks that present to us the form of our discussion. If we are clear about the role of these examples in our discussion, then we shall not be tempted to construe such grammatical remarks as necessary *truths*, nor shall we be puzzled when our ordinary assertions about the objects of our discourse seem to lack the *necessity* that belongs to the grammatical remarks that hold only of the examples.[194]

This characterisation of Wittgenstein's method resonates with Kuusela's and the later Baker's emphasis on objects of comparison and their place in characterising language games as perspicuous presentation (cf. chapter 2 above). It clearly marks where Wittgenstein differs from Spengler: Language-games in the sense of enabling, simplifying devices are projections of similarities derived from known/ conventional cases (which we might call 'prototypes' etc.), and they help in understanding further cases. But while using language-games makes predictions possible in the first place, it does not grant these predictions a claim to authority. Predictions at best are objects of comparison used to present a particular view of a possible future: there will, accordingly, be much space for different outcomes. As Cahill sums up: 'There is no evidence to support the idea that Wittgenstein believed a Gestalt analysis of history could aid one in predicting what would characterize the next historical epoch'[195].

To sum up, Wittgenstein is a notably anti-prophetic philosopher. He does not assume that philosophers – or thinkers, in general – are at all well equipped to make true predictions about the future. This seems to me to be a plausible explanation of why Wittgenstein could be neither married to the concept of overall progress (which one might characterise as the prediction that things will get better *in a general sense* if one behaves in the way x) nor the concept of overall decline (which one might characterise as the prediction that things will get worse *in a general sense* if one behaves in the way x).[196] Instead, other factors will come into play, and predictions can only have very

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[194] Cahill, p.130.

[195] Cahill, p.216n19 – the collection of quotations from Wittgenstein on the limits of predicting the future without confusing oneself are found in this endnote as well.

[196] Cahill comes to a similar conclusion, alas via a slightly different argument, cf. Cahill, p.134.

limited authority. The danger lies in making predictions and following them compulsively: this would risk missing out on the positive opportunities that might arise along the way, which have not been predicted by humans with their limited overview. This danger might also be characterised as a dysfunctional self-limitation based on a narrow and rigid presentation of the situation. Through the language-game method, Wittgenstein offers an alternative, which constantly redirects the attention to what can actually be seen by looking at the concrete situation of the actual use of a word, concept, or sign, rather than hastily jumping to conclusions. Ultimately, Cahill argues against taking Wittgenstein as a conservative thinker:

> […] the main reason for opposing the idea that what I have said automatically licenses an ascription of some kind of political conservativism to Wittgenstein is that this ascription has little basis if the "ideal" of European (and American) culture that he "repudiates" is a *metaphysical* conception of progress, and, indeed, one that is symptomatic of a confusion: the validity of our (nongrammatical) ordinary assertions about progress can be secured, as it were, completely independently of any of our actual determinations of what counts as progress. This confusion is in fact no more than a recapitulation of the mythological demand on rationality critiqued in the rule-following remarks, the demand that our understanding of the rule be conceptually independent, both of those responses that we have previously accepted as being in accord with the rule and of all further possible moves we could give. An important consequence of these considerations is that we should realize that there is nothing mysterious or inherently wrong with using the word "progress" or, for that matter, its opposite, "decline". (And had Wittgenstein taken the latter to be the form of our civilization, identical considerations would apply to it.)[197]

In regard to the worry that Wittgenstein's method fosters a passive attitude it can at least be shown that Wittgenstein as a person did not aim for passivity. Cahill draws together several remarks that indicate that Wittgenstein did not hold that 'inner change' was the only relevant shift that was important, 'suggesting he believed it both possible and desirable for there to be a substantial cultural shift that would allow these problems to evaporate'.[198] However, Cahill also notes that Wittgenstein occasionally makes remarks that are at least ambiguous, which contribute to the overall impression of him holding an unnecessarily pessimistic view, which Sluga also critically acknowledges (as mentioned above). For example, Wittgenstein's aim of providing a method that allows 'thoughts at peace' (CV, 50) is taken by Georg Hendrik von Wright

[197] Cahill, p.150.
[198] Cahill, p.164.

to 'have no important consequences of a social nature, either for habits of thinking or for ways of living'[199]. Von Wright reports that this view could be attributed to Wittgenstein, but this ultimately brings me to my point about the relative irrelevance of the question 'what Wittgenstein meant by this': perhaps Wittgenstein as a historical person did hold this view at one point in his life and reported it to von Wright. Perhaps von Wright misunderstood what he heard. Perhaps Wittgenstein changed his opinion on this matter later on. All of this is hard to reconstruct and of uncertain value: what does it matter if the inventor of the method we are using held personal opinions, if the method itself is designed to ascertain how deep such opinions reach? More to the point, the next chapters will argue that 'thoughts at peace' is the basis for confidently taking action, rather than blocking any kind of particular progress to be made.[200]

Wittgenstein seems to be sceptical of the notion of 'progress' not because he thinks improvement is impossible or undesirable but because he sees the need for finding a properly peaceful clarity as a precondition to solving problems. *A Serious Man* can be useful in getting a clear view of what this entails in practice. For instance, Larry is in dire need of such clarity about the nature of his problems, to make the right choices about how to solve them, e.g. to make first of all distinctions between solvable and unsolvable problems. The picture of progress in contrast suggests a compulsion towards being faster, better, earlier etc., and accordingly 'progressive philosophy' might be expected to give us a clear direction and approach (or picture of the good life, the right decision, etc.), which can then be followed in the most efficient manner without any need for further questioning or attention to the particular. Contrary to this, Wittgenstein asks his reader to consider first what sort of help they can hope to gain from philosophy, rather than pushing 'forwards' into complicated theories that do not address the 'real need'. As such, Wittgenstein's philosophy does feel like slowing down, like a time-out from the compulsion to push forward. It is important for my busy mind to recognise that such a time-out is not wasted time if it gets me unstuck from dogmatic assumptions that are ultimately empty – pushing 'forward' is not worth anything if it is based on a false picture of what 'the right direction' is. Larry's problem is precisely this: he wants to be told what the right direction is, what he has to do, without the trouble of actually thinking or paying attention to the messy particular problems of his everyday life. But every direction he might go in appears as untrustworthy and so needs to be replaced by a better direction, which is why Larry never finds an authority – whether religious or mathematical – that gives him what he needs, because he is unclear about what he needs. Wittgenstein's method acknowledges the continuously changing nature of what we are facing when we think in everyday life, trying to find 'our way about' (PI§123), as we can see in a series of notes he made on the phrase 'everything flows':

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[199] Cf. Wright, G.H. von. 'Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times', St Augustine 1998, p.206.

[200] Moi 2017 as a whole similarly argues for the use of Wittgensteinian philosophy for progressive causes.

> That everything flows seems to hinder us from expressing the truth because it is as though we couldn't get a hold of it since it slips away.[201]
>
> When someone says that 'everything flows' we feel that we are hindered from noting the essential, the essential reality. The process on the cinema screen escapes us precisely because it is a process. But we do describe something, and is that a different process? The description stands, after all, in relation to the image on the screen. The feeling of helplessness must therefore be based on a wrong picture. Since what we want to describe, we can describe.[202]

Wittgenstein's considerations are concerned with philosophy – many commentators who wonder if he is sufficiently concerned with social change don't seem to acknowledge that Wittgenstein himself wondered about the interactions between philosophy and action. Rather than the classical top-down-hierarchy of thinking over doing, for Wittgenstein, there is a sense that actions already inform what we think ('in the beginning was the deed', as Wittgenstein quotes Goethe's *Faust*).[203] What philosophical thinking contributes is a new clarity, a new arrangement of the already available information. Philosophy in this sense can contribute to acting more efficiently, more successfully but also more sustainably, because the decisions are made with more oversight, taking into account more aspects, avoiding unsustainably dogmatic and one-sided views. Wittgenstein was clearly interested in having an effect, but at the same time he saw quite clearly that a form of prescription that could be applied mechanically to all new cases would not do (cf. preface of the *Investigations*: 'I should not like my writing to spare others the trouble of thinking'). A theory that would be applied over and over could not offer the change needed, nor would a systematic depiction of relations of concepts be able to avoid the pitfalls of 'injustice' and 'emptiness' that Wittgenstein tries to avoid. He instead opts for the radically open structure of the *Investigations* that is designed to train readers to think more subtly, precisely, and radically. The consequences of Wittgenstein's method involve 'breaking the spell' of various confusions. *A Serious Man* similarly does not offer positive models of good behaviour or good thinking, but it is instructive precisely *ex negativo* by characterising such confusions that arise from applying Wittgensteinian concepts *mechanically*. As a last step, I will argue that relating the film to Wittgenstein's implicit philosophical virtues can be helpful in explaining how a popular and generic film can teach philosophical thinking, which sets the stage for the argument of the next two chapters.

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[201] Ts-213,212r[3] My translation.
[202] Ts-213,427r[3]et428r[1] My translation.
[203] 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness' (21/10/1937), in PO, p.395.

Returning to the lyrics of *Somebody to Love*, they address the kind of uncertainty that Larry worries about throughout the film: 'when the truth turns out to be lies'. One might argue that 'truth' never actually was truth if it can turn out to be lies. One might also see this line from the lyrics as typically postmodern, insisting that there can be no such thing as truth to begin with. Both of these views would miss the Wittgensteinian option, which consists in looking at particular uses of the word 'truth'. In everyday language, it is well possible to use the word 'truth' in unproblematic ways, e.g. stating factual correctness in particular cases. In such cases, it is also easy to imagine that what one held to be true turns out to be different. *A Serious Man* offers a whole series of examples of this process. The final scenes of the film make clear that the characters' lives are constantly threatened by deep uncertainty. The film gestures at potential catastrophes, such as Larry possibly having an illness and Larry's children being threatened by a hurricane. None of these suggestions by the film are, however, confirmed in the film, leaving the audience without certainty or conclusion. The film sets up yet another expectation at the very end that leads the audience to make predictions that may or may *not* be confirmed. One lesson that can be taken from the film is that 'having a bad feeling' is not a valid indicator that something bad will indeed happen – and nor is feeling certain, as Sy Ableman clearly does before dying in a car crash, an indication of something good. Another point to be taken from the film is not to delve too deep into such speculations, as Larry does, because it holds him back from taking action. Even as his colleague tells him, 'doing nothing is not bad. *Ipso facto*. Relax', we may wonder if that is indeed true in the case of Larry Gopnik. His worries in everyday life do not prepare him for the real problems, which come as a surprise.

According to Wittgenstein, Larry Gopnik is not a good philosopher: he not only constantly traps himself in hasty speculations and generalisations that contribute to his confusion but also is completely unwilling to question his own contribution to his miserable situation. As such he is weak and lacks the courage to face the disasters that befall his life, and he fails to live up to the best of his capabilities as a thinker. But, as Wittgenstein says, it is possible to *learn* from a bad philosopher: these 'philosophical virtues' according to Wittgenstein – honesty, strength, and courage as well as humility – have been gathered by Gabriel Citron from various remarks scattered throughout the *Nachlass:*[204] 'To the degree that we lack humility, then, we can only come to the wisdom of self-knowledge if we are both courageous and strong – that is, if we are both willing and able to bear the disappointing and shameful truths which honest introspection is likely to lay bare .'[205] Part of such a painful acknowledgement is to accept the limitations of one's own capabilities, which I will connect to *A Serious Man*'s concern with popular culture and the ordinary below. Wittgenstein cautions that the same standard of aesthetic style should not simply be expected of everyone, without regard for their capabilities and circumstances, as in this quote:

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[204] Citron, Gabriel (2018b). *Wisdom, Humility, Courage, & Strength: Later Wittgenstein on the Difficulties of Philosophy and the Philosophical Virtues*. Forthcoming.

[205] Citron 2018b, p.12.

> Can one take something as a model merely because it is good? Doesn't one often *have* to give what is less good, because one's own talent and the circumstances don't allow the greater one? Should everyone try, and is it possible, at all times to write a lapidary style?! If anyone tries to do this at the wrong time, he gives only artificial lapidarity.[206]

Wittgenstein demands radical honesty towards oneself, but he does not ask for perfection. Indeed, he says that one can learn even from a bad philosopher insofar as that philosopher is honest.[207] Citron sums Wittgenstein's position up:

> Since honesty, strength, and courage are the three principal philosophical virtues integral to the successful practice of philosophy by those who do have talent, it turns out that in demonstrating honesty, strength, and courage in their own philosophical 'gnawing', even teachers of philosophy who lack significant talent will nonetheless have something essential to pass on to their students – including even students who are more talented than them.[208]

Along these lines, it is possible to understand the statement by Wittgenstein that forms the epigraph for this chapter: Wittgenstein prefers a 'foolish & naive American film', which can 'in all its foolishness & *by means of* it be instructive'. The foolishness itself might be taken as a humble style of filmmaking, such as the genre films Wittgenstein generally preferred (western and musical).[209] This might be extended to a re-evaluation of pop cultural phenomena more generally in line with these Wittgensteinian philosophical virtues: just as an honest person might be a better teacher of philosophy than a clever one, it is also possible for pop cultural artwork to go further in being 'instructive' in thinking and challenging one's own preconceptions than 'a fatuous, non-naïve English film'. I take the comment on English films to be based on the perception that American films are using clear genre templates, whereas European films (of which Wittgenstein was probably mostly seeing the English ones at the cinema in Cambridge) attempted to mark their distinction from 'low' genre fare by using what Wittgenstein describes as a 'a fatuous, non-naïve' style. We do not need to agree with Wittgenstein's assumptions about English films in order to accept that he appreciated genre films (and pulp fiction novels) for their valuable thinking, against the quick and superficial categorisations of what was assumed to be 'good' art and 'bad' pulp – categorisations that were culturally widely accepted at the time. I will return to the discussion of genre films, evaluation, and pop culture in chapter 4.

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[206] Citron 2018b, p.14: Quoted and translated by Rush Rhees, in his 'Correspondence and Comment [Letter 3]', The Human World, Nos. 15-16, May-August 1974, p.156.
[207] Citron 2018b, p.19.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Cf. Monk 1991, pp.423f.

Returning to *A Serious Man*, these remarks by Wittgenstein can be helpful in clarifying how the film is 'instructive' despite its humble, naïve characters: it presents ways in which thinking goes wrong, embedded in everyday life contexts. By making the ways in which words are used and abused surveyable, the film offers *filmic narrative scenes* as language-games, i.e. as objects of comparison that help dissolve the kind of confusions in which the characters are caught up. As such, not only the reappropriation of the lyrics by Marshak can be seen as a language-game, but the film presents language-games – surveyable everyday activities of shared uses of signs – throughout. The next chapter will connect the language-game method with genre theory and follow up on this point. We can now return to the notion of the overview introduced at the beginning of the film. Larry lacks an overview of his life, but at the end of the film, the audience has gained some (limited) overview that allows us as viewers to see where Larry and his contemporaries tend to go wrong.

A Serious Man points out that the religious use of pictures is similar to pop-cultural uses of pictures: in religion, as in pop-culture, we can find pictures that are used as guiding principles in everyday life, and in both cases iconography can turn into idolisation (that is, an attachment to the picture that is uncritical and ultimately dishonest in the sense that it becomes a trap for honest assessment of what is actually going on). The film focuses mostly on religious idolisation of rules, although the film also satirically sketches Larry's children as overly, compulsively attached to popular culture, including television and pop music. But just as the religious picture as object of comparison needs to be assessed fairly – in the context of its actual uses – the pop-cultural iconography cannot simply be dismissed e.g. by generically claiming that pop culture is merely shallow, dishonest, and stupid. The scene with Rabbi Marshak takes up these fine lines without resolving the tension between pop culture and religious discourse, pointing out these parallels and leaving it to the audience to figure out the status of what Marshak says here. In this way, the film reflects on its own status as a pop cultural artefact that is concerned with theological worries, ultimately handing the challenge to clarify this relationship on to its audience.

In relation to Larry's passive attitude, of which the film certainly warns rather than encouraging its emulation, the film allows me to clarify the element of Wittgenstein's method that seems to encourage passivity: as we can see through Larry's failed attempts to solve his problems through thinking, part of a process of conceptual clarification needs to be clarifying what else, other than thinking, needs to be done in order to start solving particular problems which clearly cannot be solved by *merely thinking*. But for gaining this kind of overview, thinking is needed.

To sum up: As we have seen, *A Serious Man* clarifies some possible pitfalls of Wittgensteinian philosophical thinking, including temptations towards seeking certainty through metaphysical speculation but also problematic versions of attempting to only use aspect-seeing and objects of comparison for dissolving the attachment to questions that cannot be answered. The film therefore goes some way towards offering concrete everyday examples at how Wittgenstein's method works

and putting up warning signs as to how not to apply it. The film challenges its viewers to take up a critical approach towards apparent 'mysteries' without providing the context of use that would allow us to give substance to any speculation about their meaning (cf. the argument on riddle in chapter 5). It draws attention to this lack of context and thus sets up interesting questions about how the language-game method plays out (i.e. what consequences it has) in discussing notions of 'high culture' versus 'pop-culture', the status of conventions and rules in genre films, and what might count as creative agency. In order to discuss this further, I will now turn to the uses of Wittgensteinian method in genre theory and what we can take from the Coen brothers' use of Wittgensteinian method when we compare the relative ambiguity of 'genre' in *A Serious Man* to the relative certainty of genre in Graf's generic television crime dramas.

4.

The Uses and Abuses of Genre: The case of Dominik Graf as a challenge to genre theory

> Throughout his career, Graf has been pushing the stone of genre filmmaking up the hill of a German film industry that has generally been unwilling actively to carve out a trough into which Graf might have been able to rest his films so that his efforts could have acquired a degree of consistency with those of other filmmakers, thus fashioning the very "neighborhood" that is essential to any genre; as Petzold argues, such a genre "neighborhood" is produced by and organized according to a logic of seriality, repetition, similarities, and differences and usually has appeal for larger audiences precisely because they tend to associate with such a "neighborhood" a desirable feeling of familiarity (and, occasionally, of surprise). […] Differently put, the essential invisibility of Dominik Graf […]—one that in fact corresponds to his own filmmaking ideal of being a craftsman rather than auteur—results from the German film industry's failure to invest more in the production of genre films; conversely, the failure of the German film industry to produce with greater frequency and regularity films (other than films about the country's totalitarian pasts and comedies) that manage to attract larger audiences can be considered symptomatic of the fact that Graf's career-long efforts to generate a viable genre film culture in Germany have consistently been met with indifference, if not flat-out hostility: specifically, a genre-film culture drawing less on comedies (which are notoriously difficult to export) than on police films, crime films, thrillers, science fiction films, and horror films—film genres that enjoyed their earliest artistic heights during the years of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933).[210]

I will discuss the ways in which the dynamic aspect of genre filmmaking – the development of genre patterns over time, within and through a film as part of a tradition or series – can be conceptualised: Graf's film *Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot…* challenges both existing attempts to define genres and the approach of framing their dynamic development as performativity. Even the most fine-grained ways of defining films, using Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance to explain how a film might

[210] Abel, Marco. 'The Yearning for Genre: The Films of Dominik Graf'. In Fisher, Jaimey, and ProQuest. *Generic Histories of German Cinema: Genre and Its Deviations.* Columbia, MD, 2013, p.263f.

simultaneously belong to several groups of films of genre, still problematically suggest that the possibilities of genre filmmaking are determined in advance and in this way offer an overly rigid and limiting view of genre despite of theorists' efforts to overcome this determinism.

The focus of this chapter and the following one will be on the various ways in which genre has been conceptualised and what practical consequences that has for an actual filmmaker: Dominik Graf. In this way, the two chapters form a unit, which is split in half to make the argument more surveyable: Both chapters will outline the aspect of Graf's work that I will call his *critical filmmaking*. This chapter tracks his use of surprises, whereas chapter 5 turns to critical, yet playful appropriations of existing structures and his reflection on the media in which he works.

I will focus on two films –in this chapter I will return to *Er sollte tot...*, which I began to discuss in the introduction, and in chapter 5 I will move on to *Die Freunde der Freunde*.

To understand Graf's critical filmmaking means seeing it against the background of some classic German film theories, which still inform widely shared assumptions about film 'quality' in Germany. Therefore, I will survey these theories not in order to respond to their arguments in much detail but in order to clarify (some of) the more widely shared theoretical assumptions, which Graf's films critically engage with (in 4.1.). Graf's style of critical filmmaking can then be brought into focus by looking at essential elements of his style. Chapter 4 begins this investigation by studying his particular use of *surprise* as a performative, creative twist connected to a framework of generic conventions (in 4.2.), which challenges preconceptions about genre filmmaking as static, conformist or overly-determined by regularities. In 4.3., I will look at the use of Wittgenstein's philosophy in genre theory so far, evaluate the arguments and begin to point to ways beyond their shortcomings. This leads me to consider the status of genre rules as grammar (4.4.) and how Wittgenstein's method offers a committed, yet playfully liberated alternative to some problematic aspects of genre performativity (4.5.).

This chapter takes a broadly Wittgensteinian critical approach to genre conceptions and pays special attention to the problems inherent in what has so far been taken to be 'the' Wittgensteinian approach to conceptualising genre: the use of family resemblance to explain (some of) the fuzziness of genre definitions. As we will see, family resemblance does not solve the practical problems that filmmakers such as Graf encounter. Going beyond family resemblance, a grammatical investigation that highlights the status of genre rules and the uses (and users) of genres can clarify wide-spread confusions about genres. Building on the reading of Wittgenstein's method as thinking without theories, theses or dogmas, it is important to note that I do not attempt to replace existing theories with a 'Wittgensteinian theory of genre', but instead I consider the creative and liberating contribution that Wittgenstein's method can make.

There are very many ways of conceptualising genre, which are usually denoted by comparisons (genre as frame, genre as class, genre as family, genre as rhizome etc.) presented as factual theories about how things actually are. The Wittgensteinian

contribution, as I have explained, lies in making explicit how such pictures, implicit in these comparisons, can be useful *only* if we also honestly acknowledge their limits. This focus on limits has a liberating effect insofar as the compulsive notion that such limits indicate limitations is dissolved. While both rigorous definitions and the idea of family resemblance can be useful for particular purposes in thinking through and talking about genre, they cannot ground a 'theory' of all possible cases of genre. Here, one might remember the central point of Kuusela's *Struggle against Dogmatism*, which was to remind us of the difference between statements of facts and statements of necessity despite their superficial similarities.

Before going into more detail, I will address some possible objections to what I set out to do here: Firstly, one might ask why genre should even be given such an extended consideration, given that there seems to be no general consensus on how to define both the overall concept of 'genre' and particular genres. Secondly, besides the overall focus of this study on Wittgenstein's method in relation to film, why would one need to turn to Wittgenstein's method for the clarification of genre conceptions? Thirdly, one might ask why Dominik Graf would be a good case study, and vice versa one might ask if (or what) clarification of these problems would contribute to a better understanding of his films.

I will provide a short answer at this point, but I hope that the overall treatment of these issues in the next two chapters offers a fully convincing answer.

1. Genre is the main focus here because, even though the very concept and the various definitions are debated and controversial, it remains extremely influential in filmmaking, film distribution, film reception, and the academic study of film. To ignore the conceptions of genre because there is no real consensus means leaving the field to confusion and dogmatism.
2. Confusion and dogmatism as well as compulsiveness, emptiness, and injustice in thinking are arguably the main targets of Wittgenstein's critical approach. Insofar as Wittgenstein's method is actually helpful in avoiding them or showing alternatives to them, it will be appropriate to employ this method in relation to the problems that arise in conceptualising genre. Importantly, one should not expect from such an approach a more worked out theory of what genre 'really is' (either as a concept in general or in relation to defining or conceptualising a particular genre such as 'science fiction'). Instead, the point here is to clarify different uses and thereby avoid and unmask typical confusions that have important consequences (namely, such confusions prevent creativity in the making of and lead to mistakes in the academic evaluation of genre films).
3. Dominik Graf is a particularly interesting case – and, not coincidentally, the starting point of this study overall. As I will show, conceptions and confusions of genre are essential to understanding his work, his style, and his national and international reputation. Through his work, Graf presents a challenge to certain preconceptions about critical thinking. To be clear, I argue that Graf himself can

be considered a critical thinker, which we are in a better position to appreciate if we use a Wittgensteinian method.

The overall argument of this study so far been directed through Wittgenstein's method back at his writing (at making it more understandable and at criticising some misapplications). In this chapter, I take the opportunity to look, through the lenses provided by Wittgenstein's method, at a variety of problems outlined and tackled by another thinker – Dominik Graf – who works both in writing (namely film criticism) and, more relevant to my concerns, in the medium of genre film.

As we have seen in chapter 3, the Coen brothers can be taken to engage critically with Wittgensteinian methodology as an approach to the philosophy of culture. Building on this, we can now fully concentrate on three aspects of Graf's filmmaking that serve to characterise his critical filmmaking as distinct from the Coens'. In *A Serious Man*, Larry does not know how to go on in everyday life. This fits Wittgenstein's simple description of the form of a philosophical problem: 'I don't know my way about' (cf. PI §123). Dominik Graf on the other hand mostly uses characters that *know their way about* in their everyday procedures. He regularly chooses the genre of the police procedural and follows and explores the ordinary and everyday ways of going on of his characters, although his films tend to reframe the ordinary in unexpected ways. This focus on the conventional and the everyday can be seen as directly connected to Graf's commitment to genre filmmaking, which may be characterised as *ordinary film language*. One might say that Graf's films exemplify a way of going on with both ordinary genre filmmaking *and* critical reflection that – most of the time – is not and does not need to resort to a self-distancing style. This is why his films can create an atmosphere of warmth and even a sense of being-at-home, while also constantly involving critical reflection, involving dark, unpleasant, and challenging themes and atmospheres. Graf's critical approach, embedded in a friendlier view of everyday habits, may be seen as *a way of inheriting Wittgenstein's critical method*: Graf's films can teach us something about critical thinking with Wittgenstein as a critical and creative approach to rethinking institutions.

As a first step, I will give an overview of the theoretical assumptions about film as art and the exclusionary stance towards genre films.

