Alien Ways of Thinking

At the beginning of the first chapter of *On Film*, his short but rich discussion of the Alien quartet, Stephen Mulhall describes the first scene of Ridley Scott's original movie, where the camera slowly glides around the spaceship Nostromo, undisturbed by any human activity.[1] Eventually, we are shown the human inhabitants slowly awake from the suspended animation, in what Mulhall calls "a kind of rebirth," one which "represses its creatureliness, that represents parturition as an automated function of technology rather than of flesh emerging noisily and painfully from flesh—as essentially devoid of blood, trauma and sexuality." (16) These skillfully written pages set up much of what is to come: the problematic relationship between humans and technology, sexuality and embodiment; but also the problem each film confronts in having to give new life to the alien universe, to bring a new directorial sensibility to each film while preserving the continuity of the series.

But from a philosophical point of view, the main, underlying question which the book never escapes from has already been raised in the introduction. Mulhall writes that he wants to see each of 'Alien' films as "philosophy in action—film as philosophizing."(2) But what does it mean for film to philosophize? Reading and rereading the book, watching and rewatching the films it discusses, this for me emerges as the most important and pressing question raised in *On Film*.

Mulhall specifies a few things he does *not* mean in claiming that a film can philosophize. It does not mean that film provides "philosophy's raw material"(2) in the sense that the philosopher treats the film as merely providing

subject matter for his or her philosophizing. Nor is it "a source for its ornamentation"(2), from which examples and illustrations can be plucked to dress up philosophy in the garb of accessible popular culture. To add to these two negative answers, we can also say that to see film as philosophizing is not to see it as simply utilizing a mélange of philosophical ideas in order to explore their dramatic potential. All these ways of treating film philosophically have been exemplified by both the makers of and the panoply of commentators on *The Matrix.*[2] Scenes from the film, and aspects of its story line, have been taken up as starting points for philosophical discussions or as 'cool' illustrations of perennial philosophical problems. The film certainly plays with many philosophical ideas, such as those concerning reality, authenticity, determinism and free will. But few have claimed that the film *itself* did serious philosophical work (i.e., genuinely *furthering* our understanding of the problems and issues it raises), mainly because it does no such thing. It does *not* deepen our understanding of the ideas it toys with, for it merely plays intellectual and dramatic games with them (albeit to spectacular effect).

Most obviously, perhaps, Mulhall is not thinking about film as philosophizing in the sense that film can offer explicit arguments, or a series of articulated syllogisms. Interestingly, this is how the Wachowski brothers sought to deepen the philosophical dimension of the original in *The Matrix Reloaded.* Perhaps emboldened by the philosophical literature the first film spawned, in the sequel they allowed themselves the indulgence of inserting lengthy philosophical digressions, in which the characters actually discuss explicit philosophical ideas and arguments. This crude attempt to put philosophy into the film was rightly derided by the critics, who saw through the pretentiousness of the script to its philosophically bankrupt core.

A further approach which Mulhall himself expressly eschews is to follow the many philosophers and film theorists who "treat the films they discuss as objects to which specific theoretical edifices…could be applied."(6) If we are to take the idea of film as philosophizing seriously, films must be able to challenge the prior theoretical commitments we bring to them and not simply confirm our preconceived prejudices. This deliberate distancing from the conventions of film criticism may disconcert readers expecting to find discussions couched in a particular vocabulary. For example, nowhere in the text does the term 'auteur' appear, even though Mulhall does relate the 'Alien' films to other works by their respective directors. This is not because Mulhall the philosopher hasn't done his film-crit homework (as if to prove this point, there are four references to 'auteur theory' in the index; it seems rather that Mulhall is deliberately trying to make sure we don't construe his discussion of the 'Alien' films as a standard (whatever that means) piece of film criticism, and that we remember that he is looking at the films as examples of 'philosophy in action.'

Now, having catalogued the various things Mulhall does *not* mean by

'film as philosophizing,' what *does* he mean by this phrase? Mulhall seems clear enough: "…I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about then in just the ways that philosophers do"(2). While many films represent philosophically pregnant ideas and arguments, few of them actually further the conversation. For a film to genuinely philosophize, it must make such a positive contribution. It must not mimic or enact philosophical arguments but do some real work with them.

