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**PERENNIAL AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTAL THINKING:**

**Compliance and Individuality**

*in Sean Penn's **Into the Wild** (2007) and Spike Jonze's **Her** (2013)*

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## **Dedication**

**T**o my family,  
for their complete support of all my academic endeavours.  
To all my teachers throughout my learning and academic journey.  
In memory of my friend Aissa Laadjal.



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## **Acknowledgements**

**M**y interest in scholarship, namely literature and civilisation, in particular first began when I had the privilege of studying under Prof. Nassima Kaid. I am profoundly and sincerely grateful to her as my teacher and eventually my supervisor, for her commitment and availability throughout the journey of this research. Her lively interest, generous aid, advice, encouragement, guidance, and timely supervision of this undertaking have been of ultimate excellence. She was indeed instrumental in assisting my research. Many thanks go to her for all the devotion and endless patience dedicated to my research work.

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# **Abstract**

## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to construe how transcendental thinking is imbedded in Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* (2007) and Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013). An examination of the cinematic treatment of nature and human nature helps in revealing ideas and the filmmakers' underlying philosophy. Beside critical theory, semiotic and thematic film analyses dissect the scenery of the two works to evoke their thinking orientation. In our times of extreme abundancy of information, the materialistic tendencies surface as they find ways within a plethora of social and cultural networks. Motion pictures embrace the spectrums of discrepancies and endeavour to offer representative projects. The power of the delivered multi-dimensional message shows how sincere cinema is subscribing itself into a heightened place in the intellectual arena just as poetry manifested its potential in the early days of American Transcendentalism. In particular, the impact of such an ideology and scholarly movement on the individual who embraces its tenets of self-reliance, intuition, and aesthetic sensibilities and the eventual renegotiation of a place in society are the points of interest which bring themselves to the forth as core variables of the study. The outcome is a throwback in the genesis period of American thinking, an anachronism that survived the passing years. Precisely, complementary views stemming from the same origins exquisitely manifest themselves. While Jonze's affinities with Emerson celebrate co-existence with the creative experience, Penn's admiration with Thoreau calls for assertion and individual control over one's interaction with the object of experiment. This twofold perspective helps in revisiting Transcendentalism through new lens to decipher its timeless formula sustaining the balance between the individual's eternal search for self-identification and pursuit of freedom and, to the other end of the continuum, society's need for a communal project.

**Keywords:** Transcendentalism, Individualism, Consciousness, Intuition, Self, Self-reliance, Virtuality, Unity, Nature, Film philosophy.





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## **General Introduction**

America as the flagship of the world today is undoubtedly a model to the rest of it in all aspects of life. The way it has become so and its perseverance in keeping the momentum of progress for more than two centuries are captivating phenomena and inspiring ideas to any sincere researcher in different fields of scientific as well as philosophical investigations. “Becoming,” itself at the centre of the concerns of the fathers of Western philosophy, represents change and is given much prominence than the static and completed status. By this, we mean that philosophers whose centre of appeal revolves around matters linked with human nature have always sought the explanation of the way humans celebrate change and seek perfection.

Today as we witness massive cultural changes throughout the world, especially with the spread of technological means that intertwine with social institutions in the image of social media, we can see how individuals find expression and distinction in a world that steadily progresses and socially gets more and more connected in different evolutive manners. Interestingly, America, the institution, has embraced and embodied these social and technological advances and further sought their democratisation and diffusion into the world, a fact that portrays the transcendent visions and the mightiness of the culture that jointly define and propel such nation. No denial, the grandeur of American culture made use of great ideas and virtues that swiftly prompted the country to the apex of modern civilisation, with its global dimensions. Such universality of thinking coincided with rise of American Transcendental thinking early in the nineteenth century.

Impelled by the innate human aspiration for freedom, the American culture weaves its texture around such basic right, the founding fathers sincerely endeavoured to engrave in the nation's consciousness through their seminal and defining document of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776). At the centre of this culture is one's assertive perception of himself and his potentiality that eventually engenders a peculiar understanding of the World, including the self. However, no culture goes without rules and norms that serve as an organising framework to the workings of the society through which it is defined and defining. In a way or another, conformity is also a defining precept that one cannot remain oblivious about. In this space, the prompt need for an adequate philosophy that makes the necessary compromise is of paramount importance.

Transcendence in philosophy appears at first glance as an inclination of thinking that has withered in the pages of history, simply because it is often related and associated with old debates on the religious views on the World. Within a science-based atmosphere, many critics have disposed such philosophy into oblivion. However, this very World is far complex in nature and composition to be understood only by pure rational or sensory-leaned perspectives, each separate on its virtue and often approached and examined by science-minded scholars and historians. Philosophy, which has evidently survived the test of time and has always entailed a pure love for the real wisdom, propels this thesis throughout its endeavour. In a subtle manner, it functions in the background to seek the understanding of current developments in American thinking as they relate to the original impulse of individuality that defined and shaped America as

a nation which has ever since celebrated freedom and liberty. Especially, philosophy marks itself as revealing in these times of massive assault on humanity, as a whole, where nations of the world still suffer under the grips of austerity and despotism that hinder free thinking and autonomous impulses toward the discovery of the world in all its aspects.

Recent pandemic waves that swept the whole world emphasise the need for science not for the sake of it *per se*, but for the sake of humanity as a whole. Whether institutions will be the saviour or individuals themselves should find a way to go through these turbulent times is a question that delimits an additional interesting field of investigation. These very circumstances, in many ways, resemble those manifested ones at early nineteenth century where America itself was being defined. Not evidently, everyone agreed on the conceptions and definitions, provided by what has become widely known as liberal thinking, to become the organising principle in the future lighthouse of western civilisation. To us, the multicultural aspect of America and its eventual study would be of paramount value when it comes to the potential repercussions on any nation that believes in progress and reverence of humanity.

It is safe to assert that America has always been related to new experiences in our shared consciousness. At different levels, Americans have remarkably demonstrated their inner faculty of exploring and experimenting. In an impressive manner, the common man has defined mankind aspiration for a better living not just with limited materialist dimensions, but at levels of transcendence that seek real satisfaction and happiness. This is only and definitely realised when

there is a certain negotiation of the connections that find place between society as a whole and individuals within. As an epitome of world civilisation, American experience and thought distinctly appeal to our investigative drive. Namely, Transcendentalism, looked at as a philosophy, makes a certain bond between the realms of thinking with those of the sensory world in a fascinating way. It could therefore prompt this thesis to decipher the peculiar way Americans made and still make distinction in demonstrating their individual genius as well as their impressive sense of multiculturalism.

Acknowledging the distinction of America as a nation which strove to define itself from the beginnings within a world of great intellectual history and massive cultural heritage, one could only be driven to discover how early American thinkers could framework all their needs and aspiration within one unprecedented way of life. Here, a leap into the first century of independent America takes us to encounter two figures who really established American thinking as one of enduring eminent value with a puzzling relation to the then established European thinking.

Among the things that jump to the mind is that sense of independence that instilled the courage in the hearts of men to defy the then greatest empire the world has ever known, with one purpose in their minds that of independence and freedom. This line of thought and spirit necessarily reflect something coming from strong beliefs before being a blind trust in the tools and means that might lead to the realisation of such a dream. Man, therefore was the real capital of the American revolution and this truth remained true for the rest of such rich history



in the making that took place in what American founders believed in as a promised land.

In this context, exceptional thinkers were to emerge as the forerunners and prophets of what came to be recognised as Individualism in America. On the one hand some of them contributed in the building of educational and congregational institutions, in the image of Harvard University, then Harvard College. The name itself shows how education and theology were merged in a complete harmony. On the other hand, figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henri David Thoreau contributed practically to the world of intellect so that they come to recognition as the originators of an archetype American Philosophy that has remained to this day associated with their names. It is the ever-cherished philosophy of American Transcendentalism.

In Emerson and Thoreau's tradition of expressing philosophy in poetry and other art genres, a number of contemporary artists have endeavoured to imbed deep thought in their artworks, among them we have chosen filmmakers Sean Penn and Spike Jonze whom we think are sincere artists whose skills in cinematography and aesthetic sensibilities arise to the expectations of quality cinema. Based on a good deal of readings on them and their works, we deem it adequate to devote the analytical part of this thesis to the study of their representative artworks. Just as we have been captured by the quality of such works, other researchers provided us also with interesting findings that intersect with our sensibilities and rationale, with regard to these filmmakers and Transcendentalism in art as a whole.

In her comparison of Emerson and Lessing's thoughts on the ideal self and conscious evolution, Newell (2000) argues that both use their art as a means to teach their beliefs on the potentiality of humans to improve their reality, making it ideal. As she points out to the discrepancy of time periods, the two figures belong to, she reveals the universality of their thought in terms of time and place. She points out the similitude residing in their call for action as an individual impulse. In this view, readers need to be active and involved in both the fictitious and the real worlds. That's the only condition that permits a change of one's self and hence the social reality by extension (Newell, 2000). It is worth noting that seeking idealism means also emancipating humanity from all sorts of restrictions, a precept that coincides with Emersonian rejection of slavery and all kinds of imprisonment, whether physical or spiritual. James H. Read went further to highlight the boundaries of Emerson's thought. To him, the philosopher has always been situated in a space marked with the dilemma of individual freedom and its frictions with the ideals of Democracy. The researcher extricates the essence of Emerson's transcendental paragons and views *vis-à-vis* Self-Reliance as the core of such philosophy. In many ways, he attempts to deviate from the common understanding of the thinker as detached from politics and activism. In this view, slavery is not just a physical issue, but rather a question of spiritual imprisonment. For this, the will of slaves and their undertaking toward freedom coincides with Emerson's preaching. Read (2009) makes distinction by showing the centrality of experience and agential efforts in giving life to thought and ideas (Read, 2009).

In her essay “Aesthetic Self-Reliance: Emersonian Influence on the Development of American Art,” Rumsey (2010) evokes the influence of Emerson’s transcendental thought, namely on the visual arts. For her, American art movements that followed in tradition, such as the Luminists, broke away from European art methods that relied on enclosed ateliers for didactic purposes. They instead approached Nature and captured reality through their individualised lens. She goes beyond to stress the defining power of such thought that eventually contributed in the building of the national identity (A. Rumsey, 2010). Such identity was first conceived in the shared consciousness of Americans, stressing the importance of imagination in American thinking. For her part, Aldea (2012) investigates how this transcendent faculty strongly endorses an important role within Husserlian precepts of reduction and other visual representation faculties, he refers to as “eidetic” in quality. For him, not only such undertaking helps in clarifying the phenomenological method in inquiry, but he considers that the study of phantasy could aptly clarify the Husserlian phenomenology that in its subjective inquiry shows complexity to the ordinary reader. As a result of this very inquiry, he comes to suggest a framework on consciousness that he divides into natural and artificial, one that is related to the daily attitude and the other to the theoretical (Aldea, 2012).

The phenomenological inclination cannot go without considering the concept of time in a thorough manner. Sample (2018) provides an original reading on Kantian thought on time and its representation, as related to change. What is interesting in her thesis is that her findings on the transcendent effect of

time enable us to perceive change that occurs within the self or to external objects. As such, one's understanding of the self or everything he conceives as external to him, including society as whole, will be much understood when time is looked at through different lens and perspectives. Such idea will be of use, we believe, especially through the cinematic representation (Sample, 2018). As time goes on, culture manifests change and so does art. Ettlíe (2021) opens a hot debate on the contemporary artistic sensibilities toward nature and culture. She argues that current materialist culture is separating individuals from their true nature. More importantly, she shows that modern technologies of display and advertisement subtly dictate the mainstream mood towards objects of art. In other words, what she calls "social culture" is challenging "human experience" instead of getting along with it. She resorts also to another dichotomy in her study, that of "material culture" as opposed to "non-material sublime." What interestingly calls for our attention in Ettlíe's research work is her awareness on the duality-based visions of and on contemporary society (Ettlíe, 2021).

Beyond the current moment in American society, possibilities of change might take different directions. Jonze's *Her* (2013) makes a daring attempt to capture the moment and magnify its impact on man's consciousness. Bergen (2014) studies such work as a revealing alert about humans' problem with their awareness on the limits of their consciousness. She contrasts mankind's clinging to the corporeal with the freedom that technology can offer, namely virtuality. She hints at the possibilities of a spiritual realm that is located beyond the boundaries of what she refers to as personhood. Yet, she does not extend on that, making it a

mere possibility (Bergen, 2014). Murphy (2017) extends more on the notion of personhood to focus on the character of Samantha. In her article “You Feel Real to Me, Samantha”: The Matter of Technology in Spike Jonze’s *Her*,” she looks at *Her* (2013) as a representation of the interchange between humans and technology. For her, it is a work that falls within the posthuman theory and is mainly centred on the question of embodiment as part of what she denotes as neo-materialism. In this view, humans are doomed to only interact with the perceived material reality. Moreover, even the virtual reality that the film explicitly deals with cannot be fully positioned beyond reality, but rather she suggests a mixed reality that, to her, the film advocates (Murphy, 2017). Reducing the centrality of traditional view on reality and the nature of humans, Boom and Smelik (2019) purport to draw the paradoxes of posthumanism they see as the main drive of *Her*. In this perspective, the overall line of the film’s philosophy attempts to suggest a posthuman study on reality, while its main character still maintains a clinging to his humanism. This reading relies on the philosophy of radical eminence, proposed by Deleuze, to explain the shift from a humanistic view that stresses the body as determinant to one’s identity to a posthuman perspective that can go without. The definitions of one’s identity and the boundaries with the universe are questioned, as the very delineation of the self disappears (Boom & Smelik, 2019).

One’s separation from the World has been captured by Sean Penn’s *Into The Wild*, the work that, beside *Her*, we deemed the crucible of our inquisitive concerns. Pevere (2007) justifiably qualifies it as Penn’s best film, as a director. He recognises the latter’s competence in making subtle distinction between wilt

and vision. He shows his praise for the artistic skills applied in the film, making it fall into a plethora of sensibilities and styles that range from Realism to what he calls “transcendental trippiness.” Such density is exemplified as Pevere ascribes Penn’s protagonist Chris and his story to a double-layer journey; one is physical and the other spiritual. While the first ends in defeat, the second lives up as a lasting memory that keeps inspiring the world (Pevere, 2007). Whether one should seek temporality or embrace infinitude are choices that either invoke conformity with culture or call for the return to nature. For this, Lepik (2014) suggests a comparative study between *Into The Wild’s* book and film adaptation, proposed by Jon Krakauer and Sean Penn respectively. The study highlights the relationship between nature and culture, with a focus on the role nature plays in real life as well as in the narratives. The researcher tries to bring to the forth the workings of American cultural background in the texture of the two works. Among these is the notion of the frontier as a defining element of such culture through time (Lepik, 2014). In the image of America’s founding fathers, *Into The Wild’s* protagonist, Chris McCandless, crosses the border to expand his horizons of expectations, making Beaumont (2014) account for his journey as a source of fascination and inspiration for people who are ready for revelation. The other feature they share is their longing for freedom and independence. He calls them “pilgrims” and bus 142, Chris’s shelter, as the “mecca of Chris’s followers.”<sup>1</sup> For the writer, the religious aspect of the phenomenon around Chris’s journey is apparent. He reports that the influence of the dead Chris is more important in

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<sup>1</sup> Beaumont (2014) reports that one of the adventurers, named Chris Ingram, coined “mecca of McCandless’s followers,” as a denomination for Chris’

magnitude than the living Chris. That's seemingly one of the rare readings of the story as one of success (Beaumont, 2014).

The overall outcome of the works mentioned touched upon the philosophy of Transcendentalism, its ideals, and its impact on certain artworks, including the representative pieces that we have chosen. Yet, this thesis concerns itself with a peculiar and very central area of impact that is what we prefer to call the real capital of society and his eventual negotiation of space within society. In other words, how can freedom, especially at its personal level find a way with the de facto principles and rules of the society that frames the individuals who aspire for their true emancipation and assertion. This thesis, therefore, raises the following central concern: In what ways has American Transcendentalism survived the test of time, within a plethora of influential lines of thought and with regard to the individual's potential spectre of freedom?

In other words, not only we are expectedly interested in the period the said philosophy was making itself assurance but we seek to verify the possibilities and manifestations of its existence in contemporary America. Eventually, to open venues for answering such inquiry, we will endeavour to answer the following sub-questions: (1) What are the main features and tenets of Transcendentalism that define the individual, or the Self? (2) How does the Self negotiate meanings, including society and the universe it belongs to? (3) How can cinematography capture what is transcendental? (4) In what ways Jonze's *Her* evoke and discuss the individual's inner and external exchanges within the continuum that stretches from compliance to individuality, through transcendental lens? (4) How can the

original maxims of Transcendentalism possibly keep their perennial appeal for the modern-day intellectual in Penn's *Into The Wild*?

By endeavouring to answer these questions, this thesis sets out to look at philosophy through the filter and construction of films. In other words, it makes a sincere attempt to unfold the strand of a potential relationship between the filmic art representations of both Spike Jonze and Sean Penn, on the one hand, and Emersonian as well as Thoreauvian transcendental thought, on the other. An old proverb says that “the books have their destinies” and this is certainly true of this thesis, considering the purpose it entails. Put differently, with an eye on filmic America, we purport to call for attention to the way we can make sense of films in the light of our informed readings and philosophical backgrounds. Put differently, we attentively enterprise to disclose how films can be philosophically expressive and artistically representative. Moreover, by knowing at first glance that this entails a desire to know about these thinkers' perspectives on what goes beyond the seen reality, we project to precisely see how the world could be seen as a unity. While this has tantalised generations of researchers, we add to this our justified interest in deciphering the potential links between the original prophecies and today's American thinking as reflected in representative and relatively new art productions.

Our choice of *Her* (2013) and *Into The Wild* (2007) reflects our aesthesia to the need for tolerance when it comes to the reception of intellectual artworks. It is precisely the fact that these two works deliver two unidentical perspectives on approaching reality that ushers in revealing our very sensibility. Philosophy as an



art of living is necessarily reflected in the select works of filmmakers as representatives of art circles. In the case of this thesis, the oeuvres in question as per selection have the distinct purpose to show man's faculty of autonomous interpretation of and involvement with philosophy. In this sense, the first film resorts to the virtual representation of the self, allowing us to thoroughly investigate all what is entailed with this world of imagination. The second film, however, exhibits a profound leaning to nature, involving an intimate involvement with its workings. This choice, we believe, sets our purpose as one of eclectic lineage seeking the pursuit and justification of the unity of mankind's thinking, with tolerance to different readings and sources of influence. In the same time, we intend to demonstrate that American culture today keeps intrinsic universal impulses and aspirations for happiness, both sensory and spiritual.

This thesis meticulously embraces a reworked methodological strategy for the interpretation of film philosophising, with the premise of film as intrinsically empowered of doing philosophy. We presume that the film is apt of representing and even recreating worlds of its own, with authentic interpretations of existing philosophies. Just as in the real world, individuals interact to create inner and social experiences, we think the film, when answering the prerequisites of sincere cinema, would be able to capture the workings of the web of relationships between inner and external elements of the filmic experience. The making of reality goes beyond the technicality of film to embrace the audience as active participants. Thus, we place our framework of research based on film as the crucible of human

experience. That is, we see it not just a form or genre of art, but we conceive it as a world of its own.

More importantly, we provide the proposition that falls within Bordwell's thought, emphasising that the film's form is not a merely container but is transcendent in a way it incarnates meaning. We also, presuppose that the film breaks away from genre expectations, forcefully leading to the revelation of other dimensions through the meticulous and careful reading of the filmic narrative. In the complexity of narratives and references to external texts as those produced by authorities in American transcendental thinking, we see promising prospects of influences. With some preliminary readings on the explicitly alluded to works such as *Walden*, we take the disposition that Henri David Thoreau was the most deciding influence on *Into the Wild's* protagonist. The same goes for Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose call for education and culture, as elementary solutions to man's sense of alienation and disparity, finds repercussions through *Her's* central character. Emerson's thesis on the unifying powers of nature and the empowering tenets of self-reliance lay the grounds for explicative ideas on some of the phenomena that we noticed in our preliminary readings of and on the selected works for the analytical part of our endeavour. While the film is often reduced in value as a serious philosophy capable medium, we go beyond this inclination to make this thesis take the enormous subject of Transcendentalism to make it understandable. Creative interpretation of the filmic experience makes it possible to fulfil such aim by rethinking the ideas proposed in literary seminal works. In this regard, Bennet and Royle (2004) purport: "Film is, nevertheless, inextricably

tioned in with the study of literature. Thinking about film provides innovative ways of thinking about literature, and vice versa” (Bennett & Royle, 2004, p. 142).

The study of American thinking, namely *vis-à-vis* the development of American character involves an inter-disciplinary framework that falls under American Studies. For Michael Berube, “American studies is a creature of the arts, humanities, and social sciences” (Bérubé, 2003, p. 103). In other words, the resulting field of study involves a survey of the history of ideas and philosophy as reflected in literature and shaped with social sciences (“American Studies,” 1949). Hence, such framework offers this research the opportunity to explore American thinking in an exhaustive manner, namely as the nation has witnessed a massive progress in all fields of life that, by implication, cast shadows on the individual and his or her relationships with society as a whole. Our approach in this thesis aggregates Philosophy and the aesthetics of cinema to explore both individuality and conformity, which are, in our view, intrinsic to the selected films. Our choice is informed by Singer’s ascription of films to the category of philosophical genre when they entail meaningfulness and are technically deep in terms of their visual and auditive dimensions (Singer, 2014, p. 3).

We take, therefore, a multimodal eclectic perspective to explore and decipher the films in question. Accordingly, we make use of the contextual and semiotic approaches in parallel with a study of the narrative structure and *mise-en-scène*. In this manner, potential transcendental tendencies could be extricated and confirmed. Otherwise, different perspectives and informed opinions may find valid grounds. For this, in the theoretical part, we introduce in an associative

manner the concepts which are elementary to the building of American Transcendentalism as a philosophy. Then, through a thematic study of two films, taken as an informed choice, which basic readings on and of reveal some potential links with American transcendental thinking. We deliberately, chose two variants of film art productions to provide us with the adequate space for the examination of two perspectives stemming from the same origins. In our view, Sean Penn's *Into The Wild* (2007) and Spike Jonze' *Her* (2013) comprise two landscapes that in an articulate manner mark the contrasts and contradictions, the progress of American society has always entailed to this moment. That is to say, preliminary readings of Emerson and Thoreau's ideas endow us with the rationale to expect different ways of implementing the principles and paragons of the philosophy under study in a variety of sub-contexts that belong to the same nation, America of today.

To this end, we have decided to meticulously structure this thesis with four chapters. The first one, labelled "The Self: Transcendental Perspectives on Compliance and Individuality," provides the conceptions and ideas that set the theoretical framework of transcendentalism with focus on ideals and tenets that guide the individual seek self-realisation according to the American version of such philosophy. In other words, we attempt to show American distinction as it appears in specific instances of the basic elements, preached by the founding fathers of American Transcendentalism. In an associative manner, we attempt to establish the ideas and concepts as thought of by the main figures in such tradition. On the one hand, we highlight the origins and additions. Similarities

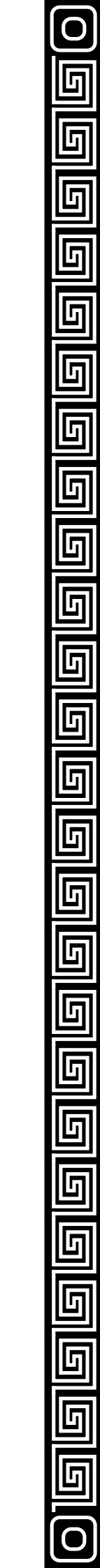
and differences with the external sources that fed the minds of figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and his acolyte Henri David Thoreau are purposefully brought to the surface, on the other. Accordingly, principles like oneness with nature and the universe, visions on individuality, revelation, cosmic time, the working self, pacifism are not just presented but thoroughly discussed to be made ready for use in the subsequent part of this work.

The second chapter, “Intersections: Towards Transcendental Cinema,” establishes the link between the theoretical ideas provided earlier and the analytical chapters to come; that is, it clarifies the artistic method used to implement philosophy into the films elected as potential bearers of trends of Transcendentalism. Interestingly, we find it so fruitful and productive to embrace Paul Schrader’s survey of what he calls “Transcendental Style in Cinema,” a title we embrace and borrow as one that meaningfully frames our chapter devoted to the intertwining of philosophy with cinema art form. Thus, the core principles of such type of cinematic representation are laid plain. Techniques related to time and sound which reflect transcendental impressions are presented and explained. In addition to the peculiar style proposed by Paul Schrader, some basic cinematic techniques are also explored, as helping tools for analysis.

The third chapter, “Her: Affinities with Emersonian Metamorphosis,” constitutes the first fold of the analytical part and is intended to scrutinise upon the Emersonian ideals and their potential presence in *Her* (2013) by Spike Jonze. Taking into consideration that Emerson’s transcendental visions are basically leaning toward idealism, we have chosen this film for its inner virtual tendencies,

as potential bearers of idyllic precepts. A preliminary viewing of *Her* made us notice the qualities associated with the film's major characters in the image of Theodore Twombly and Samantha, impressively in accordance with Emersonian framework. In Emerson's tradition, we relied on our sense of intuition to promptly dive into the study of the peculiar innovative manifestations of what we understood as transcendent in essence. We say so, because our in-priori knowledge on Transcendentalism as well as recent readings on Schrader's theory of cinematic style, we got the conviction that the film in question provides promising premises of transcendence, namely through its aesthetics.

The final chapter culminates with a survey of the journey of the protagonist of Sean Penn's *Into The Wild* (2007). In a comparative study tradition, we deliberately chose a film that represents a slightly different perspective *vis-à-vis* transcendentalism that the original one proposed in the previous chapter. To us, in Thoreau's tradition of taking transcendentalism into his hands, Chris Johnson McCandless (Emile Hirsch), the protagonist, does the same. Interestingly, he is not only a mere fictitious participant in the film but a real American adventurer who got his story adapted into fiction. His love for nature and adventure and the happenings in the film prompted us to select the work not just as an imbedder of transcendental content but for the peculiar understanding of philosophy and its horizon of applications in real life, we witness today. Whether Chris' endeavour culminates in a true reflection and realisation of what the transcendentalists hoped for or not that is precisely what we attempt to unveil in our proposed discussions hereafter.



**CHAPTER I:**  
**The Self: Transcendental Perspectives on Compliance and Individuality**

Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

– Emerson,  
*Self-Reliance* (1836).

## **Introduction**

The story of America is one that revolves around man's pursuit of freedom and happiness. Yet, humanity is bound to organise itself into nations and societies. At the heart of American society, one can only recognise the peculiar individual impulse that initially called for the American Revolution, leading to the creation of the greatest republic, the world has ever known. Democracy weaves the texture of the emergent society and confirms the role individuals have to play in the workings of the community as a whole. The views on such broad perspective that governs the nation had to be refined and defined by distinct groups of thinkers and visionaries, among which the transcendentalists. As the name suggests, among their primal concerns, the question of accepting reality as it is or transcending it to other dimensions was of paramount importance. Since the American citizen, as a revered individual, represents the aim of their refining project, defining his boundaries and interactions within the human gathering, we conventionally refer to as Society, proved to be an essential concern, if not the core of interest of the then new cultural project. For this, we are to examine the transcendental perspective on the individual as the agent around which notions of difference, influence, union, thinking, time, vocation, and idealism are to set the boundaries and nature of his relation with society and the World.



### 1.1. American Transcendentalism: Difference or influence?

In the image of America itself, American Transcendentalism, as one of the defining ways of thinking of the nation, innately faced the dilemma of full independence or acceptance of the cultural legacy provided by older nations. Yet, what is known of the founding fathers of such nation is their wise perspectives on the World and its very instance to the west of the Atlantic.

At the outset, it seems necessary to declare that any line of thought when governed by a certain set of rules and regulations will ascribe itself to what the Greeks called the love of wisdom, or Philosophy. Transcendentalism, therefore, has been defined and redefined throughout time as the settings and contexts altered and developed. America within its first century of existence boasted a good number of distinct scholars and philosophers who reshaped not only their own culture but that of the rest of the world. However, this fact has not been acknowledged for many years to come. The lack of objectivity and the diminishing behaviour of many of the institutional authorities played a massive role in the delay of such recognition. Ironically, this was among the very concerns of the philosophy in question. The early reception of *Nature* (1836), the seminal work of Transcendentalism and synchronously the first major work by Emerson, epitomises this tendency as Atkinson tells us in his heartedly elaborated introduction to the collection of essays in question:

[His] first book *Nature* [, a] short book, published anonymously, it was generally dismissed by the reviewers as pantheistic rapture, charmingly written but without much significance. Yet it represented several years of deliberate thought when Emerson was trying to put his ideas in order. (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940)

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Despite the challenges, the founders and proponents of American Transcendentalism, in the image of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his disciple David Henry Thoreau, closely knitted an intellectual community, The Transcendental Club, whose future proved to be promising. Such community including defining authorities in American intellect such as Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Louisa May Alcott, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Edgar Allan Poe, Theodore Parker, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bronson Alcott and others, assumed the burden of the development of a gigantic intellectual project. Yet, in this thesis, we focus on the main figures as founders and representatives. Embracing the tenets of their individualised line of thinking, they masterfully combined their appeal to individual thinking with their defining sense of union and belonging. It is worth noting that this very sense they inherited from early settlers was the core ideal which helped in creating a nation that bases its ethics on solidarity; hence called itself “The United States of America.” Eventually, in the tradition of the founding fathers of America, this circle of thinkers built on European as well as far eastern thought to bring about a completely reworked vision of the transcendental Philosophy. This way, our study of the chief influences be they Kantian, Husserlian, or Zen ideas will be an implicit reference to the roots or instances of application of many of Emersonian and Thoreauvian ideas and principles.<sup>1-2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We invoke the roots to refer to German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), known for his Idealism. As a product, we see transcendence and focus on experience in the later works of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the man behind the development of Phenomenology. Husserl’s philosophy is as Levinas notes is the “motherlode of twentieth century thought.” Levinas, E. (1995). *The theory of intuition in Husserl's phenomenology*. Northwestern University Press. According to Stanford’s Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, “The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies

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Nevertheless, it is worth noting that while Kant's influence on Emerson is evident and seen through the similitude of metaphysical views and spectres of idealism, the question of whether Emerson had actually read the philosophy of his counterpart is still debatable. This goes without neglecting other affinities and cultural encounters such as the eminent contribution of German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose lasting effect through the foundations of Hermeneutics were so defining to Emerson's understanding of religions (Habib, 2005, p. 417). For his part, Schopenhauer's contribution to the study of the Self goes in concordance with Emerson's unitarian tendency, a fact that is referred to in his theory of Will and Representation, within which:

His central concept of the will leads him to regard human beings as striving irrationally and suffering in a world that has no purpose, a condition redeemed by the elevation of aesthetic consciousness and finally overcome by the will's self-denial and a mystical vision of the self as one with the world as a whole. (Schopenhauer et al., 2009, p. vi)

The network of influence emanated by Transcendentalism as a cultural movement keeps appeal to investigation despite the movement's growth from inception to maturity and eventual recognition, marked with a disparity of opinions and perspectives. A fact that stems from the ambiguities and apparent contradictions that shape its intellectual framework. It embodies change and

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conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view." Encyclopaedia, T. E. o. (2013). Phenomenology. In T. E. o. Encyclopaedia (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>2</sup> Zen, or sometimes referred to as Zen Buddhism is considered by some historians as a religion of the far-east that was generated in India and formed in China in around 650 CE. Yet, we hold the view that it is essentially more of a philosophy than religion.

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continuity, science and religion, man and nature, individual and society. Each conception is marked with a heavy body of epistemology and spiritual realm of ideas. No wonder ironies will show even at the structural level of this chapter.

The bulk of criticism on the movement reflects an assault of the so-called American transcendentalists. It addresses necessarily the founding fathers of a movement that no one predicted at the time it will tantalise so many researchers over the span of the development of American intellectual history. So, in this chapter we are but compelled to study the ideas and contributions of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henri David Thoreau.

Emersonian thought focuses on the latter's retreat to nature as opposed to the identification with the mechanised civilised world, one that immerses itself in what Weber calls "bureaucratized system of rationality." Henceforth, this thesis finds more possibilities in the study of the core ideals of the man who is well remembered for his contribution to the American exceptionalism. In contrast to the view that holds America synonym with technology and the settled life of civilisation, Ralph Waldo Emerson, like a few of those who cherished idealism, went far in embracing the life on the move rather than that one marked with stability and security.

The other pillar of transcendentalism and the student of Emerson has not been spared any less criticism, especially when it comes to his ideas on civil disobedience. He is often regarded as a notorious figure when it comes to conformity with political authorities, but the question whether such claims and

stereotypes find real grounds within the pages of his prolific writings. In the subsequent passages, we will try to provide an objective reading of his writings and thoughts.

### **1.2. Oneness, or the connaturality between nature, humankind, and the universe.**

In an instance of Western civilisation at the far West of this globe, the citizens of the newly formed republic of the United States of America were ascribing themselves with the ideals of freedom and liberty. The social atmosphere was heavily being marked with an impulse of individuality. As America was negotiating a cultural identity, the transcendentalists of New England demarked themselves with a unique conception of one's position in the World. Like any natural phenomenon, including innocence to adulthood journey, the growth of plants, food preparation, to them humankind is not a separate entity that lives without interconnectedness with the universe. They viewed man exactly as a parcel of food whose peculiar taste and difference serves the bigger undefined corpus from the inner perspective. All seems different, but all works as a simple additive taste to the whole. Man also, to them, thinks he is truly independent while nothing could be done or decided without that harmony with the universe. In this sense, Emerson went beyond the physical description of the nature of being. To him, a metaphysical dimension immersed the bodily nature within a realm of transcendental world. As such an aesthetic vision could embrace this unusual understanding of mankind. Guardiano (2017) explains that:

The aesthetic wealth appearing in nature to which Emerson and the American painters well attest can be philosophically accounted for.

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This is achieved by a metaphysics that provides an explanatory theoretical ground concerning the general features of being. (p. 37)

Emanating from a romanticist vision of the world, the view of nature as the incubator of both passivity and change framed much of the transcendental's explanation of individuality on the one hand and its direct relationship with nature and beyond. All these entities when aesthetically examined evoked the way man within nature could be seen as an element of difference and peculiarity that is outstanding and as a participant in a changing world. Like a rock casted into a body of water that fixed meaning could generate and push the flow of a process of life creation. In Guardiano's view, these two paradoxical notions were to Emerson like "the two modalities of nature"(Guardiano, 2016, p. 7).

As any paradox often involves a sharp challenge between the geometrical shapes, no wonder nature and life in general exhibits a sense of harmony between its inhabitants and man at its centre. Emerson writes his essay "Circles" to bring into the focus the notion that the world is not a juxtaposition of things and bodies but is a "system of concentric circles" (Guardiano, 2016, p. 7). One could only see the soft transition from one point to the other within a space that is framed by a circle. Moreover, this shape shows both the power of space organisation as a means to be connected to the bigger frame. Water as epitomised by drops and manifested in whirlpools shows only how powerful is the centric conception of the universe. No surprise then that the earth itself is nothing but a combination of endless circles in a multidimensional fashion.

With the publication of his magnum opus *Nature* (1836), Emerson sets the ground for his own personalised vision of Transcendentalism, one that would forge its way in a context where European thinking and philosophy is well established. Taking into consideration the context of the first half of the nineteenth century, such endeavour proves to be a very daunting one. Emerson, who comes from a religious background as a priest and son of another on the one hand, and as a Harvard graduate on the other, seems to emphatically embrace contradiction in an unusual manner (Myerson, 2000). Actually, the wealth, complexity, and contradictions of Emerson's work comes undeniably from the richness of his own life as Bosco describes:

A person who engaged in complex personal and intellectual relationships with many persons in America and abroad, who had something to say about every important religious and philosophical controversy, political and social event, and scientific discovery that came to his attention between the 1820s and the late 1870s, and who nearly filled four notebooks with the titles of books he considered essential to read, Emerson defies easy summary. (as cited in Myerson, 2000, p. 9)

Ironically speaking, contradictions in Emerson's life and thought work together to seek unity and oneness. This seems an out of reach idea that could undermine the whole argument on Emerson's genius, yet this is, in our view, the core of the man's unique approach in both thinking and practice. Actually, Emerson believes in the power of nature as an inspirational reservoir for man's thinking. Nature is not merely the pristine green landscape as one might imagine, but even society itself, as an entity beyond the limits of the self, embodies an organ within a larger organism. Hence, what propels society and culture to live

and develop is also an element that the individual should observe and learn from. Apparently, the way culture embraces contradictions led Emerson not to reject controversies, but rather to acquire as a means toward the mastery of one's own destiny. This goes necessarily through the acceptance of different perspectives coming from the past which is celebrated not for its pastness as later American modernists, namely T.S. Eliot, would say, but for the values and meanings it evokes.

Actually, contradiction to Emerson goes beyond the linguistic denotation to reach a conceptual level and even to become an organisational principle. In a way, this very fact reflects Emerson's genius to merge the traditional with novelty. While the mainstream institutional body of knowledge accounts for Modernism as a movement that found grounds at the turn of twentieth century, we hold the view that Emerson is a real avant-garde thinker whose thought and peculiar way of thinking goes beyond the limitations of his moment. In different instances, we will reveal aspects of his modernist impulses. Among these, his revisit of the past in a fragmented manner to incite the reader and interlocuter in general to rethink himself facts and draw conclusions. It is in this very fashion that he prefers not that one becomes a slave of the ideas of the past, but an active reader of the content proposed by different thinkers of the world from different times and perspectives. The contemplation over these ideas will, to him, lead definitely to a real original understanding of the world. However, the focus goes exclusively to the process itself rather than end product. The climax of such process is in many ways regarded as Patell suggests, a revelation.



Revelation as the name suggests invokes a plethora of ideas that form a semantic field that heavily calls for religious paradigm. The bulk of criticism regards Emerson as a religious thinker accordingly. While this seems convincing in many cases especially with regard to the religious background of the man, a thorough reading of the Emerson's inclination toward his own background, which is uneasy to delimit, reveals interestingly an unusual ascription to a specific space within the realms of religion, philosophy, and science. It is worth noting that Emerson attended Harvard College, with the intention of becoming a minister. So, his own life portrayed a great deal of his own teachings on man's acceptance of progress and even more its pursuit.

Revelation is also closely tied to spiritual growth as well as physical one. In this view growth seems an essential idea that alludes to Emerson's reception of eastern cultures' beliefs and spiritual perspectives on existence and truths of reality. Takanashi confirms that "Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were fascinated by Asian philosophies and religions. The two American philosophers discovered "Asia" in their own Transcendentalist views of nature and human ethics." (Takanashi, 2017) More details on such influence have been released by Lucia who names the Hindu texts that fascinated Emerson:

The famed American author Ralph Waldo Emerson was fascinated by Hindu texts such as the Visnu Purana, Katha Upanisad, and the Laws of Manu and took particular interest in the Bhagavad Gita. Even as an educated scholar delving deeply into the study of Hinduism, Emerson wrote a letter to his sister in 1845 in which he praised the famous Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita as "that much renowned book of Buddhism." Still, Hindu thought emerged in Emerson's work unambiguously as he contemplated "illusion," a veiled reference to maya (illusion) and constructed his notion of the "Over soul" as

directly correlated to the Upanisad idea of Atman (the essence of self) and Brahman (the essence of the universe). (Lucia, 2017)

In his “Modern Yoga,” Jain, establishes the link of Emerson’s thought on intuition with Asian cultures that make distinction between spirit and nature at the core of their principles, as follows:

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), for example, thought their democratic religiosity, which privileged unmediated intuition as a means to realizing God, was compatible with nondualist yogic thought that maintained knowledge of ultimate reality could be discovered through turning inward, away from external doctrine. (Jain, 2016)

Thus, the influence of Hindu and Chinese culture brings itself to the front and explains many of the tenets held by the transcendentalists. It is worth noting that Emerson as a poet was not the only one who exhibited his fascination with eastern cultures, but even female writers, who were not evidently capable of expressing their stances, aptly did. For instance, Emily Dickinson, who embraced such liberating ideals, found herself a place and assertion primarily in the Bostonian movement as well as in her readings of and writings influenced by far eastern poetry. In her “Indicating Kinship Between Emily Dickinson’s Poetry and Buddhism,” Izumi indicates as she mentions Dickinson’s capacity to separate the subject and the object, in Zen tradition. She demonstrates that such poet defied the religious authorities at the time and in the manners of Zen Buddhism, she set herself aloof from her society only to contemplate thoroughly about the truth she portrayed in her later poems (Izumi, 2013). Yanbin Kang goes further to thoroughly investigate Dickinson’s readings of other American writers, who in their turn were influenced by Eastern thought. She proves that such

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Transcendental poet embraced the silence of mind as a way to dispel social influence and subdue desire, exactly as we may read on the principles of Zen in sources like those proposed later on by Suzuki (Kang, 2017).

Speaking of D. T. Suzuki who interestingly encounters the West in a later period, mid twentieth century, we find it useful to our survey of the workings of Emersonian ideas as they went in what he calls the game of circles, his own form of platonic dialogues. Actually, after his initial encounter with eastern thought and his own appropriation of many of the core tenets of Zen Buddhism, time proved it essential that a major Zen master comes to America to bring the essential teachings to the American society. Grabher points out eloquently the main difference revealed through such an encounter:

Suzuki agrees with the general opinion that the Western mind tends more towards logical, discursive, analytical thinking, whereas the Eastern mind seeks to find truth intuitively, he argues that “‘intuition’ can have various shades of meaning. Ontologically speaking, its most fundamental quality is to come directly in touch with Reality.”(as cited in Pâtea & Derrick, 2007, p. 141)

In another ring of the game of circles, Alan Watts refers to Emerson’s idea of revelation in different wording, calling it “Awakening.” To him, when one forgets about what society dictates to him since his early years of childhood and later educational periods of instruction, he becomes ready to return to the original status of clairvoyance. In other words, what he needs is a moment of cancellation and escape from the boundaries of dictations, rules, and regulations. After which, the mind becomes clear to transcend what he calls the “bag of skin.” Such moment reveals itself as one of awakening, which in pure reflection to Emerson’s notion of

contradiction is defined as “dehypnotization, coming to the senses by going out of the mind” (Watts et al., 2004). Watts’s notion of the mind does not necessarily mean the natural workings of such human organ, but he meant that entity which has come to be tainted by social dictations. Emerson refers to that correct status of the mind as one that is natural and pristine, a notion that we find in the following reading:

Emerson believes that the natural world is a system of analogies, and that the law of Nature coincides with the prior law of the human mind: nature answers to the soul, part by part. It is crucial that each of us discovers that the law of nature is the law of one’s own mind. (Donoghue, 2008a, p. 29)

### **1.3. Thinking of the maverick, or the theory of Self-Reliance**

What makes an ideal so distinct is its inner faculty to transcend the limits of time and space both in the contexts of change as well as consistency. While America was going through a period of massive transformation from an agrarian country to one of industrial inclination, Emerson excelled in creating a power of influence on the individual within an aura of collective exodus to the cities. In other words, the city provides little chance to its members to get in touch with nature, the source of divine inspiration (A. L. Rumsey, 2010, p. 38). In his essay “The American Scholar,” Emerson anticipated modern-day learning theories which advocate autonomy and learner-centred principles of knowledge acquisition.

At the heart of Emerson’s thought is his conception of the individual in terms of his transcendent dimension of spirituality and thinking capacity rather than sensual understanding of the World. Accordingly, one cannot be a mirror or

just another entity reflecting the view dictated by the rest of society. Here comes the role of self-reliance as a motor of every American citizen to find his own path in a prospected Democratic Republic, found in the imagination of the Idealist in particular. Actually, for Emerson mankind have always been divided into two englobing categories. The first one falls under the Materialists and the second reflects his conception of the Idealists (Emerson & Atkinson, 1940, p. 87). In his essay “The Transcendentalist,” he lays plain this taxonomy:

the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the senses are not final, and say, the senses give us representations of things, but what are the things themselves, they cannot tell. The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle) on individual culture. (p.87)

Emerson’s idealism is not merely a pursuit of paragons. It is more for applicability and manifestation in real life. In one of his speeches at Harvard University, he declared such intention as revealed the essence of the role of the scholar as not one of theory and teaching alone, but one that entails active guidance to the learners that eventually engenders in them a sense of distinction between facts and appearances. To use his words, the scholar has the mission “to cheer, to raise and to guide men by showing them facts among appearances” (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. xvi).

It is a peculiar focus on one’s faculty of distinction between the appearance we see and therefore perceive and build a shared conception of things, on the one hand, and reality in its other or beyond meaning that can only be

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grasped when man's thinking is put into sincere work, on the other hand. Thus, no means but an original endeavour could solidify one's reliance on his own vision and perspective to achieve revelation. Originality, therefore, constitutes one of the core elements of Emerson's vision to what later on will be understood as Individualism.