4.1. Genre film as manipulation, or genre film as the opposite of art?

Before turning to my analysis Graf's films, I will sketch the landscape of relevant theoretical assumptions that forms the background of his filmmaking. Graf struggles perpetually with the limitations imposed on genre filmmakers by the German film industry – which arguably lacks properly industrial structures and cannot support or sustain the sort of structural stability and learning processes required for genre filmmaking.[211] One aspect of these limitations is, however, not based in practical

[211] See chapter 1, and also see Abel, quoted at the beginning of the chapter.

problems, such as a lack of available funding, but arise from an *inability to think* of genre films in more open ways than as the opposite of 'art film'.
In 1983, Graf had already turned away from his original ambition to become an individualistic 'Autorenfilmer' in the sense of the New German Film. He directed six episodes of 'Köberle kommt' for television, for the first time making several episodes of a series. In this year, his colleague filmmaker, Ulrike Ottinger, attacked what she saw as a 'Zwang zum Genrekino' in an article on the state of German film: 'The dictatorship of mediocrity has decided the restless extermination of the extraordinary by arguing for democracy'.[212] Graf talks about his transition to television around that time in a markedly different way:

> 'And if there was one thing you really couldn't learn in German film at that time, it was craftmanship. No one could explain to you how to stage a car chase. [...] I thought of a knack how it might be done in such a way that no one could tell how weakly it was directed. And from this playing around with knacks [...] at some point became earnest [action film staging].[213]

The discourse has not become much more differentiated in the following decades, as Graf himself argues in an essay about the prevailing notions of 'quality' in 2012; these notions directly influence which films get money from public funding bodies, and which films get nominations:

> 'Valiantly covered up by the Deutsche Filmakademie, there is nevertheless a deep rift within the pretentious 'German Movie-Making'. The debate rages along the superficial lines of "commerce" against "film art". On the quiet, it is common to rant with foam at the mouth about the other group's films. In seminars for the formation of judgements the Akademie asked: "What is a good film?" The result was a list of categories comparable to an outdated ideology of 'masterpieces'. Beyond all event-peddling, the most beautiful, incidental, purposeless could exist. But how might that come to pass if the committees only fund that "which Germany needs"?[214]

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[212] An academic history of resentments against genre film in this tradition as well as in a tradition of anticapitalist polemics can be found in: Rother, Rainer, and Julia Pattis. *Die Lust am Genre: Verbrechergeschichten aus Deutschland*. Berlin: Bertz Fischer, 2011. This quote is from p. 68. My translation: '[Die] Diktatur des Mittelmaßes [hat] mit dem Argument der Demokratie die restlose Vernichtung des Außergewöhnlichen beschlossen'.

[213] Huber/ Möller, p.107. My translation: 'Und wenn du eines im deutschen Film jener Zeit wirklich nicht lernen konntest, dann war das Handwerk. Es hat dir kein Mensch erklären können, wie man eine Autoverfolgungsjagd inszeniert [...]. Ich überlegte mir eher 'nen Trick, wie's vielleicht so aussehen könnte, dass niemand merkt, wie schwach es inszeniert ist. Und aus diesem Spiel mit den Tricks heraus [...] wurde dann irgendwann Ernst.'

[214] Dominik Graf. "Das Grauen ... das Grauen!", in: *Zeit Online*. 27.04.2012. Online version. My translation: 'Von der Deutschen Filmakademie tapfer übertüncht, existiert dennoch ein tiefer Riss im German-

From this false dichotomy of genre against art films springs a lack of support for a more *grammatically* diverse and rich approach to filmmaking. Chapter 5 will argue in detail how such a grammatical mixedness and richness can be conceived. This inability, I will argue, is indeed based in problematic uses of a philosophical/ conceptual picture of how things supposedly are, which is then projected onto actual cases, making it difficult or impossible to think of alternatives. Graf's films can be seen as challenging the assumptions inherent in this unnecessarily narrow conception of genre films.

Relevant here is a family of arguments introduced by early German film theorists such as Siegfried Kracauer and Rudolf Arnheim and echoed in slight variations by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. They share the conviction that the possibilities of film are determined in advance, that by looking at the structures of its material (including the physical film material and its process of production, the machines involved, and ultimately the industrial context that shapes the actual uses of film) they can arrive at an implicitly or explicitly normative argument that allows forms of transcendental criticisms of film: criticism that reveals the preconditions of filmmaking as shaping what filmmakers can – and should – do with film. This normative argument runs, again in some variations, along the lines of dividing films into two groups: On the one hand they place an ambitious conception of 'art film', which at least Kracauer and Arnheim outline as films that necessarily employ a *realistic mode of presentation* in order to counter the manipulative and deceptive tendencies of film as a medium.[215] On the other hand they place what might be summed up as 'seductive' forms of film (although that is not what they call these films), which for Kracauer, and Adorno, and Horkheimer are both commercially motivated and showcasing a tendency towards propaganda.[216] An overview of these arguments, and their respective differences to each other, can be found in a recent book by German film scholar Marcus Stiglegger, who argues that the *seductive modes of film* need not be conflated with propaganda in all cases, although such problematic cases do exist and accordingly need to be criticised (which he goes on to do).[217] For Stiglegger, art film itself can be seductive in various ways, which need

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Moviemaking-Gewese. Der Streit tobt entlang der oberflächlichen Frontlinien »Kommerz« gegen »Filmkunst«. Hinter vorgehaltener Hand wird mit Schaum vor dem Mund über die Filme der anderen geschimpft. In Seminaren zur Urteilsbildung fragte die Akademie: »Was ist ein guter Film?« Das Resultat war eine Kategorienliste, vergleichbar mit jener ältlichen Meisterwerks-Ideologie [...]. Jenseits aller Eventhuberei könnte das Schönste, das Beiläufigste, das Zweckfreieste, das Befreiendste liegen. Aber wie soll das zustande kommen, wenn im Gremieneinklang nur gefördert wird, »was Deutschland braucht«?'

URL: http://www.zeit.de/2012/18/Deutscher-Filmpreis/seite-1 (28.09.2015)

[215] Cf. Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film als Kunst*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002. Print. Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft; 1553. Kracauer, Siegfried. *Von Caligari Zu Hitler : Eine psychologische Geschichte des Deutschen Films*. Frankfurt Am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984. Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theorie des Films: Die Errettung der äußeren Wirklichkeit*. Frankfurt Am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985. Print. Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft; p.546.

[216] Cf. Horkheimer, Max, Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1988, pp.128-176.

[217] Stiglegger, Marcus. *Ritual & Verführung: Schaulust, Spektakel & Sinnlichkeit im Film*. Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2006. Print. Deep Focus (Ser.); 3. See especially the introduction, pp.9-30.

to be analysed for a clear critical view of their strengths and problems. Such problems are sketched in Jörg Schweinitz's study of varieties of *stereotypes* in film, which engages in more depth with several of the relevant writers. He remarks: 'Long before Horkheimer and Adorno criticized the "culture industry" (particularly Hollywood) and its tendency towards the intertextually and culturally conventionalized schema—the stereotype—critical observers around 1930 described cinema as a "dream factory" (Ilya Ehrenburg) and "fantasy machine" (René Fülöp-Miller) or talked about the "standardization" (Siegfried Kracauer, for example) and "Taylorism" (Willy Haas) of film, or even the "ready-made film" (Rudolf Arnheim)'.[218] Schweinitz speaks about 'the fundamentally critical position of classical German film theory, which emerged against the backdrop of an aesthetic rejection of all things conventional, as a legacy of both the romantic aesthetic tradition and language skepticism (*Sprachskepsis*).'[219] Wittgenstein's philosophy can be seen in part as a response to this language skepticism, which he was intimately familiar with through his childhood in Vienna and therefore promises to offer an alternative critical approach to genre structures and the way they are embedded in institutions of production and reception.[220] Schweinitz's analysis offers a sweeping outline of the history of ideas that lead up to contemporary views on films that make use of industrial structures and (narrative and iconographic) conventions, such as Graf's and the Coens' use of genre in their films. Whereas the Coen's are regularly seen as – and marketed as – individualistic auteurs, Graf has distanced himself from this label, as we have seen.[221] He acknowledges being equally influenced by American and French filmmaking, especially by Nouvelle Vague auteurs, and transnational genre film 'rules' – following these rules, I will argue, may not simply be conflated with conformism. However, as Schweinitz points out, the concept of the auteur as developed by Bazin was not in principal opposed to industrially enabled filmmaking from its inception, and when it was employed by American theorists, it became even more compatible with Hollywood filmmaking, now highlighting 'formal intelligence' and 'artistic signatures' rather realistic attention to social reality.[222] One 'fundamental notion [...] was retained—that artistic individuality does not demand a radical breach with the system of mass culture and its stereotypes but can in fact be manifested in the personal and nuanced manner in which ready-made patterns of cinema are used'.[223] Schweinitz concludes his historical sketch of the development of this discourse by characterising recent playful uses of storytelling patterns as taking complete leave from the realistic aspiration 'to refer to an "authentic reality"'.[224]

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[218] Schweinitz, Jörg. *Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011, p.xii.

[219] Ibid., p.xvii.

[220] Cf. Janik, Allan, and Stephen Toulmin. *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. Chicago, 1996. Print. In particular chapters 3-5 deal with the Viennese language skepticism and its influence on Wittgenstein. Hofmannsthal's famous *The Letter of Lord Chandos* (1902), which Schweinitz refers to on pp.136ff., is discussed by Janik & Toulmin on pp.115-119.

[221] Cf. Schweinitz discussing the Coens in this way: Ibid., p.118.

[222] Ibid., p.114.

[223] Ibid., p.115.

[224] Ibid., p.118.

Instead of being concerned with facts or realism, such playful uses (his examples include the Coen Brothers and David Lynch) of patterns constitute a form of ironic 'self-referentiality', which creates a 'distance', namely 'a defamiliarized, reflexive view of enmeshed stereotypes, which is offered up as a play of signs and is by no means to be enjoyed only by an intellectual audience'.[225] I will argue that this end point still does not solve the problems inherent in early film theorists' worries about the perceived dichotomy between realistic art and manipulative commerce. While they are right to point out dangers inherent in manipulative uses of film, they are too quick to conflate many or all uses of film with manipulation. As we shall see, the *generalised* worry about manipulation is connected to a confused conception of the supposedly necessary prevalence of filmic realism, an idea that is implicitly connected to a problematic picture of film-viewers as automatons, which I will set out to clarify in chapter 5.
To some degree, these theorists might be aligned with the unnecessarily narrow and rigid approaches that Toril Moi criticises as a 'hermeneutics of suspicion':

> To read the text suspiciously is to see it as a symptom of something else. That "something else" usually turns out to be a theoretical or political insight possessed by the critic in advance of the reading. Instead of responding to the text's concerns, the critic forces it to submit to his or her own theoretical or political schemes. The result is often entirely predictable readings. Even critics totally committed to critique admit that the results can become stultifying.[226]

Moi also provides detailed responses to the charge that Wittgenstein and Austin have to be seen as somehow opposed to specialised, analytical, or poetic language (such charges were prominently made by Marcuse, Gellner, and Fish).[227] In line with this argument against ordinary language philosophy, a reader might worry that my defense of ordinary filmic language is unworried about biases, harmful stereotypes or uncritical complicity with exploitative structures of film production. However, I am not proposing that filmmakers 'restrict themselves' to generic forms in filmmaking, and much less am I in the business of 'policing' the supposed correctness of ordinary uses of film.[228] Quite to the opposite: I am encouraging a closer look at genre film and its myriad possibilities, which *include* the aesthetic possibilities of any and all avant-gardist forms. As Moi argues, there is no simple line to draw between ordinary forms of language and 'specialist' or 'extraordinary' forms:

> Ordinary language is language that teaches us differences. This is why ordinary language does not stand in opposition to specialist

[225] Ibid., p.119.
[226] Moi 2017, p.175.
[227] Moi 2017, pp.150-171.
[228] Marcuse and Butler imagine the ordinary language philosopher as policing the work of poets and critical thinkers (which for them is indistinguishable anyway), cf. Moi 2017, p.164.

> vocabularies, technical expressions, or to the language of chemistry and mathematics. Ordinary language is certainly not the opposite of "literary" language. (In my view, there is no such thing as "literary language.") Nor is ordinary language the opposite of "extraordinary language." The extraordinary is at home in the ordinary. (We share perfectly ordinary criteria for when to apply the concept.)[229]

Graf is an example of a filmmaker who demonstrates that genre forms do not imply an uncritical attitude, either. Rather than assume that the possibilities of film can be determined in a theoretical mode *in advance*, I will take Graf's films as my starting point to *look and see* what they are actually doing with the medium and the art form. This allows for a more concrete and practically oriented way of countering dogmatic views about genre films than remaining in merely theoretical or conceptual discussion.
In order to argue for the dynamic aspect of genre filmmaking, I will focus in chapter 4 on the concept of the *performative* as a way of thinking about ordinary, generic film forms as compatible with *making change*. I will focus on an ordinary element of film storytelling: surprise coinciding with a turning point in the dramaturgical structure. Under certain circumstances, this structure enables a critical *performative force* that challenges rigid conceptions of genre films, including the obsession of genre theorists with *defining* genre. While the performative remains in the end unsatisfying as a conception of the dynamics of genre, it leads towards more open ways of conceptualising genre film.

4.2. Surprise! The performativity of Dominik Graf's genre filmmaking

This section is concerned with the performative and critical force of surprise in Dominik Graf's genre films. How can actual suprises be possible in a regular, conventional, generic structure that by definition seems to denote something that can be expected and predicted? Answering this question brings into focus the *status* of the rules and regularities of genre films, which leads me to connect genre rules to Wittgenstein's concepts of grammar and language-games in chapter 5. Sceptical questions can be addressed in relation to the concrete example of the surprising final turning point of *Er sollte tot…*: Can the film's use of certain conventional techniques be criticised as merely going through the motions of ready-made genre filmmaking?[230] If not, what is the difference? And further, if the surprise actually works for a particular audience, does it have to be addressed as a manipulative use of film rhetorics?
Alfred Hitchcock famously believed that suspense – to know in advance what will inevitably happen to the characters and to dread it – is dramatically more powerful than moments of surprise, which he took to be merely a short momentary shock

[229] Moi 2017, p.162.
[230] Cf. Tobin, Vera, *Elements of Surprise: Our Mental Limits and the Satisfactions of Plot* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), pp.34ff on the wide-spread negative attitudes against well-made moments of surprise.

without any profound force on the audience.[231] In contrast, I will argue that the use of surprise in narrative film can performatively bring about a profound change in the audience. Looking at surprise through the lense of performance theory, however, also reveals the limits of performance theory. Making these limits explicit points to ways of going beyond – and enabling new uses of – performance theories with Wittgenstein's method. Graf's way of using surprise is a crucial element of what I describe as the critical aspect of his filmmaking. As we will see, moments of surprise only work because they rest on certain necessary contexts that enable them to develop a profound force. This recognition will prepare for a further investigation of these contexts in the later sections of the chapter.

4.2.1. Exploding genre: The final turning point and the unreliable narrator of Er sollte tot…

The final turning point of *Er sollte tot…* reveals the murderer and coincides with an important acknowledgement by Maria (Rosalie Thomass), the protagonist. Up to this point the film suggests, through flashbacks woven into Maria's telling of her life's story, that Maria herself was a victim of the crime organisation she worked for. We know that she was forced into prostitution. We find out that she scammed several older men by pretending she wanted to leave the sex trade and needed their financial help to do so. It turns out that she omitted important parts of her story while presenting herself as merely a victim of bad circumstances who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The scene reveals that she actively committed murders. Not only does this revelation solve the crime mystery but, more importantly, it also marks a turning point in Maria's character development: she decides to take responsibility for her actions and comes to see and present herself in a radically different way.

In this subsection I will look at the way this turning point is embedded in the structure of the film and how it aligns with several other surprises in the development of the story. It will be necessary to analyse the development of the protagonist throughout the film and to distinguish between surprise as a mere 'effect' and surprise as a sort of critical training for the audience. The film's title turns up in dialogue during the film's third act, coinciding with the final surprising turning point of the film, in which Maria comes to see herself radically differently, upending what she – and the viewers – assumed to be the case up to this point:

> Maria: "Wie seltsam, dass ich das immer sage ... er sollte tot ... er musste tot."
>
> Tauber: "Aber du warst das."

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[231] Cf. Truffaut, Francois. *Mr. Hitchcock, wie haben Sie das gemacht?* München: Wilhelm Heyne, 1999, pp.62f. – It should be noted that e.g. his own *Psycho* (USA 1960) nonetheless is most famous for its use of surprising twists. See also Tobin 2018, pp.39-44 on the differences between suspense and surprise.

Maria: "Ja, ich war das. Das weiß ich jetzt."[232]

In a sense, this scene runs parallel to Larry's encounter with aspect-seeing in *A Serious Man*, but whereas Rabbi Scott misfires in his attempt to convey a change of attitude, Tauber's guidance felicitously creates a performative change. *Er sollte tot…* is constructed almost entirely from interrogation scenes. Interrogations are a conventional 'standard situation' (comparable to standard situations in football or chess) in many crime films.[233] Still, the film uses this element to an unusual extent. Such interrogations elsewhere only feature as a short sequence. Here, it takes up most of the film's running time and turns into a multilayered and dense drama. Throughout the film, Maria's unreliable storytelling in flashbacks is juxtaposed with commissioner Jürgen Tauber's voice-over narration, which further helps us to find bearing in the story, as well as enabling the film to move its story forward at a high pace. The male voice of the investigator in the beginning is presented as the relevant source of authority of 'what is true' in the story-world and actively pushes and questions the female voice of the suspect. As the film progresses, and Maria takes more and more responsibility, her voice takes over the dominant position as the film's narrator. The film ends when Maria finally acknowledges she committed the murder, whereas up to that point she has seen herself as the victim of other people's plans and bullying, a helpless vehicle for other people's actions. This challenges the established clean distinctions between protagonist and antagonist as well as between victim and murderer and several typical preconceptions a viewer might have about these roles.

The film mirrors this story of the empowering recovery of agency in the theme of disability. Not only is Tauber one-armed and suffers from constant challenges, his colleague commissioner Obermair has to wear a stabilising collar around her neck. This thematic thread complements the main story of the 'child-like' prostitute – we find out that Maria was more successful in the sex trade than many of the more dressed-up and heavily masqueraded women. The interpretation of this is left to the audience: What is it that makes her more attractive? Is it that they see her as movingly 'innocent', 'pure', or 'authentic'? Is there an undercurrant of ageism or even pedophilia?

Tauber and Obermair highlight and connect these thematic threads when they discuss why men are interested in disabled, weaker, or child-like women. It is about the feeling of power for men with weak personalities, speculates Tauber, who himself rarely brings up his impaired body and never puts himself into the position of the victim, but

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[232] Maria: 'How strange that I should always say that ... he should dead ... he must dead.'
Tauber: 'But it was you.'
Maria: 'Yes, it was me. I know that now.'

[233] Interrogation has been characterised as a 'standard situation' of film narration, a concept championed by Thomas Koebner and other German film scholars, which denotes a smaller 'unit' of conventional film style for narration than the larger patterns of genres. Standard situations can turn up across genres, retaining some techniques and features but adopting others to each genre's and film's context. For an analysis of interregation as filmic standard situation, cf. Anette Kaufmann's entry in Koebner, Thomas. *Standardsituationen im Film. Ein Handbuch.* Co-edited with Norbert Grob and Anette Kaufmann. Schüren, Marburg 2016, pp.335-338.

who stumbles at the very end when he claims to be completely disconnected from any of these feelings – a stumbling that indicates that his calm and professional manner itself is a social practice to balance his insecurity with a sense of control. I will return, in chapter 6, to the difficult acknowledgement that it sometimes takes honesty and courage to accept that one needs certain kinds of 'crutches' to deal with one's own limits and how this relates to the themes in Graf's filmmaking that I investigate throughout this chapter. My analysis will next set out to show that and how the film 'explodes' genre storytelling – in keeping with Whedon's metaphor (as quoted in the introduction) – and what needs to be in place for this 'explosion' to come to fruition.

Let us at this point return to the quote from the introduction: 'Those who created genre exploded it every time. That's what it's for.' Whedon's sentences are short but dense. It points out that the explosion of a genre is not an exception to the rule: if it explodes 'every time', then explosion is the rule. Of course, we have hardly begun to explore what Whedon means by 'explosion', but we might take it to be something like a surprise, something unexpected that entirely changes the genre from the inside out. To speak of the 'identity' of genre across various films might then appear problematic insofar as genres would change profoundly, if indeed genre 'exploded every time'. As we will see this worry about the identity of genre across time has troubled theorists for millenia, who try to define 'genre' as a concept as well as various genres (such as 'tragedy', 'science fiction', and 'crime mystery/ drama'). This is further complicated in regard to films insofar as there is a conventional, broad distinction between 'genre films' and 'non-genre films' – which causes most genre theorists to raise their eyebrows. But for filmmakers, distributors, and critics, the existence of these two groups of films is a truism. When filmmakers and film-critics use the term 'genre', they often use 'genre' to 'indicate the formulaic and the conventional, the popular genres of crime mysteries, romance, and especially the socially less accepted genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror.'[234] As such, we might say: the distinction between genre and non-genre films is a *grammatical statement* in the sense given by Wittgenstein. It does not state any facts but lays out the rules according to which we use these words. We will later see that one might raise valid objections to this initial distinction, but at first, we may accept it as a way of speaking that is both understandable and conventional.

Beyond the problem of what we might mean by the identity of genre across time (and, as we will see, across groups of users), I will explain the conceptions relevant to seeing genre as having a 'frame', 'creators', and regularities below, until finally I am in a position to consider the notions of 'freedom' and 'agency' in genre filmmaking, which seem to be implied in the notion of 'exploding' genre. We might intuitively and vaguely grasp what Whedon and Graf want to say when they use these metaphors. However, the powerful concept of freely 'using' genre, which I take to be at the centre of these comments, becomes clearer only when we look at the practice in particular films and once we get an overview of some relevant conceptions – and definitions – of genre.

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[234] Frow, p.1f.

The first step we need to take is to reconsider the ways in which different groups define 'genre'. John Frow argues against the narrow use of the term 'genre' (denoting the 'conventional' and 'formulaic') mentioned above, even though 'it is certainly the case that this usage points to real distinctions between different textual functions, different audience structures, and different patterns of reading'[235]. Still, we should not be too quick in drawing a line between what '*is*' supposedly a genre and what '*is not*'. That would 'obscure[…] the extent to which even the most complex and least formulaic of texts is shaped and organised by its relation to generic structures'.[236] He argues that genre constitutes

> 'a universal dimension of textuality. [...] Far from being merely "stylistic" devices, genres create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or of philosophy or of science, or in painting, or in everyday talk. These effects are not, however, fixed and stable, since texts – even the simplest and most formulaic – do not "belong" to genres but are, rather, uses of them'.[237]

What Frow calls 'reality effects' needs to be distinguished from 'reality', insofar as they merely create an 'effect' that gives the text authority and frames the speakers' utterances as factual reporting (as in the speaking position of newspapers of documentaries). They evoke the impression of factual reporting, whether their claims are factual or not. These basic assumptions allow Frow in the later stages of his argument to show how philosophy and tabloid newspapers draw on generic speech positions to legitimise the authority of the statements they make and how indeed any act of communication appears to be necessarily shaped by its relation to pre-existing genres, insofar as it is at all understandable. A Wittgensteinian answer to the apparent conflict between the conventional distinction of 'genre films' from 'non-genre films' (which often would be labelled something like 'art films') and the view advocated by Frow that all communication relies on genre is to point out that these are two *different uses* of the word 'genre' with different grammars. Indeed, here we find two very different conceptions of genre: on the one hand a relatively narrow and particular set of conventions (and therefore expectations) within filmmaking, film-distribution, and film-viewing and, on the other hand, a 'universal dimension of textuality', which undermines any notion of there being films 'outside of genre'. But if we look at how people actually speak about genre, we find that these two concepts do not need to be seen as mutually exclusive as long as we are clear which genre-conception we are appealing to at any one moment.

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[235] Ibid.
[236] Frow, p.2.
[237] Ibid.

So far, we have seen that 'genre' refers to at least two concepts that denote different ways of going on in storytelling and everyday communication with different claims and a commitment to different kinds of rules. In Graf, we find a filmmaker who commits himself to explicitly making 'genre films' in the sense of the conventional and formulaic, yet he is a filmmaker who defies the notion that this would commit him to narrowly follow conventions and formulas in a simple and predictable manner: Graf poses a challenge to the wide-spread notion that the limits of genres are limitations for the creativity of a filmmaker. As a next step, I will focus on the theme of determination in *Er sollte tot…*, and on both how the film depicts Maria regaining agency and how this theme, in turn, serves to reflect back on the film's limits.

4.2.2. Commitment to genre rules: Confining or enabling?

Graf keeps revisiting, in a critical way, the relationship between institutional rules, procedures, habits, and techniques, on the one hand, and the idea of agency, creativity, freedom, and a way of breaking loose from (different varieties of) compulsion on the other hand. Across his large body of work, mostly for television, the institutions he investigates include, amongst others, the German police force, organised crime, and the structures of German filmmaking, e.g. in the documentary, *Es werde Stadt!* (Germany 2014).

Maria always sees herself as a child. Talking about her limits to some degree empowers her, having always felt determined by circumstance: she says she was the baby girl in the orphanage where she grew up and still gets called a 'baby' by her pimp. In the film's final turning point, she reclaims an active and responsible position within her life through telling her story in a different way and, in the dialogue quoted above, actively taking responsibility for the consequences of her actions. This is portrayed by the film as a liberating step for her, even though this acknowledgement means that she has to go to prison for murdering the final victim of her scam (who also happens to be a detective). But prison, for her, is neither unfamiliar nor frightening but rather an escape from the violent pimps in her life and the pressure they impress on her.

Accordingly, the film ends with a shot of Maria as a child, sitting next to the shore of a lake, looking at the ripples she is making in the water. The shot appears suddenly, without introduction. This image illustrates and highlights the underlying process of identification that we have witnessed throughout the film, looking at splintered aspects, which at first appeared as unconnected images such as sudden flashbacks to torture, which now have been integrated into a coherent narrative. Maria, the innocent child, causes ripples in the water surface, in which she sees herself. She seems unbelieving and fascinated that she has actively changed the world by touching the surface of the water, a small touch that causes ever-growing effects, ripples. She has viewed herself as a passive victim of causation for most of the film and thereby disconnected herself from her responsibilities and from how she really would be able to make active changes to the world around her if only she changed her *conception* of her own agency: her way of seeing herself as determined by ulterior forces impedes her taking charge in the first place.