Mulhall's succinct answer is the source of what for me is this book's most important and lingering question: how can film philosophize in this way? How can a movie think "seriously and systematically…in just the ways that philosophers do"? And what does the answer to that question tell us about the ways in which philosophers normally think "seriously and systematically"? The answers to these questions are not self-evident, since it is obvious that the kind of discussion exemplified in *On Film* is very different from those usually found in contemporary academic journals and monographs. While Mulhall does not explicitly *answer* these questions anywhere in the book, this should not be seen as a great failing or omission. Rather, I would like to take seriously the possibility that, in being invited to see the 'Alien' films as examples of philosophy *in action*, we are deliberately being *shown* examples of what philosophy is rather than simply being *told* what it is. And the most plausible explanation of why Mulhall shows us (rather than simply telling us) what he means is that he sees that difference as being crucial to understanding the mode of philosophizing with which he is dealing.

One cannot talk about the difference between showing and telling in philosophy without evoking Wittgenstein's famous aphorism, "What *can* be shown *cannot* be said."[3] If Wittgenstein is right, his assertion seems to threaten the very possibility of writing philosophically about what is being shown. For if, as I have suggested, Mulhall is working with the idea that film as philosophizing is a form of showing, and what can be shown cannot be said, then in trying to write about it, isn't he attempting to say the unsayable? And isn't this paradox doubled if, in discussing Mulhall's text, we attempt to spell out what it is Mulhall shows?

The way out of the first paradox also provides a way out of the second. The simple point is that one can show with words, and that this is nonetheless different from saying. For example, I can say what singing is or I can show you what singing is, by breaking into song. In both cases I use words, but in the second case I am genuinely showing your something rather than saying what it is. Similarly, and more pertinently, I can attempt to say what philosophy is, by completing a locution of the form 'philosophy is…'; or I can attempt to show what philosophy is by doing some for you. Again, in both cases words are being used, but one is an example of saying, the other showing.

So there is no paradox in the idea that Mulhall might be showing us what

philosophy is (or can be) in his text rather than saying it, since his showing can take the form of a demonstration or exemplification of a particular form of philosophizing. Nevertheless, his task is not easy, since he is trying to show us how film as philosophizing is a distinct *form* of philosophizing. The difficulty he has is how to show this without translating his examples of film as philosophizing into standard written forms of philosophizing. This is perhaps the main reason why Mulhall cannot explicitly say what it means for film to philosophize, for to say it would be transform its distinctive mode of philosophizing into another mode and thus to distort the phenomenon which is supposed to be explained. So Mulhall has to point and gesture towards the philosophizing undertaken in the films, hoping that we see for ourselves what is going on. And in writing about this attempt, this review must also avoid trying to say what can only be shown by providing a neat 'translation' into the prose form of the mode of philosophizing possible in film.

If we are to take seriously the idea of a distinctive 'film as philosophizing' mode of argumentation, we can thus hope to be able to understand it at least in part by reference to the show/tell distinction. By itself, however, the distinction is inadequate to explain how fictional films can philosophize, since by their nature what they show is not reality but a fictional construct. This is especially true within the genre of science fiction, where the action is premised precisely on the fact that the world depicted is different from the real world we inhabit. So to show something within a film is not necessarily to show something which is true of the world and is indeed sometimes to necessarily not show something which is true of the world. This might seem antithetical to the project of philosophy, which is surely in some sense at least to reveal the nature of reality, the structure of logic, the essence of being and so forth. If this is true, then how can fictional representations hope to show the nature of reality in a philosophically rigorous way?

The problem, however, may not appear so great to someone with Mulhall's broader philosophical commitments. He has spoken elsewhere of his "sense that there's an open border between philosophy and literature."[4] For anyone who holds such a view, the distinction between a description of reality and a fictional representation of reality is not likely to be as sharp as, say, the project of pure twentieth century analytical philosophy would hope. For Mulhall, to accept this "open border" does not mean going the whole way down the road to accepting that all descriptions of reality are 'mere' constructs, or that there is no difference at all between fact and fiction. It simply implies that both literature and philosophy are in the business of describing and representing (often in very different ways) profound truths.

This kind of truthfulness is obviously not the kind of truth as depicted in traditional correspondence theories, for example, where a proposition is held to be true if and only if it fits reality exactly. As the paradigm example has it, the proposition 'snow is white' is true if an only if snow is white. A filmmaker

or novelist does not attempt to be truthful by achieving this kind of literal correspondence. Of course we do not say that Newt's line in *Aliens*, 'My mommy always said there were no monsters - no real ones - but there are,' is true if and only if there are monsters and her mother said there weren't. That much is obvious. But what is less obvious is what truthfulness means in philosophy if we declare the correspondence theory dead, as many philosophers have done.

