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WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE JOHN MALKOVICH?: THE EXPLORATION OF SUBJECTIVITY IN *BEING JOHN MALKOVICH*

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I. INTRODUCTION

"After decades in the shadows", Murray Smith and Thomas Wartenberg proclaim, "the philosophy of film has arrived, borne on the currents of the wider revival of philosophical aesthetics."[1] Of specific interest in this growing discipline is the notion of film *as* philosophy. In a question: "To what extent can film - or individual films - act as a vehicle of or forum for philosophy itself?"[2] Many have responded that films can indeed *do* philosophy, in some significant sense.[3] Furthermore, it has been claimed that this virtue does not belong solely to 'art' films, but that *popular* cinema too can do philosophy.[4]

A case in point is Spike Jonze's 1999 film *Being John Malkovich*, the Oscar-winning screenplay of which was written by Charlie Kaufman. The outrageous premise of this comic fantasy is summarised by the film's protagonist, Craig Schwartz:

> There's a tiny door in my office Maxine. It's a portal, and it takes you inside John Malkovich. You see the world through John Malkovich's eyes. And then, after about fifteen minutes, you're spit out into a ditch on the side of the New Jersey Turnpike.

1 Smith and Wartenberg (2006), p.1.
2 Ibid.
3 Notably Mulhall (2002).
4 Cavell (1979) and (1981).

The philosophical issues that this scenario raises are manifold. My primary aim in this paper is to follow the film through its exploration of subjectivity, clarifying its insights with the aid of current philosophical work on the topic. Hopefully, this will enhance our understanding both of subjectivity, and of the philosophical relevance of the film. A secondary goal of this enquiry is to employ the film as a case study in *film-as-philosophy*, discussing the nature of its philosophical credentials.

II. FILM AS PHILOSOPHY

Before considering the case of *Being John Malkovich*, we must see how far we can take the idea that film can do philosophy. The literature on this issue displays three main dimensions of disagreement, each of which concerns some subordinate question. The first such question, captured by Paisley Livingston, asks "who (or what) is to be taken as doing the real philosophical work?"[5] The second issue concerns what kind of *contribution* film can make to philosophical enquiry. The third asks "why take the detour" into film doing philosophy, rather than sticking to philosophical texts, or even to other types of art?[6] I will distinguish three positions on the question of film-as-philosophy: the bold view, the sceptical view and the moderate view. Each will offer a different set of answers to these subordinate questions.

The 'bold view' is an amalgam of those claims in the literature that are most optimistic about the philosophical power of film. This position regards the *film itself* as actively performing philosophical work.[7] Stephen Mulhall sees films "as thinking seriously and systematically… in just the ways that philosophers do."[8] According to Stanley Cavell, Joseph Kupfer and Cynthia Freeland, the contributions that film can make to philosophical discourse can be both *significant* and *original*.[9] Furthermore, a bold view would regard these insights as specifically filmic: that is, they could not have been provided by a different artistic medium or by a philosophical text.[10]

The 'sceptical view' combines the more pessimistic claims made about film's philosophical power, opposing the bold view on all three dimensions. Livingston

5 Livingston (2009), p.3.
6 Ibid, p.4
7 For an elucidation of this notion see Shaw (2006).
8 Mulhall (2002), p.2.
9 See Cavell (1979), Kupfer (1999) and Freeland (2000).
10 Livingston's criticism of this position acknowledges that few thinkers explicitly support it, though many lean towards it; see Livingston (2006), p.18.

argues that "a film does not have any beliefs, so it cannot hold or promote views about metaphysical topics."[11] Consequently, we can only describe a film as philosophical if it reflects philosophical *intentions* of the film-makers. He warns that *most* films are not made with such a purpose, and that philosophers must be careful not to *project* their own reflections onto the film-makers. Though some films express philosophical intentions, on the sceptical view their contribution to philosophy "can have at most a heuristic or pedagogic function."[12] A film never offers "*confirmation* of any general theses (philosophical or other) about the actual world."[13] Bruce Russell argues convincingly that we cannot infer necessities or probabilities from the fictions portrayed in film.[14] Film might offer an enjoyable expression of a philosophical position, but the real philosophical work must be done elsewhere.