As such, the central surprise of the film takes up the theme of the film's prologue, which sets up what needs to be in place for the final turn to work properly (the preconditions of the surprise). The prologue also opens up a way of seeing the film as reflecting on the preconditions of its own storytelling. As we have seen in the introduction, Graf uses genre conventions in the prologue to build expectations and then draws attention to these expectations through a surprising revelation that – in this case – highlights the differences between a deadly accident and murder. We saw that the prologue also addresses the preconceptions of the crime drama audience: the bloodied bodies are presented in such a way that the audience will quickly assume that the bodies must be corpses, typical of a crime drama opening scene and often central in such a film's plot. In contrast, they turn out to not even be part of the film's storyworld but rather part of a story within the story. Much like the prologue in *A Serious Man*, this scene is used as an object of comparison, placed in the film, *next* to the other scenes (and before them, thus framing them like a signpost that warns the audience not to jump to conclusions too quickly), in order to make explicit certain themes and expectations – such as the problematic conflation of personal responsibility and agency (which are required for something to be counted as a murder) with the contingent, determined, or accidental. Without the prologue, these themes would not become as pronounced, and the audience's expectations would be different. The prologue demonstrates how easily one may jump to false conclusions, and in this way the film challenges us, the audience, to take more responsibility for the way we make predictions.

Er sollte tot… (unlike the vague appeals to genres in *A Serious* Man) unambiguously appeals to the genre conventions of crime drama, as I will explain in more detail below. But then it *uses* this clear commitment – a sort of implicit promise or contract between the filmmakers and the audience that commits them to deliver a certain kind of experience – in order to both foster expectations and more effectively subvert them. And this use of genre is made explicit, and therefore reflected on, by the film's prologue, which makes clear that we can expect it to remain fully committed to the genre but nonetheless be ready to use the genre rules in flexible and playful ways. As such, the film's prologue does not merely reaffirm genre stereotypes but also works towards making the audience aware of problematic conflations and generalisations, performatively changing the generic stereotype from within.

This use of surprise is not something completely new, of course. It is, for instance, quite typical of the turning points first remarked upon by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. In line with Aristotle's remarks, it here involves the protagonist of a tragedy (which has somewhat different parameters than a police procedural or crime mystery) recognising her situation in a way that radically changes her view of what she has done throughout the story. Aristotle's example for this is Oedipus' recognition that he has fulfilled the prophecy his parents worked so hard to avoid: he has killed his father and married his mother.[238] In this case, the surprise involves the character recognising an important

[238] Cf. Tobin 2018, pp.174-183.

fact of his own identity, as well as enabling him to see his own actions up to this point in a completely different light.

The *critical* use of surprise that I am interested in equally works like this: it presents both the characters and the audience with a playful *challenge* to rethink the way they have so far arranged the facts of the story – how they understood the story and for what reasons – up to this point. It is critical because it addresses the preconditions that lead to false conclusions, and it arguably works as a playful exercise or training in critical thinking. This sort of surprise is not unconventional or anticonventional. Although the moment of surprise makes us aware of the need to question and potentially to change our expectations as well as our understanding, it might be argued that genre story patterns *conventionally* involve numerous such surprises. The *conventional expectation* when viewing a genre film, especially a crime drama or mystery film, is that the film will deliver more or less successful surprises. This means that Graf's use of surprising moments can be described as itself a convention against *rigid genre film conventions* – an innovative element within the conventional structure of genre film. A convention that filmmakers employ to introduce differences into the repetitive structures of generic storytelling, without disappointing the expectations of the audience but rather as a *fulfilment of the expectations* in new ways. As such, surprise can be used as a critical element in storytelling in those cases when it works as a training for loosening our undue attachment to predictions and helps us manage the emotional turmoil of discovering that what we thought to be the case has to be reconsidered and made sense of in a radically different way. In *Er sollte tot…* these moments of surprise coincide with the characters reflecting more honestly on their own shortcomings in dealing with their feeling of helplessness.

What I am interested in is the potential radicality of surprise and what it allows the viewers and storytellers to do. *If* it actually is profoundly surprising in the way I defined above, it is insufficient to consider it merely as a clever but ultimately superficial 'effect' that creates a short and inconsequential thrill. To clarify this difference, it is useful to distinguish between surprise as local narrative effect and surprise as a way of holistically turning upside down the audience's understanding of the story world.

These moments of holistic surprise do not necessarily put the facts that were established in the story up to this point into doubt. In the case of both the prologue and the final turning point of *Er sollte tot…* we do not merely gain more information (although a little bit of new information, namely context, is involved) but most importantly, we discover a different *dimension* that is relevant to understanding what we have seen up to this point, comparable to a paradigm shift in science alas on the smaller scale of the story-world. It turns out that what one believed was a murder was actually an accident in the prologue, and we come to understand the connection between various random flashbacks throughout the film in a different way when Maria gives them a new framework during the final turning point.

This use of surprise might be compared to the prologue of *A Serious Man*, which sets the stage for the film's philosophical concern with contingency: in the world of Larry Gopnik, everything appears as undermined by the general potential for surprises –

even if it remains a mere potential, as in the suggestion of cancer and looming catastrophe at the film's end. Surprise, in *A Serious Man*, is connected to deep existential uncertainty. Graf's films acknowledge such uncertainty by employing surprise as a storytelling device that at any point may completely shatter the characters' (and possibly the audience's) preconceptions.

My way of describing Graf's films as having a critical aspect works towards this point: Graf's films integrate the scary acknowledgement of deep existential uncertainty into the playful context of entertaining storytelling. Graf uses surprise as a narrative device to enable the audience to better understand the difficulty of his main characters who have to face their own flaws with rigorous honesty and then have to work on them. I will return to the notion of honesty in chapter 6. So far, I have offered a description of the sort of surprises that bring into view the unacknowledged preconceptions inherent in genre expectations. I argued that the experience of such surprises, if it works, is well suited to bring about changes of attitude in the audience. But under which conditions may we even speak about surprises 'working' in this way?

4.2.3. The aspect of performative force

Under what circumstances can surprise in the ambitious critical sense I outlined above unfold? In order to clarify this question, the conditions or circumstances that are required for such moments of surprise to be successful might be compared to performative conditions and language-games, which initially seem to be similar concepts of the pragmatic uses of (film) language, that point to the dynamic change through genre in which I am interested. Ultimately, however, I will draw an important distinction between performative force and language-games: it is important to recognise the performative aspect in this film (as in others), but it needs to be integrated into a multi-aspectual perspicuous presentation of various possible uses of the film.

In a recent overview article on genre and performativity, I have argued that Austin's concept of the 'performative' can be a useful tool for the study of genre films, with some necessary modifications that take into account that the filmic 'speech act' does not, or not mainly, take place in the medium of word-language.[239] I defined performativity as the capacity of genre films to bring about (different varieties of) change. A Wittgensteinian multidimensional logical presentation of various aspects of a film is an advantageous way of approaching the study of performativity, avoiding dogmatic one-sidedness in the characterisation of films. When film and theatre scholars speak about the performative dimension of, e.g., a film, they often mean the aspect of performance involved in a film, and by 'performance' they mean not *only* the craft of acting but also the overall experiential and affective aspect involved in film spectatorship. As Stiglegger points out, the focus here shifts from the question 'what' happens on the narrative level to the question 'how' the film experience works for an audience

[239] Urschel, Martin. 'Genre und Performativität'. In: Stiglegger M. (eds) *Handbuch Filmgenre*. Springer Reference Geisteswissenschaften. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019.

member.[240] Note that this is something that can be *described* analytically. A multi-aspectual description of films can include an interest both in decoding their meaning and in further performative uses of genre film. One element that remained undeveloped in this essay was the suggestion that genres themselves could be described as language-games and that seeing genres as language-games was different from describing genres through the focus of performativity. These important distinctions are relevant here insofar as they help clarify the status of genre rules in relation to the change of the conventions that Graf takes up in his genre filmmaking.

Graf and his screenwriter Rolf Basedow use the narrative structure of the surprising final turning point in a way that might be described as a *performance* of this structure: it actualises the structure within a new context and according to the particular needs and goals of this film. When we speak about performance in relation to film, this use of the term might too easily be conflated with the picture of mechanical performance, denoting efficiency and intensity. On this view, performativity is based on a narrow focus on *measuring* performance, that is, a way of establishing rigid criteria for success and failure and of being able to quickly judge – to control and surveil – how a certain task is 'performed' at the expense of the 'substance' of the task. As Paul Standish argues, '"performativity" is the term coined by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984), borrowing J.L. Austin's use of "performative" but turning it to narrower ends. Lyotard's term denotes ways of thinking that prioritise efficient procedures to the neglect of the substance of what is done. Since his identification of the phenomenon, it has become amply evident in policy and practice in many fields, heralded by the jargon of efficiency and effectiveness, and performance management.'[241] This problematic one-sidedness may be countered by seeing performativity as merely one of several important aspects of a film. The importance of the film's themes and their arrangement in the film's dramaturgical structure has to be seen as connected to the intensity of the scenes' performative force. There are many pre-conditions for the film unfolding this force, a few of which I will now outline for my concrete case, taking into account the film's implicit intertextual dimension.

Notably, there is nothing to *guarantee* that Graf's suprising scene will in all cases, for all viewers, develop the ambitious, critical performative force that I attributed to it above – opening the audience up to unexpected revelations (within the film, or even in everyday life).[242] As a first step, a viewer necessarily needs to be involved in the film and indeed commit herself to the viewing experience in an attentive and generally

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[240] Stiglegger, Marcus. 2013. 'Im Angesicht des Äußersten. Der Kampf als Grenzsituationen und performative Kadenz im zeitgenössischen Kriegsfilm.' In: Kappelhoff, Hermann/ Gaertner, David/ Pogodda, Cilli/ Pischel, Christian (Hg.). *Mobilisierung der Sinne: Der Hollywood-Kriegsfilm zwischen Genrekino und Historie*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2013, p.137.

[241] Paul Standish. 'Wittgenstein's Impact on the Philosophy of Education'.
Philosophical Investigations 41:2 April 2018, p.224. ISSN 0190-0536; DOI: 10.1111/phin.12198

[242] For a very finely differentiated account with substantial work on the historical development of relevant concepts by e.g. Austin, Cavell, Derrida, Butler, and to a lesser degree Wittgenstein, see: Loxley, James. *Performativity*. London: Routledge, 2007. Print. New Critical Idiom. Loxley describes the vulnerability of the performative throughout, e.g. p.12.

open-minded way.[243] The prologue of *Er sollte tot…*, as I described above, contributes to *creating* the needed conditions. It encourages the audience to approach the film with the *attitude* and set of expectations required as a precondition for the radically critical turns the film later takes. Beyond the prologue, the film also relies on references to other films in order to guide and influence viewers' expectations, whether or not they are fully aware of these intertextual references. Most obviously, the film is intertextually connected to other films in the *Polizeiruf 110* series, which not only employs similar storytelling structures but also builds large storytelling continuities across loosely connected films. The very fact that Graf and Basedow placed this project in German primetime television is a precondition of the film's possible impact on viewers: the Sunday night primetime slot at ARD was (and is) prestigious and receives high viewing numbers. The *Polizeiruf 110* series has a committed group of regular viewers. The filmmakers can thus expect to reach a considerable amount of people - most of them when the film is first broadcast, further viewers with each repetition over the next years or decades. The number of viewers in itself is a precondition of a film's performative force – in order to develop its potential for creating a transformative experience, it first needs to be seen and understood by viewers. Due to its screening on television, the film will not be received with the same national or international attention as a cinematic release, despite its qualities. As such, Marco Abel is correct in saying that the largest part of Graf's filmmaking takes place in obscurity and remains invisible to many international film scholars and critics. As he says, only some of Graf's television dramas have received an eventual release on DVD or Bluray and are essentially unavailable internationally.[244] While their reach is not as wide, the structures of televised non-comedic genre storytelling enable Graf to work on what Abel characterises his artistic project:

> The problem, perhaps, is that German film culture continues to be too hung up on the issue of "legitimacy," which was proudly reintroduced by Werner Herzog in the early 1970s. Graf's relentless demand for genre filmmaking and his affirmation that "Das Schöne beim Genre ist ja, dass Du nicht dauernd Deinen Film legitimieren musst" (The nice thing about genre is that you do not permanently have to legitimize your film) marks his resistance to Germany's *Kunstkino* (art cinema) tradition.[245] Instead, he stubbornly continues to produce a counter-discourse within the structures of the German film industry. As Petzold argues, Graf makes films that, because they are against the socio-political status quo without necessarily mark(et)ing themselves as counter-films, have a difficult stand in Germany precisely because

[243] For a more comprehensive list of performative conditions that enable genre films to unfold various levels of performative force, cf. Urschel 2019.

[244] Abel, Marco. 'The Yearning for Genre: The Films of Dominik Graf'. In Fisher, Jaimey, and ProQuest. *Generic Histories of German Cinema: Genre and Its Deviations.* Columbia, MD, 2013, p.432.

[245] Cf. the longer version quoted in the introduction, taken from Graf/ Hochhäusler/ Petzold 2006.

> they derive their identity not merely from their oppositional attitude but are, instead, characterized by a certain composure and openness, by a relaxed attitude that gives the impression of being casually, *aus-dem-Ärmel-geschüttelte* films (films produced just like that)—arguably Graf's aesthetic filmmaking ideal.[246]

I would add that the ideal of '*aus-dem-Ärmel-geschüttelte*' films suggests that they should look and feel *effortless*, which certainly *Er sollte tot…* achieves, despite its highly precise use of various levels of filmic storytelling working together and reflecting on each other. *Polizeiruf 110,* as a series (like *Tatort*), provides an institutional structure that is the closest thing to an industrial approach to filmmaking in Germany. In addition, it offers a narrative template with a recurring structure, following detectives in their investigation of crimes (usually murders), which is open to be used to different ends, such as Basedow and Graf's own collaborative project. This creative use of the *Polizeiruf* storytelling pattern might helpfully be compared with something that Frow says about the 'use' of genre rules: 'all texts are strongly shaped by their relation to one or more genres, which in turn they modify'[247]. Frow offers here an argument for viewing our cognitive processes as shaped by generic expectations. However, we need to be careful not to lose the precise use of the word as it is already conventionally used: a way of talking about cultural items, such as books, films, and conventional patterns such as 'riddles' etc. that Frow references as 'simple genres'. In chapter 5, I will return to riddles and simple generic forms in Graf's work. Frow accepts Derrida's suggestion that genre relies heavily on citation:

> Such a shift of context is a normal and central part of human language, and it is one of the reasons why there is no simple fit between a text and a genre [...] One definition of aesthetic practices is that they are keyings of the real: representations of real acts or thoughts or feelings which are not themselves, in quite the same sense, real. Shifting texts to another generic context has that kind of effect: it suspends the primary generic *force* of the text, but not its generic structure.[248]

In the case of *Er sollte tot*, we can indeed find various forms of citation and intertextuality, although I will argue against seeing them as 'keyings of the real' or even 'representations' of something else. One intertextual shift was made by screenwriter Basedow, a frequent collaborator of Graf's. He researched an actual murder case and moved its 'story' structure – and some lines from the witness report – from the generic

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[246] Quote within quoted passage (from Abel, ibid.): Christian Petzold in an interview with Margrit Fröhlich, "Uns fehlt eine Filmwirtschaft," *epd Film* 12/09, http://www.epd-film.de/33178_69894.php (accessed 7th August 2018).

[247] Frow, p.1.

[248] Frow, p.49.

context of court material into the generic context of his screenplay, including the title of the film. Graf comments on Basedow's impact on the film: 'As in all his stories, Basedow here explores an unknown world that appears like a negative mirror image of our neo-bourgeois reality'.[249] The shift of documentary material into the 'whodunnit' genre might be understood as a shift from one language-game into another: the same signs are used, but they are used according to different grammatical rules in order to answer different needs. Court files serve to provide evidence and are treated as documents, which can be assessed due to a standard of whether what is said in them is factually correct. This is no longer expected of the screenplay and fictionalised version on film, but precisely by turning the documentary material into a fiction, it can be used in new ways, for instance to reflect on more general questions of how living together as a society might work or fail. I will outline the use of the concept of language-games in relation to both performance and to film analysis towards the end of this section.

A second intertextual use of a – this time stylistic rather than narrative – regularity is the way in which *Er sollte tot...* participates in a particular visual tradition: the film arguably quotes the typical look of Italian horror films, *gialli*, prominently made by Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci, and Mario Bava by using intensely coloured lighting: mostly gold, blue, and red. Graf's nod to this distinctive use of intensely coloured light is in line with his appreciation of their style in several articles he has written.[250] The intense colouring evokes a dream-like atmosphere while giving the more monochromatic scenes an artificial look, characterising the sex workers' milieu as surreal or oddly fantastic. The film uses colours as a consistent but subtle layer of symbolism. Although this will be missed by less attentive viewers, at least the intensely monochromatic scenes are colour-coded: in the film, red is often connected to violence and the red-light milieu, e.g. when the pimps at the bar 'Why Not' torment Maria. Blue colouring, as can be seen even in the film's first shot (and as I have discussed in the introduction), is often used relating to freedom, alluding to the sky, to night, and to aviation. It also turns up in the gay bar where Maria embraces a dancer in a drag or military costume. As such, while red is mostly connected to crime, violence, and pain in Maria's life, blue often turns up when she strives for freedom from her oppressors.

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[249] 'Wie in all seinen Geschichten erforscht Basedow auch hier eine unbekannte Welt, die wie ein Negativabdruck unserer neobürgerlichen Wirklichkeit wirkt.' – Graf quoted in: Rainer Tittelbach. "Reihe Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot". *Tittelbach TV*. 06.08.2006. Online. URL: http://www.tittelbach.tv/programm/reihe/artikel-1583.html (Accessed 03.10.2015)

[250] Cf. the chapter on Italian films in: Graf, Dominik. *Schläft Ein Lied in allen Dingen: Texte zum Film*. Berlin: Alexander-Verlag, 2009, pp. 242-265.

Figure 7: Maria's pimps at the starkly coloured red-light bar 'Why not', which also, fittingly, turns out to be her personal hell.

Figure 8: Blue light at the gay bar, where Maria experiences her only tender embrace in the film.

Figure 9: Dario Argento's Suspiria *(Italy 1977) contrasts starkly artificial red and blue colouring in set design and lighting throughout, shot on Technicolor.*

The film remains accessible to audiences with varying degrees of knowledge about film history, offering a richer experience to the 'initiated' without punishing the others. Whether or not an individual audience member notices the reference to gialli, whether she becomes aware of the colour coding, or whether she simply sees these intensely colourful scenes as typical of Maria's life in the sex trade. *Er sollte tot…* carefully builds an intensely sensual and multi-layered texture, working to give us, the audience, an experience that aligns ours with Maria's experiences of excess, trauma, and pain. As the investigation moves ever deeper into Maria's past, her memories of getting tortured are revealed by longer flashbacks, which at the beginning of the film seemed like random, surreally abstract inserts without immediate connection to the story, and now become available as pieces in a bigger jigsaw puzzle. The reason for inserting short glimpses of these memories from the film's start is that several characters – not just Maria but also a senior police officer who slept with her – ignore these memories because they do not fit the way they would like to see themselves. The film's jigsaw structure mirrors the characters' process of acknowledging their own responsibilities for their own actions and for each other. The combination of suggestive camera work and Rosalie Thomass's acting allows the audience to empathise with the character's hopes and her deepening despair. In this way, the film provides a very particular effect: we do not so much reach a catharsis by locating guilt and punishing the murderer (as many crime dramas do) but instead reconsider our own premature judgements about seemingly 'innocent' and 'naïve' Maria. If we find ourselves agreeing to such a description of her as 'innocent and naïve', we have already implicitly categorised her with the same gendered prejudice in relation to supposed 'female passivity' as her violent oppressors and her gullible victims in the film. As such, the film uses problematically generalised negative stereotypes and offers them to the audience – but then it challenges the audience to reconsider their own premature conclusions in light of a closer inspection, while the characters also have to rethink their developing conclusions. The filmmakers use the platforms of entertaining crime mysteries to shine a light on Maria's painful everyday life in a hardly acknowledged, violent niche of

German society. Basedow's long-time research into the sex trade contributes to a *feeling* of authenticity: as an audience member I may have heard through interviews or reviews about this research, and this knowledge gives the story some authority (though not quite as much as if the film were produced following the rules of the documentary genre with its suggestion – and standard of measurement – of factual correctness).[251] The film's story gains a documentary quality to some degree, while remaining accessible through its entertaining and playful style. Therefore, *Er sollte tot…* participates in several ongoing discourses at the same time: its 'performance' of the crime mystery and *Polizeiruf 110* is successful according to the performative conditions of the generic context; the film gives these conventions a surprising spin.

For Rick Altman, 'genre offers neither a unique object of study nor the stability of an exactly duplicated text. There exists no generic original of which particular events might be represented as performances'.[252] While my descriptions above did not claim that Graf's films were simply performances of an 'original' genre pattern, Altman's remark raises the question as to how genre films are to be defined and, as he puts it, 'where genres are located'. [253]

Before we now turn from performative uses of conventional film structures to Wittgensteinian conceptions of genre, it is important to understand that Wittgenstein and Austin do not argue in the same way, and they do not present pictures of language and its relation to human action in the same way. The similarities of their interest in 'ordinary language' and pragmatic uses of words have too often overshadowed the important differences between them. Wittgenstein's concept of language-games shows the same word, used in different ways and according to different rules, to have radically different meanings – these differences are substantial and yet easily overlooked. Because Wittgenstein is interested in how we use language in everyday practices, it has sometimes been assumed that language-games are simply different kinds of speech-acts. But let us take a closer look.

As I outlined in chapter 2, there are two different concepts of language-games: 1. The actual shared activities of playing language-games, which might include performative uses of film, and 2. The picture of how these activities work, a model or analysis of these uses. In order to offer helpful, clarifying overviews, Wittgenstein presents language-games as 'objects of comparison' that highlight internal relations in one possible perspicuous presentation and in this way convey understanding. If we look e.g. at one film scene, we might see that the scene can be 'used' by viewers in various different ways, and so there are various different ways to discuss it, and its meaning, and also different ways of evaluating its qualities depending on which language-game we play.

It is important to understand that Wittgenstein does *not* claim that his pictures present things 'how they actually are'. Here, Austin and Wittgenstein part ways: Austin says that his work is meant as first steps towards 'a true and comprehensive *science of*

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[251] Nicodemus, Katja and Christof Siemes. "Bei den Russen ist da dieser Stolz". ZEIT. Online 15.04.2010. http://www.zeit.de/2010/16/Dominik-Graf/komplettansicht (Accessed 04.10.2015)

[252] Altman, Rick. (1999). *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing, p.83.

[253] Ibid.

language', 'cool and well regulated, progressing steadily towards a distant final state.'[254] As such, Austin puts up theories and then pokes holes in them in order to set up better ones in their place, but Wittgenstein is not interested in presenting theories to begin with. He does not see theories as part of the *practices of philosophy* – theories are part of the *practices of science*, and philosophy might interact with them, but philosophy in Wittgenstein's method does not itself offer (or get attached to) theories; that would be a category mistake. Wittgenstein's philosophy aims to gain an overview of logical possibilities, not of how things actually are.
It is possible to treat Austin's conception of the performative as a language-game in the sense of 'heuristic example' because Austin offers the concept of the performative as a picture of language-use. Therefore, Austin's terminology can be integrated into Wittgenstein's methodology, and it can benefit from it because it can stop the compulsive spiral of replacing one attempt to bring messy human interactions into a system with the next attempt. An important overlap between Austin and Wittgenstein is that they both view language as involved in constantly changing and deeply vulnerable human interaction. Wittgenstein is the more radical one of the two. While Austin is attached to the notion that pictures need to be constantly replaced (one taxonomy of speech acts replaces the other, only to demand to be replaced by the next one), Wittgenstein wants to find the necessary peace that makes thinking possible in the first place. He does this by placing pictures next to each other, not replacing them at all. Instead, his method guides us to recognise the usefulness of a picture for a particular project – and to critically note the limits of its usefulness. It is possible to speak of a performativity of Wittgenstein's method, which accordingly consists in enabling us to get the momentary overview we currently need within a world full of movement and change. In this way we performatively dissolve our compulsive or unhealthy *attachment* to a picture.

So far, we have seen how Graf uses several genres, namely court reports, crime dramas, and gialli – or at least generic patterns, if we hesitate to see the *giallo* as distinct from crime drama. These elements are used in the film simultaneously, without creating a muddle, in which these genres become indistinguishable. The film has both entertaining and serious, humorous and dark aspects, which work together. Graf overlays genre patterns in order to bring out the themes of dishonest attitude towards memory, dealing with unresolved issues and unacknowledged dependencies. Graf here skilfully layers these generic affiliations without resorting to irony. This overlapping use of genre patterns is quite typical of Graf's films and completely undermines any attempt to cleanly separate 'art film' and 'genre film', as I will argue for the rest of this chapter and in regard to an initial opposition between 'filmic realism' and generic modes of storytelling (including the fantastic) in chapter 5. Debates about the distinctions made between genres and the phenomenon of *genre overlaps* have often

[254] Austin, John Langshaw. *Philosophical papers*. Oxford: Clarendon 1961, p. 232, also quoted by Loxley, p.25.

been conducted in genre theory either by speaking about 'genre hybridity' or appealing to Wittgenstein's concept of *family resemblance*, but since the 1960s the concept has been marginalised.[255] I looked into the criticisms of Wittgenstein's philosophy as an approach to genre, and found them lacking, not so much because I disagreed with their arguments but because they miss the main potential of Wittgensteinian method for the study of genre. As a next step, I will therefore outline the 'standard' way of reading Wittgenstein in relation to genre, and explain how family resemblance can still be useful to genre studies once we take leave of the constraining theory of genre as a family, even in the somewhat derivative theory of central prototypes, which have been offered as an attempt to rescue the family resemblance conception of genre from its critics.

There are four central points of criticism of the family resemblance conception of genre, which I will address in this order:

- The concept is based on a biological metaphor, which is inappropriate for a number of reasons.
- The concept is too vague.
- The concept is too static.
- The concept is too deterministic.

