One could imagine seeing human life in a film, or being merely allowed to observe life without participating in it. Anyone who did this would then understand human life as we understand the life of fish or even plants. We can’t talk about the joy and sorrow, etc. of fish.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Though hardly understood this way, Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was someone who thought about and with film and media. In the remark above, written in the late 1940s and posthumously published in Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, he turns to film as part of an investigation into the activities and concepts of thinking.1 Media of all kinds play a similar role in Wittgenstein’s writings, particularly in his later works. He calls upon painted and drawn images, photography, sculpture, telephones, telegraphs, musical instruments, and recording devices to help clarify a number of philosophical questions. In these instances, he describes the variable roles different media play in the broader conceptual landscapes of human life and provides finely detailed studies of myriad encounters between media, bodies, and thought. From 1929 to the late 1940s, a period co-extensive with his mid-to-late philosophy, Wittgenstein wrote dozens of extended commentaries on film, using it as a conceptual tool for investigating the various problems with which his work was concerned.2

*I am deeply grateful to D. N. Rodowick, Eugenie Brinkema, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Malcolm Turvey, Matthew Croombs, Sara Swain, and Olivier Creurer for their generous and invaluable help in responding to drafts of this article. Wittgenstein’s paragraph indentations have been modified to fit house style.


2. Wittgenstein’s love of the cinema is well known. For portions of his life, he went to the movies whenever possible, often daily. In his diaries, he paints a vivid picture of the ways in which film provided him both “rest for the mind” and gripping “food for thoughts & feelings.” See Ludwig
be an overstatement to call Wittgenstein a film or media theorist, I contend that his approach to film contains important insights, and that his remarks reveal particular instances in which moving-image media affected the possibilities for thought in the modern era. In recounting how individuals can and do think with film as a material framework, Wittgenstein demonstrates how cinema offered distinctions, conceptions, images, and problems to thought that were simply not available before film. And as the cinema remarks evince and explore, these ways of thinking do not remain neatly tied to cinema-focused thought but come to affect wider possibilities for thinking about time, space, perception, memory, and more. To be clear, cinema did not constitute a radical epistemic break for Wittgenstein—he gives cinema no preference over any other material or cultural form that participates in shaping what he calls the “grammar” or frameworks of our thought. Nevertheless, his writings on cinema track how film contributed, in a non-totalizing fashion, to reframing questions of human existence in new and different ways, as I will explore below.

Despite the recent increase in scholarship on Wittgenstein’s value for thinking about cinema, these film-focused writings have gone almost entirely unacknowledged in English-language scholarship on Wittgenstein.\(^3\) By synthesizing these remarks and contextualizing them within Wittgenstein’s larger thought, this essay will shed new light on important features of his thinking about skepticism, time, visual space, and what he calls “seeing aspects.” It will also bring forward this neglected instance of a philosopher thinking about film, reframing the broader history of the field of film and philosophy in the process. Such reframing follows from the central role one of Wittgenstein’s most important interlocutors, American philosopher Stanley Cavell, played in founding the field of film and philosophy.\(^4\) With works like *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971/79) and *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981),


4. On Cavell’s role in founding this field, see for example David Sorfa, “What Is Film-Philosophy?,” *Film-Philosophy* 20 (2016), p. 4. As Sorfa recounts, while Cavell’s writing and Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema* books mark the beginning of film and philosophy within professional academia, discussion is ongoing as to whether earlier instances of philosophically informed writing on film (which had been previously categorized as film theory) should be included under the umbrella of film and philosophy.
Cavell made a persuasive and influential case that Anglo-American philosophy should turn its attention to film. Given the significance of Wittgenstein to Cavell’s thought, the former has been deemed something of a grandfather to the field. However, the discovery of Wittgenstein’s cinema remarks recalibrates this picture, showing Wittgenstein himself to have been philosophizing with film decades prior to Cavell’s work. In turn, Wittgenstein’s writings on film reveal fascinating links with Cavell’s later claims. For example, Cavell argued in *The World Viewed* that film manifests the strong presence of skepticism in modern thought—in that it presents viewers with a world they cannot affect—and Wittgenstein’s cinema remarks find the Austrian philosopher exploring similar claims. As will be described below, Wittgenstein’s remarks trace film’s role in both perpetuating skeptical thought and exploring the possibilities it offers for clarifying or moving beyond skeptical thought.

Wittgenstein’s cinema remarks also hint at a different methodological approach for this field of film and philosophy, which has, to a certain extent, organized itself around the debate over whether film is subordinate to and merely illustrative of preexisting philosophies or whether it offers concepts and forms of thought in a manner equivalent to philosophy. Within these poles, scholars have moved between, on the one hand, reading individual films for their philosophical illustrations or self-proposed concepts and, on the other, developing philosophical claims about film’s nature and effects in order to address the medium’s ontological, ethical, affective, and aesthetic status. Against this backdrop, Wittgenstein stands out: He is comparatively uninterested in explicating film for the sake of understanding it, and his writings do not deal with the narrative, ideological, or stylistic aspects of cinema. He does not read specific films for their philosophical stances or expressed concepts, nor does he make metaphysical claims about the nature or workings of film. Instead, Wittgenstein traces how film (though not film alone) offers pictures, concepts, and questions to the ways “we” think. (I will address Wittgenstein’s use of this “we,” situating it as a crucial element of his idiosyncratic form of ordinary-language philosophy, later in the essay.) Wittgenstein’s method, which involves gathering examples of what we say when we speak about certain things, enables him to chart film’s presence in the grammars of thought.

Key to this method is the fact that Wittgenstein homes in on the material, variable components of the cinematic apparatus, whether these are projectors and screens, black-and-white and color images, or soundtracks and the celluloid film-

---


6. This is particularly interesting given that, to my knowledge, Cavell was not aware of Wittgenstein’s writings on film.


strip. Each of these components is shown to appear in and thus potentially clarify our ways of thinking. In this sense, Wittgenstein’s approach shares something with media-studies approaches that, in the wake of thinkers like Marshall McLuhan and Friedrich Kittler, analyze media’s “introjections into the structures of feeling and forms of life that constitute human subjectivity and collectivity.” In finding and describing these “introjections” of film, Wittgenstein takes film, as a constellation of media components, to be part of the material with which philosophy works or thinks. He aims to dispel or dissolve worrying philosophical problems, and he enlists his fine-grained, perspicuous descriptions of the material aspects of film in this project. In his provision of these detailed descriptions of the effects of media in the landscape of thought, and his thoroughgoing revelations of their contributions to philosophical concerns, Wittgenstein shows how an ordinary-language approach to cinema and related media points toward an exciting new avenue for studies of film and philosophy.

In the final sections of this essay I will argue that film is relevant for understanding Wittgenstein’s later ethical thought, as his ethics find value in doing what film can do—making an experience or concept available for a clarifying “change in aspect.” The conception of the “aspect-change”—wherein a transformation occurs in one’s perception of something but not in the thing itself—plays a supervening role in clarification, which is an ethical end in itself for Wittgenstein. To his thinking, ethical questions are interconnected with aesthetic ones, and the change in aspect becomes a linchpin of any transformation of one’s ethical-aesthetic ways of seeing. This analysis of the cinema remarks will draw out how the moving image, with its ability to make events available to be seen anew, can be understood as a model for Wittgenstein’s conceptions of ethics. In making this argument, I am less concerned with claiming that Wittgenstein was intentionally designing an ethical program around film than with drawing out connections and points of overlap between Wittgenstein’s enacted form of ethics and his understanding of film, revealing that—intentionally or not—his ethical approach aspires to work in a way similar to film. He wants to be able to show (rather than tell) his reader something, intervene in her way of seeing, and produce clarification by allowing her to see a situation or concept anew, opening up new ethical-existential possibilities in the process. Whether or not Wittgenstein’s considerations of film influenced his developing late ethical thought, film and its workings can now help to clarify Wittgenstein’s ethical aims.