The 'modest view' is my own position, and seeks to navigate a middle course between the bold and sceptical positions. We should agree with Livingston that a film is only philosophical if it reflects philosophical intentions in the film-maker. However, film-makers can intend much more than to illustrate or express a philosophical position. Wartenberg argues that "fiction films can function as philosophical thought experiments."[15] It is standard for philosophers to invent peculiar hypothetical situations in order to reveal certain possibilities, or establish certain distinctions. Such thought-experiments offer an interlocutor *reason to believe* some philosophical conclusion. Film can have precisely the same dialectical force. Russell recommends caution when drawing inferences from film, but acknowledges that they are capable of "offering counterexamples to proposed necessary truths."[16] This allows film an active role in philosophical enquiry.

This film-as-thought-experiment position should not assume that from *x*'s being depicted on film, we can infer the *possibility* of *x*, since some films plausibly present *impossible* scenarios. One example of this is the *Terminator* franchise, which rests on a paradoxical time-travel scenario that many metaphysicians would dismiss as impossible. This need not deter us. Just as thought-experiments are useful devices that occasionally misfire, so too are philosophical films. Exercising caution, we can regard the fictional world of a film as *helping us come to realise* that something is possible,

11 Livingstone (2009), p.194.
12 As described by Wartenberg (2004).
13 Livingstone (2009), p.196, emphasis in original.
14 Russell (2005), p.390.
15 Wartenberg (2004).
16 Russell (2005), p.390.

rather than itself *proving* it to be so. By eliciting such philosophical responses, Mary Litch argues that "a work of fiction can sometimes function like an argument."[17]

We should reject the bold claim that the insights a film provides could never have been provided outside film.[18] That said, taking philosophy on a detour through film achieves much more than improving its accessibility and vivacity. Film is, in some respects, *superior* to academic texts at presenting thought-experiments. I will postpone my justification of this last point until after my exploration of *Being John Malkovich*. Overall, this film will act as an example of film-as-philosophy that complements the moderate view. The film may not achieve what the bold position would wish, but I hope to show that it exceeds the boundaries proposed by the sceptical position.

III. SUBJECTIVITY

III.i *The Topic of Enquiry*

What precisely is the philosophical issue that the film is intended to explore? In the film, Craig Schwartz summarises the significance of the portal as follows:

> It raises all sorts of philosophical type questions, y'know. About the nature of the self, about the existence of a soul, y'know. Am I me? Is Malkovich Malkovich? ... Do you see what a metaphysical can of worms this portal is?

This indicates that the key philosophical issue in the film is *subjectivity*, and is a sure sign of the philosophical intent of the film-makers. The term 'subjective' has a variety of applications, but in essence it concerns the property of self-hood, of being an individual with their own personal experiences and their own perspective on the world.[19] Subjectivity is connected intimately to consciousness. Thomas Nagel claims that "an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something it is like to be that organism–something it is like *for* the organism."[20] This first-person point of view, that science inevitably ignores, is precisely what the film is concerned with: the portal seems to reveal *what it is like to be John Malkovich*.

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17 Litch (2002), p.1.
18 Livingstone (2006) makes a strong case for this conclusion.
19 On the various uses of 'subjective' see De Sousa (1999).
20 Nagel (1974), p.436, emphasis in original.

III.ii *Three Questions*

The film engages with at least three issues of subjectivity:

1. **Aspect**. Firstly, it explores what the different *aspects* of a subject are. Self-hood is a complicated thing, so isolating its different elements and the relationships between them is a substantial philosophical project. The film employs concrete examples to explore the topic, asking 'What is John Malkovich?' and 'What is Craig Schwartz?', dividing those individuals into their constituent elements.

2. **Privacy**. Of these different aspects of the subject, which must be exclusively owned by that subject, and which of them could conceivably be owned by a *different* subject? Michael Tye clarifies this question by noting that one's watch, or even one's heart, could end up being owned by someone else, while one's pains, it seems, could not.[21] The film explores which aspects of Malkovich could fall under the ownership of those who enter the portal, such as Craig. Related to this issue of *private ownership* is the question of *private access*: our exclusive possession of a kind of self-knowledge. This epistemic privacy is at the heart of the problem of other minds.[22] It seems that I can have direct access only to my own mind, and that the inaccessibility of other minds makes it difficult to justify my beliefs about their characteristics, or even their existence. Does the portal truly offer direct contact with Malkovich's mind, or are there aspects of Malkovich to which he maintains exclusive access?