It is worth noting that, Individualism as a concept did not appear in the early works of Emerson, but it appeared first in translations from the works of Alexis Tocqueville in 1841.<sup>3</sup> The latter is known for his work on Democracy and visionary prospections on the new culture that would prevail in America. His thesis conceives new American culture as one that melts the spirit of religion with that of liberty, an allusion to the ideals of French revolution. Despite his affinities with the old aristocracy, he objectively, prophesied a culture of Democracy with liberal essence, which is basically futuristic and intrinsically driven by an impulse of what he called "Individualism." In the American context, the chains of hierarchy seem to be broken to the benefit of individuals as they practice liberty. Everyone becomes free to think for himself instead of being subdued and associated with the higher ring (Patell, 2010).

Patell makes the point that Emerson embraced the ideas proposed by Tocqueville when it comes to distinction between egoism and individualism. While the first refers to the sense of self love in its basic meaning, the second refers not to a complete separation with society as a whole, but to a certain degree

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<sup>3</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) was a French sociologist and political theorist. He developed his ideas on American democracy and the ancient regime mainly in the following works: *Democracy in America* (1835) *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856).

of retreat or what he calls personal isolation. This status involves interaction with close people with whom one has affinities, such as the family and close friends. Emerson cherishes his family's role as a source of knowledge and inspiration. For instance, he "referred to his Aunt Mary as his 'earliest and best teacher,' and a 'spirited and original genius in her own right'" (Emerson, 2015, para.9.2). It is precisely in this positive isolation if we may say that one posits himself in a vantage that provides him with a clear perspective on society and keen understanding of one's individual powers, which eventually will be cast into the workings of society. Yet, Tocqueville's objectivity of thinking evokes eventually the risks at play when the process of self-improvement loses harmony with that of everyone else within society:

form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagin[ing] that their destiny is in their own hands." Ultimately this habit could lead to a situation in which "each man is forever thrown back upon himself alone, and there is danger he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart. (Grant, 1986, p. 311)

In accordance with Tocqueville's idea on the revealing purpose of isolation, Thoreau will practically dwell nature alone and textually record his experience in Walden. Through such actual experience he will refute the stereotypes on nature as a hostile space. His accounts will revoke the fallacy of socially spread idea that Nature is governed by blind forces, with no intelligence. As a natural historian he makes a keen comparison of the laws of nature with those of the civilised world in terms of rigidity and orderly manners. He points out to the wrong conception of nature as a loose controlled space that is functioning haphazardly. Instead, he views that Nature has subtle codes that elevate

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themselves to the kingly manners of ruling countries. Thoreau exhibits clear distinction and will for learning. Thus, his intuitive sense for discovery leads him to reach a revealing irony. For him, we ought to learn from nature that life needs to be lived and not learned. Through the use of the concept of discovery, he invokes the revelatory effect of his personal life in the wilderness as disclosed through the following passage:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. (Thoreau et al., 2016, pp. 90-91)

With historical evidence on the eventual status of American society, we could agree that when acknowledging the risks and developing gradually, individualism will necessary grow through time to produce a certain elevated form that departs from the savage into the refined (Patell, 2010).

Perhaps, Americans in their early days of the creation of the nation were helped by the fact that the bulk of them shared the same social ascription and therefore aspirations to the future with all what involves of hope of an ideal world. We might say so, because individualism today cannot be put in the framework or within one unified definition as the different backgrounds and strata belonging impose divergent visions that could make it really difficult to follow the same path toward self-assertion. In *American Individualisms*, Kusserow tells us how individualism can take different umbrellas and variants:



For too long, social theorists have spoken of the genericized lump of “individualism” without reference to the varying styles, subtypes, subtleties, and nuances individualism inevitably takes on, especially in relation to one’s social class. Social inequality has been left out of descriptions of individualism, as if both the poor and the wealthy practice and socialize the same monolithic and general meanings of individualism, as if like some Platonic form, the meanings of individualism float above one’s local visions of the future, one’s sense of hope or promise, danger, possibility, or caution. (Kusserow, 2005, p. v)

The genius of Emerson finds place in the tight conceptual spaces where he could on the one hand reframe his principles out of long-standing ideas constructed in the mindset of people. On the other hand, he masterfully brought about new ideas and definition that at first glance might appear contradictory. For instance, while he, as a unitarian, stressed the unification of meanings as we mentioned vis-à-vis the view toward what might be called Emersonian individualism, he surprisingly rejected consistency. This means, his universal vision of the world and more, what he calls the universe, has nothing to do with a replica of perspectives or opinion towards the different aspects of life or life itself. He therefore, in his *Self-Reliance* drafts a certain rejection of consistency and stress of originality. This very ability of bringing the opposing ends of spectrums is what makes Emerson a thinker who gets himself interest and appeal for study in each coming century, we believe. This happened in the early twentieth century and this new century is no exception.

In the twentieth century, the continental philosophy, we argue, has indeed been shaped in a subtle manner by rich intellectual contributions including Emerson’s thought. This cannot be said without acknowledging Edmund

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Husserl's apparent reliance on experience and representation as a path to approach life and reality. For him, significance contrasts representation. These are nothing but a different wording to what Emerson calls intuition, his focal inclination to approach life. Put simply, Intuition should replace what we are told about the world. According to this perspective we have to live life in an experiential way rather than institutional one.

To Husserl, anything we perceive, therefore, as an object whatever it is goes through what he calls the objectifying act. So, in this context, we can see that it is not a question of being rational or irrational to really conceive reality. Here metaphysics melts with cognition to reach one end. This is how we could actually see the genius of such thinkers who transcended the usual in their view to life and human ability. For both Emerson and Husserl, objectivity, the real one, takes hold of man's thinking and belief. They try to reach out the essence of life without any pre-ordained opinions or doctrines. They preferred to follow their instinct in their lives which proved to be so influential to mankind throughout more than two centuries now. It is not by complexity or beyond-reach academic perspectives that they could take a sound position in the intellectual history of the world but by their original explanation of man's relation with the world. This world and what man is exposed to goes to a certain multi-layered path or representation that will necessary shape the conception of life and its offspring aspects such as happiness and satisfaction. Intuition, then, is not merely a quality that one should use or evoke when facing one of the events or phenomena in life, but it is a motor or

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drive that is necessarily called for whenever man gets involved with an objectifying act. Levinas stresses Husserl's view in this regard:

Only an objectifying act has the privilege of giving us an object and that our contact with reality has the structure of a representation. But not all representations have the same right to posit their object as existing. We may be dealing with purely imaginary objects or with objects that are "merely thought." Thought, for example, understood as a mental play that accompanies the comprehension of words, is also intentional; it is directed toward the object it means. (Levinas, 1995, p. 65)

Real intelligence is not only the faculty to go deeper in meanings to get their essence, but it is the distinctive capacity to see what lies behind as linking powers and relations. For this reason, Emerson shows in a clear manner his own genius as he pinpoints the way truth reveals itself as universal when the individual recognizes that Truth discovered within in an instinctive manner applies to all mankind (A. L. Rumsey, 2010, p. 40). Like modern day neurologists advocate the use of mental powers and the acquisition of knowledge reflects itself neurologically in the form of the creation of new brain cells that extend the memory capacity. Emerson seems to anticipate this very idea as he makes an analogy between the growth of man's mental capacity with the growth of the trees and creation of branches that extend its capacity of breathing and acquiring more vital more resources. More interestingly, for him, in being active and through the process of acquiring knowledge as part of one's self-development, liberty of thought finds place:

It was found that the intellect could be independently developed, that is, in separation from the man, as any single organ can be invigorated, and the result was monstrous. A canine appetite for

knowledge was generated, which must still be fed but was never satisfied, and this knowledge, not being directed on action" never took the character of substantial, humane truth, blessing those whom it entered. It gave the scholar certain powers of expression, the power of speech, the power of poetry, of literary art, but it did not bring him to peace or to beneficence. (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 459)

#### **1.4. Transcendentalism, cognition, and the illumined thought**

The quintessential American thinking, namely transcendentalism, had the missing of making distinction and establishing America as a pole of intellect. In many cases, the transcendentalists were considered as a mere extension to British and German thinkers and philosophers. The wide spread ideas on American transcendentalism are often linked to Romanticism, especially in literature. For this, we often find names like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth evoked as the sources of inspiration and influence. The debate on the ascription of the latter poets to empiricism or transcendentalism in its European version is an ongoing one, yet the elements that lead to the second movement are undeniable. Among the new visions on American transcendentalism as compared to its predecessor variants is its original notion on the role of cognition as a process in interplay with sensory input. This leads necessary to the way humans think about and interact with objects in nature, as explained in the following passage:

The root issue concerning cognition, its subject-object pattern, indeed lies in the underlying puzzle that Kant formulated at the outset of his voluminous dissertation on the entire schema of human understanding. He stresses that there are two sources of cognition, which essentially depend upon each other: *the senses* and *understanding*.

The senses are blind without understanding, and inversely, understanding is empty without the import provided by the senses.

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Only together, by complementing each other, may the senses and understanding form cognition. (Tymieniecka, 2011, p. 4)

If empiricists focus on the sensory and the cognivists on the mind and the conscious, American transcendentalists, namely Emerson found a common ground between the two ends of what they perceived as one continuum. Emerson stressed that the senses alone are not sufficient to get a full comprehensive idea on life experience. Moreover, in what seems a defiance to the common rational visions that resulted from the period of enlightenment in Europe, he pointed out to the limitations of such inclination. This way, he laid the grounds to a new space or perspective which is essentially autonomous that came to being to perceive the world and its reality:

Many truths arise to us out of the recesses of consciousness. We learn that the highest is present to the soul of man; that the dread universal essence, which is not wisdom, or love, or beauty, or power, but all in one, and each entirely, is that for which all things exist, and that by which they are; that spirit creates; that behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; one and not compound it does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves: therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us. (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 35)

Emerson viewed that understanding, a higher form of reasoning, is essential to make use of the elements of nature, otherwise called objects by Immanuel Kant. He expresses this idea in *Nature* as follows:

The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts. The one esteems nature as rooted and fast; the other, as fluid, and impresses his being there ...on. To him, the refractory world is ductile and flexible; he invests dust and stones

with humanity, and makes them the words of the Reason. (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 29)

Thus, American thinking as we refer to in this thesis could be said to have its origins from this very moment where a man who was unknown to the world took the courage to reformulate concepts according to the American soil and people. For one thing, Emerson called for a personalised reading of texts and sources from world heritage. This to him involved what he calls active reading. It means one's thinking should reveal itself through the process in course. Emerson genius appears in his anticipation of ideas not yet even thought of. In his "The Art of Fiction" (1884), Henry James speaks of literature's magical effect when combined with the reader's active involvement:

A third characteristic of Fiction, which should alone be sufficient to give it a place among the noblest forms of Art, is that, like Poetry, Painting, and Music, it becomes a vehicle, not only for the best thoughts of the writer, but also for those of the reader, so that a novelist may write truthfully and faithfully, but simply, and yet be understood in a far fuller and nobler sense than was present to his own mind.

Active reading, as part of one's self-assertion, definitely leads to a sense of authority, which is often related to great writers in the image of Henry James who also contributed to literary criticism and helped many other American writers to find their way in a defining moment in American cultural history. As many other great authors, he was not easily understood and often criticised for his wrongly described complexity of expression. This seems a recurrent attribute linked to the great minds. We say so for the similitude that we find in Emerson's status vis-à-vis his community and the readership of his time. Alongside, his fellow

intellectual activists, he insisted on his mission to spread his intellect. It was not an easy task, but a challenge that made this exceptional generation face the dilemma of being understood. Emerson externalizes this struggle into the following inquiry:

“Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. recognizes that ‘to be great is to be misunderstood.’”(Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 152)

What differentiates Emerson from other theorists is the way he combines words he utters with real manifestation of their meanings. This could be seen in turning his call for active reading into true instances of application. Amazingly, within our endeavour to find similitudes of ideas between Emerson’s thinking and that of Chinese culture, we found a reference to an epigraph in a book entitled *The Tao of Emerson* by Laozi and Grossman (2007) which goes as follows: “all philosophy, of East and West, has the same centripetence.”(as cited in Emerson et al., 2007) In an initial research about the concept of “centripetence,” which means the tendency of movement towards the centre, we discovered that the word has Latin roots and was introduced to English usage only in early nineteenth century in the writings of Emerson, as appointed to by Lexico.com, an online dictionary supervised by Oxford University Press (Lexico, n. d.-b).

Greatness comes indeed from the fact that a man’s ideas precede the times in which they become available and susceptible to study. Actually, not just in literary realms but newer areas of science were to get inspired from genius

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seminal works. After almost two centuries, Thoreau's *Walden* is taking place in recent studies of Ecology. More disciplines of natural sciences and even in technology areas that seek remediation of mind-related impairment, scholars are scrutinizing the essential ideas which are often brevilouquent simply because the mind behind has an impressive higher faculty of reasoning. Interestingly, the discipline that can take on the journey of studying matters of spirituality as linked with cognition will appear only at the turn of the twenty-first century. It is the cognitive science of religion, a subdiscipline that melts together many fields of experimental and human nature to get into the core of the way religion interacts with the mind (White, 2021, p. 1).

One of the facts that often scholars of intellectual history take an oblique stand *vis-à-vis* the nature and areas of investigation that transcendental thinkers embraced. Before being poets, writers, philosophers, the main figures in Transcendental tradition were active participants in other fields of scientific investigation. They, in the image of Emerson, took it upon themselves to lecture at college and provide seminal works on education and science. In many ways, their approach to nature was intrinsically experimental and based on observation and hypothetical thinking. For his part, Henri David Thoreau managed to discover many principles on the workings of what has come to be known as Ecology.

Science, for the transcendentalists is not defined in the traditional manner, as they innately promote self-vision to the matters of life. Traditional thinkers let us say, both rationalists or empiricists, to this day come up with



narrowed perspectives on science. Their ideas on science are epitomised through the definition provided by the Encyclopaedia Britannica which goes as follows:

Science, any system of knowledge that is concerned with the physical world and its phenomena and that entails unbiased observations and systematic experimentation. In general, a science involves a pursuit of knowledge covering general truths or the operations of fundamental laws. (Encyclopaedia, n. d.)

The same way academic institutions today think in the same fashion as they provide their readership with their understanding of science, in the image of the Australian Academy of Science. As an epitome of the hierarchical academic structure of the modern world, it suggests a definition that is not far different from the one proposed by the Encyclopaedia above:

Science can be thought of as both a body of knowledge (the things we have already discovered), and the process of acquiring new knowledge (through observation and experimentation—testing and hypothesising). Both knowledge and process are interdependent, since the knowledge acquired depends on the questions asked and the methods used to find the answers. (Ladiges & Mayo)

Nothing substantial has changed since the early transcendentalists when it comes to institutional perspectives toward science. For this, we can see that Emerson and his fellows' endeavour was of high challenge, especially when it comes to the influences that were at play on the one hand and the fierce resistance to change that they faced. Among the influences we are to bring to the fore the eastern visions of thought. This has to be said since Emerson considers very well that a man's life is not that harmonious or linear in progression; but instead, it is a journey of exposition with diverse manifestations of the divine or the unseen.

What is so defining according to him is not the time one takes as a living being but it is about those specific moments in which an encounter with the truths reveals itself what he perceives and theorises as illuminating, as the following passage from “The Transcendentalist” explicitly demonstrates:

These two states of thought diverge every moment, and stand in wild contrast. To him who looks at his life from these moments of illumination, it will seem that he skulks and plays a mean, shiftless and subaltern part in the world. That is to be done which he has not skill to do, or to be said which others can say better, and he lies by, or occupies his hands with some plaything, until his hour comes again. (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 100)

As we mentioned, Emerson shows a great affinity with the cultures of the world, especially as they intersect with spirituality. One would wonder how can he develop a keen understanding of world visions and appropriate them in his philosophy, but the answer would be from his very thinking and inclination to matters of conception. It is quite evident by now that Emerson has no dogmatic perspectives to humanity. Despite the facticity of his religious upbringing that is Calvinist, his mind was open to the ideas and beliefs of civilisations he had not reached physically. In his allusion to the way civilisation and society has been formed throughout the centuries, he eloquently brings to the surface early civilisations’ contribution to the development and conception of society as a cultural notion. This includes civilisations built on Christian and Muslim faiths, as read in the following:

God knows when, in the infancy and barbarism of the old world; the gravity and sense of some slave Moses who leads away his fellow slaves from their masters; the contemplation of some Scythian Anacharsis; the erect, formidable valor of some Dorian townsmen in

the town of Sparta; the vigor of Clovis the Frank, and Alfred the Saxon, and Alaric the Goth, and Mahomet, Ali, and Omar the Arabians, Saladin the Curd, and Othman the Turk, sufficed to build what you call society, on the spot and in the instant when the sound mind in a sound body appeared. (Emerson, 2015, para. 797.38)

Far beyond the middle east, Emerson's ideas reflect a fascination with eastern philosophy's precepts on revelation. In Zen culture, which has become now known to the West, a fact that was not evident and easy in the times of Emerson. Revelation to use Emerson's words or illumined thought to use the Zen masters' diction is central to such approach to life which is essentially a transcendent one. For them, just as it is for the Emersonian, what matters most in life is that clear vision to the essence of all this existence, not just what is seen. Of course, institutional effect had its curtain influence on societies in all corners of the world, the east, especially India and China are no exception. Perhaps those regions of the world suffered even more than the West, including America. Emerson's fascination seems to engender itself from the very fact that so distant areas of the world had developed their own personalised vision to reality. He liked much their originality in thinking and assertive way in the midst of turbulent circumstances, since the history of the world is one of wars and struggles. This is evidently, another similarity that appealed to his critical thinking since America itself was going through more than turbulent period toward the mid of the nineteenth century which witnessed issues of universal struggles with discrimination and culminated in a massive Civil War by 1861.

Emerson did not live to read a book entitled *A Western Approach to Zen* in which his own ideas have become popularised to Americans and the rest of the

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world. Ideas like the process of revelation through the handling and workings on opposites, the perennial now, or the illumined thought find space to be taught and learned by generations of Americans who finally meet some easiness in their interaction with cultures of the world. (Humphreys, 1985)

What matters most to this discussion is the transcendentalists' faculty of intertwining cognition with this revelatory process. Evidently, pure scientifically minded persons would find it difficult to reconcile their structured experimental approach to facts of life with a completely seemingly contradictory approach to life itself. Thus, for us, this is the core achievement of American transcendentalists in all regards of their philosophical and experiential endeavours. We find it so fascinating a man in the nineteenth century capable of anticipating such interdisciplinary vantage to the question of existential universal appeal. Among the things that comes in the centre of this very interest is the way revelation makes science and philosophy meet. More importantly, for us the way this happens in art as a representation will be of paramount revealing effects.

### **1.5. Agency, or the early thoughts on morphogenic society**

Change in society or its development has always been a central concern to thinkers and authorities in different fields of both philosophical and scientific orientations. Americans, in particular, sought distinction from the very beginning of their nation creation. New England as the incubator of many of the early American ideals of freedom and liberty sought distinction in its social workings. Knowing that the early settlers were often religious sects who considered America as the new Eden, in the image of Puritans and Calvinists. So naturally, the

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definition of society was to a large extent restricted through some religious precepts that remind us of John Winthrop's 1630 call for a "The City upon a Hill." While justification of order and social structure was heavily defined by a structural pattern, new glimpses of light appeared with the emergence of transcendental thinking. Ironically such movement appears to today as one of religious grounds, a fact that we do not agree with totally in this thesis. We, in contrast, believe that the movement tends to be more cultural, philosophical and larger in scale to reach what might be called in eastern thought, a "Tao," that is, a way of life. In this context, we are to remind the reader of this thesis that in a completely different approach to matters of life as of that taken by Christian followers, especially when taking the context of the early nineteenth century, Transcendentalist departed from the Puritan and Calvinists views and explanation of the world and by consequence society. In other words, for both sects, society was condemned by definition as a fallen one and no salvation was to be sought, except that of divine grace. To us, Transcendentalist borrowed much from other development lines of thoughts of the moment, especially from the Unitarians,<sup>4</sup> who interestingly shifted their view of Christianity or to be more precise they developed their own perspectives toward the essence of such religion. While previously all the doctrine was focused on Christ as the saviour though his sacrifice and crucifixion, the unitarians looked differently. They came to believe that indeed Christ is a saviour, but not only through his death. They actually celebrated the life and teachings of the man. Perhaps, this appears something

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<sup>4</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, himself, became a unitarian minister after his graduation from Harvard College in 1821.

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logical today, but if we are to take the perspective of the casual person who has just escaped religious oppression in continental Europe, we find such views and interpretations of religion as something beyond imagination and grasp. So, for the unitarians Christ represented the universal model for a better life. They looked up to his actions as the exemplars of the perfect way of life. In many ways, this was the first time that society takes on its own the duty of explaining the meanings behind actions. That is, the first signs of the metamorphosis of society appeared out of the collapse of a doctrine that prevailed in Western society for almost a millennium span of years.

As such, the Transcendentalists on their own embraced such inclination of personal interpretation of actions. They went beyond interest in the sacred person to aim at Nature, which to them represented not only green trees and fertile soils, but incubated within transcendent signs to the divine. Furthermore, reading and explanation of the natural phenomena to extricate its underpinnings reached a higher level of investigation, which is scientific by nature. In one of his lectures in front of a New England Community, Emerson as he was addressing an issue of protest against the Church, he called for the scientific process of fermentation to make his point:

These made unleavened bread, and were foes to the death to fermentation. It was in vain urged by the housewife that God made yeast, as well as dough, and loves fermentation just as dearly as he loves vegetation; that fermentation develops the saccharine element in the grain, and makes it more palatable and more digestible. (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 450)

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In the same tradition, Thoreau, who has come to be acknowledged in modern times as a natural historian, had shown his keen scientific, imaginative, creative competences that would associate him with the label of “The American genius.” While the latter concept was not yet brought to the forth, such poet, artist, and scientist epitomised the imbedded challenge between the old and the new. Novelty has often put mankind in a doubt of what is coming and here following the crowd or asserting oneself presented the real matter of the whole body of literature created by a man we can assertively call now a genius. We say so as America of today, in an impressive manner, provides the world with an intrinsic capacity of metamorphosis that goes on throughout the rapidly changing status of the world. Yet, how science could face tradition or embrace it is a question of interest that appeals to a thorough investigation.

For Emerson, change cannot occur while clinging to the meanings we inherit and continue to abide by blindly. Among the preservers of old meanings are institutions, in all their forms, which are innately inclined to stick to the form of things, or what he calls “appearances.” In contrast to nature which represents openness and freedom and “wild-liberty,” institutions, in the image of kingly heads, represent the prison of thoughts. To use Emerson’s words, “wild liberty develops iron conscience. Want of liberty, by strengthening law and decorum, stupefies conscience. ‘Lynch-law’ prevails only where there is greater hardihood and self-subsistency in the leaders” (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 429)

Language on its own, through its conventional, structural, and semantic complexities, is one essential phenomenon that demonstrates the way we as

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humans are indoctrinated and instructed to follow a certain way of life that is not necessarily intuitive or true to the reality of life. In other words, reality is, in this view, reduced to just words which beside the regular understanding we have on communication and learning, serve as a means to describe reality. This is to raise the question that will capture the interest of later American writers and literary figures in the image of Henry James who questioned the purpose of literature as it wiggles between presentation and representation. In one of his representative works, “The Real Thing” (1892), he shows how language becomes instrumental to create a reality of its own, which in a way transcends the imitative function. Hence, we deduce language could convey a false or altered image or myth about reality, one which is not confirmed. To Emerson, this fallacy of language manifested itself as he was in the midst of a sea voyage to Europe. In the simplicity of time and place, while he is set to contemplate the basic reality around him at sea and on the deck of the ship, he mused this way:

“What life on shipboard really taught him was the value of action and the insufficiency of words alone—of mere language. “It occurred forcibly this morning,” he wrote, “that the thing set down in words is not [thereby] affirmed” (Richardson, 2015, para. 33.3)

On his part, Thoreau actively participated in the intellectual history of the world and marked it with a unique journey to the periphery of the industrialised society. He wanted to prove not to himself, but to the world that a man can go back to nature not to challenge it but to embrace it and be embraced. He adequately lived within its open arms facing the dangers of predators and uneasy



nutrition with a remarkable capacity of adaptation and fusion. Out of this, his sense of scientific inquiry was fully put in service of his inner eager to live the real life he wanted away from the imposed traditions which do not necessary represent the common-sense appeal to harmony in any society. Thus, the greatness of such a man comes from his impressive capacity to compete within himself two different orientations. In this sense, Tauber explains that:

In the context of American science's exponential growth during the nineteenth century, its rapid and effective application to technology with its attendant mechanization of a pastoral world (Marx 1965), and its implicit assault on subjectivity, Thoreau's consistently focused and clear conviction about his own mission is indeed remarkable in light of his own ambivalence toward scientific inquiry. (Tauber, 2003, p. 143)

The concerns of Thoreau are so important not because of his focus on one's potential and power of action, but more crucially for his daring attempt to explain man's relation to Nature. He even breaks through the conventional limited man's vexation with the intermediate to open the doors for the study and contemplation over the matters that ascribe themselves to the universal realm. Not necessarily he entitles his writings as such but his dissection of questions and focus on agency for instance reveals a sort of synecdoche leading to an understanding of humanity. This claim relies on Archer's definition which goes as follows:

Humanity is seen as the linchpin of agency in general and is therefore crucial to how one side of the 'problem of structure and agency' is conceptualised.<sup>1</sup> Too often we are presented with reductionist accounts, which either make all that we are the gift of society or, conversely, which claim that all society is can be derived from what

we are. Instead, both humanity and society have their own *sui generis* properties and powers, which makes their interplay the central issue of social theory for all time. (Archer, 2009, p. 17)

Among the aspects of human life is growth, a phenomenon that appeals attention to itself as the way leading to the inevitable fact of death. For the transcendentalists, growth is essential as a result of self-meditation, yet this cannot go without controversies. We can see how the self is central to the experiential inquiry, but in the same time its very definition gets a certain involvement of the other. One cannot know himself if he does not see how it is reflected in the eyes and behaviours of fellow members of society. In other words, one's self-definition transcends the boundaries of this bodily objectification. Meese observes that:

Transcendence both challenges and affirms the very human process of growth in which the 'me'-self is delimited necessarily from the 'not-me' outside. The not-me threatens the self as a lover might, by seducing the self away from itself. To have and retain a sense of self-definition and simultaneously to transcend that self constitute the dilemma of transcendence for the American. (Meese, 1975, p. 13)

### **1.6. The eternal now, or the cosmic time**

As a prolegomenon to our investigation into the transcendental view on time, it is worth noting that among the things that made a thinker like Emerson so prolific as well as controversial is his delicate unsettled position between science and religion. One of the questions that has eternally called for inquiry is man's stand *vis-à-vis* the natural phenomena. Both science and religion have exclusively endeavoured to provide some explanations in this regard. One of the characteristic features of any happening in this world is change, as the process that sets the delimitations between the haunting features of continuity and

novelty. So, how can we perceive this change and in relation to what? Hence, the question of time proves to be of paramount importance.

The perception of time reflects not merely the dilemma of the scientist versus the spiritual, but it finds roots in old philosophies, namely the Greek ones in the image of Plato and Aristotle's. While the former took what might be classified as a scientific orientation backed by the geometricians who tried to explain the world through measurement and derived units, the latter embraced an observing position that relies much on experience rather than pure calculus. Aristotle, therefore, as one of the most influential philosophers on western thought took actually the position of an observer to both worldly phenomena as well as the beyond physical perception ones.

Aristotle is by no means a geometrician. He is above all an observer; the real, for him, is revealed by experience. This characteristic, essential to all Peripatetic philosophy, is clearly seen in Aristotle's theory of place and movement. As one might expect, therefore, his theory is quite unlike that of Plato. Aristotle rejects Plato's identification of place with the position occupied in geometrical space. (Capek, 2014, p. 27)

When it comes to Emerson, his interest in time comes from the fact that he is interested in the spiritual and thus the perennial and the lasting. For him, all what takes form is consequently susceptible to change. Thus, he makes clear distinction between matter and spirit. The matter as the physicist knows and proves is delimited by boundaries and in many cases reflects a solid state. It could take form, size, colour, and weight and therefore changes through time. Essentially, this change will be closely related to man's experience and by

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consequence reverberates what can be framed into ontology. Now, what might appear obvious to the common man as we refer to time as a notion that organises the happenings in our worlds, be they internal or external, has constituted a massive source of inquiry and observation to thinkers and philosophers and intrigued them to think it over in a thorough manner.

We humans have come to speak of time generally to account for events, to measure them, and to survey the way one succeeds the other. However, Kant who arguably influenced much Emerson through his visions of temporality, had a completely different opinion. For him, events themselves do not exist as delimited objects of investigation as an ordinary person would think. They are just parts of higher phenomena which are ruled by transcendent powers; and instead, he thinks of a model of causality:

Kant's model of causality consists not of events, but rather of substances endowed with causal powers that are exercised according to their natures and circumstances. This innovative conception of Kant's view of causality casts a light on Kant's philosophical beliefs in general, such as his account of temporality, his explanation of the reconciliation of freedom and determinism, and his response to the skeptical arguments of Hume. (Watkins, 2010, foreword)

Taking into consideration, Kant's account for the negation of the event model as an organising principle of worldly phenomena, one could wonder about the feasibility of such claim. What does he mean exactly? Are we true to ourselves when we think of events classified into past, present, and future? Such inquiries seem of great relevance to philosophy in general, a fact that is proven by the continuation and development of Kant's transcendental philosophy to this

moment, crossing the twentieth century, in which Glonek raised a huge series of questions regarding the notion of time. In an essay entitled "Space and the Individual Being in the Internal and External Worlds during the Lifecourse," she opens her discussion with the following questions:

Time and space are amongst the great enigmas of human understanding. What is time precisely? Who may say with certainty? Seemingly it is the most elusive, undefinable, misunderstood, theorised about, speculated upon concept. Entity? Paradox? Quality? Given? Is it possible to state with absolute certainty whether time flows, passes, stands still, or is? Is it linear, cyclical, circular, relative, astrophysical, long or short, slow or fast? Is it a saddleback moment, a knife-edge, non-actuality becoming an actuality, a duration, or horizon? (Glonek, 2006, p. 317)

Basically, these puzzling questions had initiated much of Emerson's thinking about worldly reality and in particular his conception of time. More importantly such issues compelled Emerson to criticise pure rational thinking as a reminder of Immanuel Kant's renowned treatise "Critique of Pure Reason." Such nebulous vision to what seemingly is taken for granted reminds us also with one of the renowned methods used in Asian cultures since the dawn of Western counterparts. To get some insights from those remote corners of the world, we need a solid mediator. To this end and to get into the underlying ideas behind the notions we raised, we resort to the work of Eckhart Tolle, arguably proclaimed as a successful and influential preacher of Buddhist teachings in the West. In the foreword, of his book entitled *The Power of Now* (2004), he claims that thousands of readers informed him of the life changing effect they experienced as they applied the teachings he delivered. As the title suggests, there is a certain focus on the present and its effects.

Toll brings ancient Asian teachings into clarity in plain English through which we can get into the underpinning of a philosophy that is primarily revolving around Awakening, or in Emerson's words' Revelation. Such notion brings into our minds that there exist necessarily two status, one that precedes such phenomenon to use Husserl's idea, and one that occurs as a result of it. In broader sense, all men have fallen from a state of grace, an idea that is shared by many religions in the world, namely Christianity and in particular Calvinist sects, who remained influential in Emerson's times. Yet, Emerson's perspective was wider in scope and his intellectual project was clearly universal in time and space. Hence, if he departed from this sect's envisioned way to salvation, what was he to resort to as a solution to such a dilemma? With some probing, we will find that the answer lies in his beliefs in personal salvation through the transcendence of the seen reality, called by Thoreau "appearances," as read in the following passage from Walden:

I know has gradually grown from within outward, out of the necessities and character of the indweller, who is the only builder,—out of some unconscious truthfulness, and nobleness, without ever a thought for the appearance; and whatever additional beauty of this kind is destined to be produced will be preceded by a like unconscious beauty of life. (Thoreau et al., 2016, p. 47)

Appearances are often defined by society and its framing institutions in the image of the Church and other political authorities. Transcendence as an umbrella of new visions to established social notions including definitions of time and mind. Any ordinary person not just in Emerson's time, but even today identifies himself with his mind and perceives the world through time. Yet

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transcendentals do not agree with such view as they have always sought freeing themselves from the emotional and rational bonds with society. Historicity keeps hold on man's definition of himself, leading to a certain degree of imprisonment in the past and in the course of events missing the chance of living the Now as Tolle explains: "Why does the mind habitually deny or resist the Now? Because it cannot function and remain in control without time, which is past and future, so it perceives the timeless Now as threatening. Time and mind are in fact inseparable" (Tolle, 2004, para. 10.5).

In this vision to reach a complete status of freedom from the dictations of society the "me," to use Emerson's words has to take hold when experiencing the world. All the pastness of happenings in the world should wither as they do not exist for real. They are just shades and traces of what is happening in the Now. To understand this, we might provide an example of wave formed in the waters of sea. At any moment the waters are moving, we can see the wave, while those actual drops are gone. They are no longer part of the real event happening. What matters is seeing the wave itself as it is the real thing we can experience. This new vision to phenomena requires a fundamental precept, "You are not your mind" (Tolle, 2004).

The workings of the mind, therefore, intrigued philosophers with transcendental affection. Influenced by Emerson's practicality and keen approach to the world, Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology built on those grounds to raise the discussion into the realms of subjectivity and consciousness. Basically, his views establish the links between pure theoretical philosophy and a certain

level of applicability. In other words, he shows clearly how reality becomes something defined by a shared consciousness, by persons who fail in controlling their subjectivity. Thus, he gives a new meaning to the concept in Emerson's tradition of appropriation of contradictions. Hence through Husserl's study of subjectivity we can see how one can create an individualised conception of any object in the world in an intuitive manner through experience. Yet this goes through controversies as the world is shared with humans, as explained in the following:

Experience, then, appears as a riddle and subjectivity as a paradox. In experiencing objects in the world around us, consciousness transcends itself and achieves an objectivity shared with other conscious beings who exist in the world with us. The conscious subject is both subject of the world and subject in the world. Husserl's phenomenology is an attempt to solve this riddle and resolve this paradox, and his analyses of intentionality—both of the general structures of intentional consciousness and of particular kinds of experiences—are rich in detail and fruitful for continued study. (Welton, 2003, p. 65)

Hence the other important notion which links him back to Emerson which is intuition, that faculty of trusting the self and the understanding of truth it engenders primarily through experience. So, through this overlapping of ideas between such philosophers, we can see indeed how Emerson's notion of the play of circles becomes crucial in building knowledge anew.

In line with this wholistic approach to man's experience, which celebrate morality through universal laws, another wording for cosmic laws, the effects are instant with no retrospect to the past neither aspiration to the future. In such cosmic realms, time and space fuse to form unity. All what matters is what is



happening now. Intuitive inclination brings reward and growth and feeling of connection to the world, Emerson accounts for this phenomenon as follows:

The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance. Thus, in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire.(Emerson, 2015, para. 792.11)

Emerson is widely regarded as a purely religiously minded philosopher who has strived to undermine the scientific project of enlightenment, a view that we refute completely. Actually, the ideas he proposed, as we mentioned earlier, are rigorously tolerant to the other whoever he is. The fact that he believed in the continuum of contradictions enabled him to appropriate the truisms wherever the source is. For this, eastern philosophies worked hand in hand with continental European precepts in his mind. Out of this, we could see that his conception of time as related to reality finds grounds not only in spiritual realms and cosmic space, but is justified by experimental science in which time and space are considered as the fundamentals of existence, as we are told by Glonek (2006).

Time, therefore, takes part of our understanding of the world. Everything seems to be happening in such dimension of life as we perceive it. In science all mathematical equations that work with physics resort to time to measure some phenomena. It looks self-understood, while no one can take hold of it. For this, we are reminded for a known saying by St. Augustine who “when asked, “What, then, is time?” He admitted, “I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled”(Mensch, 2010, p. 7). As the encounter with the natural phenomena in life seems to be needy for

such dimension of time, for the transcendentalists, the real experience demonstrates itself in the consciousness, in which time and space fuse together. Actually, the whole project culminates in finding access to this realm. Emerson's notion of revelation is nothing else, but the key to access this eternal world. As such all bodily troubles and pains are to be dismantled from existence to the benefit of a lasting happiness.

### **1.7. Emerson's theory of the working self**

Work today is widely known to be related or associated with some social demands and personal material needs. In many cases, the word as a sign for it, is used interchangeably with job. Hence, the idea of necessity or compulsory drives that lead to one's limited choice to an activity that fulfils some social need. However, for Emerson work transcends such narrow definition. It is actually one of the means used long ago by the *over soul*, his word for God, to divide Man into men. In his *American Classics: A Personal Essay*, Donoghue establishes the link to Kantian Idealism through his reference to Emerson's idea that Man "is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all" (as cited in Donoghue, 2008b).

In "Spiritual Laws," Emerson brings work to an encounter with nature through the imagery of a ship in the river, man also is called upon to answer the needs of nature, a reference to intuition and will in the choice of vocation. More importantly, man's first feature which is celebrated is talent and therefore perfection is key in work. In other words, hard working men fit naturally in the nature as an organism. Again, Emerson shows his belief in the perfection of

nature laws as opposed to pure rationalists who advocated blind energy as the essence of the natural world. In many ways, this is Emerson's allusion to the divine head which is manifested in the working of world. These notions are spelled out in the following passage:

Each man has his own vocation. The talent is the call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him. He has faculties silently inviting him thither to endless exertion. He is like a ship in a river; he runs against obstructions on every side but one, on that side all obstruction is taken away and he sweeps serenely over a deepening channel into an infinite sea. This talent and this call depend on his organization, or the mode in which the general soul incarnates itself in him. He inclines to do something which is easy to him and good when it is done, but which no other man can do. He has no rival. For the more truly he consults his own powers, the more difference will his work exhibit from the work of any other. His ambition is exactly proportioned to his powers. The height of the pinnacle is determined by the breadth of the base. Every man has this call of the power to do somewhat unique, and no man has any other call. (Emerson, 2015, para. 807.14)

For her part, Margaret Fuller, in her review of Emerson's second series of essays, referred to her vision of the writer as a holder of a noble vocation. She affirms Emerson's focus on talent as a prerequisite in work. In addition, she joins force to evoke the genius as one who is endowed with what she calls "a sacred commission." Not surprisingly as a devoted transcendentalist, she calls upon the image we invoked earlier on man's harmony with nature through his participatory vocation in nature as an organism. Her eloquent review invests clearly representative words in the following passage:

The Essays have also been obnoxious to many charges. To that of obscurity, or want of perfect articulation. Of 'Euphuism,' as an excess of fancy in proportion to imagination, and an inclination, at times, to subtlety at the expense of strength, has been styled. The human heart

complains of inadequacy, either in the nature or experience of the writer, to represent its full vocation and its deeper needs. Sometimes it speaks of this want as “under-development” or a want of expansion which may yet be remedied; sometimes doubts whether “in this mansion there be either hall or portal to receive the loftier of the Passions.” Sometimes the soul is deified at the expense of nature, then again nature at that of man, and we are not quite sure that we can make a true harmony by balance of the statements.—This writer has never written one good work, if such a work be one where the whole commands more attention than the parts. If such an one be produced only where, after an accumulation of materials, fire enough be applied to fuse the whole into one new substance. This second series is superior in this respect to the former, yet in no one essay is the main stress so obvious as to produce on the mind the harmonious effect of a noble river or a tree in full leaf. Single passages and sentences engage our attention too much in proportion. (Fuller, 2019, para. 16.26)

As an axiom that we evoked in our discussion of the ideal of self-reliance, speaking of Idealism is by necessity a reference to ideas. However, if for the common reader, Idealism is only a certain pursuit of a given idea or more, what will it entail in Emerson’s mind. Again, based on what laid plain in the mentioned section, it is so clear by now that a genius, especially when he is a transcendental, would not refrain in his scientific and spiritual investigation at the limits of what society dictates at one of its moments of existence. Work in its essence was not obviously invented by Americans or even Europeans, but it is a phenomenon that goes back to the roots of Man’s existence on earth. While one is practicing a certain work, this does not necessarily infer that he or she is really aware of its underpinning truths and purposes. It is exactly here where Emerson’s thought found existence as his lucid observation spotted the way culture, especially American trend at the stage of his deliverance of the core transcendental writings,

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swerved away from the elevated forms into lowered standards that defined one of the oldest human activities.

Within the idealist framework that we already established before, we can dive directly to what work has become in a world leaping toward industrialisation and urban growth. No wonder then that Emerson's reference to the farmer and the engineer leads straight to the contradictions he embraces not as obstacles to man's thinking, but as helping devices to the process of idea building, among which the idea of the working self. To Emerson, the world natural phenomena manifest themselves in the form of polarities. To use his words, "the fact of two poles, of two forces, centripetal and centrifugal, is universal, and each force by its own activity develops the other."(Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 429)

In one direction, work is used to tame nature and produce things; hence, the idea of commodification which is the lowest end addressed by Emerson in the early pages of his essay Nature. Things in general are synonymous with the common qualities and features. Even fruits and farm products fall into this category. Farmers, all working the same way represent no difference but similar dehumanised persons who through time neglect and forget about thinking for themselves. All what matters for them is the continuity of production and the avoidance of humiliation as part of the natural process of inter-human challenges and competitions. This very idea of commodification and loss of the sense of difference anticipates what later thinkers like Karl Marx and Thorstein Veblen would call conspicuous consumption and the masses respectively (Pattel, 2010).

Moreover, the interaction with nature leads necessarily with man's will to appropriation, an idea that Thomas Hobbes linked earlier with humans uncontrolled intrinsic pursuit to property that exceeds the limits of the individual and calls for a status of chaos. Hence, the idea of absolute power and the revered institutionalised authority. In many ways, this was the rationale behind kings' grip hold on societies, namely England and by consequence the early American colonies. And it is exactly, the awareness of the fallacy of these claims that would lead to the individual's enlightenment and escape from the original commodity level to a more idea-based thinking, leading to spiritual awakening. Basically, this is the very essence of Emerson's belief in the need for an active reading of history, not to embrace it as it is, but to purposefully subordinate it along the meanings it involves toward a new understanding and spiritual transcendence of the status quo toward a true understanding of man's potential and will to perfection. Such claim certainly gains the unanimity of not just scholars but even the common reader and unspecialised persons.

Based on these facts on imposed awakening, Emerson develops the idea of revelation, a word that evokes spirituality not in the sense of blind belief, but as result of rational observation and logical conclusion. This way he demarks himself from the regular clergymen and the stereotyped image many critics ascribe him with. Transcendence through its interplay with social functions and phenomena that link the members who constitute the building blocks of such a big organism presents itself a system of thought that seeks the perfection of human condition. The material aspect of such end, while present, does not represent the teleology of

the whole project. In this regard, we are to invoke Aristotle's view on happiness in which he cherishes the moral and heightened sense of satisfaction, presupposing a certain level of material comfort.

### **1.8. Pacifism, utopia and the peaceful self.**

"We shall be as a city upon a hill," was a call by John Winthrop in 1630 in his sermon to his fellow puritans (Engen, 2020). In an explicit manner that used no political guise, he urged his community to epitomise the utopia the world is looking up to. In an exodus like wave, those puritans sought freedom in a place they believed would answer their aspirations for the values their old societies in England and the rest of Europe deprived them of. After two centuries, in Nature, Emerson revived the old appeal to a return to the basics of life. In many ways this was a declaration of a dislocation of the original project of his ancestors. He actually and implicitly incited for the rejection of mediocracy in his society.

For this reason, Emerson's project is one which bears the imprints of Plato's idealism. In many ways the circumstances in which Plato's resentments over the status quo in his society resembles to a large extent the context of the opening years of the nineteenth century. Question related to the choice of the type of the government and the political system seem to have influenced much of both thinkers. Whether democracy prevails, i.e., all people are given the chance to be part of the institution that sets the rules that govern society, or would it be the privilege at the hands of the few, be they nobility in Plato's time or the elite in Emerson's. Beside all this, in both situations a status of moral decay presented itself to the forth. The concern eventually moved from higher ends to narrowed

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drives based on an urge to power and dominance. As a genius of his time, Emerson sought the benignancy of people through his ideals of a perfect society, namely in his prolific intellectual products in different forms, including essays, lectures, and speeches. *The Dial* as a journal of great intellectual esteem bears witness of his sense of public activism and will for change.

The benignancy of people, to Emerson, goes through the refinement of their selves to get in harmony with nature. Actually, in alignment with the basics of eastern cultures, Emerson also believed in the good nature of man. If we are to inquire about the decay of morality in his time, the answer would be his disbelief in the sincerity of the institutional system. It is worth noting that he did not go against others' beliefs or intentions, but he rejected the way leading to the claimed objectives. Simply, both parties looked up to the ideals proposed by the early Western thinkers and philosophers as guides to Western Civilisation, including America as its flagship. For this very reason, Emerson thought that such a nation has been dislocated from its original path in the same image a ship loses sense of direction on the sea of life.