Wittgenstein’s Film Remarks

While remarks on film can be found from his early notebooks until the end of his life, the densest grouping exists in the notebooks and related publications from the period of 1929 to 1934. Following the completion of the *Tractatus Logico-

Philosophicus (1921) in 1918, Wittgenstein had departed from the world of professional philosophy; he returned, however, to Cambridge and to philosophy in 1929. While lecturing at Cambridge as a fellow, Wittgenstein produced vast numbers of notebooks and typescripts. These works, most of which were compiled by others and published posthumously, are often categorized as constituting a transitional phase between his early and late philosophies; they include Philosophical Remarks (1975), written over 1929–30, Philosophical Grammar (1931–33/1975), and The Big Typescript (1932–33/2005). Though the cinematic remarks are concentrated in these works, they can be found through the late 1940s, and serve as evidence of Wittgenstein’s continued explicit attention to film. In his total oeuvre, there are approximately thirty “remarks,” or numbered separate sections, that take up film directly. About a quarter of these comments overlap with each other, often with important differences. This is because Wittgenstein’s method of composition involved reordering and rewriting his works in an unending circle, always trying and failing to find the perfection required for publication.

That Wittgenstein changed, extended, and occasionally abandoned the cinematic remarks over the course of writing the Remarks, Grammar, and Typescript material reveals much about the rapid shifts taking place in Wittgenstein’s thought during these years. The earlier philosophy of the Tractatus took as certain that there must, for example, be a connection between language and the world, and that it was this connection that enabled sentences to give us a “picture” of the world. Wittgenstein’s later thought, however, repudiated both the search for metaphysical systems and the assumption of their existence. His later thinking instead concerned itself with “grammar.” Grammar, a difficult term in his thought, names something like the dynamic collection of concepts that frame meaningful uses of language. As Cavell writes, Wittgenstein’s “grammar” consists of the answers that individuals would give about “what is said and meant” in a situation, or “how we conceive, what the concept is, [and] what counts as.” The term also overlaps con-

10. That the majority of Wittgenstein’s film-related remarks are clustered within his transitional works may go some way toward explaining the relative lack of scholarly attention to them: The film and media scholars who deal with Wittgenstein’s thought focus on either of the pillars of the Tractatus or the Investigations, and the philosophers who address the middle works have little to no disciplinary interest in Wittgenstein’s attention to cinema. For the two exceptions, see David Stern, “The ‘Middle Wittgenstein’: From Logical Atomism to Practical Holism,” Synthese 87, no. 2 (1991), pp. 203–26; Katalin Neumer, “Bilder sehen, Musik hören—Zu Wittgensteins Aufzeichnungen zwischen 1946 und 1951,” in Essays on Wittgenstein and Austrian Philosophy: In Honour of J. C. Nyíri, ed. János Kristóf Nyíri and Tamás Demeter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 245–74.


12. In asking questions about what we say in certain situations, Wittgenstein “is asking something which can be answered by remembering what is said and meant, or by trying out his own response to an imagined situation. . . . What do such answers look like? They will be facts about what we call (how we
ceptually with the notion of rules. As Wittgenstein writes, “Grammatical rules determine a meaning.” However, his understanding of rules is particular. He emphasizes that rules do not cause individuals to act a certain way: “Grammar . . . has somewhat the same relation to the language as . . . the rules of a game have to a game.” In other words, in understanding grammar to consist of rules, one should keep in mind that someone can play a game without fully understanding certain rules, without having learned them explicitly in the first place, without being able to remember or articulate them, or simply without achieving success in following those rules. As Wittgenstein writes, “Here the fundamental fact is that we lay down rules, a technique, for playing a game, and that then, when we follow the rules, things don’t turn out as we had assumed. So that we are, as it were, entangled in our own rules.”

Wittgenstein thereby draws attention to a crucial function that the “rules” of grammar serve, even as he emphasizes that when someone speaks meaningfully it is not because she is “operating a calculus according to definite rules.” The rules of a game, or the grammar of our language and thought, are a structure we can turn to when we want to better understand something. If we have become entangled in the rules, or are otherwise unclear, we can turn to what Wittgenstein calls a grammatical inquiry, in which one investigates the “possibilities of phenomena” by calling to mind “the kinds of statements that we make about phenomena.” Grammar, outlining the conditions for experience and understanding, escapes individuals’ totalizing comprehension (as Wittgenstein notes, such inquiries will not result in “a final analysis of our linguistic expressions, and so a single completely analysed form of every expression”). People are thus led into confusions and temptations that pain them. Philosophy then becomes, for Wittgenstein, a therapeutic endeavor in which specific occurrences of these confusions are clarified and temporarily alleviated. Aiming to provide such clarification,
Wittgenstein’s mid-to-late works consist of thousands of investigations into bound-
ed, determinate instances of language use and their linked forms of life and mate-
rial existence.20 Through these investigations, and his accompanying refusal to
draw grounding or first principles from these analyses, Wittgenstein unfolds the
critique that our beliefs in such metaphysical first principles, as well as our feeling
of desperation over our inability to discern them, arise from different misunder-
standings of the logical grammars of language and experience. Such misunder-
standings are unavoidable, as they arise from the nature of language; however,
they are further compounded when we take language as separable from its world
and the context of its use.

These well-known aspects of his later thought have, problematically, con-
tributed to Wittgenstein’s reputation as strictly a philosopher of language, a
thinker associated solely with the linguistic turn. This misconception has under-
determined the promise of his methods and philosophical approach for thinkers of
media. While Wittgenstein is concerned with the structures and natures of lan-
guage, his later philosophy sets out to abolish the idea of language as dissociable
from or understandable without existential forms of life. ("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."21) His focus is a world of daily needs and uses, of
sonic, visual, and tactile experiences, and of behaviors and modes of life. This
focus very much includes media, broadly defined. As will become clear below, by
training his thought on the conceptual landscape in which he found himself,
Wittgenstein simultaneously tracked media’s role in available forms of life and its
presence in wider grammars. Given that Wittgenstein wrote about many different
types of media in his investigations, the cinema remarks should not be taken as
idiosyncratic or as the most extensive discussion of a medium or art form within
his work. Nevertheless, his discussions of cinema do show that Wittgenstein is,
through his method of conceptual clarification, shining a light on aspects parti-
cular to cinema. These remarks draw attention to the ways in which facets of modern
thought only make sense in light of cinema. Modern individuals share a picture of
the world in thought that, while of course not free from the presence and effects
of other media, could not have been drawn without cinema. Wittgenstein’s investi-
gations of cinema’s fictional worlds, projectors, screens, filmstrips, soundtracks,
and black-and-white images thus help to illuminate this picture.

20. The meaning of the term “form of life” is a much-debated question in Wittgenstein scholar-
ship, as Wittgenstein uses it only five times in Philosophical Investigations and, in line with his broader
anti-essentialist approach, never provides a definition for the term. As Anat Biletzki and Anat Matar
summarize in their entry on Wittgenstein for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in the plural,
"forms of life can be understood as changing and contingent, dependent on culture, context, history,
etc.; in the singular, “it is the form of life common to humankind,” with language being a primary
example. In the late Wittgensteinian spirit of avoiding generalities and unchanging definitions, I take
the term to encompass both possibilities. See Anat Biletzki and Anat Matar, “Ludwig Wittgenstein,” The

Philosophical Remarks: *The Early Writings and the Skeptical Picture of Visual Space*

Upon returning to philosophy in 1929, Wittgenstein concerned himself with, among other things, the question of visual space, and it is here that film becomes a primary point of discussion. In *Philosophical Remarks*, Wittgenstein discusses both visual space and the related notion of “immediate experience.” According to a then prominent strain of philosophical thought, immediate experience is made up solely of one’s visual space, one’s private sense data, and one’s memories, all presumed to exist in the delimited present. In order to analyze this conception, Wittgenstein introduces the filmstrip and film projector into his investigation:

> If I compare the facts of immediate experience with the pictures on the screen and the facts of physics with pictures in the film strip, on the film strip there is a present picture and past and future pictures. But on the screen, there is only the present.

What is characteristic about this image is that in using it I regard the future as pre-formed.

> There’s a point in saying that future events are pre-formed if it belongs to the *essence* of time that it does not break off. For then we can say: something will happen, it’s only that I don’t know what. And in the world of physics we can say that.  

In this and related remarks, Wittgenstein uses film to picture two different uses of the word *time*. The first usage concerns the time of visual space—what he calls “phenomenal time” or “immediate experience”—which he here connects with film’s projected image on the screen. The second usage refers to what he terms “physics time,” or the temporality of the natural world. This physics time, figured as the filmstrip, is the time of a world that is not known a priori. Rather, it is fathomed through hypotheses, tested against and within predictable, homogenous time: a “line” of time that does not “break off” but rather reliably extends from the past into the future.