3. **Essence**. The third question explored by the film concerns *essence*. Of the established aspects of a subject, which are the *necessary* features of that subject, and which merely *contingent*? As Malkovich begins to *lose* certain aspects of himself, the film explores whether Malkovich himself still remains. Similarly, as characters such as Craig begin to *acquire* aspects of Malkovich, the film asks whether they remain the same subject, or become someone else. As Daniel Shaw puts it, "Can these individuals accurately be described as having enjoyed *being* John Malkovich?"[23]

Raising these questions is itself a philosophical achievement of the film but, as we will see, the film also sheds light on how we should *answer* those questions. The next three sections each focus on one element of the film, showing how it establishes an *aspect* of subjectivity, and how it encourages conclusions about the *privacy* and

[21] Tye (1995).
[22] For a review of this issue see Avramides (2001).
[23] Shaw (2006), p.114.

essentiality of that aspect. Each section also considers possible connections between the film scenario and real-life cases of non-standard subjectivity.

IV. SUBJECTIVE PERSPECTIVE AND SEEING THROUGH MALKOVICH'S EYES

IV.i *The Film Scenario*

After Craig has crawled through the mysterious door in his office, he finds himself seeing what Malkovich sees. As Malkovich looks at himself in a mirror, Craig too sees Malkovich's reflection from the same position. This is communicated through the camera's *first-person* perspective. As Malkovich eats his toast, Craig hears the crunching as if it was inside his own head. Later in the film, when Craig's wife Lotte goes through the portal, we learn she experiences the same *tactile* sensations as Malkovich. Overall, the portal seems to offer people precisely the same *sensory inputs* as those enjoyed by Malkovich.

IV.ii *What the Scenario Demonstrates*

1). **Aspect**. This element of the film identifies the *perspectival* aspect of subjectivity. All of our sensory perceptions are from a specific point of view, normally that of our *body* and its sense organs. The events concern the perspective distinctive to Malkovich's sense-organs. Philosophical work on subjectivity recognises the significance of perceptual perspective. For instance, William Lycan places great philosophical weight on the fact that "different subjects differ informationally with respect to the same external environment." [24] Thomas Metzinger describes 'perspectivalness' as "a global, *structural* property of phenomenal space as a whole", noting that "it possesses an immovable center."[25] Frederic Peters, working from the position of cognitive science, describes perceptions as having a "self-locational reference frame."[26]

2). **Privacy**. The fact that the portal allows people to take on Malkovich's perceptual perspective indicates that this perspective is *not logically private* to him. There is nothing incoherent about the notion of individuals other than Malkovich having the same perceptual inputs as he does, nor to having them *at the same time* as he does. If Malkovich does enjoy an exclusive epistemic access to anything, it clearly

[24] Lycan (1990), p.117.
[25] Metzinger (2000), p.9.
[26] Peters (2010), p.13.

is not to the data of his senses.

3). **Essence**. As Craig loses the perceptual perspective centred on his *own* body, and takes on that of Malkovich, Craig himself persists as a subject. He maintains an unbroken stream of memories, keeps the same character traits and so on. In no sense does the new perspective make Craig cease to be who he is. The normal perceptual perspective that Craig had before entering the portal is thus presented as a merely *accidental* aspect of Craig, and not among his *essential* properties. As subjects, we are thus only *contingently* connected to the sensory perspective offered by our body, and furthermore, only contingently *dis*connected from the sensory perspectives associated with other bodies.

IV.iii *The Scenario's Relation to Real Cases*

Many philosophers of a scientific bent explore subjectivity by considering cases in which standard subjectivity is frustrated. This might be the result of some experimental set-up, or of a deficit in an individual.[27] This attention to the non-standard resembles the film-makers' methodology of engaging with obscure and extreme possibilities.

Many real-life cases show a subject's perspective diverging from their actual bodily location. A mild example of this is Vilayanur Ramachandran's experiment in which participants feel that their nose is located to the side of its real location, creating what Rita Carter calls a "Phantom Nose."[28] Another experiment leads participants to feel that their body is located a few feet away from their actual bodily location.[29] The much-explored phenomenon of the 'out of body experience' provides more extreme cases of a subject's perspective diverging from the perspective offered by their sense organs.[30] Perhaps it is possible to have an out of body experience in which the world is experienced from the position of another person.

The events described in *Being John Malkovich* offer an extension of these cases. In the real-life examples the brain makes some kind of error in processing the information offered by our *own* sense organs. By contrast, the film's portal offers a direct connection to the sensory inputs of a *different* body. Where Craig's own body goes when he enters the portal is unclear, but he evidently is no longer influenced by

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27 Van Gulick (1995).
28 Ramachandran (1998) and Carter (2005).
29 Lenggenhager et al. (2007).
30 For a review of such cases see Metzinger (2003), pp.488-504.

its sensory inputs.[31] This points to the possibility of a thorough disconnection of the subject from their own body's sense organs, and from the perceptual perspective that those organs offer.