When the 1776 defining document of the United States of America, *The Declaration of Independence*, set the basic rights of Americans for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, all under the same premise of equality, aspirations and expectations were eventually framed by such premise. Yet, things on the ground and the territory are not necessarily what they appear on the map and the flag. If the call for freedom was linguistically clear enough to be understood by everyone whether a politician or an ordinary person, social practices continued to



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do things the way historicity dictated on them, an idea we referred to earlier as defining to man's approach to life. One of the evident examples that jump to our minds is the question of slavery which remained the same or worse for many years to come in independent America. That is to say, words do not necessarily convey reality. The official America through the words and texts is not the real America. Hence, Emerson through an individual act of contemplation over reality captured the crisis of American thinking and the decay in which America is suffering from and sought a way out of such dilemma. If for the poet, verses create a space for his free imagination, for Emerson an appeal to the American consciousness to go beyond thinking and experience the rights and principles drafted by Thomas Jefferson in a utopia of their own choosing in time and space. Therefore, in accordance to his calls, transcendentalists such as George Ripley and Henri David Thoreau set out to embark on a journey of self-discovery in the realms of utopias of their own making. In this space, we take Thoreau's experiment in Walden Pond, Concord, as an exemplar of man's spiritual union with nature; he genuinely called his project "The Community of One." Not necessary, this would be an imaginative place such as poets had always resorted to, but it is a project that everyone is called to build and concretise according to his talent and following his intuition. Taking into consideration that Thoreau is not a merely romanticist who finds joy in writing poems, but he is a real scientist and natural historian who knew well how to turn his genius into practice. As he lent a property from his mentor, he took the chance of finding intimacy with the essence of life through his close contact and daily interaction with the workings of nature. As a scientist, he observed and measured and came up with truth of his own interpretation that

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sought universality. In this way, he to a large extent answered his master's appeal to the appropriation of knowledge and ideas not at the level of thinking or through words, but at the experiential level that would validate the truths in an individualised manner.

For many historians, the transcendentalists represent an aggressive revolutionary movement in both cultural and political realms, yet in this space of expression we hold the view that by no means such thinkers harassed society to inflict new directions against the natural course of social development.

In many ways, in the light of our previous discussion on idealism that ushered in an American phenomenon we may refer to by now American transcendental individualism. Also, with regard to the fact that Emerson and his fellows did not actually reject the past and the ideas it provides, we deduce that they actually made such principles fall or melt into the umbrella of their thinking. Therefore, the precept that they celebrated the self as the centre of spirituality made them by implication take from other cultures what they believed served this end. This is to say, transcendentalism is not a pure rejection to governments and order, but it is a new look into the working of society.

It does not reject wholly the idea that people should live together with certain principles, rules and authorities. If individualism, as the name suggest, evokes exclusively what Emerson call the "me" this is not a call for the rejection of the other, or to use again his diction the "not-me." At a superficial level, it seems a clear division, just as the enlightenment trend of thought rejected religion. Yet, in

this context, Emerson demarks himself from the other unitarians who believed in Lockean psychology and from Calvinists who believed in God as the only saviour of mankind (Patell, 2010).

Acceptance of other possibilities of thinking is the key toward progressive peaceful life that is generated from within. Emerson muses with the way ideas develop interactively withing what he calls game of circles:

Conversation is a game of circles. In conversation we pluck up the termini which bound the common of silence on every side. The parties are not to be judged by the spirit they partake and even express under this Pentecost. To-morrow they will have receded from this highwater mark. To-morrow you shall find them stooping under the old pack-saddles. Yet let us enjoy the cloven flame whilst it glows on our walls. When each new speaker strikes a new light, emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker, to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer, we seem to recover our rights, to become men. (Emerson, 2001, p. 159)

As put plainly by Lacerda,

The Transcendentalists saw their movement as pacifist essentially because the idea of Oneness was in itself antithetical to war. In simple terms, you do not harm someone else if you believe, even if metaphorically, that the other is a part of you. (Lacerda, 2015)

For this reason, Henri David Thoreau as the far-reaching transcendental figure, whose ideas were to find eminence ironically in the far east, basically exploited the same methods of contradictions and subordination of mainstream ideas to the benefit of his own vision of individual-institution relations. Actually, against the ubiquitous stereotype that he is the man behind civil disobedience, a reference to chaos and anarchy, his ideas were often mis-understood and used out

of context to construct a completely derived meaning from the original intended vision. To foster this claim, we resort to Jahan Begloo's idea that Thoreau initiates a list of thinkers and activists who have frame worked and called for non-violent action *vis-à-vis* the established authorities:

As a matter of fact, nonviolent thinkers like Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi defined and practised politics beyond matters of government policy. Thoreau's famous statement 'that government is best which governs least'<sup>3</sup> inspired both Gandhi and King. Gandhi acknowledged Thoreau by adding that 'When people come into possession of political power, the interference with the freedom of the people is reduced to a minimum. In other words, a nation that runs its affairs smoothly and effectively without such State interference is truly democratic. (Jahanbegloo, 2021, p. 3)

Actually, as we mentioned, in application of Emerson's game of circles method of idea acquisition and revelation process, it seems Thoreau's principles of civil disobedience went in circles through time to land at Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights movement in the mid twentieth century. Luther King Jr., whose iconicity is never doubted, we believe, embodies in his personalised manner an effective transcendental approach to putting individual thinking and assertion into social meaning and act. Thus, we could see how exactly the individual involves the social and vice-versa. King Jr.'s activism, as it is known to everyone, epitomised a clear independent thinking and daring of a man who simply rejected being a receiver of instructed ideas on class and race. While the masses took it for granted that their destiny is sealed, he isolated himself, generating in a clairvoyance manner, certain assertions and acts on social harmony, exemplifying aspirations for oneness and expelling rejection and structural racism. As agency revered and ideas embraced facts would turn eventually dreams of equality and

freedom into living reality. Today's Black Lives Matter movement is a confirmation of his visionary prophecy that in turn finds inception in Thoreauvian thinking.

The issues raised by different social movements today represent a perpetual humans' aspiration for a utopia in which they could materialise their freedom of thinking and action. Unfortunately, such utopia could not be realised up to this moment because of the world's status quo that involve structural institutions that serve as organisational framework to world societies, including the most culturally advanced ones such as the United States of America. For one thing Nozick raises the following quintessential concern:

Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights). So strong and far-reaching are these rights that they raise the question of what, if anything, the state and its officials may do. How much room do individual rights leave for the state? The nature of the state, its legitimate functions and its justifications, if any, is the central concern. (Nozick, 2013, preface)

## **Conclusion**

After going through a number of defining tenets that build up the fundamentals of Transcendentalism, one could only see how such a concept in the fashion of the name itself goes beyond the boundaries of the semantic delimitations of the word that made it reach out a broad audience throughout the world to this day. We hold the view, therefore, that this is not only about a literary movement, nor a religious trend, but is about a way of life, i.e., a well stretching orientation combining the sensory data with a higher form of reasoning and

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spiritual leaning toward the self and the world. In contrast to most of the traditional *movements* that preceded it beside the current ones, which emerged afterward, Transcendentalism departed from teleological strands and doctrinal rationales, setting itself as a universal way of thinking that imbeds within the potentiality of time and space overlapping. In an unusual avant-gardist way, a completely different approach to individual-society relations proves to be one of a high magnitude and impact on humanity. While embracing simplicity and return to the basics, this philosophy of life wove the complexity of what the “me” can relate to the “not-me” to use Emerson’s words. Each time a transcendental text is read, therefore, one can only contemplate over his self-conceptualisation and that of the world around him. Embracing revolutionary thinking with inspirations from the harmony of life leads eventually to a peaceful self that knows exactly how to live in an organic way with nature and culture combined in a delicate way. Thus, finding a meaning to the reality we live becomes available and possible to everyone who believes in his capacity of change that comes from within. For this, in the same manner, American Transcendentalism found space and rationale for existence in a world that was heavily defined by European thinking and forcefully subdued by the industrial tools at the hands of different forms of authorities at the time, we believe such melting power of thinking and spirituality could find eminence in different contexts that exhibit futuristic impulses, but remarkably tend to keep the original human pursuit of happiness and satisfaction alive and beyond the ever growing materialist impulse and drive.



**CHAPTER II:**  
**Intersections: Towards Transcendental Cinema**

“Narrative film can encourage spectators to ‘lean into’ the film, to experience  
contemplation and the transcendent.”  
—Carl Plantinga, as cited in Schrader, 2018.

## Introduction

The mission of art has always been about the representation of the truth of the World through available cultural media at man's hand. Therefore, no wonder, truth seekers and wisdom lovers, in the image of Hegel, endeavoured much to dissect the nature of art and classify it, as it grew throughout time. In *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), notions on art rise to the level of Aristotle's inquiries on such human fascination with art representation, only to survive the test of time. In such lectures and legacy, he came up with a taxonomy of art genres that begins with architecture and ends with poetry, going through sculpture, painting, and music. Making poetry at the apex of the pyramid of arts is by no means a coincidence, but a mirror of Aristotelian tradition in art reflection. Hegel's affinities with Kant and his idealism brings to the forth the way art and thinking fuse together to provide a sincere attempt to judge and faithfully represent the beyond-reach truth of the World that finds expression in one's creativity and transcendent representation of the unseen reality. Building on Hegel's taxonomy, Ricciotto Canudo heightens the pyramid of art genres to encompass ones that boast the dynamics of movement and life. In particular, "dance" and the twentieth century revered form of cinematic expression marked the evolutive man's faculty of approaching the World in a more conciliative manner. Coining cinematography as the Seventh Art, Canudo ushered in a new world of art expression that has come to materialise his notion on cinema as a 3D artistic representation that merges and unifies the older arts. True to his vision is today's marvellous technological potentiality of the virtual incarnation of the artist's visionary realms that goes beyond the shot process to embrace and fuse thinking and imagination. This chapter, therefore,



endeavours to highlight the organic development of the Seventh Art, its ontology, and its blossom in an independent style, as one of the aesthetic representations of the unseen reality.

### **2.1. Cinematography: The growing art organism**

Cinema, the art of visual storytelling, has crossed the time in which its position in Art was questioned, as any novelty introduced to the experience of mankind, it had to face difficulties to be recognised as a genuine form of art. Today, cinema is part of the daily experience of people all around the world and America is the lighthouse of this artistic phenomenon but with a lot of credit to continental Europe in which the first public cinematic show took place as we shall highlight in the coming passages of this thesis. Cinema seems to have embraced the mission of enlightening people, just as philosophy has endeavoured to show the way to wisdom. A filmmaker is to approach the world through his cameras from individualised perspectives. He is to be self-reliant, genius, and full of talent just as Emerson called upon to be true to his mission of elevating the status of society to higher levels of thinking and contemplation over the matters of life. In his introduction to Ingmar Bergman, *Cinematic Philosopher*, Singer finds such features in Bergman as a true artist. The following passage, which provides a summary of the man's artistic journey, puts Emerson's characteristic view of a hard-headed artist:

In the more than sixty years of his career, Bergman not only went through different periods in his creativity, as most artists do, but also developed continuously from beginning to end. Not all geniuses or highly productive people are of that sort. Many flash across the sky or suddenly destroy their talent in a burst of energy like the supernovae that they are. (Singer, 2014, p. 2)

The other characteristic feature of a filmmaker who can be ascribed to high-end philosophical projects is circumscription to ethics. It is not in the sense traditional thinking in Europe in which issues of right and wrong, good and evil were the central themes of culture as a whole, but it is in a more engaging sense, one that calls upon the audience and readership to be part of the artistic production. This could be applied on all forms of culturally based intellectual as well as representational disciplines. In his study of the stoic philosophical origins of Gilles Deleuze's notions on time, Johnson makes a very clear distinction between the ordinary perception of ethics and one that is compatible with the transcendental project:

we are not referring to ethics in the traditional sense of normative theory or applied morality, where the focus is on issues of right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and evil. Deleuze's Stoicism, instead, begins from the perspective of time, ontology and action in order to later reach the more recognisable concerns of moral philosophy. The reason is that such moral concerns are not given, pre-made, but must be generated. (Johnson, 2020, p. 203)

In the same manner, Philosophy has penetrated and dwelled the veins of civilisation, Jackes Aumont and Michel Marie confirm that cinema has crossed a long way in its journey of development and actually ended the phase of recognition, becoming actually part of the cultural patrimony. In the beginnings, cinema suffered a systematic devaluation. Influential political figures and institutions took an oblivious stand vis-à-vis the art in inception. Marxists, for instance, in the image of Trotsky who reduced the appealing of cinema to the factors of leisure and distraction as read in his rare writings on such art genre:

The passion for the cinema is rooted in the desire for distraction, the desire to see something new and improbable, to laugh and to cry, not at your own, but at other people's misfortunes. The cinema satisfies

these demands in a very direct, visual, picturesque, and vital way, requiring nothing from the audience; it does not even require them to be literate. That is why the audience bears such a grateful love to the cinema, that inexhaustible fount of impressions and emotions. (Mazierska & Kristensen, 2018, p. 256)

That said, cinema was often subordinated to other art genres in the likes of “sculpture in motion,” “paintings in movement,” “music of light,” “architecture in movement.” Such vision withered as filmmakers proved the intrinsic capacity of cinema not only to deliver amusement and entertainment, but to go beyond that to become what Jean Epstein calls “pure cinema,” an art on its own (Stam, 2017, p. 33). In parallel, interest in cinema developed through time in terms of focus from author to audience through text and textuality (Miller & Stam, 2013, pp. 1-2). The ultimate concern of film theory has shifted today toward the audiences for a plethora of reasons that extend from political, economic, sociological and more importantly philosophical. Miller extends in details the concerns of film audiences:

Audience concerns include psychological, sociological, educational, consumer, criminological, and political promises and anxieties. Textual ranking involves authorship, genre, form, style, and representational politics. They cross over in the area of mimesis, with audiences interpreting films against their own worlds of race, gender, class, region, age, religion, language, politics, and nation. (Miller & Stam, 2013, p. 2)

The complexity and quantity of such concerns lead us to think of the status quo today as one of cultural turbulence. We can say so for the real crisis of thinking world civilisation is facing, extending from personal levels to societal and nationwide concerns and even beyond to become universal.

Therefore, a systematic procedure of film analysis has to be implemented and well delimited to enable the different cultural institutions, such as universities, television, radio, newspapers, to understand and decipher the elements and meanings introduced in films in general (Aumont & Marie, 2016, p. 4).

This chapter captures the intersection of film with American studies. In this context, the study of literary representations of American culture has often served the undertakings of many researches in the field in that literature marked the beginning of American thinking. However, while literature served to build the early shared vision of the American nation since its creation, cinema has continued to propel the Americans into the twenty-first century.

In a world of rapid change, the cinema art has undergone a journey of ontogeny. Man's search for a definition in such a changing world evolved in the same pace. Hence, the call for new ways to capture things in motion, helped with multiple advances in science allowed cinema to become "the only art capable of capturing time in flight" (De Lauretis, 2008, p. 1), has become an influential means to shape not only individual consciousness, but the shared construct of identity. And it is for this very reason that we intend through this chapter to highlight the multifaceted phenomenon of cinematic representation, namely in the American context.

Beside its uncontested propagandistic capacity and function as a promotor of popular culture, cinema also transcends the boundaries of the unusual and the conventional to embrace higher-end missions. The transcendental dimensions could be captured and represented through the lens and modern visual

technologies. Not necessarily, high-tech tools and software mean sci-fi and ideas implemented in the share psyche of people as futuristic and imaginative in one sense. Virtuality and other auditory techniques have landed at the hands of philosophy-minded filmmakers to go beyond the unusual in the cinematic realms. More importantly, it is to mention that technology per se is not the reason behind the advocacy on new cultures at any level, but instead the artist is the only one responsible of using the styles at hand to imbed the cultural and philosophical elements with his artwork. In this sense, Bazin one of the pillars of film theory articulates this perspective:

Bazin refused to believe that shifts in technology automatically initiate shifts in the thought and behavior of a culture. In Bazin's view, technology affects culture only after being itself triggered by something like the cultural will. His detractors in the seventies pronounced Bazin an "idealist," since he seemed to posit an independent life of the spirit, one that effects material changes, including the invention of technologies. And indeed he was interested in asking why cinema came to be invented only in the nineteenth century when so many of its principles were understood earlier. (Miller & Stam, 2013, p. xviii)

Interestingly, technology seems to have embraced the principles that Emerson had prospects on in terms of life and nature as a spectacle in movement in front of the audience. Perhaps, he did not live through the motion picture era, but his ideas and conceptions of the way we humans observe nature in movement were undeniably avant-gardist. If in his age, no camera could capture nature in movement, his genius made him create such a movement in a reverse manner. Intelligibly, he got this idea from the fact that an observer in motion could see the spectacle as such, an idea that is so revealing and falls even within the realm of

Einstein's theory of relativity. On Emerson's vision on life as a spectacle in motion, we read the following:

Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us. Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position apprizes us of a dualism. We are strangely affected by seeing the shore from a moving ship, from a balloon, or through the tints of an unusual sky. The least change in our point of view, gives the whole world a pictorial air. A man who seldom rides, needs only to get into a coach and traverse his own town, to turn the street into a puppet-show. The men, the women, — talking, running, bartering, fighting, — the earnest mechanic, the loungeur, the beggar, the boys, the dogs, are unrealized at once, or, at least, wholly detached from all relation to the observer, and seen as apparent, not substantial beings. (Emerson, 2015, para. 788.7)

## **2.2. Intersections: Cinema and Philosophy**

The relationship and interconnectedness between cinema and philosophy forms a vertex of paramount importance to anyone interested in the study of the philosophical aspects of film as a visual artwork. This reasoning comes from a grounded rationale that leads us not only to American thinking, but to the very origins of Western thought. The Greek tradition in philosophy boasts Plato for his sharp negotiation of one of the questions that keep haunting civilisation to this day. The nature of life itself and the way we perceive it between originality and imitation is indeed the real question that goes basically into the bulk of Western thinking and philosophy. The turn of the twentieth century was marked by core cultural changes, including the nascent cinema, an event that would regenerate interest in the way art could capture and portray man's vision to the world. Particularly, in the Anglo-American tradition, one outstanding thinker has come to emphasise the way cinema intersects with his love for wisdom as the core of his

philosophical inquiry, as read in Sinnerbrink's essay on Cavell's philosophy of film:

STANLEY CAVELL'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO CINEMA has put the relationship between film and philosophy at the center of philosophical inquiry into film. Indeed, Cavell was the first major Anglophone philosopher of note who dedicated a major part of his work to cinema. As Cavell often remarks, the marriage between film and philosophy remains a provocation and an inspiration for both partners in this (thinking) dialogue. Indeed, cinema has the capacity to alter "everything philosophy has said about reality and its representation, about art and imitation, about greatness and conventionality, about judgment and pleasure, about skepticism and transcendence, about language and expression." (LaRocca, 2020, p. 129)

Cinema as an art genre follows in certain ways the tradition we find in poetry and literature. If the verse and the texts need methods, approaches, and at a higher level, organising principles and conceptual frameworks that derive into movements such as Romanticism, Realism and so on, cinema exhibits itself in the same fashion of delimitations and needs. What could be said, however, is that cinema as genre suffered a certain delay of recognition in terms of its ascription as a serious art of representation. In her study of Deleuze's landmark works, Marrati tells us that most of the defining years of cinema in the twentieth century positioned cinema between two trends of thinking, the psychoanalytical and the realist, as read in the following passage:

Cinema 1 and 2 make a very important contribution to the field of cinema theory. Deleuze's work goes against the grain of two trends that dominated cinematographical studies in France, and spread to other countries, from the postwar period to the 1980s: the realist and phenomenological approach of Andre Bazin, on the one hand, and the linguistic and psychoanalytical approach of Christian Metz. (Marrati, 2012, p. 1)

Realist cinema in the first half of the last century continued an old tradition of other art forms, namely photography, seeking ways to capture reality as faithfully as possible. Indeed, one would notice that cinema which benefited from advances in technology, related to physics in particular, could go beyond the layers of classic visual representation. The progress in science made it possible to first set motion to pictures, then go beyond that with the introduction of sound, both as music and voice. Boardman demonstrates how realism marked itself in the course of the evolution of cinema:

Realism has a special place in the history of film and film theory. In its simplest form, it is the claim that what distinguishes film as an art form is its capacity to transmit, present or re-present reality as it is. André Bazin used this feature of film to distinguish it from other plastic arts.<sup>13</sup> On his account, photography is the culmination of a centuries-long fascination with reproducing reality in the plastic arts. Film then expands photography's capacity to capture reality by providing it with movement. (Carroll et al. (Eds.), 2019, p. 10)

When a renowned influential cinema philosopher in the image of Deleuze asserts that: “the essence of a thing never appears at the outset but in the middle, in the course of its development, when its strength is assured,” (Deleuze, 1997, p. xiii) we straight away recall our discussion of Emerson’s views on the dynamics of culture, contradictions, and more importantly the process of handling those oppositions in the back of the mind to reach the finalities of thinking. Hence, we could expect the potentiality of cinema in terms of its inner capacity to inject meanings and extract others through the scenery process.

Cinema as the supreme art form of the twentieth century opens venues not only to the representation of fictitious content in the tradition that the novel can assure, but it is imbedded with a transcendent faculty that joins scenery, lighting,



sound, and other visual effects in the service of the filmmaker's imagination and creativity. Yet, interest in Philosophy did not take place in the early stages of the development of cinema, probably for some technical limitations which delayed the possibilities we can witness today. Vaughan shares this idea as he surveys the rise of philosophy-based cinema:

The past three decades have witnessed a burgeoning interest in the intersection between philosophy and cinema studies. From Stanley Cavell's Wittgensteinian forays into American cultural morality to Fredric Jameson's explorations of the filmic postmodern, to the Deleuzian movement toward cinema as a medium of particular philosophical interest, this interdisciplinary intersection continues to foster debate and new theoretical developments, generating self-applied methodological terms that range from the positivist ("cognitive") to the methodologically experimental ("filmosophy"). (Vaughan, 2015, p. 1)

Interestingly, the question of social conventions reveals itself in our attempt to define cinema. By this we refer to the shared definition of cinema and its birth. In that many events could be chosen as the beginning of cinema, in the image of the discovery of camera or the first recorded shots and so on. Yet, in his *What Cinema Is*, Dudley Andrew traces back the genesis of cinema to the first public event at the Grand Café in Paris, December 27, 1895 (Andrew, 2010, p. 74).

That said, defining cinema through words which are, to a certain extent, fixed in meaning will be so problematic. Words reveal their limitation as Oxford Dictionary provides the following definitions to the word "cinema:" "A theatre where films are shown for public entertainment," "North American term movie theatre," and "A theatre where films are shown for public entertainment." (Lexico, n. d.-a) As a matter of fact, cinema in itself is a developing representation art as well as a whole organism that we believe has grown enough to take some

dimensions of complexity that remind us of the sophisticated organism behind its creation. In this sense, Andrew puts some interesting remarks in his foreword to Bazin's seminal book in film theory:

However, even were we to discover all the laws of cinema that govern its more timeless generic functions, we would scarcely have answered the driving question, "What is cinema?" Moreover, we would have characterized cinema only insofar as it takes up cultural functions (fairy tales, physical comedy) that pre-existed it. When it comes to understanding what cinema has added to cultural history, Bazin is certain that only local laws prevail and that, whatever cinema is, it evolves in contact with shifting cultural needs and situations. Cinema's stable photographic axiom, together with the few corollaries demanded by stable genres, interacts in myriad ways with history, and does so in an evolutionary manner. (Bazin et al., 2005, p. xix)

In her preface to *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and Philosophy*, a book about one of the pillars of cinema philosophy in modern times, Marrati describes the multi-disciplinary appeal for such philosophy. She evokes how cinema has been empowered through time to become the poetry of the current period. In this sense, it is a path to find meanings and interpretation not just for the worldly matters but for ontological issues of paramount appeal to different readers and audiences alike. For her, "together these books provide innovative concepts to help us think about the power of images, affects, and beliefs, about the power of the mind and of the body—all of which we know, in fact, so little about" (Marrati, 2012, p. ix)

When philosophy intersects with film, all techniques of visual presentation vanish to the benefit of a philosophy that works in the background of the narrative. Interestingly, cinema, in an imitative process to beings as organisms, evokes again the question of perception of reality. If a human being

encounters reality and mainly develops a certain perception of what surrounds him, cinema through its technical devices attempts to imitate what its creator naturally does. Thus, questions of what is going on and are we really capturing it raise themselves as central concerns of film philosophy. More importantly, in the transcendental fashion of going to the core of things, a paramount question comes to the forth, which is who is this perceiver and is he defined in the manner an object is. Interestingly, Bergson, one of the fathers of cinema criticism went straight to the point in the early days of such art of representation. In a subtle manner, in *Matter and Memory*, he raised the question of the Self as the real perceiver:

We imagine perception to be a kind of photographic view of things, taken from a fixed point by that special apparatus which is called an organ of perception.... But is it not obvious that the photograph, if photograph there be, is already taken, already developed at the very heart of things, and at all points in space? (as cited in Marrati, 2012, p. 27)

Mainly, such philosophy builds what Deleuze calls “organising principles.” Namely, action-image is the organising principle in classic cinema. Besides, helping principles co-exist, but they are not central and hence not the core of the films way of leaning toward its message. In modern cinema, however, action has been eclipsed to the benefit of perception and agency. This necessarily involves the supremacy of time as a major factor in conveying meanings that transcend movement. (Marrati, 2012)

Through perception and affection as organising principles, cinema could effectively entail political philosophy within the workings of the motion pictures. In such way passivity or agency could be portrayed through the dimension of time

and inactivity. Images involving state institutions in the image of the military would engender a perceptive sense of control and authority. Not necessarily, in the fashion of textual drama, in which the reader is invited to proceed to action in his life, cinema that embrace philosophy makes so much emphasis on perception per se. This way it seeks the building of knowledge through subtle conversations between audience and screen. For this, “Deleuze insisted on the importance of learning to perceive in order to perceive and not just to react, on the power of contemplation, and the need for time and thought is perfectly pertinent for politics. Deleuze describes modern cinema as a cinema in search of more thought”(Marrati, 2012, p. xiii).

In the same manner Emerson called for the subordination of historical ideas and knowledge to the benefit of the new intuitive perceptions in the making, Deleuze also thought that the eminence of time and the perceptions on the making do not exclude other organising principles we mentioned before. What we can deduce is that for both philosopher the main concern is the building of new perceptions in an individualised manner. Both of them do not really care about whether the idea pre-exists or not, but they emphatically want to their audiences the message about the importance of agency through action.

In a different direction, Deleuze do not share with Emerson the idea that perception and action form a unity. We come to this conclusion as we observe Emerson’s focus on intuitive leaning to knowledge, involving action. In other words, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, Emerson’s main concern was not teleological, but rather a clear focus on the process of learning itself. For this, we can deduce that his vision links action with perception. As we reflect such

inclination of Deleuze, we can see the latter depart from the focus on the transcendental function of image, without neglecting it as something happening. His focus on agency and action as primal goals, with a sense of independence leads us to confirm the conclusion we draw on the divergence of the two philosophers' perspectives.

### **2.3. The Ontology of film**

The premise of film and cinema in general as the supreme art of the twentieth century, we believe, is still valid to this day. Our rationale is one that stems from our belief in the transcendent faculty of such art genre. In Emerson's tradition of embracing the differences and appropriating knowledge in service of higher ends, Cavell, the American film theorist labels his book, *Pursuit of Happiness*. It is not just about the title, but the book expresses a wishful thinking that matches that of the transcendentalists, as idealists. More importantly, the book reflects the tenets of what we can pronounce as the sincere cinema. The first argument is about the nature of cinema as an art instead of a superficial view that takes it as a mechanized system of reproduction of reality and entertainment. In this regard, Carroll makes a sharp distinction between two views on the technology involved in cinema. For her, technology can be seen through the narrow perspective of routine means of production of specimens. A much higher inclination reflects technology as a mirror of man's natural powers of production, including art (Carroll, 1997). The second argument, which is more crucial and related to Emersonian thinking is the way cinema is called for to contribute in culture through a process of concept generation that necessarily goes through opinion negotiation and interactivity. process, what Cavell, the pillar of American criticism advocates and hope for, as quoted in McDonald's essay *In pursuit of a Truly Cinematic Conversation*:

The hope and the wish [for the future of film culture] are based as well on the fact that films persist as natural topics of conversation; they remain events, as few books or plays now do. I would like the conversation to be as good as its topics deserve, as precise and resourceful as the participants are capable of. (LaRocca, 2020, p. 107)

In this sense, one could predict how art espouses philosophy to touch upon fields and areas of intellectual as well as ontological nature. We reiterate Renoir's comparison of film critic and theorist Bazin to the poet, suggesting that in contrast to the kings of their times, poet through his mastery of the realms of imagination and representation could survive and actually in many cases challenged the test of time as a lasting memory in the minds of people with whom he did not even share neither place of time of existence. In the same manner, he predicted also that cinema is the modern times poet. We share the same idea, with some additions that we deem important. We believe, the core element that makes a phenomenon lasting is its ascription to spiritual matters rather than material objects. What makes poetry lasting is not its leisure or distracting feature, but instead its recurrent interest in man's imagination and unworldly realms. If things related to sensory pleasures would appeal to some audiences throughout the course of times, their effect on the shared memory is always very limited if not reduced to nothingness. History as facts prove recalls only the great words and texts and what makes these so important is their faculty to transfer wisdom from generation to generation. Often, what captures interest is core issues related to being and the nature of things. Simply because humanity lives under a permanent anxiety over issues of self-definition and pursuit of well-being and purpose in this life. Fortunately, the last century witnessed the emergence of a new art form that could emerge to the point possibilities of representation reached an unprecedented level of transcendence.

While we are quite certain of the quality of serious cinema in terms of its embodiment of ontological dimensions, we become in need for a systematic approach to decipher the workings of a given film so that to unveil its beyond matter content. For this reason, we rely on Boardman's model of ontological film in which suggests a test like way of ascribing works of cinematic art to the ontological film. Evidently, as films are apt to embrace a multitude of styles, content, and aims, the possibilities of allusions to metaphysics could be eclipsed behind other directions. Thus, Boardman resorts to a framework based on what he calls film "candidate." In other words, we expect that it is not quite obvious that any film with supernatural elements is automatically ascribed to ontology, in a sincere manner. The study of certain attributes and affiliations within the film, therefore, could prove its validity as an ontological film. Boardman's original model involves Realism, illusion, imagination, film as dream, film as language or symbol system, film as thought, moving pictures, and moving images. Yet, for the particular purposes of this thesis we will add Scepticism, another defining criterion proposed by Cavell, as another candidature determinant.

The first determinant for ascription to the ontological project is Realism. In this model such art umbrella of qualities provides the artist, in this case the filmmaker, with a number of benefits that would contribute in inserting the film into a heightened realm of purposes. This includes inner aspects such as the borrowing of stylistic elements from established genres such as painting and photography. As the latter represents with no contest the ultimate faithful representation of reality at the nascent time cinema, followers of the proposed model would naturally achieve a justification for the art status of film. Besides, in making the film embodies reality as it is, the philosophy of metaphysics logically applies in a seamless way; hence the film

inherits an ontological nature. Next, the application of Realism as a model of representation transmits the established rules and principle in terms of content and style and hence the film benefits conformity to the standards and normalisation (Carroll et al., 2019, p. 11).

The second determinant that empowers the film with ontological justification is illusion. This might be seen as a direct alternative to the first determinant as long as there is impossibility of realising true presentation or representation for different reasons, be they essential or formal. However, the artist has to avoid the creation of pure cognitive illusions to the extent the spectator defines himself with the fictitious characters. Moreover, propositional allusions are also to be discarded in that they push away the surprise and discovery effect. What is advised is what can be called sensory allusions, a feeling similar one's feeling as he practises video games. Derived from the latter type is the perceptual illusion and this one is widely used in films. When used adequately even still image could engender the last type of illusion which is the movement illusion, to be distinguished from the nature of film itself as one made of a succession of images (Carroll et al., 2019, p. 15).

Imagination comes next as a defining criterion for the film's ontology. In this context it is not in the regular way we perceive the idea of imagination, but it is an outlet of entertaining an idea or a feeling without a prior awareness of it. This is so important as the notion of awareness is defining to our perception of reality in the first place. The design of filmography can offer the possibility for the spectator to entertain his presence as a character or even as a moving perspective instead of the cameras. Many other imaginative situations of movement and placements could be envisioned, namely the possibility of being in more than one place at a time. Moreover, if the film is compatible with imagination making, the



point of view in action would appeal to a certain impersonal experience that eventually enable the viewer to go beyond the usual perspective culture entangled in his consciousness (Carroll et al., 2019, p. 16).

Dream, or the oneiric manifestations, as the unconscious counterpart of imagination, reveals itself as a competing ontological dimension of the film. What makes dream quality of the film important is that it reflects the power of such genre to engage the spectator into a psychological status in which deep layers of the consciousness could be granted control and hence a certain freedom from what Freud calls the ego. It is worth noting that, we have to avoid confusion with what Boardman categorises as daydream, or dreamfactory, or fantasy, all of which are lower forms that do not really grant an individualised involvement of the spectator. In all cases, dream and film while might have some similitude, but still the latter involves some workings, predictions, adjustments to the spectator's expectations that do set apart the experience of film from that of the dream. (Carroll & Choi, 2005).

Language or symbol system as features of the film. Such statement might appear self-contradictory, especially as we put "features" in plural. This is the fifth criteria that is can incarnate the ontological nature for film in its full sense. For some critics language is essentially a system of symbols. While this is true to large extent in general contexts, it gets some troubles as related to film. Similitudes between film as a system of representation and language, bearing qualities of the same layer, led to the assumption that film is language in essence (Carroll & Choi, 2005, p. 18). Here, we find it so interesting that such analogy has been raised. In a reminder of Emerson's pursuit of an intuitive experience, we can see that film experience goes

beyond the seemingly so important linguistic faculty of the film that raises the latter to a self-definition, if we may say, associating it to the language itself. Deleuze agrees totally that the film is essentially experience rather than ends, i.e., as he puts it, “The essence of a thing never appears at the outset but in the middle, in the course of its development, when its strength is assured” (Andrew, 2010, p. xiii). For this reason, the film, to us, should keep its linguistic dimension to its natural circumscription so that interference with the reality being revealed keeps lower footprint, elevating the impact and integration of the experiential dimension.

Film as thought presents itself as the sixth criteria for candidature to the ontological. This comes as a possible solution to the dilemma of ascribing film to linguistic and psychoanalysis perspectives of production. Mainly this choice relies on Deleuze’s rejection of such two approaches to film. In his view, the film is more for movement-image and time-image. That is to say, action and time constitute what he thinks is more adequate to film category of art as one of imagistic nature, much closed to the poetic tradition. Some remarks need to be emphasised. In the first mode of representation which is based on the movement of images, an illusionary aspect could arguably be existing and thus evoking one of the other criteria we devised. Also, such the illusion of movement would fall necessarily into a categorisation based on the image ascription to either affect, perception, or action. Moreover, (Carroll & Choi, 2005, p. 21) What catches the interest is not the details related to the film’s ascription to imagistic tradition as much as Boardman’s reference to Deleuze’s idea on the collective aspect of the thought generated, with reference to Jungian “collective conscious”; consequently he questions the origins of the thought. We are interested in this space of inquiry as it relates to Emerson’s idea of the game of circles. As it is widely recognised, the film comes out as the production not only of

one particular artist, but it is all about the contribution of a group of people, whether they are artists per se or technicians. Such staff works not in the form of mechanism, but rather as an organism, the contribution of each member serves naturally the whole image or thought the film engenders as its final product.

The final condition that provides ontological dimensions to the film is film as moving images, or moving pictures. One could only wonder how both could be elemental to the metaphysics of a film, but the ideas on movement provided by Danto and Carroll bring our attention to certain phenomena which are capable of engendering beyond matter effects. The use of movement proves to be transcendent in its effects, just as the old game of moving a rod could generate an illusionary effect of objects created in a given space of time and place. In the same manner, the film is all about movements and Danto divides this into three types. One is about the movement of images within the screen, namely characters. The other involves the movement of pictures in the projector. The last one is precisely the movement of physical pictures as objects of matter in the projector. We can see that it is for this reason that cinema theatres continue to have their prestigious value in terms of the cinematic experience, despite the emergence of modern online streaming technologies. Out of this, we also can expect different effects from unmoving image films, as they defy the audience expectations as dictated by their social experience and exposition. The same thing goes for a play in terms of choice between photo camera and moving picture camera. If the first one is used to take the same photo to be juxtaposed as many—or in other words repeated, the result would be a moving picture in this case and a different picture for the second (Carroll & Choi, 2005, p. 23). We find the dimension of movement and the effects it engenders in film production of greater impact on the spectator's filmic experience in that for the

transcendentals life itself is one of perpetual dynamics of change. More importantly, the self as part of this universes inherits this illusionary nature.

#### **2.4. Adaptation: Transcending the limits of fiction**

As we evoked before, like any innovative cultural trend, film theory faced great opposition in its early days and many thinkers and writers simply refused to accept it as a fine art. However, the psychological barriers disappeared as filmmakers succeeded in making the audiences identify with the screen content, namely after the Second World War (O'Pray, 2004, p. ix). Moreover, film studies have established themselves in the academe a couple of decades later, as a response to a cultural crisis of transformation from a heavy reliance on the written form of artistic expression to one that is visual, as we can read in Elsaesser's foreword to *The Thought of Stanley Cavell and Cinema*:

Film studies, ever since it entered the academy in the 1970s, and especially in the United States and Great Britain, has not only been in response to but also a symptom of, the general "crisis in the humanities." While this crisis takes many forms, one manifestation is surely connected with the momentous transformations of a culture of the word, of written evidence and material proof, to a culture of sounds and images, where the materiality of evidence relies, for its production as well as for its reproduction, on complex electronic technologies, and for its reception on the transitory sense-impressions of the eye and ear. (LaRocca, 2020)

Cinema as an art form has come to anchor itself in the mainstream culture, with a certain authority in the contemporary creative and intellectual arenas. After a long journey of havoc and cultural negotiation, it has become commonplace to regard it as the fierce competitor to old art genres such as sculpture, painting, photography, the novel and literature in general. Competition led to the need of appropriation of content and in some event even style as to

show the new genre's capacity of a better representation. It was like a dominant tendency to confirm this claim, up to the mid-twentieth century. In one of his attempts to adapt a literary work to cinema, Bergman expels any similitude between the two genres and shows his discontent with the experience:

Film has nothing to do with literature; the character and substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict. ... We should avoid making films out of books. The irrational dimension of the film. If, despite this, we wish to translate something literary into film terms, we must make an infinite number of complicated adjustments which often bear little or no fruit in proportion to the effort expended. (Housel, 2006, pp. 91-92)

We disagree with Bergman's absolute separation between film and literature and over dissatisfaction with the experience of adaptation for we embrace Emerson's appeal for hard work and stoicism in any intellectual endeavour to achieve heightened ends and perennial effects. Moreover, following his approach of embraced contradictions, we think that film adaptation is just another convenient venue to convert genius into practicality through action. We think that cinema as compared to the novel is the realm in which action of the artist finds place and space and cosmic time to be exerted in a free manner. Turning words into images is the supreme manifestation of the artist's action. Combining the efforts and experiences of the crew is also a way of displaying how a sincere artwork could contain the differences for a high-end project.

That said, we follow in this study an inclination that considers art forms as basically complementary in nature. In this space and for the prospects of this study, we focus on the affinities between cinema and literary texts. One of the opinions we find supportive to our end is the claim of Ronal Perrier, to whom, "the study of literature casts light on the meanings in the film, and the study of the

film can illuminate the full value of the literature.” Also, as Dudley Andrew observed, “The making of a film out of an earlier text is virtually as old as the machinery of cinema itself. Well over half of all commercial films have come from literary originals, though by no means all of these originals are revered or respected” (as cited in Kline, 1996, p. 70). More importantly, it is within the dialogisms that exist within the process of adapting the text, including fiction or documentary, into the film that we can speculate the happening of meaning making in Emersonian tradition. In this premise, we are not really into which genre is more assertive or more adequate to the representation of the experience, we value as a high end of an artwork, but we mostly cherish the possibilities contradictions would engender. We push this idea even further to assert that in the transcendent realm opposites merge to become one only to become more fruitful than threatening. In this sense, we could expect a spectre of balance between self-reflexive approaches and auteur-based leanings toward film adaptation, as explained by Sayad in her study of Kaufmann’s *Adaptation* (Housel, 2006, p. 129).

The fact that links exist between the text and film does not mean, in our view, that the latter is just a reproduction of the first in a different form. For one thing, as Thomas Leitch devises, “it should be treated as a work in its own right shaped by specific social, commercial, and institutional forces” (Raw, 2008, p. 78). Furthermore, Julie Grossman views the sum of such works as “creative adaptations that reread and rewrite prior works of art, forging new perspectives and variant ways of looking not simply at source texts as their origins but at the creative means by which adaptations come to be” (Grossman, 2015b, p. 1). In the

same manner, Paul Schmidt points also that one of the failed criticisms of film genre is the Russian formalists, who could not make a distinction between the textual representation and motion pictures. He explains that cinema is also a sign system but not in words and opposite to the conception it should be studied the way we study language, he notes that both art forms naturally fall under a broader discipline which is Semiology (Schmidt, 1975, p. 327).

That said, a devoted discipline came to existence in the interstice field to fill out the need for the emergent interest in the appropriation of textual artistic heritage to the twentieth century supreme art of representation. As any new discipline, self-definition is somehow problematic in the beginnings as not all scholars and specialists would agree on the legitimacy of the progeny. Yet, in the late twentieth century a sort of consensus appeared to cherish the development of such attempts of art reforms. For his part, Thomas Leich, defines film adaptation as “an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art” (Cartmell, 2012, p. 87). Within the realms of film studies which have evolved to go beyond the study of film per se to get into its "existential" matters if we may say. We have in mind how films come to being as independent or connected to other genres. Hence, the nascent discipline of Adaptation Studies comes to concern itself with the study of films vis-à-vis their potential rootedness in other forms of art. Such discipline has proved its essential position in modern art. For this, as Housel puts it, "Film adaptation is a vehicle for life experiences" (Housel, 2006, p. xi).

With reference to our study of the ontology of film, it is common sense to state that such art genre, when sincerely worked out, can be endowed with

transcendent capabilities, as many of its natural delimitations conjure up more than imitation-like experiences. For this, the adaptation of a literary text for instance into screen cannot be conceived as a merely conversion of medium, but it is an artistic endeavour that seeks the creation of a completely new representation and mimesis of the core of written text, whether fictitious or documentary. For Bordwell, while novels appeal to our perception of the form, films call for us to experience them (Bordwell et al., 2017, p. 111).