As the remark continues, Wittgenstein further emphasizes the role of the film projector and screen in the migration in broader thought of one concept of time into the other:

> If someone says, only the present experience has reality, then the word “present” must be redundant here. . . . For it cannot mean present as opposed to past and future.—Something else must be meant by the word, something that isn’t in a space, but is itself a space. That is to

The present we are talking about here is not the frame in the film reel that is in front of the projector’s lens at precisely this moment, as opposed to the frames before and after it, which have already been there or are yet to come; but the picture on the screen which would illegitimately be called present, since “present” would not be used here to distinguish it from past and future. And so it would be a meaningless epithet.23

Film, in other words, highlights a confusion of grammars in the use of the word present in relation to phenomenal time. In Wittgenstein’s analysis of the way people talk in this particular instance, the filmstrip has overtaken the projected image as the “picture” for understanding phenomenal experience. In the filmstrip picture, there is a time that could be called the “present” that one experiences and that would be marked on each “side” by the past and the future. These vaguely or potentially physical entities of past and future, existing somehow and somewhere, provide the boundary, constantly being redrawn, with one’s “immediate experience.” But Wittgenstein wants to highlight the misapplication in this picture. To his thinking at this point, when an individual talks of the time of phenomenal experience, she is speaking of the “possibility of change” and the “possibility of motion.” These are logical possibilities that characterize and constitute the nature of this space, rather than exist in a space. And time as the potential for change is not the same thing as the time that “flows” unidirectionally in the pictures of the time of physics or the filmstrip.24

Above, I characterize Wittgenstein’s use of film as an instrument for visualizing two different uses of the word time. This language may lend itself to the idea that he uses film only as a hermeneutic or explanatory device throughout the cinematic remarks. Though this is true to a certain extent, his thinking of film is not limited to this. His remarks also attest to the ways in which film has emerged into wider modes of thought. A brief recounting of some aspects of Wittgenstein’s thought will help to explain this claim. In his influential essay “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” Cavell argues that Wittgenstein’s movement between an individual speaker and the “we” in his writings plays a crucial role in understanding his thought. As Cavell shows, Wittgenstein’s understanding of language is universally distributed, in that speakers of a language all have an equal claim to knowledge of that language. At the same time, language is also irrevocably inflected by differential

and personal forms of know-how, or what Cavell calls self-knowledge.\textsuperscript{25} In this sense, when Wittgenstein or anyone else speaks about what “we” say, he is necessarily projecting from the position of self-knowledge to the position of a wider community of language speakers. This is not a false move but a perfectly reasonable if potentially fallible one, open to possible criticism. To put it differently: A speaker does not need empirical evidence about what groups of speakers say or have said in order to make a claim about what they will say in a certain situation.\textsuperscript{26} The speaker herself is a member of that group—she takes her practices, history, and understanding as a source of evidence in speaking about what “we” do.\textsuperscript{27} As Cavell puts it: “The claim that in general we do not require evidence for statements in the first person plural does not rest upon a claim that we cannot be wrong about where we are going or about what we say, but only that it would be extraordinary if we were (often).”\textsuperscript{28} In other words, thinking and speaking on behalf of a “we” is a normal and even expected move within human forms of life.

It thus matters that Wittgenstein uses the “we” in the film remarks and not the “I” or other individual pronouns. In his writing, Wittgenstein takes his own sense that film provides new ways of speaking about and picturing experience to be representative of the way a larger section of humanity thinks and talks. For example, one of his remarks states, “We imagine that experience is like a film strip, and that we can say: This picture and no other is in front of the lens at this moment.”\textsuperscript{29} His use of the “we” here and throughout contends that these cinematically inflected modes of thought are shared by others. Of course, certain individuals may not agree with a particular claim, thus exempting themselves from the scope of Wittgenstein’s projected “we.” To put it differently, Wittgenstein’s use of the “we” constitutes evidence, in the special sense Cavell describes, that film was operative in wider thought at this moment in the twentieth century. At least some of Wittgenstein’s readers would find the ways of thinking with film he describes to be legible or recognizable—a fact that extends and reiterates his self-gathered evi-

\textsuperscript{25} The fact that individuals regularly claim authority to certain understandings of language based on personal experience is what leads necessarily to disagreements between individuals about meaning and language use. See Cavell’s essays “Must We Mean What We Say?” and “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy” in Must We Mean What We Say?, as well as Stephen Mulhall’s lucid discussion of these subjects in Stanley Cavell: Philosophy’s Recounting of the Ordinary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), particularly pp. 1–21.

\textsuperscript{26} When Wittgenstein asks, “What would we say?,” he is not “asking just any question about the use of language. He is, in particular, not predicting what will be said in certain circumstances, not, for example, asking how often a word will be used. . . . (Those questions can, of course, be asked; and their answers will indeed require ordinary empirical methods for collecting sociological data)” (Cavell, “Availability,” p. 64).

\textsuperscript{27} I am drawing on Mulhall particularly here. Cavell, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{28} Cavell, “Must We Mean,” p. 14.

\textsuperscript{29} Wittgenstein, The Big Typescript, p. 351. The next line of the remark states, “but only in a film can one talk about a picture that is present at this moment; not when one moves from physical space and its time to visual space and its time.”
dence. In remarks I will explore more fully below, Wittgenstein also claims that cinematic elements—the filmstrip or the projection mechanism, for example—“mislead us,” and that particular confusions arise from the way “we are using” film in our thinking. These confusions simply could not exist—nor would Wittgenstein’s attempts to dispel them be coherent—if cinema had not emerged into a corner of our grammar, no matter how small that corner might be. Put another way, cinema’s presence within grammar follows from the fact that we can think by way of cinematic figures in certain instances, not that we must. Of course, cinema is always only one element in Wittgenstein’s analyses, and so its presence in his thought should not be overstated. Nevertheless, his remarks lay claim to the fact that the emergence of cinematic media marked the possibilities for wider thought in a consequential way, even if it was not unique in this regard.

Returning to Wittgenstein’s remarks on visual space will further elaborate cinema’s role in his and perhaps our thinking. Within the semi-metaphysical approach of the Remarks, Wittgenstein conceives of visual space as an object, and an object to which the apparatus of the film projector offers a clarifying picture. While his conception of visual space as an object will change dramatically, Wittgenstein’s early discussions of film and visual space also provide a window onto an important aspect of his ethical thought. As Cavell’s interlocutory readings contend, Wittgenstein’s ethical concerns ground themselves in the problematic of skepticism, or the mode of thought in which one doubts that one can know the world or others with certainty. In this vein, Wittgenstein’s remarks about cinema’s picture of two times serve as a rejoinder to the skeptical mindset. Here, Wittgenstein targets spatialized conceptions of the present in which a delimited moment is understood to “contain” a person’s sense-data, memories, and consciousness “within” it. Such conceptions inevitably provide support for solipsistic and skeptical forms of thought. This is because a spatially contained and “independent” moment seems to leave all that it “contains” subject to a delusion or some other obscuration of the truth. The existence of the world becomes uncertain, and this lack of certainty pulls the skeptic ever further from that world. While skepticism is largely discussed as a problem of epistemology—how one can know the world with certainty—it is also, in this sense, an ethical problem. Skepticism’s ethical ramifications lie in this loosening of one’s relation to the world. The stakes of an individual’s engagement with an “uncertain” or “unreal” world are altered from her engagement with the world, just as the stakes of her engagement with another person are altered when—as in the “problem of

30. Cavell’s work has been instrumental in excavating this picture of Wittgenstein as a philosopher concerned with skepticism. See Stanley Cavell, The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Cavell, Must We Mean What We Say?

31. That skepticism presents one of Wittgenstein’s concerns in this set of remarks on film and visual space comes to the fore in a remark late in the discussion: “Does it now make any sense to say that I could have been deceived by a demon and what I took for a description wasn’t one at all, but a memory delusion? No, that can have no sense. A delusion that, ex hypothesi, cannot be unmasked isn’t a delusion.” Wittgenstein, Philosophical Remarks, p. 104.
other minds”—she feels that she cannot be “certain” of another’s status as a feeling, thinking human being.\textsuperscript{32}

In regards to the question of cinema’s relation to skepticism, it is telling that Wittgenstein reported that the thought of “the cinema lamp” first occurred to him during a discussion with Gottlob Frege in 1911 on the subject of René Descartes’s formulation of the isolated subject position of the \textit{cogito ergo sum}.\textsuperscript{33} In Remarks, Wittgenstein’s investigations into visual space are accompanied by a push to challenge the related concept of visual space’s private, subjective “owner.”\textsuperscript{34} A conceptual descendent of the \textit{cogito ergo sum}, this figure of the isolated subject, seemingly unable to share his or her private senses or to access others’, would continue to play an increasingly important role in Wittgenstein’s thinking. At the moment of writing the Remarks, Wittgenstein’s 1911 cinematic epiphany thus offered him two things: First, it presented a materialization of two different times, each with different qualities and structures. Second, it provided a way to show how skeptical anxieties about the present follow from a confusion of qualities across those two times, as present experience becomes like a spatial container or like a bordered frame in a filmstrip. Wittgenstein uses cinema here and in other remarks to show how film’s material structure leads to and supports such a confusion in individuals’ thinking, enabling distrust of their present experience. He employs cinema to reveal and clarify this skeptical picture, in which one’s “immediate experience” is thought to be wholly private and excisable from time. In his reminder that individuals exist in a shared, phenomenal present—not in a “present moment” isolated or isolatable from a world—Wittgenstein thus puts cinema into the service of an ethical aim.