V. SUBJECTIVE AGENCY AND ACTING THROUGH MALKOVICH'S BODY

V.i *The Film Scenario*

After several visits through the portal, Craig begins to take control of Malkovich's body. Where before Craig found himself connected to the *bodily inputs* of Malkovich's senses, now he attaches himself to Malkovich's *bodily outputs*, his physical behaviour. Interestingly, earlier scenes show Craig controlling the movements of his puppets, which act as a kind surrogate body through which he expresses himself. Where Craig controls his puppets via movements of his *own* body, here he controls Malkovich's body directly. Furthermore, where Craig cannot take on the perceptual position of his puppets, he controls Malkovich's body from a first-person perspective. The most dramatic depiction of Craig's control is when Craig/Malkovich's lover Maxine says "Do a puppet show for me Craig, honey", leading Craig to put on a show with Malkovich's body that we have already witnessed him perform with his wooden puppets.

V.ii *What the Scenario Demonstrates*

1). **Aspect**. The element of Malkovich that Craig steals is his bodily *agency*. This is the capacity to move your body through your acts of will. Metzinger emphasises that this agency is not just a matter of the subject *causing* an action, but of their being aware of themselves *as* causing the action. We experience our actions "as systematically correlated self-generated events." [32] Many have recognised the evolutionary importance of recognising certain physical events as self-caused. [33] Without agency, the subject is merely a passive perceiver of the world. Like Malkovich after Craig's take-over, a subject without agency cannot actively engage with their environment.

2). **Privacy**. We are shown that control over your body is an aspect of yourself that

[31] The question of the location of things entering the portal comes to the fore when Craig enters Malkovich's head with a piece of wood but exits without it, leading him to consider where that wood is. On Craig's final visit through the portal he emerges, unnervingly, with the wood in hand.
[32] Metzinger (2003) p.309
[33] For instance, Peters (2010).

can conceivably be taken over by a different subject. The *perspectival* aspect of subjectivity transpired to be something that Craig and Malkovich could 'own' simultaneously, but Craig acquires his control *to the exclusion* of Malkovich. For instance, after Craig's first successful act of control Malkovich shouts "That's not me. I didn't say that." The film does, however, present more complex cases in which the *ownership* of Malkovich's actions is unclear. Craig's wife Lotte, for example, appears to influence what Malkovich himself wills. This leads Malkovich to feel, as he puts it, "strangely compelled" without Lotte ever taking direct control of his body.

3). **Essence**. It is clear that "Craig remains Craig when he enters the portal."[34] When referred to as Malkovich by a man in a bar, Craig/Malkovich shouts back "I am not Malkovich!" Craig's control of his *own* body is thus presented as not *essential* to his identity. Similarly, when Malkovich loses his bodily agency, he persists as a powerless subject watching Craig take control of his life. This is evident towards the end of the film when Malkovich, on briefly regaining control of his body, says "I'm free", indicating that he had persisted as a subject without his bodily agency.

Shaw adopts an interpretation of the film that initially appears at odds with this conclusion. He writes that "the key to being John Malkovich was to be the will behind the actions of the Malkovich vessel." [35] Shaw goes on to relate this idea to existentialist notions of identity, focusing on the Nietzschean conception of the self as a hierarchy of wills. Shaw is right that the film emphasises the supreme *importance* of control, but his claims about *essence* are at odds with the film's depiction of the empowered Craig and of the powerless Malkovich. Shaw himself appears to realise this, softening his conclusion with the claim that maybe "nobody succeeded in truly being John Malkovich", and that the powerless Malkovich has only "effectively" ceased to be.[36] As such, we can regard Shaw as *agreeing* with our interpretation of the film's implications for identity, though we wishes to emphasise that the film presents power as the aspect of self that *really matters*.

V.iii *The Scenario's Relation to Real Cases*

Studies by many psychologists examine 'mania'; a phenomenon often associated with schizophrenia. Here the subject can experience themselves as controlling events in the

[34] Litch, (2002), p.82.
[35] Shaw, (2006), p.115.
[36] Ibid, p.117.

world including the actions of another body, much like Craig does. There are also many studies of the alarming phenomenon of "anarchic hand."[37] Here a subject feels that the movements of a limb are not their own, which would seem to match Malkovich's experience as Craig takes control. However, both of these real cases involve *false* representations. Mania is clearly a delusion and Metzinger suggests that the movements of an anarchic hand *are* caused by the subject, but that an awareness of their intentions is unavailable to them.[38] By contrast, Craig and Malkovich have *veridical* experiences of their agency and lack of agency respectively.