Even if we maintain that truth is a matter of correspondence, *truthfulness* can still be seen as distinct from truth. Bernard Williams, for example, sees truthfulness as being a kind of intellectual virtue, "a readiness against being fooled, and eagerness to see through appearances to the real structure and motives that lie behind them."[5] This virtue of truthfulness can be shared by philosophy, literature and film. Paradigmatically, philosophy's truthfulness is demonstrated by the precision and rigour of its arguments. And yet it is far too limiting to conceive of philosophy as being solely (or even mainly) about the construction of arguments, with conclusions that follow from premises, as the product follows from the multiplication of numbers. For example, in order to reason well from sound premises one first needs to identify those features of the world which are most pertinent to the problem at hand. This process of identification is not itself a form of deductive argument. Rather, it is something which is done well or badly according the skill and judgement of the philosopher. We thus assess the success of this part of their philosophizing not by looking to see if they have an appropriate argument but by judging whether the philosopher has correctly identified what it is that really matters.

For example, David Hume's most famous contribution to the philosophy of personal identity is not an argument, but an observation:

> When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist.[6]

We assess this claim not by attending to the logical structure of the paragraph but by entering most intimately into what we are ourselves, to see if our experience matches that of Hume. What we are looking for is a consonance between Hume's perception and representation of the world and our own.

This is much closer to what goes on when we look for truthfulness in film or literature, and explains at least in part how literature, film and philosophy can overlap. It also explains how film can be a form of philosophizing. The filmmaker perceives the world in a certain way and represents it to us—perhaps symbolically. We judge the success of the result—philosophically, if not aesthetically—by the extent to which that representation is consonant with

our experience. It is not, enough, however, for a representation to be merely consonant with our experience. If that were all we were looking for, then video recordings from CCTV cameras would be as good as feature films. Film should be consonant with our experience but in such a way as to reveal something about it we had not noticed before, or to make sense of it in a different and helpful way. This would serve equally well as a description of philosophy; Hume's observations on the self are philosophically interesting because they reveal to us something about the nature of our experience of self which we may not have noticed or articulated as clearly before.

This fits in with what Mulhall says about film as philosophizing as "reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them." Film, like philosophy, can represent reality to us truthfully, in such a way as to make us understand it better or more accurately than before. Film usually achieves this through fictions (which can include non-literal modes of representation such as metaphor), whereas philosophy usually mobilizes more literal modes of description. Philosophy thus *says* what film *shows*, its form of showing being distinct from more literal forms (such as demonstration).

How does this cash out in the particular examples of film being discussed, namely, the 'Alien' quartet and selected other works by their directors? Mulhall identifies various themes the films philosophize about. Their two main philosophical subjects are identified as "the relation of human identity to embodiment"(2) and "the conditions for the possibility of film"(3). What might be surprising is that when Mulhall comes to illustrate how the 'Alien' films exemplify film as philosophizing, what we seem to be offered is a standard form of interpretation, where the films are understood to contain various levels of symbolic meaning. The language here includes the usual verbs of metaphor and simile: 'represents,' 'characterizes,' 'like,' 'suggest' and so forth. Hence, in some lines already cited: "We are being given a picture of human origination that represses its creatureliness, that represents parturition as an automated function of technology rather than of flesh emerging noisily and painfully from flesh…" (16)

Mulhall's unpacking of the series' metaphors, in particular those of sexuality, life and human identity, is meticulous and insightful. Yet, especially given his somewhat negative assessment of the majority of film criticism in the introduction, one may wonder how what is being offered here is any different from the standard critical fare. Is the reality of film as philosophizing simply the familiar idea that films contain layers of symbolic meaning, which perhaps correspond to certain arguments and views about the way the world is? That can't be so, since, as we have seen, Mulhall insists that for films to philosophize they have to 'reflect' and 'evaluate' the positions that they raise, and perhaps most interestingly, they must do so 'in just the ways that philosophers do.'(2) It is not enough, then, that the eponymous aliens of the series in some sense

symbolize raw life and male sexual threat, for example. In order for this symbolic representation to be philosophical, it must contain substantive reflections on and evaluations of life and male sexuality, ones which take our understanding forward rather than merely represent without commentary pre-existing philosophical views.