At this point in his developing thought, however, film also gives to Wittgenstein a tantalizing picture of visual space as a \textit{thing}—a thing that seems to have characteristics, an essence, and an existence—and he is unable to find a way out of the picture he hopes to draw out and dissolve for others. A few pages later in Remarks, Wittgenstein turns to a related investigation. This is his interest in finding or building the phenomenological language necessary to “represent the phenomena of visual space, isolated as such.”\textsuperscript{35} In constructing such a language, he hopes to circumvent the inevitable move into that other time, the time of physics.

\textsuperscript{32}. For a further discussion of the problem of other minds, skepticism, and Wittgenstein, see Davide Sparti, “Responsiveness as Responsibility,” \textit{Philosophy and Social Criticism} 26, no. 5 (2000), pp. 81–107, particularly pp. 85–90.


\textsuperscript{34}. In a remark in this section that hints at Wittgenstein’s forthcoming turn to grammar, he writes of his developing sense that the “subject” of visual space is an effect of the language and concepts in play, not a metaphysically occupied “position”: “Even the word ‘visual space’ is unsuitable for our purpose, since it contains an allusion to a sense organ which is as inessential to the space as it is to a book that it belongs to a particular person; and it could be very misleading if our language were constructed in such a way that we couldn’t use it to designate a book without relating it to an owner. It might lead to the idea that a book can only exist in relation to a person” (\textit{Philosophical Remarks}, p. 103).

\textsuperscript{35}. Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Remarks}, p. 98.
However, two issues present themselves: the fact that sentences necessarily unwind in and over time; and that they seem to use hypothesis, that staple of physics time, in their drawing from the past and looking to the future. Film seems to offer a possible solution to these problems:

I mean: what I call a sign must be what is called a sign in grammar; something on the film, not on the screen. . . .

With our language we find ourselves, so to speak, in the domain of the film, not of the projected picture. And if I want to make music to accompany what is happening on the screen, whatever produces the music must again happen in the sphere of the film.36

Here Wittgenstein links the time of the filmstrip to the shared temporalities of grammar, language, and music. He then goes on to work through the possibility, offered up by the picture of the filmic mechanism, of a connection—a relation of projection—between the seemingly exclusive realms of phenomenological experience and physics time. Wittgenstein’s question is whether one might be able to work backwards, as it were, from the “projected film image” of one’s experiences to reconstruct the “film strip,” and to thus reveal the “rules” of grammar operating in that time, which, through this relation of projection, guide the nature of one’s phenomenological experience:

It seems as if there is a sine curve on the film, of which we can see particular parts.

That is to say, what we see can be described by means of a sine curve on the film, when the light projecting it has been interrupted at particular points.37

In other words, for Wittgenstein, experience in the phenomenal time of visual space can be described by means of something on the filmstrip: A rule there outlines and causes, by way of projection, the shape of one’s experience here, if only one could imagine how to trace the light back.

The sense of Wittgenstein having hit a dead end in this particular investigation becomes quickly evident, however. This set of remarks constitutes the only extensive discussion of a cinema-related topic that Wittgenstein does not rework

36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 99.
and insert into later writings. In these post-Remarks writings, he moves from believing that one could create a logically perfect and totalizing structure (of metaphysics, of language) that would dissolve all philosophical problems toward another conception of philosophy. In his later thinking, the belief in and desire for there to be these sorts of explanations, rules, and structures become, themselves, the object of Wittgenstein’s concern and attention. Even at this earlier point of the Remarks, one feels Wittgenstein’s disappointment at his being held back from “entering into” visual space or immediate experience, of the failure of language to accompany him or us there, as if we were running our hand over a projected image and unable to break its skin and enter its proffered space. The picture of visual space as a thing ultimately reveals itself to be no prophylactic against the skeptical mind-set that Wittgenstein awakes to here. And to double the disclosure of skepticism in these remarks, one simultaneously feels Wittgenstein’s sense that neither is there perfect access to that other realm, the physical-time realm of grammar and the film projector. Rather, he writes as if we could only partially trace out aspects of that time and its systems of grammar by reviewing our experience of the film’s projected image in our heads (a concept whose importance will return below). In this phase of Wittgenstein’s cinematic thinking, with his assumption of an actual, ontological (rather than conceptual or grammatical) division between the time of visual space and the time of the natural world’s processes, the imagined person of his “we” feels at home neither in the projected image of visual space nor in the filmstrip of conceptual and physical time. Rather, to Wittgenstein’s thinking, we ourselves can exist in this picture of the film projector and projected image only as the light—in the projector and on the screen simultaneously, but never able to experience the one without the other, never wholly *within*.

The Big Typescript: Film Becomes Grammar

Wittgenstein’s remarks on film in *The Big Typescript*, written three years after the Remarks, highlight a dramatic shift in his thinking. Now, for example, visual space is no longer a thing:

> When we speak about visual space we are easily seduced into imagining that it is a kind of peep-show box that everyone carries around in front of himself. That is to say, in doing this we are using the word “space” in a way similar to when we call a room a space. But in reality the word “visual space” only refers to a geometry, I mean to a section of the grammar of our language.  

The clear referent for Wittgenstein’s mention of the “peep-show box” is Thomas Edison’s Kinetoscope, an early motion-picture exhibition device in which an individual spectator would privately watch a film through a peephole. Here, film no

---

longer presents an analogic relation to visual space. Rather, as Wittgenstein goes on to explain, the Kinetoscope and other filmic forms now lend themselves to the mistaken conception of visual space as a metaphysical substantive—as he puts it, they “mislead” us. They do this by making a picture available to wider thought: A viewer looks privately at something only she can see. Drawing from this picture, the common uses of the word *space*, and other aspects of grammar, people assign “thingness” to visual space. Film is not the only element shaping this conception, but it plays a role, and thinking about space in this way contributes to the frustration that we are not able to share or show “our visual space” to another person. This skepticism-supporting frustration guides the kind of philosophical inquiries Wittgenstein both engages in and addresses with this remark. A few sentences later, Wittgenstein notes,

> What is misleading us here is simply the simile of the peep-show or, say, a circular white disc that we carry with us as a projection screen, as it were, which is the space where the respective visual image appears. But the flaw in this simile is that it visually imagines the opportunity—the possibility—of a visual image itself appearing; for, after all, the white screen is itself an image. 39

In characteristic fashion, Wittgenstein thus dismantles the picture in which one could take the film projector and screen (the white disc) as the mirror of how one literally sees the world. The simile, he explains, presupposes the visual space it is meant to explain.

Wittgenstein’s shift away from metaphysics is even more evident in his reworking of the question of phenomenological language in this later work. In both *Remarks* and the *Typescript*, Wittgenstein writes of a film-like machine that could capture and then reproduce one’s sensory experiences. Here is the *Typescript* version:

> Phenomenological Language: the description of immediate sense perception without any hypothetical addition. If anything, then surely a portrayal in a painted picture or the like must be such a description of immediate experience. . . . Let’s even imagine that our sense perception is reproduced by creating a model for describing it, a model that, seen from a certain point, produces these perceptions; this machine could be set into proper motion with a crank drive, and by turning the crank, we could read off the description. (An approximation to this would be a representation in film.)