Carter examines the phenomenon of dream-paralysis in which individuals wake up from a dream but are unable to move. This is due to a chemical "motor blockade" that the brain deploys when we dream, but that sometimes fails to recede.[39] This *real* loss of bodily agency is akin to Malkovich's situation, but there seem to be no genuine cases of taking control of another person's body. As such, the film depicts a more radical possibility than has been found in actuality.

VI. THE SUBJECTIVE MIND AND THINKING MALKOVICH'S THOUGHTS

VI.i *The Film Scenario*

The portal allows Craig to take on Malkovich's perceptual perspective and, eventually, to take control of Malkovich's body. As has been established, we see that Craig endures through this peculiar alteration. For instance, we hear Craig's "inner monologue" as he wills Malkovich's body to act. Furthermore, the actions he performs through Malkovich's body correspond to desires that we know Craig has.[40] For example, in this new body Craig succeeds in winning the affections of Maxine, and fulfils his dream of becoming a famous puppeteer. Even Craig's turn of phrase is reflected in Malkovich's speech.

VI.ii *What it Demonstrates*

1). **Aspect.** This element of the film helps us to identify Craig as a *thinker*. In total isolation from his own body, we see Craig continue an unbroken stream of thought. It is within these thoughts that his *psychological dispositions* are manifest; his desires, his beliefs and his memories. This itself is clearly a complex aspect of the subject

[37] Blakemore et al. (2002).
[38] Metzinger (2003).
[39] Carter (2005).
[40] Litch (2002) points this out.

which could doubtless be analysed in to yet more parts.

The film also explores the relationship between thinking, agency and perspective. The perceptual perspective provided by our body's sense organs determine *what* we perceive, but it is in thought that we *reflect* upon this input. Similarly, our agency over a body determines *what* we move, but it is in thought that we *choose* which actions to perform. This complements a distinction between the *mind* and the body to which it is contingently connected, and through which it perceives and interacts with the world.

2). **Privacy**. Malkovich never loses ownership of his own thoughts and Craig never acquires the thoughts of Malkovich. Inside Malkovich's head are two distinct streams of thought belonging to Malkovich and Craig respectively. This encourages the conclusion that, unlike one's watch, one's thoughts can never be owned by anyone but you. The film also sheds light on the epistemic aspect of privacy. It seems that only Malkovich has direct access to what he is thinking. The portal never provides this special knowledge of Malkovich's thoughts. Of course, we should remember Russell's observation that "no one can establish that something holds in all possible worlds by presenting an example or two from a possible world depicted in film."[41] We cannot *infer* from the film that owning thoughts is *necessarily* private. We can, though, note that this necessity is *respected* in the film.

Several events indicate the film-makers' acknowledgement of this privacy. Lester, the eccentric manager of the office that houses the portal, believes erroneously that he has a terrible speech impediment. "I've been very lonely in my isolated tower of indecipherable speech", he tells Craig. Perhaps this scene illustrates that the thoughts of others are known only indirectly, through the imperfect medium of language, and that our awareness of our thoughts is inevitably 'lonely.'

3). **Essence**. Is the *thinking* part of Malkovich essential to him being the subject that he is? It seems the film encourages this conclusion. With all the changes that Malkovich and Craig undergo, their respective streams of thought appear to be the enduring kernel that defines them. Litch advocates this interpretation of the film.[42] If Craig no longer had his own thoughts after entering the portal, in what sense would Craig be in Malkovich's head? If Malkovich's thoughts disappeared when Craig took over his body, wouldn't Malkovich then cease to exist? In Cartesian parlance, one might say that we are essentially *thinking things*, and so without our thinking there

41 Russell (2005), p.390.
42 Litch (2002).

would be no 'thing' left of us.

If having Malkovich's thoughts is an essential part of being the subject John Malkovich then, despite the film's title, nobody ever truly *becomes* John Malkovich. An interview with Kaufman, the film's writer, indicates that this was his philosophical intention. He says "you are inside someone else's skin, but Craig doesn't have the experience of being Malkovich, he has the experience of using Malkovich."[43] The fact that the portal only connects you to Malkovich's body, rather than his mind, is reflected in the characters' motivations for entering the portal. Craig wants to become attractive to Maxine, Lotte wants to become a man, an overweight character wants to become thin and Lester and his friends want to become young. The *mind* of Malkovich is irrelevant to these objectives. They want only to take on the *body* to which Malkovich's mind is contingently connected.