The counter-argument to the last two will stretch into the next chapter and requires us to shift our focus away from family resemblance to understand how the criticisms miss their assumed target.

4.3. Family resemblance and genre: Just a biological metaphor?

In order to address the criticism that the family resemblance conception of genre is inadequate because it is based on a biological metaphor, we need to first delineate the most prominent strands of employing family resemblance in genre theory. I will then argue that a central problem in these strands is that they separate family resemblance from the larger context of Wittgenstein's method, which helps to see why the criticism of a supposed 'biological metaphor' is misguided. Intrinsically connected to this worry is the worry that the family resemblance model of genre inhibits rigorous definition and somehow results in relativism. The solution to this involves recognising the consequences of the argument of chapter 2, namely that the family resemblance approach to genre in the context of a properly Wittgensteinian method cannot be read as a theory (about genre) but must be understood as a methodological reminder that genres are groups with sub-groups as well as overlap with other groups (releasing the compulsion to look for purity and characteristics shared by all members). Ultimately, a move beyond these limitations has to involve the recognition that the interest in taxonomy itself is only one relevant aspect when we are trying to understand what

[255] Cf. for an overview of theory on genre hybridity: Mundhenke F. (2018) 'Hybride Genres'. In: Stiglegger M. (eds) Handbuch Filmgenre. Springer Reference Geisteswissenschaften. Springer VS, Wiesbaden

filmmakers such as Graf and the Coen Brothers find useful and creatively liberating in genre filmmaking. As such, this section also starts to explore ways of transcending the problematic one-sided focus on taxonomy.

Since the 1970s, the concept of 'family resemblance' has been quite prominent in thinking about generic kinds insofar as it seemed necessary to first of all define 'genre' in order to clarify what a genre film is. This is how Wittgenstein outlines 'family resemblance' in the *Investigations*:

> Consider, for example, the activities that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic games, and so on. What is common to them all? — Don't say: "They *must* have something in common, or they would not be called 'games'" — but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. — For if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look! — Look, for example, at board-games, with their various affinities. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. — Are they all '*entertaining*'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball-games, there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck, and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of singing and dancing games; here we have the element of entertainment, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way, can see how similarities crop up and disappear.
>
> And the upshot of these considerations is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small.
>
> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family — build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth — overlap and criss-cross in the same way. — And I shall say: 'games' form a family. (PI §§66/ 67)

As I read both Wittgensteinian arguments for thinking about genre as a family resemblance concept and criticisms of this approach, I came to realise that *both*

dissatisfied me because they both miss the focus on *potential* that I found in the *Investigations*. The most quoted proponent of family resemblance as key conception for thinking through genre is Alastair Fowler, especially his study *Kinds of Literature*, in which he claims: 'Representations of a genre may then be regarded as making up a family whose septs and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all'.[256] Fowler (and Wittgenstein's family resemblance conception) has been criticised, e.g. in the most careful and comprehensive description of film genres that I have encountered: Robert Altman's *Film/Genre*, which gives an overview of the different uses of the terminology of genre, different conceptions, and some of its historical development insofar as they are relevant to film genres.[257] It is symptomatic of other commentators' criticisms, so I will take his argument as the starting point for sketching my alternative.

Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance' has been offered as a way to *replace* attempts to define both the concept of 'genre' and genres such as 'science fiction' or 'crime drama'. Conventionally, from antiquity on, definitions of genres had proceeded by employing precise criteria along the lines of necessary and sufficient conditions that would allow genres to be sharply outlined and to – ideally – clearly categorize individual cases as belonging to this or that genre. 'Genre is, amongst other things, a matter of discrimination and taxonomy: of organising things into recognisable classes.'[258]

Genre as a family resemblance concept seemed to not require a sharp line drawn around a group defined by something common to all cases – but how else was it going to offer a rigorous and useful concept of genre? Both Maurice Mandelbaum and David Fishelov outline what they see as shortcomings of both Wittgenstein and those who have inherited his thinking within genre theory, but they attempt to fix these problems so that family resemblance concept might still be used.[259] Fishelov gives an overview of the discourse at the time of his writing (1991), just before the interest in Wittgenstein seems to generally have faded. I will sum up their positions below. Roughly, there seem to be two critical positions on the use of the family resemblance concept in genre theory:

a) Genre is best conceived of *as* a family resemblance concept, which means that necessary and sufficient criteria cannot be satisfyingly identified, and clear demarcation lines cannot be drawn around what counts as, e.g., 'science fiction'.

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[256] Fowler, Alastair, 1982. *Kinds of literature. An introduction to the theory of genres and modes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p.41.

[257] Altman 1999.

[258] Frow, p.56.

[259] Fishelov, David. "Genre Theory and Family Resemblance - Revisited." *Poetics*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1991, pp. 123–138., doi:10.1016/0304-422x(91)90002-7.

Mandelbaum, Maurice. "Family Resemblances and Generalization concerning the Arts". *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Jul., 1965), pp. 219-228. Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of the North American Philosophical Publications. URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009169 (Accessed: 24.11.2017)

b) While genres might indeed sometimes involve fuzzy sets, the conception of genre as a family resemblance concept is not satisfying because it apparently does not e.g. allow us to say that something is *not* e.g. 'science fiction'. It also uses an inappropriate biological metaphor, which makes 'genre' appear as an at least somewhat fixed and slowly 'evolving' group with an unshakeable 'genetic' background. Wittgensteinian appeals to what we ordinarily say also cause the problem that actual differences between different conceptions of, e.g., 'science fiction' become invisible. This means that the different actual uses and accordingly the different definitions, as well as struggles for dominance of one definition over another, are blanked out.

Even from within Wittgensteinian approaches, the first position, which conceives of itself as Wittgensteinian, appears as problematic.[260] Attempts to fix this by complicating the matter, e.g. offering a theory of prototypes (cf. Fishelov, see below), have not served to actually solve the problems (as Altman argues). What both positions share is an overly rigid view of Wittgenstein's philosophical project.

As we have seen from the analysis of overlapping narrative traditions in the first few shots of *Er sollte tot…,* genre conventions are useful in offering orientation. In *Er sollte tot* as well as in the prologue of *A Serious Man*, these conventions mobilise expectations and quickly sketch out a context for the characters and their problems. But they can also be recombined, mixed, or remain vaguely associated. To describe these kinds of generic mixing through family resemblance seems inadequate: if indeed crime dramas are connected *only* by multiple more or less overlapping characteristics and similarities rather than a few central characteristics, then the rigour of definition seems to be lost altogether, and the concept of, e.g., 'crime drama' seems to become unlimited and so vague as to be meaningless.

Additionally, both 'family resemblance' and 'genre hybridity' have been criticised as 'biological metaphors' that implant a misleading picture of how genres work. As Frow remarks: 'It has been above all the model of the biological species, building on the organic connotations of the concepts of 'kind' and 'genre', that has been used to bring the authority of a scientific discourse to genre theory.'[261] It is correct that Wittgenstein compares varieties of games to the way a family presents relations and forms a group in a recognisable and understandable way. Altman claims that Wittgenstein 'oversimplifies the situation'.[262]

> But suppose different individuals or groups, by virtue of their differing designs on a genre, were to use it differently. Wouldn't they *look* at different parts, *see* different aspects, and finally become convinced that they *know* different things? In short, it may be that Wittgenstein's common language approach takes too much for

[260] cf. Fishelov, p.125f.
[261] Frow, p.57.
[262] Altman, p.99.

> granted. In fact, it is precisely the notion that language is common (i.e., shared) that we must question.[263]

Altman asks: 'Who are *we* in the case of genre? The producers? The exhibitors? The viewers? The critics?'[264] If one were to assume that all these groups share a single conception of a particular genre, that would be highly problematic, insofar as it 'creates a clearly fictitious togetherness, falsely assuming shared vocabulary, similar purposes and transparent communication'[265]. Here, Altman echoes concerns that Cavell discusses in some depth.[266] Cavell argues that interpreters are mistaken who take Wittgenstein's appeal to 'our' shared language to be easily understandable as complacent conformism or as a simplistic appeal to common sense. Instead, according to Cavell, Wittgenstein draws attention to the limits and fragility of the community of who 'we' are whenever we speak. Altman's attention to the need to see that the same terminology might obscure very relevant differences in its meaning is actually highlighted by Wittgenstein's language-game method, as I will discuss in more detail below. Altman's characterisation of Wittgenstein's family resemblance is typical of much recent genre theory (cf. also Frow, Rieder) both in its dismissive attitude towards Wittgenstein and in its lack of precision in treating what Wittgenstein actually says.

For instance, Altman writes: 'The fact that nuts (or genres) can be imaged in a variety of different ways suggests the possibility that Wittgenstein's 'look and see' begs a basic epistemological question: do we really move straight from looking to seeing to knowing?'[267] If one revisits Wittgenstein's original writing on family resemblance quoted above, one can find that he does not assert that 'we really move straight from looking to seeing to knowing' at all. Instead, the family resemblance concept is brought in to complicate a tempting but overly hasty move in thinking, namely, that games '*must* have something in common, or they would not be called "games"'. To point out that such an assumption might prove upon closer examination to be vacuous is different from claiming that 'look and see' is a fail-proof road to knowledge.

Altman is right to critically ask who gets to define genre, and in what context, and to what end those definitions are provided. Asking who 'we' are when 'we' define genre in such-and-such way is valid in this regard: 'The perceived nature and purpose of genres depend directly and heavily on the identity and purpose of those using and evaluating them.'[268] As such, what Altman offers as criticism of Wittgenstein and family resemblance turns out to be merely a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's concept, due to an imprecise reading and quite possibly a neglect of the larger context of how Wittgenstein uses family resemblance. Altman's work then is in its actual descriptions of different uses of genre and different uses of genre definitions very much compatible

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[263] Altman, p.98.
[264] Altman, p.99.
[265] Altman, p.99.
[266] Cavell 2002, p.96.
[267] Altman, p.98.
[268] Altman, p.98.

with Wittgenstein's method but the descriptions of Wittgenstein's philosophy in this book are misleading.

What Altman helpfully draws attention to is that there are many descriptions that can illuminate particular aspects of film genres, but any way of describing film genres gets problematic whenever these pictures or overviews are taken to offer exclusively and exhaustively a presentation of the whole complex of what genre actually both is and can be. As such, Altman's many different comparisons of genre are very helpful and shine a light on different areas of research that are complementary but which also have quite a different understanding of genre and employ genre rules in drastically different ways (one might say, with Wittgenstein, that their use of 'genre' has different 'grammars' and therefore different essences, as I will explore more when I address grammar, rules and language-games in the next section). For example, Altman recognises four different broad conceptions of genre:

- Genre as *blueprint*, as a formula that precedes, programmes, and patterns industry production;
- Genre as *structure*, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded;
- Genre as *label*, as the name of a category central to the decisions and communications of distributors and exhibitors;
- Genre as *contract*, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience.[269]

When Graf speaks of genre as a 'floating board that stops us from drowning', he might appeal to all of these.[270] All these comparisons highlight different practical uses of different aspects of genre. The problem appears to be an unduly narrow focus on family resemblance: 'Our challenge is to discover the ways in which the authors and consumers of generic terminology disguise their interests and their activity. Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" model unfortunately proves complicitous in this regard, because it systematically conceals generic agency behind an apparently natural process (the development of family resemblances through genetics).'[271] Altman, like many other genre theorists who think themselves to disagree with Wittgenstein, actually needs only to switch his focus from the aspect of family resemblance to those aspects of language-use, which Wittgenstein highlights through such concepts as language-games and grammar, in order to see how deeply the concept of family resemblance depends on and is connected to the larger context of Wittgenstein's method.

In terms of the criticism of Wittgenstein supposedly using a 'biological metaphor', it is also noteworthy that Wittgenstein does not actually focus on biological examples to characterise family resemblance, but instead he looks at cultural artefacts and concepts, such as 'games', 'language', and 'number'. He does compare them to biological

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[269] Altman, p.14.
[270] Cf. Graf/ Hochhäusler/ Petzold, p.6, see above in 1.2..
[271] Altman, p.99.

and 'genetic' features such as eye colour but only as part of his morphological approach (inspired by Goethe, as mentioned in chapter 2), highly sensitive to the danger of confusing the form of investigation with the object of investigation (as Kuusela points out; cf. also the notes on Spengler's morphology in chapter 3). What makes complaints about a supposed 'biological metaphor' even more problematic is that Wittgenstein's method as an approach to philosophy of culture questions any simple, quick, or clear line between 'natural' and 'cultural' that we might draw in talking about human activities: our cultural activities (which we might compare to uses of signs such as language-games) are themselves woven into the complex of particular practices, techniques, and bodily shapes (down to having four limbs, two eyes, a need for certain nutrition, etc.) that we might take to constitute our form of life.[272] To talk about a clear and definite distinction between what is 'natural' and what is, in opposition to that, 'cultural' presumes that the human shared activities that make up culture are not themselves intrinsically linked to human nature.

4.3.1. Too vague? Similarity in family resemblance

Related to the worry that the biological picture is inappropriate and sets up limiting expectations is the notion that family-resemblance does not allow us to draw any sharp lines of definition, or that it undermines attempts at such rigorous delineation even when they would be useful or needed. Frow lists several genre theorists who argue along these lines, and he sums this position up in the following way. 'But using likeness as the basis for a classification raises the problem of where the line of dissimilarity is to be drawn: "how is one to decide that family resemblance does *not* exist?"'[273] As we have seen, Alastair Fowler uses family resemblance to propose a picture of genre as a class with 'septs': Fowler's answer, to stress biological relations between the members 'perhaps indicates how deeply rooted the biological model remains in our thinking about cultural taxonomy.'[274]

As such, the aforementioned criticisms of using the idea of family resemblance to build a theory of genre are indeed valid: similarities might be endlessly extended, especially if they only need to connect through local overlaps (rather than characteristics that run through all members of the family) in order to still count as members of the same family. Equally, however, ever more fine-grained dissimilarities might be encountered and highlighted, which diffuse the notion of a family likeness indicating the 'same'

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[272] There is quite some debate about what Wittgenstein means by 'forms of life'. For a position close to mine cf. Moi, pp.54-61. A contrary position has recently been taken by Rahel Jaeggi, in line with the reading of Gellner, which has been perpetuated by critical theorists including Habermas (against which Moi's argument is set); cf. Jaeggi, Rahel. *Kritik von Lebensformen*. Berlin: Suhrkamp 2014. For an overview of recent exegetical research cf. *Wittgenstein and Forms of Life*. Nordic Wittgenstein Review, Special Issue 2015. Edited by Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and Piergiorgio Donatelli. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15845/nwr.v4i0

[273] Frow, p.59, quoting from: Miner, Earl. "Some Issues of Literary 'Species, or Distinct Kind.'" *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 15–44.

[274] Frow, p.59.

group. So, the critics complain, to approach genres as family resemblance concepts leaves us with many undecidable cases, or perhaps only undecidable cases – and if that is the consequence of using Wittgenstein in genre studies, it is not surprising that genre theorists turned their back on his philosophy.

But these criticisms rest on the assumption that Wittgenstein does indeed use comparisons as a way of making claims about things being one way rather than another (that is, they take Wittgenstein to provide a theory of how things are *factually*) – which he does not. This is why it is necessary not to separate the idea of family resemblance from its context as a part of Wittgenstein's method: family resemblance itself is used in the *Philosophical Investigations* as a comparison highlighting the varieties of language-use. The discussion about family resemblance is embedded in Wittgenstein's investigation into different conceptions (pictures) of language, signs, meanings and ways of understanding. It is clearly signposted in this way by the paragraph that immediately precedes it:

> 'someone might object against me: "You make things easy for yourself! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what is essential to a language-game, and so to language: what is common to all these activities, and makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you the most headache, the part about the general form of the proposition and of language."
>
> And this is true. — Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all — but there are many different kinds of affinity between them. And on account of this affinity, or these affinities, we call them all "languages". I'll try to explain this.' (PI §65)

So, the description of family resemblance is itself used as an object of comparison to clarify why Wittgenstein no longer (as in the *Tractatus*) seeks the 'general form of the proposition and of language'. However, its main object of attack does not seem to be just the notion that one needs to say 'what is essential' or 'what is common to all cases' in order to define a group such as 'games', 'language', and 'language-games'. Wittgenstein does *not* attack definitions along the lines of 'what is essential' or 'what is common to all cases' in any general fashion; he merely points out that many of our problems arise from the dogmatic assumption that meaning is correlated to words (and signs) in a rigid and absolute sense without the need to take into account the actual practices and therefore the larger, messier context (cf. my discussion of PI§1 and the way Wittgenstein sets up his investigations to begin with in chapter 2). Arguably, rigorous definitions are still useful in particular situations but only if they are clear about their particular purposes (I will say as a shorthand: as part of a particular project).

One way of trying to deal with the perceived vagueness of family resemblance has been to offer 'prototypes' as an attempt to 'fix' the family resemblance conception of genre rather than give up on it. As I will argue, this does not dissolve the fundamental problem inherent in the attempt to define genres generally, insofar as prototypes bring back an abstracted ideal centre of genre, which still abuses the concept of genre by imposing a confused normative view of how instances of genre *have to be* and imposes a limiting picture of the creative potentiality of genre filmmaking that we have started to explore by thinking about the dynamic aspect of genre by describing Graf's use of surprises in terms of performative force. What is now left to do for this chapter is to look at performativity in a critical way and recognise the limits of this approach by connecting it to the excursus about defining genres in the last two sections.

4.3.2. Prototypes, or: Do we need to bring back the idea of an essence of genre?

Can genre theory fix the problems surrounding the idea of family resemblance by turning to the concept of prototype, as Fishelov suggests? Taxonomic attempts to define genres in the form of an overview or 'map' have come and gone, and the reason for their eventual replacement was that influential counter-examples were found. For any definition of science fiction, an example could be used to show that this particular rigorous definition with its sharp lines was unable to accommodate these cases.[275] Thus, as Frow argues, both taxonomies of genre in the line of Aristotle and 'other models of classification seek to address the fuzziness and open-endedness of the relation between texts [e.g. a film] and genres.'[276] Altman connects attempts to understand genres as 'prototypes' to the assumption that there is a kind of unchanging 'core' of genres: 'The current tendency to figure genres transhistorically simply extends Aristotle's intention to note the *essential* quality of each poetic kind. It is precisely the notion that genres have essential qualities that makes it possible to align them with archetypes and myths and to treat them as expressive of broad and perdurable human concerns.'[277]

According to Fishelov, however, critics using the idea of family resemblance have too quickly assumed that just because no necessary conditions can be established that cover all instances of genre X, there is nothing stable or relevant tying instances of genre X together. [278] This is not so much because of Wittgenstein's use of the concept: there is sometimes a discrepancy between the loose concept of family resemblance and the practical assumptions made about genres, even by the very advocates of the concept.[279] Fishelov points out that even though the various members of a set grouped together by family resemblance do not have one thing in common, that does not mean

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[275] John Rieder, 'On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History', first published in *Science Fiction Studies* 2010;11(37):191-209.
Available online, http://www.strangehorizons.com/2013/20130826/2rieder-a.shtml (02.02.15)

[276] Frow, p.58.

[277] Altman, p.20.

[278] Fishelov, p.124.

[279] Fishelov, p.124.

that members share nothing *with each other*, and Fishelov warns against abusing the concept of family resemblance by thinking of genres as vague and undefinable. Family resemblance has helped to loosen an unnecessarily rigid thinking about genre, but there is the risk of pushing the comparison too far. My essential objection to this formulation of the analogy is that whereas rigid, Platonic or Neo-Classical concepts of genre are justifiably rejected, the alternative presented by the radical version of the family resemblance seems to go too far in implying that genres are totally open and undelineated categories.[280]

As such, characterising genre as a family resemblance concept does not necessarily mean that no definitions might be given and 'one may even claim that the possibility of formulating a definition as far as specific language games are concerned is implicitly assumed rather than denied.'[281] At this point, Fishelov connects family resemblance and language-games, but he does not go into much detail but rather offers 'prototypes' as a more useful concept to think about genres with family resemblance, or possibly as a replacement. He reminds his reader that Wittgenstein does not use the concept of family resemblance isolated from his other methodological concerns: 'Different kinds of language-use are compared to different kinds of games, which in turn are compared to members of a family, who resemble each other only partially.'[282] As Morris Weitz argues, genres are constantly extended because generic categories are projected onto new cases, which in turn can become new typical instances. Fishelov warns against deducing from this that there can be no agreement on genre definition, although he accepts Weitz's general characterisation of genre as fluid: 'This elusive situation where every new work re-shapes and re-shuffles the entire defining system, and consequently blocks the establishment of a definition, derives from the innovative nature of art.'[283]

Frow summarizes the position of scholars who argue along the lines of Fishelov in similar terms: 'A refinement of the theory of family resemblances is the account developed in cognitive psychology of classification by prototype: the postulate that we understand categories (such as *bird*) through a very concrete logic of typicality. […] The judgement we make ('is it like this, or is it more like that?') is as much pragmatic as it is conceptual, a matter of how we wish to contextualise these texts and the uses we wish to make of them.'[284] Despite Fishelov's argument that prototypes are meant to be used merely descriptively in order to highlight central characteristics of a genre, there is already a normative element to it. The picture of more and less prototypical genre films imposes a hierarchy of importance and highlights certain relations between films as more relevant than others. To have such a hierarchy in place is not problematic *per se*, as I will argue below. Wittgenstein's concept of perspicuous presentation also highlights certain relations rather than others (for example we can emphasise the

[280] Fishelov, p.125
[281] Fishelov, p.125
[282] Fishelov, p.125.
[283] Fishelov, p.126
[284] Frow, p.59.

particular relations between films that we recognise as crime dramas rather than films starring Olivia Colman). But Fishelov fails to explain exactly what the choice of prototypes does, and because of this unclarity, they remain as problematic as other forms of abstraction (such as ideals and simple forms) that are assumed to be placed hierarchically higher than the various particular instances that they describe:

> The assumption is always that, whatever the tensions between them, these larger forms govern and define the more specific genres and sub-genres, and that by working from the general to the particular we can understand something of the complementary structures of truth, temporality, and subjectivity that flow down to inform the individual genres. The logical relationship is something like that between genus and species, a metonymic relation of the part to the whole.[285]

This is the sort of hierarchical ordering of certain objects of comparison (namely ideals, abstract models) above everyday ways of speaking and making sense which Wittgenstein radically criticises – hierarchies *are possible* but only *in relation to a particular problem* in a particular context.[286] As such, it is problematic to assume that genre and medium determine the possibilities of a particular film/ narrative/ piece of art in advance in a general sense.

Another relevant issue with the picture of genres as involving prototypes is the tendency to think of prototypes as mixed up with value judgements. As Altman points out, this conflation of generic affiliation with value judgements is a generalisation that we can find across many conceptions of genre. There is the assumption that it makes sense to speak of generic quality as a sort of generalised rule about the overall quality of the whole genre, which would free us from looking at particular cases.[287] Therefore, the conflation of description with value judgements is not just a problem of the prototype picture of genre but is not solved by it, either.

Frow similarly recognises such a conflation of description with value judgements. He explains it in terms of the way genre terminology is part of the implicit knowledge that is shared by a group: 'All of these activities involve the use of knowledges which are embedded in the flow of everyday practices.'[288] Further, this practice of classification (i.e. knowing what to call something) has to be conceived as a kind of *standard*: 'We also tend to think of classifications as being like standards: explicit, formalised, durable rules which extend over several communities of practice […] rather than as ad hoc, changing, and inherently fuzzy practices.'[289] As such, what looks like a factual description is implicitly conflated with a statement of normative necessity (putting up

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[285] Frow, p.69.

[286] Cf. Kuusela on the possibility and uses of hierarchies in philosophy according to Wittgenstein: Kuusela 2008, pp.215-264.

[287] Altman, pp.110-113

[288] Frow, p.56.

[289] Frow, p.56f.

an idealised picture, to which actual cases are now required to conform), and this is where a Wittgensteinian methodology can helpfully intervene as we will see. At this point, we might remember the comment by Haller on the use of examples as 'prototypes':

> According to Wittgenstein, when particular examples ("prototype" [*Urbild*] or "paradigm" [*Paradigma*] shape the way we think and talk about things, when they provide the form of our language game, then statements about these examples are not ordinary assertions but rather grammatical remarks that present to us the form of our discussion. If we are clear about the role of these examples in our discussion, then we shall not be tempted to construe such grammatical remarks as necessary *truths*, nor shall we be puzzled when our ordinary assertions about the objects of our discourse seem to lack the *necessity* that belongs to the grammatical remarks that hold only of the examples.[290]

Fishelov tries to save family resemblance by combining it with prototypes as centres of variations in order to clarify how similarity among e.g. science fiction films, and dissimilarity between e.g. science fiction films and Westerns, can be conceptualised. But arguably, Mandelbaum, Fishelov, and Fowler all confuse statements of necessity with statements of fact: they present definitions of genres as a factual matter, whereas it is a way of presenting films by conceptually highlighting certain relations between them. That means that there need not be contradictions between differing definitions of genre as long as one is clear about what one is doing while one defines a genre: defining genres means making decisions about how to group films together based on certain characteristics, but there are infinitely many such ways of grouping them together, and none of them is 'correct' or 'wrong' in an *absolute* sense, but one can nevertheless be correct or mistaken within the use a particular definition *if one makes the standard of measurement explicit*. John Rieder sets out his project of an exemplary genealogy of the Science Fiction genre in this way:

> A history of genre systems attentive to the power that generic attribution exercises upon distribution and reception would not be one structured primarily by the appearance of literary masterpieces, but rather one also punctuated by watersheds in the technology of publication, the distribution of reading materials, and the social production and distribution of literacy itself. [...] Bowker and Starr's analysis makes all definitions of SF appear in the light of working definitions, provisional conceptualizations suited to the purposes of a

[290] Rudolf Haller quoted in: Cahill, p.130.