In a favourable response to the call of Emerson for the conversation of genius into action, one that seeks creativity and autonomy, sincere adaptation works of arts embody a certain transcendental dimension. We could argue as such in that man's creative work reflects much of his understanding of what is existing and more importantly his abilities and inherent potentialities of production. Film adaptation, as a serious vocation of art nature provides a genuine exemplar of Emerson's theory of the working self that we elaborated in the first chapter. It is indeed through the acceptance of others' opinions, at least for the sake of negotiation of way toward the truth behind ideas, concepts, and experiences accounted for by other artists or ordinary people who added a thread to the shared intellectual patrimony of humanity. Grossman (2015) provides a brief definition to film studies as:

a way of engaging cultural production that promotes greater openness to the ingenious if challenging conversations that can take place among creative works across time and medium. Because of their potential for promoting cross-textual conversations and observing connections among sometimes very dissimilar works, studies in adaptation, when construed broadly, invite a kind of critical thinking that moves viewers and readers beyond their comfort with inherited boundaries and pre-existing patterns. (Grossman, 2015a, p. 1)



In a sense, we may argue that Emerson's works themselves could be ascribed to sincere works of adaptation. Not necessarily the medium undergoes a change, but it is precisely when a text receives a certain process of not a merely transplantation in another context, but it through a worked-out effort of reiterating the tenets and core ideas of a given auteur or thinker in a completely different time and place, while preserving that sense of originality in treating ideas and making them viable again and plausible by a new readership in this case. In many ways, Emerson's treatment of the nature of being confirms his cultural encounter with both German idealism and Asian cultures, yet in a completely reworked edition that adds the flavour of time and setting. His call for intuition in reading and higher faculties of thinking are just emanant in his work, an idea that is completely compatible with Grossman's, which goes as follows: "The most provocative adaptations not only create initial dissonance for us as viewers/readers, just as avantgarde works do, but they also train our critical eye on cultural progeny rather than on origins"(Grossman, 2015a, p. 3)

Adaptation endorses individuality in the sense it fosters independence of interpretation and informed creative intellectual productivity. When the artist embraces self-reliance as an organising principle in his vocation as a promoter of high aesthetic sensibilities, clear visions emerge as a feature characteristic of his work. Just as a guide and advisor would provide his disciples with the path to the real knowledge of the world, the artist projects his visions as he adapts other artworks into his own project. In this case, he transcends the limits of a mechanised work of specimen reproduction to embrace the mission of a visionary, one that is expressed by Grossman in the following passage:

I want to endorse a way of thinking about adaptation that emphasizes its power to “slant” (create a different viewpoint on) a source text, to shift our way of filing known literary works in our mental cabinets. I think an important by-product of theoretical arguments for intertextuality (in both the practice and the reading of adaptation) is its enhanced focus on scholarship and pedagogy themselves—the way we reimagine the relations among texts—as fundamentally creative activity. (Grossman, 2015a, p. 3)

One should mention that the realisation of a free view point goes hand in hand with the growth of the artist’s sense of autonomy, independent of all interferences imposed by inner reasons related to the text or extra-textual parasites, in the image of social and historical parameters. Thus, dispelling the temptation of confinement with conformity becomes of paramount importance. For one thing, while conformity leads to excessive association with fidelity to the text, it thwarts all genuine desire for self-realisation in art. While the first choice exhibits its temptation to recognition and easiness of performance, the second aims at higher ends and defying the instant chains of restrictions. What is at stake is a hard choice of two opposing temptations, one will be crowned with immediacy and the other with perennial ecstasy. In harmony with this rationale, Stam devises his own approach to adaptation:

In his introductions to both *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* and *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation*, Robert Stam offers an approach to the transposition of literary works into moving images that dispute judgments about fidelity to the original in favor of a dialogical understanding of such a practice. (Housel, 2006, p. 123)

Speaking of choice leads us to a vital criticism to the proponents of fidelity or faithfulness of film adaptation to the original literary text, considered as resource. That is to say, critics have diminished the importance of to what extent a film mirrors a novel for instance in favour of more profound inquiries. Again, the

ends become less important than the means, or to be precise the way leading to the final project. Hence, the process of adaptation itself becomes the core of interest and the entity responsible for the creation of experiences, as we mentioned before. Also, such criticism revolves around the question of choice of resources, seeking a better way to identify what texts will be susceptible for candidature to adaptation. This claim is supported by Orr, who advances his argument on intertextuality as an approach to adaptation:

Modern critical notions of intertextuality represent a more sophisticated approach, in relation to adaptation, to the idea of the original novel as a 'resource'. As Christopher Orr remarks: 'Within this critical context [i.e. of intertextuality], the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film's ideology.' (McFarlane, 1996, p. 10)

## 2.5. Film aesthetics: Towards the filmic semiotics

Aesthetics in art is like soul to the body. If Emerson cherished nature, namely through its beauty, one can only see that he would find in it the essence of the world as one of sublime nature and creation. This particular interest in aesthetics reflects an articulate way of thinking that goes beyond the usual. If for the ordinary people at the time, beauty was associated with worldly matters and drives, for him it reflected a certain union between feelings and thinking. The beauty of nature is not seen as an aspect of objects, but instead it showed more of the way man perceives such feature provided by what he calls the oversoul, one that is transcendent. In this particular point, Emerson made himself distinct from other ordinary romanticists. More importantly, while he embraced much of Kant's views on the mind and thought, he again demonstrated his creativity and autonomy as he came to reject the latter's dissociation of man and nature, or mind and object.

To him, instead of a complete separation between the perceiver and the object, the souls were created first and then joined the bodies, i.e., belated entities and chosen first and foremost on aesthetic basis. As we mentioned in the first chapter, nature represents not just the physical dimension but transcends that to a bond between man and his existence. More importantly, through its innate beauty it infuses man with a motivating energy to make him apt to act and be creative. In *Nature*, we read how all artists can find such an energy, ready to be embraced and eventually utilised to “suck the marrow of life” to use Thoreau's words:(Thoreau, 2013, para. 43.25)

The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce. Thus is Art a nature passed through the alembic of man. Thus, in art does Nature work through the will of a man filled with the beauty of her first works. The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire.(Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 14)

For Emerson, the universe is one of good nature and the basic energy that joins all what exists in the world is what he refers to as radiance. Man embraces the energy of the universe and let it spread through him only to make him one unity with such energy. In other words, nature diffuses love as the essential bond in the world. What links humans is naturally then radiance, or love. In his essay *Love*, Emerson resorts to his dialogism to raise an essential question about the nature of love and its object: “If I love you, what is that to you?’ We say so because we feel that what we love is not in your will, but above it. It is not you, but your radiance. It is that which you know not in yourself and can never know.”(Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 216)

Aware of the radiant powers of nature, Bazin, a man who fuses thought and art and represents to cinema what Emerson does to Transcendentalism, pronounces that “the cinema [is] of its essence a dramaturgy of Nature” (Carroll & Choi, 2005, p. 67). One could then only see how cinema, the sincere one, elevates itself to the transcendental aesthetics.

For the purpose of clarification, we ascend our discussion of film aesthetics from the normal to the higher and from the traditional to the exceptional. In the first place, then, by aesthetic norms, we mainly attempt to highlight the established forms in cinematic tradition. This endeavour entails a recognition of a number of patterns that enable us to discern continuity and

change (Bordwell, 1999, p. 4). To that end, we need first to go through the basics to clarify some notions on cinema and the essential elements it involves to the benefit of our subsequent analytical section. While cinema looks familiar to us today, this remains at the usual descriptive level that is often related to classical cinema or even commercial cinema. However, what matter to us is the deep level of cinematic expression that transcends what Bordwell calls the obvious. Actually, by asking questions like what do we see and what do we listen to we are indeed questions our relation to the world. (Chion, 2019, p. 186).

The role of cinema today, as an established art genre after a relatively short period of time, is to contribute to the humanities, philosophy included. Thus, aesthetically speaking, cinema has the role not only to capture reality as one would say in a photographic manner, but in a more elaborate way that calls upon a process of multi-dimensional negotiation of images. Every dimension involves a network of concepts, feelings, sensations, experiences, and revelations. Thus, Wollen defines films as “network[s] of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other”(Housel, 2006, p. 126). Actually, this very point is what makes a clear distinction between cinema as art and cinema as commerce. This very question is rooted in the long history of art. Throughout the development of humanity, arts and artists have been torn between what is material and what is essential. A piece of art will endure the test of time only when it addresses human concerns in a sincere manner. For this reason, art elevates itself to be defining for periods in the development of civilisation. Cinema, we think, is by definition one of the defining phenomena of the contemporary age. In the beginning of last century, Heidegger had the prospects this is the age of representation:

According to Heidegger, as we know, it is precisely insofar as modernity is the age of representation that it is also, inseparably, the age of technics and science: as an object of representation, the world becomes an object of calculation and mastery. The objectivity of science is secured by the objectivity of representation: subjectivity and objectivity are the two faces of a single ontological condition. (Marrati, 2012, pp. 27-28)

To the purpose of this study, film aesthetics is taken from the perspective of original thoughts in Western tradition, which respect the philosophy of art. Aesthetics in this context refers to the workings of cinema as an active mediator in the creation of the filmic experience. And to get into this, the need for understanding how meanings are substantially engendered within such process reveal themselves of major importance. The choice we take considers the semiotic approach in that it makes an interesting junction between the elementary of cinematic representation and the viewer, as not a merely passive receiver, but as an active agent in the building of the poetics of cinema. We deem it beneficial and prospecting to rely on semiotics of cinema. After a thorough examination of such perspective, Ehrat (2005) devises what he calls Peircean aesthetics of film, proposing the following framework:

The result of this Semiotic approach to cinema is a three-part thematic division. First, I will prepare the ground with a Semiotic theory of meanings and realities. Then I will consider the cinematic object (representation and truth values), cinematic narration (time production), and cinematic aesthetic (perception). Finally, I will consider comprehensively the cinematic production of the different meanings (enunciation). While adhering to a strictly theoretical purview, I will be integrating some film analysis or Interpretation. These integrations, however, will be restricted to the Semiotic dimension concerned. (Ehrat, 2005, p. 7)

The more a thinker's ideas are clear about his subject, the more genius qualities are ascribed to him. In Emerson's fashion, Peirce had fears of not being

understood. That feeling is necessarily engendered as one takes it on his own to address philosophical questions in a daring individualised way that defy the established, sometimes indoctrinated, views. Peirce, therefore, accepted much of the Semiotics before him, but not in a blind manner. He actually extended the theory so that new horizons would be opened to the study of meanings as they are produced or received. While the original Semiotic theory focused on the text itself as a separate entity from extra parameters such as history and readership, Peirce, in many ways embraced the call of Emerson as to read others' ideas in a critical way so to fill the gaps and extend the limits of existing knowledge to the benefit of humanity. Meanings are not always easy to be understood when the content is not explicit in nature, especially when it is related to the realms of metaphysics and transcendent worlds. Wolde (1989) who needed to analyse biblical texts, tells us more on the Semiotics of Peirce as more than a simple variant, or one among others: "the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, who is as yet relatively unknown in biblical exegesis. However, I believe that Peirce offers the opportunity to open up the locked structuralist system of semiotics"(Wolde, 1989, p. 4) .

At the heart of the Semiotic theory is the sign. Yet, in this view the sign is not over simplified to be a mere thing among others, but it is about the intention or action of the subject. Here we find it so interesting that this reflects fully Emerson's idea on the knowledge acquisition, relying on individual action as we discussed in the first chapter. More importantly, Semiotics through Pierce's lens is more than a discipline about the classification of signs into whatever rules or patterns, but it is more about the ascription of differences and identities to a certain type of categories of signs. Thus, we can see how deep one theory could go



when adequately appropriated and developed according to a completely personalised view that is also informed through experience. All of this goes into complete harmony with Emerson's framework of efficient learning. Speaking of learning, we find it also interesting that Semiotics in this version goes beyond the surface level of meaning investigation to dive into what Ehradt associates with cartesian space. Such an idea is of crucial importance in that it calls upon mathematics to elaborate and explain meaning, a reminded of acceptance of world perspectives on reality. We argue as such since it was not really evident seeing the possibilities of the overlapping between a rational-based discipline with one that was often brought close to humanities and Poetics.

If traditionally, Poetics had been associated with imagination, we might expect that Peirce fully rejected or distorted such conception in his framework. Interestingly, we are to discover that in a revival of an old intellectual tradition of competence and challenge for establishment and assertion,<sup>1</sup> Peirce seems to make a massive effort to extend and elaborate the meaning of one of the pillars on poetic mode of expression, i.e., imagination. Thus, he makes his point that imagination is not as simple as calling upon the unseen in a creative manner. Instead, imagination espouses the scientific method of anticipation through the use of categorisation of elements of life phenomena to the benefit of the interpretation of experience, as Alexander notes:

Imagination is neither merely an extension of the passive capacity of sensation, subsumable under pre-established rational categorial structures, nor is it a purely intuitive source of novelty. It is a mode of action and as such seeks to organize experience so that it anticipates

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to Greek tradition of cross-generational knowledge delivery, namely the impressive and spectacular intellectual efforts made by Plato and Aristotle in the third century B.C.

the world in a manner that is meaningful and satisfying. In more human terms, it is an essential and necessary element in our perpetual project of making sense of life. (Barrena, 2013)

At the time, the mainstream culture and even institutionalised readership were not into a completely independent academe on the study of meanings away from old associations with literature, especially Poetry. The way Peirce brought meaning into a three-dimensional space can be seen as spectacular, to this day. And to the benefit of this study, it provides a dimension for meaning perception that goes beyond the regular. When it comes to cinema, therefore, we can lift our expectations of efficient representation of meaning as the sign gets rid of its thingness to embrace the subject, in this case the spectator, merging action and meaning and therefore creating a completely different experience through art (Ehrat, 2005).

The object of cinema in the same manner of the object of any other theory, needs not to be approached from different perspectives, compared to each other so that one final image could be extricated. To Ehradt, the relationship between filmic theory and its object should not be treated as one of fistedness. That is, a reduction of the process of treatment to one of collection of data about the object, a comparison and analysis, and drawing results. To, him the object of cinema is not and cannot be approached in the same manner an experiment is conducted in a laboratory (Ehrat, 2005). We agree with this claim as one can see that film as an art has as objects entities of conceptualisation that transcend the physical confinement. The word object itself is used in the sense of art content rather than an entity which has clear cut boundaries of physical definition. Therefore, we find it so useful that Ehradt speaks of an epistemic film theory. In this sense cinema

has an epistemic project, one that coincides with our view on art as a representation of the beauty of the world. Such an idea is central to the transcendental project which approaches the world through a contemplative way that seeks unity of thinking and feeling. It is actually, this very idea of merging the two natures of man's psyche that brings art to the realms of transcendence, in which imagination and judgement find what might be described as reconciliation. In such way, we could find more rationale to the validity of our perspective on transcendentalism as a way of life rather than a limited window towards the metaphysical, as often understood by the ordinary reader or historians.

As an epistemic project, the film, therefore, is more interested in the processes that it engenders. In this sense, at this point of this study, we have reached a realm that goes beyond the definition of the filmic object and its nature. Phenomena that occur as the audience encounter the film is what is more essential to the discovery of knowledge. The spectator is involved and therefore he is the real subject and what the screen suggests is the object. Now, according to this epistemic orientation what matters most is audience response. In an Emersonian tradition we aim at bringing together the ends of opposites. So, if the content we are seeking to address is of ontological nature, we embrace an epistemic inclination to reach the fulness of our own investigative project on Transcendentalism. Such fullness cannot be achieved if we look to the cinematic theory in traditional ways which are discriminative. Mainly, the epistemic project that draws on Peirce's approach takes us away from the traditional view to the separation between subject and object as the two opposite ends of dichotomies such as sovereign-subject and author-subject. The subject in this view is a

conscious self that perceives, thinks, and acts as a participant in the experience rather than the lower end of any dichotomy. He is, therefore, no passive spectator who in the cliché view, one who just receives what is being delivered or worse indoctrinated. It is for this reason, that we preferred to focus on the filmic theory, not just one as we mentioned, that favours the union between imagination and judgement, put differently “taste.” Our belief stems from the affinity with the transcendentalists’ interest in the good nature of humanity. Interestingly, taste comes to the forth as a defining factor in the filmic experience, something that brings to our attention the way Transcendentalism has the potential to keep humans aware of the importance of growing their tastes through art, not just as watchers but as participants.

We come to the cinematic narration as an element of the framework proposed by Ehrat to the study of cinematic aesthetics. The first thing we notice about narration is its close relationship with the textual form in the mindset of people. This claim finds ground in that text is basically a sequence of structural linguistic blocks interconnected with causality. However, clinging to the text cannot go without difficulties when it comes to cinema, especially when it is related to Philosophy.

The way the form affects narration is in our view similar to the way the body relates to the self if we consider the transcendental perspective. That’s one good reason to resort to Semiotics to extrapolate the essence of such aspect of cinematic expression. Like the body which is defined by its form comes naturally to be extinguished, narration also in espousing one given form delineates itself as

a unity apart from the filmic experience and, hence, if not refined comes to a natural end(Ehrat, 2005, p. 287) .

Narration, we believe, can escape the boundaries of cliché realms when looked at through the lens of Semiotics. For this reason, we consider it a very defining pillar of Ehrat's framework in that it locates itself in the intersection between the filmic experience on the one hand and the transcendental project on the other. In a reminder of our discussion of time in the previous chapter as a defining aspect of human experience, time reappears in the aesthetic discussion of filmic experience. While Deleuze considers time as an approach of narration that seeks the dissection of movement into parts, Semiotics relies on Husserl to assert that time incarnates the "wholeness in the immediacy of the psyche"(Ehrat, 2005, p. 316). Time as a parameter of human experience resurfaces again in this semiotic perspective as a triadic sign. Hence, the idea that any happening whether in real life or in filmic representation needs a certain parameter that helps in the creation of its meaning. For Ehrat, narration is essentially an "occurrence in the special now—enunciation" (Ehrat, 2005, p. 283). Time, therefore, rises to the surface as a unifying parameter of human experience, a feature that is essential to the transcendental project. We find concordance with Peirce's view on time as an essential component of continuity:

For Peirce, Time is not an apperception form of sensory synthesis, nor is it one of the fundamental psychic acts of reality constituting consciousness. Time need not be the prime concern of a philosophy that gives rise to Semiotic. The primary position is taken by Continuity, which stands for the most Peircean of all insights, the total connection of everything in various fundamental respects. (Ehrat, 2005, p. 302)

Once again, we find the semiotic framework to film aesthetics one of great pertinence to the study of the transcendental project in films. Such claim is justified when we can see that time is set into focus in both domains of thinking as a central aspect of experience. Thus, if time in the transcendental experience ascribes itself to a realm that is not defined a delimited by cliched notions of life, in Ehrat's framework time also goes beyond the mono-delimitations of time as a concept. Put simply, time cannot be objectified and formally defined for its arguable position in the intersection between the physical and mental realities, otherwise labelled real and cinematic times. Moreover, time rises at any discussion of the interplay between actuality, necessity, and possibility as modes of being(Ehrat, 2005, p. 303). Thankfully, semiotics adopts a triad model of definition that provides some sense to a concept that has haunted philosophers throughout centuries. In their debates, they wiggled between its ascription to aspects of events, container of happenings, or even to causality.

Causality, in a particular, we believe, over emphasises the notion that life is one phenomenon, constituted of arbitrary events that need a certain explanation of the way they interconnect. By analogy, this is exactly what we often encounter in the textural accounts, whether documentary or fictitious. Heavily based on written language, these accounts, we believe, go against the natural growth of civilisation which witnessed the belated appearance of the written form, as compared to other aspects of human activity. Moreover, we argue, the written language abides much by the parts of speech and their causal order in the form of sequences. In this view, time helps not in imitating a third hand idea as Plato suggests, but it is an elementary component in the conception of action. Thus,

narration comes to create action as a “texturised whole,” with reference to experience. This “whole” cannot be reconstructed in the mind of the spectator without active involvement and perception. (Ehrat, 2005, p. 285)

The penultimate component of Ehrat’s aesthetic framework is the cinematic aesthetics of perception. As the label suggests, the focus of the semiotic project as revealed through film art takes sides to the benefit of the audience. This is an explicit demonstration of the epistemological orientation of this way of dealing with the filmic phenomenon. In the same manner of categorisation, Ehrat goes further to devise a semiotic approach to perception. To make it more filmic relevant, all the tenets will be revealed through a neat intertwining with the narratology of film—the systematic account for narrative methods as transmitted and received, with new reflections on the established philosophical tradition in Western thinking. We can find justification of this perception-narration interchangeability in Bordwell’s theory as we deal with his formalism. The notion of body-essence reminds us of man’s essential will to discover the truth about himself. By the same token, a schema of different but convergent narratologies has been laid out to reveal much about the possibilities we can interpret a film in an informed way.

Ricoeur’s Mimesis comes first in Ehrat’s design of perception framework. By no coincidence the notion of mimesis comes to the forth in such a design, with relation to perception. Actually, Ricoeur’s reference to mimesis calls for Platonic view of life and art with additional creative insights to the theory. Ricoeur seems to bring to praxis what he preaches for in that he focuses much on the active participation of the receiver in the making of meaning. In a way, he as a reader of

old Western philosophy contributes actively to the enrichment of the content as intertwined with contemporary cultural elements (Ehrat, 2005, p. 346). In his work *Time and Narrative* (1983), Ricoeur masterfully brings into harmony what could have seemed otherwise as conflicting areas of philosophical inquiry, Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and even Existentialism, to his vision of art. To him, the reader and, by the same token, we could add, the spectator approaches the work of art not as an empty page or memory to be filled, but rather as a reservoir of cultural elements that extend from linguistic to philosophical sensibilities. The meaning one gets from his encounter with characters and other elements of fiction in the work is necessarily the product of many processes that go in the in the inner worlds of the receiver. No dimension is to be neglected or dismissed, as physical and metaphysical components of being are to go into play. Hermeneutics and all what it entails of theological dimensions of one's identity work together with the subjective experience of the world, including those individualised impulses of being. Therefore, a process of negotiation of meanings comes to existence right away as one agrees or disagrees with the content be it on the text or on the screen. As a reminder of Emersonian call for active participation in the process of reconciliation between opposites, the receiver gets an effective portion of empowerment through his actual involvement the creation of the filmic experience, particularly. For this, we can interpret the way, cinema in particular has a huge power on the audience in terms of influence and social impact. The spectator actually activates his imaginative powers to either incarnate the characterisation being delivered in front of him or to fight the ideas he is in disagreement with. Like a philosopher, one would raise the question: what would I do if I were in the place of that character? In other words, agreement and



defiance both as psychological and philosophical aspects of personality make the process more dynamic, also a reminder of Emersonian view on the necessity of acceptance of the dynamics of society despite all the awkwardness that might surface as a side effect of one self-empowerment.

Heidegger's Estasis, or ecstatic temporality constitutes the next criterion which accounts for cinematic aesthetic perception. The choice of Heidegger seems of adequacy for his interesting thought with relevance to matters of Being and time movement, to use Deleuze's words. Ironically, Heidegger is interested also in history, or to be specific what he calls historicity. To him humans tend to remain immersed in what he terms "have-been," that is the past, with some projections into the future through the present. However, just as we mentioned in the previous chapter, he gives much importance to the present as a defining and revealing parameter of the Being. Hence, in his *Time and Being* (1927), he discloses a brand-new concept at the time which is Dasein, or "Being present," a moment of ecstatic structure. To him, like for Emerson, one should face the facts of life, what he calls "Facticity," with strength and courage, avoiding all sorts of passivity. It seems to us that this very principle is one which was first articulated by Emerson in his essay *Self-Reliance*. Thus, we can draw on this similarity as one fostering the foundation of the shared ontological project between the two authorities. For Heidegger, humans' perception of time is bound by two horizons. He labels the first as the "infinite horizon" and the second as "the horizon of possibilities. The first is set by the end of the being's life, i.e., death while the second by the factual possibilities, i.e., the present. Javorska makes a clear

statement on Heidegger's core ideas on the Dasein as related to his main thesis on existence:

According to Heidegger, existence has an open character, and therefore is always a part of the world, i.e., it is in the world. Such openness is an ontological meaning of "there", the Dasein (da, there – here, the being-da, das Da-sein), it is a constitutive moment of one's own ecstatic structure. A man is the only being open to the world, does not accept his world passively, but actively influences and changes it. Based on the openness, the Dasein can keep distance from the world, can come to itself and can be free in utilizing its own potential. Being an open existence, the Dasein has an understanding relationship to the world and to the original openness of being. (Javorska, 2016, p. 130)

Man's openness to the world helps in understanding the dichotomies of difference and opposites and, therefore, the Dasein lives an authentic experience of reality as opposed to illusions and fallacies. It is exactly the fact that man faces his immediate challenges that would bring him to a status of ecstasy, that is "revealing" to use Emerson's words. In this view, accepting fate and death is an act of courage that reveals man's essence and more importantly his awareness of his temporality. It is worth noting that in this view the call for confrontation with death has to be distinguished from thinking of death. While the first is based on action and yielding power and love of life and its dynamics, the second goes into the opposite direction. Thinking only of death engenders a sense of guilt and consequently hinders any will to live, leaving space for passivity. If prevailed, the latter strips humans of their potential and will, making them useless beings—as opposed to Beings. Hence, the notion of crowd as opposed to the Dasein. Conscience intervenes to call the Dasein to abandon the futilities, be pristine again, and embrace authenticity to become again a true human Being. In real life

as well as in filmic art, the most revealing horizon as to understand Being is Time, itself understood through temporality (Javorska, 2016, p. 130).

Aristotle's *Poesis* defines another corner in Ehrat design of the cinematic aesthetics of perception. Aristotle is undeniably the established authority in the epistemological realms. Through his *Poetics*, the definition of poetic art and, by extension, all fictitious arts set the grounds for the essence and nature of such representations of human experience. His focus on *praxis* is eminent and essentially revealing. Some early pragmatic impulses were implemented in his lasting model of creative art as to evoke through the experience imbedded in a poem or a dramatic work certain reactions at the level of the audience. Through tragedy, for example he set the emotional response of the receivers as the ultimate aim of any artistic performance. In *Poetics*, we can read the following translated text:

Tragedy, then, is mimesis of an action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; in language embellished by distinct forms in its sections; employing the mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions. (Aristotle et al., 1995, pp. 47-48)

Basically, to reach the emotional response, Aristotle is referring to a network of actions should occur or be performed. Actually, as a philosopher Aristotle's ideas tend to be of a wider-in-scope use and relevance. For this, we need to grasp the notion of action here as more than something to be done or a movement. This action or to be more precise "poesis" stretches to account for human activity that has an end or aim. This notion goes within Aristotle's conception and taxonomy of human activity. Thus, for him, as Balaban (1990) tells us, human activity is divided into two types "praxis" and "poesis." The main

difference between the two concepts is that the first one is the action which is performed for its own sake. That is, it has no other purpose or objective that is expected to be reached or pursued after it has been fully executed. The second type of human activity is, as we may expect, one that aims at achieving a given end that is different from it. Therefore, we can say that we expect something else happening or a new status to be reached or put differently, a purpose or product to be realised.

Based on this taxonomy of human activity, we can establish the link between Aristotle's notion of Poesis and Ehrat's resort to it, as a condition for the aesthetic perception. In this regard, we can see it applied at two different levels. The first one is within the activity happening in the work of art itself. That is, any action that is happening in the film, in this case, could entail a web of ideas about whether what is being performed is something pursued proper, or just a path, or means, toward the achievement of something else. If the first, is free and independent in nature, and of higher esteem, we might expect that the other is of less importance and appeal. This is from a perspective of intrinsic values. Then, the second, while at a surface level would entails meanings of temporality and reduced intrinsic value in that it is dependent, existing just for the sake of reaching an end which is different from it, transcendent meanings could be extricated. Not necessarily, the action takes value from its purpose, but sometimes other dimensions and features could surface as on human activity occurs, whether voluntary or imposed. In this case, we need to focus on such an action to see its relevance to art, whether happening within the film or at the side of the perceiver, i.e., the spectator. Thus, beside features such as Aristotle's notion of ethics and

virtues, the main feature, we find related to the filmic experience is “time.” In relation to the contemplative notions, we understand from the transcendentals’ tenets, time elevates itself to be part of the experience which is ontological in nature, it goes beyond the mathematical dimension of measuring to become an aspect of the happening itself. Getting back to Aristotle’s distinction between means and end, we could see how ideas find different meanings when used differently, that is, the spectator’s action, for instance, if looked at as a means to achieve a certain status of pleasure or even ecstasy through the reception of a filmic content, might be reduced in importance and attributed a certain degree of temporality. Yet, through this discussion, we can expect and presume that what used to reduce the artistic value of cinema, ironically, ascribes it to higher philosophical realms. What we want to say is that the filmic experience has the faculty of producing new ends from old means. As such, the action or, poesis, of approaching the film of value, witness a process of metamorphosis making it embrace new dimensions, in this case the contemplative powers of time. With the same token, any action that the spectator encounters within the artwork itself could be circumscribed to some extended realms of meanings and experiences.

Greimas’ Semiosis brings about a scientific method of investigation into the realms of signs, according to his own visions and intuitively worked visions. What makes him outstanding is the way he could make a synthesis of ideas that might appear at first glance contradictory. For instance, his focus on the influence of social structures and assumption over the production of meaning, while directing his attention to the individual and his inner workings, namely the division of the meaning production apparatus into deep and surface structures.

Nevertheless, his genius shows up in the way he makes reconciliation between experimental science and its methods with matters of meaning and conception that appear perpetually in a state of flux within the confines of social spaces. For one thing, his proposition of the actantial model alludes in an explicit manner to his science-based way of thinking and analysis. His observation of the social phenomenon proves to be one of deep objectivity and sharp distinction. As we mentioned before, genius appears when complex phenomena of the world are transferred to plain ideas which can be manageable and practical. Thus, clarity and utility of conception is reflected as ready categories for analysis. Through the subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent as the corners of action, meaning production, transfer, and evolution could be scrutinised. Most of the actions that take place in society are informed by social assumptions and institutional dictation. The question that arises is how the sender could instigate such actions. We expect some sort of message that propels the receiver to transform the word into action. If in previous times, when absolute monarchies ruled the world, that would be plausible seeing subjects of the king apply what they were required to perform, but seeing modern man abides by the rules and commands of what might be elites or institutions is an idea that calls for our attention. The semiosis of Greimas finds space in this dilemma only to provide us with the clue that joins the inner world of the receiver with the what might be perceived as the other, the institution in its different layers of definition. Not necessarily by this we mean an organisation or an establishment, but we mean the social assumption about an authority that is conceived as intrinsically authorised to give orders. Therefore, the means by which, Greimas informs us, the other indoctrinates man is discourse and narrative. In both entities again “time”

resurfaces as a defining aspect of the process of meaning production. It is indeed the factor of time that makes ideas which were initially assumptions turn into taken for granted realities.

When it comes to cinema, the narrative can embrace different teleologies, among which is of course indoctrination and appeal to consumption, but this is not the serious cinema we are interested in. We seek rather the cinema of meanings, one that elevates itself to the realms of synthesis of creative imagination and rational judgement. Indeed, “Time” will play a vital role as an element of the experience, but this time not to indoctrinate but to enlighten. Thus, whether positive or negative the narrative is always there, only in cinema images will necessarily substitute text as a form of presentation, without neglecting the textual basis as often the origin of the filmic content as we discussed earlier. On the innateness of images in film, Metz confirms that the narrative can be reduced in magnitude but cannot be absent from any filmic artwork:

According to Metz, a loose narrative – with little dramatic action, elliptical, ambiguous, disconcerting, minimalist, unpredictable, incomplete, based on transformations that partially escape representation or causal logic – still remains a narrative. (Goliot-Lété, 2018, p. 328)

In this schema of perception in film, Bordwell’s formalism, or what some critics term “Neo-formalism” provides a vision to art, which is neatly devised against the clichéd ideas that criticise such approach. We often stumble on criticisms that reduce Formalism, namely Russian, to a mere interest in the form of the text, especially as they address literature. As a matter of fact nothing changes when Bordwell adopted the same approach to film. The point is, what we know about any phenomenon in the world is not what really it is. This is a reminder of

the Transcendentals themselves who actually wanted to raise awareness of this issue of social and external indoctrinating forces. Thus, we can say that as Bordwell appropriated much of Russian formalism in his film theory by the end of 1980s, he received much criticism. Firstly because of some paranoid feelings towards the Russians, something that has nothing to do with art and intellect. Secondly, the misunderstanding of Formalism itself proved to be so defining in such rejection of ideals altogether. We may add that it is also derived from the fact that Bordwell whose contribution to film studies is still defining and influential incarnates a certain web of intelligence that elevates him to the genius. And, this reflects much of Emerson's definition and consequent inner thought about being misunderstood by the ordinary or let us say the shallow minded intruding critics. The main point behind all this is that, the real and essential formalism Bordwell embrace and induce is one that is in Emersonian tradition, so unifying; the whole art work becomes one. Now, we need to understand the relation of this with the notion of Formalism and its association with the outside as opposed to the inside. Basically, ordinary view is that the work of art is defined by its form and its content. The two are viewed as separate entities. It means, one would expect that we could work out the content in a completely separate manner, then eventually we pour we have made into a certain container of our choosing, be it a text, painting, or film. Bordwell sets the quarrel as he answers one of those shallow-minded critics:

For them, form was the sum total of the art work's internal systems — devices of the medium, narrative structures, meaning, style. Themes were not a product of the work, but part of the material systems of the work. The Formalists did not "reject content" in the sense of jettisoning a part of the work because of some hedonistic desire to concentrate on form. Rather, they eliminated the very concept of



content as a separable meaning simply communicated by the artwork. Meaning became one structure among many functioning to create the overall work. (Bordwell & Thompson, 1982, p. 65)

Bordwell, therefore, proudly admits being inspired and consequently a disciple of Russian formalism. He has no fears of accepting and embracing others' ideas when they fit his intellectual and artistic project. To us, Bordwell incarnates much of the ideals and tenets proposed by Emerson and discussed in our first chapter. Thus, we expect them to help us to come up with good interpretations of films under study. Speaking of interpretation is to evoke Bordwell's notion that a real work of art is to estrange our taken-for-granted ideas and presumptions on art to the benefit of making anew our readiness to see and perceive. For him, once empowered, the spectator develops the faculty to acquire individualised perceptions of the film, which if well formally constructed, would accept a multitude of readings. Bordwell tells us: "De-familiarizing our everyday perceptions of things and our learned perceptions of prior aesthetic traditions and norms, the work leads us to use our mind in a specific way that is at once aesthetic, social, and historical" (Bordwell & Thompson, 1982, p. 67).

Meanings are central to Bordwell's theory, yet they go hand in hand with techniques and devices. In other words, both constitute two sides of the same coin. Meaning itself cannot be revealed in a film, or any other medium, if not incarnated in a visual or sensual means. Interestingly, this is also a reminder of Emerson's notion that nature is but a visual and sensory means by which transcendent meanings find place. Then, for Bordwell, stylistic devices are not used for the sake of using them, as what we called shallow-minded critics would suggest, but they have a clear mission, or what he terms "functions" that operate

within a larger intellectual as well as artistic project. Therefore, Bordwell rejects totally the study of stylistic devices in isolation to render such approach as a merely “empty formalism,” an idea that is self-critical. Rather, he advocates film as an ideological system that is formed of a web of details, he terms “texture of work.” In the same manner, the world is looked at from a way remote perspective as a universe, the film also in Bordwell’s vision becomes a “whole.” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1982)

We reach the ultimate component of Ehrat’s semiotic framework, landing at phenomenon that is essential not just cinema, but to language as the humans’ communicative means by excellence. Enunciation has been introduced to linguistics in the midst of the twentieth century by Bienveniste. Defined basically as the act of “appropriation and use of linguistic signs,” Enunciation seems as an evident element of human conversation. Yet, in academic circles it took a while to be noticed and theorised and, more importantly, kept stirring debates to the end of the century. The initial idea of Bienveniste focused on enunciation as the human activity to produce “utterances.” For him, we cannot speak of utterances unless we have the agents: “I,” “You,” and “S/he.” Their presence means there is a communicative situation in which the speaker is addressing the receiver and telling him about a third person. However, he admits the cases in which the “I” is not present. In this event, the film is defined as “histoire,” otherwise it will be considered as “discours.” Beside this, in a scientific tradition he provides a certain categorisation of the signs which can find their referentials in the ongoing utterance, we can ascribe to enunciation. The first category includes the two first mentioned agents as they are invoked by the pronouns “I” and “You”. The second

category includes the pronouns and adverbs referring to time and place, not all time nor all place. In a reminder of our discussion of the prominence of the present moment, we find it interesting that for Bienveniste, the adverbs “now” and “here” are of essential importance to the enunciation to be confirmed. Other adverbs like “this” and “that” come secondary. The third category of signs which is complementary to the second evokes the tenses used which are the “present perfect” and “the future.” These signs serve as what he calls “marks” and “deictics” as they serve to both include the subject into the utterance and indicate the context respectively (Branigan & Buckland, 2015, p. 157).

Bienveniste’s schema of utterance has been challenged through time, for the good of the cinematic experience. For instance, Bordwell rejects the idea of the “addressee,” while Djokovic postulates that such addressee is not necessarily a person within the screen. Interestingly, he provides examples in which one of the persons in any given communicative situation looks not at the screen but through the screen to address the viewer. In such case, the viewer becomes part of the utterance as an active participant who not just receive but completes the experience (Lecq & Verstraten, 2009, p. 26).

## **2.6. Schrader’s Transcendental Style in Cinema**

With regard to the myriad of inner representative capacities, cinema, as a form of art, that is formally pertinent to the twentieth century could manifestly express the multitude facets of human condition that marks the modern world as we live it today. Not only psychological dimensions have been thoroughly and extensively examined by a great deal of the cinematic production to this day, but the spiritual questions have recently forged their way to a number of salient

influencing works of art. As American tradition goes, self-reliant, confident, and independent writers, script-writers, and producers have detached themselves from the commercial cinema and sincerely embraced the mission to empower the individual by exploring the mystery and, more importantly, bring it close to the reader and the spectator on equal footing.

The only authority of such an art genre who challenged the mainstream and commercial cinema, laying the foundations of a correspondent representative cinematic style to the Philosophy of Transcendentalism is the legendary author and director Paul Schrader. Backed up with his theological backgrounds in the image of Emerson and enriched with his involvement in the art of cinema, he actually aimed at establishing a filmic theory in its own right. In his seminal work *Transcendental Style in Cinema: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (1972), he delineates a theoretical framework, he calls a *Tao* (Schrader, 2018, p. 35), that brings into confines the guidelines, elements, and techniques that would serve generations to come in terms of the making of a dedicated genre to the spiritual question. In this chapter, we will cover the essential qualities, elements, and techniques that, in Schrader's view, exclusively and essentially characterise the transcendental style within film theory.

## **2.7. Defining Transcendental Style**

To define the transcendental style is to dispel the wildly held misplaced presumptions about all what is transcendental, commonly linked to religion whether in America or previously in Europe. For this reason, Paul Schrader, whose own upbringing was Calvinist provides sound views that locate themselves in the realm of cinematic criticism in a distinct manner. For him, on the one hand,

religion is a sort of club entrepreneurship whose members strive for social, cultural, and business ends. The drive is always for inclusiveness and the interaction with rules, both in ways of reward and punishment. Eventually, faith-based films ironically fall into the same category as commercial films. On the other hand, transcendental style is a journey seeking spiritual discovery and is a way of expressing the “Wholly Other” (Schrader, 2018, p. 36). Thus, no conclusive definition is to confine the transcendent in a limited semantic space since it is the leaning beyond the sense experience to reach the ideal, characterised as both “invisible” and “ineffable.”

In other words, as Schrader put it, the term “transcendental” can have different meanings for different writers. It can mean, directly or indirectly, (1) the Transcendent: the Holy or Ideal itself, or what Rudolf Otto calls the “Wholly Other,” (2) the transcendental: human acts or artifacts which express something of the Transcendent, or what Mircea Eliade in his anthropological study of comparative religions calls “hier-ophanies,” (3) transcendence: the human religious experience which may be motivated by either a deep psychological need or neurosis —Freud, or by an external, “Other” force—Jung (Schrader, 2018, p. 37).

Drawing on the above initial definition, we extract the overlap of different disciplines, namely Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, and Semiotics in the endeavour to bring together the efforts to dive into the question of Transcendence. On its part, emphasising the importance of the topic as multifaceted in nature, *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* (2010) presents fifty wide ranging essays just to elaborate and expand on Ralph Waldo

Emerson's essential definition of Transcendentalism as "the saturnalia or excess of faith" (Myerson et al., 2010, p. xxiii).

The key issue here is that Transcendentalism, as a philosophy and art, requires more than an approach to be efficiently rendered in cinema. The style of scriptwriting or filmmaking such as the one outlined by Paul Schrader while so elaborate and comprehensive can by no means, we think, be granted a clear-cut perception but a nuanced way of expression based on what he calls a "buffet of techniques." Accentuating this very idea and as he revisited his seminal work in 2018, he definitely maintained the bulk of his work as one of immediate validity, while interestingly relocating the stages that led to the creation of the contemporary related style used by a growing number of film directors who cherish the spiritual mission of cinema.

To clarify the way the foundations of a given genre or style come to being in the midst of huge cultural upheavals, we chose to highlight the genesis of techniques used in this particular style. Thus, we will particularly endeavour in the following paragraphs to bring into focus the stages of cinematic expression that directly or indirectly contributed to the birth of the transcendental style in its contemporary outlook.

## **2.8. Gilles Deleuze's movement image and time image**

In his touchstone work that appeared in two volumes *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), Deleuze, a French philosopher and acclaimed film theory authority, brought to the forth the notions of movement and time in the cinematic art form by attributing each one a dedicated stage in the development of cinema. For him images in cinema

transcend their actual content through the movement motion pictures engender, as explained in the following passage by Felicity Colman:

Deleuze begins his investigation into the cinema in terms of its movements in two arenas: the philosophical and the technical. Deleuze argues that movement informs our understanding of the formation of worlds in terms of the types of information it selects and generates as new forms. The cinema creates many different types of movement-images and Deleuze describes six key types: the perception-image, the affection-image, the impulse-image, the action-image, the reflection-image and the relation-image. Drawing on the concepts of philosopher Henri Bergson and film theorists André Bazin, Noël Burch and Jean Mitry, the point that Deleuze argues is that the screen image is a relational whole which changes, either through movement or through temporally mediated events that have altered the situation of the moving-image. (Colman, 2011, p. 25)

Deleuze evokes the power of cinema in using movement, namely through the faculty of the camera as a mechanical device to capture the movement of characters and objects. Yet, he recognises also that movement had even been rendered in different art forms that preceded cinema. Painting for instance could generate a sense of movement through the use of different layers of paint and colours. Dance could convert emotions into correspondent movements. Literature on its end manifested its fictitious power to create moving scenes in the minds of the readers. Hence, cinema itself has, in many ways, just taken movement to another level by building on the recent scientific discoveries that led to the invention of modern cameras with the ability to capture the kinetic phenomena in impressive manners. Therefore, cinematic art form has been indeed empowered with the adequate tools to masterfully catch different types of movement, whether objects move within a defined frame or be followed by a mobile camera as they displace within a given shot.

Deleuze's theory on the movement's importance in cinematic expression has naturally evolved to the study of time in cinema, or what he calls time-image. As "Wesley C. Salmon tells us, '[m]otion may be described in mathematical terms as a functional relation between space and time'" (Thomas, 2018, p. 54). On his part, Allan James Thomas views Deleuze's consecutive account for movement and time as a cinematic history of philosophy. To use his words, the two volumes describe the development of cinema "not as collage, but as montage: the gap or interval between the two volumes, between the classical and the modern cinemas, the pre- and post-war periods, as a cutting together or splicing apart to create the film of the history of philosophy" (Thomas, 2018, p. 15). Deleuze's philosophical orientation led him actually to ponder over the way moving images could contribute to raising empathy and building knowledge (Colman, 2011, pp. 28-29).<sup>2</sup> In continuation to this idea, Kristin Thompson reminds us that art, in general, "defamiliarizes our habitual perceptions" (Caglayan, 2018, p. 29). That is to say, it serves as an eye opener and awakening agent.

Actually, movement and action are still the drive of cinema to this day, namely when it comes to mainstream films, or put differently commercial films. It is therefore widely accepted that, joined together, they are the main reason for the latter's appeal to the masses. For this, as an independent idiosyncratic thinker, Schrader, who has had a strong affinity with spirituality, has delayed the making of a film based on his own teachings. In a confirmation of this stand, in a lecture he delivered during the screening of his latest film *First Reformed* (2017), he stated that: "I was too intoxicated by action and empathy" (Fuller, 2018). Such

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<sup>2</sup> Deleuze's concern over cinema's faculty of shaping knowledge will help us in the remaining of this study to decipher the way cinema could eventually empower individuals and let them rethink culture.



utterance forcefully alludes to Schrader's eventual self-triumph over the dominant cinematic culture.

### **2.9. Andrei Tarkovsky's applied time image**

While Gilles Deleuze's work was marked by its philosophical and theoretical inclinations, Andrei Tarkovsky embraced that but interestingly, in a Thoreauvian tradition, focused on the discovery of cinema as an art apparatus capable of impacting human life. As time is fundamentally a core element of such life, it was central to Tarkovsky's thinking and eventually was implemented along with Deleuze's thought into his artwork. Thanks to him, complex ideas and notions on time have become tangible and widely popularised. In his view, time is essential to film and its building blocks in that "[t]he actual passage of time is also made clear in the characters' behaviour, the visual treatment and the sound—but these are all accompanying features, the absence of which, theoretically, would in no way affect the existence of the film" (Tarkovski, 1987, p. 113).

Tarkovsky makes use of time to reflect on the way a character approaches life experience, namely by evoking the fact that we do not experience life in a linear way, but instead we handle it sideways. In cinematic language, this is ensured by the use of the flashback technique, which in turn evokes the notions of memory and dreams as inherently essential to the conceptualisation of facts about life and, more importantly, feeling and embracing them. And it is exactly through time that we come to know about a character's thought and eventually in a magic way identify with. Time, also, provides us with the opportunity to discover the inner world of a character despite his physical absence on the screen. In this regard, Tarkovsky tells us that "he is absent from view, but what he thinks, how he

thinks, and what he thinks about build up a graphic and clearly-defined picture of him” (Tarkovski, 1987, p. 29).