VI.iii *The Scenario's Relation to Real Cases*

Since our conclusion here is that having other people's thoughts is impossible, it is not surprising that there are no real-life cases that would indicate such an occurrence. However, it is worth noting that some propose actual cases of two distinct thinking subjects in one head. This position is motivated by genuine medical cases, though the interpretation of those cases is quite unconvincing.[44] There is no reason to believe that the *logical* possibility presented in the film is ever *actual*.

VII. WHAT THE FILM ACHIEVES

The film successfully executes the apparent philosophical ambitions of its makers and, consequently, should be regarded as a genuine piece of philosophy. This thought-experiment-on-celluloid encourages a series of conclusions concerning the nature of subjectivity.[45] Its value does not appear to be essentially filmic; a graphic novel of *Being John Malkovich* could perhaps have boasted the same philosophical merit. That said, I would argue that the film offers something an *academic* article on subjectivity could not.

Firstly, in comparison to a philosopher's thought-experiment, film offers

[43] Quoted by Shaw (2006) p.115
[44] For a sceptical commentary on such claims see Lockwood (1989)
[45] It should be acknowldged that the film also explores the role of one's *name* in their identity as discussed by Turner (2002) and Litch (2002).

"particularly acute, detailed, and concrete illustrations."[46] This richness of content gives film a *superior dialectical force*. In the first section, I noted the fallibility of thought-experiments. One of the established standard errors one can make with this method is known as "defeater neglect."[47] This is when we believe that *p* is possible because we are *unaware* of some *q* such that *q* entails *p*'s impossibility. An analogue of this error is plausibly exemplified in the *Terminator* case: the cursory depiction of the time-travel scenarios means the film 'neglects' the paradoxical elements that entail the *impossibility* of the events it depicts. With this in mind, we can propose that the more detailed a thought-experiment is, the lower the chances are of defeater neglect. *Being John Malkovich* offers a scenario that is far more detailed and multi-faceted than any academic thought-experiment, so perhaps we are *more* justified in inferring these conclusions about subjectivity from the film than we would be from a philosophical text.[48]

Secondly, though the film does not lead us to any *new* conclusions about subjectivity, a case could be made for the film improving our *understanding* of those conclusions. Believing some proposition does not guarantee the full incorporation of that proposition into our minds, especially with the highly abstract propositions of philosophy. When watching the film, we engage with this thought-experiment almost as if it was real. This plausibly helps us to *integrate* the possibilities depicted with our wider beliefs and intuitions, improving our "imaginative mobility."[49] The way we experience film helps us to appreciate these possibilities from the 'centered' perspective of a character, due to the complex "structures of sympathy" involved in our engagement.[50] Furthermore, "Our propensity to respond emotionally to fictional characters is a key aspect of our experience and enjoyment of narrative films."[51] As such, where an academic text might establish some element of the self, the film can be more "emotionally engaging", [52] revealing how we *feel* about that element. Malkovich's loss of agency, for instance, is far more disconcerting than people accessing his perceptual perspective. This elicited emotional response allows us to

[46] Freeland and Wartenberg (1995).
[47] See Stoljar (2006) p.77.
[48] Wartenberg (2007) suggests that *The Matrix* improves upon Descartes' evil demon thought-experiment, but only insofar as it modernises it. This is not a significantly *philosophical* advantage.
[49] Smith (1995) p.235.
[50] Smith (1995) and (1999).
[51] Smith (1995), p.1.
[52] Livingstone (2006), p.11.

understand subjectivity on a more personal level.

Overall, *Being John Malkovich* falls short of the bold view's over-ambitious dream of a film itself actively providing original and essentially filmic contributions to philosophy. It does, however, surpass the limitations proposed by the sceptical view, boasting achievements in line with the moderate view of *film-as-philosophy* I advocate. Does the film present us with the comprehensive truths of self-hood? Perhaps not. But as Charlie Sheen says to Malkovich in the film, "truth is for suckers Johnny boy."[53]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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[53] It is no coincidence that Kaufman's other screenplays are also notably philosophical. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* explores the ethics of memory erasure (see Grau 2006), *Adaptation* examines the nature of authorship, *Synechdoche, New York* considers our relationship to art and *all* of these films have a great deal to say about the self. This is evidence of Kaufman's philosophical intent in *this* film.

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