> particular community of practice and, within that community, to the needs and goals of a specific project.[291]

An element of Rieder's text, which Rieder himself hardly explores, is the concept of the 'community of practice', which he takes from Bowker's and Starr's *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* but which originated from Lave and Wenger's work on apprenticeship, where they argue for the need to allow 'legitimate peripheral participation' in order to facilitate learning: apprentices take part in a community of practice of more experienced craftsmen, and as they gain experience, their degree of participation and responsibility evolves (an enabling and empowering procedure).[292] In Rieder's text, we find the argument that different communities of practice, groups of people involved in a shared project, define genre differently, based on their current needs and in order to further their particular project. Rieder then takes Bowker and Starr's concept of the boundary object, a sort of prototype, as a mutual ground of consensus that different communities of practice can agree on. So, even if a film company and a particular artist might have different concepts of 'science fiction', they can still find mutual ground when pointing to concrete films. Graf's films, I will argue below, often work by appealing to different communities of practice at the same time, and a member of a community with a particularly narrow and negative definition of 'genre films' might therefore be justified to claim that Graf's films 'are' not genre films according to their standard of measurement/ definition. The choice of comparison – what relations between the films one chooses to highlight in order to define a group – may, however, not be understood as based on general facts but strictly, only on practical *needs* within a project and community.

As I have argued in chapter 2, Wittgenstein's method allows for the continued use of ideals, but it neither assumes them to be located 'behind (or within) things' nor projects them onto things. The critical edge of Wittgenstein's method lies in showing the limits of projection as well as the compulsiveness of any one general picture (such as the one that wants to fix the place of ideals behind things, perhaps to be revealed by the correct kind of projection). Idealised abstractions such as genre definitions are instead compared, as we have seen, to optical glasses which reveal certain aspects of things:

> The ideal, as we conceive of it, is unshakable. You can't step outside it. You must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot

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[291] Rieder, John. 'On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History', first published in *Science Fiction Studies* 2010;11(37):191-209. Available online, URL: http://www.strangehorizons.com/2013/20130826/2rieder-a.shtml#twoe (02.02.15)

[292] Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Starr. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1999.

> breathe. — How come? The idea is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off. (PPF §103)

The comparison with glasses is limited insofar as in the case of ideals it does not seem *possible* to completely 'take them off', but one might recognise the usefulness of different ideals as bringing certain relations clearly into view and in this way rendering something understandable. An abstract concept of the genre 'crime drama' allows me to recognise a film as a crime drama, and to make predictions about its style, setting, the sorts of characters that will turn up and the sort of experiences that the film might offer. It also allows me to get surprised by a film such as *Er sollte tot…* in a way that I am never surprised by *A Serious Man*: because *A Serious Man* never clearly aligns itself with any one genre but moves between different narrative traditions without committing to them fully, the film builds expectations and surprises in a different way, as we have seen in chapter 3. For now, it is important to remind ourselves that the Wittgensteinian perspicuous presentation by means of ideals as objects of comparison places ideals not hierarchically higher than any other objects but next to what they are compared with (cf. chapter 2). In this way, Wittgenstein's method offers an attractive alternative to the problems associated with the prototype theory of genre.

Where have we gotten to? We have recalibrated thinking about and through genre film by turning to Wittgenstein and acknowledged the actual use of family resemblance (and genre definitions) within the context of Wittgenstein's method, rather than assuming that the family resemblance concept offers a *theory* about what genre actually is. Arguably the positive contribution of a properly Wittgensteinian methodology to genre studies consists in a way of clearly distinguishing factual and necessary statements. It increases flexibility and allows creative uses of genre by reframing generic essence as grammar, which is conceived as part of the mode of presentation of genre.

Definitions of genre offer statements of necessity insofar as they define a mode of presentation of films. They do not, as definitions, offer statements of facts: by defining genres, we *enable* ourselves to speak about the facts of films. Definition then proceeds by drawing distinctions between certain groups in order to offer some kind of orientation and highlighting certain actual relations between these films for a particular purpose. To imagine such distinctions necessarily as clear 'lines' or 'borders' between groups is highly problematic. Genres might be usefully seen as a way of grouping films together for a particular purpose, such as agreeing with collaborators on the sort of mood one is going for in the production of a film, or as helping an audience find a film that matches their needs or interests, or as making a film's story and characters more accessible and understandable. As we have seen in Graf's case, such definitions are also regularly abused as a way of limiting the options: at worst, this abuse is not even recognised by the perpetrators because they confuse their grammatical statement ('this is this genre/ I define this genre in these terms') for a

statement of fact, claiming that genre films need to conform to a particular picture of genre films because that 'is' what genre films (factually) 'are'.
I now turn to a more precise description of 'use' and how such descriptions of use provide an overview of rules, which Wittgenstein calls 'grammar'. Cavell similarly draws attention to the ways in which family resemblance and grammar need to be seen in relation to each other:

> I might summarize the vision I have been trying to convey of the tempering of speech — the simultaneous tolerance and intolerance of words — by remarking that when Wittgenstein says "Essence is expressed by grammar" (§371), he is not denying the importance, or significance, of the concept of essence, but retrieving it. The need for essence is satisfied by grammar, if we see our real need.[293] […] But I think that all that the idea of "family resemblances" is meant to do, or need do, is to make us dissatisfied with the idea of universals as explanations of language, of how a word can refer to this and that and that other thing, to suggest that it fails to meet "our real need".[294] […] I think that what Wittgenstein ultimately wishes to show is that it makes no sense at all to give a general explanation for the generality of language, because it makes no sense at all to suppose words in general might not recur, that we might possess a name for a thing (say "chair" or "feeding") and yet be willing to call nothing (else) "the same thing".[295]

Whereas it has become fashionable among genre theorists to reject the concepts of 'essence' and 'transhistorical' (timeless) definitions, I argue that precisely Wittgenstein's acceptance of a continuously changing world allows him to give a new use to timeless ideals, including the notion of essence (cf. chapter 2 and 3). A definition of a genre (and of 'genre' as a concept in itself) offers a picture that gives the impression of being static, general, and all-encompassing – which is correct but only insofar as the picture itself is static, general, and encompassing 'all', i.e. making statements of necessity about all cases of this genre-rule. This is not a problem as long as one does not make the hasty jump from accepting the claim of this picture as a useful overview to the assumption that the picture both shows 'things as they are' and 'things as they should be'.
As I have argued above, genre definitions and descriptions are in practice often unproblematic and useful for particular projects. As a tool for creative innovation, various definitions of the same genre may be compared and put next to each other as objects of comparison. By reframing the discussion about genre definitions as part of a

[293] Cavell, 1979a, p.186.
[294] Cavell, 1979a, p.187.
[295] Cavell, 1979a, p.188.

more contextualised investigation into the practical uses of genre, the notion of genre performativity gets markedly clearer: we can clarify the community of practice involved in a particular definition of a genre, and therefore the aligned normative sets of expectations about what the 'promise' of the genre consists in become more tangible. But it is also understandable that these expectations will differ between e.g. some of Graf's viewers who will not know him as a filmmaker and only come across his films because they appear in the regular slot reserved for television crime drama, on the one hand, and on the other hand, those viewers who treat him as an *auteur* and expect his films to further develop his artistic *écriture* – as well as those viewers who belong to both groups, etc. It is, as such possible to explain these expectations and what would count as a success of a genre film (or a surprising scene) in terms of genre rules, but that does not assume that these rules are 'in' or 'behind' particular genre films in a realm of ideals, etc., but merely that these are the standards of measurement that actual viewers (and producers, critics, etc.) use to discuss whether films 'work', if they have certain qualities or flaws, etc.

So far, I have outlined the model of intertextual quotation as a performative use of pre-existing structures that is meant to explain how and why it is possible to make changes while moving along the lines of the pre-existing structures: there is no contradiction between using conventions and doing something new *with* them (rather than against them or without them). The concept of performativity is useful to highlight the unique intensity, atmosphere, and (varieties of) *force* that can be introduced in different ways during this performance, even while narrative structures, or complete texts, remain the same. However, a Wittgensteinian criticism of performativity can go further than the one by Standish (quoted above): the concept of performativity itself offers a picture that can be used in an overly narrow way. For instance, it becomes problematic when it is taken to suggest that there is a *need in all cases* to *replace* or at least *change* conventional ways of going on. This is problematic not just because of the focus on efficiency (as Standish thinks) but also due to the suggestion inherent in the way performativity is used by Derrida and Butler.[296] The suggestion seems to be that conventions in all cases skew the way we look at things – that a form of pure presence, or at least a deliberate 'break' from convention, would be more radical, or authentic, than quoting, or using, pre-existing conventional structures.[297] While a focus on performance sometimes helps in developing powerful criticisms of overly *narrow and rigid* rules and conventions, and I support artists doing things in new and unconventional ways when this is required by their project, the picture of 'confining' conventions can also lead to self-subversion. Notably, Cavell argues for seeing *genre as*

[296] Cf. Moi's criticism of Marcuse, Gellner and Butler along similar lines, especially pp. 168f.

[297] Sybille Krämer points out that there is a tendency towards 'pure' performativity understood as intentionally meaningless presence, beyond invoking conventions, which however is itself deceptive in its compulsive radicalism – performances (in art) usually retain elements of quotation. Cf. Urschel 2018, and Krämer, Sybille. 'Was haben ‚Performativität' und ‚Medialität' miteinander zu tun?' In *Performativität und Medialität*. Edited by Sybille Krämer. München: Fink 2004.

a medium and proposes: 'The first successful movies […] were not applications of a medium but the *creation of a medium* by their giving significance to specific possibilities. Only the art itself can discover its possibilities, and the discovery of a new possibility is the discovery of a new medium.'[298] Cavell's use of the word medium is unusual (it does not coventionally cover modes of storytelling such as genres), but it points in the direction of the sorts of considerations on genre as grammar and mediality as grammar that I will outline in section 4.4. and chapter 5.

Graf's struggle against the automatic assumption that his films, when they are not formulaic, are not genre films and the lack of support for genre films that aim for more playful and creative uses of genre point to a very narrow and prejudiced picture of genre film as at best 'mediocre'. The demand of filmmakers in the 1960s to leave behind genre films thus at least partly turn out to have confining rather than liberating consequences.[299] They ended up attacking the preconditions of a liberated way of using all the tools of film (and inventing new ones), by reducing genre films to its most impoverished, manipulative and formulaic version. Genre rules (which chapter 5 will address in detail) are in this view conflated with 'conformist' rules.[300] This is why I have approached the conditions of performative surprising moments in Graf's film in the way I have: to clarify their status as *enabling* conditions, distinct from conformist pressure and indeed, for Graf, liberating.

In summary: performativity is an important aspect of Graf's film, but it needs to be seen as an aspect, not as a theoretical picture of an *alternative* to conventional storytelling. Seeing performativity as an alternative might lead us to think that we have to (or at least *could*) give up conventions, which is in itself an unnecessarily narrow view that again seems to restrict what we can do with film. Family resemblance offers orientation over the spectrum of uses of genre film forms, but it may still suggest an overly rigid or inflexible view of genre films, whereas Graf and the Coen brothers in their actual practice of genre-filmmaking use, combine, and bend genres with such ease: this liberating commitment and earnest playfulness will be the focus of the next chapter.

I will now investigate the various aspects of Graf's critical engagement with film. His style of using and combining various grammatical rules (inheriting several filmic traditions or ways of going on at once) might be characterised as a pluralistic and committed playfulness at the heart of his particular mode of critical filmmaking. As a next step I will clarify the *status* of genre rules as grammar of genre films.

4.4. The status of genre rules: grammar, law, and language-games

We saw that generic expectations can still be satisfied even while a film makes these expectations explicit. The focus on (pre-)conditions and rules complements the interest in definitions and in similarities and dissimilarities in and between genres with

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[298] Cavell, Stanley, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enl. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard UP, 1979), p.32. 'Genre as medium' is mentioned on p.36.

[299] Cf. Ulrich Kriest. 'Großes Kino – die Diktatur des Mittelmaßes. Notizen zum Genrediskurs im deutschen Film 1964-87.' In Rother/ Pattis, pp.67-84.

[300] Cf. Moi 2017, p.150.

an interest in the pragmatics, i.e. how the genre works in particular cases. Before I will turn in chapter 5 to what I describe as Graf's 'committed playfulness', I need to clarify the concepts of 'grammar' and 'language-games' in relation to the description of performative genre uses: rules are abstracted from the actual practices of going on with filmmaking in order to make practices perspicuous. However, that does not mean that genre rules have to be conceived as *purely* conventional and constructed, as we will see.

Altman argues that there are two different conceptions of genre films, which are based in two different critical approaches: 'Whereas ritual critics interpret narrative situations and structural relations as offering *imaginative* solutions to a society's real problems, ideological critics see the same situations and structures as luring the audience into accepting *deceptive* non-solutions, while all the time serving governmental or industry purposes.'[301] According to Altman, examples of the ideological critical approach are Althusser, Adorno, and Barthes. Altman himself suggests that Hollywood genre films are able to *both* work deceptively and as offering imaginative solutions to real problems.[302] What I will suggest is yet another approach: to look at the simplicity of generic conventions as part of the grammar of genre film. In order to come to see this aspect of genre rules, it will be useful to think of different uses of genre conventions by different groups. Altman offers detailed descriptions of such actual entanglements of various groups of users (filmmakers, producers, studios, marketing, recipients, critics, academics, etc.). Each of these uses can be considered as a language-game with its own rules of using a particular genre to particular ends. These different 'communities of practice' may still be able to agree on certain regularities between different instances of the same genre, but their interest in regularities is shaped by their own community's specific concerns.[303] To recognise this is not relativistic or quietist: it offers ways of bridging initially incompatible ways of *understanding* each other once these different language-games are clarified. Film genre rules can in this way serve as a way to *create community* insofar as different persons and groups can come to see regularities and can learn to understand the specific grammatical rules according to which a filmmaker uses certain signs within the context of a particular genre. So, a first point to note here is: genre rules can be used to enable mutual understanding and create communities; communities need not be seen as given or unchanging.

It might seem tempting to think of this view of 'genre grammar' as either 'conventionalism' or 'constructivism'. This may lead critics to assume that it is possible or desirable to 'deconstruct' genre rules or to punch through the veil of banal conventions to more liberated uses of film, to an 'objective' or 'neutral' set of rules

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[301] Altman, 27.

[302] Altman, 28.

[303] Cf. the concept of 'communities of practice' in: Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger. Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Starr. Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1999.

according to which all films work and can be judged. However tempting, this is a problematic conception of genre rules as grammar.

As Kuusela argues, it is indeed the case that grammar cannot be derived from the facts of nature. This has led readers to adopt a 'constructivist' reading of Wittgenstein, which views grammatical necessity as completely arbitrary, and from this follows that 'grammatical rules fix concepts and also what is essential and necessary'.[304] In contrast, Kuusela points out that Wittgenstein actually sees grammar as arbitrary *and* non-arbitrary.[305] To make this clear, Kuusela quotes Wittgenstein noting that certain colour combinations are necessarily impossible, which we can see if we look at a colour spectrum, and he recognises this necessary rule as a grammatical rule. Therefore, although the rules of grammar are not derivable from the regularities of nature (i.e. we do not need to, and cannot, justify all the rules that clarify our understanding of meaning by reference to empirical proofs), they can be (in particular cases) shaped by them. Such considerations about possibilities, essences, and necessities as fixed in grammatical rules can be very helpful in clarifying both the status of genre rules and the sorts of clarifications about the possibilities of film as a medium that are typical of film theory. For example, one might look at the non-arbitrariness of the recording devices typically used in filmmaking. It seems to be part of their grammar that they record what is in front of them in a particular way, mechanically and precisely, and that in this way the filmed recordings can be compared to falsifiable observations made by a scientific tool for measurement. Lines on the film material then correlate in a particular way to lines before the recording camera (at least from its point of view) – to understand the way the filmic picture relates to the world before the camera then is the grammar of the filmic picture. This non-arbitrariness, which is admittedly an *aspect* of the ordinary grammar of film, seems to be what film theorists appeal to when they want to commit film as an art form to a particular kind of photographic, or even social, or psychological realism. They often take the 'essence' of film to be *necessarily* founded in this aspect of film's grammar and assume in different variations that film necessarily will develop its greatest strength when it relies on this 'essence'.

But this conception of the grammar of film neglects the *arbitrariness* of many, or even most, cases of film use: there is the arbitrariness of where to put the recording device in relation to what it records, how to move it, what to put in front of it, how to edit and use the footage, and all the other possibilities of working artistically with the film before, during, or after the initial recording. To want to limit or eradicate these influences is already to have accepted the former picture of film's grammar as all there *should* be. A normative judgement has therefore already taken place before the investigation of the possibilities of film has begun. There are also vague and mixed cases – for example the grammar of what exactly the film material is *able* to record.[306] It might be less or more light-sensitive, quickly 'burning out' or skewing certain colour

[304] Kuusela 2008, p. 188.
[305] Ibid., p.187.
[306] Cf. Citron 2012 on mixed and vague grammar.

tones. This might to some degree have to do with non-arbitrary possibilities and limits of the technical equipment, or there might have been decisions in the design-process as to what is taken to be the most important spectrum of what the recording device should be able to record (think, for instance, of the decision in early colour film to focus on the material's ability to record bright skin colours, without regard to the particular needs in recording the colours of non-Caucasian skin tones).[307]

Equally, it is possible to think of genre rules as grammar with both arbitrary and non-arbitrary elements. Non-arbitrary rules would e.g. be those regularities of genre films that have developed *because they actually work*, as filmmakers have learned over time, in particular ways for particular audiences. Arbitrary rules include idiosyncratic conventions that are adopted and perpetuated, such as quotes and intertextual references from films in the same genre, fads, trends, and personal styles, exaggerations without any particular practical justification, which nonetheless become a part of the way in which films convey meaning. Just because arbitrary genre rules are conventional does not imply that they are easily replacable, nor is it clear that it would be helpful to attempt to replace them with a more 'neutral' grammar of the film, which some conceptions of filmic realism want to get at.[308] What would 'neutral' even mean here? A way of recording film that is not only to be understood by one group of viewers, not shaped by a particular group's expectations? The very notion of such a neutral way of going on is highly problematic because it tries to imagine a film without particular users, since the rules, for fear of partisanship, could not be derived from the actual uses of film by film-viewers and filmmakers and any progress made towards describing the rules could be undone by pointing to the mere possibility of someone using film differently.

Ultimately, this would require trying to imagine film without film – the very material of film is equally answerable to *particular* (not absolute, unbiased, 'neutral') grammatical rules that need to be understood and can be made explicit, as chapter 5 will show. Kuusela's outline of Wittgenstein's method has the advantage that different uses (of signs, words, and pictures), and their rules can be investigated, made perspicuous and added to, without the need to worry about such a 'neutral' point of view, which turns out to be unthinkable anyway. The point of comparing certain regular aspects of film (as a medium, as a narrative form etc.) with grammar is not to make an empirical statement – to see film in this way is not always falsifiable – but the point is to draw clear distinctions between statements of varieties of necessities in film use (e.g. film as art) and statements of facts (e.g. historical or technological facts about the development of film as a human shared practice) and to foster a clearer understanding of the open-ended pluralism of different uses of film.

For now, what I have tried to show in 4.2. might be summed up in this way: Certain regularities in the use of film, including the adoption of narrative patterns and their

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[307] Cf. Roth, Lorna. "Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34.1 (2009): 111-36.

[308] Cf. Kracauer's view that film should use as little graphic shaping in the composition of shots as possible, in Kracauer 1985.

organisation in order to create a certain moment of surprise, do not have to be conceived as a case of filmmakers submitting themselves to conformism. Such rules can be conceived as an open texture that keeps developing, and this development does not need to be seen as a contradiction to its character as rules. As I already outlined in chapter 3, a Wittgensteinian philosophy of culture is wary of the picture of 'rules as rails'. A variation of this can be found in H.L.A. Hart's famous *The Concept of Law* in regard to the particular, applied rules that constitute law. The reason why law needs to be an open texture lies in a 'handicap' of the human condition:

> The first handicap is our relative ignorance of fact: the second is our relative indeterminacy of aim. If the world in which we live were characterized only by a finite number of features, and these together with all the modes in which they could combine were known to us, then provision could be made in advance for every possibility. [...] This would be a world fit for 'mechanical' jurisprudence.[309]

Thus, Hart advocates an 'open texture' of law, in which much must be left for decisions on a case-by-case basis. (Hart's conception of law could be contrasted with Derrida's worries about the law of genre in order to further develop its usefulness to genre studies, but this does not enhance the argument of this study.)[310] Similarly, genre rules can be conceived, with Wittgenstein, as an open texture that continuously evolves depending on needs and purposes. Wittgenstein equally proposes that we can participate in a rule-governed practice (such as a ball game) and shift the rules – not just shifting between different games but also 'the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them — as we go along.' (PI §83). Notably, Wittgenstein makes no claim about all cases, he merely suggests that different conceptions of rules are worth investigating and should not be excluded a priori. While I will focus in the next section mostly on the way in which language-games make grammar perspicuous. It is relevant to clarify the differences between going on with genre rules by following them (or by altering them) on the one hand and 'interpreting' rules. The notion that we need to think e.g. of filmmakers making genre films and coming up with creative uses of genre rules as diverging 'interpretations' of genres still underlies many of the arguments concerning performance and performativity (although performativity includes a focus on embodiment, which could at least in principle be understood as distinct from 'interpretation'). The uses of genre rules in

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[309] Hart, H. L. A., Joseph. Raz, and Penelope A. Bulloch. *The Concept of Law*. 3rd Ed. / with a Postscript edited by Penelope A. Bulloch and Joseph Raz and with an introduction and notes by Leslie Green. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print. Clarendon Law Series, p.128.

[310] Derrida, Jacques, and Avital Ronell. "The Law of Genre." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative, University of Chicago Press (Autumn, 1980), p.57. Also cf. Morgan, Ben. "Law in Action: Ian McEwan's 'The Children Act' and the Limits of the Legal Practices in Menke's 'Law and Violence' In Christoph Menke et al., *'Law and Violence' in Dialogue.* Manchester UP, 2018, pp.137-166.

filmmaking are better compared to an *ability* rather than to an 'interpretation'. Baker and Hacker make this point clear:

> When one is puzzled how a rule can determine what must be done, one is tempted to invoke an interpretation to mediate between the rule and its extension. An interpretation appears to be the bridge between a rule and the acts that accord with it, e.g. between the rule '+ 2' and what is to be done after writing '1000'. This suggestion runs into immediate difficulties. For it is now supposed that what one does will count as being in accordance with the rule one is following if it fits the interpretation. But this 'fitting' was precisely what was to be explained by the interposition of an interpretation. Not only is it not thus explained, but, further, 'Whatever I do can, on some interpretation, be brought into accord with the rule' (PI §198). But if 'anything goes', there is no following of a rule at all.[311] [...] There is no bridge between a rule and what accords with it, for there is no gulf to bridge. There is, on the one hand, the expression (formulation) of a rule, and on the other a description of what is called 'acting in accordance with this rule'. These are grammatically related. No bridging apparatus, whether fabricated by metaphysics or supplied by social services (communal agreement), is either necessary or possible in order to connect what cannot intelligibly be sundered. It is similarly misconceived to think that it makes sense to ask 'How can I make the transition from grasping a rule to acting in accordance with it?' For to grasp a rule is to understand it, and understanding a rule is not an act but an ability manifested in following the rule.[312]

So far, I have argued that genre rules might be understood as grammatical rules, clarifying the possibilities of (genre) film, which combine both arbitrary and non-arbitrary elements, and, as such, that the Wittgensteinian investigation of grammar is not simply a form of 'constructivism'. Then I used the quote by Baker and Hacker to clarify the difference between 'interpretation' and the ability to understand a rule and the activity of following a rule. This view of rules opens a way of looking at films that is distinct from the view that films – even conventional narrative films – have to be necessarily, or primarily, conceived as a 'referential' art form; however, while performativity offers an important aspect of films, highlighting what they do and how films matter and change conventions, the concept can become problematic in isolation or when it becomes a theory of all of art, as the next section will explain.

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[311] Baker, Gordon P., and P. M. S. Hacker. *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity: Essays and Exegesis of 185-242*. 2nd, Extensively Rev. Ed. / by P.M.S. Hacker. ed. Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Baker, Gordon P., and P. M. S. Hacker. Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations (2005), p.93.

[312] Baker and Hacker 2009, pp.95f.

4.5. Commitment without determinism: Dynamic uses of genre

To sum up, we have seen that Graf's way of using surprising moments highlights his understanding of and ability to follow genre rules to the point of using them *critically*. This, in turn, can be compared to Wittgenstein's reflections on rules and serves as a first aspect of Graf's critical filmmaking, which, like Wittgenstein's method, manages to do critical work without undermining its own ability to go on, by presenting objects of comparison, such as the prologue and the surprising turning points, for conceptual clarification.

Rather than taking the function of a frame or medium that transports an aspect of a pre-existing object (as a representation), genre films importantly often constitute an event in themselves: they do not speak of something else but offer, in and through the event of their screening, an experience. In order to discuss this event, that unfolds between a viewer and the screen, it is important to pay attention to further aspects than mere representation. For instance, the intense dream-like quality of Graf's *giallo*-esque scenes cannot be appropriately understood as just a framing device for something else – their value lies in their uniqueness, in experiencing their nuance and beauty and recognising the subtle nod to a neglected corner of Italian cinema. Similarly, surprising moments in *Er sollte tot…* do not so much point to something else as unfold their performative force on the attentive viewer who has intellectually and emotionally tuned into the film. Here, we find a liberated use of regularities that helps to see rules as dynamic practical tools, instead of unchanging structures (cf. the criticism of the picture of rules as rails in chapter 3). The target audience (German television viewers who are familiar with the Sunday night crime dramas on the ARD channel) knows the relevant genre rules because they are familiar regular patterns of crime dramas. This does not seem to confine screenwriter Basedow and Graf as much as it enables them to play with the audience's expectations and challenge the audience to rethink not just their predictions but also the way they form such predictions. In the process, the filmmakers complicate the very notions of what a crime is and what it means to take responsibility for one's actions within a situation that is already shaped by others. Tracing the place of performative change to the practice and ability of rule-following, understood as an *open-ended practice*, has turned out to be a helpful way to think about the normative aspect of the performative, which explained why Graf's following of genre rules is *enabling* and *liberating* to him.