> If *that* isn’t a representation of the immediate—then what *can* be?—Anything that claimed to be even more immediate would have to

39. Ibid.
forego being a description. Instead of a description, what results in that case is that inarticulate sound with which some authors would like to begin philosophy.\textsuperscript{40}

In the earlier version, Wittgenstein uses a similar account of this film-like machine to highlight the problems encountered within the metaphysical approach. There, any attempt to capture pure phenomenological experience will fail because the time involved in reexperiencing the object forces one into the time of physics, the time beyond immediate experience. But now, in thinking about this film-like machine three years later, Wittgenstein finds a grammatical impossibility at work. This impossibility is the desire for the film-machine to, in its reproducing of experience, provide something that would be both a representation of something and the thing itself. There is a logical confusion in this desire: the hope or belief that something other than the experience itself—here, a representation in moving images—could be the experience itself, giving us perfect access to the phenomena while still retaining the sense of its not being the experience itself. To Wittgenstein’s thinking now, the limits that this desire runs up against are part of the concepts themselves, not a metaphysical boundary holding us back from perfect phenomenological reexperiencing. We are dealing no longer with ontological divisions but rather grammatical ones.

In 1916, psychologist and early film theorist Hugo Münsterberg wrote of how cinema offered externalized reflections of psychological processes.\textsuperscript{41} Münsterberg’s approach provides a clear example of just what Wittgenstein was setting his thinking against. For Wittgenstein, as he turns to his later conception of philosophy, human thinking and psychology are resolutely not “like” film or other material pictures.\textsuperscript{42} Film does not picture thought; it does not materialize predictable and unchanging processes of psychology or cognitive functions. Rather, it puts a picture to thought. Wittgenstein’s cinema remarks simultaneously trace and enact the ways in which film has added to the field of grammar, introducing new or different conceptual pictures to thought in the process. As his remarks on film outline, the concepts of photography, moving images, filmstrips, projection, soundtracks, and more affect a branching web of other concepts, including time, memory, language, experience, and subjectivity. And Wittgenstein’s shift from the metaphysical to the grammatical does not lessen the weight of the confusions that might result from the provision of such pictures. As these film concepts lead to correspondences with psychological concepts, they equally create thoughts and expectations that can be troubling and upsetting. They can lead to conceptual and existential quandaries that were not new to human thought but that could and would take a new form through these correspondences. These kinds of correlations are what Wittgenstein works to clarify in his philosophical writings.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 349.
\textsuperscript{41} Allan Langdale, \textit{Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay—A Psychological Study and Other Writings} (New York: Routledge, 2002).
\textsuperscript{42} See Wittgenstein, \textit{The Big Typescript}, pp. 349–50.
A last set of film remarks will exemplify the sort of troubling appearances of film in wider grammars that Wittgenstein wants to treat or alleviate. In *Philosophical Remarks* and *The Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein notes individuals’ tendency to feel that even in filmed reproductions of reality, everything feels “in flux.” Despite one’s ability to describe the onscreen event, a feeling of “powerlessness” to capture the “actual event” lingers. Wittgenstein attributes this feeling to a false image underlying broader thought:

Isn’t this false image that of a strip of pictures that runs by so quickly that we don’t have any time to perceive a single picture?

For in that case we would be inclined to chase after the picture. But of course there is nothing analogous to that in the course of an event.

It’s remarkable that in everyday life we never have the feeling that a phenomenon is getting away from us, that we never sense the continual flow of appearance—not until we philosophize. This points to the fact that here we are dealing with a thought that is suggested to us by a misuse of our language.

For the feeling is that the present fades into the past without our being able to prevent it. *And here we are obviously using the image of a strip that constantly moves past us and that we can’t stop.*

Whereas in an earlier philosophical moment, the river might have lent itself as the frame for thinking through the “movement” of time, Wittgenstein here speaks to his sense that we now use the picture of the filmstrip and its related concepts of “captured life” when contemplating this notion. He endeavors to dissolve this frustration by making the now familiar point that this feeling results from the confusion between the grammars of experiential time and physical time: In his words, “One cannot say ‘time flows’ if by ‘time’ one means the possibility of change.” But this passage is less remarkable for the solution it offers than for the problem it diagnoses, as well as the force of the familiarity of this picture: the filmstrip of our lives, trailing out forever behind us, escaping our grasp and yet weighing us down. If Wittgenstein’s cinematic investigations make sense, it is because his reader is already seeing the world the way cinema pictures it; he does not need to work to convince his reader of this in his writing. His cinema remarks gain their force from this shared picture of modern life, one in which film’s concepts of time and more offer people a—possibly pernicious—way to understand their own forms of experience.

44. Ibid.
Certainly, to Wittgenstein’s thinking, film gives a conceptual picture that particularly aligns with a sense of distance from life, experience, and the world. His comments focus on the sense that the time comprising one’s life is always slipping past one—“remorselessly,” as Wittgenstein puts it in Remarks. Here, experiences and even one’s private thoughts seem always to escape one’s grasp. In addition to powerlessness, isolation is a common theme in these remarks; the inability to show or share private visual images with others provides a regular refrain. In many ways, then, Wittgenstein’s writings on cinema fall neatly in line with the picture of him as a philosopher of skepticism, a philosopher both struggling with and working to dispel the confusions that support and express skepticism. Indisputably, the therapeutic philosophical method that Wittgenstein develops in these and later works predisposes him to a focus on the anxieties and troubles arising from cinema’s conceptual pictures. But this therapeutic aim does not constitute the entirety of Wittgenstein’s response to the emergence of cinematic concepts. Nor are distress and anxiety the only responses within the broader patterns of thought that he is documenting and working through. As the next section will detail, Wittgenstein’s ethical thought gives an example of the ways in which cinematic concepts could be seen to add to and positively underpin wider forms of thought.

Wittgenstein’s Ethics of Showing and Seeing

Wittgenstein’s ethical thought takes a cinematic form. As this section will explore, his increasing emphasis on “showing” and “seeing” rather than “saying” in his ethical thinking frames this connection. In what follows, I will outline Wittgenstein’s complex conception of “seeing” in order to argue that changes in one’s way of seeing play an important role in his ethics, an ethics oriented toward what he calls “clarification.” Analyzing two film remarks, I contend in the final section that cinema’s proffered possibility of returning to and re-viewing already seen events provides a model for Wittgenstein’s ethical thought. In other words, if changing one’s way of seeing, or “seeing anew,” becomes an ethical resource in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, then the moving image gives a form to such a possibility. That is to say, while cinema can lead people into troubling ways of thinking, it may also give shape to a way out of such trouble.

Ray Monk dates an essential shift toward “showing” and “seeing” in Wittgenstein’s thinking to the early 1930s, a shift that coincides with the time of the concentrated film remarks.45 This change in Wittgenstein’s thought, which will play an important role in his evolving thought about ethics, reflects his solidifying sense that large realms of human understanding exist independently from verbal articulation. In this way, Wittgenstein was becoming interested in what he would later call the “kind of understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections.’”46 In

Wittgenstein’s thinking here, one need not be able to put something into words for an understanding—wherein one sees connections, likenesses, or differences, for example—to be an understanding, nor for it to have an effect on how one acts. Accordingly, as Monk outlines, the major change in Wittgenstein’s philosophical method comes as he shifts away from a focus on explaining or saying and moves toward the activities of showing, seeing, and looking: “The really decisive moment [in the shift from the transitional to the late philosophy] came when he began to take literally the idea of the *Tractatus* that the philosopher has nothing to say, but only something to show, and applied that idea with complete rigor.” Wittgenstein himself describes this methodology thusly: “What I give is the morphology of the use of an expression. . . In philosophy one feels forced to look at a concept a certain way. What I do is suggest, or even invent, other ways of looking at it.” In other words, Wittgenstein now wants to show rather than tell.

In order to understand Wittgenstein’s ethical thought from this period onward, then, one must look at the ways in which he describes, invents, and contrasts concrete examples of thinking and acting, and the kinds of examples he aligns and contrasts—and not only at any articulated claims he makes as to the nature of ethics. The only explicit remarks Wittgenstein made concerning ethics in this transitional period—found in the 1929 lecture he gave to a lay-philosophy group on the topic—already imply as much. In the lecture, he expands on his brief claims in the *Tractatus* that “there can be no ethical propositions” and that “ethics cannot be expressed.” Now Wittgenstein describes the desire to speak about ethics as the wish “to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language.” Talking about ethics is “to run against the boundaries of language,” and surmounting this boundary is “perfectly, absolutely hopeless.” This is not a prohibition on speaking about ethics, however. Wittgenstein himself regularly spoke on private occasions on the subjects of ethics and morality, express-

47. Wittgenstein: “I may draw you a face. Then at another time I draw another face. You say: ‘That’s not the same face’—but you can’t say whether the eyes are closer together, or mouth longer . . . or anything of this sort. ‘It looks different, somehow.’ This is enormously important for all philosophy.” As J. Jeremy Wisnewski writes about this passage, “We are able to discern differences [and similarities] that we cannot quite articulate. This shows that the articulation is not what is crucial to the discernment. . . This is not a reflection of the poverty of language; it is rather a reflection of the rich and textured nature of our understanding. It is an understanding that is corporeal, pre-linguistic, and which philosophy consistently attempts to put into words.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 31; J. Jeremy Wisnewski, *Wittgenstein and Ethical Inquiry: A Defense of Ethics as Clarification* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 104.