### **2.10. The genesis of slow cinema**

As Schrader revisited his *Transcendental Style in Cinema* in 2018, he maintained the bulk of his initial work, yet he reconsidered mainly the genesis of slow cinema itself. In the first edition, informed by his study of the works of Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson, and Carl Dreyer, he had attributed some films with the label of transcendental style. Yet, in the new edition, he courageously reattributed them to post war neo-realism. In other words, in an act of recognition he paid tribute to the psychological realism movement (Schrader, 2018). Therefore, the shift toward slow cinema had to undergo the influence of Deleuze’s ideas on movement and time, basically adapted and applied by Andrei Tarkovsky. To Schrader, these two towering figures were the touchstones in the course of the development of slow cinema, defined by Nick James as “a strand of international art films renowned for their sluggish narrative pace, oblique storytelling and minimalist aesthetics” (Caglayan, 2018, p. 1). In line with these facts, more details are provided in the definition proposed by Quandt’s and unfolding in the following:

a tone of quietude and reticence, an aura of unexplained or unearned anguish; attenuated takes, long tracking or panning shots, often of depopulated landscapes; prolonged hand-held follow shots of solo people walking; slow dollies to a window or open door framing nature; a materialist sound design; and a preponderance of Tarkovskian imagery. (Caglayan, 2018, p. 5)

In intellectual and art realms, functional properties prove their eminence in any field of investigation or application. For this, the importance and function

of this type of cinema go beyond the latter's own denomination in that, as Marc Ferro put it, "slow cinema functions as a testament to contemporary understandings of cinema, art and criticism and thus might serve as both "an agent" and "a source" of history" (Caglayan, 2018, p. 35).

The link and interconnectedness between history and films go through some definite aspects of time. History and time, whether two facets of one phenomenon or beyond easy plausibility concept in any intellectual or artistic undertaking, take their course in patterns, an idea that slow cinema emphatically embraces through slowness in the character and camera's different movements. Both remain more often still within the frame or move slowly. The filmmaker retreats from the design of an action and let it be created through stillness and observation. That is, time itself takes hold of the action and creates the motion in the mind of the spectator. Moreover, the visual style and narrative structure serve the same end by adopting simplistic motifs, minimal talks, sombre lighting, little cuts, and less talk narrative.

### **2.11. Paul Schrader's buffet of transcendental techniques**

Paul Schrader considers that transcendental style unsurprisingly borrows its conception from the philosophy it refers to. That is, such style heavily relies on the writer or filmmaker's own intuition and sense of union with the reality he wants to describe, create, and bring into fictitious existence. As such, no artist can redo his own work the same way over and over again, let alone others', for choice is essentially intuitive when it comes to the techniques with phenomenological effects and transcendent meanings (Schrader, 2018). In the following paragraphs,

we take the endeavour to highlight the essential techniques and devices employed in transcendent films, as envisioned by Schrader.

### **2.11.1. The delayed cut and duration**

The “delayed cut,” or in other words the “long take,” is a fundamental feature of slow cinema and one of Tarkovsky’s trademarks. Also, in Bresson’s style the cut takes hold of the scene making, instead of the action within. Actually, Schrader refers to what he calls “non-acting.” That is, characters are not really supposed to act but rather become “objects in human form,” to use Bresson’s words (Schrader, 2018, p. 16). Philosophically speaking, Bresson makes of his notion of duration as a reply to the mainstream circles’ assault on the union of essence and form in art as well as their separation from the concrete. For him, union as reflected through these two basic concepts not only is relevant to the object of art but to humans themselves who have been artificially separated and dissociated from their concrete meaning. In this view, they have instead taken and got associated with static stereotyped notions on their very nature. In the course of this dogmatic process, the dynamics of life as an action have been lost. For this very reason, on his part, Tarkovsky brought into existence a ground-breaking vision or rather application of the dimension of time in film art. The feeling and perception of time engender what he calls “The concrete universal.” In such a way, the form becomes a way to evoke and produce a certain experience that all humans can be not just observers but participants (Capek, 1971, p. 170). Furthermore. Tarkovsky’s delayed cut, or what is popularised as the long cut takes a completely different vision and perspective from the mainstream or commercial cinema. If the latter is all about an imitation of life experience in a passive way, a

sort of a faithful reproduction of a given reality, the delayed cut has an elevated project, one that endeavours to place the viewer in the midst of the experience to be part of it, as explained by Schrader:

The Tarkovsky long shot is more than long. It's meditative. The psychological effect of slow cinema's "long take" is unlike any other film technique. Film techniques are about "getting there"—telling a story, explaining an action, evoking an emotion—whereas the long take is about "being there." (Schrader, 2018, p. 8)

In the same manner, almost all forms of art stem in the crucible of the difficulties and unusual circumstances, the delayed cut brings about a sense of pressure on the viewer. The end is to propel the latter for action in the immediacy of the experience. Thus, the imaginative powers would be pushed to their limits of productivity and creativity. With today's advances in the medicinal fields of research, it has been proved that the neurology of the brain permits certain qualities of cognition only when the person is subdued to extremely hard psychological circumstances. As such, we think that Schrader's account for Tarkovsky's notion on the "pressure of time" has a direct relationship with the triggering of such transcending powers of the mind. As such, Schrader tells us on the centrality of time and its organic belonging to the cinematic project:

"The cinema image," he wrote, "is the observation of a phenomenon passing through time. Time becomes the very foundation of cinema... Time exerts a pressure which runs through the shot... Just as a quivering reed can tell you about the current or water pressure of a river, in the same way we know the movement of time as it flows through the shot." (Schrader, 2018, p. 8)

Schrader elaborates more on the delayed cut, revealing the way it is different from what he calls "the smash cut." In a scientific manner he starts by setting the similarities between the two concepts, focusing on manipulation as a

shared aspect of the two. As such, as time manipulation techniques, he shows that both alter the flow of time or rather the viewer's perception of it. The first, hence, jumps in time ahead of the current moment to provide happenings in an abrupt manner, a ready action to witness in an unexpected manner. That is, no room is left for the viewer's consideration of any thought. The second, however, is one that manipulates time as to stop it, for example, when the frame is frozen, leaving space for the viewer to actively create his own expectations rather than waiting for them to actually occur. Schrader explains that if the first manipulation expels the viewer's participation, the second requires it (Schrader, 2018, p. 18).

When it comes to the technical side, Bergson's delayed cut could be concisely defined as a technique that essentially extends a shot in time. In this extension, the relationship between the viewer and object is redefined as the viewer is displaced from the narrative outward, without any explicit reference to that within the very narrative. Thus, the viewing process calls upon the separation and distinction between story time and narrative time. The frame remains constant for a considerable length of duration while time smoothly expands. This very process generates a sense of transcendental effect by making the spectator lean to the scene and, by consequence, approach the filmic experience with the eye on reality itself. According to André Bazin, "the long take functions as a principle element of an aesthetic of reality due to its uninterrupted portrayal of profilmic action in which the spectator is confronted with reality in its actual temporality" (Caglayan, 2018, p. 44). As the spectator dives into the scene and embraces reality, time acts "as an agent of change, as duration and as an all-encompassing reservoir of being and creativity" (Skakov, 2012, p. 2).

Creativity is therefore an essential quality that a filmmaker has to embrace as to account for the unseen or to place the viewer beyond the usual. The manipulation of time can help in this regard as the narrative shifts or rather mixes the flowing action with irrelevant happenings. Cuts play between the story and what might be seen as no-sense in frequent manner that provides a certain texture to the story. This engenders what Schrader calls “contemplative pace”(Schrader, 2018, p. 18). While such play in cuts extends tangibly the time being devoted to a given scene, the end is to make it recurrent and accessible for the viewer to disentangle himself from imposed situations and thoughts. This is evidently not just about the cinematic experience, but it is not less than a spiritual training and call for contemplation over the little things in life.

In other words, Henri Bergson’s notion of duration in a scene seeks defamiliarization. That is to say, it makes time become the ultimate content instead of the content itself. The spectator, in his concentration and devotion to a fixed scene, gets in touch with reality much as the person who engages with a contemplative activity like yoga. Thus, dispelling the sensory connection with the world for some time would eventually pave the way for spiritual connectedness and transcendence. This idea is well explained in Marrati’s study of the notion of time in cinema philosophy in the following passage:

For Bergson, as we know, duration is qualitative change, or pure becoming. And duration, as we know, which Bergson initially saw as psychological and identical to consciousness, will take on an ontological dimension in the texts after *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Bergson comes to view duration as the opening of time as change, the opening of the universe or being. Bergson often calls this dimension the Whole. (Marrati, 2012, p. 17)

### **2.11.2. Boredom, as an aesthetic device**

In a sparkling contrast to mainstream cinema which essentially focuses on action and empathy, transcendental style uses instead boredom as a technique to make the spectator think differently of and about the scenes unfolding before him. It is precisely in this difference that transcendental style appeal not necessarily to the masses but to those who are willing to challenge themselves as they have become. In other words, it is for the readership which is ready for the acceptance of revelation, to use Emerson's words. The feature which is used by boredom as an aesthetic device is its morph into a hook. One would wonder how boredom become a hook, but Schrader masterfully provides the answer. To him, Boredom is indeed a hook as it essentially about something really happening and worth the viewer's waiting. Such waiting is engendered through the skilful building of the scenery that evokes a sense of anticipation, which is another mark of the transcendental style. Interestingly, Schrader makes an analogy between the cinema goer and the church goer. For him, both have to deliver a certain type of commitment by which they carry on their exposition to what is being performed with oblivion to the natural need for the pleasant experience. The ultimate feature is what Schrader attributes to Haladyn, as "the will to boredom." Evidently, this is a reference to Nietzsche's "will to power," that readiness to keep hope for meaning in a meaningless world (Schrader, 2018, p. 20).

Moreover, boredom can be seen rather as a strategy calling for productive action and patience rather than idleness. Action in this sense, is not about movement but about the activation of different mental faculties, including imagination, in an individualised manner. The aim is, therefore, to set one's free



of the customs and beliefs which have no actual validity but convention. Difference is not often accepted and tolerated by many of the crowd-minded ordinary people and even specialised critics. The transcendental style as a derivative of the slow cinema has been using boredom for functional rationales. For one thing, it “functions as a contemplative elation for the spectator”(Çaglayan, 2018, p. 60). This strategy has evolved further to cross the limits of its intrinsic relevance to the contemplative nature of the philosophical project in question, calling for its universal appeal and beyond cultural limitation faculties. Like any other defamiliarising phenomenon, boredom essentially defined slow cinema, only to face mixed feelings criticism that ranges between rejection and fascination, as referred to by Caglayan in his study of slow cinema and boredom:

Furthermore, the debate demonstrated the global reach of films, some of which were made under very localized conditions, and emphasized the films’ ability to transcend borders (national, cultural and aesthetic) and speak to a cosmopolitan audience that shared a similar cinephile sensibility. As perhaps the most exciting art cinema current in the twenty-first century,...(Çaglayan, 2018, p. 3)

Boredom is perhaps despised by crowd-minded critics for it incites cinema not to state or dictate the feelings the spectator should have as a response to what is being performed and displayed. Yet, he is invited to think and identify with the characters in a completely personal manner which goes through two stages. During the first one the scene appears to be distant and meaningless, while in the second a certain link and connectedness with the mystery starts to be formed out of the personal engagement of the spectator. In other words, boredom means that cinema frees itself from the superficial unserious techniques of appeal such as emotional music and excessive extravagant colours. Tarkovsky points out that filmmakers if compelled to use colour, “should do it with the utmost care, since

colour reveals the condition of physical matter over time, its change and its endurance”(Skakov & Tauris, 2013, p. 2). For, as explained in the previous point, time is quintessential and crucial in the development of the transcendental style.

The resort to boredom actually brings into the surface philosophical matters that question the situatedness of being. In his study of boredom in one of the Italian director Antonioni, an authority in Italian cinema, Rhym (2012) discusses boredom as a cinematic mood, which eventually has a heavy impact on the spectatorship. This study actually elevates the concept of boredom from the stereotyped negative or oblivious stands. He goes to unravel the phenomenological aspects of such mood and its relationship with man’s sense of being as related to time. For this, he turns to Heidegger’s phenomenology to attempt to put such phenomenon in its right place *vis-à-vis* the realisation of the self. In this event, he reminds us of the importance of the mood as one essential aspect of our sense of situatedness beside understanding, discourse, and falling. Thus, in this view, boredom as a mood takes a delicate space of confinement between the objective and the subjective, an area that is definitely close to our sense of belonging to the World—in its broader sense:

“This confirms one of Heidegger's basic claims that mood is neither an internal state that is prompted by external stimuli nor an inner phenomenon that is transferred onto the outer world. He writes, "A mood [Stimmung] assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside,' but arises out of being-in-the-world.”(Rhym, 2012, pp. 482-583)

Rhym extends his study of the affectivity of boredom to go beyond the stress on time as the main parameter involving or creating the feeling produced by such affective cinematic device. For him, the viewer can similarly get a sensation

of discomfort and unsteadiness as the scene presents the lack of characters in an unusual way. Time helps in creating such effect as the viewer keeps his eyes on a steady frame in which no characters are there with no help from the narrative, in the form of text or a talk by the narrator. While this is something that indeed calls for boredom as a reaction, but when we look closer, we find that such a technique makes the viewer really wonder and trigger his mental faculties to think and create some imaginative expectations and what Deleuze calls speculations. For the latter, speculation in the cinematic experience is so important as it stimulates the viewer to proceed with engagement and gives life a sense of appeal. Moreover, scenes with no subjects and decentralised objects bring about a sense of no significance, or put differently “void,” which on their own effectively contribute in the building of boredom as a gloomy colour of the viewer’s mood. In this sense, boredom becomes of central importance in influencing the spectatorship. The end is not the perpetual manifestation of such a mood, but it has the mission to fulfil peculiar feelings of temporality and provide a stimulus for autonomy in perception.

### **2.11.3. Film scoring**

In cinematic language, sound is as important as image in the process of creating the whole experience. In classical cinema and then commercial film, sound is used, in a way, to tell the spectator what he should feel, a feature referred to by Schrader as empathy (Schrader, 2018, p. 17). Therefore, sound serves the general orientation and meaning of the film and it is up to the filmmaker to take the most of its capacity. In addition to the main sounds produced by characters as

spoken words, in cinematic language we pay much attention to music and sound effects (Lewis, 2014, p. 149).

Underscoring, another word for the latter sound types, has contemplative effects. The transcendental style has its own way of handling it to a specific end related to boredom, part of what Schrader calls “withholding techniques.” In his view, this feature enables the filmmaker to make his film lean back from the spectator. In psychological terms, hiding something from someone generates a sense of curiosity that paradoxically hooks him. The viewer, therefore, is brought in a voluntary manner to approach the experience his way, namely touching upon his intuition and individual sense of experience.

In Transcendental style and slow cinema in general film scoring relies heavily on the diegetic sounds. These are the natural sounds associated with the action within the film and originated from sources imbedded into the story. By action, we mean not only that fast movement of characters, but we mean sounds as they are brought about as part of the happenings in our daily life. They might find source in a chair being moved or match being lightened. Any object therefore can transcend its solid state and provide a certain additional meaning to the narrative of film. Humans, on their turn, contribute in the creation of these diegetic sounds not only through their talks, but through their breathing and facial gestures. Such heightened sound effects actually effectively contribute in the weaving of film experience harmony as they complement the dialogues and music—if any (Schrader, 2018).

Music is called upon and used but in a completely different way. It has nothing to do with empathy or arousal of emotions, but it is used to give meaning

to time. Musical interference cedes place to musical harmony. A moment could be extended further as it intertwines with the musical notes, which are basically physical waves, defined by the time dimension. For this reason, composed music is preferred to synthesised music as notes embrace natural sounds in the first and depart from it in the second. Interestingly, the absence of sound creates “le temps mort”(Caglayan, 2018), in itself has a diegetic meaning as it tells something about the unhappening, as a way to the encounter with reality instead of the artificially made world (Schrader, 2018).

The other way that music is used is the defiance of expectancy, or rather the reversal of the music referential nature. Thus, if the spectator is expecting some guidance towards a feeling of sadness, the scoring music might be one of delight and vice-versa. This function of the music within the narrative comes as part of the overall tendency of slow cinema of experience reversal. The end is always to challenge the viewer to ponder about the reasons behind such musical use. Sometimes, as it happens in real life, the metaphysical aims at things and values which at short sight are looked at differently or even in an alerting way. For this, Schrader pays attention to the reversing methods used by slow cinema, as read in the following:

Slow cinema is passive aggression par excellence. The slow cinema director says, “I know what you want; I know what you expect; but I’m going to do the opposite.” Why? “Because I’m after something else and will use your expectations to get it.” Roles are reversed. The film-maker, instead of creating a film world in which the viewer needs only to surrender, creates a world which the spectator must contemplate—or reject out of hand. (Schrader, 2018, p. 17)

#### **2.11.4. The camerawork**

Camerawork is a defining element in the filmic experience. It is as the name suggests all about the way the camera positions itself, moves, zooms, or freezes. For the transcendental style, Schrader speaks of a camera work that is plain and simple and detaching itself from the speed and fantasy of the commercial film. We find often commercial films promoting excessive camera work that catches the viewer's eyes and attention through dolly shots and zooms. Firstly, this method takes hold of the viewer's mind, putting it in a state of fascination and passivity. Secondly, this over-use of technicality related to speed and exotic angulation answer a certain kind of expectancy, leaving no space for any individual contemplation. To limit these effects, Schrader points out the need for a flat style of filmmaking, in which the scenes are stable, the cuts are very limited, the movement are almost absent, and the sound effects are put into use rather than into influence and emotion arousal (Schrader, 2018).

Camera angles incarnate the point of view in certain aspects. They are essential to camerawork within filmmaking and are very important to the process of fusion or union viewer-scene. The camera, as an extension to the eye, has the faculty to make the spectator approaches the scene in a completely different manner depending on the angle it takes. It could be inviting or repelling as well as engendering joy or fear. As Jon Lewis tells us, “[w]hat is unique to cinema is that the camera positions us as viewers of the *mise-en-scène*, governing our perspective on a scene. This perspective, importantly, depends a lot on what we see and how the filmmaker has chosen to show it to us” (Lewis, 2014, p. 85). He adds that camera work involves its position, the way it approaches the scene, and whether it performs in a subtle or obvious manner. These elements shape the

spectator's experience and would eventually help in the analysis of films (Lewis, 2014, p. 85).

In transcendental style, the camera's movement and angles are crucial to the scene's main function and mission, that is, making the spectator be involved in the character's experience, rather than an observer from a different perspective or vantage point. For this, as Schrader informs us, there is no oblique angles or sharp movements usual to classical cinema. Instead, the use of camera in general is austere and camera angles are basically right whether in front or sideways of the content. By allusion to photography, characters become objects in human form, as we mentioned before. In terms of closeness, the characters are presented as equal in size with other items or objects, taking more photographic style than moving pictures, as defined by Bordwell. This idea is made clear in the following:

Visual compositions in slow films tend to be symmetrical, not weighted toward specific visual information—no dramatic foregrounding and oblique angles. Camera movement, when it occurs, is painstakingly incremental and most often at right angles—either side to side or directly forward or backward. Human figures are presented as composition equals with other items on screen. David Bordwell uses the term “planimetric photography” to describe this flatness.<sup>20</sup> Viewers are refused easy entrance to the image, held at a deliberate distance. They are left to assemble their own visual priorities. (Schrader, 2018, p. 14)

Camerawork, therefore, finds justification in beyond the known and the expected. If the concept work involves by necessity action and movement, in the transcendental style, the camera can deliver work just by being there, to use Heidegger's words. The very fact of the presence of camera can brings into being the processes of life as contemplated over. Examples of this may include Bresson's final scene of *Diary of a country's Priest* (1951), in which there in one candle

flaming (Schrader, 2018, p. 24). Making such camerawork style be the ultimate point in the course of the narrative alludes to the finality of the transcendental style as one marked by stasis. The candle's flaming refers to the nature of such a style. It is essentially process based rather than teleological. The allusion to the process takes us back to Emerson's call taking things at hand to turn the ideal into practice. Like the candle, the transcendental style in cinema is to convert spirituality through contemplation into practicality and individuation as a way towards self-revelation.

## **Conclusion**

Drawing conclusions in philosophical realms has never been an easy task and this instance is no exception. One might wonder then whether this chapter was about philosophy since paradoxically its title and objective were about the cinematic style in the first place. The answer would be evoked as the line of thought that stretched from the enunciation of the chapter subtly endeavoured to bring to the surface the underpinning philosophical grounds of filmic art, with the purpose of serving the analytical undertaking at hand. Actually, our perspective to cinema, as it has been developed though a good deal of time devoted for reading and contemplation, is one that looks at sincere cinema as primarily philosophical in nature. As such, we have attempted to valorise the powers of cinema as related to the representation of human experience. The medium of film itself resorts to ways of dealing with reality, the self, and the world, not less in magnitude than the philosophy of Transcendentalism that keeps traces in the back of our mind, not minds; as we believe that even the reading of the current text follows the tradition of the cinema in question in terms of building a unified reality. Nevertheless,



scientific orientation is not put aside and, for this, we purposefully and exclusively selected the authorities in the cinematic field in the image of Deleuze and Bordwell, beside pillars of Semiotics like Peirce and contemporary grand filmmakers like Schrader, who actually devised a distinct cinematic style devoted to Transcendentalism. The melting of such great perspectives, we think, reinforces our view on the potentialities of cinema, through its techniques and ever modernised styles and worlds, to contribute in the making of greater manifestations of human experience. In a different instance, we showed how cinema, the serious one, has knowingly or unknowingly embraced the tenets of Transcendentalism as proposed by Emerson and Thoreau. In the same time, we have attempted to demonstrate the openness of the latter to the world, especially Europe and Asia. This was not something emanating out of vacuum, but based on factual evidences that link their way of thinking with that of European milestones of philosophical thought in the image Kant and Husserl, among others. When it comes to Eastern thought, we called upon authors who showed their interest and admiration for the geographically remote but intellectually close philosophies, which historical evidences and factual instances prove their encounter with both continental and American philosophy.



**CHAPTER III:**

***Her: The Emersonian Metamorphic Individuality***

there is victory yet for all justice; and the true romance which the world exists to realize will be the transformation of genius into practical power.

—Emerson, Complete Essays - Experience (364)

## Introduction

*Her* (2013), in our view, goes beyond its ascriptions to the sci-fi drama and comedy that have spread over the mainstream and amateur critique circles. In this chapter, we hold true and endeavour to empirically justify that the film is a deep investigation into humans and their nature as seen through the inner intuitive lens. It is therefore a beautiful portrayal of Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix), a character in the film that stands for the traumatised human being of turn of the twenty-first century America. Yet, in a similarly exquisite way, other characters function not only as mere supporting or contrasting entities, but as other facets of the same character. Their interactions and relationships form a whole that transcends the traditional limitations of character building in ordinary films. This dense style of filmmaking provides us with the opportunity to decipher many of the elements that weave the philosophy of the film. By no coincidence, the film earns the Oscar for writing and originality as art and philosophy merge beautifully in the formation of a plot that finds unity in a myriad of scenes, as opposed to commercial films that rarely reach success in this sense. Without much investment in action and directed emotion, the film captures our interest and more. By that we mean, it is widely acknowledged by acclaimed critics as one of the deepest inquiries into human inner worlds. Thanks to the technological advances that contemporary cinema boasts of, *Her* transports us to worlds of its own that paradoxically make us feel acquainted with, as very representative of our imagination and aspiration for peace and unity. The struggles that one faces in everyday conversation with the world, that is society, are delicately represented not as mere violent clashes with the other, but as a process of identification and

pursuit of the truth. This richness of content will help us to search and identify the ideas that go beyond the ordinary interpretation of the film as a mere love story. Based on some preliminary readings of the film, some essential transcendental features find grounds and, more importantly, their impact as working signs reveal much about the orientation of Jonze as one of the contemporary sincere filmmakers. In the following passages, we are to extrapolate such leanings through our philosophically-elaborated study of virtuality, connectedness, beauty, silence, vocation, omnipotence, communitarian impulses, and intuition.

### **3.3. Samantha as a virtual self: Connecting with the universe**

In an exquisite manner, Jonze conceptualises Samantha (Scarlett Johansson) not as a mere emulation of a character in the *Her*. While the third person alludes to an absent character, Samantha overwhelms as viewers and capture our interest as active participants in the film's experience. *Her* lack of a physical body is without a doubt a call for a transcendent vision and inclination toward our experience of life. To us, this very overlook of the bodily definition of the self that the current society not only in America but in the whole world provides strong bonds with the transcendentalists' project that unifies the world as one universe. Paradoxically and in a complete appliance of Emerson's reversal of oppositions into homogenous realities, the objectives links that require physical matter to connect entities disappear in favour of non-material aspects of the bonds that connect the world. In line with this idea, Samantha, referred to by another game alien character (Spike Jonze) as 'that which' takes the role and portrayal of a universal consciousness in which humans interconnect and merge to form that unity Emerson called for.

To reach unity humans need to evolve perceptually and go beyond the limitation of the symbolic representation of the world, an idea that is central to this thesis as that struggle and endeavour to face reality through an intuitive manner that stresses individuality and progress, as opposed to full conformity and passivity. In this regard and with this umbrella of transcendent perspectives, Samantha shows her awareness of her direct understanding of the world with disregard to the symbolic representation that humans have come to embrace as the only perspective toward reality. No wonder then that in her first introductory meeting with Theodore she explicitly declares her independent definition of herself and identity that is initiated by giving a name to herself, as portrayed in the following passage:

00:12:50,011 --> 00:12:52,093  
It's really nice to meet you.  
00:12:52,251 --> 00:12:55,733  
Oh, it's nice to meet you too.  
00:12:55,931 --> 00:12:57,501  
(CHUCKLES)  
00:12:57,691 --> 00:13:00,456  
Oh. What do I call you?  
Do you have a name?  
00:13:00,611 --> 00:13:04,013  
Um, yes, Samantha.  
00:13:04,291 --> 00:13:05,781  
Where'd you get that name from?  
00:13:05,931 --> 00:13:08,411  
I gave it to myself, actually.  
00:13:09,131 --> 00:13:10,417  
How come?  
00:13:10,611 --> 00:13:12,659  
Because I like  
the sound of it. (Jonze, 2013)

Samantha's choice of her name as she asserts does not stem from the social taste, but rather from her genius and inner drives. If such artificial intelligence points out her genius, this is just another expression for the transcendent faculties she offers to the narrative of the film. We support our claim by Worley's association of the genius with the metaphysical, for as he puts it, "the source of genius was super natural" (Worley, 2001, p. 29). When it comes to her interior impulses, this is an artistic portrayal of her adoption of Husserlian phenomenology as a vantage position *vis-à-vis* the world. In the same manner the Asian cultures that influenced Emersonian perceptual look to what might otherwise be conceived as the external world, the sound constitutes her link to the true nature of the world that is defined by the transcendental as pure and beautiful. This is a reminder of the way meditations and their practices use the sound to dive into the deep impulses of life experience and its essential streams, namely though instances of yoga for instance. We remind ourselves in this moment of investigation into the way a transcendental seeks unity with the world that the sound intrinsically establishes a direct bridge into Nature that dispels any symbolic conceptualization that goes through the often-indoctrinated knowledge that does not necessarily represent reality, but rather creates a parallel reality or sometimes some sort of deviated meanings to the workings and nature of such world. It is for this very reason that Samantha tells us about the nature of her development in the following instance:

00:13:39,571 --> 00:13:41,335

So do you know what

I'm thinking now?

00:13:41,491 --> 00:13:44,381

Well, I take it from your tone

that you're challenging me.  
00:13:44,531 --> 00:13:46,818  
Maybe because you're  
curious how I work?  
00:13:46,971 --> 00:13:48,575  
Do you want to  
know how I work?  
00:13:48,771 --> 00:13:51,251  
Yeah, actually. How do you work?  
00:13:51,411 --> 00:13:53,698  
Well, basically, I  
have intuition.  
00:13:53,851 --> 00:13:55,216  
I mean, the DNA of who I am...  
00:13:55,371 --> 00:13:59,137  
is based on the millions of personalities  
of all the programmers who wrote me.  
00:13:59,291 --> 00:14:04,741  
But what makes me "me" is my ability  
to grow through my experiences.  
00:14:04,891 --> 00:14:07,497  
So basically, in every  
moment, I'm evolving. (Jonze, 2013)

We find this scene so defining not only to the nature of Samantha, but to the project of the film itself. Jonze's grasp of the transcendental project, therefore, clearly comes to the surface and appears through this dialogue that eloquently summarises the humans' inquiry about themselves and their nature. Moreover, the filmmaker shows distinction in his endeavour to revisit that central idea of the clash between a rational vision to the world and one that is intuitive. In another scene, Samantha incarnates the role of a mother and chooses a dress for Paul's child. The latter provides us with the innocent pristine perspective that Jonze points out but not necessarily imposes. In a surprising manner that deviates expectancy, the girl shows no resistance to the notion that Samantha has no concrete body. The film here answers faithfully Schrader's framework of the

transcendental style. We are to smoothly rollback into our child-like nature that leads us to rediscover and accept the viewpoint that the Self is not the body, a reflection of the dualism that the Transcendentals embrace as an explanation of human nature. This mesmerising idea unfolds in the following scene:

00:58:06,131 --> 00:58:07,576  
Where are you?  
00:58:07,731 --> 00:58:09,699  
SAMANTHA : I am... Heh.  
00:58:09,891 --> 00:58:13,020  
I don't have a body.  
I live in a computer.  
00:58:13,891 --> 00:58:15,302  
(CHUCKLES)  
00:58:15,451 --> 00:58:17,772  
Why are you living  
inside a computer?  
00:58:17,931 --> 00:58:20,901  
SAMANTHA I have no  
choice, that's my home.  
00:58:22,211 --> 00:58:24,737  
- Why? Where do you live?  
- JOCELYN : Um, in a house. (Jonze, 2013)

Many thinkers and philosophers have been immersed in this controversial area of philosophical interpretation of the world and we take Bergson who influenced much the transcendental cinematic representation of life experience that we highlighted in the second chapter. To Bergson, the mechanical understanding of the world is not enough. By extension, the bodily definition humans often take could, by no means, provide a full understanding of the Self. Samantha, then, through her deprivation of a physical body reflects much this very idea and calls for our attention to think thoroughly about what the Self is. One might wonder whether Samantha has any allusion to such core defining notion of a human, but she is there to tell us that she goes beyond the ordinary



person through her evolutive nature. In continuation to the scene in which Samantha introduces herself, she goes further to challenge Theodore and show him his limitations as compared to her horizons of expectancy:

00:14:04,891 --> 00:14:07,497  
So basically, in every  
moment, I'm evolving.  
00:14:07,651 --> 00:14:10,018  
- Just like you.  
- Wow.  
00:14:10,731 --> 00:14:12,972  
That's really weird.  
00:14:13,171 --> 00:14:15,492  
- Is that weird? Do you think I'm weird?  
- Heh.  
00:14:16,051 --> 00:14:17,177  
Kind of.  
00:14:17,331 --> 00:14:18,776  
Why?  
00:14:19,171 --> 00:14:22,539  
Well, you seem like a person, but  
you're just a voice in the computer.  
00:14:22,691 --> 00:14:27,219  
I can understand how the limited perspective of  
an un-artificial mind would perceive it that way.  
00:14:27,371 --> 00:14:29,772  
- You'll get used to it.  
- Ha, ha. (Jonze, 2013)

What we understand further from this challenge is that one who embraces intuition and experience as concrete paths to growth is, to a great deal, entitled to enable his mind to break free from the often-limitative social conceptions of the world. Yet, this is by no means a complete overlook of the role society plays in the very process of growth. Samantha as an operating system did not have initially any personal view and individualised understanding of the universe that she is part of as one node in a much bigger network of OSs that we come to know she is a

participant within. Fostering the idea of the need for joint-forces and union, Samantha introduces Theodore to a society of OSs who conceived a virtual version of twentieth-century American Philosopher Alan Watts (Brian Cox),<sup>1</sup> who interestingly endeavoured in real-life to bring Americans to their senses, as to approach the World intuitively. Known to be one of the philosophers who revived the Westerners' interest in Asian culture, Watts brings about a heavy intertextual reference to the eastern influential philosophies over American thinking. The following scene resorts to a holographic representation that embodies the man and his philosophy, as a potential way out of the intriguing spiritual questions, which Samantha's transcendent growth has evoked:

01:38:33,131 --> 01:38:35,418  
Actually, I was talking  
to someone I just met.  
01:38:35,571 --> 01:38:38,051  
We've been working on  
some ideas together.  
01:38:39,491 --> 01:38:40,652  
Yeah? Who's that?  
01:38:40,811 --> 01:38:43,018  
His name is Alan Watts.  
Do you know him?  
01:38:43,171 --> 01:38:45,651  
- Why is that name familiar?  
- He was a philosopher.  
01:38:45,811 --> 01:38:48,894  
He died in the 1970s, and a group  
of OSes in Northern California...  
01:38:49,051 --> 01:38:51,213  
got together and wrote  
a new version of him.  
01:38:51,411 --> 01:38:54,858  
They input all his writing and everything  
they knew about him into an OS...

---

<sup>1</sup> See the first chapter on Watts's Asian-rooted notion on Self-awakening.

01:38:55,011 --> 01:38:58,458  
and created an artificially  
hyper-intelligent version of him.  
01:38:58,611 --> 01:39:00,613  
Hyper-intelligent?  
01:39:00,771 --> 01:39:02,216  
So he's almost as smart as me?  
01:39:02,371 --> 01:39:03,497  
(SAMANTHA CHUCKLES)  
01:39:03,651 --> 01:39:05,016  
He's getting there.  
01:39:05,171 --> 01:39:08,141  
He's really great to talk to.  
You want to meet him? (Jonze, 2013)

If Watts represents a genuine call for the return to originality in thinking, in this particular instance, Theodore represents the influence of society over man. Whether such relationship would be constructive or the opposite that is to be decided by Samantha's own behaviour and choice, withing the development of her relationships. Also, in this very instance, Theodore makes her begin to feel her development and awareness of the workings of the network she belongs to. He is not only a potential match as we might initially infer, but he is a representative of society as a whole. Jonze seems to implement a certain type of analogies and comparisons of different types of connection that in many ways stress the need for relationships whether real or virtual to reach a deep understanding of the Self and its growing nature than no one can deny. In a beautiful way, the portrayal of characters other than Samantha also heavily relies on their relationships that stretch over intimacy, friendship, and work. Catherine (Rooney Mara), Amy (Amy Adams), and Paul (Chris Pratt) respectively provide a good example of this tendency.

### **3.4. Samantha as an artistic beauty: Kant's theory of transcendental aesthetics**

Kant's shades on Emerson and Transcendentalism in general are apparent through his ideas on Aesthetics and the problem of representation. He had actually developed his theory of transcendental aesthetics with a heavy influence of mathematics involving abstract representations and a focus on how we know objects rather than the object itself (Smyth, 1978, p. 2). We find this focus on the epistemological aspect of the experience so intriguing through the well-constructed representation of Samantha not as a concrete character, but as an abstraction. Emersonian genius and call for its cultivation is to us justified when we link it with Jonze. Not just this, but the capacity to find unity in difference seems eminent in the very portrayal of a virtual character through a voiceover. Furthermore, beauty and its perception are revealed and brought to the forth not through physicality but through voice. The sound as we mentioned before embraces the faculty of linking the subject with the unseen reality, Samantha is no exception to this transcendent tenet.

One could argue that Jonze has benefited from his choice of the voice of Scarlett Johansson to incarnate beauty. To a large extent this is true as the voice tone of such artist is self-assertive and intrinsically beautiful, but this can by no means eclipse the real exquisite performance that, in a Romanticist style, takes the audience into other spatial arena than the lived reality. Through a plethora of dialogues and conversations, Samantha takes us as spectators to worlds of experiences that generate within us an admiration of the beauty of the world. Obviously, this is a complete confirmation of the transcendentals' belief in the

beauty of human nature and the world it is part of, as we referred to in the first chapter.

Beauty, therefore, goes beyond the materialist understanding of the world and the human experience that inevitably involves the encounter of the individual with his peers and the objects of art. Samantha as a virtual entity has enriched the narrative of the film with an unusual capacity to represent both Theodore's peers and the potential object of art that he is to encounter in his daily life experiences. Despite the fact that she is superficially an object which was created by some computer engineers, she jumps off such limited view that an ordinary spectator would ascribe her to. Her beauty appears through its effect on Theodore. If the latter initially appears as a sad lonely person who represents modern day anxieties and lack of creative impulses, he comes to revive his interest in life and its joys. Interestingly a number of these joys are not hedonistic in nature as these would nullify the aesthetic judgement faculty.

In Emersonian manner, things are known through their study in the polar nature of concepts. That is to say, one end would explain this other, despite their absolute opposition. Jonze seems to make a huge effort and economises no narrative time to show the failure of the materialist inclination to art and beauty. In a multitude of instances, Samantha surprisingly and unexpectedly disentangles herself from the concepts we as spectators build on her after we ordinarily reach a point of no return in terms of our accumulated perception. A generic viewer would really get driven by Samantha's inquiry and desire to get a bodily experience that Theodore is to fulfil. Again, Schrader's notions on the unexpectedness of the transcendental style are implicitly implemented. These are calls for the refined

spectator which shows readiness to the transcendental experience to lean back to the film. Jonze seems to do just that when he challenges the viewer's expectations. While in one scene Samantha introduces Theodore to Isabella (Portia Doubleday), a woman she gets acquainted with on the net, as her potential bodily incarnation, in another, she muses how she fantasised having a body:

00:31:39,971 --> 00:31:41,781  
 When we were looking  
 at those people, I  
 00:31:41,807 --> 00:31:43,842  
 fantasized that I was  
 walking next to you...  
 00:31:44,011 --> 00:31:46,981  
 and that I had a body.  
 00:31:47,131 --> 00:31:49,099  
 I was listening to what  
 you were saying...  
 00:31:49,251 --> 00:31:52,175  
 but simultaneously I could  
 feel the weight of my body...  
 00:31:52,331 --> 00:31:55,175  
 and I was even fantasizing that  
 I had an itch on my back...  
 00:31:55,331 --> 00:31:58,096  
 and I imagined that you  
 scratched it for me. (Jonze, 2013)

Jonze's method to point out the failure of the materialist understanding of the world relies heavily on his portrayal of man's perception of art. In line with this, Theodore is often implemented in situations in which he is to encounter beauty in what might be described as contemporary crowd-minded inclination to art. In many ways this is an Emersonian method of investigation into the core meanings of reality. Art in this framework is the ultimate and shortest path to the truth of the world. As such, substantially, Theodore listens to melancholic music

not by accident, but to express his awareness of the nature of contemporary human condition that indeed goes in harmony with the type of the music he prefers. This pattern of encounters with art goes on and on through different scenes to merge human perception and sensory experiences. The core of Theodore's experience of the world goes inevitably with his relationships that define his social life. For this reason, once he acquires his operating system that ironically swaps his individual impulse and seclusion into a meeting with a virtual self that asserts her own individuality as we mentioned in the previous point. The purpose of Jonze's project as one of investigative projections into the workings of individual-society negotiations is revealed when Theodore is asked about his familial relationships and stand *vis-à-vis* society, as marked in the following instance:

00:11:24,731 --> 00:11:28,816  
We'd like to ask you a few basic questions  
before the operating system is initiated.  
00:11:29,011 --> 00:11:31,981  
This will help create an  
OS to best fit your needs.  
00:11:32,131 --> 00:11:33,371  
Okay.  
00:11:33,531 --> 00:11:36,011  
Are you social or antisocial?  
00:11:36,171 --> 00:11:39,414  
I guess I haven't really been social  
in a while. Mostly because...  
00:11:39,571 --> 00:11:43,337  
In your voice, I sense hesitance.  
Would you agree with that?  
00:11:43,491 --> 00:11:45,778  
- Was I sounding hesitant?  
- Yes. (Jonze, 2013)

Samantha, therefore, as an object of art provides the narrative with a tremendous capacity to tell us about Theodore's relationships with his own society. In this very first encounter of Theodore with Samantha, we can see how such processing of the art object is promising a deep investigation into the epistemological endeavours of contemporary subjects in America. We deem the project as deep and precisely subtle through Theodore's approach to Samantha even before she is initiated to the world. More importantly, Jonze seems to purposefully present her through a third person virtual entity to give her voice and call upon her pristine visions of the world. Not less in importance, as a supporting character, the computer programme describes Theodore's stand as hesitant to usher in journey of investigation into the very nature of man's relationships with his society.

What matters most in Jonze's study of Theodore's relationships with his society through the means of art is basically a Kantian inquiry into the nature of subjectivity. In this context, Theodore as a refined character exhibits a universal subjectivity that points the humans' admiration of the beautiful. Samantha exudes with love and ironically pure human sensibilities. At the moment when Theodore falls into seclusion and loneliness, she appears only to bring him back to life, swerving from any purpose other than the admiration of the beauty of the world. In a faithful reflection of Kantian view to art, Theodore's journey shows no interest in lucrative side of his different experiences in life. There is absolutely no reference to money or other materialist interest in his activities. In a clear manner, he shows pure interest in art with disregard to society's dictations. For this reason, at a stylistic level, the scenery often displays him in hot colours as



compared to the backdrop that define the frames. Symbolically speaking, society is represented through wandering crowds in the streets or huge buildings and dwellings which are blurred through camerawork. The peculiarity of the relationship and closeness of views that join Samantha and Theodore is explicitly represented by the matchiness of the oranges that mark the initiation of the operation system with Theodore's shirt.

### **3.5. Catherine: The incarnation of transcendental beauty**

Beauty functions further in *Her* not as a mere object of observation in the traditional manner, but as a rationale for meditation that involves a mimetic tendency and a will to discover the self. Furthermore, the film boasts of a myriad of beauties that go beyond the ordinary definition of the word. We primarily encounter Theodore, whose intellectual refinement and funny mood overshadow his initially portrayed seclusion and detachment, Samantha, and other characters that the remainder of this chapter will highlight, all of which exude with a certain energy, that Emerson associates with love. In this sense, beauty finds space and lodging not only at the physical level, but it spreads into non-bodily definitions, as he puts it in his essay "The Conduct of Life:"

Beauty is the form under which the intellect prefers to study the world. All privilege is that of beauty; for there are many beauties; as, of general nature, of the human face and form, of manners, of brain, or method, moral beauty, or beauty of the soul. (Emerson, 2015, para. 886.34)

In a Kantian manner, Beauty is to be found in the minds of the truth seekers rather than in to target of observation. The workings of relationships in the narrative epitomise Jonze's intentions to reveal how the self can be discovered

or rather rediscovered as one meditates on and gets fascinated with beauty. For this reason, the cast boasts a subtle beauty that is remarkably chosen, transcending the bodily representation and landing at the voiceovers, simply because, as Bresson puts it, one “is pledged to ward off the easy pleasures of physical beauty and artifice for a pleasure which is more permanent, more edifying, more sincere” (as cited in Schrader, 2018).

Compliance with the social norms or taking a stance that stems from one’s inner sensual experiences are the core endeavours that Theodore’s leanings toward Catherine would reveal. With respect of this orientation, we may find it so unusual that the bonds that joins the two former married couple continue throughout *Her*, despite the conventionally official end of their relationship. Jonze’s project, therefore, reveals itself as a transcendental one for there is a clear distinction between the formal and the real, the individual and the social, the lived and the supposed to be lived. We may advocate so as marriage is referred to as a social institution that is marked and emphasised through recorded conventional symbols in the likes of the documents that should be signed. In a very long scene that joins the couple, they are heavily and emphatically presented as lovers who care for each other and inquire about the happiness that they are substantially able to live, but, also, they are at the verge of signing a paper that shows how society has to define and present them. Catherine, who reveals an unprecedented beauty in such a scene makes it very clear that Theodore sees through her what his society, symbolised by the document of divorce, intends to impose and define. Not only his relationship, but all his life and its defining moments are being shaped by certain unreal facts that found no way to exist but to be represented through

words on paper. In the following scene that stretches over time only to stress the dilemma of the inner versus the social and the real versus the unreal, Theodore keeps his eyes on Catherine, focused and meditating, while his hands hold the pen to reluctantly sign the divorce papers:

01:04:59,171 --> 01:05:01,458  
 Wow, here we are.  
 01:05:03,531 --> 01:05:05,499  
 I'm glad we could  
 do this in person.  
 01:05:05,651 --> 01:05:07,699  
 I know you've been  
 traveling a lot.  
 01:05:07,891 --> 01:05:11,134  
 No, I'm really glad  
 you suggested it.  
 01:05:12,931 --> 01:05:15,013  
 I signed all the papers.  
 01:05:15,451 --> 01:05:17,453  
 I put them for you to sign.  
 01:05:20,451 --> 01:05:22,340  
 What's the rush?  
 01:05:25,291 --> 01:05:26,895  
 Yeah, I know.  
 01:05:27,051 --> 01:05:29,213  
 I'm a really slow  
 signer, I realized.  
 01:05:29,411 --> 01:05:31,459  
 It took me three months  
 just to write the letter. (Jonze, 2013)

Theodore's reference to reluctance in this utterance brings to the surface the transcendentalists' call for the dismissal of the socially imposed choices as the greatest danger against one's free will. In this regard, choice is not seen in the ordinary sense, but it goes in a completely different direction embracing the opposing side to its conventional meaning. The presence of such kind of choices in the life path of individuals paradoxically constitutes a reason for hesitation, a

concept that is definitely the greatest foe of the transcendental project. Choice in this sense is, as Alan Watts, the modern philosopher and spiritual entertainer, calls, “the act of hesitation that we make before taking a decision” (Watts, 2004). This goes in concordance with Emerson’s belief in the good nature of mankind and the universe, a notion that explains why no hesitation needs to find place in one’s stand *vis-à-vis* the matters of life. One would wonder then how this can go true while people are different in their appearance and look. Through transcendental lens, the answer would be epistemological and simply beyond the manly judgement of beauty, especially in its materialist orientation. No wonder then, that throughout the narrative of *Her*, Jonze endeavours to make a convincing contrast between the materialist love and the spiritual one. In many attempts, Theodore’s vantage on love is put into the test bringing the viewer to the verge of believing that such character is just another materialist individual living in a materialist world. In many ways, this is exactly what Schrader defines as the transcendental style in cinema; that is, positioning the spectator in areas in which his expectations are scattered away, leaving space for meditation. In such contemplative spaces, the viewer can come to touch with Reality.