As I have argued, Graf's films are earnestly *committed* to following the rules of the genre they inherit, which might be understood as delivering on the implicit *promises* of the genre. So, when I speak of Graf's critical filmmaking, in its uses of surprise, playfulness and institutions, as *committed*, I refer to the way in which an earnest involvement in a performative act (such as promising) is substantial.[313] This is a key difference between Graf's work as a filmmaker and what Schweinitz characterised as contemporary forms

[313] Cf. Austin, John Langshaw. *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962, pp.14f. See also Loxley, pp. 58-61.

of 'postmodern' uses of problematic stereotypes. Here, 'self-referentiality' arguably does not serve to create 'distance', and the way his use of surprise breaks up the closed worldview inherent in stereotypes is unlike 'a defamiliarized, reflexive view of enmeshed stereotypes, which is offered up as a play of signs'.[314] For Graf, even when there is an element of quotation involved in inheriting genres, he fully and earnestly commits to the genre, without taking an ironic distance. His following genre rules is a practice without mediation by an 'interpretation'. Therefore his use of rules is more directly involved in *doing genre* than a mere 'quotation' of genre patterns would suggest: a way of going on, rather than going in circles of (self-) referentiality. It is this non-distancing approach that enables his even more rigorously critical use of genre (and his inheritance of its narrative structures, and his work within German filmmaking institutions).

Notably, this way of looking at genre also clarifies why the possibilities of genre films cannot simply be determined (and therefore are not determined) in advance: a definition offers a way of grouping films together and is useful in many ways, but it is very limited as a tool for making predictions about future cases of genre filmmaking. This is why both filmmakers and genre theorists need to let themselves be surprised by new uses of genre and develop a properly pluralistic way of seeing different genre definitions as offering different, alas limited, insights.

Graf's radicality lies in *choosing* 'ordinary' genre filmmaking within the conventional structures of German television – a context that is less prestigious than making films for cinema release and a context that automatically is assumed to demand conformism to narrow confinements and demands. Committing to a context and then working to find freedom within it makes Graf a Wittgensteinian filmmaker, in some ways similar to and in important ways dissimilar from the Coen brothers: whereas *A Serious Man* confronts the viewers with abuses of Wittgenstein's method, *Er sollte tot…* presents a therapeutic aspect change that successfully liberates Maria. In a way, it is possible to relate Maria's move towards commitment to Graf's own commitment to genre structures: both find liberation in commitment. Maria's aspect change coincides with her decision to take responsibility and no longer to see herself as a child. This is the most 'minimal' change, in a way, and yet it addresses her *real need*, as far as the film indicates, by dissolving her anxieties about being overly determined. This aspect-change opens up the option of leaving behind her dependence on her abusers. In this way, the film suggests she does liberate herself, helped by the criminal investigators who act at the same time as empathetic therapists.

This model of change is not sufficiently captured by the concept of performativity, if a study of performativity remains narrowly focused on *maximising* change and intensities without paying open-ended attention to the varieties of needs by different groups and persons in different situation.

Chapter 4 considered the importance of a multi-aspectual approach to genre studies, which outlined a similarity in Graf's storytelling and the Coen brothers' storytelling:

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[314] Schweinitz, p.119.

they use various genres in mixed, vague, and overlapping ways, which do not, however, result in muddle and serve to challenge the standard use of Wittgenstein's philosophy in genre studies. As we saw, neither the concept of performativity nor the idea of family resemblance taken out of the context of its use in Wittgenstein's method could alone account for the free and playful use of genre by Graf and the Coen brothers, and both concepts run into problems if they are not seen as having strictly limited use. I will now argue that the limitations of these concepts can be overcome by adding another aspect to the investigation. The *status* of genre rules and the grammar (logical possibilities) of film forms need to be further clarified. This kind of clarification can indeed liberate both filmmakers and film scholars from confining pictures of what film supposedly has to be – by clearing away confusions between what films (empirically/ historically) are and have been in the past and what we can justifiedly accept as the possibilities and limits of film.

5.

Dreams of a different German film: Graf on genre film's grammar and language-games

> We dreamt German cinema differently, and we dreamt it in television. As it never really existed and likely never will be. Except for on TV. […] It was a sort of invocation of a different kind of film, which would not win any awards for Germany abroad, but perhaps would have been the right films at the right time in order to gain the solid trust of German audiences. Trust in consistently good story-telling, of unpretentious humour, of tension, and occasionally even of a surprisingly hard-hitting quality.
>
> – Dominik Graf[315]

This chapter will closely study Dominik Graf's *Die Freunde der Freunde* to consider how Wittgenstein's philosophy is helpful and liberating both for filmmakers who proceed in its spirit and for film scholars, specifically by practising the language-game method. As we have seen, language-games function as simple objects of comparison that make the grammatical rules explicit according to which a sign is to be understood within the context of a specific use. To focus specifically on language-games in regard to film, and to use them in this way, is what I call the language-game method. Here, my argument proceeds by making a clear distinction between how we speak about what film is and what it should be – discussing the possibilities and limits of (genre) film.

5.1. Graf's Film Language-Games: *Die Freunde der Freunde*, realism, mediality, and imagination

Graf's films use the rules of genre films in a playful manner. The various lines of filmmaking traditions, conventions, iconographies and storytelling patterns can best be described with Wittgenstein's terminology, making sense of Graf's playful appropriations as *film language-games* with a discernible *grammar*. I discuss the way in which Wittgenstein's critical method can be connected to elements of self-reflexivity and the criticism of the preconditions of Graf's own work. I will show how this criticism, conducted in a Wittgensteinian spirit, works as part of a regular, everyday way of going on and point out the creative potential of such criticism as part of a learning process, marking a distinction between productive (self-)criticism of a project with Wittgenstein's method and forms of attacking or undermining a project.

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[315] Abel, p.267n22; his translation. Quoting from: Dominik Graf. 'Wo die Straßen keine Namen haben.' In *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. 11.05.2005, p.17.

In *Die Freunde der Freunde*, Graf breathes new life into several sets of narrative conventions and challenges the theoretical preconceptions outlined at the beginning of chapter 4. I will consider the following film genre language-games played by the film:

- art film reflecting on film as film material/ medium
- genre film involving crime subplot and ghosts
- pop-cultural simplicity
- literary adaptation
- autobiographical écriture

In order to make this argument, I will first outline the way in which the film uses photographs and which conceptions of film the film appeals to and contrasts in its style (5.2.). The next section considers how Graf's film uses blurriness and ambiguity, and therefore I begin thinking about the grammar of these elements of the film's style (5.3.). Then, I read Cora Diamond's and Stephen Mulhall's reflections on the grammar of riddles as a way to explore the film's more obscure elements (5.4.). I arrive at a characterisation of language-games that enables me to clarify Graf's committed playfulness in his use of genres (5.5.), which leads me to discuss the fantastic elements in the film (5.6.). Finally, I conclude the chapter with a reflection on how this approach has clarified the film's richness and its particular mode of going on with critically aware filmic storytelling (5.7.).

5.2. Blurry portraits, surveillance and ambiguity

I will take the last shot of *Die Freunde der Freunde* as my starting point to investigate the film's grammatical commitments to filmic realism, *l'art pour l'art* abstraction of film as film, symbolism, and fantastic genre filmmaking. The film's abstract forms challenge us to consider the various *uses* of film, which can be made clear by comparing it to Graf's *Polizeiruf 110: Smoke on the Water* (Germany, ARD, 2014) and Graf's exploration of the theme of control and film as a tool of surveillance. This leads us back to themes that we have also found in *Er sollte tot…* (and which are characteristic of Graf's other films, too) – contingency and planning, responsibility and control, characters searching for a good life and characters falling into criminal entanglements. Graf's adaptation (with a screenplay co-written by Graf and his frequent collaborator Markus Busch) of Henry James' novella *The Friends of Friends* (1896) is set in contemporary Germany, in Traunstein, mostly in the local boarding school, Internat Schloss Stein. The characters are students, unlike James' characters. Graf turns this into one of his most obviously autobiographically influenced films; he went to this boarding school, knows the local idiosyncracies, habits, and locations, and he even acts in the film in a speaking role. He plays a teacher who comes into the room in the morning to make sure everyone gets up.

A critic of *Die Freunde der Freunde* aligns it with Graf's films in general in that they are 'always less subtle than they could be'.[316] While this critic takes this to be a flaw, I will

[316] Knörer, Ekkehard. " Dominik Graf: Die Freunde der Freunde (D 2001). Jump Cut Magazin, n.d. URL: http://www.jump-cut.de/filmkritik-diefreundederfreunde.html (Accessed 24 May 2016.)

argue that this lack of subtlety can be taken seriously as a feature of Graf's style, a part of the complex grammar of his film. Graf's simplicity, occasionally exaggerated to the point of crudeness, has a function, and it can tell us something about the way he sees film as a medium and as an art form. Graf embraces flaws, mistakes, 'Schlampereien' and rethinks the intrinsic value of making such mistakes, to fail, to give space to flawed objects of art, and to appreciate them without an obsession with cleanliness and perfection. This endorsement of imperfection has to do with Graf's aesthetic interest in a visible 'human touch' in films, and so he acknowledges positively the traces of human work in film as imperfect endeavours. Graf's reviews argue for the value of 'dirt' and serenity, and they make clear that Graf knows how difficult to achieve the right kind of dirt and imperfection is: when films are overly polished and perfect, when the filmmakers seem overly worried about correctness and streamlining the narrative and the 'look', Graf's reviews of the films are bitingly critical. For instance, Jeunet's *Un long dimanche des fianceilles* (France 2004) tries too hard to be dirty, according to Graf, but ultimately comes across as mechanical, like a 'wind-up toy ape'.[317] When writing about other filmmakers, he castigates films that appear overly controlled and polished and clearly commits himself to a motto from the Nouvelle Vague: according to this mode of film criticism, when you come to appreciate a filmmaker, you have to embrace all of her work, not just the good parts, the 'triumphs'. Indeed, you have to embrace especially their failures, because they are in a sense the 'core' of a filmmaker's work, and, according to Graf, still categorically more interesting than impersonal films only made in a drawing-by-numbers fashion by what Graf bitterly calls 'everybody's-darling-directors'.[318] How can a multidimensional logical description of the uses of film help us to better understand the use of imperfections and 'unsubtleties'?

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[317] Graf 2009, pp. 203-205.

[318] Dominik Graf. 'Drachenblut. Über Paul Schraders Filme. Laudatio Basel 3. Juni 2018.' URL: http://www.bildrausch-basel.ch/fileadmin/web/dokumente/Medienmitteilungen_2018/BR8_Laudatio_Schrader__c__Dominik_Graf.pdf (accessed 29th June 2018)

See also his article looking back at his encounter with Schrader after giving his appraisal of his work: Dominik Graf. 'One Hour Photo'. In *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Published 15th July 2018. URL: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kino/dominik-graf-ueber-paul-schrader-15689707.html (accessed 29th June 2018)

Figure 10: The final shot of Die Freunde der Freunde*.*

The last shot of *Die Freunde der Freunde* is a still split-screen of two photographs (Fig. 10). Two photographs that play a central rule in the film and allow me to explore the film's central themes, all relating to these two photographs. They are blurry and shaky images, and this distortion can be understood as relating to several levels of the film's grammar. In the photographs we can vaguely make out Georg's (Matthias Schweighöfer) two friends, mentioned in the film's title, who came into his life and began to mean much to him, but whom he lost in peculiar ways – for reasons the film ventures to capture. They are the only pictures Georg owns of Billie (Sabine Timoteo) and Arthur (Florian Stetter). The film's general look, based in its use of digital video, however, is also blurry, and occasionally shaky. I will outline the argument for the film's use of photography and video imagery as both inheriting and critiquing filmic realism, before I investigate further possibilities.

The argument for film as ontologically determined and normatively requiring films to take a realistic mode of presentation assumes that film is based on photography, and so it is significant that Graf here takes up the supposed 'realism' of photography as a problem for the characters. *Die Freunde der Freunde* explores the open field between two conceptions of photography: photography as a disinterested recording and photography as involved in human relationships. By exploring this field, the film reflects on narrative film. Like the Coen brothers, Graf is less interested in how to conceptualise the (un)certainty of sense-impressions and more interested in the attitude of the person who is in the first place so sceptically worried about whether sense-impressions can be trusted.

Georg, as we will see, tries to use photography to *capture*, and hold on to, his friends. At the same time, he also believes in (metaphysical) predetermination: towards the end, Georg will reflect that he still believes that for every person there is another person matched to them by fate – but he has learned through his attempts at controlling their relationship, and losing it, that he wasn't that person for Billie. As the

film ends, it is not at all clear if Georg's idea of people 'destined' to belong to each other is anything but an illusory image, a teleological interpretation of human interaction that leads Georg to prevent a meeting between Billie and Arthur, who he thinks might be supernaturally connected. It is relevant here how his attempts at calming these worries about metaphysical connections contribute to his failure to be a friend – and, for my interest in self-reflexivity in Graf's films most interestingly, Graf ties Georg's attempts at controlling relationships to photography and film.

Arthur is uncomfortable with being photographed. That is why the only photograph of him (Fig. 10) is so shaky and unrecognisable. Arthur and Billie have many character traits in common: They retain an air of mystery, are radically autonomous and somewhat lost; Arthur inherits criminal connections from his father, which will eventually lead to his death (an element added by Graf to James' story), Billie escaped an abusive relationship and now works at the parties of upper-class friends to feed her son. They also both believe in the supernatural and claim to have had ghostly encounters with dead people close to them in the moment of their death. Unlike Georg, they both actively make decisions, while Georg passively goes along. These character-traits make both of them hard to pin down – they evade capture and description, Georg cannot hold on to them. The impossibility of taking their picture characterises their personality as being in constant change – and in some ways, they are like ghosts themselves.

Seeing, and taking pictures (and in extension: filming) here is connected to the attempt to hold on to the presence of a beloved person fading away (by taking leave, or by dying).[319] Similarly, the measuring of time (which is the additional dimension of film in comparison to photography) in the end becomes Georg's tool for controlling their relationship: Georg is worried that Arthur and Billie will fall in love and that he will lose them. He tries to reconstruct whether they might have met by measuring the time one would need to get from one place to the other, but finally cannot settle the question empirically. The film leaves open the question whether Georg's attempts to control, measure, and hold on to the friendships sped up their breaking down or whether his needs are just incompatible with the needs of Billie and Arthur. Photography and measuring time are thus connected in the film as units of measurement that Georg tries to use as tools of control. This *attitude* by the character can be connected to Graf's choice of digital video as material for filming: the resulting look of the film is strikingly similar to the look of surveillance cameras, for instance in the film's first scene. *Die Freunde der Freunde* starts in medias res, the camera is handheld and shaking, with close framing and with an immediately recognisable video-look.

319 Cf. Sontag's characterisation of photography as a technique that offers a false sense of distance and control from human suffering and contingency, in Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1978)

Figure 11: The last shot of the first scene in Die Freunde der Freunde*.*

The point that I draw from this is that Graf wants to point out how futile such narrow-minded attempts at control are in the first place and how hopeless they are as replacement for unmeasurable but essential dimensions of human interaction, like trust or commitment. Graf chooses the hyper-realism of the digital video look in order to reflect critically on more or less controlling uses of film and video.

Early in the film, the first wide wide shot (Fig. 11) that finally gives an overview of the backyard, in which Georg got robbed, resembles the image recorded by a surveillance camera: the surveillance-camera-look points towards the use of moving images as a document, capturing what goes on in a precise, disinterested, archival fashion. The handheld camera, with which the film begins, on the other hand, is involved in the scene. But the shaky style of filming still evokes film used as a document – as if what we see here were a documentary, or a piece of reporting, or a private video shot by amateurs who do not know how to stabilise the camera. The film here invokes highly realistic or even naturalistic styles of filmmaking, such as *cinema verité*, naturalistic minimalism, or, most obviously, the Danish *dogme 95* movement. Graf's camera is decidedly less shaky than Trier's in either his only 'proper' dogme film *Idioterne* (Denmark 1998), or *Riget* (Denmark 1994-'97) or in the later *Dogville* (Denmark 2003). Graf said in an interview about *Der Felsen* (Germany 2002), another film that he shot with a similar video look, although in more lively colours, that he wanted to experiment with digital video as a bow to *cinema verité* without having to follow the rules of the Danish manifesto of formal asceticism.[320]

As such, the film employs a filmic style that relates it with the most naturalistic forms of filmic realism. But the story, and the characters are concerned with the ambiguities

[320] Seibert, Marcus. *Revolver: Kino muss gefährlich sein*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2006, p.198.

of interpersonal relationships, the hopes and fears of friendship and love. Graf tells these stories by overlaying the realistic style with elements of the fantastic and of horror films, which at first might appear to contradict the grammar of realism: if the promise of the realism is to get as close as possible to depicting things as they are, these genres question whether things are as they seem, or they imagine how things might yet be otherwise. Before I further discuss the grammar of the fantastic streak in Graf's films (here and elsewhere), I will investigate the blurry and ambiguous imagery a little more in detail in terms of the film's grammar.

5.3. The grammar of the medium and the grammar of symbolism

So far, the film's jarring and unusual use of video material seemed to suggest that we can best align its look and style with filmic realism: The video material offers a 'document' of something that the camera 'merely' recorded and which the film now presents again, reproduces, re-presents. The 'bad quality' of the video material and the lack of subtlety in sketching the characters appears as merely a flaw, a resistance of inferior technology that will need to be replaced with better technology that can present clearer imagery. But the film itself challenges such a reading: as a first step, it undermines a realistic reading of its images as a 'window' or 'representation' into a passively recorded world by including highly symbolistic images that function as icons (rather than a copy of an object's surface). Further, this iconic and symbolistic dimension of the film's grammar is connected to the film's genre film elements: the notion of destiny, the possibility of spectral appearances, and the subplot involving shadowy criminals. The film employs the recurring symbolistic motifs of masks, ghosts, and mirrors.

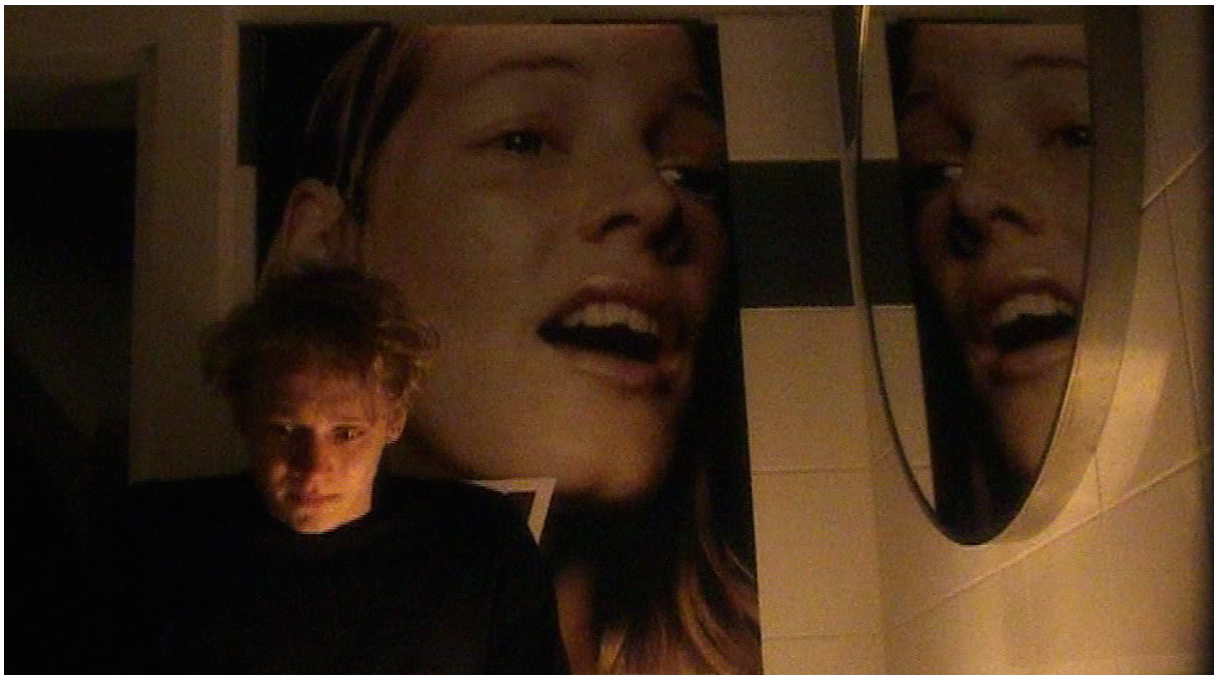

Figure 12: Georg loses control of the situation and cries before the mirroring images of a girl's face on a concert poster.

Figure 13: Billie sees a ghost.

Characters looking into mirrors is a standard situation of self-reflection in film history. Often, in such situations, characters have to face difficult decisions or recognise unpleasant facts about themselves.[321] So, if the film's use of the mirror-view standard situation suggests self-reflection, what does the film reflect on? We already saw that the film reflects on photography, measuring time, and arguably film as forms of surveillance and control. But the film is more radical: it addresses the *limits* of film's grammar. There is the question what photography and, in extension, film *cannot* capture: the film is concerned *both* with the possibilities *and* with the limits of film (which is reflected through the possibilities and limits of the related media of photography, video, and human sense perception). Graf's film does not simply resolve that the medium fully determines what can be done with it: what appears 'unclean' about the material — the kind of visual 'static noise' — is here brought to the foreground in an appreciative fashion. Graf's film neither takes the media (including actors, etc. — not just the material or the recording) of the film to overly determine and therefore to undermine the trustworthiness of everything that is given in a medium, nor does it attempt to make us forget that it is a medium rather than the depicted thing itself.[322] Graf fully embraces the 'digital dirt', the limited range of the digital video camera for light reception and the strange and artificial texture of the pixels. He emphasises the 'burn out' effect where the light is too bright, so that a whole

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[321] Cf. Daniel Stümpfig. 'Spiegelblicke'. In Koebner, Thomas, et al. *Standardsituationen im Film: Ein Handbuch*. Schüren, 2016, pp.292-294.

[322] This means that Graf goes beyond the limiting dichotomy of 'media determinism' versus 'media marginalism' that is influential in media studies, and critiqued e.g. by Sybille Krämer, c.f. Krämer, Sybille. "Was haben >Performativität< und >Medialität< miteinander zu tun? Plädoyer für eine in der >Aisthetisierung< gründende Konzeption des Performativen." In: Krämer, Sybille (ed.): *Performativität und Medialität*. München: Fink 2004.

area in the shot becomes glaringly white without any detail. To bring this to the foreground, Graf in one scene stages a woman smoking while positioning a bright light behind her:

Figure 14: Georg's friend Pia smokes in the morning, after the party.

The smoke of the cigarette and the light reflecting on her skin and her hair become indiscernible. The fogginess of the video image and the smoke interact; the film's presentation celebrates smoke and low-resolution video fog as a visual quality rather than a flaw. In another scene, Billie sits on the bed, in the sun, and her shape dissolves in the brightness that is more intense than what the DV camera is able to record (Fig. 15). This image of burning out is echoed by Pia's worry that she would lose Arthur: 'er verbrennt mir', she says.[323] Billie, from her first appearance on, when she dances next to torches, is connected to fire.

[323] Translation: 'He's burning away from me.' (Thanks to Joanna Raisbeck for advice on this translation.)

Figure 15: After staying the night at Georg's room, Billie 'glows' in the morning sun.

Next to Billie, we can see the dark shape of the mask they played with the day before. It is a menacing, devilish, old wooden mask, which the film inserts – randomly, at first sight – at several points during dialogues that take place in the room. We see it for the first time when Georg first meets Billie and phones Arthur to join them, but Arthur is with one of his many partners. The mask points to the aspects of both hiding and revealing that masks are conventionally used for in theatre play and rituals.[324] Here, both aspects of the mask come into play. By placing the mask in these scenes, the film reveals something about the way certain elements of Billie's and Arthur's lives remain hidden to Georg. We can see Georg slowly build a communal sense of belonging with both of them. While Georg certainly understands much of what they say and we can see him tune into the emotions they make available to him in their faces and body-language, there are often short moments of uncertainty in which he looks at them full of doubt and confusion. He is not wrong to sense that he lacks insight into their lives. Arthur's criminal ties, Billie's coming and going, and their seeing ghosts remain hidden to Georg and undermine his attempts at managing their relationships. At the same time, the mask also works to reveal a 'demonic' aspect in both Billie and Arthur: the association between them and the demon mask indicates how their characteristic impulsiveness does not fit with Georg's consistent, rather controlled way of living his life and even takes on a threatening aspect. The demonic mask *reveals* their connection to the contingencies of life, both as a narrative device, sketching their personality for the film viewers and as a way of signposting how Georg sees them.

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[324] Cf. Friedemann Kreuder. "Maske", in: Fischer-Lichte, Erika. Metzler-Lexikon Theatertheorie. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005, pp.192-194.

Figure 16: Before Georg and Billie sleep with each other for the first time, she jokingly dances with the mask.

The double function of the mask as hiding and revealing might be compared to Graf's use of the 'rough' video material: Graf takes the limits of the medium and highlights and acknowledges them by making them explicit. The grammar of the video image is *not just* the grammar of the medium but also becomes – through its use in the film – a cipher for the limits of human perception and understanding (distinct from each other: perceiving film, receiving audio-visual cues, as we established at the beginning of this section, is not the same as understanding it). So the *mediality* of the film itself *becomes symbolic*, iconically signifying. This symbolistic use of iconography is connected to the film's supernatural subplot, as we have already seen in regard to the mirror-view scenes and the use of the mask. Additionally, the blurry pictures of Arthur and Billie are reminiscent of the daguerreotypes with shades that were taken to be 'ghosts' around 1900 (Knörer also alludes to these in his review, quoted above). In this regard the film's video look also inherits a layer of intertextual grammar that points to the use of photography to capture the 'paranormal' – an early use of photography that further complicates the notion of film as 'purely' recording 'reality'. As such, the film itself reflects on the possibilities and grammar of its own means of communicating meaning: it makes explicit the grammar of the medium, investigates the limits of surveillance as a form of surface realism (recoding impartially how things are but missing the *point* of human relationships and anxieties), and confronts the grammar of the film recording with the grammar of both iconic symbolism and theatrical masks. And, in the end, the film does not present these different uses of signs and these different sets of rules according to which the film may be understood as contradicting. This is another level of the film's grammar: it presents a way of looking at film as a form of art that effortlessly combines these different grammars without creating a muddle; instead, this grammar effects a richness of adding layers that complement each other.