52. Ibid.
ing his preferences for how individuals should live and act. Rather, as the lecture makes clear, these remarks reference Wittgenstein’s belief that ethics cannot be made subject to scientific or fact-based analysis: “Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense.” Put differently, ethics does not lend itself to the kind of analysis that expects to find a systematic substrate behind or below our ways of speaking and acting. But as Wittgenstein makes clear at the end of the lecture, the ethical drive to speak beyond what can be said is a human tendency he nevertheless respects deeply.

The contradiction implied in these remarks—that Wittgenstein claims we cannot succeed in saying anything about ethics but that he deeply respects the drive to do so—is largely alleviated when one understands what he wanted to offer in the place of “saying”: the activities of showing and seeing. He would increasingly emphasize these elements in his later work, but examples specific to ethics already appear in the “Lecture on Ethics.” He writes:

To make you see as clearly as possible what I take to be the subject matter of Ethics I will put before you a number of more or less synonymous expressions each of which could be substituted for the above definition, and by enumerating them I want to produce the same sort of effect which Galton produced when he took a number of photos of different faces on the same photographic plate in order to get the picture of the typical features they all had in common. If you look through the row of synonyms . . . you will, I hope, be able to see the . . . characteristic features of Ethics.

In other words, Wittgenstein does not explain ethics, nor does he make propositions as to their nature. Instead, he provides descriptions of concrete instances of what individuals say when they speak about ethics, and he hopes that his listener will be able to see the connections between them. As Wittgenstein makes clear elsewhere, these examples of individuals speaking about ethics should be understood as activities that he is showing us, rather than instances of language that

55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., pp. 4–5.
express facts for analysis. Moreover, in describing the showing and seeing that he wants to take place here, Wittgenstein takes the photographic medium, with its ability to superimpose images of life, as a model. His ethical thought here aspires to work in the way that photographic film does.

Wittgenstein’s emphasis on clarification constitutes another key element of his ethics, and one that further elucidates the role of showing and seeing in his thinking. Many of Wittgenstein’s writings and personal remarks both enact and articulate his valuation of “becoming clear” about something. In Wittgenstein’s words, “Our civilization is characterized by the word ‘progress.’ … And even clarity is sought only as a means to this end, not as an end in itself. For me on the contrary clarity, perspicuity are valuable in themselves.” Remarks like these lead J. Jeremy Wisnewski to argue that Wittgenstein’s ethics are, in fact, an ethics of clarification. For Wisnewski, Wittgenstein’s ethics cannot be about developing “a procedure for algorithmically solving all of our ethical dilemmas,” as this would require the impossible ability to analyze ethics as one analyzes facts of the natural world. Rather, Wisnewski contends that Wittgensteinian ethics are about the work of becoming clearer about the values one already holds but which are not necessarily transparent to one. Importantly, this activity of clarification grounds itself again in the realm of sight. For Wittgenstein, as Wisnewski writes,

> Clarification . . . is a fundamentally critical endeavor: in clarifying what we know or perceive only inchoately, we are forced to deal with the world as we find it. We are forced to confront our own phenomenology. Ethical theory (at least as it is traditionally construed) makes the effort to tell us what to do. As Wittgenstein insists, however, this is nonsense. The aim of ethics should not be to determine what we do. Rather, it should be to determine how we should see.

Before I develop the claim that ethics must attend to how we see, a final point from the “Lecture on Ethics” is relevant. Toward the end of the lecture, Wittgenstein asks his audience to imagine a “miracle”—an event that points beyond the realm of language, toward the ethical. The miracle is that an audience member would suddenly grow a lion’s head. Wittgenstein then wonders where the miracle would “have got to” if the other audience members had responded by having the lion-man scientifically investigated or vivisected. He writes:

58. About religion, which he regularly equates with ethics in “Lecture,” Wittgenstein said this: “Obviously the essence of religion cannot have anything to do with the fact that there is talking, or rather: when people talk, then this itself is part of a religious act and not a theory. Thus it also does not matter at all if the words used are true or false or nonsense.” Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 117.


60. See Wisnewski, *Wittgenstein and Ethical Inquiry*.

61. Ibid., p. xxii.

62. Ibid., p. 98.
For it is clear when we look at it this way that everything miraculous has disappeared. . . . The truth is that the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle. . . . And I will now describe the experience of wondering at the existence of the world by saying: it is the experience of seeing the world as a miracle.63

He here connects ethical experience, which he had described as the experience of wondering at the existence of the world earlier in the essay, to the experience of seeing something as something. To “look at” or “see” something under the experience of the ethical is to see it not through the scientific way of looking but in another way. Indeed, it is dependent on the ability to see something a certain way, and this realization illuminates Wittgenstein’s frequent claim that ethics and aesthetics are connected, for both realms ask how we see, how we should see, and how we can see differently.64

Seeing Aspects and Conceptual Pictures

Wittgenstein devoted significant attention to questions of sight in the set of writings often referred to as the “Seeing Aspect” remarks. These constitute section xi of the second half of Philosophical Investigations. In them, Wittgenstein explores the wide-ranging grammars of “sight” and “seeing,” and he provides examples of the ways in which individuals use concepts of sight in their thinking and acting, drawing attention to the fact that such uses extend far beyond individuals describing their visual perceptions. While these remarks tend to be understood as primarily concerned with aesthetic questions, Wittgenstein increasingly introduces ethical topics as the section unfolds, moving from examples of ways of speaking about seeing pictorial objects to remarks bearing on the skeptical “problem of other minds.” (“If I see someone writhing in pain with evident cause, I do not think: all the same, his feelings are hidden from me.”65) The implication is that these ethically weighted latter examples—in which skepticism has one withholding care from another, for example—equally draw on grammars of sight and pictures. As Wittgenstein puts it, “[The notion that] ‘I can’t know what’s going on in him’ is, above all, a picture.”66 In other words, interventions into or changes in one’s way of seeing matter as much for the ethi-

64. In §6.421 of the Tractatus, Wittgenstein writes that “ethics and aesthetics are one.” In the “Lecture,” he explains that he will use “the term Ethics in [a sense] which includes what I believe to be the most essential part of what is generally called Aesthetics” (p. 4).
65. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 235 (#324). See also remarks #315–40 in this section, and #352–64. (As a note to readers, remarks from the first or eponymous part of Philosophical Investigations are characterized with the § symbol, while those from the second part, also called “Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment,” are characterized with the # symbol.)
66. Ibid., p. 235 (#326).
cal as for the aesthetic. This section will unpack the role of sight in Wittgenstein’s understanding of the ethical, and I will introduce the notion of “conceptual pictures” or “conceptual seeing” as a helpful concept in this regard. I will also turn to Wittgenstein’s notions of “seeing-as” and the “aspect change” in order to explain their importance to Wittgenstein’s ethical thought.

Throughout the Seeing Aspect remarks, Wittgenstein draws attention to the fact that our shared manners of speaking about sight extend beyond the specific case of reporting perceptual experience. Moreover, as the remarks highlight, drawing a line between our ways of speaking about perceptual sight on the one hand and our ways of speaking about non- or extra-perceptual “sight” on the other is not a simple (or perhaps even possible) task. Wittgenstein writes:

I see that an animal in a picture is transfixed by an arrow. It has struck it in the throat, and sticks out at the back of the neck. Let the picture be a silhouette.—Do you see the arrow—or do you merely know that these two bits are supposed to represent part of an arrow? . . .