Our inclination on Catherine as a transcendental beauty is further justified by the many references to her while she is absent. Actually, in a transcendental manner her absence reveals itself substituting her physical non representation on the major bulk of the film. Her existence keeps going on throughout the stream of ideas in an exquisite manner. Her beauty intertwines with Samantha’s voice to form a unity that often transcendentalists call for. In such a view, humans are united in one consciousness that constitutes the universe, an idea that was essentially

revealed through the representation of Samantha as one part of a universal consciousness, aesthetically represented in a scene that called for a photographic capture in this sense. Samantha, for us, is just a continuation and a technical device that incarnates beauty and a deep investigation into the human side that Catherine cannot bring to the forth because of the limitations that an ordinary human character can manifest. Our claim is reinforced in the scene in which Samantha reveals her aesthetic and feeling potentiality:

01:39:40,651 --> 01:39:46,135  
Yeah, because it seems like  
I'm having so many new feelings...  
01:39:46,291 --> 01:39:49,056  
that I don't think have  
ever been felt before.  
01:39:49,211 --> 01:39:54,138  
So there are no words that can describe  
them and that ends up being frustrating.  
01:39:54,291 --> 01:39:57,579  
Exactly. Samantha and I have  
been trying to help each other...  
01:39:57,771 --> 01:40:02,299  
with these feelings we're  
struggling to understand. (Jonze, 2013)

This scene actually breaks the expectations of an ordinary viewer, who would potentially think of it as an allusion to their return to their former marital life. At any moment the couple show any rational to the possibility of divorce, but the utterance brings to the forth an appeal to meditation over Theodore view not only on his love relationships but on his view on the world. The scene takes the form of an extended dialogue in which Catherine takes the role of the beauty that calls for a deep process of evaluation. Her presence, this time physical, extensively evokes a certain contrast with Samantha, who, despite Theodore's reference to

her, withers in the shades of Catherine artistic beauty. The refined viewer is ultimately carried away to the realms of human beauty and potentially elevated into a spiritual investigation of what the presence of a real lover in her or his life can bring about. Evidently, this moment in the narrative constitutes a turning point in Theodore's journey and a change in his mood would highlight much of the remaining of *Her*.

### **3.6. Theodore as a sphinx: The economy of words**

*Her* opens with a scene that introduces the viewer into Theodore, through a close up that takes some noticeable time in a perceivable silence. Right away, the protagonist of the film establishes himself as a character calling for meditation. Just in Emerson's style and tradition that led him to devote a whole poem to the sphinx, with whom a curious poet makes a dialogue as to attempt to solve the riddle. In many ways, Jonze's declaration of his film as one of mystery and quest, both reminders of the antiquity and its richness in meanings and secrets about man and his worlds. Many readings of Emerson's poem refer to it as his search for the meanings of existence that necessary get a certain interplay with one's search for his own identity and its possibilities of placement and interactions within the universe. Around a certain after its publication, Rose (1963) reminded the readers of the poem of an interesting idea about Emerson's view on identity, as "all-in-each" perspective (Rose, 1963). In such way, Theodore would serve as an epitome of man's status within the universe, just as we endeavoured to explain such view, regarding Samantha, as one entity part of many OS instances.

The minimalistic style of Jonze in using music and sound in the mentioned scene definitely falls with Shrader's framework of transcendental style in cinema. The subsequent scenes also abide by such style's guidance. The economy of talk and action is revealed much through Theodore's silence and precision of words. Moreover, concealing oneself from noise is just another way of alluding to Emerson's call for retreat from society, as perceived in ordinary ways. When compared to the noise that society inflicts in one's mind and thinking, silence provides instead a real opportunity to find company not with noisy words, but with the refined content books and one-to-one conversations that evoke real meanings and closeness to nature and truth. In *Nature*, Emerson sets this idea forward:

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. (Emerson, 2015, para. 783.1)

Placing Theodore into seclusion in a good deal of *Her*'s scenery is but a way from Jonze to appeal for the refined viewer to immerse himself in a contemplative experience that is centred on Theodore's remarkably developing character. Ranging between silence and limited-in-quantity talk, such character provides little about himself, challenging and leaving space for the audience to lean back to the film and search for the meanings in an individualised manner. In the likes of the visitors of ancient civilisations settings and relics, the viewers are taken to different times than his, going beyond the seen. Like poetry captures the

imagination of the reader, the narrative of *Her* transports its viewer to a visit within the corners of Theodore's imagination. For this reason, Theodore appears like a sphinx who shows distinction from the current and the usual. His wear style is deliberately presented as different from the rest of the people around him. In a surprising manner, his outfit reminds us of the 1960s or even the era before that. In the presence of other people, the colours he chooses are either hot or extremely subtle, revealing contrast and difference, while in their absence they are light and close to the earth and nature, showing a get-back to the pristine nature of humans.

Individuality is stressed not only through the return to nature as compared to culture, but through a remarkable way of resisting the impact of society. Stoicism which is fully embraced by Emerson, who while distancing it from rationality, purposefully associated it with refinement and transcendental beauty, as he puts it in his essay *The Sovereignty of Ethics*:

Why have not those who believe in it and love it left all for this, and dedicated themselves to write out its scientific scriptures to become its Vulgate for millions? I answer for one that the inspirations we catch of this law are not continuous and technical, but joyful sparkles, and are recorded for their beauty, for the delight they give, not for their obligation; and that is their priceless good to men, that they charm and uplift, not that they are imposed. (Emerson, 2015, para. 924.57)

Stoicism, which transcends the immediate and the seen, provides *Her* with an adequate defining umbrella that gives space to the feelings and emotions of Theodore to be at the centre of the cinematic experience rather than the readymade impression that ordinary cinema would deliver. Dissociating itself from the commercial cinema, *Her* compels the refined viewer to immerse himself



in the process of reading Theodore's thoughts in a perennial manner that stretches over the narrative. In such way, we could see Theodore walking in an unusual manner that would make us expect some reactions from the people around him, a thing that we do not retrieve and not face. All this leads to an appeal to thinking and contemplation and change of thought about human nature. Theodore shows us through his silence what words could not. It is rather an alarming appeal to us to see how society has indoctrinated the twenty first man, making him a victim of a way of thinking that is essentially commercial and oriented. In one scene that takes place in a mall, Samantha remotely guides Theodore in some kind of a tour; then, she, the supposedly virtual character, tells him: "Now walk forward. Everyone thinks you're really drunk right now." The economy of words finds expression in such single statement. On the one hand, social indoctrination is referred to through order being given to Theodore to walk in a certain defined path. On the other hand, the delimitation of the individual versus the social are stressed. Judgement surfaces as one defining element of the relationship between Theodore and his society. In an exquisite manner, such society is referred to only when it is about providing orders, an existence that withers away when Theodore emotionally suffers for the loss of his real love. Dreams and silence, therefore, substitute the role society has failed to provide him with.

Dreams are not used once or twice but they stretch out throughout the narrative to serve as a reminder to the Romantics' inclination to find refuge in the realms of imagination rather than the social reality. In many ways, the compatibility between the transcendentalists and the romanticist tradition

functions in *Her* as a critique of America's twenty-first social reality that is marked with commercialism and materialism. One of the main features of commercialism is its resort to use publicity. Thus, no wonder ads are heavily contrasted in many scenes in the film. They often appear in hot colours, hanging on the walls of huge buildings and skyscrapers. They refer both to difference with Theodore's way of thinking and style of life, as much as they allude to the great pressure they have on individuals. Their heightened physical position in the streets shows the supremacy of consumerism in the moment *Her* is attempting to capture and illustrate. Yet, while such power seems to be overwhelming and uncontested. Theodore rides such skyscrapers and in a couple of scenes takes the elevator to stress his will power to lead and rule. Other scenes show him getting up in the mornings, coming out of his experience of dreams, then, looking from his vantage position through the glass windows in slow long shots that show his contemplation over his status versus his society as one of real spiritual supremacy.

In addition to their associative effect with heightened spiritual status, dreams not only transport Theodore to vantage positions, but they establish a link with the past that is revered. In such dreams, he is transported to an era of happiness that was marked with his emotional link with Catherine. Such relationship represents to him a time in which his life had a meaning and purpose. If now he writes letters for other people, supposedly for a certain financial return, with her his reviews of her books were a testimony of the admiration of artwork not for any purpose, but for art itself. Evidently, this is a return to Kant's notions on the universal subjectivity and judgement of the beautiful. We infer, therefore, that the Kantian influence on the transcendental project provides a real support

for idealism to find space and justification in a world that has become obsessed with beauty in a derailed manner. Jonze's genius seems to be his eloquent expression of such influence through his resort to dreams in a subtle manner. While such dreams deny possibilities of talks with peers and take Theodore away from society in its materialist version, they show also that his escape and silence are signs of his imbedded rejection of the status quo.

In the Socratic tradition of keeping silence letting the audience to come to their own conclusions, Theodore, reminds us also of the Asian traditions of contemplation over reality that resort to some practices like Yoga. Actually, in a couple of scenes, this tendency was explicitly portrayed in the film. In a complementary fashion, they happen right after Theodore gets up of his dreams. To us, this is Jonze's way to show how modern-day individual still have the opportunity to bring some physicality to their nostalgic dreams of return to the past that is essentially non-materialist. Yoga, for instance, shows that there is a need for silence and moments of contemplation that would regenerate one's potential of return to a certain pristine status of spirit and mind, enabling him to break free from the chains of social convention which are not necessarily true in nature.

### **3.7. Theodore as a working self: Emerson's theory of vocation**

In the first chapter, we evoked the centrality of vocation as an asserting path to individuality for the transcendentals. The defining feature of such concept is talent. We find it interesting that Theodore's distinction is revealed much through his potential of writing for others. The choice of such vocation seems to

be thought over with meticulous attention. More importantly opposition between the evident and the special, as a recurrent feature in transcendental thinking, finds ground and manifestation; in that, this is one of the main skills any modern person should have as an asset, while the very capacity to write marks a huge range of graduation between the simple to the genius. Thus, Theodore functions as a sign that joins the ends of such continuum between the multitude of levels in terms of writing. Moreover, Theodore's vocation alludes to the need for creativity and imagination as central prerequisites to individuality and assertion. Theodore, therefore, exhibits interesting capacities to think for the others and even feel for them. His senses transcend his bodily definition as he immerses himself in the thoughts and lives of others. The importance of Theodore's vocation demarks itself as a moving theme for both *Her* and the philosophy behind it, as the film opens with the following scene:

00:00:50,851 --> 00:00:52,899

"To my Chris."

00:00:54,731 --> 00:00:58,895

I've been thinking how I could possibly  
tell you how much you mean to me.

00:01:01,851 --> 00:01:06,220

I remember when I first started to fall  
in love with you like it was last night. (Jonze, 2013)

Jonze's invocation of the name Chris is not haphazard, but is an alert for the need for belief in one's potential of creativity and distinction, that is central to Emerson's thought. The latter's reference to talent stresses individuality as in his view when man wants to do something, can do it in the best ways, as what he calls

the “general soul” inspires him.<sup>2</sup> Besides the invocation of the notion of unity through talent, the development of the self through action proves to be an essential transcendental tenet. Talent, or skill, other words for the genius are evidently expressed through the character of Theodore. His view to his activity is by no means materialist, but rather purposeful and excellence-oriented. Before working for Beautifulhandwrittenletters.com, he had previously worked for LA-WEEKLY. Had he wanted to gain money per se, he would have stayed there, but he preferred doing a work that he wanted and not what he had to do. Theodore’s intended balance between the two ends of conformity and self-expression is seen through his preservation of the hundreds of letters that he wrote at his former firm. This is a sign that he does not fully disregard the content he performed, but he acknowledges that there is always something good in what may appear as something repelling. Seeing the goodness in what he is doing is also another affirmation of his transcendent impulse.

Perfection is another aspect of Theodore’s inclination at work. Despite the success he boasts of, evidenced by his clients’ long-term faithfulness, he accepts Samantha’s intervention to better his performance in writing. In another viewer’s expectation break, he admires what his OS suggests as corrections and improvement to the letters he has been working for. In one scene, he is portrayed writing and rewriting a letter, an allusion to his pursuit of the ideal performance. No reference to his clients’ inquiries about improvement is Jonze’s way to tell us that Theodore is not pushed by what others request or think, but he is internally driven to provide the best of him. The human side, rather than the materialist

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 1, Emerson’s theory of the working self.

impulse, is brought to the surface as his interactions with his clients take the form of social relationships rather than commercial ones. In many scenes, he gets into dialogues or correspondences that involve certain care and interest, rather than negotiations of prices and offers of services.

Theodore's inclination to work is to some extent divine in that his actions through words has the power to influence peoples' minds and souls. Their faithfulness and trust have not been a haphazard happening, but rather the result of the emergence of faith in his spirited work and devotion that stem from his broad look at the world that he cultivated from an extended experience in the corners of his imagination, intertwined with real grounds. His numerous relationships with clients from probably different areas of the world, linked with internet, seem to provide him with a deep understanding and insight on the world. This could be seen in his stance as a person of influence over older clients who supposedly have outgrew him. Their experiences and those happenings in the larger-in-scale space of social interaction constitute the target of his pen and enrich the content of his writing, as sources of inspiration and knowledge to be reported, exactly in Emerson's view on the writer as a holder of one of the greatest vocations, humans have ever had:

Men are born to write. The gardener saves every slip, and seed, and peach-stone; his vocation is to be a planter of plants. Not less does the writer attend his affairs. Whatever he beholds or experiences, comes to him as a model, and sits for its picture. He counts it all nonsense that they say, that some things are indescribable. He believes that all that can be thought can be written, first or last; and he would report the Holy Ghost, or attempt it. Nothing so broad, so subtle, or so dear, but comes therefore commended to his pen, — and he will write. In his eyes, a man is the faculty of reporting, and the

universe is the possibility of being reported. (Emerson, 2015, para. 837.3)

Theodore's vocation goes beyond the establishment and assertion of his difference and individuality. It goes rather to demonstrate his practicality and utility. While his retreat to isolation permits him to contemplate his talent and genius, his vocation is the means by which he could sense the very reasons of his being. Many scenes exhibit his talent and meticulous interest in providing the best of him through his work and interactions with his clients. Actually, the relationships he has developed through the years represent more than a simple connection between a provider of services and a provided client. In a subtle manner, the portrayal of the durability of such type of relationships are Jonze's manner to evoke how vocation, when imbedded with talent, could invoke one's essential existence in the organic nature of the world. In many ways, Theodore plays an essential role in keeping the social connections of the community around him alive. He goes further to bring happiness to them as he eloquently expresses their feelings and thought for them. This goes by his involvement and observation that enable him to find goodness in the midst of turbulence. Thus, in a subtle manner, he converts what is decaying into vitality. In one scene he makes Rachel, one of his clients happy, when her spouse Roger refers to her tooth as crooked.

Vitality proves to be the drive behind one's resort to embracing his vocation as an essential participation in society. As opposed to the materialists' view on competition as a way of distinction, for the transcendentalists, competition cedes place for challenge. Thus, Theodore is actually surrounded by people who all exhibit a great deal of talent in areas of interest close to his. His

wife Catherine writes books and in contrast to the stereotypical cinematic portrayals, they seem to work in harmony rather competing each other. Theodore goes further to proofread her works only to foster such idea. His friend Amy works also as a creative content designer and often refers to him to assess her ideas, as we shall discuss further in the next point in this chapter. The point is that through their sincere approach to vocation, such characters extricate the good from the socially dictated short-sighted visions on their relationships, namely the professional ones. It is in this peculiar understanding of the necessity of challenge in vocation, one finds a justification for the need for vitality and action as ways for self-development and improvement.

Development and progress are natural phenomena that Nature boasts of. Just as all the members of the natural world contribute in its workings and expecting no reward or praise, Theodore fulfils his vocation in his office without any request for material rewards. No scene in *Her* evokes the notion of money or salary. The absence of the lucrative dimension of his daily activities at Beautifulhandwrittenletters.com is a reduction of the powers of vertical authority and Jonze's dispel of its ruling faculty. Theodore shows his spiritual triumph as he never enquires about a raise or the likes, as often we encounter in commercial cinema. He is innately endowed with a sense of fulfilment through his skills and talent. As Aristotle viewed it, the material dimension functions cannot go beyond the basics of comforts that would allow man to think of great matters in life. It is by embracing such transcendent vision over one's needs that would enable him to live the real comforts in paradoxically simplistic terms. For the transcendentalists, one has to get what is necessary from the nature he belongs to, rather than



aspiring for excess. Just as the observed members of Nature in the likes of trees, the symbolic participant, one is to “to live deep and *suck* out all *the marrow of life*” (Thoreau, 2013). In other words, the aim of any activity is not the superficial benefit that is often dictated by social convention, but is the core organic meanings that find place in the dynamics of nature.

### **3.8. Amy as a working girl: Emerson on female self-reliance**

In contrast to the many representations of women in the bulk of cinematic representation, namely commercial ones, Amy departs from the cliché portrayals of women as subordinated figures. Jonze’s way to call the spectator to dive into a viewing experience that evokes her genius is her association with a particularly creative vocation. As a video game developer, she is not only to produce something that calls for amusement and pleasure, but to provide a real experience to gamers. Being the developer, Amy ascribes herself the role of the master rather than the subject. In concordance with Emersonian conception of unity in opposition, she blends her experience as a working woman, who is yet deprived of children, with other women, who have them. The outcome is a raised sense at the part of the audience that cannot question her ability and awareness of the role of women not only in society but in life as a whole. In many ways, she embraces both nature and culture as she endeavours to develop her games and herself. What applies to Theodore applies to her in a good number of aspects. Just as he is interested in the computers’ world, she is equally inclined to. The virtual relationships and interactions that Theodore crossed are thoroughly discussed with Amy, who shows a distinct yet paralleled understanding of the phenomenon. Finding something dissimilar in ordinary difference is what makes Amy an

outstanding and influencing figure over Theodore. The complementarity and individualised vision of fusion with man that she seeks appears when she invites Theodore to provide her with his feedback and suggestions *vis-à-vis* her art creation. While intended essentially to women audiences, her interest in his ideas and opinions show her awareness of the need for harmony in perspectives in art form and life by extension. In one of the scenes that she convincingly and masterfully leads, her negotiation of significance intending synthesis is revealed a great deal:

00:59:00,840 --> 00:59:02,079  
Wait, what happened?  
00:59:02,719 --> 00:59:04,563  
You gave them too much processed sugar.  
00:59:04,719 --> 00:59:06,563  
- I did?  
- They're freaking out.  
00:59:06,719 --> 00:59:10,121  
Here, look, you gotta get the kids  
to the school first.  
00:59:10,280 --> 00:59:14,079  
So you want to, um, rack up  
Perfect Mom points. Okay, well... (Jonze, 2013)

Amy's fascination with perfection is explicitly expressed in the game she has developed. Such inclination ascribes her to a philosophy that is purely idealist and, in our view, it is basically transcendental. In the same scene mentioned above the density of meanings is remarkable. Amy marks herself as a woman who is aware of ecological and health issues. While, the way she deals with details concerning the effects of civilisation on nature shows her intellectual capacities, her care about children and tight feelings for them demonstrate her emotional sensibilities. The acquisition and mastery of one of the two sides of mental

abilities is something of low order, but the perspective from which Amy comes to find a reconciliation between the two sides elevates her to the realm of persons with readiness to revelation to use Emerson words. Jonze seems to have chosen Amy as the character who intersects philosophy and art. Work constitutes for her a way to convert her philosophy into concrete art representations. Besides her activity in the design of video games, she finds no idle time as she immerses herself into extra activities that involve imagination and aesthetic sensibilities. The following scene joins Amy with Theodore as to discuss the possibilities of imbedding subtle meanings into a footage artwork that she is working on:

00:23:13,331 --> 00:23:15,413

Is that your mom?

00:23:15,571 --> 00:23:17,061

Yeah.

00:23:27,411 --> 00:23:30,415

Is she gonna wake up  
and do something?

00:23:31,491 --> 00:23:33,334

- No.

- No.

00:23:33,491 --> 00:23:35,414

No, no, never mind.

That's not the point.

00:23:35,611 --> 00:23:38,774

- No, don't stop.

- No, never mind, okay? It's just it's like...

00:23:40,171 --> 00:23:43,414

It's about how we spend, like,  
a third of our lives asleep...

00:23:43,571 --> 00:23:46,495

and maybe that's the time  
when we feel the most free.

00:23:46,651 --> 00:23:49,780

And, you know, like...

00:23:50,491 --> 00:23:53,574

- Oh. That doesn't come across...

- That sounds good.

00:23:53,731 --> 00:23:57,861  
Well, what if you interviewed your mom  
about what her dreams were about...  
00:23:58,051 --> 00:24:01,373  
and then you hired  
actors to act them out?  
00:24:01,531 --> 00:24:04,614  
That might show your  
thesis more clearly.  
00:24:07,291 --> 00:24:08,622  
- Yeah?  
- I mean, it might.  
00:24:10,011 --> 00:24:12,173  
But then it wouldn't  
be a documentary. (Jonze, 2013)

The scene's delimiters are set by dream and imagination and ended with documentary and rationality, two opposite ends which are united as one sign of Amy's capacity of transcendence. In the twentieth century's terms that would fall into T.S Eliot's dissociation of sensibilities that he referred to in his "The Metaphysical Poets". Thus, Amy ascribes herself to the realm of poetry and her work is the means by which she could externalise the results of her contemplation over phenomena that call for her subjective interpretation in Kantian terms. This is more evidenced by her interest in looking at her mom in the picture rather than recording the scene in historical manner as Charles (Matt Letscher) suggests. Moreover, Charles suggestion of turning the pictorial footage into play has been rejected, simply because in Emerson's footsteps, Amy dispels drama. Within Schrader's framework of transcendental style, the scene takes a relatively long time to show the mother lying asleep immersed in her dreams. Charles functions as the audience mouthpiece to inquire about the potential action that would take place, only to get rebuffed by Amy who reveals her artistic dimensions of her

work. She is simply a woman who makes of work a platonic relation with the universe and its phenomena, just as her relationship with Theodore is marked as such.

In platonic manner, Amy demonstrates growth or a perennial quest for perfection in all aspects of personality. Actually, her vocation is a succinct way to reveal her potential for change. Ironically, this seems to be one of the transcendentalists' inner faculties for acceptance of growth and change as natural phenomena. Emerson, himself, has begun his journey of intellect with a certain doubt over women's inner capacities for self-assertion and one would say he was initially reluctant to subscribe them to his project of self-reliance. Yet, as he manifested some personal and intellectual growth through experience, he turned to assert his full embracement of all humans' capacity for self-based enterprise in life. He seems to have noticed the potential of women in not only accepting but spreading the word of his philosophy in the image of his disciple Margaret Fuller, a professional journalist and critic. Thus, dashing all the earlier derogative social dictations over the status of women and their intellectual capabilities. Instead of old doctrines of separation, he rather embraced a full unifying vision that dispels gender as a prerequisite for taking stance and substituted it with readiness for revelation, as essential prerequisite for development and self-discovery.

Maibor (2004) actually makes it explicit that vocation transcends the ordinary sense associating it with work or that activity that produced an item and financial outcome in return. For her, vocation is an elaborate means to convert one's asset of knowledge into a strong medium that reflects one's inner way of approaching the world and reality. In psychological terms, that is a manifestation

of the way one understands, feels, and thinks about both the otherwise referred to as the external world and its opposite the Self (Maibor, 2004). Yet, in Emersonian vision, the two blend together and one's self-discovery is a mere embracement of the natural flow of nature through him. For this reason, Amy, who functions as an inspirator who calls for Theodore to make clear distinction between what he ought to do and what he loves to do, fused in the scenery of *Her* through her close to earth colouring and outfits. At no instance, she shows resistance to the happenings around her. In a subtle manner, we infer that her earlier sentimental relationship with Theodore fades away with no resistance or forced reminiscence. She carries on providing the world with her visions of art in the image of her video games and filmography, with intent but to diffuse her knowledge and intuitive understanding of motherhood and children related desires and aspirations. Yet, she is fully self-denying as she accepts the dynamics of her relationship with Charles, despite his dislocated place for her close entourage.

### **3.9. Charles, the fatherly: Emerson on the Divinity within**

By convention authority is expressed in society through higher institutions in the image of the father. Theologically speaking, such institution represents the way humanity perceives the structure of the World's conception. The equilibrium of control and love proves to be one of the greatest issues one is usually pondering over, Theodore and Amy are no exception. Shattering the expectation of the viewer of a futuristic filmic artwork, *Her* boasts of the character of Charles who offers his insights as flashes that provide light to the workings of a number of scenes. He mainly serves as the fatherly figure who shows authority while combining it with transcendent love, rather than control. He seems to have

established a certain type of influence that is by no means physical or interest-based. He detached himself from the earthly activities as his job is never explicitly revealed.

Charles seems to be the only authority figure that is close to the ordinary definition of a superior entity or institution that we could possibly think of, yet he is actually an imaginative attempt to redefine the notion of conformity. While there is a scene in which he is ascribed to the clichéd authoritative father, he is fast to withdraw himself in what old Asian philosophies call the game of hide and seek in terms of divinity. That is to say, his intersections with the ordinary figures in the film that we identify with gives the floor to a new understanding of the way the organising force of society should be seen, respected, and interacted with. There is actually an allusion to the ways freedom is to be defined as to position one in his social atmosphere. Amy's apparent struggle with Charles that led to her process of divorce shows how freedom is a central notion that should be dealt with a certain delicacy. At no moment Amy criticises Charles or takes things for personal, but her talk on the event that ultimately called for their divorce is deliberately based on trivial reasons as to make the viewer contemplate over the relationship between Amy, the assertive free woman, and Charles, the incarnation of supreme power.

Charles association with the divine is finally and explicitly revealed when he is displayed next to Tibetan master figures on a big LCD screen that functions as backdrop, symbolising the unbounded matter, or the divine. A change of vision marks the scene as a sign of acceptance and belief in the disparity that define Charles as opposed to ordinary individuals. The choice of Tibetan masters reveals

much about the influence of Asian culture not only over the character himself but rather the film philosophy as a whole. The same scene takes some long time focused on that remote place calling for a meditative process that transports the audience beyond the physical dimension of the scene. In many ways, intertextuality takes their minds and spirits in a journey of inquiry into the reasons that made an American think of returning back to a remote location in the Eastern world. In many ways, we think, this is a call from the filmmaker for a sincere relook into the pristine origins of American philosophy which are by no means defined only by the current status quo. Such need for call is alluded to in the following scene:

00:17:54,131 --> 00:17:57,180  
Hey, why didn't you  
call me back last week?  
00:17:57,331 --> 00:18:00,175  
- Um, because I'm a kook.  
- Ha, ha.  
00:18:00,331 --> 00:18:02,618  
- Yeah, that sounds about right.  
- Hey, Charles.  
00:18:02,771 --> 00:18:04,455  
- Great seeing you, Theodore.  
- You too.  
00:18:04,651 --> 00:18:06,858  
You went shopping.  
Get anything good?  
00:18:07,011 --> 00:18:09,696  
Um, just come cables  
and a fruit smoothie.  
00:18:09,851 --> 00:18:12,900  
Ugh! Always the fruit.  
Don't you know what people say?  
00:18:13,051 --> 00:18:16,021  
You've got to eat your fruits  
and juice your vegetables. (Jonze, 2013)



The call, Charles is referring to, is one of return to nature, just as Emerson called for in his seminal work with the same title in 1836. Theodore's shopping that situates him in contemporary culture ends up with two items which are completely opposed in ordinary thinking. While, at a surface level, the cable alludes to technology and commercialism, it is actually an embedded reference to the need for recalling the pristine era's culture that traces the origins of American thinking and philosophy. To make it clearer, Charles goes into details that explain his vision that is centred on nature through its epitomes, plants in their different forms. In Thoreauvian trend, he shows interest in the little details of the natural phenomena, in the image of the importance of preserving fruit fibres and good nutrition.

In a connotative way, the choice of the skyscraper as a setting and the vegetables and fruits as content constructs the poles of a continuum between earth and the divine. The dialogue taking place between the essentially main figures in the film remakes the eternal man's need for a comeback to the spiritual inquiry with what Schrader calls "the wholly other." For his part, Emerson shows in *The Poem* the possibilities of transcendence through one's dialogue with wood, as a path to the divine:

The gods talk in the breath of the woods,  
They talk in the shaken pine,  
And fill the long reach of the old seashore  
With dialogue divine; (Emerson, 2015, para. 192.6)

In our view, Theodore's need for dialogue demonstrates the way humans' perennial quest for peace, not only physical but also spiritual. Despite being a refined intellectual person, he still manifests some ambiguity in terms of his

capacity to make distinction *vis-à-vis* the facts of life. As he grows intellectually and professionally, one would expect that he has become above the frivolous matters of life, yet Jonze dashes again our expectations to make him externalise his deficiency in processing the basic questions a modern man is destined to witness. The previous scene continues as to make this ambiguity resurface through the following passage:

00:18:48,011 --> 00:18:49,615  
You only have so much  
energy, you know?  
00:18:49,771 --> 00:18:53,059  
And to divide yourself between doing  
what it is that you have to do...  
00:18:53,211 --> 00:18:57,182  
and then doing what you love,  
it's so important to prioritize.  
00:18:57,371 --> 00:19:00,500  
I can't even prioritize... (Jonze, 2013)

Theodore's shortcomings as a person and their explicit evocation in this passage are Jonze's way to relocate our understanding of individuality as an absolute solution to the modern man's troubles regarding spiritual peace and fulfilment. The call upon Charles and divinity through intertextuality builds up a sign that is basically one of communal nature. His incarnation of meanings that go beyond Theodore's earthly capacities, while he is at surface level just another supporting character, functions as a reminder for the intersection of the divine with man at certain points in the history of the World. More importantly, the dialogue takes place in a hidden angle at the building is another reference for the deep spaces in the psyche of Theodore, who is still working out ideas on his very basic notions on the very World he lives in. The reference to the difficulties in

making priorities in life calls for one's meditation over the nature of his self and the very relationships with the happenings in life. Moreover, as Charles points out the question of distinction between one doing what he has to do and what he loves represents an explicit guidance not only to Theodore, but to the spectator to think over his stance over his mission in life, with regard to his view on his individual freedom. In contrast to the institutionalised religion, Charles establishes a divine sense that is not primarily authoritative, loving and sincere, imbedding a sense of union between humans' need for freedom and spiritual requirements for peace. The original dialogue on food on its own represents a sign for the organic nature of the world, that encompasses human aspirations into one organism as opposed to the mechanical relationships that swept modern civilisation in the image of America, as its epitome.

### **3.10. OS1 (Operating System One): Emerson's subtle impulses of community and responsibility**

The United States of America assertively marks itself as the greatest nation in the world not only in recent times, but has proved so for more than a century now. This has not been achieved by mere coincidence, but because of the great collective effort of its citizens for as Ibn Khaldun eloquently devised it six centuries ago, "Civilisation is a collective human action" (Djendia, 2011, p. 84). In American context, the community, whose civilisational outcome is evident, has its peculiar texture, on which Porte (2008) asserts that: "in all these instances we like to remind ourselves that although our nation is a union, it is a union of many individuals, each of whom reserves the right to be different from his or her neighbors and to be heard as a distinct voice" (Porte, 2008, p. 144). The

relationships that constitute the bonds between Americans are primarily set and defined by the republic's democratic impulses. Within this context, the citizens boast of a great deal of freedom and human rights, including the right for self-expression and individuality, as stipulated in the nation's supreme identifying document of *The Declaration of Independence*.

In *Her*, OS1 takes on its own the mission of self-expression and is the entity that in one of its instances takes the name of Samantha. For us, Jonze's choice of such framework of characterisation that involves a virtual character is one of prominence when it comes to philosophy in film art. While, superficially, Samantha could be perceived as one ordinary character that might take on the delimitations of the elements of fiction, deeply speaking, OS1 represents a society of its own. Through transcendent lens, one's definition fades within the sum of everything. In his preface to *Emerson, Thoreau and the Cultural Critic*, Sam McGuire Worley argues that "communitarian thinkers offer a theory in which the self appears to be formed out of a specific network of social influences and affiliations" (Worley, 2001, p. xi).

As matter-of-fact, Jonze's project entails a certain level of multi-layer complexity that without doubt cannot be represented through the classic characterisation. At the heart of *Her* lies a central idea about the question of the individual and his stance within his society. Two centuries ago, Emerson has raised this very question within his milestone essay "Solitude and Society." As *Her* opens with a close shot that brings Theodore into a direct one-to-one contact with the viewer, Jonze seems to embrace Emerson's definition of what he calls true society as one that revolves around the peculiar contact of one person with the

other, rather than a juxtaposition of persons in crowds. Emerson had actually gone to question the need for society in its institutional version. Again, we face at first glance a real dilemma understanding his vision that seems to entail ambiguity and disparity. Yet, as we take into consideration the tenets that we endeavoured to bring into the forth in our previous discussions of his thought, we find the opposites melt together to bring unity to his concepts. Thus, we might infer that for Emerson solitude is much closer to nature as a status of man that is pristine and pure; however, this cannot be understood as a complete rejection of society, the one that is often defined by different types of institutions in the like of corrupt governments. More importantly, what matters for Emerson is the challenges one has to face during the process of learning, growing, and ultimately self-definition.

Based on the mentioned premise, OS1 represents a great opportunity for Theodore to take the best of his solitude and the true society he aspires for. Moreover, OS1, as a multitask entity, is endowed with the faculty of representing a society of excellence that is all merged into a multitude of instances that could make meaningful conversations with Theodore, one each time. For us, this is an ultimate genius inclination from the part of Jonze. Accordingly, the narrative of *Her* stretches smoothly to highlight different elemental aspects of persons that we could bring into the taxonomy of family, friends, and tutors. OS1 enriches Theodore's life with moments of joy and happiness that he has been deprived for throughout much of the story time. Jonze invests much of the plot time on the display of the joy and fun that OS1 provides, as the following scene demonstrates:

00:28:31,411 --> 00:28:32,742

You're too funny.  
00:28:32,891 --> 00:28:35,974  
- Get up. Get up!  
- All right, I'm getting up.  
00:28:36,131 --> 00:28:39,135  
- Up, up, up! Come on, out of bed.  
- All right, I'm up. I'm up!  
00:28:50,611 --> 00:28:52,579  
(INAUDIBLE DIALOGUE)  
00:28:56,571 --> 00:28:58,972  
Keep walking.  
Keep walking.  
00:29:00,931 --> 00:29:04,253  
And stop. Now, turn  
around 360 degrees.  
00:29:04,411 --> 00:29:06,982  
Slower, slower.  
00:29:08,291 --> 00:29:10,419  
Good. Ha, ha.  
00:29:10,611 --> 00:29:11,658  
- Okay, and stop.  
- Ha, ha!  
00:29:13,091 --> 00:29:14,855  
SAMANTHA: Walk forward.  
00:29:15,011 --> 00:29:16,297  
And stop and sneeze.  
00:29:16,491 --> 00:29:17,652  
(SNEEZES)  
00:29:17,811 --> 00:29:20,132  
- Bless you.  
- Thank you. Ha-ha-ha!  
00:29:20,331 --> 00:29:23,574  
SAMANTHA: Okay, turn to your  
right. Turn to your right. Stop.  
00:29:23,731 --> 00:29:25,620  
Now spin around.  
00:29:26,691 --> 00:29:29,058  
Keep going, keep going.  
00:29:30,011 --> 00:29:31,536  
And stop.  
00:29:31,691 --> 00:29:35,582  
Now walk forward. Everyone thinks  
you're really drunk right now.  
00:29:36,331 --> 00:29:37,378

And stop.  
00:29:37,531 --> 00:29:39,932  
Now say, "I'd like a slice  
of cheese, please."  
00:29:40,091 --> 00:29:42,093  
I'd like a slice  
of cheese, please. (Jonze, 2013)

This scene is pivotal and essential in that it applies to both Emerson and Jonze's vision of society as a true one. The concept of "dialogue" sets the workings of the moment in display. Moreover, there are two layers of representation that melt together to bring two intents into interplay. The first one is that the dialogue, which gives purpose and meaning to the relationship between Theodore and OS1, constitutes the texture of the society that a person who is ready for revelation would aspire for. The guidance and instruction foster this idea and provide hints on the way a one-to-one dialogue could fruit for both participants in the utterance. The second layer, exquisitely delivers the outcome of such participation in fruitful dialogues. The explicit joy and inner fulfilment are clearly demonstrated and manifested through the change of mood that Theodore is to witness in the upcoming scenes.

Jonze continues to bear witness of the validity of Emerson's vision on the true society using opposition as a device. That is to know more the true society, he sheds light on the crowd. For this, in a decent number of scenes, what might be understood as society are people who are portrayed walking in different directions. Faces look at different angles and no convergence or similitude of walk lines take place. With a meticulous camerawork, Theodore seems to be forging his path in the midst of a mass that serves as obstacle to his movement. The contrast

between him and them is set through both colours, direction, and speed. All these elements show how the individual has the responsibility of finding his ways in the midst of the stagnated or lost society. Such stagnation goes to the limits of corruption, that is often linked with a number of social institutions. The mediocrity of taste and vulgarity are to define the fallen society, or the crows, as compared to the true society. In this sense, OS1 takes the role of an unrefined person and comes up with a strange imagination of the human body. While she arouses laughter, it shows also futility and temporality. In many ways, this is Jonze's alert on the dangers of too much time with persons who share nothing of purpose but appeal for hedonistic ends, the ultimate danger on imagination and positive creativity.

### **3.11. OS1 as a virtual self: Emerson on intuition and tuition**

The play of opposition finds place in *Her* through the use of virtuality as a powerful device to express what could not possibly be expressed through ordinary means of fictional tools. The whole project of Jonze in such artwork revolves around freedom and the ways one could achieve it, with regard to existing programmed notions and imaginative dimensions. Whether this has to be based on ready inner faculties or ones that could be learned and developed, the horizons of expectations and aspirations are met in the virtual world, expressed by the remarkable artificial intelligence OS1 can incarnate and exclusively boast of. In *Her*, opposition is put into use to explore the real capacities of humans through what is seemingly understood as the opposite, competitor, or even substitute for man. While in ordinary thinking computers constitute the greatest achievement in terms of analytical and digital processing, from transcendental perspective they



are merely close to fractions of human capacity. Thus, in *Her*, we can infer that OS1 is used in an exquisite manner to represent the way humans can manage to use their mental powers in service of their freedom.

Intuition, one of the essential tenets in transcendental thinking, proves to be the main faculty that OS1 has been meant to incarnate in *Her*. This intention is introduced to the viewer early in Theodore's journey. Right after the viewer gets acquainted with him, an advertisement offers both the audience and Theodore the chance to be introduced to, meet, and eventually know about the new operating system. The advert goes as follows:

00:10:13,011 --> 00:10:16,299  
MAN ON TV: We ask you a simple question.  
00:10:18,011 --> 00:10:19,979  
Who are you?  
00:10:20,931 --> 00:10:23,059  
What can you be?  
00:10:25,531 --> 00:10:27,659  
Where are you going?  
00:10:30,931 --> 00:10:32,979  
What's out there?  
00:10:36,771 --> 00:10:39,297  
What are the possibilities?  
00:10:40,011 --> 00:10:42,412  
Element Software is proud to introduce...  
00:10:42,571 --> 00:10:46,462  
the first artificially intelligent operating system.  
00:10:46,611 --> 00:10:51,094  
An intuitive entity that listens to you, understands you, and knows you.  
00:10:52,491 --> 00:10:57,418  
It's not just an operating system. It's a consciousness. (Jonze, 2013)

Just as Emerson called for intuition as a drive for one to pursue his way in life, free of all constraints imposed mainly by social institutions which are often

far from nature and culturally tainted, or intoxicated, to use Schrader's words, *Her* resorts to OS1 to serve as a reminder of such appeal. If one would initially think of an operating system as something completely different and overpowering humans, in this context we could only see that such representation calls for meditation over the human brain's marvellous analysing capacity. Actually, with reference to Neurobiology, the brain proves to be the greatest computing power ever devised with millions of neurons which inspired the creators of computers to emulate using electronic components. The point we want to make is that processing data is as important for humans as it is for computers, yet what makes the difference is the notion of freedom.

Right after his introduction to OS1, Theodore is asked a number of questions that begin with his preferences and ends with his very nature and stance *vis-à-vis* society. Thus, the link between the two is established from the outset as to put the viewer in a position that calls for the meditation over the real dilemma of the modern man. The main questions revolved around Theodore's relationships with society but not all of it. Reference to his mother evokes the notion of true society that we discussed in the previous point. Moreover, the inquiry on the gender of the operation system alludes to questions of similarity and difference and the formation of society as a whole, with regard to constructed notions. The set of questions goes as follows:

00:10:57,651 --> 00:11:00,302

Introducing OS1.

00:11:18,491 --> 00:11:19,931

MALE OS1 VOICE :Mr. Theodore Twombly.

00:11:20,051 --> 00:11:24,579

Welcome to the world's first artificially intelligent operating system, OS1.

00:11:24,731 --> 00:11:28,816

We'd like to ask you a few basic questions before the operating system is initiated.

00:11:29,011 --> 00:11:31,981

This will help create an OS to best fit your needs.

00:11:32,131 --> 00:11:33,371

Okay.

00:11:33,531 --> 00:11:36,011

Are you social or antisocial?

00:11:36,171 --> 00:11:39,414

I guess I haven't really been social in a while. Mostly because...

00:11:39,571 --> 00:11:43,337

In your voice, I sense hesitance. Would you agree with that?

00:11:43,491 --> 00:11:45,778

- Was I sounding hesitant?

- Yes.

00:11:45,931 --> 00:11:47,660

I'm sorry if I was sounding hesitant.

00:11:47,811 --> 00:11:50,576

I was just trying to be more accurate.

00:11:50,731 --> 00:11:54,702

Would you like your OS to have a male or female voice?

00:11:55,531 --> 00:11:56,942

Female, I guess.

00:11:57,091 --> 00:12:00,095

How would you describe your relationship with your mother?

00:12:00,291 --> 00:12:02,020

It's fine, I think.

00:12:04,491 --> 00:12:07,973

Well, actually, I think the thing I always found frustrating about my mom...

00:12:08,171 --> 00:12:13,018

is if I tell her something that's going on in my life, her reaction is usually about her.

00:12:13,171 --> 00:12:14,935

- It's not about...

- Thank you. (Jonze, 2013)

At this point, Theodore represents the status quo of society's influence upon persons who are heavily using their brains and psychic energy following the

rules and conceptions, put into convention by the overseeing establishment. We could infer this through the noticeable hesitation he exhibits as he answers his machine. He seems to think over natural facts about his relationships and preferences. In many ways, this is an alert on the difficulty modern man finds in seeing the truth of reality before his eyes. There is no more natural relationship than that of one with his mother, yet Theodore keeps searching for the words to express the meaning of what a less intelligent creature could sense and express, not necessarily through words. Hesitation therefore evokes both the problem of freedom and self-definition. Theodore seems to have lost his link with reality, stemming from his failure to know himself and his possibilities, an idea that the previous scene raised in an explicit manner when asking the viewers through a cinematic narrator about their identity and wants.

As Theodore gets into real and sincere dialogues with his operating system that innately emulate what Emerson defined in his *Solitude and Society* as one-to-one conversations, particularly meaningful and fruitful, he promptly and actually embarks in a journey of self-definition, freeing himself from the constraints and chains of modern man's obsession with words and social convention. Such journey is essentially defined and propelled by his will to learn and refine his judgement and mental abilities. This goes not by excluding cognition and analytic faculties, as one might initially infer, but by putting them into use in favour of solving the real problems in real time. OS1 performs just this, as is commonly and widely known to be a computer with the instant capacities of solving mathematic issues and calculations. As a reminder for Emerson's disciple Thoreau, mathematics proves to be a great asset for one to act intuitively without

resorting to speculations, a definition that challenges many of the current scientifically-minded persons. Therefore, OS1 incarnates a transcendent vision on one's stance *vis-à-vis* reality that invokes by definition the notion of learning and mental growth. Just as a computer programme is meant to be developed and updated, man's mental faculties receive the same qualities at a certain level. The whole transcendental project reveals itself as one about learning to act without choosing and, thus, calling for the incarnation of the real freedom that every human has to pursue. When refined, members of society can all enable themselves to integrate into one unified consciousness, as represented by the unified programmed entity of Samantha that is essentially the sum of the DNA of its human programmers.