5.4. Riddling the grammar of the obscure and fantastical

All these motifs, these elements of the film's language, are used consistently throughout the film. They relate to the theme of vulnerability and uncertainty of relationships. Even friendship, the sense of knowing a person well, even romantic relationships and love, do not lead Georg to anything resembling complete certainty about these relationships. Ultimately, Georg's worrying about the firmness of their friendship becomes self-undermining; he does not have the courage to trust them. But human relationships, the film reminds us, are vulnerable and therefore *require trust*. Graf's concern with the limits of film should not be misconstrued as an attempt to offer a magical glimpse beyond those limits. To clarify an alternative approach, it is useful to draw on Mulhall's characterisation of nonsense, which is equally concerned with a Wittgensteinian way to think about the limits of sense:

> The notion of substantial nonsense is that of pseudo-propositions that are unintelligible, but determinately so; they therefore seem to specify a thought that we cannot think — an identifiable place in the region that lies beyond the limits of sense, something specific that exceeds our mental grasp. But of course, if the limits of sense are the limits of intelligibility, then nothing whatever lies beyond them; they are not boundaries fencing us off from a further determinate or determinable region, and so not limitations upon our capacity to think or speak. To recognize that the only species of nonsense is gibberish is, accordingly, to recognize that the limits of sense are not limitations; to acknowledge them as limits rather than limitations is precisely a matter of acknowledging that there is nothing (no specifiable thing, no conceivable task or activity) that we cannot do.[325]

Die Freunde der Freunde reflects on the limits of film's grammar in a similar way. Still, the indiscernibly burnt out area of the filmic image where the white fog is too bright to get recorded in the digital images is not simply nonsense in the sense of gibberish. The way in which elements that appear at first sight nonsensical can be understood if they are seen in context of the film's use of these elements might be compared to what Diamond and Mulhall have to say about riddles. As Mulhall sums up Diamond: 'In the case of ordinary riddles, and mathematical proofs, Diamond argues that it is only when we discover that there is a solution to the riddle, and how it counts as a solution, that we fully understand the question the riddle poses; before this, the relevant phrases or propositions have only promissory meaning.'[326] This undermines the dogmatic

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[325] Mulhall, Stephen. *Wittgenstein's Private Language: Grammar, Nonsense, and Imagination in Philosophical Investigation, 243-315*. Oxford University Press, 2007, p.8.

[326] Mulhall, Stephen. *The Great Riddle: Wittgenstein and Nonsense, Theology and Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p.38.

assumption that nonsense can be easily dismissed in all cases, and it even undermines a quick and simple distinction between sense and nonsense: In the cases of riddles (mathematical, ordinary and theological) discussed by Diamond and Mulhall, it is necessary to abstain from a final judgement about their sense or nonsense until an appropriate set of rules for unriddling them can be established. Riddles typically rely on analogical projection of words into new contexts, in a sense stretching their meaning into new uses.[327]

This is interesting for my consideration of apparently nonsensical and in any case non-realistic elements in Graf's films because it offers a different approach to them: Rather than quickly assuming that the distortions of material, the abstracted simplicity of genre storytelling patterns, ambiguous symbols, and supernatural elements either make sense according to the grammar of filmic/ photographic realism (i.e. they show objects) or are simply nonsense, one can ask whether an appropriate set of rules for their sensible use can be established. Such a set of rules could be presented as a language-game, a simple picture to explain the uses of film, as the next section will argue.

5.5. Committed playfulness: Graf's critical use of conventions

This section will at first clarify how the concept of language-games is in the *Investigations* already connected to visual seeing and offering ways to see e.g. persons and their behaviour more or less transparently. Then it will argue that Graf's 'committed playfulness' might be clarified by reference to the 'play' of language-games. As I will argue, language-games can help clarify how ambiguity might be accepted as itself valuable without losing the clarity needed for rigorous analysis.

Wittgenstein himself connects language-games and visual seeing in more or less direct ways, which are useful in order to clarify the mixed filmic grammar of *Die Freunde der Freunde*: Just like language-use, seeing can to some degree be understood as shaped by shared practices that we are trained in as we grow up in a community. Variations of the argument that training in particular cases implicitly shapes and underlies the ways in which we *see* can be found throughout the *PPF* (e.g. §168). However, we will not always be aware of the training, the shared rules, the shared agreements. Wittgenstein reminds us of these underlying assumptions, these unacknowledged conventions, by sketching some simple examples of such on-going shared activities. For instance, he imagines children who agree to play with a box and use it as a house in their game (*PPF* §205). The shared game allows the children to see the box as a house. As in the *Investigations*, the simple children's game here is used as a 'simple object of comparison'. We can compare our own actual activities, in which our own seeing is embedded, to the simple activity presented here and (re)discover how much of our perception relies on training. Wittgenstein similarly directs our attention to the way we 'use' images in our life, which might be understood as the grammar of the picture, its rules, in a certain visual language-game:

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[327] Mulhall 2018, pp.77-80.

> You need to think of the role which pictures such as paintings (as opposed to working drawings) play in our lives. This role is by no means a uniform one.
>
> A comparison: proverbs are sometimes hung on the wall. But not theorems of mechanics. (Our attitude to these two things.) (PPF §195)

Both Baker and Kuusela argue that objects of comparisons reveal aspects by pointing out and exaggerating similarities as well as dissimilarities between a picture and actual objects.[328] Taking these considerations further, we might argue for an approach to studying film that focuses on uses of films to explain how different uses of the same filmic image can reveal different aspects. This can account for the possibility that different people see the same film at the same time and can validly come to different conclusions about its meanings and qualities. The properly Wittgensteinian way to deal with such disagreement is then not to 'deconstruct' these different ways of seeing the film but to allow, at least initially, for the possibility of several language-games with distinct grammar to coexist, which help see clearly different ways to understand a film. Each of these language-games then needs to be made explicit so that it may become possible to probe them for their validity, rigour, and congruity. Such proper understanding of the pluralistic uses, meanings, and qualities of a film (let alone various film forms, such as genres) would be hindered by the overly quick and dogmatic assumption that there must only be one 'correct' assessment. It is easy to forget such *habits* of seeing, and we might assume that our way of seeing is the 'natural', 'neutral' or 'direct' (in the sense of unmediated) way of seeing something. Wittgenstein clarifies that this assumption can be confusing:

> We also say of a person that he is transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards our considerations that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. One learns this when one comes into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even though one has mastered the country's language. One does not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We can't find our feet with them. (PPF §325)

As this example points out, seeing the exact same visual cues will not deliver the same kind of *insight* to everybody. The right kind of training, through participation in a shared practice or culture, enables me to see people's reasons for doing things transparently. But even coming to understand their reasons in this way does not mean that we can say with certainty that the person is *fully* transparent to us – even if they

[328] Baker, pp.279-293. Kuusela, Oskari. 2014. 'Gordon Baker, Wittgensteinian philosophical conceptions and perspicuous representation.' In *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 3(2): 71–98.

appear so! We would be justified in saying that we understand their actions, since we surely do not need to assume that 'understanding' implies complete understanding. The method of multi-aspectual description that I outlined in chapter 2 is helpful to explain how different uses of 'language-game' itself are possible and can further clarify the ambiguity of the concept. The German word 'Sprachspiel' is itself more ambiguous than the English translation, 'language-game', might lead English-speakers to assume. The comparison of language with games is clearly in the foreground and gets explored in detail by considering the varieties of what we recognise as games in everyday parlance, by discussing the status of rules, and rule-books, in relation to the actual activities of playing games and by comparing the feeling and understanding of pain as private and/ or public with the game patience.[329] However, there is a less obvious meaning, insofar as in German, 'Spiel' can also be used in reference to leeway. For example, in engineering, it is conventional to speak of the 'Spiel' of certain parts of an engine, which are fitted loosely in order to permit certain necessary movements. This is necessary in order to allow, for example, materials to extend as they heat up or contract as they cool down. If in building a machine, one neglected to make space for the necessary 'Spiel', this would lead to catastrophic failure of the engine (similar to 'play' in English, which, however, seems less implied in the term 'language-game').
This is the way in which Thomas Bauer uses 'Sprachspiel', which he contrasts with 'Sprachernst', to bring out the point he wants to make about the need for language to allow for ambiguity.[330] Bauer's argument is that it can be shown that many current (inter-)cultural, philosophical, and political problems arise from a compulsive and ultimately dysfunctional tendency to erase ambiguities. What gets lost, by trying to reach a state of total 'Eindeutigkeit' (literally translatable as 'a state of having exactly one precise and explicit meaning'), is the actual richness of ambiguous language-use. Such a reduction does not actually serve to clarify language-meaning but confuses the language-user, who as a result neglects relevant aspects and is unable to deal with actual ambiguities. As Bauer argues, dealing with ambiguity involves skill, and he traces the historical development of cultural techniques in 'Ambiguitätstraining' (training for dealing with ambiguity). According to his view such training should be considered useful and even pragmatically necessary: 'Ambiguity cannot be erased but only tamed'.[331] Bauer does not reference Wittgenstein (which is surprising, given that Wittgenstein invented the term 'Sprachspiel'), but Wittgenstein discusses this problematic view of clarification, which erases ambiguities and vagueness when they are actually needed for an appropriate understanding.

> One can say that the concept of a game is a concept with blurred edges.
> — "But is a blurred concept a concept at all?" — Is a photograph that

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[329] For comparisons between pain and the game patience, see Mulhall, Stephen. *Wittgenstein's Private Language: Grammar, Nonsense, and Imagination in Philosophical Investigations, 243-315*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2007, especially chapter 4.

[330] Bauer, Thomas.. Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams. Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2016, especially chapter 7, 'Sprachernst und Sprachspiel', pp.224-267.

[331] Bauer, p.267.

> is not sharp a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace a picture that is not sharp by one that is? Isn't one that isn't sharp often just what we need?
>
> Frege compares a concept to a region, and says that a region without clear boundaries can't be called a region at all. This presumably means that we can't do anything with it. — But is it senseless to say "Stay roughly here"? Imagine that I were standing with someone in a city square and said that. As I say it, I do not bother drawing any boundary, but just make a pointing gesture — as if I were indicating a particular spot. And this is just how one might explain what a game is. One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way. — I do not mean by this expression, however, that he is supposed to see in those examples that common feature which I – for some reason – was unable to formulate, but that he is now to employ those examples in a particular way. Here giving examples is not an indirect way of explaining — in default of a better one. For any general explanation may be misunderstood too. This, after all, is how we play the game. (I mean the language-game with the word "game".) (PI §71)

As Wittgenstein remarks, the clarification of a murky picture consists not necessarily in making it less murky, at the expense of losing the richness of its ambiguity (PI §71). And in practical contexts it is often enough to make a vague gesture without drawing exact lines of definition. As such, the conceptual clarity that Wittgenstein's method is working towards does not always require exact definitions. This is useful in order to clarify the murky – certainly 'not sharp' – pictures that are central to Graf's *Die Freunde der Freunde*. Wittgenstein's method does not leave us with a murky picture of ambiguity or a helplessly relativistic 'everything goes'. Instead, by outlining different ways of seeing the film's murkiness, different ways of understanding the film can be clarified. My argument for different conceptions of photography and film along different uses made explicit in the film's story already exemplify such *film language-games*. And this reconsideration of the most simple elements of the film's style are necessary in order to understand what Graf is up to, for the film itself outlines *various* aspects of film storytelling. It shows how film cannot simply be reduced to either one, but it clarifies this irreducible richness by using *different tools of reduction and abstraction* and positioning them next to each other within the film. These different ways of reducing the ambiguity are useful as grammatical clarifications. Through seeing language-games in such a broader methodological context, it can also be seen in Graf's film how he is able to flexibly switch between different language-games (sets of grammar), without having to decide between them *in general* but only for *particular purposes*. Just because Graf commits to the realistic look of a video camera, he is not automatically committed to abstain from thinking about the fantastic and about the

ghostliness of the appearance of shapes on film itself.[332] Equally, just because Graf's use of genre rules is liberated and playful does not make his use less committed to these genres. As such, film language-games, thus understood, can clarify how Graf's use of genres should not be understood as ironically distanced, or as a form of postmodern 'quotation', but opens up the necessary 'play' in going on with genre filmmaking that is required to fully develop the potential of the kind of film craftsmanship that is typical of genre films for his present needs.

The critical aspect of the language-game method consists in demanding a practical justification for philosophical hierarchies. As Kuusela points out, it can make sense to use hierarchies as part of a Wittgensteinian approach, e.g. by thinking of essences of a particular concept as being more relevant than certain inessential particulars.[333] However, these hierarchies need to justify themselves by doing a job in relation to the particular problem that this conception is meant to solve. What is essential about an abstract concept is not essential on a super-level 'in the world', but it is essential in a particular mode of presentation – and this mode of presentation serves practical purposes in actual life. Language-games are a usefully flexible way of approaching philosophical problems, because they methodically investigate what is essential for a particular need, and what alternatives there might be, and they leave open the option of switching from one language-game to another to address the 'real need'.

To focus on the 'Spiel' of films, in the sense of 'Spiel' ('play') in the context of engineering, allows us to point out how different groups are involved in playing different language-games with a film. A narrative film is designed in such a way that it encourages the viewers to play various language-games in the process of viewing it. And the exact way (or ways) in which the film does this can be analytically shown. As such, discussing the language-games within which a film (or scene, etc.) make sense, or discussing the language-games in which a film visibly participates (such as the shared practices of genres), can integrate and bring together various aspects of Wittgenstein's method discussed so far: it brings into view the status of rules, as well as the uses and limits of group definitions, and it highlights the enabling character of certain conventions and institutions without uncritically accepting any general claims of normativity (it ties normativity to pragmatic needs, so to speak).

Thus understood, the language-game method can be (re-)discovered as a method for gaining agency before an inherited (biographical) background: for acknowledging the inherited possibilities of the situation the filmmaker finds herself in and discovering or inventing new possibilities. That is the creative aspect of Wittgenstein's method, which the study of genre films, and specifically Dominik Graf's films, can reveal. I have tried to offer descriptions of film language-games by pointing to iconographic traditions, other films that can be seen as thematically connected, and the reference to standard

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[332] Cf. for a discussion of various instances of Graf's films reflecting on the similarities between shapes on film and ghosts and their connection to mirrors in Graf's film style: Chris Wahl. 'Stilistische Muster in den Filmen von Dominik Graf. Off-Kommentar, Zwischenbild, Freeze Frame und transparente Reflexion'. In Wahl, Abel, Jockenhövel, Wedel 2012, pp.254-266.

[333] Kuusela 2008, pp.221-223.

situations (which, I take it, might themselves be explored in terms of filmic language-games: regular uses of certain signs for regular situations, which allow for variation according to the actual needs of a particular situation). As a next step, I now turn to discussing unsubtleties in Graf's style as grammar, insofar as to show how fantastic and popular modes of filmic storytelling offer important contributions, even though they do not make constative statements of facts at all.

5.6. How things might be otherwise: Thinking about alternatives with language-games

Die Freunde der Freunde is concerned with filmic realism in both appreciative and critical ways: it shows both its possibilities and its limits. By addressing realism, Graf also reinforces a model of moving freely between, and *combining*, different modes of presentation, mixing their grammar when appropriate – in this way providing examples for looking at film that question the dogmatism of the assumption that films have to be 'realistic' in the narrow sense of merely depicting similarity to pre-existing facts. Diamond provides an argument to see Wittgenstein if not as a 'realist' then as endorsing a 'realistic spirit', which does not require him to embrace empiricism in the way (philosophical) realism typically does.[334] Her essay 'Realism and the realistic spirit' lists Wittgenstein's various remarks on 'realism', a term he uses both in philosophical and non-philosophical ways. Realism (in everyday ways of speaking, not in the philosophical sense), Diamond reminds us, is usually contrasted in various ways with such terms as magic, myth, fantasy, and superstition.[335] She presents the way in which a realistic spirit is adapted by philosophers to get rid of distorted views – including philosophical fantasies that present themselves as 'realism' but which only make distinctions that cannot have any actual usefulness.[336] This returns the discussion to a point that I started to explore at the end of chapter 3: if philosophy is to properly provide clarity in thinking, it requires rigorous honesty, courage, strength and humility – which Wittgenstein outlines as philosophical virtues, according to Citron.[337] Diamond's realistic spirit is concerned with not deceiving oneself, of which Wittgenstein notes: 'Nothing is as difficult as not deceiving oneself' (CV, p.34). Now we can ask: does Graf's use of distortion of film material, especially the distortion through generic patterns of storytelling (use of standard situations and appeal to stereotypical genre patterns), stand against the realistic spirit of non-deceptive honesty? A quick first answer, typical of critics of genre film, would be that the distortion of the film models a distorted way of looking at the world that is then confused with how things actually are.[338] But the conflation of genre film, or fantastic narrative elements, with

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[334] Diamond, Cora. *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991.
[335] Diamond 1991, p.40.
[336] Ibid., p.43.
[337] Citron, Gabriel (2018). *Wisdom, Humility, Courage, & Strength: Later Wittgenstein on the Difficulties of Philosophy and the Philosophical Virtues*. Forthcoming.
[338] Cf. the Altman quote at the beginning of this section about ideological critics.

self-deception is itself deceptive. It is necessary to investigate the actual use of the fantastic to make a qualified judgement. Genre patterns often do not so much replicate a pre-existing reality as present alternate versions of it. But rather than worry about this basic fact, it would be more to the point to ask if the use of genre patterns and such non-realistic elements as supernatural visions and the appearances of ghosts and miracles have to be taken to be *dishonest*. I am not asking whether they have to be taken as lies, which would make a further step, namely asking if the dishonest presentation is wilfully directed at the audience in order to distort their view of what is actually the case. Criticism of film as deceptive needs to make sure that it is not itself based on bad faith and a suspicious attitude that undermines thinking clearly. A more precise argument against genre filmmaking, and specifically the use of elements of the fantastic, involves the claim that the mode of presentation of genre films can be taken as a form of *escapism* – one variety of dishonestly avoiding facing the facts. Literary scholar Adam Roberts takes up this argument but shows that it is simplistic, although he agrees with the critics of the fantasy and science fiction genres that escapism can be problematic when it amounts to a refusal to face unpleasant facts. According to Roberts, many defenders of fantastic modes of storytelling are not quite radical enough to counter the accusations against escapism. Roberts argues that the apparent choice between realism and escapism omits a relevant alternative that is still neglected by those who defend escapism as itself a positive, liberating concept.

> Art is about modes of engagement with the world, not modes of avoiding it. Escapism is not a very good word, actually, for the positive psychological qualities its defenders want to defend; it is less a question of breaking one's bars and running away (running wither, we might ask?); and more of keeping alive the facility for imaginative *play*, which only a fool would deny is core to any healthy psychological make-up. [...] What is wrong with Art that insists too severely on pressing people's faces too insistently against the miseries of actual existence is not that we should not have to confront Darfur or Iraq, poverty or oppression; it is that such art rarely gives us the imaginative wriggle-room to think how things might be improved, or challenged, or even accepted.[339]

Roberts addresses these distinctions between realism, escapism, and fantastic modes of imaginative play within a study of riddles, both in the work of Tolkien and across the history of English literature. Mulhall notes a certain convergence between his Wittgensteinian reflections on riddles and Roberts' study about the use of riddles in Anglo-Saxon literature and especially in Tolkien (I became aware of Roberts's work by reading the epilogue of Mulhall's book).[340] Roberts approaches the interpretation of art

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[339] Roberts, Adam. *The Riddles of The Hobbit*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.152.
[340] Mulhall, 2018, pp.128-131.

quite generally through riddling (comparable to hermeneutics): 'Roberts' view […] is that locating the context within which all of a poem's direct articulations make sense is typically a complex exercise of right judgement from case to case; and that once reached, the relevant solutions take us to phenomena—such as memory or love—that are very far from simple, and indeed whose lack of perspicuity is very often precisely what preoccupied the poet.'[341] The practice of riddling, as I said above, might be taken as a way of looking for the appropriate language-game – sometimes pointing to the need to invent a new language-game because there are not, so far, conventions for dealing with this new sort of puzzle.

Before concluding this chapter in the last section, I want to consider an aspect of Graf's filmmaking that is difficult to study, because it concerns the *films that he has not made*. Graf has attempted to make at least two science fiction films: an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's *Ubik* and *Der Golem*, with a screenplay by Günter Schütter based on the medieval saga.[342] The fantastic genres allow us to think about ways of living that are alternative to the ways we have grown accustomed to, and insofar they can be like language-games that invent forms of life with language in order to clarify how what we take most for granted need not be taken for granted. The fantastic genres are an extreme form of film not presenting a view of how things factually are – in *this* sense they are indeed unrealistic. So far, the fantastic streak of Graf's films has remained a more or less subtle tone, occasionally a theme or leitmotif, which is also present in *Die Freunde der Freunde* through the supernatural elements. Graf's most explicit foray into the fantastic is his bitingly sarcastic and violent crime drama *Polizeiruf 110: Smoke on the Water* (Germany, 2014), which also more explicitly than *Die Freunde der Freunde* attacks the limitations of film as a tool of control. Although that film still mostly can be considered a crime drama and police procedural, it projects and stretches the meaning of the concept 'crime drama' to an unusual degree. When we see parents implanting electronic chips into their children to track their location and masked policemen implanting such a chip into commissioner Meuffels, the film uses elements of the science fiction genre, speculating about technology that is not (yet) available. The use of available GPS technology is satirically exaggerated, and a historical development towards surveillance is extended into a dystopian vision that is not as simple as it might appear at first glance. Graf gives his film a subtle hint of a 'phildickian' style, situating his film in the stylistic neighbourhood of Philip K. Dick, with a similarly hallucinatory style and its themes of surveillance, police state, and power relations.[343] The resulting film is tonally uneven and unapologetically over the top. This, it appears to me, shows that even though Graf is enabled by the possibilities of the crime drama to playfully combine various genre elements, the *Polizeiruf 110* series is not a sufficient platform for the radicalism of imagining alternatives that Graf's interest in the fantastic here

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[341] Mulhall, 2018, p.129.

[342] This information is based on emails by Graf to me.

[343] Cf. Link, Eric Carl. *Understanding Philip K. Dick*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2010; especially pp.86/87 on 'phildickian' style and the themes of the police state and surveillance in P.K.D.'s work.

demands. This points ultimately not to limitations of the genre but to limitations of the German film industry, which is overly fixated on 'realistic' genres such as crime dramas. In comparison, *Die Freunde der Freunde* only subtly hints at the theme of surveillance, but it does share some of the hallucinatory ecstasy of *Smoke on the water*.

Figure 17: Masked policemen turn the house surveillance against the family of a German politician in Polizeiruf 110: Smoke on the Water *(Germany, ARD, 2014).*

I said that the concept of language-games as heuristic devices make grammar explicit by drawing attention to the regular activities into which language-use is woven and showing how the rules constituting meaningfulness are dependent of the form of our life with this language. Exploring what a properly Wittgensteinian approach to genre films would consist in, the focus on language-games reminds us of the ordinary practices involved in genre filmmaking with at least two liberating effects. First, we recognise that the limits of grammar in genre do not constitute limitations, which means we can – as filmmakers – continue to use the constitutive rules of genre without anxiety about supposed limitations that we would first have to get rid of before being able to say something in or through film. And second, it means that we are not limited, in the sense that we can indeed do new things, not in opposition to genre grammar but developing out of it. The powerful and challenging moments of Graf's films that have been taken to indicate that he 'transgresses' the elusive 'boundaries' of genre need not be considered 'outside of genre grammar', unless one wants to say that they are totally devoid of meaning and basically a filmic form of gibberish. Rather, in the cases discussed above, they are meaningful, and it is a form of riddling that he employs here. That means, following Mulhall's reading of Diamond, that we might draw an analogy here between seemingly nonsensical combinations of signs (riddles) and mathematical conjectures (as yet) without a proof, which might (yet) turn out to be nonsensical or meaningful depending on whether a proof is possible. Similarly, riddles depend on using the familiar signs in different ways, that is according to different rules and

therefore a different grammar. Let me now apply this to film viewing and filmmaking as two related activities of riddling.

5.7. Going on with criticism: The freedom only found in commitment

Film does not have to be conceived as necessarily committed to representation of a pre-existing reality, or to psychological, social, or aesthetic realism. Genre films are indeed free to embrace their own possibilities, and they can be no less committed and engaged in earnest concerns, social, philosophical, and aesthetic. *Die Freunde der Freunde* and *Smoke on the Water* explore film and photography as media and art forms embedded in human practices, our form of life with film. Their meaning cannot be separated from the actual practices of using them, and their uses have to be accepted as limited in order to understand them at all. The use of film solely as a tool of control does not respect these limits and limitations and ignores the way human actions cannot be reduced to their surveillable, recordable aspect without ending up losing and misunderstanding much of the potential of human interaction and cooperation. *Die Freunde der Freunde* moves on to play with more suggestive, dream-like, and fantastic uses of film, exploring ambiguities and the potential of speculating about what is not itself factual: the ghost appearances in the film bring into view the main character's poverty as a sort of hauntedness, despite his materialistic wealth. Georg is haunted by loneliness and the inability to develop fulfilling human connections. In this way, the film shows the inescapability and the vulnerability of relationships; *Die Freunde der Freunde* presents through the characters a perspicuous presentation of varieties of more or less dysfunctional approaches to dealing with this vulnerability.

The film does not 'manipulate' the audience into thinking that ghost appearances are 'factual' by playing with symbolism and dense and creepy atmosphere, evoked by the fogginess of the video image. It counters this very worry, wide-spread in German public discourse, as 4.1. has established, that it might be manipulative by 'showing its tools' so to speak. The use of the photographic image is a way to make explicit what film is able and unable to do. Similarly, as we have seen, Graf makes the relevance of surprising turns explicit by providing the prologue to *Er sollte tot.* The grammatical rules of both film as medium and genre film as a variety of more or less related modes of presentation with their very own grammatical rules and internal relations do not have to be conceived of as *hidden* at all, and so film and genre film do not have to be taken as manipulative if they make them explicit. More radically, the simplifications typical of genre films – the sketch-like characterisation of prototypical roles (the detective, the victim, the murderer, the posh school-boy) do not have to be conceived as bolstering unjust or harmful stereotypes but *can* be used as practical tools in storytelling, as Graf arguably does in his crime mysteries and even in *Die Freunde der Freunde*, when he and his co-writer Busch sketch Arthur as involved in crime. Graf's use of stereotype and simplification is not just practical but also works to *set up* a criticism of stereotypes and an exploration of a more open-minded encounter with persons taking such roles: The well-researched details of the everyday procedures of police in *Er sollte tot …* serve as a way of rethinking their work and roles. The encounter

with film and photography opens up ways of using filmic realism that does not need to exclude the fantastic (as in *Die Freunde der* Freunde) and can consider alternatives to the factual (as in *Smoke on the Water*).