“But this surely isn’t seeing!”—“But this surely is seeing!”—It must be possible to give both remarks a conceptual justification.67

As he contends, we can imagine a conceptual background for each of these opposing claims about whether one is seeing that an arrow has speared the animal. In neither case is it incorrect to say one is “seeing.” While the latter case (“surely this is seeing!”) draws on the related grammars of knowledge, belief, and past experience, differentiating it from strict perceptual reports, this use of “seeing” is not incorrect or secondary. As Wittgenstein writes on the next page, “‘To me it is an animal transfixed by an arrow.’ That is what I treat it as; this is my attitude to the figure. This is one meaning in calling it a case of ‘seeing.’”68

The use of the phrase “I see it” in such an instance thus serves a purpose for the person using it—a purpose only the grammar of sight can serve, even as the individual does not mean to reference perceptual sight.69 For example, the terminology of sight allows one to express that she is not adding or bringing anything to the image, or working to interpret it, but rather that she “just sees” the arrow.70 Wittgenstein does not want to conflate the grammars of perceptual sight and what we might call conceptual sight; but he does want to investigate the gram-

69. Wittgenstein: “Here one might speak of a ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ meaning of a word. . . . The secondary meaning is not a ‘metaphorical’ meaning. If I say, ‘For me the vowel e is yellow,’ I do not mean: ‘yellow’ in a metaphorical meaning—for I could not express what I want to say in any other way than by means of the concept of yellow” (Philosophical Investigations, pp. 227–28 [#276–78]).
70. “Do I really see something different each time, or do I only interpret what I see in a different way? I’m inclined to say the former. But why?—To interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is a state” (Philosophical Investigations, p. 223 [#248]).
mar of conceptual sight without the assumption that it is only a metaphor for or incorrectly applied usage of the grammar of perceptual seeing.  

For Wittgenstein, the complicated grammatical overlap between sight, knowledge, belief, and imagination can only be mapped in reference to specific instances. I propose the shorthand terminology of “conceptual seeing” and “conceptual pictures” as a way to parse the conceptual from the perceptual, and to call up the various extra-perceptual grammars that he finds in our ways of speaking about sight. In *The Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein references silent cinema’s convention of tinting certain sequences blue in order to represent dreams or memories. Here, Wittgenstein provides an illustrative example of a conceptual picture:

> But of course dream and memory images don’t have a bluish tint—any more than our visual image has washed-out edges; so the bluish pictures on the screen are not pictures that are taken of dreams, but “pictures” in another sense.  

These blue-tinted images instantiate a shared cultural understanding that equates blue tinting with dreaming and remembering; they do not materially depict any visual quality of dreaming or remembering.

These tinted images are, as Wittgenstein puts it in an earlier version of the remark, “pictures in a sense which is not immediately visual.” In other words, they are pictures that invite and exist in conceptual seeing. To Wittgenstein’s thinking, humans’ experience of the world is both limited and constituted by a myriad of such conceptual pictures—pictures that follow from individuals’ “just seeing” something in a certain way. These shared pictures tie people together, as becomes clear when, as he often remarks, individuals cannot find their way in another culture, even after they have learned the language. And yet just as often individuals do not share conceptual pictures amongst themselves, a fact that Wittgenstein emphasizes when he writes that he hopes his readers will see what he shows them, thereby acknowledging the possibility that a reader may not be able to see a particular conceptual picture. Here, ethics and aesthetics come together

71. In the first remark of section xi, Wittgenstein emphasizes the “categorial difference” between a perceptual object of sight and conceptual object of sight. Upon noticing the latter—a likeness between two faces—he writes that he now (conceptually) sees the face differently. He then writes that we are interested not in the physiological causes of such an event but rather in the concept and “its place among concepts of experience” (*Philosophical Investigations*, p. 203 [#111]).


74. In using the terminology of “conceptual pictures,” one should be mindful of Wittgenstein’s admonitions not to let substantives in language lead us to imagine substantive metaphysical “objects.”


76. In addition to the quoted example from the “Lecture on Ethics” above, Wittgenstein also writes early in the lecture, “All I can do is . . . to hope that in the end you may see both the way and where it leads to” (p. 4). Wittgenstein’s postulations about “aspect-blind” individuals in the *Investigations* imply similar points; see pp. 224–25.
again; both have grammars for the experiences of shared and unshared conceptual pictures. These are the arenas in which, whether viewing a painting or the treatment of another human, individuals confront the question: How can I be looking at something in front of me, certain of what I see, only to look to the person next to me and realize that he is seeing something very different?

In the case of the tinted film, an audience member sees the blue image as night. In Wittgenstein’s description of one form of his ethical experience, he experiences seeing the world as a miracle. These emphases on the phenomenon of seeing something one way and not another bring us to a final element of Wittgenstein’s ethical thought: his concern with how one might shift from one way of seeing to another. He devotes a portion of the SeeingAspect remarks to the phenomenon of what he calls the “aspect change,” wherein what changes is not the object of one’s sight but how one sees the object. Here, the object does not transform in any way, but a different aspect of the object “lights up” for the observer, as he puts it. For example, a viewer looking at the famous image Wittgenstein uses to illustrate the aspect change may at first see only a duck. But then a different way of seeing occurs to the viewer, and she now sees that this is the drawing of a “duck-rabbit,” an image that can be seen as either animal. It is these alternate possibilities for seeing the image that introduce the grammars of what Wittgenstein calls “seeing-as.” Prior to an aspect change, I simply see a duck in the drawing. After an aspect change presents other ways of seeing, I may now recast that experience as seeing the drawing as a duck. In other words, the grammar of seeing-as may come into play once I understand that there is more than one way to see this image.

The aspect change is crucial to Wittgenstein’s ethical thought because it introduces new ways of seeing. In the first half of section xi, Wittgenstein discusses the aspect change in relation to visual and aesthetic objects, such as a duck-rabbit or a triangle. But the aspect change continues to appear as Wittgenstein turns his attention in the section’s latter half to examples taken from the ethical realm, analyzing topics associated with the problem of other minds. During a discussion of whether one can be certain of another’s feelings or motives—and thus free of skepticism in relation to that person, Wittgenstein entreats his reader: “Let yourself be struck by the existence of such a thing as our language-game of confessing the motive of my action.” Wittgenstein here asks his reader to see an otherwise unchanged situation differently, to understand that motives are not metaphysically hidden from us, but that the concept of motive necessitates that one ask another about her motives (or that one confess her motives). And, of course, his interlocutor’s instigating remark that “only [the other person] knows his motives” is of a piece with Wittgenstein’s “picture” in which we cannot know what goes on in

77. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 204 (#118). Wittgenstein takes this figure from Joseph Jastrow’s Fact and Fable in Psychology (1900).
78. Wittgenstein emphasizes that “seeing-as” is a specific language game. Not all seeing is “seeing-as.” See Philosophical Investigations, p. 204 (#121–24).
79. Ibid., p. 236 (#334).
another person. In asking his reader to see these skeptical forms of thought as a picture, and so to be able to see other possible pictures of one’s relationship to others and the world, Wittgenstein is relying on and hoping for a change in aspect. Like the duck-rabbit, nothing has changed in the seen phenomenon; however, in light of an aspect change, I see (or “see”) the other differently—a change with ramifications for how I might then act toward that person. In this sense, the aspect change plays an important role in Wittgenstein’s ethical thought. Wittgenstein intervenes into the ethical realm by “showing” his reader examples that he hopes will reveal certain conceptual pictures or ways of seeing—pictures that keep her skeptical and mistrusting of the world and others. Wittgenstein’s repeated “clarification” of such a picture, in which the other’s interiority is hidden from us, depends on his reader’s ability to see an otherwise unchanged situation anew and to let new aspects affect her.

And while Wittgenstein’s investigations into questions of other minds present a more obvious link to the ethical, one can make a similar claim about the importance of the aspect change and the ability to “see anew” for his own ethos, or valued form of life. As Monk writes, Wittgenstein’s whole philosophical method can be understood as aiming to “change the aspect under which certain things are seen—for example . . . to see a mathematical formula not as a proposition but as a rule, to see first-person reports of psychological states (‘I am in pain’ etc.) not as descriptions but as expressions, and so on.” For Monk, the push to “urge a change in aspect,” or “a change in the way things are perceived,” was of crucial importance for Wittgenstein, as the “consequence of a ‘change of aspect’ might be a change of life.” This is not to say that for Wittgenstein every time an aspect lights up or changes, an ethical event has occurred. Rather, the aspect change contributes to the conditions of possibility for ethical engagement and therefore has an essential role to play in Wittgenstein’s thinking of the ethical: whether by “clarifying” one’s ways of seeing (Wittgenstein’s “good in and of itself”) in coming to see aspects that were already there or by changing one’s ways of seeing and thus one’s ethical possibilities for being in the world.