Yet I have to confess that I have struggled to see the 'Alien' films (and Mulhall's discussions of them) in these terms. For philosophy to be anything more than an exchange of opinions, it must, in my view, involve the giving of good reasons for accepting or rejecting the position under discussion. These reasons may well be other than formal arguments, but they must be reasons of some kind. Such reasons, however, appear to be lacking in the 'Alien' quartet. Take, for example, one of two possible explanations given by Mulhall for why Ripley sleeps with Clemens in *Alien³*. For Mulhall, this is in urgent need of explanation, for Ripley has not only been chaste in the first two 'Alien' films but also (he has argued) has been engaged in a symbolic battle against the violence of heterosexual male penetration, which the alien (as a creature that literally enters and impregnates the body of its host by force) represents. Mulhall believes the key is (as the title sequence of the third film shows) that she has already been penetrated by the alien, and on some level she knows this. He writes: "…Ripley has, without willing it, already undergone her worst nightmare of heterosexual intercourse and survived; hence (assuming she knows this about herself), it is a world in which actual, human heterosexual intercourse has been demystified, and hence becomes a real option for her."(104-105)

To even attempt to spell out in explicit terms the ways in which this aspect of the film advances philosophical debate in the area of human sexuality would run counter to my stated goal of avoiding taking the sense in which film can philosophize too literally. But whatever way we understand this as an attempt to move us forward, to 'reflect' on and 'evaluate' our existing ideas, it is hard to see how the depiction of events in the film could provide us with reasons for accepting or rejecting the picture we are being offered. The 'alien universe,' as Mulhall repeatedly calls it, is simply too artificial a creation for us to be able to draw any inferences from what happens there to how the world really is. At best, it seems, the alien universe can be used to provide us with models and metaphors that we can then go and examine to see how accurately they reflect the world we inhabit. But this takes us back to the idea of the films as providing the 'raw materials' for philosophy rather than actually being examples of 'philosophy in action,' which is precisely what Mulhall said would be mistaken.

I will consider a possible response to this objection shortly. But first I want to stress that I do not have these doubts because I think that 'film as philosophizing' is impossible. Rather, I simply think that the 'Alien' films fail to provide good examples of it. A better example, I would argue, is Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon. Rashomon* is usually thought of as providing a

meditation on (or even demonstration of) the relativity of truth. However, to think that the film merely champions a version of relativism (or Nietzschean perspectivism) is, I would argue, to seriously underestimate the extent to which it is, in Mulhall's phrase, an example of 'philosophy in action.'

The basic structure of the film is that one event—the capture of a couple, the rape of the woman and murder of the husband—is reported in contradictory ways by four different protagonists: Tajomaru, the wife, the husband (via a medium) and the woodcutter. What makes it philosophically interesting—and original—is that the specific ways in which the accounts differ point towards a much more subtle conception of truth than crude relativism or perspectivism, but one which nonetheless preserves their basic insights. The crucial point is that even though the accounts *differ* in several important aspects, they are sufficiently similar for us to be able to see them as recollections *of the same event.* Furthermore, when one looks at how much is common to all accounts, a surprisingly large number of objective facts remain constant. Hence the recollections, although very different, are in a large number of respects consistent with a stripped-down version of events that confines itself only to certain central events.

Where the accounts differ most is in how they portray the comportment of the protagonists, in particular those aspects of their behaviour which relate most clearly to their virtue (or lack of it), and which are seen as indicative of their inner states of mind. It is quite clear that the protagonists are making very different moral assessments of how they (and the others) behaved, assessments which are (in part) based on their perceptions of motives and feelings which cannot be fully manifest in behaviour, since they have at least in part a private dimension.

What we are really being shown, then, is how a single event (which in certain respects objectively occurred, since its key details are not contested by the inconsistent accounts) is nonetheless recalled differently, because the participants did not merely experience the events as detached, objective observers, but as participants who saw in their actions (and the actions of others) motives, feelings and moral commitments that were not simple, publicly observable facts. Hence we are shown how to make the non-relativistic view that there are objective facts compatible with the truth that events are ineluctably perceived differently by each individual.

Obviously, this is just a sketch of the philosophically deep waters through which *Rashomon* gracefully swims. The purpose of this sketch is merely to bring out two important points. The first is that this is an example of how film can further a philosophical debate in a specifically cinematic way. Although one can to a certain extent formalize the 'argument' of the film in standard philosophical discourse, the argument of *Rashomon* is stronger on screen precisely because it is more effective in this case to show than to tell. This is because - and this is the second key point - the showing provides reasons for

us to accept the philosophical position being shown. It demonstrates the possibility of what might (simply described) seem impossible, by showing it in the context of a story that is all-to believable—all-too human in its moral and emotional projection, fallibility and self-serving bias—it provides evidence that this is actually the way the world is. In short, the argument presented is coherent, it explains things about truth and belief in novel ways and it fits our understanding of how the world actually is.