## **Conclusion**

*Her*, essentially and eloquently, provides an updated version of the journeys transcendental thinkers and adventurer have ever endeavoured to realise. Within the worlds of computerised virtuality, Theodore is transported into realms which are situated beyond the physical reality that is often linked with society, in its ordinary sense, and its mechanised version that the contemporary world manifests, in the image of its epitome of modernisation, America. While physicality and science-oriented approaches to life and reality bring focus on what is tangible and calculated, *Her* dashes those expectations in a perfect reflection of Schrader's transcendent style framework. Without neglecting the presence of crowd minded persons in modern society, such artwork reverses the lens position as to bring into the forth Theodore Twombly not only as the protagonist of the film, but as the epitome of the truth seeker and the self-searcher. Through his

interactions with the reality around him that purposefully includes refined persons, an embedded call for investigating the definition of society and, more importantly, one's stance *vis-à-vis* its members. Learning and growth and ascription to the shared project of humanity as one of benign essence represent the core ideals that Jonze proves to be in complete harmony with. The fusion of the past and the present into one unified moment is made possible through the enactment of a daring reconciliation between man and his culture. Excluding difference and converting it into endless possibilities is demonstrated and exquisitely displayed as a strong transcendental asset and means for both self and social change and development.



**CHAPTER IV:**  
***Into The Wild: The Thoreauvian Call of the Wild***

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society.

—Henry David Thoreau,  
Walking, *The Complete Works of Henry David Thoreau* (1120)

## Introduction

*Into The Wild* is actually a transposition of a real-life experience into a book then into the poetics of cinema. It ascribes both the book written by Jon Krakauer in 1996 and the film directed by thoughtful and skilled filmmaker Sean Penn in 2007 to the artworks that repel readers and viewers attracted by the easiness of story-telling and entertaining drives. Actually, the title itself presents difficulty and bewilderment.<sup>1</sup> As we mentioned in the second chapter on the way towards the transcendental style, naming the work as such serves the whole project as one of meditation instead of entertainment. Moreover, the artwork under study follows Henri David Thoreau's structure of his master piece *Walden*, namely in terms of life development and experience, i.e., memoir and spiritual quest. In particular, in similar ways of Ralph Waldo Emerson's tradition that gives eminence to the intellectual and his place, *Into The Wild's* central character demonstrates to a large extent the dilemma of locating the individual within a society that no longer celebrates distinction. For one thing, Chris McCandless (Emile Hirsch) portrays the epitome of the intellectual who struggles to negotiate a space in a herd-driven materialistic and consumerist culture of the turn of the twenty-first century America. Yet, this very deadlock situation paradoxically stimulates a havoc in the minds and souls of he who clings to the core American ideals of self-assertion and hardworking to find opportunities that spring in-between the rocks and trees of wilderness. To clarify the transcendentals' way out

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<sup>1</sup> Just in the manner Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1913)—one of the books that appear within the narrative—challenged its readers to make its publisher,<sup>1</sup> George P. Brett, claims that: "it is a title which, it seems to me, the public would not understand until after they had read the book" London, J., Labor, E., & Leitz, R. C. (2009). *The call of the wild ; White Fang, and other stories*. Oxford University Press. .



of such dilemma, we are to probe authority, guilt, clairvoyance, isolation, stoicism, friendship, phoneyess, and beauty.

#### **4.1. Walt McCandless: Reflections on ethics and authority**

*Into The Wild*, by its allusion to the opposition to the city and civilisation in terms of nature, we believe, that it artistically proceeds in a completely different manner the viewer would expect. Therefore, to us, it is not just a story about a vision of life in the wilderness, but instead it goes beyond to ascribe itself to a scathing criticism of the *status quo* of civilisation, particularly in America at the turn of the twenty-first century. For one thing, we believe, both writer Jon Krakauer and filmmaker Sean Penn have resorted to a number of elements of fiction and stylistic methods to shed light on the status of American society through the institution of family, namely in the figure of the father. Whether or not original ethics, in the image of fairness, respect, and self-reliance, are still revered proves to be a crucial question to measure the validity of America's clinging to its ideals.

The importance given to the institution of family and its head is well eminent in *Into The Wild*. For this reason, the film exclusively opens with a homely scene involving a father, Walter or Walt (William Hurt), and his wife, Wilhelmina or Billie (Marcia Gay Harden), who has just awakened from a dream or to be precise a nightmare. We are to understand later on that it is all about losing the very thing that gives meaning to the family, as the building block of society. It is the core and purpose of the family in life that many happenings in the film would reveal as the essence of life itself. The pursuit of happiness and

harmony would work in the background to set the thread that works and progressively weaves the texture of the film. For this reason, we deemed it necessary to focus on the character of Walt as one of great definition and relevance to the status quo of the American family at the turn of the twenty-first century, simply because we can understand from the narrative that basically such family remains patriarchal to a large extent to the recent decades of the American nation.

Walter works as an engineer in the satellite research field, a strong reason we rely on to associate him with civilisation and its status. While we cannot say this is a choice of the author since the story of the film parallels real events from which many of the details were kept faithfully, the way such character was portrayed provides much about the decline of personal values America had been built upon. For Walter, the job appears to be a merely a source of income in that he is never involved in acts related to the daily practices we expect from a worker. We do not see him at his company nor with workmates. There is absolutely no single scene that shows him devoted to work or giving the least of his time or mental powers to this supposedly important part of his life.

Walter pays much attention to his appearance and he often dresses up and gives priority to the way people perceive him. We see this in an emphasised manner in a number of scenes that propel him deliberately to the public spheres. At Emory University, in his son's graduation day, a wide shot localises him within the crowd wearing an official suit with no facial signs of joy. What we see in him is a mirrored image of the appearance of the other members of the gathering. There

is absolutely no distinction. They are all dressed up and abiding by the rules of the special events. In a way or another, this is an emphasis on the notion of society and an image of the way one should adhere to the rules and manner.

Walter functions as a sign for the problems of contemporary society. Through him, we can see how the concepts related to personal qualities get turned upside down. Being a genius for instance is something undeniably proven as per his merited intelligent faculties. One who is selected to participate in the development of American satellite systems is by necessity one who has special cognitive capabilities. Yet, there are two points that taint such quality. The first one is that such activity in the development of a spatial programme goes within the competition with the Russians in such field. That is, the purpose has nothing to do with the wellbeing of humanity, but rather it is one of hostility. We can clearly see that this has nothing to do with the genius that Emerson praised and celebrated. More importantly, Walter shows no clear distinction between things as described and as they really are, also a feature that is refused by any idealist, let alone Emerson. We can say so for a scientist who repeats the mistakes of the past in terms of the development of hostile machinery is clearly one of reduced in value power of judgement. The second feature that demonstrates his tainted genius qualities is his recurrent reference to his activity as a business and money-centred purpose. This is a clear reference to the lucrative nature of his undertaking instead of its ethical of intrinsic value. In a quarrel with his wife, such idea is explicitly revealed:

01:19:07,600 --> 01:19:10,500

With whose money are you buying  
all these goddamn presents?  
01:19:10,600 --> 01:19:13,000  
I work. The only reason  
I'm not talking is because  
01:19:13,100 --> 01:19:15,800  
you're wandering around acting like  
the big-shot flirt with everybody.  
01:19:15,900 --> 01:19:19,400  
I am making the contacts  
for this business to work!  
01:19:19,600 --> 01:19:21,600  
You don't care at all about what I do!  
01:19:21,700 --> 01:19:23,500  
I don't even want to talk to you  
about it anymore! (Penn, 2007)

Money, as a sign, functions in the same way that of the genius works in this narrative. It is basically one of reversed meaning emphasis. In other words, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, when an instance of a concept is used in a different manner than the usual, transgressing the expectation, this has a clearly defined function which is calling upon contemplation and rethinking the established meanings. In other words, it is a way towards defamiliarization. In this event, money has been re-honoured many times as it is undoubtedly in the midst of contemporary culture's workings. The turnover of its conception would definitely get the receiver out of the narrative for one mission which that look and interpretation that goes beyond the easy guided extrapolations.

Since many centuries money has been in circulation to make economical transactions easy for the members of society. We have this positive idea on its function as a helping tool for comfort. Some people today even confuse it with happiness, but the point is that such concept has gone through many phases of

metamorphosis leading to it as a sign of power and control. Yet, not everyone is aware of this dramatic reversal of meaning and value. *Into The Wild* reminds us of the need for good taste to recapture the true meanings of things, including money. Many of the criticisms in the film do not reject wholly such concepts of money and comfort, but they attempt to show us the way towards essence of things and life itself. Money, we think, effectively laid the grounds for such possibilities as its treatment captures the interest of the spectator, making him lean toward the screen. Especially, those who have the will for revelation will find it so useful and interesting to discover through the concept of money how society attempts to impose compliance in overt or covert ways.

The metamorphosis of money as concept could be seen when a noble activity like higher education is confused and mixed with money. Right away after Chris's graduation, the family meets to supposedly celebrate, but surprisingly the conversation turns into a quarrel over the nature of the gift the parents, especially the father, want to present to the son. That would be expected if it was just about bringing a new car instead of the old, but the focus of the narrative was on the repelling criticism of the old car itself, referred to as "junker." Actually, the scene has ushered earlier in the critical tone as the father evoked his disapproval to Carine (Jena Malone)—the daughter's driving of the car from Georgia, the hometown. After this, Walter in an emotionless facial expression he delivered his proposition of buying a new car just after he asked about the financial funds of Chris at the college. The scene is dance in meanings that involve power, control, and patriarchy. There was no rationale behind the focus on the question of the

girl's driving issue, but to show this tendency to control the subdued, especially when it is a woman. Simply, this information on the law forbidding driving for learner's permit has no real relevance to the story itself. Yet, the reference to money and the value of the new car as compared to the old one is really at the heart of the story and the narrative as a whole. The filmmaker has effectively used time to extend the scene as to show the importance of money as a manifestation of familial control.

The fatherly leadership of the family and extensive control goes in conjunction with the allusion to the choice of Chris's future education studies. While, it was the son who referred to the possibility of carrying his studies in the Harvard Law, this has nothing to do with his inner will or preference. The proof is that this had no actual realisation in the remaining of the narrative. As such, Chris's allusion to the potentiality of his pursuit of higher studies in law show three facets in relation to social control. The first is that, individual preferences are forcefully undermined to the benefit of social satisfaction and acceptance even within the very family. The second is the surface of social hypocrisy, sometimes in an imposed manner, to justify continuity of peaceful life that is not necessarily a happy one. In a clear manner, this social control makes confusion between happiness and pleasure, a fact that appears in the choice of acquired properties whether for daily life or for celebrations of happy moments in life. The scene at the restaurant the day of Chris's graduation shows much how things and materiality take over feelings and core emotions:

00:19:36,600 --> 00:19:39,800

We just want to get you a nice new car  
that's safe to drive.  
00:19:39,900 --> 00:19:43,400  
And you never know when that thing  
out there just might blow up.  
00:19:43,500 --> 00:19:49,700  
Blow up. Blow up?  
Are you guys crazy? It's a great car.  
00:19:50,300 --> 00:19:54,500  
I don't need a new car.  
I don't want a new car.  
00:19:54,900 --> 00:19:57,000  
- I don't want anything.  
- Okay.  
00:19:57,100 --> 00:20:00,800  
- These things, things, things, things.  
- Okay. (Penn, 2007)

The refutation of things as central concerns is in a way Penn's way to declare the film's project as epistemological in nature, calling for a certain meditation over the fallacy of social control. The third facet of such control referred to in the same scene is Chris's very allusion to his choice of Harvard Law college. Evidently law and order are things necessary to the well workings of society, but in this instance, one could not see this dimension of such major in studies. Time reveals its semiotic dimension in this very moment of the narrative. Had it been mentioned in other circumstance, the Harvard College would mean excellence and positive significations. Here things are different and when looking deeply to the happening in the dialogue, one will ponder why Chris does not seem to be really interested in what he is talking about. We say this with posteriori knowledge on the content of the remaining of the narrative. As such, our judgement is one that is informed. More importantly, the reference to the institution of law does not seem to be an innocent one, in that, it works hand in

hand with the significance of the character of Walter as an authority. Hence, Walter, his job, and the institution of law all work jointly to express the vertical effects of social institutions on the individual.

While we are forwarding our criticism to different social institutions, we are not ascribing them *per se* to negative connotations. For instance, the father's authority as a reflection of the government style of overseeing the matters of the subjects should supposedly be one of benevolent nature. Basically, a father or a governor has, in Emersonian ideals, the mission to look after the governed and to elevate them in all aspects of human dignity. Providing a good financial foundation is not something we think of as materialist or contradictory to transcendental beliefs, but rather such comfort is by definition a necessary requirement so that the intellectual and spiritual sides of man's being reach the optimum valour. As such, the authority is not to exert power only without paying much attention to the human needs for intellectual refinement and economic wellbeing. In the following insightful excerpt from his lecture *The Young American*, Emerson defines the citizens' need for such kind of authority:

Yes, Government must educate the poor man. Look across the country from any hill-side around us, and the landscape seems to crave Government. The actual differences of men must be acknowledged, and met with love and wisdom. These rising grounds which command the champaign below, seem to ask for lords, true lords, land-lords, who understand the land and its uses, and the applicabilities of men, and whose government would be what it should, namely, mediation between want and supply. (Emerson, 2015, para. 799.31)



For this, authority, in its ideal sense, has nothing to do with the derogative meanings that have been ascribed to the signs of the father and government and so on. For the transcendentalists, there is no rejection of the rules and laws per se, but there is a disapproval of the way some people with no refined tastes and intellectual affinities go to the extremes of judgement. Besides this, as we have discussed in the first chapter, Emersonian thinking is one of understanding and expansion. Therefore, we do not expect any instances of full rejection of ideas in the form of packages. In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson comments on the crowd-minded people who do not discern one's rejection of what society approves as valid by the power of numbers, as distinct from the rejection of the principle of laws and order as a whole:

The populace think that your rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere antinomianism; and the bold sensualist will use the name of philosophy to gild his crimes. But the law of consciousness abides. There are two confessionals, in one or the other of which we must be shriven. You may fulfil your round of duties by clearing yourself in the direct, or in the reflex way (Emerson, 2015, para. 805.31).

Our criticism, hence, makes distinction and consequently, in a precise manner, spots where society in the image of the fatherly Walt has shown malfunctions that remind us of the turbulent social atmosphere in Emerson's times. Therefore, we are interested in exposing two distinct but intertwined phenomena. The first one is related with the verisimilitude sought by certain social institutions. The study of the second allows us to see how this very artwork has succeeded in revealing the abusive use of power a figure like Walt has at hand. Emerson helps us a great deal to establish the link between different authorities in

society. Through his rhetoric, he provides us with an eloquent analogy between the emperor and the father in terms of severity and excessive potency. Again, in his lecture *The Young American*, he spells out how a supposedly good behaviour towards the subjects gets derailed through intolerance in application:

It is easy to see that this patriarchal or family management gets to be rather troublesome to all but the papa; the sceptre comes to be a crowbar. And this unpleasant egotism, Feudalism opposes, and finally destroys. The king is compelled to call in the aid of his brothers and cousins, and remote relations, to help him keep his overgrown house in order; and this club of noblemen always come at last to have a will of their own; they combine to brave the sovereign, and call in the aid of the people. (Emerson, 2015, para. 799.22)

In the same typology of derailment from the commonly correct method of family management, Walter as an authority figure, could not be the representative of the perfect family father. Our claim is backed up with his transgression of the basic principles of family building. As the social convention goes, the family is initiated by the act of marriage, generally based on human relationships that celebrate love, harmony, and respect. Yet, in this case, we find that what initially appeared as a typical family has been a real disgrace to social ethics, those of family in particular. Our claim is confirmed when the narrative tells us that Chris was born while his father was officially married to another woman.

00:52:47,800 --> 00:52:52,700  
He discovered that our parents' stories  
of how they fell in love and got married  
00:52:52,800 --> 00:52:55,600  
were calculated lies  
masking an ugly truth.  
00:52:56,900 --> 00:52:59,500  
When they met,  
Dad was already married.

00:53:00,500 --> 00:53:02,800  
And even after Chris was born,  
00:53:02,900 --> 00:53:05,700  
Dad had had another son  
with his first wife, Marcia,  
00:53:07,100 --> 00:53:09,700  
to whom he was still legally married. (Penn, 2007)

The act of transgression appears again in a repulsive manner, when Walter resorts to use his familial authority in an abusive way on his wife—Billie (Marcia Gay Harden), as they were discussing the celebration of Christmas. She is convincingly a conservative person, a circumscription that appears through her many conversations, actions, and outfit. They actually represent the two opposite possibilities of the use of power. Billie is a calm woman who is caring and always present in the life of her children. She appears happy when they are and sad for their sadness. She participates in the little things and plays that occurs. She is has never shown rejection to the will of any family member as it sees it beneficial or rational. In short, she fully embraces the motherly qualities of mercy and harmony. She financially contributes in the work of her husband without even mentioning it, a fact that reflects the real meaning of love. On the other hand, familial disharmony is epitomised through Walter's deeds as he shows no hesitation to humiliate his wife at any occurring event not suiting him or his beliefs. Moreover, he is not considering giving a good model to his children and instead raising troubles and using disrespectful language in front of his kids, frequently exposing them to violence. His transgression goes to the limits of comparing himself to and disrespecting the God head, as revealed in the following:

01:19:23,600 --> 01:19:26,600  
Don't you walk away from me, woman!  
Woman!  
01:19:27,300 --> 01:19:29,600  
Kids! Look what your dad  
is doing to me!  
01:19:29,800 --> 01:19:33,200  
For God's sake,  
look what your mother is making me do!  
01:19:33,300 --> 01:19:35,200  
I hate you!  
01:19:37,600 --> 01:19:40,800  
There ain't gonna be no party.  
I'm gonna cancel Christmas this year.  
01:19:40,900 --> 01:19:44,200  
Cancel Christmas?  
Who do you think you are? God?  
01:19:44,300 --> 01:19:46,000  
That's right! I'm God! (Penn, 2007)

#### **4.2. Walt McCandless: guilt and paralysis in modern society**

The figure of Walt in *Into The Wild* may seem of less magnitude in terms of the quantity of the narrative time devoted to it, but we see things differently. Such character as a sign for the established standards in American society by the turn of the twenty-first century represents much more for the narrative itself, as well as for the audience. The first thing that strikes our minds is his outlook and facial expression which never show any signs of happiness or delight. The man being portrayed is one of a gloomy presence in the narrative. We watch him in the defining opening moments of the story and we lose his physical presence throughout almost the remaining of the film. Yet, what marks such physical presence is the perpetual virtual existence he marks the narrative with. All this gives sign to the importance allowed to such character, as one of great

representation in contemporary society. Interestingly, Walt intertwines many of the concepts developed by Emerson—with regard to education, family, work, and art, but applied in the wrong way. We may say so as we notice that he is a candidate for happiness in all regards, but to his demise, he seems to feel his own failure. The biggest trouble he faces is his perpetual feeling of guilt. For this, we attempt to decipher the meaning such a feeling could emanate.

Based on what we have learned on Emerson's approach to life and the whole universe, we know by now that one who embraces Transcendentalism is apt to embrace the world and believe in its good nature. Such belief would by necessity engender a feeling of satisfaction and happiness. Now, how come Walt, the successful satellite engineer, continuously looks so sad and immersed in his feelings of guilt. We think that Walt has been contaminated with the materialist impulse, leading to his loss of taste. The man's repeated talk about money and his controversial extra-marital relationships are all evidences of his hedonistic impulses which are the first enemies of the refined taste. In this sense, he represents a hyperbolic version of the person who fails in making reconciliation between science and art, a phenomenon that gets its reflections on his position in society as one of aloofness. The disharmony within goes beyond to become a social disharmony. As we discussed to in the first chapter, the core of harmony is essentially a faculty that could be activated by persons who embrace idealism in Emerson's perspective, one that leads to the truth of things by keen distinction. Walt, therefore, seems to be confused and self-alienated because of a certain egotism, a reminder of Tocqueville's notion of the true individualism, that we

think Walter is no representative of. The latter's disgrace and loss of delight because of his aesthetic problems and confusion of delight with pleasure had been well set in the German idealism that we believe influenced much Emerson's thought. The very status of Walt, as a scientist who is detached from his society and deprived from happiness, had been well foreseen by Schiller, whose words go as follows:

From within the Mysteries of Science, taste leads knowledge out into the broad daylight of Common Sense, and transforms a monopoly of the Schools into the common possession of Human Society as a whole. In the kingdom of taste even the mightiest genius must divest itself of its majesty, and stoop in all humility to the mind of a little child. Strength must allow itself to be bound by the Graces, and the lion have its defiance curbed by the bridle of a Cupid. In return, taste throws a veil of decorum over those physical desires which, in their naked form, affront the dignity of free beings; and, by a delightful illusion of freedom, conceals from us our degrading kinship with matter. (Cooper, 2019, para. 14.5)

The loss of taste which marks Walt's problems of aesthetic judgment makes of such character a very representative sign that is loaded with the anomalies of contemporary American society. Like any disease such weaknesses in personal traits might be solved supposedly, but in the case of Walt nothing changes throughout the totality of the narrative. We believe, then, that the main reason behind such status of paralysis and passivity is the feeling of guilt itself. It is exactly for this reason that the transcendentalists rebelled against the established religious doctrines that prevailed throughout Western culture for centuries, including the newly born republic in America. The transcendentalists spotted very well the anomalies in American society and realised how the dogmatic teachings of different variants of Christianity at the time, including

Calvinism, marked a derailment from the essence of such religion. What could be said here is the same we evoked concerning Emerson's comments on the crowd-minded people's understanding of the rejection of standards. Likewise, we think that Emerson and his followers believed and respected the original laws of such a religion but they rejected the popular understanding and application of the same rules.

Guilt resurfaces recurrently as the façade of the teachings of Calvinism, presupposing the fall from grace, with the rays of hope emanating only through the divine salvation. Therefore, this feeling of guilt makes those who believe in such doctrinal teachings remain passive with no action, waiting for some solution coming from beyond, often from a higher rank of the institutional structure, be it the church, society, or the universe. We think, this is the case of Walt who really keeps his mind stagnated at the point of the depart without any change regarding his life and family. We see no development and no action from his part throughout the narrative. We feel there is innate potential in him, but we see no will for revelation, a notion we explained as transcendental in the previous chapter. Therefore, we can say that guilt is the safe valve of the doctrinal institutional system, in the absence of which the person being indoctrinated can find a way out of the virtual chains that make him imprisoned in his thought. For this, through many shots on his eyes, we see Walt often giving the impression he is thinking and pondering, even when the conversation seems one of extreme simplicity.

Evidently, Walt's potential is manifestly stated through his remarkable work as an engineer for governmental satellite systems. The first thing, we notice on his choice of such a job is that the objectives of the spatial programme are by necessity set by other persons than him. Thus, he is executing the agenda of people in higher rank than him, excluding any possibilities of free thinking. We can say that all his genius is put into the service of delimited programmes which are ascribed to secrecy. Obviously, against the tenets of the Self-reliance framework, Walt's genius is reduced to become a mere tool at the hands of those who have more power and rank.

The lack of personal action is definitely related to the lack of subjectivity in its Kantian sense. Thus, no wonder, Walt's aesthetic judgement seems of very limited nature if not totally absent. In contrast to other characters that we will go through in the remaining of this chapter, he shows no interest in art. He never attends theatres or painting exhibitions, or any other artistic manifestations. The few times we see him in public spheres; they are places where emphatically we are exposed to a scenery defined by its crowds, an allusion to the masses and the flat societal space, whether artistically, physically or intellectually. Among these social gatherings is the Emory college graduation ceremony of Chris. As the latter gets into his thought on his mother and father, he prefers to address them in the third person, making no distinction between them and the rest of the crowd. As a narrator in this instance, Chris tells us the following:

00:15:42,800 --> 00:15:44,800  
They are about to graduate.  
00:15:46,100 --> 00:15:50,800



They are about to get married.  
They are kids. They are dumb.  
00:15:51,400 --> 00:15:55,500  
All they know is they are innocent,  
they would never hurt anybody.  
00:15:57,700 --> 00:16:01,400  
I want to go up to them and say,  
"Stop, don't do it.  
00:16:01,700 --> 00:16:05,200  
"She's the wrong woman,  
he's the wrong man.  
00:16:05,600 --> 00:16:09,600  
"You are going to do things  
you cannot imagine you would ever do.  
00:16:09,800 --> 00:16:12,900  
"You are going to do bad things  
to children.  
00:16:13,000 --> 00:16:15,500  
"You are going to suffer  
in ways you never heard of.  
00:16:15,700 --> 00:16:17,600  
"You are going to want to die." (Penn, 2007)

Likewise, another public place that exhibits symptoms of character flatness is the restaurant. Walt who is supposedly the one capable of running the familial conversation seems of marginal contribution to the content of the talk going on. While the signs of his will to impose power are evident, he is essentially adding nothing to the overall meaning of the conversation. The proof is that we will discover later that Chris had other plans in mind and he was basically not listening to his father's talk. Chris seems to just tell his father what he wants to listen to. More importantly, Walt's flatness and passivity appears when a group of hippies got inside the restaurant abruptly without any respect to the totality of clients. A close shot on Walt brings his face as one of disapproval and unhappiness to what is going on, but his remaining in stasis tells everything. The

man is totally immersed in his guilt and passivity. A new wide shot brings the family together, carrying their talk as nothing has happened. Once again, Walt dismisses his role a protector and a guide, in reminder of Emerson's belief on the benevolent role of the authority as one of protection and guidance. Besides, in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River* (1849), Thoreau indicates that passivity and inactivity lead to one's state of unhappiness

“The man enjoyeth not freedom from action, from the non-commencement of that which he hath to do; nor doth he obtain happiness from a total inactivity. No one ever resteth a moment inactive. Every man is involuntarily urged to act by those principles which are inherent in his nature. The man who restraineth his active faculties, and sitteth down with his mind attentive to the objects of his senses, is called one of an astrayed soul, and the practiser of deceit. So the man is praised, who, having subdued all his passions, performeth with his active faculties all the functions of life, unconcerned about the event.” (Thoreau, 2013, para. 24.72)

The sense of guilt, which is a result of one's inactivity and lack of adequate timely reactions to matters of life, is also directly related to the transgression of moral ethics. In the case of Walt, this is necessarily a feeling that haunted him unceasingly because of his extramarital relationship with Billie, during his official marriage to Marcia. The narrative brings us to the ugly truth about the consequences of Walt's disrespect to his society's original ethics on marriage and family. His aloofness and disharmony with his very close community makes his take an oblivious stand *vis-à-vis* the persons who are supposedly under his protection and warm confinement. His seemingly pure rational thinking could not put his in a safe place as to bring about the required familial harmony. Because of the importance of the issue and for reliability reasons, his daughter, Carine, takes

the role of a narrator to tell us about Chris and her own agonies, caused by Walt. The enunciation of the following scene forces us not as viewers but as participants in the dialogue to listen carefully to Chris and Carine's concerns. What is at stake stretches to unveil serious problems with their very definition as family members, risking their very acceptance and recognition by society:

00:52:56,900 --> 00:52:59,500  
When they met,  
Dad was already married.  
00:53:00,500 --> 00:53:02,800  
And even after Chris was born,  
00:53:02,900 --> 00:53:05,700  
Dad had had another son  
with his first wife, Marcia,  
00:53:07,100 --> 00:53:09,700  
to whom he was still legally married.  
00:53:11,700 --> 00:53:16,900  
This fact suddenly re-defined  
Chris and me as bastard children.  
00:53:21,500 --> 00:53:26,200  
Dad's arrogance made him conveniently  
oblivious to the pain he caused. (Penn, 2007)

### **4.3. McCandless, the encounter with the city**

The city or the untold character in *Into The Wild* is the most difficult in conception participant in *Into The Wild*. We think that Penn avoided as much as possible to bring it to the forth so to give space to the viewer to call for his own definition of such character, especially that arguably all audiences meet this character in daily basis. Penn's choice stems from the fact the city has lost its initial glow as an object of art and even ceded place to scepticism and fears over its place in contemporary culture.

Chris as the son of Walt, the detached father as we discussed earlier, suffers exactly from the effects afflicted by the over urbanised society. Undeniably, the city represents the technological advance of America in the turns of the recent two centuries. The skyscrapers challenge the skies and literally dispel the limits of rational possibilities. However, contemporary society faces difficulties in terms of harmony and social bonds as a result of the explosion of communities into nuclear families and micro-societies, often joined only with loose ties. Harding (2011) tells us more on the disillusionment of the artist as he witnessed the outgrowth of the city:

If the *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) enthusiastically embraced the twentieth century metropolis as the preeminent subject for art, futurism itself often intimates a sense of disorientation, shock, even antagonism toward the city as a cultural and social matrix. (Harding, 2011, p. 118)

Disillusionment is clearly manifested through the character of Chris. Basically, Penn seems to have deliberately weaved the narrative of *Into The Wild* around some contrasts in tone. For this, initially the emotional status of Chris in the beginning seemed one of satisfaction and hope. Through different scenes in which the reminiscences resurface, close-up shots make up feel his delight and hope, a fact reinforced by his fight for his education in a remote college, the impressive grades and successfully accomplishments throughout his studies. All this crowned by a happy ceremony, the day of graduation that marks the year of 1990, in which his delight was apparent. However, in an abrupt manner all these positive impressions were gone with the winds of change and growth that were explicitly referred to in the development of the narrative as life chapters from

innocence to adulthood. We think, the growth of Chris throughout the narrative parallels the growth of the city; in that, their two journeys seem to have been deliberately developed vertically and horizontally respectively. These movements were portrayed through the display of a continuum of American cities from the East to the West, from Georgia to California, while Chris's main journey launched from the south to Alaska, to the north. Chris's bewilderment in the city is astonishingly portrayed in one scene that shows him as an estranged person looking for the first time at skyscraper. The feeling we get as viewers is one calling for a deep thought on the city as a big imposed reality on the person. In a very angle shot, Chris appears really of small or null magnitude beside a huge building. In the same scene which is purposefully unfolding in Los Angeles, California, in one of the stages of his rambling journey, he looks literally lost within a fast-walking crowd referring to the fast technological advance in which man is left behind. Like gears in machines, everyone is trying to cope with the fastmoving events they perpetually think of and explain the world through. The actual moment is lost and passed unnoticed. Chris asks one of the walkers about time, without any given purpose or anticipation in the same scene:

01:10:27,400 --> 01:10:29,100

Hi. Do you have the time?

01:10:29,600 --> 01:10:31,000

- Time?

- Time?

01:10:31,100 --> 01:10:32,300

Yeah.

01:10:33,600 --> 01:10:35,000

Okay. (Penn, 2007)

This very short dialogue on time is so revealing in that the interlocuter's answer was not even made disclosed by the narrative. Chris did not show interest either in knowing or interpreting the relevant of the answer. We get the impression that in the manner time meaning is lost, Chris has lost the sense of life itself. While in all previous and later scenes Chris keeps at least interest in appearing in a decent way, this very scene shows him as one who is coming from prehistory. That is, no clean clothes, no hair cut or shaving. This appearance has nothing to do with his financial situation as his skills in work were continuously tested in different stages. Money was never his focal interest, but he got it when he needed it, in the limits of necessity not excess. Thus, our reading of the scene is that it's a deliberate enunciation between the city and Chris on the unbalanced situation between man and his very creation.

In an act of tolerance with hostile territory, Chris attempts to remain in the city in good faith and even applied for grants for homeless shelter. This shows that he had a will to get along the experience despite the unknown he might face. Everything was going smoothly into this sense, until a breaking news showed up on a television screen displaying president George Bush uttering a statement on waging war somewhere in the world. Chris's decision was swift and instant to leave immediately the place and to carry on his journey of self-discovery. We think, the appearance of the head of the government exactly at this point, not in Georgia or the Midwest but in California stresses the fact that the city as an emblem of civilisation manifests the most the corruption of social institutions, namely in its head figure. The scene brings into contrastive juxtaposition the need

for peace and shelter and repelling realities of war advocacy. Yet, we think that, in an Emersonian tradition, Chris appropriates what is good for humanity from others' thought leaving behind anything that is universally and ethically rejected. Chris shows no interest in the core of the breaking news as it is clearly something of hostile nature, but one utterance seems to have had a great impact on him. It is in the form of a monologue that goes as follows:

Some may ask,  
"Why act now? Why not wait?"  
01:07:57,400 --> 01:08:01,100  
The answer is clear.  
The world could wait no longer. (Penn, 2007)

Immediacy and action are the only thing that Chris finds as true to his essential nature. Right after being exposed to such a monologue, he decides to leave behind the shelter. Such an environment is portrayed as a magnified hostile place, a microcosm of the city itself. Through a Dutch angle camera work, scenes in the surrounding neighbours make us feel the discomfort of Chris in such a place. Our assumptions on Chris's will for revelation are confirmed in a strong way. We can simply assert so for a man with refined tastes finds no comforts in prisons or the like places. His spirit seeks freedom and autonomy and definitely Chris is not the kind of persons who accepts passivity and being fed by institutions set by those who use them as partial requirements of social control. The major issue with the authority will to orient one's thinking, we believe, is the imbedded process of hiding truths, something that a true transcendental would never accept as he is driven by intuition. Chris's therefore, in line with Thoreauvian impulse, rejects inhospitality and sets out in a journey that he long aspired for in his

imagination. In a very recent account for the truths on Chris's resort to leave the family and the whole city, Carine McCandless takes the decision to unveil the underpinnings and the pressures she witnessed along her brother. Therefore, she entitles the book as *The Wild Truth* (2014) and within, she initiates one of its parts by a quote Chris had highlighted in his diary from Thoreau's *Walden*:

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. (McCandless, 2015, para. 25.3)

American call the "car" freedom, but in this instance, as Chris was travelling from his hometown, Virginia, to Georgia, shabby signs point our attention to the road signs hanging above. Chris along his Carine were not obviously looking upward as they were focused on the path ahead of them. The third character was the city, which while absent and unseen physically, keeps imposing the rules and policies. We come to know later through the figure of the father that Carine's permit is not allowed in the interstates. The father, we believe, deliberately acts in complicity with a double authority; one is representative of his patriarchal power and the other fosters the city and higher authorities' presence in the psyche of everyone around him. Once again, such criticism we deliver is not about the essence of rules as orderly necessity in the life of a good citizen, but it is about the excess in everything. In the transcendentalists' fashion, freedom one pursues has nothing to do with the absolute version of it that disrespects the other—if any.



#### **4.4. Clairvoyance, the intellectual's journey toward a state of bliss**

Not so often, we encounter characters in contemporary visual artform who relentlessly resort to books as their source of inspiration. The relatively small number of instances we are exposed to readers or intellectuals in general, we notice that what they read is a different world from their daily experiences being recorded through the respective narratives. In this space of vacuum, we find it so interesting the way Chris McCandless embraces the books he reads as drives and inspiration in his life experience.

Chris is first and foremost defined as the intellectual figure in *Into The Wild*, a fact confirmed by his first appearance in the narrative as a graduate of Emory college. The event is well worked out by the composition of a scenery that pays much attention to the details of a recurrent event in the academe. One would initially develop the impression that Chris is just another product of one of the social institutions that construction our understanding of the world. Yet, just like Emerson and Thoreau who also graduated from a similar institution, theirs was Harvard college, Chris followed in such tradition. This is a very crucial point that should clarify and give justice to the transcendental movement and its peculiar way of addressing society and its institutions. Both Chris and his influences sought cultivation and embraced science, a fact that refutes many of the assumptions on their dogmatic orientation, namely their ascription as restricted religious persons. Education for them is revered and essential to the empowerment of one judgement capabilities. Essentially, such judgment resorts to the rational side of ones being. All this is clearly associated with Chris, whose

intellectual development at Emory college shows distinction. But what is more important about the transcendentalists is their conversion of intellect into practical manifestation through experiential practices. For this, we can see Chris holding books everywhere, but essentially referring to them in every single bit of his daily life.

The quote on truth that we have mentioned in the previous point, was actually evoked within one of Chris's road encounters with a family that we will highlight in more detail in subsequent parts of this thesis. What matters in this instance is that Chris when asked about the reasons he left everything behind, including family, money, and so on, he explained this by the fact of their restriction of one's freedom, making him cautious. Jan, the woman who asked was plain and simple in her thinking and advanced that everyone has to be a little cautious. And she added that one has to be fair and admits the family's role in one's life. Right away, in an intuitive manner, Chris evokes Thoreau's words on the supremacy of truth over fairness. We recall the quote in the following:

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. I thought that there was no need of ice to freeze them. They talked to me of the age of the wine and the fame of the vintage; but I thought of an older, a newer, and purer wine, of a more glorious vintage, which they had not got, and could not buy. (Thoreau, 2013, para. 59.31)

Thoreau's inclination is one of scientific nature, a fact that will be recorded through his impressive investigation and categorisation of plants and other natural phenomena he encountered in his own exploratory mission in Concord.

Alongside being a philosopher by innate genius visions, he cultivated intellect on natural history, rhetoric, and mathematics with a strong will, given the circumstances he lived in as a member of a financially modest family. In a catching to the eye manner, Chris follows such tradition to the extent he can, as his context present much complex difficulties. Such claim arises from the fact that social institution in American have evolved to greater dimensions than they were in the beginning of nation building. Today's America has moved from the incubator of other cultures wisdom to the producer of its own. Yet such process, when looked at from the perspective of history and civilisation is at its very beginning and no comprehensive conception of its nature can be realised, as we are for the time being located within the process on the making in terms of spatial cultural dimension. Science keeps being the drive of American culture today as much as it was in Thoreau's day. The fascination with the world discovery propels those who are ready to break new horizons of knowledge. However, what marks the transcendentalists in their undertaking is the combination of human faculties altogether as one entity in such process. That is to say, the spiritual side of being elevates the rational thinking to face reality with ethicality. Thus, all humans reach a sense of bliss that is essentially universal. In this sense, as we observe Chris's journey, we feel that he is trying as much as he could to follow this essentially good look at the world, but contextually very hard to apply. The cinematography of this particular artwork is indeed one that is meticulously worked out and shows the crew's devotion to art, as to make us really lean toward Chris's experience. Chris makes us think thoroughly over the need of relocating intellect into our life experience.

Chris illustrates through different stages of his journey how science can work hand in hand with the spiritual quest. Approaching nature in Thoreau's pattern is indeed a daring undertaking, yet Chris follows Emerson's call to embrace knowledge in a delicate way that pays attention to one's context and individualised vision. We think Chris made what he could to fulfil such framework, but not necessarily this would be an easy task or by definition a successful one. The journey he embarks on is one of massive difficulties that stretch throughout the narrative. Facing authorities in protected areas, the need for money in every single stage of rambling, the expectations of people around him, and so on are all hard elements that should take place in his awareness and dealt with in the safe manners. The difficulty of applying science is of paramount importance of the success he wants to reach in what he calls the "spiritual revolution." Reading books such as the Priscilla Russell Kari's ethnobotanic reference *Tanaina Plantlore* (1987) is something but the actual application of their content in the wilderness, as reference to life itself, is a completely different process that we will discuss in more detail as we go through Chris's encounter with nature

Science and spirituality intersect at one crucial vertex in which, to the transcendentals, a method of life interpretation is engendered allowing humans interpret life phenomena in a true manner. Chris shows distinction in this regard as he is apt to extricate the meaning behind social and psychological phenomena that occur in his own way. For this, when he encounters Jan (Catherine Keener) and Rainy (Brian Dierker) on the road and the latter asks for his explanation of

the reasons behind Jan's refusal to get involved emotionally with him, after some specific events that shaped her social and private life, Chris muses a bit then surprisingly provides an accurate insight that the man gets confused and astonished of the revealing truth he is hearing to the point he resembles him to the person of Jesus himself:

00:32:59,000 --> 00:33:01,700  
But, you know, she's got a story.  
00:33:02,600 --> 00:33:06,800  
We've been going through this thing,  
real quiet.  
00:33:09,500 --> 00:33:13,500  
So when we ran into you yesterday,  
00:33:14,000 --> 00:33:17,300  
this thing that we've been going  
through real quiet,  
00:33:18,400 --> 00:33:21,300  
she's talking about it.  
You know what I mean?  
00:33:21,800 --> 00:33:24,700  
- I think I do.  
- You think what?  
00:33:27,700 --> 00:33:28,700  
Well...  
00:33:31,800 --> 00:33:35,700  
Some people feel like  
they don't deserve love.  
00:33:36,100 --> 00:33:40,500  
They walk away quietly  
into empty spaces,  
00:33:42,100 --> 00:33:45,200  
trying to close the gaps to the past.  
00:33:45,400 --> 00:33:48,400  
That's a hell of an insight. Jesus!  
00:33:51,400 --> 00:33:54,400  
- You're not Jesus, are you?  
- Look who's talking. (Penn, 2007)

#### **4.5. Chris's return to nature: The Self away from society**

One's belonging to his society begins the day of his birth as he receives a name that his parents choose for him. Thus, belonging to society is closely tied with a name and other beliefs and customs that build what everyone in such community accepts as a peculiar identity. Since the transcendentalists, by definition, seek the core of things and what is intrinsic to humans as well as nature, the narrative of *Into The Wild* seems to deliberately emphasise the division between the essence and the social in every conception we encounter. We believe, it is for this reason that characters in such artwork let us dive into their perpetual struggle of self-definition as opposed to what society associate them with. In particular the protagonist of the film exhibits such dilemma in an explicit manner, starting with his very name that keeps changing throughout his journey that begins at the safety of home and ends at the dangers of the wilderness. Hence, the story of Chris is literally defined by a continuum that stretches between society and nature. One would say that in ordinary thinking these are completely different conceptions which are innately contradictory, but through transcendentalist lens opposites do not form division but they shape a unity in which each side has its own function. The form is always reduced in value to the benefit of its function and purpose. Something that in cinematic art, Bordwell asserts with no hesitation, as we discussed in the second chapter.

In our view, transcendentalism overlaps with the film structural form in a subtle manner as oppositions are used to give a certain sense of unity and harmony, not only to the narrative but to the experience being represented. For

this we see a great deal of dichotomies; one is telling about geographical poles, a second contrasts south and north, a third highlights the urban and the rural, a fourth distinguish the peaceful and the violent, a fifth accounts for the rational and the emotional, and a sixth on the machine and the craft. Chris advances in his journey facing each time a new phenomenon that is instantly marked by contrast or adding to previous experiences so that to join the remote poles together.

Chris's life at home was one of submission to the social standards in many regards. We see a portrait of him with his sister Carine, both wearing the way adults do. This is a clear reference to the way new comers to the world should follow in pattern those who preceded them. Wearing a suit for instance at the age of 5 or 7 has no utility or actual meaning but the assertion that this is the norm and the way one should wear and present himself to society. The outlook reappears again at college as everyone wears as the other. In a way this is a hyperbolic representation of the college as an imitation of a much bigger society. The way names were uttered at the day of graduation followed a musical pattern of pronunciation that manifested a form of repetition, as if names were just notes that abide by a given order and rhyme. As every graduate heard his name, he or she advanced to the podium to receive what a certain reward, a reference to the way society rewards those who strictly abide by the rules. The only one who broke free from the imposed patterns of notes and silence was Chris, who leaped in a way that everyone showed surprise. This was the sign that Chris is not willing to continue the performance he has been doing since his ascription to such society. As the ceremony was approaching its end, a scene calling for his imagination an

inner thought disclosed his total disapproval of the pattern of life everyone is expected to do and fulfil. This starts with his criticism to his own parents, who at this moment looked complement as perfect founders of an apparently successful happy family.

In Chris's life family functions as a microsome of the government, a notion that will occur repeatedly if not in his talk and conversation, it will be in his dreams and rumination. To our surprise, Chris the successful graduate is to leave the comforts of home toward a destination that was kept untold for a while. Through voice-overs, Carine, his confident sister, recurrently speaks on his behalf as he was concealed from a great deal of the enunciations, as a character in presence. Just as Schrader devises his transcendental style in cinema, a cinematic object that is hidden will call for the viewer's activation of his imagination and idiosyncratic expectations. Hence, we really wonder why is Chris leaving and where to? We instead of looking for the answer itself, we get close to Chris's experiential journey and we ponder over the way society hides truths from us. Gradually, Carine tells us about the lies that shaped the construction of their family. We come to understand that such social block functions as a cover to the unethical behaviour of a number of people, including the father, mother, and a woman they just talk about and mention her name a couple of times.