80. Ibid., p. 236 (#333).

81. Wittgenstein: “I see a picture which represents a smiling face. What do I do if I take the smile now as a kind one, now as malicious? If no special circumstances reverse my interpretation, I shall conceive a particular kind of smile as kind, call it a ‘kind’ one, react accordingly” (Philosophical Investigations, §539).


83. Wittgenstein regularly admonished others to be able to see problems “as if for the first time” or “afresh.” For one example of this, see Monk, Wittgenstein, p. 276.

84. Ibid., p. 508.

85. Ibid., p. 516. Monk argues that Wittgenstein hoped for such a change in the sense that this might lead individuals to treat art and religion with the same level of seriousness contemporary culture reserves for science.
The Ethics of Re-viewing

Each of the film remarks described above endeavors to produce an aspect change, shifting how Wittgenstein’s readers see and understand the concepts of time, phenomenal experience, and more. Two final film remarks will specify further connections between film’s pictures for thought and Wittgenstein’s ethical approach. The first finds Wittgenstein reflexively articulating the value of film, particularly the ability to return to something through film, as a model for the kind of re-seeing he wishes to offer. This remark, written between 1946 and 1949 and published in *Zettel*, appears within a series designed to challenge the philosophical belief that thought is an invisible “event” or “thing” that accompanies speech. He begins by asking the reader to imagine a construction worker building something out of various bits of stuff with a set of tools. The worker tries different bits, rejecting one and finding another as necessary. But then:

I now imagine that this whole procedure is filmed. The worker perhaps also produces sound-effects like “hm” or “ha!” As it were sounds of hesitation, sudden finding, decision, satisfaction, dissatisfaction. But he does not utter a single word. Those sound-effects may be included in the film. I have the film shewn me, and now I invent a soliloquy for the worker, things that fit his manner of work, its rhythm, his play of expression, his gestures and spontaneous noises; they correspond to all this. So I sometimes make him say “No, that bit is too long, perhaps another’ll fit better.”—Or “What am I to do now?”—“Got it!”—Or, “That’s not bad” etc.

If the worker can talk—would it be a falsification of what actually goes on if he were to describe that precisely and were to say e.g., “Then I thought: no, that won’t do, I must try it another way” and so on—although he had neither spoken during the work nor imagined those words?

I want to say: May he not later give his wordless thoughts in words? And in such a fashion that we, who might see the work in progress, could accept this account?86

The more overt of Wittgenstein’s points here is this: The worker’s later narration of his thoughts, no more than the spectator’s earlier inventing of a soliloquy, cannot be a falsification of a thought. A falsification assumes an originary empirical object—the thoughts—against which the later words could be compared. If his reader shares Wittgenstein’s way of seeing in this remark, she sees that “thinking” consists in many things: the worker’s movements; his nonlinguistic emanations; his

“play of expression,” etc. And so his thinking cannot be separated from his work. In this sense, this remark tackles again the skeptical and ethically weighted picture in which “I cannot know what goes on in another” by dismantling the notion of another’s thought as metaphysically unavailable.

This construction-worker remark also reveals much about what Wittgenstein’s ethical thought shares with film. In the “Lecture on Ethics” Wittgenstein takes the experience of looking at a composite photograph—what he calls a “collective photo”—as the model figure for understanding his remarks. In looking this way, we might become clear about ethics by seeing them as something we do rather than as a realm for propositional analysis. Similarly, in the construction-worker remark, Wittgenstein foregrounds film as another model for seeing and understanding. In describing this scene, Wittgenstein performs his ethical labor of (he hopes) changing and clarifying his reader’s way of seeing. He avoids argument: Instead of the provision of evidence, he puts before his reader descriptions of events—pictures of ways of understanding those events—with the hope that the reader might see the conceptual pictures at work in certain forms of thought. In other words, Wittgenstein’s approach across his cinematic remarks and his philosophy more broadly wants to do what the cinematic recording in the remark does, which is to allow one to see one’s way of seeing (and thus to potentially see it as a way of seeing).

When the construction worker is filmed, his actions become an image that can be reviewed at a different time and place. The film makes his actions into a scene that the viewer in the remark can return to and that can be seen anew—now perhaps without the skeptical picture of thought as a metaphysical, unreachable object. To put it another way, film provides a figure for Wittgenstein’s desired form of showing and seeing, as both rest on the ability to re-view or see otherwise. The notion of moving images as able to show a “way of seeing” is essential to these points. In his remarks on film, one senses that cinema’s images are not (or not just) pictures of the world for Wittgenstein but rather pictures of a way of seeing the world. More than offering a physical or phenomenological viewpoint on specific events, film’s images picture conceptual ways of seeing those events. We see the color blue as night, we take black-and-white images for our world of color, or we see a construction worker’s gestures as thought. It is as if cinema were made up of conceptual pictures. As such, film gives Wittgenstein a material framework for thinking and talking about the

87. See ibid., p. 20.
88. See ibid., p. 44.
89. While cinema offers a particular picture of what “being made up of conceptual pictures” might look like, this notion would of course be relevant for aesthetic forms beyond cinema. This claim perhaps goes some way toward explaining Wittgenstein’s wide-ranging interest in drawings, paintings, schemata, graphic figures, and more.
complex mixture of perceptions, assumptions, expectations, foci, and blind spots that I have called conceptual seeing.

Cinema’s instantiation of “ways of seeing” also provides another conceptual picture: one in which individuals can gain a perspicacious view on their conceptual pictures’ being pictures. In light of an aspect change, a conceptual picture may shift from something one sees “through” to something one sees, and an assumption, idea, or belief will reveal itself for reconsideration. Wittgenstein picks up on this in a remark that appears in both Philosophical Grammar and Zettel. Here he describes an aspect change in the conceptual pictures surrounding the notion of intention by saying that it is as if someone had turned the lights on in a dark movie theater. He writes, “When we intend, we are surrounded by our intention’s pictures, and we are inside them.” This experience is like watching a film: “Let us imagine we are sitting in a darkened cinema and entering into the film.” But then, as we “step outside intention,” an aspect change occurs in our thinking: “Now the lights are turned on, though the film continues on the screen. But suddenly we are outside it and see it as movements of light and dark patches on a screen.” Here, film gives shape to a mode of thought in which one can be first “inside” a way of seeing and then “outside” of it. Whether regarding the concepts of intention or some other facet of thought, film materializes a picture in which one can shift from seeing through a conceptual picture to seeing it as a picture. By looking at a previously held conceptual picture from the outside, as if it were now merely “patches on a screen,” a new space for evaluation or reevaluation can open for the viewer—an opening with possible ramifications for that individual’s way of being or ethos.

These remarks make clear how cinematic re-viewing reflects and overlaps with Wittgenstein’s ethical thought. With its affinities with the aspect change, re-viewing a film here becomes a figure for his conception of the ethical work of clarification. As Wittgenstein works in his writing to have his readers see many things differently—the nature of philosophy, the forms of human experience, how one can be with others—he is projecting and drawing on a shared way of seeing. This is a way of seeing informed by cinema’s emergence into the grammars of thought. In this picture of experience, we can capture something or someone in our thoughts, holding them as a filmic ethical-aesthetic object. And now, as if we were re-viewing the filmstrip of our lives, we can return, re-view, and see differently. In surveying Wittgenstein’s remarks on cinema and his broader approach to philosophy, one finds an ethics that develops alongside cinema and that provides provocative points of connection with it. This ethics is not predicated on a freezing of the

90. Ibid., p. 42. Emphasis in original.
91. Ibid. For the related remark, see Philosophical Grammar, p. 146.
92. I develop this concept of “cinematic re-viewing” more thoroughly in my book manuscript, currently titled “Reviewing the Self: Ethics and Moving Image Media.” There, I position Wittgenstein’s writing as one example of the importance of cinema for ethical thought in the modern period.
world or a desire for mastery over it, but rather on the hope to see it anew and, in
light of that re-seeing, to perhaps find different ways to be and act in the future. In
sum, then, Wittgenstein’s cinema remarks chart how the medium of film has per-
meated the conceptual grammars of time, experience, thinking, and more. These
cinematic concepts in turn clarify both Wittgenstein’s ethics and shared wider
modes of thinking. In this broader ethical conceptual picture that Wittgenstein
traces and responds to, life itself becomes a cinematic duck-rabbit, awaiting that
ethical aspect change that might occur in an act of re-viewing.