On the level of the film reflecting on its own preconditions, the themes of perception, mirrors, and self-conscious mediality here do not lead into the dead ends of 'pure' self-referentiality, nor a kind of rationalistic self-distancing. Instead, the 'digital dirt', the masks, surfaces, and mirrors combine to give a sense of immediacy and rawness. The film thus builds an experience, in a way raw and 'immediate', not despite but *because* it highlights and *embraces* the limits of the medium in which the story and the performances are presented. The point of the film can now be taken *not* as pointing to something beyond the film, or as reproducing or representing it, or *hiding* 'it', but as creating and presenting an intellectual and emotional experience and challenge to the audience – relating to the world beyond the film but not reducible to this relationship. The sloppiness of the camera-work might be compared to the roughness and immediacy of rock'n'roll — a dirty, intentionally 'impure', unrestrained style that embraces the sensuality of the film material, the material of the bodies, and the material of space that the bodies move through.

I have assembled examples of different ways of using film within two films by Dominik Graf in order to provide a Wittgensteinian perspicuous presentation through the description of film language-games. They shine lights on different aspects of these films, and of genre filmmaking, challenging limiting preconceptions about film-viewing and film-making. As I hope to have shown, by discovering different aspects of a film, it is possible to rediscover the 'same film', i.e. without the film changing its material, in different ways. This offers the potential for going beyond the unnecessarily narrow generalised representational view and its associated problems and debates. This does not take anything away from the usefulness of describing films as representational in particular cases where it is appropriate. The problems the claims of representation raise certainly have to be discussed. Representation might be understood as a promise; the appropriate standard of measurement of a film's quality as representation then is to ask whether it fulfils its particular promise. But in regard to Graf's films the compulsiveness inherent in assuming that genre films *always and primarily have to* work as representations with a realistic grammar becomes both a hinderance to understanding his films, and a serious issue for his work, which, as we have seen, is impaired by such prejudices. Multi-aspectual presentation acknowledges what is right about the view of film as an industry with problems due to the serialised procedure of its making; it acknowledges that film storytelling involves aspects of illusion, which can be but need not always be a problem. I have tried to offer precise descriptions of grammatical rules of the films' uses of genre elements and the way in which these uses make quick and ready distinctions between 'genre film' and 'art film' problematic.

One might say that Graf acknowledges that his films involve an element of illusion, their being made in an industry that mostly remains unacknowledged within the narratives the films tell, their seriality, and both their similarities and dissimilarities to how things actually are – but he does not drive this self-reflection to the point where it would

become an indictment of film, or television, or storytelling *in general*. He merely acknowledges what might become problematic if it remained unacknowledged and then goes on to use the tools of film to speak about human relationships, dealing with loss of control and taking charge of one's own life as much as one can. As we have seen, his films involve such moments of reflection more or less subtly as part of their aesthetic style.

In *Die Freunde der Freunde,* Graf rejects even the initial, categorial distinction between 'high art' and 'popular genre film' and reads the novel by Henry James as a genre story. The adaptation moves freely, placing the story in a setting well-known and even rather personal to Graf and emphasising the supernatural or mystical elements of James' novella. The addition of the unsubtle crime subplot might be seen as another way of appropriating James' story – crime dramas are, after all, the genre that Graf has worked in most, and which he treats with the same respect as literary sources. In summary, the film uses both the source material (James) and digital video material in a playful but committed and *precise* way. The digital video image, often perceived as having a 'cold' and 'immaterial' look that stemming the low resolution of these early digital video images, is 'warmed up' by Graf's firm embrace of its flaws. In this way, Graf reminds us of the grammar of representation (through video) – and he clarifies that it is not limiting its user to mere 'representation of the factual' (as in aesthetic realism). Graf neither defends representation (through video) wholesale, nor rejects it. Instead, he accepts its limits, and by acknowledging them, he commits to them, opens it up for new uses, lives in it creatively. Storytelling is here presented and reflected upon not as comparable to a lie nor as approximating or mimicking a factual 'truth' – but a shared activity that involves aspects of these, which *thankfully* have limits. Factual truth still can be an aspect of filmmaking, and talk of aesthetic realism in filmmaking makes sense if it is taken to speak only about a part of filmmaking and film viewing (if appropriate limits are drawn, that is), without the normative tendency that puts realism *above* other ways of using film.

As a final step, I will connect my findings so far to the project of outlining a Wittgensteinian pluralistic approach to critical assessment of film in section 6.

6.

Conclusion

The larger point of this study is to say that describing films, and particularly genre films, using the Wittgensteinian method enables a multidimensional and open-ended, truly pluralistic — not relativistic — view of films. I hope to have shown the need of a more holistic way of describing the interactions of filmmakers, distributors, and audiences with storytelling conventions in (genre) films. At the same time, revisiting discussions on genre films in this way also contributes to a more flexible characterisation of Wittgenstein's philosophical project. Wittgenstein's method works as a creative method, useful for developing and critically evaluating creative projects — which means that Wittgenstein's method is concerned with not only academic 'questions of philosophy' but also questions of everyday life and the confusions that get in their way. Additionally, the thesis offers a uniquely Wittgensteinian response to the picture of a 'gap' between 'high art' and popular culture, and specifically popular genre films, along with the sorts of value judgements that go along with it. As such, this study is a contribution to genre film studies and film philosophy: it counters certain deterministic tendencies in film theory and genre theory by drawing attention to the limits of theory and offering a more open-ended alternative focused on the discovery of new possibilities of going on with film.
What is now left to do in this conclusion is to summarise and connect the threads of the argument of this study.

6.1. Summary and conclusions of the argument so far

The argument took as its starting point the prologue of *Polizeiruf 110: Er sollte tot…*, which led to a discussion of genre conventions and the difficulties that Dominik Graf has faced since he set out to make genre films in Germany in the 1980s. At least some of these problems turned out to be related to philosophical and conceptual worries about the status of genre rules and the question of whether a filmmaker who uses genre conventions should be considered as conformist. Wittgenstein's philosophical method turned out to offer a useful approach to these worries: not only does Wittgenstein discuss the status of rules and conventional, general assumptions ('pictures'), his method is also geared towards liberating thinkers and offer a way of thinking in which thoughts do not constantly bring themselves into question, as chapter 2 outlined. Chapter 3 discussed some objections to Wittgenstein's philosophy, especially concerning the use of Wittgenstein's method in the philosophy of culture, via a discussion of the Coen brothers' *A Serious Man* and Ethan Coen's Bachelor thesis on problematic tendencies in Wittgensteinian ways of doing philosophy. Chapter 4 then looked in detail at the use of Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance in genre theory and offered an alternative way of deploying his philosophical method in the discussion about genre films: rather than attempt to provide general and timeless

definitions of genres, Wittgenstein's method offers a way of integrating a variety of definitions into a multidimensional logical description of genres within concrete communities of practice. This insight led to a discussion of genre rules as genre grammar, which clarifies the status of genre rules and explains why genre rules need not be seen as restrictive and limiting and why the use of genre patterns need not be seen as conformist (in all cases). Chapter 5 finally looked at Graf's *Die Freunde der Freunde* as providing a critical reflection on the preconditions of Graf's own filmic storytelling, which allowed me to further explore how grammatical rules require limits and why grammatical limits need not be seen as limitations to what filmmakers can do with film. This in turn clarified how Wittgenstein's method encourages us to think not just about what is the case but also about how things — especially those that we take most for granted — might yet be otherwise.

The study has shown a way of relating the Late Wittgenstein's method to worries that regularly come up in relation to the use of conventional forms in filmmaking, and in this way offers a contribution specifically to the clarification of concepts in hermeneutics of genre films. The central findings might be summed up in this way:

Wittgenstein's method can be fruitfully used in film studies and film analysis even when there are no words involved. Further, Wittgenstein's method does not exclude cases where the emphasis lies not on unpacking 'meaning' but certain 'performative' aspects of film such as intensity, rhythm, or the notion of changing preconceptions through surprising subversions of expectation.

In terms of film criticism, Wittgenstein's 'objects of comparison' can clarify the standards of measurement for quality that a film establishes for itself: this is a form of grammatical investigation through the use of language-games as heuristic devices. In this way, Wittgenstein's method helps deflate unhelpful generalisations about 'high culture' and 'pop culture' which Wittgenstein himself was occasionally prone to accept when discussing art and films in private notes. Wittgenstein's private, and occasionally prejudiced, opinions need to be separated from a consistent use of his method.

Wittgenstein's method models an attitude of courageously revisiting one's own prejudices more honestly, without at the same time bringing everything one has thought so far into question. In this way, in Wittgenstein's method nothing gets lost or destroyed – it is not an iconoclastic method that replaces one picture with another picture or no pictures at all. Instead, by placing pictures next to each other as objects of comparison, the compulsive relationship between a person and a picture can be dissolved, and the picture is 'rotated' to its appropriate place. This method of facilitating 'thoughts in peace' offers the sort of stability that is a necessary precondition for taking a courageous and creative approach.

As a next step, I will summarise the use of grammatical investigation through language-games in relation to (genre) film philosophy.

6.2. The significance of my contribution to (genre) film philosophy

By clarifying the status of genre rules as grammar, and by clarifying sharply the limits of film theories as objects of comparison that are useful for bringing into view a certain

aspect of a film, Wittgenstein's method contributes to the conceptual clarity of film hermeneutics. The contribution of this thesis lies in clarifying a pluralistic approach to film criticism, sensitive to the kind of criticism that films themselves might offer in going on with their project: a form of critical self-reflection that is not self-undermining or self-distancing. I provided examples of studying the rules according to which films are meaningful as investigations of these films' grammar: by considering different ways in which a film (or a scene, or a moment in the film) might be used by a potential viewer, I provided film language games as heuristic devices of clarifying the potential for these films to be meaningful and forceful in various ways. As such, each film language game provides a standard of measurement of a film's quality, and by sketching multiple film language games, it is possible to see how different groups come to different judgements of a film's overall quality. Whether a judgement of a film's quality can in the first place be correct or incorrect (rather than muddled, confused, nonsensical, or itself working as a grammatical statement of the rules according to which we can estimate quality) then depends on its normative grammar. I argue that by using Wittgenstein's language-games as a methodological tool, three levels of normative discussion about 'better' or 'worse' films need to be distinguished. Firstly, the discussion about films' qualities needs to take into account the varieties of grammar according to which films are and can be used and according to which films are meaningful in different ways to different groups (this kind of analysis highlights a film's *potentials* for being meaningful in various ways). Secondly, a grammatical investigation can reveal a film's intrinsic standards for assessing quality by clarifying the film's 'project': what sort of consequences (emotions, change of attitude in the audience) does the film aim for? Following from this rule, it becomes possible to judge a film's qualities according to its own standards of success and failure. And thirdly, one does not need to accept these standards as the ultimate standard for criticism, but it is possible to relate the film's grammar to my own sets of questions. Since I take myself to be following Wittgenstein's method in sketching these three levels of discussing the qualities of film, neither of these levels involves the acceptance or mechanical application of dogmatic theories about the qualities of all films, but instead the very point of this approach is to draw attention to the need for acknowledging the particular needs inherent in critically describing, estimating, and judging the merits and problems of a particular film. The consequences of this particularist and pluralistic critical approach involve the need to re-evaluate quick and ready distinctions between 'high art' films and 'popular genre films', and ultimately it shifts the focus of the critical debate towards making personal and practical changes, as I will now argue in a final step.

6.3. Making progress with Wittgenstein and popular genre film

The thesis as a whole has argued that it is indeed possible to make progress with Wittgenstein's method in popular genre film: by clarifying the conceptual grammar of genre film, generalised theoretical worries about determinism, conformism and unfair generalisations through stereotypes can be made more precise. By drawing limits to

generalisation we are able see that there is space for filmmakers and film scholars going on with popular genre film in some ways that avoid problematic pitfalls and dead ends.

In regard to what it means to make progress with Wittgenstein, reading Wittgenstein with Graf and the Coen brothers in mind helps to clarify what it means to go beyond some of the dead ends outlined in chapters 3 and 4. Graf, the Coens, and Wittgenstein are all interested in posing a challenge – to themselves, but more importantly for the interests of this study, to their respective audiences. We have already seen how Citron has shown that Wittgenstein thought that certain virtues were more important for a good philosopher than intelligence: courage, humility, strength, and honesty.[344] These virtues are important because philosophical ways of going wrong do not only arise from intellectual difficulties but also, and more importantly, according to Wittgenstein, from difficulties of the will.[345] As Citron notes:

> In the end, though, the only thoroughgoing defence against the unphilosophical deployment of the concepts of 'charm', 'philosophical vice', and the like, is the greater development of the philosophical virtues of character in oneself. The more honest and humble one is in the recognition of one's own philosophical shortcomings, and the more strength and courage one has in being able to face the possibility of one's own mistakenness, the less likely one will be to try to avoid genuine and substantive philosophical exchanges with one's interlocutors, and the less quickly one will therefore be tempted to shut-down substantive argument in *ad hominem* ways.
>
> Indeed, the real reason that it is imperative to acknowledge and investigate the ways in which misguided desires and temptations can lead us philosophically astray, is not at all so as to help us in the diagnosis of other people. Rather, it is so that we can be more conscious of the work that we must each do on ourselves in our practice and teaching of philosophy. As Wittgenstein said: "work on philosophy is actually closer to working on oneself " (BT: 86: 300).[346]

My investigation into the critical aspects of Graf's filmmaking has shown his work to be self-reflective in this sense: humbly and courageously probing his own attachments to patterns of technology, namely to storytelling techniques, the preconditions and preconceptions of his storytelling, in order to find new and playful ways of inheriting them or going on with them.

What Graf's diverse styles search for is an element of surprise, something that becomes clear only in hindsight, because it remained unseen, un-surveilled, un-predicted.

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[344] Cf. Citron 2018b.
[345] Cf. Kuusela 2008, p.284 on difficulties of the will as sources of philosophical problems.
[346] Citron 2018b, p.22.

> Films made by directors who attempt full control — planning — over everything that happens in the pictures — these films are for me overly conceptualised, and they are like glass coffins, stillbirths.[347]

As such, the status of genre patterns for Graf is, as we have already seen, not that of a plan that needs to (or should, or could) be followed in detail, but rather genre is for his films a 'spine' that enables his films to get made at all, despite this courageous openness to being contradicted or challenged by reality. Moreover, genre also works as a challenge to him: he never settles on a style but moves between genres, themes, looks, and techniques of storytelling.[348] Graf clearly leaves behind the worry about rigid and narrow genre rules so radically as to simply *go on with genre filmmaking* in a liberated way. I have argued that Graf's playful but committed way of making genre films might be characterised as a way of going on with filmmaking that *involves* (self-) criticism in a continuous, non-distancing way. To clarify how this way of going on may be considered a particularist form of making progress with Wittgenstein and popular genre film, I want to distinguish between two kinds of courageously critical thinking that can be found in Graf's work: the critical thinking that challenges comfortable automatisms and the critical thinking that prevents this same critical thinking from self-subversion.

The first approach to critical thinking is in line with thinkers such as Kracauer and Adorno, quoted at the beginning of chapter 4. Their questioning of genre film rests on the notion that genre films are *based* on institutionalised rules of filmmaking. Certain tried and proven techniques are repeated over and over in order to enable an industrialised commercialisation, which these thinkers characterise as the opposite of critically aware 'authentic' art. As these regular techniques and institutions become widely accepted, it takes courage to rethink them. In the films that I have analysed, this form of self-reflection can be found in terms of the films making explicit their inheritance of a background — in reflecting on film history, generic conventions and the use of surprise to challenge preconceptions. Looking more closely at the matter, what appears problematic about conventional banality in films, not just the popular genre ones but also in so-called 'art films', is a sort of reflex-like 'automatism': in filmmaking, an example would be when it is 'automatically' assumed, by producers or by critics, that the audience can be treated like automatons, that certain filmic or storytelling techniques will work in all cases, and that filmmaking is therefore merely a matter of going through the motions of a generic pattern, comparable to a drawing-

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[347] Graf 2010, p.62. 'Filme, deren Regisseure die totale Kontrolle, Planung anstreben über alles, was in den Bildern passiert – diese Filme sind für mich über-konzipiert und sind wie Glassärge, Totgeburten'

[348] Norbert Grob, *Dominik Graf,* in: *Filmregisseure*, edited by Thomas Koebner (Stuttgart: Reclam 2008), p.287. Some recurring elements of filmic style that he relies on despite his declarations of avoiding 'style' can nevertheless be found: cf. Chris Wahl. 'Stilistische Muster in den Filmen von Dominik Graf. Off-Kommentar, Zwischenbild, Freeze Frame und transparente Reflexion'. In Wahl, Abel, Jockenhövel, Wedel 2012, pp. 238-266.

by-numbers approach in painting.[349] But once more, we are in danger of generalising overly quickly: drawing by numbers is, in actual life, often used to learn simple forms of painting, and that is already more creative than a simple automatic repetition of a pre-existing pattern. An ability can be learned (under certain circumstances and with the right attitude). Similarly, making a film along the lines of a genre film pattern can have many more reasons than merely following genre rules *automatically,* or without consideration for the consequences, or unthinkingly, and it does not require the filmmakers to imagine the audience as automaton-like. To draw such a distinction about a filmmaker's work is ultimately speculative: there can be no undoubtable criteria that allow us to make the distinction between, on the one hand, a critically aware, 'honest' use of generic patterns and techniques and, on the other hand, uses of such patterns that are motivated by a cynical calculation that an audience will react to certain patterns in a certain way. There is certainly no reason to exempt 'art films' from the critical question of how the use of their techniques and stylistic patterns is motivated. It is not enough for a film to avoid being a genre film in order to be lauded for 'courage' and 'innovation': learning to get better, taking risks, and innovation can all take place in and through the use of conventional patterns and sometimes require them. As we saw in chapter 3, an argument can be made that a certain degree of stability is needed in order to learn anything at all, and indeed to decide what it would mean to 'get better' and make progress (in regard to a particular issue).

This points to the danger of critical thinking undermining itself. The very standards, criteria, and conditions that are used for the development of a critical stance can themselves be doubted. But Wittgenstein's method does not result in such a situation, in which anything goes or in which anything that actually works would need to be given up. It is both radically critical and radically protective and in this way enables a balanced critical approach.

In order to make this distinction clear, the worries about the patterns and industrial structures of genre filmmaking may helpfully be compared to a crutch: there is certainly a danger of becoming needlessly dependent on a comfortable crutch, even one that was originally required but that then would demand effort to leave behind. Surely, the criticisms of 'Papas Kino', the German genre films of the 1950s that are mostly uninterested in (aesthetic and social) realism, were at least in part inspired by an anger about filmmakers who were seen as not taking any risks and as dishonest and complacent. But there can also be conceptual simplicity, itself dishonest and overly comfortable, in the rejection of genre *per se.* Graf agrees with the filmmakers of the slightly older New German Cinema generation that complacency and dishonesty are to be shunned – the problem just never was genre in the first place. We can see him updating this critical view of stereotypes, complacency, and dishonesty in *Er sollte tot…*: We see that an unhealthy dependency on 'crutches' is what keeps Maria

[349] A similar criticism to automatism in the process of creating dramatic art be found in Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968: Brook's criticism of 'dead theatre' clarifies precisely how a stale version of conventionalism leads to a dead end in the making and reception of art.

entangled in crime. It takes strength and courage for her to face her own responsibilities — a self-assessment, which then allows her to become (more) independent. Equally, filmmakers constantly relying on the same genre techniques and patterns might indeed shy away from taking risks and from seeking a genuinely surprising, or genuinely appropriate form for their story (appropriate according to its themes, potential, and aims). There can be no general rule here: films and filmmakers need to be studied in detail and their efforts may be discussed in terms of how courageous, honest, strong, and modest (i.e. adequate to their capabilities) their work is. As viewers we might similarly ask ourselves whether we choose to watch films because they help us or because they allow us to hide from what needs to be addressed in our lives. But again: I am not suggesting that this is a judgement that could be made for us in a general fashion. There may be very valid reasons for needing a comforting film that gives us the strength to honestly and modestly address problems elsewhere (and this, I take it, was the way Wittgenstein himself watched films). As Citron points out, Wittgenstein's method is ultimately aimed towards more honestly facing and taking responsibility for one's own limits.

As Citron briefly mentions, there is also the danger of being too proud to acknowledge one's *need* for crutches. Citron's example is taken from Thomas Merton's autobiography: Merton falls ill and chastises himself for being so weak that he immediately hides in bed; but demanding 'strength' in such an unforgiving, unkind, and useless way can quickly become destructive. Isn't this still conflating things? What Wittgenstein seems to address is an attitude of unflinching honesty that is necessary in order to produce good thinking (and creativity, i.e. good ideas). This may involve pain. But much hangs on the distinction, glossed over only briefly by Citron, between being ready to endure pain when necessary and seeking pain without need (i.e. pathologically hurting oneself). Not seeking comfort when one is ill appears to be a case of the latter. The sick person falls short of their duty of caring for themselves as well as for others. Such a craving for suffering, or for the dramatic staging of one's own suffering (for an audience that does not *need* to include any other onlookers than oneself), could be described as a dishonest and destructive impulse as well. This is relevant in regard to genre because there can be a similar tendency in filmmaking and film criticism: to reject genre filmmaking in a general way – or to reject any single genre, such as the contemporary German film landscape's rejection of fantastic genres, including science fiction, horror, and fantasy – means rigidly and dogmatically rejecting the filmic *tools* of these genres, the possibilities *enabled* by their grammar, and so this rejection can go along with dogmatically and puritanically limiting the possibilities of film. I think here, for instance of the self-imposed 'chastity' of the *Dogme '95* films, to which Graf's *Die Freunde der Freunde* was compared. I am not interested here in arguing for a rigid list of conditions under which minimalism might be beneficial and at what point it becomes harmful or a marketing ploy, but I mean to say that neither filmmakers nor critics are exempt from the ethical question of whether they reject ordinary tools and techniques in film because their project really needs them to do so or because this self-imposed 'poverty' only appears useful in a superficial way. So,

using the ordinary forms of genre can be as honest, modest, strong, and courageous as rejecting them: the pride of not accepting the 'crutches' (that I currently need) can *itself* a be 'crutch' to avoid the unpleasant realisation that I am dependent on tools, that I am vulnerable and limited.

My argument thus arrives at the point that, sometimes, it requires more courage and honesty to accept the crutch (the tools of genre filmmaking) than to reject it. In Graf's case, choosing genre filmmaking certainly meant to go 'the bloody hard way', but it was justified because it offered him the opportunity to grow as an artist, through commitment to learning and perfecting the humble craftmanship of genre film.[350] Graf's use of genre is neither the dishonest easy way nor the dishonest hard way (in a case when it is neither beneficial nor necessary).

What can be gained by clarifying what Wittgenstein calls 'the real need' is a clear hierarchy of priorities. Language-games, as heuristic devices, serve to remind us of *the need for which a technique or tool was developed*. (I here take genre patterns as well as industrial structures to be instances of technology: they are regular and institutionalised cultural techniques designed to deal with regularly recurring problems.) Herein lies the critical distinction: the language-game method *defends* the usefulness of technology, but it also sharply *attacks* the problematic tendencies in using a technology, namely the tendency of technology-users to develop unhealthy dependencies. In regard to the German structures of filmmaking, there is for instance the danger for an institution that it may become self-serving, i.e. that an institutional structure no longer gets used as a means towards an end but becomes an end in itself; but the consequence of this is not to seek the abolishment of institutions per se – which would be comparable to the rejection of 'crutches' per se, without regard to actual needs (cf. Graf's *Es werde Stadt*, which investigates the destruction of institutions that are vital for German filmmakers and arguably for democratic discourse). The language-game method in all these cases offers a way of developing critical feedback-loops that are rigorous but highly sensitive to any aspects that are relevant for a particular need, case by case. As such, it both stabilises ways of going on in practice and, by offering this stability *where it is needed*, also opens up the space and resources for innovation. Wittgenstein's method is very concrete about how a process of creative thinking with Wittgenstein works: it involves paying attention to preconceptions, but it also overcomes their limitations by *looking and seeing* what the real need is in particular cases, it opens up new options by considering alternatives and intermediate (real and invented) cases, putting them next to each other and breaking out of self-imposed rigid thinking, and imagining completely different forms of life, which help us think through what our real need is and how things would be different if our lifes and needs were different.

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[350] 'Wittgenstein used to say to me, 'Go the bloody hard way'; and he would write this in letters as well.' Rush Rhees, 'The Study of Philosophy', in his *Without Answers*, London, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1969, p.169. Also cf. Citron 2018b.

Graf might even be taken to go a step further than Wittgenstein in embracing the *need* to make mistakes: he is quite open about the flaws of his films and humbly chooses to work in a much less prestigious context than he could, and certainly less prestigious than Wittgenstein's speaking position as philosopher in Cambridge (i.e. German television and in particular the 'dirty' genre niche of the medium). This also involves forgiving oneself for making mistakes – such as the public failure of *Die Sieger*, after which Graf nearly gave up on filmmaking.[351]

This study has provided a discussion of Wittgenstein's method as a contribution to making progress with popular genre film. The progress consists in finding the right objects of comparison: it either makes positive change by dissolving a (philosophical) worry by organising facts well, or not, depending on particular circumstances. This is why it cannot be claimed in some general way that it will always 'work'. Insofar as Wittgenstein's method enables work on oneself its success depends on each person's particular actions in a particular situation. This brings the person back to the centre of consideration, rather than treating arguments (and films) like machines into which each person can be inserted in order to mechanically produce the same result.

[351] Graf, Dominik/ Körte, Peter: *Verstörung im Kino. Der Regisseur von Die Sieger im Gespräch mit Stefan Stosch über die Arbeit am Film*. Hannover: Wehrhahn 1998. Cf. Citron 2018b on Wittgenstein's failure to value the need for forgiveness.

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