Alien³, on the other hand, does not have the same intellectual reach. The image of male heterosexuality it symbolically represents may be coherent, but it is not clear how it deepens our understanding. After all, the idea that male sexuality is inherently threatening (if not actually necessarily violent) is hardly new. And although Mulhall's chapter on the third installment of the series obviously explores this theme in more depth than the average critical review, I struggle to see what significant new insight the film has to offer. Furthermore, the rational case for accepting such 'insights' (even if they were present) is lacking. Whereas *Rashomon* seemed to genuinely show us something about truth, *Alien³* seems only able to offer us metaphors for life and sexuality that we must go away and chew over later. We are back again to film as providing the 'raw materials' for philosophizing, rather than philosophizing itself.

One possible response to this objection is that I have over-simplified the ways in which philosophy can provide us with reasons. Although I have been careful to stress that these reasons need not be arguments or propositions, it could be objected that I have overlooked the extent to which a symbolic representation can itself provide reasons for belief. One line such an argument could follow is suggested by Mulhall's assertion that film can think "seriously and systematically... *in just the ways that philosophers do.*" (2, my emphasis) If we take Mulhall at his word, instead of starting from how we think philosophy works (as I have been doing), and then seeing if the 'Alien' films match up, perhaps we should look at how the films examine their ideas and see how philosophy matches up to that. If we do this, we are left with the suggestion that philosophy, too, is about offering a symbolic representation of the world which we accept or reject in so far as it fits (or fails to fit) the world it is in some sense describing. Hence the kinds of reasons we might have for accepting a philosophical position are not just those offered within and by the description or representation of that position, but those that result from our success or failure in seeing the position as providing a fruitful or enlightening way of seeing the world. This similarity between the form of film as philosophizing Mulhall seems to be describing and standard philosophy is strengthened if one accepts that a philosophical account is also a symbolic representation. The difference is simply that the symbols of orthodox philosophy are those of language and logic, whereas those of film are metaphor and imagery, in its visuals as well as dialogue.

For Mulhall, there is no objective reason why we should allow a traditional

logocentric bias in western philosophy to prejudice us against the philosophical merit of non-linguistic forms of representation. There is surely much that is right in this line of argument, in that it points the way to what Mulhall calls the "open border" between film and philosophy. But I remain unconvinced that we can start with the assumption that the 'Alien' films philosophize in precisely the same ways that philosophers ordinarily do. Certainly films can be 'philosophical' when they present a symbolic representation of the world for us to evaluate in terms of its accuracy. This is one way of understanding the "open border" between film and philosophy. But I still think we need something to distinguish philosophy from just any attempt to come up with a way of viewing the world, and I would maintain that the key to this difference is that philosophy is, by its nature, reason-giving. Reason-giving must come to an end at some point. To quote Wittgenstein again, "For just where one says 'But don't you *see...?*' the rule is of no use, it is what is explained, not what does the explaining."[7] Hence, when assessing the groundbreaking observation about personal identity that was discussed earlier, it is important to note that, while Hume is giving us a *reason* to follow him, we ultimately have to look and see if his account fits our experience of the world. To my mind, central to a philosophical enterprise is the offering of reasons for preferring the theory that the philosopher is urging us to adopt; reason-giving should end only when it has to, not before. By contrast, the 'Alien' films offer us symbolic representations of the world, but fail to provide us with good reasons for thinking that these representations are accurate. We have to go away and see it they fit our experience of the world, we are not shown that they do.

Wittgensteinians (among whom, in fairness, Mulhall must be numbered) may be less than convinced by my objections. They may be more willing to accept that philosophy can often do little more than present a picture, which we either accept or reject on the basis of how well it fits our experience. From their perspective, there is no particular problem in accepting the symbolic representations offered by the 'Alien' films as examining ideas "in just the ways philosophers do." But, for philosophers of my ilk, this may be to stretch the idea of philosophy too far, leaving us with no way of distinguishing between philosophy and, say, religious or mythological accounts of the world. It is not that this distinction cannot be sharply made, hence the existence of 'open borders.' But for those of us still sufficiently attracted to the merits of good, strong arguments, ones that provide the reasons we have for accepting them, there are good motives for wanting the open border to remain a border, one we can cross with ease while continuing to recognize its legitimacy.

In conclusion, then, Mulhall's claim that we should view the 'Alien' films (and, by extension, many other cinematic creations) as "themselves reflecting on and evaluating...views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the ways that philosophers do" can only be accepted if we also accept a much broader claim about the nature of philosophy

itself. To do so is to eschew philosophy's lofty ambition of distinguishing itself from other forms of discourse by virtue of its reason-giving nature, as we normally understand that process. Rather, philosophers must content themselves with doing little more than presenting their understandings of the world, through dry, literal descriptions (as in most academic philosophy), or through imagery, metaphor and symbolism (as in literature, film and many other art forms). Reasons may be explicitly offered as to why we should accept these understandings, but they need not be. We might simply have to judge them by how successful they are in the explanatory work they set out to do. Only on something like *this* understanding of what philosophy is can we accept Mulhall's claim that the 'Alien' films philosophize "in just the ways that philosophers do." That is, they only philosophize in just the ways that *certain* philosophers do, the ones he most frequently cites in *On Film*, namely, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche and Heidegger.

Although I have expressed my own doubts that this is how we should view philosophy, it would be dishonest of me to express any confidence in my rejection of Mulhall's stance (or indeed in my interpretation of it). I take his book to provide a serious challenge to the understanding many of us have about what forms philosophizing can take. For that reason alone, it is an extremely valuable contribution to the much neglected area of metaphilosophy: the examination of the nature and methods of philosophy itself. Yet I don't mean to leave the impression that *On Film* is mainly a metaphilosophical treatise. For me, the metaphilosophical issues it raises infuse the whole text and are of the greatest interest. But those more concerned with the cinematic aspects of the book will also find much to sink their teeth into.

In this regard, one of the richest aspects of *On Film* is its ongoing discussion of the nature of sequels. Mulhall focuses on how each reiteration of the alien universe by each different director is a comment on the nature of repetition, difference and sequeldom. In one of the best examples, he shows how James Cameron's *Aliens* fetishistically reiterates themes, structures and even whole scenes from the first film, but always in such a way as to, at the same time, transform them. More daringly, David Fincher's *Alien³* obliterates the redemption with which Cameron had ended *his* film before the opening credits have finished rolling. Yet this was not intended to disregard his inheritance but to respect it. Fincher's brutal opening reflects his judgement that Cameron, despite these repetitions, had "taken the series away from itself" and that Fincher intended to "return the series to itself"(96) and then "to shut it down."(94) The last film in the quartet, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien Resurrection*, problematises the idea of the sequel even further, since both of the main protagonists (Ripley *and* the Alien) are at once clones (i.e. copies) and yet hybrids (hence not perfect copies after all) of the protagonists of the first three films. So the basic elements of the film itself raise the question "Is *Alien Resurrection* a sequel to *Alien³*, and hence to the previous two 'Alien' films?"(119)

In these and many other discussions, Mulhall shows himself to be an engaging and insightful writer. But what makes this much more valuable (and interesting) than a mere critical dissection of the 'Alien' films is, for me at least, what it has to say (and show) about the nature of philosophy in general, and the possibility of seeing film as philosophizing in particular. This possibility deserves further exploration. It would be good to see someone try to show us how film can philosophize by focusing on its more specifically *cinematic* resources. Mulhall does not ignore the importance of editing, colour, camera movement, *mise-en-scene* and so on, but his discussion (as so much of philosophizing about film) focuses on thematic and narrative elements. In whichever ways Mulhall's key idea of 'film as philosophizing' is construed, it represents a challenge, both to film theorists and to philosophers who think they already know where and how film and philosophy meet.

Julian Baggini

Notes

[1] Stephen Mulhall, *On Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 13-17. Further references to this text will be followed by the page numbers from which they are taken.

[2] See in particular William Irwin, ed, *The Matrix and Philosophy* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002) and the official Philosophy & The Matrix website, <http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/rl_cmp/phi.html>; accessed 29 May 2003.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 2001) 4.1212

[4] "Post-Analytic Philosophy. In conversation with Stephen Mulhall," in Julian Baggini and Jeremy Stangroom, eds, *New British Philosophy: The Interviews* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[5] Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 1

[6] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* Book One (Glasgow: Fontana, 1962) pp. 301-302

[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*. ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Berkeley, Calif.: University of Calif. Press, 1970), §§302-3.