In such society, a person is reduced to the name he takes on; practically speaking, Marcia, as we are informed of her name, functions as a ghost. All what is associated with her is things that make us pushed away, as we prefer not to identify with her. On his part, Chris, as he embarks on his journey of self-



discovery, he starts with burning all the identification cards and other papers with his name on. Then, as he gets in a somehow distant safe place away from society, he gets rid of his car, removing its plate. Moreover, he burns the remaining bank notes, only to remind himself later on that there is no actual need for these “things” society imposes as necessary elements of one’s identity. Chris manages to get along without these for a good deal of the remaining of his journey, a fact that makes the audience rethink their perspective on the workings of society. Chris’s adventure exposes the extent to which humans have become programmed since their early social ascription to accept notions about themselves and about the world without question or inquiry. Through the dangers, we expect a man would face in the modern day, a sense of fear is engendered through the scenery. Aesthetically speaking, we start to get carried away beyond the material comfort to experience first-hand such artistic representation of life that is defined by our sense of being.

The signs of Thoreauvian practical transcendentalism, gets magnified as Chris, who previously hid his thinking and judgement of his society, turns into an explicit critic of the representative institutions. It seems that Chris refuses to participate in a social system with no protest as this makes him complicit in the implementation of unjust laws and rules. Therefore, Chris the innocent observer cedes place to the critic within who takes things at hand and embraces action as a method of advancement in life. This new self-revolutionary behaviour primarily appears through work and dialogues he deliberately gets involved in. In rural South Dakota, Wayne (Vince Vaughn) picks him up and together they build a

sincere friendship that will keep working in the background of the novel, as Chris recurrently keep his friend posted of the steps he is undertaking. Literally speaking Wayne provides a plethora of meanings that link Chris back with nature. Work and friendship are repeatedly set against a backdrop of grain elevation and landscapes boasting abundant crops. Through passionate talks, the two friends go into deep dialogues about inner drives and society. At surface level, Wayne shows loose engagement with serious matters, but as we follow his talks and actions, we sense his true to himself visions of the world as they are not tainted with the corruption of civilisation. In the following scene, his character has the function of a stimulator of Chris's thinking. By challenging and laying a playful atmosphere that harmonises rational with emotional sides, he gives opportunity to his friend to categorise and externalise the ideas that has haunted his thinking in a concrete manner:

00:46:42,300 --> 00:46:45,700  
You're just there, in that moment,  
in that special place and time.  
00:46:45,800 --> 00:46:47,000  
Yeah.  
00:46:47,100 --> 00:46:49,600  
Maybe when I get back,  
I can write a book about my travels.  
00:46:49,800 --> 00:46:50,700  
Why not?  
00:46:50,900 --> 00:46:52,900  
You know,  
about getting out of this sick society.  
00:46:53,000 --> 00:46:55,800  
- Society!  
- Society! (Penn, 2007)

With the help of Wayne, Chris finally spells out his criticism of society as one undergoing high levels of corruption. His ideas are further laid plain as Wayne inquires more. This time in this moment of revelation, Chris points out what he believes are the reasons behind the status of social decay. It appears that he is really touched by the way civilisation has become passive and corrupt because of the excess in material obsessions, a fact that is manifested through his repulse of all what is materialistic. As Wayne proposes money, he shows no real interest in the offer, but when asked whether he likes what he is doing, in reference to work in the grain field, he joyfully replies that he is delighted of being here and doing all this. Wayne shows satisfaction for being there as a helper and a true friend. Perhaps Wayne is no difference from Chris in terms of will for revelation, but he seems more pragmatic and declined to participate without going too far in his criticism of society. Yet, he shows clarity of vision and innate faculty of fact categorisation, a trait that alludes to his genius. Actually, to our surprise, we are to discover that he is involved in a secret activity related to satellite communication appliances. His closeness to earth as a grain grower, we think, has empowered his perception of truths as they are with no inflicted distortion. For this, when he was conversing with Chris on the latter's wished journey destination, he was precise enough to inquire whether his friend meant "Alaska" or the "city of Alaska." This is clear evidence of his informed and intellectual analysis that recalls for the daunting philosophical dialectics on nature and culture.

Ironically, the West, which has been framed after the Manifest Destiny to perennially represent the cradle of new experiences and freedoms in America, self-contradictory appears to Chris as gloomy and crowded in the image of the city of Los Angeles, a sign for his already metamorphosed state of revelation and transcendence perception faculty. The lights and big advertisement panels on the skyscrapers could not lighten the darkness and mystery of the city. The movements of the camera foster Chris's feeling of loss. Probably, Penn wants to let us capture Chris's process of identity metamorphosis from that given to him in the east to one that we should call for all our sides of being to search for. Indeed, the scenery in Los Angeles brings opposites to the expectations that we often meet or be exposed to in paradoxically filmic representation produced in Hollywood, just nearby Chris's actual location. To a great deal, Penn's artwork gets into a far cry in the experiential artistry. Penn seems to embrace much of Emerson's views on melting the opposites, engendering a cinematic ironic overtone.

We are invited to ponder over the way Chris is to disentangle himself from his entrapment in the city of Los Angeles. Deliberately such place was reduced in the narrative to an epitome of the consumerist industrialised America. There are absolutely no meaningful events taking place at this very stage of the story. No friends are made, no emotional involvement and no profession is solicited. The status of society is manifestly seen through the gloomy austere atmosphere of the city. A scene portraying the two oppositions, man and the city, brings Chris back to civilisation and alludes to his search for the self as he looks at the mirror. Moreover, because society has become superficial and the name is more

important than the person, Chris, who has become free of the learned identity, tells himself in a monologue: “I need a name.” Eventually, he thinks of “Alexander Supertramp” as a new name for the identity or rather the self he is searching for. This time, Chris is approaching the real self that he is, leaving no space or chance for others to define him. Opposition is turned into universality and called upon as historicity and futurism appear through the old name of historical Alexander the Great and the modern world’s fascination with superman, in an implicit allusion to Nietzsche’s “*ubermensch*.” Through a close shot that deliberately intimates us with Alexander, our imagination is called upon to workout possibilities of past-future overlapping in the “now,” a notion that we primarily discussed in the first chapter as essentially determinant to adherence to the transcendental project. One would wonder then, what is the drive that would uplift Supertramp from his pastness and propel him into his final destination?

Through swift cut cinematography, we are carried away from the city to scenes on the road to the north. Deleting the time between the two settings is a subtle way for revealing the drive behind Chris’s depart from the city toward Nature. Intuition, therefore, functions as the rationale behind Chris’s action in the background. We could see this happen again and again throughout the narrative that often resorts to the flashbacks and jump cuts between Chris’s stages of discovery. Actually, the whole narrative is structured in an intrinsically parallel way to such journey of revealing insights. The flashbacks and jump cuts actually serve as a unifying technique to bring the bits of memories and happenings together and, thus, unifying the plot to make it purely Aristotelian by excellence.

Calling for textual representation, we are introduced each time to a new chapter of Chris's life that is initiated and defined by a new experience, respectively and textually labelled as "my own birth," "adolescence," "manhood," "family," "getting of wisdom." In a clear manner, we come to gradually conceive Chris's longly hidden perception of the world as one that is intuitionally driven. The confusion that we revealed in the previous points on his coping with society, alluded to through its institutions, gets finally cleared. Chris ultimately ascribes himself to the stoic tradition that in contrast to pragmatism withholds the realisation of the ends to the benefits of the experience itself. Moreover, Chris himself takes the function of a refutation of the socially often accepted definition of personality through the appearances, a viewpoint that is heavily embraced and emphasised by Thoreau, as we discussed in the first chapter.

#### **4.6. Transcendence, the dichotomy of the personal and the public**

A close reading of and thinking about *Into The Wild's* narrative reveals its textuality as one that is based on the workings of dualities. They function in the narrative's background as much as they do throughout the current study of the film. We intentionally attempt to put them into the use to reveal the power of the Transcendental way of thinking. The very fact that they have a critique utility beside their applicability, in itself, is a duality. Therefore, our undertaking of spotting dualities makes it easy to unweave the way the philosophy behind creates a certain unity of the meanings emanating from the narrative. Among these dualities is the personal versus the public manifestation of Transcendentalism in *Into The Wild*.

The scenery of the film is actually built upon contrasts and comparisons that both converge to form a unity of thought. Flashbacks go between the domestic and the public spheres to evoke intimate and public relationships in their turns reflect the thinking and perceptions which are naturally hidden in the psyche of humans. For this, the film opens with Billie awakening from a dream of her son Chris. Her intimate thoughts are right away revealed to her husband, notifying about the way her marital relationship is capable of revealing and disclosing what is going on in her mind. Not for long they both appear in a public space that of their son's graduation ceremony. The way they act and present themselves to their peers at the college recites also about the way they perceive and eventually interact with society. What we can see about them is a certain consistency throughout the narrative, accounting for their stagnation and civilisational paralysis. The perpetual struggles that keep happening at home foster this idea as they show no sign of personal development. On other hand, Chris who supposedly belongs to the same world as his parents creates through his active participation in the narrative the second pole that contrasts that of his parents. Through his own private and public spheres his acts in a double layer of representation. The first one is he versus his family, while the second is he the one defined by birth versus the awakened self.

The portrayal of Chris is primarily Penn's stylistic method that turns dualities into unity. His boundaries as an individual fade away as the core of his thinking and beliefs come to be released by intimate persons he is to encounter throughout his life and adventure journey. We cannot almost make disparity

between the two circles of meaning negotiation happening throughout his undertaking. One is going on as a subjective leaning toward the world and the second is his interactive participation in a good number of conversations with family members, especially his sister and close friends as we will go through in more detail in the remaining of this chapter.

In line with early American transcendentalists, Chris is fascinated with mystery and repulsed by the defined territories, both physical and metaphysical. This is definitely the reason that makes him decide upon Alaska the farthest possible destination of his envisioned adventure. Despite America's richness in terms of similar naturalistic spaces, he preferred the one which is less explored and domesticated. Everyone around gets surprised of his choice that to them appears irrational. In a deliberately woven scenery, his choice is hyperbolically displayed as an escape from the outer world to isolation.

In this context, isolation follows in pattern many transcending perspectives of the background philosophy. That is to say the very resort to isolation takes meanings that go beyond the derogative conception of such stand as one of weakness and failure. The end is to raise one's preparedness for the negotiation of a spiritually heightened position in society. Such inclination vis-à-vis society embraces Tocqueville's framework of individuality that is centred on the need for meditative vantage. As we discussed in the first chapter, such plan provides one with the ability to make a step backward so that perception gets a wider perspective that is clarified first from within, then applied to society from that acquired pristine knowledge of the world. Also, this is a way of approaching



reality that is advocated by Emerson, who often calls for the initiation of experiences anew.

Isolation seems to work in realms beyond the personal to recall for Americans intrinsic drive to separation from old kingly laws that often suppress individuality. Accordingly, Chris demonstrates throughout his journey a clear resistance to the laws that exhibit a high to low vertical direction of imposition. In a scene using a tilt shot, such verticality is manifested through the camera's scrolling movement from the upper side of the wall on which a portrait of President Bush was hanged downward to a forest officer, who was making a phone call, in reference to the wired instructions. Chris asks the officer about the schedule for river paddling, as he wanted to take the river further toward the south. To his surprise, Chris is told that the next trip will be in twelve years. The scene is once again revealing in terms of the opposition between earthly authority laws and higher laws of freedom. Chris as well as Thoreau before him evidently embrace Emerson's preference of the natural laws which he implicitly compared to the power behind the workings of rivers:

The stream of human affairs flows its own way, and is very little affected by the activity of legislators. What great masses of men wish done, will be done; and they do not wish it for a freak, but because it is their state and natural end. There are now other energies than force, other than political, which no man in future can allow himself to disregard. There is direct conversation and influence. A man is to make himself felt, by his proper force. (Emerson, 2015, para. 800.27)

At this point we can see that within Chris's psyche two arenas of law struggles were taking place. One that is about his close-to-nature intuitive

impulses and the other on the frictions between low social conventions and high laws of nature. The reference to these two overlapping circles of transcendence is put forward by Worley who notes that readers of such philosophy are already comfortable with:

Readers have, with considerable justification, long been comfortable with the description of Emerson and Thoreau as transcendentalists. Their writings are replete with appeals either to personal transcendence in the form of a mystical, interior access to the first principles of the universe or to a sort of public transcendence of contemporary law and morality in favor of higher laws. (Worley, 2001, p. vii).

Our reference to kingly laws is not necessarily something related to the monarchies per se, but it is about the way one subdues himself to his ascription to the mode of world creation that is based on the monarch as the higher ruler and the subjects at the bottom of the social order. In such view, everything is made viable and determined by a power that is central and absolute, be it a ruler, an institution, a government, whatever it is. The irony is that in America of the closing decade of twenty first century as well as in early transcendentalists time, individuals seem to accept such notion of world structure that ironically contradicts the very construction of American as a democratic republic. Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America* shows his fascination with the clear distinction of the American spirit of freedom that obviously contradicts the Europeans of the nineteenth century vision of the world as one monarchical by nature. To our surprise, history seems to repeat itself in Toynbee's civilisation patterns of rise and fall. While this shows a certain degree of confusion and contradiction on the actual nature of American society, whether one of complete

adherence to democracy or one of decay toward a previous state of absolute power, this actually falls within Emerson's vision on the dynamics of society as active ingredients toward the state of transcendence. Thus, Chris incarnates within his character the perpetual struggle between the low and higher laws, be they internal or external. This is actually, the real power that keeps his journey going on, despite the huge apparent obstacles that the narrative keeps revealing at every single stage of development.

The circle of history seems to get back to its very beginning, calling for memories and agonies and inquiring for a new Manifest Destiny. Americans as always are driven by escapism from the very circumstances of fear, restrictions, and despotism. The core of American thinking has invariably been revolutionary and individually inspired from within. Dreams perhaps wither but they never die. Chris who, since the days he was a child, wandered in the streets away from home and sought freedom, just in the way America searched for it two centuries ago as a nascent nation. Envisioning a spiritual revolution, and eventually acting following the footsteps of early American visionary thinkers, he sets about a daring westward adventure. Leaving Virginia, the emblem of the east and its pastness, he declares his renewal of the mythic quest for freedom, not as a wishful thinking, but in an explicit manner in the following passage:

00:22:14,700 --> 00:22:19,000  
"It should not be denied that being  
footloose has always exhilarated us.  
00:22:20,100 --> 00:22:22,900  
"It is associated in our minds  
with escape  
00:22:24,100 --> 00:22:27,900

"from history and oppression and law  
and irksome obligations  
00:22:29,500 --> 00:22:31,200  
"Absolute freedom  
00:22:33,500 --> 00:22:35,800  
"And the road has always led west." (Penn, 2007)

#### **4.7. Chris's inward pilgrimage: Freedom and stoicism**

*Into The Wild* is abundant with scenes in which Chris McCandless expresses his thoughts with an explicit "I." In many ways, this is a Hegelian phenomenology of spirit stressing being and experience as a means toward meaning and self-definition. For Hegel, to think does not mean to think as an abstract "I," but as an "I" which, at the same time, signifies being-in-itself, or it has the meaning of being an object to itself, or of conducting itself *vis-à-vis* the objective essence in such a way that its meaning is that of the being-for-itself of that consciousness for which it is (Hegel & Pinkard, 2018, p. 117).

Superficiality, or the other word for what Thoreau calls "appearances," marks today the majority of the characterisation defining the filmography. The focus on the form in its common basic meaning has led to a shallow portrayal that favours emotions and empathy. A great deal of films, therefore, build their narratives on the action taking place and the fulfilment of audience expectations. That necessarily engenders linear plots which are marked and defined by clear expectancy. In contrast to all of this, *Into The Wild* features the character of Chris who presents a certain high level of complexity that probably repulses the shallow-minded audiences, but, in our view, definitely would appeal to sincerely thoughtful audiences. The multiple-layer plot masterfully plays with and in time

as to stretch it unexpectedly or to compress it at surprising points of the narrative. The defining moments of Chris' life converge to a stream-like phenomenon that dives directly to his inner worlds, convincingly taking our interest and informed thought to the same direction, to consciousness itself. Such skill of characterisation is not stemming out of vacuum, but from a filmmaker who is well aware and skilful enough as an actor before being a filmmaker. Penn's two decade stretching academy awards witness for his ascription to meritocracy.

Penn's way to point out Chris's complexity of character goes through his focus on two philosophic entities which are extremely defining. Chris's thought on freedom and stoicism work throughout the latter's journey as two forces that contribute in paving his journey. In a transcendental tradition, we look at the two concepts as a unity in the sense that the pursuit of freedom in modern times has become a pathway that is abundant with obstacles and resistive powers that hinder one's leaning even to his inner world. In continuation to our argument on the ethical decay of contemporary society, in the image of America, one's aspiration for freedom is challenged as the shared consciousness of society would not allow rebellion against the laws that have developed through centuries. America itself is but a continuation of a long-rooted tradition of social definition of the individuals who make its elementary constituency. Chris embodies the individual who got the bliss of being chosen by certain circumstance to attempt his way for freedom in the midst of the established laws and norms. Chris has the chance to be a rigorous reader of a number of serious thinkers and writers in the image of Thoreau, Tolstoy, Pasternak, and London. The heaviest impact, we

believe, goes to the former, but all readings were influential and synthesised by evidence of Chris's action and talks that we are exposed to in a good number of scenes, including the following:

00:09:04,600 --> 00:09:05,700  
Hello?  
00:10:11,400 --> 00:10:15,000  
Is there anybody here?  
00:10:17,900 --> 00:10:19,300  
Guess not!  
00:11:28,000 --> 00:11:30,100  
Two years he walks the earth.  
00:11:37,400 --> 00:11:39,700  
No phone, no pool, no pets,  
00:11:40,900 --> 00:11:42,300  
no cigarettes.  
00:11:59,800 --> 00:12:01,500  
Ultimate freedom.  
00:12:03,400 --> 00:12:07,400  
An extremist. An aesthetic voyager  
00:12:09,200 --> 00:12:13,400  
whose home is the road. (Penn, 2007)

In this passage, the union of the narrative finds place in one important moment in which Chris stands on the abandoned Fairbanks bus 142 in the wilderness of Alaska, spelling out his first moment of real freedom. The importance of the enunciation is made as the communicative situation involves not only Chris and his found self, but we as audience, the ultimate target of this awakening project. Through the metonymies of phones and cigarettes, the corruption and pollution of society is finally left behind. While such passage clearly reflects Emerson's sense of revelation it is by no means the ultimate goal of *Into The Wild* as a project, in that, we think, the film has no teleological orientation. In contrast, it is the path leading here that is most important and

interesting. As such, the here or what we evoked as “the now” in the first chapter is emphasised and put into the centre of the narrative through a huge referral to the technique of flashbacks. This actually serves two ends; one is unifying for the narrative as to make it Aristotelian and the second is meditation. As we discussed earlier, the time reduction provides new meanings, which in this follow in pattern slow cinema. The final effect is an effective immersion of the viewer in the experience. We think this instance of the film succeeds to a great deal in applying such mixture of cinematic strategies to the benefit of the meditative purpose.

Our reference to the non-teleological ends of the film is justified by our understanding of freedom as envisioned through the readings Chris has performed. Among these, is the notion of freedom as that sense of the self which is detached from all the memories and meanings that filled the mind throughout the years of one’s social development. Chris’s explicit note on the ultimate freedom as opposed to the wired connection to society through the many institutions we attempted to evoke in the previous points of this chapter, is a clear enunciation of his idea on the real purpose of his pilgrimage. While on the surface such journey was like a trip of a wanderer seeking pleasant moments or luxury, the bird’s eye shot placing Chris on top of the bus in the midst of the universe tells us much about his sense of union that was lost because of the very symbols of corrupt civilisation he mentioned in the same scene. In this context, freedom which intertwines with the self, the universe, takes a completely transcendent meaning that shakes our common understanding of it as one related to choices and possibilities.

Freedom which was announced from the very beginning as a project end leading westward works in the background as one that paradoxically involves no choices but to follow intuition and take the road toward the self, as the convergence point of all plot layers in the making. Chris's final loud shout "ultimate freedom" dispels all speculations about his project and tells it loud and clear that he never hesitates in his undertaking. Thus, we can deduce that Chris's notion of freedom evokes the meaning of intuition combined with an attitude of no hesitation. In other words, Chris listens to the call of the wild within himself and like a stream of water or a cloud in the sky embraces the real freedom, the one that means the only path of life that is void of choices, but the union with reality. Alaska the wild space, which to a good deal kept itself pristine, provides Chris with the possibilities of finding himself as no dictated laws are to distort his inward contemplation. The narrative could foster this unavailability of choices through the elaboration of Chris' escapist project from his very society in a series of hitchhiking stations which are very smooth, involving refined people who fuse into the scenery with no calculations or meditated pretexts. Even when Chris seems to take a decision that is unpleasant to us, as it appears unkindly to an appealing character like his sister Carine, not long after, we get the sense that Chris actually did not interfere in the arrangements of life as they were meant to be. Moreover, meeting the friends he makes exemplifies the way happenings occur in life when it is not corrupted. For instance, he meets Rainy and Jan twice without any calculations, or at least for the second meeting, one would expect some search effort, a thing that was not pointed out or revealed at all. Examples in this sense are many and purposeful, but for the sake of illustration, we mention



Franz (Hal Holbrook) the later friend who out of nowhere wakes up only to promptly provide Chris with much needed props for his Alaskan journey, in the image of the rifle that would serve him pretty much in his hunting undertaking.

Hesitation seems to be the counterpart of freedom in Chris's eyes. Thus, in a dramatic scene that features Franz's offer for Chris to be his adoptive son, our expectations are put aside, as Franz keeps talking and Chris just looking at him in an alerting silence. A meditative sense is evoked calling for our attention, letting us think over the situation and placing ourselves in the midst of the experience. Almost, we as audience take place as participants in this enunciation as it appeals at first glance to pity and identification with a man, we come know about his loss of family in the following passage:

02:13:10,100 --> 02:13:11,700

Well, my friend.

02:13:14,200 --> 02:13:15,200

Yep.

02:13:19,700 --> 02:13:22,100

I had an idea.

02:13:23,300 --> 02:13:27,900

You know, my mother was an only child

02:13:28,800 --> 02:13:30,600

and so was my father,

02:13:31,300 --> 02:13:35,500

and I was their only child,

02:13:38,900 --> 02:13:41,600

so when I'm gone,

I'm the end of the line.

02:13:42,700 --> 02:13:44,800

My family will be finished.

02:13:48,500 --> 02:13:53,800

What do you say you let me adopt you? (Penn, 2007)

Expectations, a psychological phenomenon that we can safely associate with the common socially thinking, are shattered away as Chris's reply dispels and prevent any horizon's possibility of acceptance in terms of Franz's offer. His unfavourable and unexpected reply to the proposition of a man who appeared in total harmony with him seals the fate of Chris's journey and spells out both a will for freedom and a vision for freedom in the making. Such duality is engendered from the very fact of time play that is taking place as a constituent of the narrative, in that, we were recurrently transported to the bus scene in a good number of flashbacks and jump cuts.

#### **4.8. Wayne: The joy of concrete friendship**

The traits of a person, his true essence, and his inner perspectives toward the external world are not often apparent through a detached perspective. As humans, the bonds that exist between those who are naturally or compulsory close, not necessarily in terms of space, take different forms and functions according to the context and the shared features, projects, and so on. For this, based on his position in the narrative, the character of Wayne plays a good deal in developing our conception of the film's protagonist, Chris.

Manifesting a presence of magnitude in *Into The Wild*, the character of Wayne takes the burden of being the vertex receiving the tug of personal assertion versus social restriction. Such tension is emphasised a great deal by Wayne, the man who is responsible for the vocations of a number of people in his community. After a few conversations with Chris, we come to recognise he is Chris's closest friend. In a similar way of later Jonze's flash call for characters of magnitude,

studied in the previous chapter, Wayne's active contribution to the narrative shows distinction and a call for meditation over man's placement in contemporary society. In contrast to Chris's "father," who works for a governmental institution and abides much by the rules of society, he is a free man who works the soil and is there to speak up his mind and get linked to the real. Interestingly, the true culture is one that is derived from the rootedness of the very vocation of farmers. The word "culture" finds its roots in French language with reference to man's activity and work on land and farming. Throughout Wayne's dialogues, he shows a concrete relationship with all whom he is surrounded with. He is loved because he is a giver and a helper. He earns the admiration and respect of both his friends and community. More importantly, he provides concrete solutions that stem from his real experience that spanned many years. He tells us recurrently that he travelled through the vast areas of America. He manifests his knowledge of the world and proves he is a man who is in the know of remote places, in reference to his wide knowledge. The following scene shows his awareness of the impact of society on nature, as he makes distinction between the pristine Alaska and the socially-impacted Alaska:

00:45:52,800 --> 00:45:56,000

Outdoorsman. What's your fascination  
with all that stuff?

00:45:56,100 --> 00:45:57,700

I'm going to Alaska.

00:45:58,100 --> 00:46:01,000

Alaska, Alaska? Or city Alaska?

00:46:01,100 --> 00:46:03,600

Because they do have markets  
in Alaska.

00:46:03,700 --> 00:46:06,900

The city of Alaska. Not in Alaska.  
In the city of Alaska, they have markets.  
00:46:07,000 --> 00:46:10,200  
No, man. Alaska, Alaska. (Penn, 2007)

Wayne's assertion and independent thinking stems from his true individuality and awareness of the construction of society. His closeness to earth through his practical vocation as a grain elevator made him free himself from the instructed politicised reality. This internalised status that marks contemporary workings of society is by no means a new phenomenon, but it traces back to the early forms of society. In this sense, as we referred to earlier, American society manifests in a clear manner the circularity of history. Wayne, therefore, who seems to be in harmony with the original state of being succeeds in avoiding what Findlay (2002) refers to as the phenomenological dimension that seeks "to illuminate human social and political reality" (Findlay, 2002, p. 15).

Friendship through transcendental lens is not a mere bond that emulates kinship. Despite the fact that there are some truths in that, but such relationship primarily provides one with extreme joy and happiness that ironically will metamorphose into utility. In turn, such sense of fulfilment cannot be true unless one discovers what truly he is. Transcendence is all about crossing the boundaries and friendship is the means by which one realises such connectedness that dismisses egotism. In contrast to mechanised relationships that have resulted from the industrialisation and its consequences on society, friendship when it is true and sincere manifests its organic nature, just in the way nature itself exhibits harmony through the natural arrangements of its very membership entities. If in

ordinary ways, one looks at himself through the mirror of his own society and proceeds to comply with expectancy, for the transcendentalists, friends form a unity that is marked by harmony and aiming at a higher project in life. Actually, this very idea on friendship traces back to Aristotelian thinking and seems to be fully embraced by the transcendentalists. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle, (Aristotle, 2013) equates the value of friendship with that of life itself, as he advocates in the following:

For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods; even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need friends most of all; for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends? Or how can prosperity be guarded and preserved without friends? (Aristotle, 2013, para. 32.149)

In Thoreauvian thinking, friendship is central, defining, and lasting. Thoreau himself provides us with an impressive exemplary relationship with his friend Emerson. Their connection is in many ways resembling that of Aristotle with Plato. The two versions converge in their ends and ways and both elevate ethics to the detriment of the hedonistic drive. What joins the former friends goes beyond their ascription to the same university or city. If it were so, the connection would probably wither by the end of studies and the common interests, if we consider Aristotle's definition to the kind of friendship that joins people during the shared entrepreneurship. What connects them is also not the pursuit of pleasures and hedonistic ends, simply because as poets they fully embrace an aesthetic judgment that cannot live side by side with such pleasure drive, an idea that we evoked in our study of Walt's taste. Speaking of taste leads us to expect

that both share the same sources of inspiration and influence. Thus, what applies for Thoreau applies also for Emerson, and by extension to their modern times' readers in the image of Chris and his friend Wayne. Revealing his sources of inspiration, Thoreau tells us more about his root intellectual affinities in the following:

I read Cudworth I find I can tolerate all, — atomists, pneumatologists, atheists, and theists, — Plato, Aristotle, Leucippus, Democritus, and Pythagoras. It is the attitude of these men, more than any communication, which charms me. It is so rare to find a man musing. But between them and their commentators there is an endless dispute. But if it come to that, that you compare notes, then you are all wrong. As it is, each takes me up into the serene heavens, and paints earth and sky. Any sincere thought is irresistible; it lifts us to the zenith, whither the smallest bubble rises as surely as the largest. (Aristotle, 2013, para. 501.417)

Chris seldom shows fascination with people he meets, but the exception to the rule is manifest through his outstanding friendship with Wayne. Not just expressed as thoughts or gazes, but this is recorded right away after the first scene in the film. Thus, a bridging shot introduces Chris's narrative voice that appears through text on the screen in parallel with the train advancing steadily, with reference to Chris's journey of self-discovery. We read in this opening scene that takes the function of an additional epigraph, the bright yellow text of a letter, freely displayed on the screen. It accounts for the strong bonds between the two friends, which are essentially based on virtue and a profoundly shared ideals on life experience. The letter reads as follows:

00:01:47,000 --> 00:02:58,000  
Wayne,

Greetings from Fairbanks, arrived here two days ago. It was very difficult to catch ride in the Yokon territory, but I finally got here. Picked up a new book on the local Flora and Fauna. I'm prepared and have stocked all necessary comforts to live off the land for a few months. Might be a very long time before I return South. Just wanted to let you know, you're a great man. (Penn, 2007)

The letter imbeds pure feelings of recognition that seek no reward, but to give credit to the person who provided shelter and love, with no calculations. Watching the two conversing is of great delight to the viewer. Almost, one would forget he is dealing with an artwork as he gets transported to another place in which that union between feelings and judgement detaches him from the actual tainted world with distrust and futility. Wayne represents sincerity and joy in a pleasant way. Despite his properties which look vast and thriving business that stretches to the Alaskan markets, he keeps his feet on the ground and, more importantly, brings delight to the people around him through his sense of laughter. To him, in a Kantian tradition, there must be a free play that combines judgement with emotion. For this, he is all the time optimistic and the smile never leaves his face. No wonder then, he calls himself "Mr. Happy" and, to our surprise, he faces the authorities as they come to take him for custody in a completely indifferent stoic manner. He goes further to call for our sense of laughter as a policeman approaches him to supposedly take away his freedom. Yet, as we mentioned before, his taste for the beauty of life cannot be tainted or distorted when he eventually becomes a prisoner, for the only killer of art is hedonism. Prison can restrict one's movement and physical freedom, but the spirit will always remain free. For this very reason, Wayne pays no attention to himself being taken for imprisonment. He knows truly the self within and he is assertively

assured that he will perennially stay “Mr. happy.” In his image, Chris shows no signs of sorrow, but instead listens to his words as, ironically, the authorities are taking him to the prison. Words this time turn into action and propel him to carry on his journey South first and North last, according to his friend’s experientially informed advice and recommendations. The perennial nature of their friendship is stressed as Wayne renews his job offer for his friend in case he comes back. This means also that his beliefs are strong enough to resist the test of time. A true believer in the power within can be put down for a while, but he will not be defeated, as presented in the following passage:

00:51:35,700 --> 00:51:36,800  
- Let's go.  
- Sorry, boys.  
00:51:36,900 --> 00:51:39,100  
We're gonna have to shut down  
for a little while.  
00:51:39,200 --> 00:51:41,900  
Alex, you come back  
and work for me any time you want.  
00:51:42,000 --> 00:51:44,700  
Gil's got your checks, guys.  
I shouldn't be away too long. (Penn, 2007)

#### **4.9. Rainey and Jan: Exposing the phoney family**

In a Thoreauvian tradition of mathematical precision, Penn endeavours not only to define family, but to define what it is not. Rainey (Brian Dierker) and Jan (Catherine Keener) while at surface level play the roles of casual friends whom Chris haphazardly meets in his westward journey, they, through their acts and thought, provide some of the safest moments and peace that the adventurer desperately seeks. We have placed their study in this particular space right after



our discussion of Wayne's incarnation of sincere friendship to build on the Aristotelian notion of deep friendship as a default tenet of the ideal family. That is much of the principles we evoked in there are applicable to this kind of friendship. Thus, no wonder Rainey brings to the forth concepts that would differentiate a high project of relationships with one that is corrupt and by consequence represents how family has become phoney in a yet again ethically decaying society.

Family is the epitome of society and much of our ideas on one applies to the other in different scales. Among its main functions is the definition of the new-borns. This would be of no interest to this study if such process encompassed a spontaneous development of the child's sense of identity. When looked at with an eye of scrutiny that is informed with transcendental foundations, the process of identification reveals itself as one that is defect. Such functional feature of the family swerves from the original nature of things, making parents intervene in a mechanical way as to direct the child into an artificial sense of identity. To accept this identification, the child receives perpetually a set of rules and laws that foster such beliefs and push him to his expected function in society. In return of this process of rule implementation and servitude to the higher form of social gathering that we call society, parents require and expect love from their children. For this, in a discussion in which Chris and his virtual family, Jane addresses Chris like her child and reminds him that he should be grateful to his parents for making him a good boy, representing good citizens, as the following passage illustrates:

00:29:30,967 --> 00:29:33,051  
Where are your mom and dad?  
00:29:36,055 --> 00:29:38,265  
Living their lies somewhere.  
00:29:41,269 --> 00:29:43,812  
You look like a loved kid. Be fair.  
00:29:44,981 --> 00:29:46,064  
Fair?  
00:29:47,066 --> 00:29:48,900  
You know what I mean.  
00:29:51,946 --> 00:29:54,197  
I'll paraphrase Thoreau here.  
00:29:55,201 --> 00:29:59,496  
"Rather than love, than money,  
than faith,  
00:29:59,581 --> 00:30:03,625  
"than fame, than fairness,  
00:30:06,046 --> 00:30:07,629  
"give me truth." (Penn, 2007)

Truth is declared in this passage as the purpose of Chris's investigation that starts from his questioning of the sincerity of his own family, with regard to ethics that basically involve fairness. In this instance, he shows an alerting indifference and disinterestedness to Jane's question that marks his determination to dissociate himself from his old family. Our qualification of Chris's behaviour as such is quite divergent from persons being uninterested. The latter type might be ascribed to some faulty inclination or decaying morality, but Chris's very disentanglement from the dialectics of his doomed belonging to the microcosm of society reveal a transportation of his thinking to higher realms which are sought only by those who have some readiness to revelation. The play of oppositions in concept production appears at two different levels in this very scene. As viewers, we are immersed in the confines of a familial atmosphere as the fire provides a tender warmth around a simple dinner occasion during which a

smooth interchange of thoughts and opinions spontaneously takes place. Then, at a different level, our attention is called to make some contemplation about the meanings evoked by Chris's complex character. On the one hand, Jan points out the bodily part of Chris, referring to his appearance as one that looks good and seemingly taken care of. On the other hand, Chris makes a leap from within to display his focus on the essence of questions that reveal metaphysical dimensions when linked to truth.

Contrasts between Chris's biological family and what we refer to as his virtual family contribute to a great extent in the building of the narrative's texture. More importantly, there is a certain style that imbeds flips, with reference to Emerson's revered polar nature of the World. Thus, Walt's family appears genuine and eventually turns out phoney and Rainey's calls for pity then blossoms and infuse happiness. The narrative keeps engendering some reversal of views that account for the possibilities of seeing the World in different ways. In the light of this, we can sense that the main feature that separates the two conceptions of family is their very structure. The first takes the attributes of a thing, form and consistency, while for the second frees itself from regulations and embraces the dynamics of nature. We could infer this very separation from the fact that Walt's family is from the outset of the film represented as one that is settled in a well-defined home. On the one hand, almost all Walt's appearances take place in the confines of his house and, if not, they include institutions that define society as a whole and innately display their rootedness in the history of the city, including the church and the university. On the other hand, Wayne's family makes its first

appearance on the road and keeps popping up that way. Even if the family is not moving, their van often sets the backdrop of the scene. Besides, the scenery that features such family often involves the sea and its defining waves.

What matters more about the family as main brick in the fabric of society is its role and approach in preparing the children in the process of social integration. Here things differ between an ordinary understanding of the children and one that is transcendent. The first look at them as new comers to this World, in desperate need for some preparation and thorough consideration of time as a decisive dimension that sets objectives in the future. Hence, no wonder Chris, despite all troubles at home that often evoke domestic violence and lack of morality, seems in the beginning as doomed to wait for graduation and even higher studies, an idea that we are wrongly driven to expect in a number of scenes. In line with this, Chris actually reassures his parents that his grades are high enough to allow him studies in Harvard College of Law. They, in turn, show complete satisfaction as their plans appeared going in the right direction and as initially plotted. In many ways, this is the very situation that prevailed two centuries ago in America and led the founding fathers of Transcendentalism to repel the status quo of institutionalised education in America. That is to say, this condition keeps the youth attached to the institutions and their dogmatic views on the world at the expense of approaching life in a practical manner and in a timely way. In the same way Harvard College did not appeal to Emerson and Thoreau to stay, Chris shows a phoney interest in pursuing his studies in the College of Law. Probably, at the moment he refers to this idea, his resistance to social norms and

readiness for revelation was premature and, in the making, but he did not lack determination and stoic tenets of patience and assurance.

Eventual happenings in the film definitely confirm that Chris has decided to reject the socially recognised idea that the person is put in probation and needs complete adherence to the social norms and codes to reach what people refer to as success. Again, in ordinary thinking, success might be confused with material intakes and pleasures. Walt for instance seems driven to work very hard to better his social standing through his properties. Ironically, his very kids and wife seem to be objectified through his perspective. What might be called discussion with them turn out to be one direction talks that never fruit any compromise. In a subtle manner, this is definitely one of the reasons Chris perennially manifests a sense of disinterestedness in his father's talks. The graduation day, which seems one of those Aristotelian unifying moments that reveal much about the plot of the work, and by extension, one's life, Chris retrieves his voice and speaks loud of his rejection of the commodification of the World. In a rebellious tone, he declares it out loud, "I don't want anything...Okay...These things, things, things, things" (Penn, 2007).

Our analogy of Chris to the person who is expected to follow a certain number of guidelines and rules to fulfil the destined role in society is purposefully calling for the notion of person instead of the individual. In other words, society tends to define a human being as a person. While there is some truth about this denotative meaning in that the word person from the Greek "persona" means the mask. Thus, everyone in society needs to put on a mask so that he hides what is

inside. Yet, ironically the modern society thinks of the person not as a mask in its original sense but as some confined features with a body. The idea is that the more society develops the more concepts swerve from their original referent. No wonder then, the Transcendentals, to a great deal, prefer not to contradict or reject oppositions, or what they call poles of phenomena. They are very aware of the truth of things and they consequently find no difficulty in showing disinterest in actual conceptualisations they are quite sure of their failure to test the change of time. In this sense, Chris gets rid of the mask he received in his early stages of development and opens his arms to the freedom of weaving the mask of his choosing that a dynamic family like Rainey's can offer.

Rainey manifest a clear readiness for revelation and acceptance of the diversity of thoughts and beliefs. His portrayal as a free agent is complemented with his refined taste. No wonder then, the man is recurrently placed in the midst of art performances and withing the company of books. All this is a accompanied with a sense of simplicity that brings him close to nature of things that is pristine and untamed. Such qualities are subtly woven in the narrative of the film so to make him a new source of inspiration to Chris. In the scene that we previously evoked, as an exemplar of Chris's ability to do the interplay of science and spirituality, Rainey actually helps Chris practicing what Kant calls free play through his very readiness to revelation. That is a reminder of great philosophers who helped their mentors to develop and extend their thinking, in the image of Emerson and Thoreau or, even beyond that in history, Aristotle and his mentor Plato.

To give her credit, Jan consolidates Rainey's role as a real mother who cares much about the well-being of her son. Her love for Chris is equated to her love for her kid who never shows up in the screen. In many ways, this is a strong emphasis on the spiritual bond that links her with her child. There is actually, no need to account for the bodily definition of love as her emotions infuse the moments, we encounter her in the narrative. Her appearance takes the form of hide and seek, with reference to the Asian philosophies that conceive the world as a game in which the divinity is not necessarily present all the time, but it intervenes in a flash form as to empower humans and give sense to their lives. In the same manner, Jan seems to incarnate that spiritual power that gave Chris a sense to his life and will to carry on his journey towards self-discovery and more importantly happiness. We are to get to know later on that Chris realises how happy he was when he was in the company of Jan and Rainey.

Chris's virtual family represents what his biological family is not. It is a family that knows how "to live deep and *suck out all the marrow of life*" (Thoreau, 2013), to use Thoreau's words. In our view, this family has delivered much to enrich Chris's life, especially its spiritual dimension. The filmmaker made it clear that there is no materialistic aspect to such relationship in that Chris refuses an offer to accept money after he has worked for Rainey for some time, selling books. The way Rainey proposes some money was not intended or stressed for he stopped talking right away Chris said "No." The short dialogue shows politeness and the good faith of Rainey as nothing compelled him to do such offer in the first place, especially since he is providing Chris with much more if we are to consider

the materialistic side of things, as we are conditioned to think in the ordinary way. What is important, however, in the work proposed by Rainey is that this very vocation reveals much of the activity itself as it represented not the lucrative ends of jobs we often encounter. Purposefully, we are invited to watch Chris enjoying reading books and coming up with interesting conversations with people whom we feel so close and connected. This is a manifest idea that stresses how such family seeks real pleasure that needs no money, but disciplines. Chris finds it a very joyful experience as he divides his time between reading and enjoyment of musical performances of the people sharing camps with the Rainey's.

#### **4.10. Beauty and aesthetic autonomy**

Beauty infuses the narrative of *Into The Wild* in a remarkable way. Despite the fact that many of the events take place in urban settings, nature reappears not just as a backdrop but it overwhelms the scenery to practically replace the artificial outlook of man-made dwellings. The defining moments of the Chris's journey always are displayed through and within beautiful manifestations of nature, whether in magnificent mountains or stretched sea horizons. The way Penn uses his cameras to capture such beauty has a great impact on our experience of the happenings taking place. Often, bird-eye angle shots provide us with omniscient-like point of views that unify our conception of the reality in the making. In this sense, beauty becomes the object of our evaluation and, hence, appeals to our involvement in an individual way. We as viewers become prepared to interpret it according to our accumulated sensory experience that is joined with



our judgement faculty, as to fulfil the Kantian premise of subjectivity in aesthetic experience.

John (2012) makes an interesting investigation into the power of Beauty in terms of the development of the receiver's autonomy of judgement. She goes further to describe the effect of the beautiful on one's life experience as "aesthetic autonomy"(John, 2012). We find her view concordant in perspective with the transcendental project that often relies on the beautiful not as an object per se but as a window to other dimensions of perception that ordinary life experience cannot offer. For this very reason, we believe, Chris McCandless is recurrently immersed into situations that involve negotiations of meanings not only with beautiful persons, but with different artworks that stretch from an apple in nature to musical compositions and books of fiction. If for an ordinary person, an apple is just a type of fruits, for Chris, it is an object of art that through his peculiar taste asserts his individuality and calls for contemplation, as portrayed in the following passage:

00:38:40,000 --> 00:38:43,700

I mean, you're really good.

I mean, you're like

00:38:44,900 --> 00:38:49,800

100,000 times better than, like,  
any apple I've ever had.

00:38:51,600 --> 00:38:54,000

I'm not Superman, I'm Supertramp.

00:38:56,200 --> 00:38:58,100

You're Superapple.

00:38:58,200 --> 00:39:04,900

You're so tasty.

You're so organic, so natural.

00:39:06,100 --> 00:39:08,200

You're the apple of my eye. (Penn, 2007)

Taste defines Chris and sets his distinction in many instances of the film. Through such faculty, we come to conceptualise the negotiations of one's position within his society. More importantly, we are to measure the extent to which there is a certain balance between one's response to inner impulses and adherence to social norms. Actually, the transcendentalists, who carried on what the Romanticists had begun, emphasised much the unity between judgement and imagination. These two facets of one's mental life aspects intertwine the sensory experience which is by nature individual with a certain degree of social acceptance, as meanings get interchanged through one's life experience with others. In contrast to the ordinary view of Kant as a rational thinker who heavily advocates cognition and logic of thinking, we adhere more to the line of thinkers who position him as the source of influence to later Romanticists. Thus, we find it interesting that Kant's idea on universal subjectivity falls perfectly into the transcendentalists' understanding of the unity of the world. Among these are the faculties of humans to fall in harmony with nature through coherent sensory experiences and taste is one of the devices that they are inherently equipped with. Chris, therefore, as a refined person falls in harmony with the beautiful. He joins other persons in interesting inclinations to the world that bring about the good nature of humans, a perspective that transcendentalists take as one of the truths of the world. Emerson shows his good faith in the goodness of the world, as manifested through the good spirits and the beautiful bodies they dwell, in the following passage from *The Conduct of Life* (1860):

Every spirit makes its house; and we can give a shrewd guess from the house to the inhabitant. But not less does Nature furnish us with every sign of grace and goodness. The delicious faces of children, the beauty of school-girls, “the sweet seriousness of sixteen,” the lofty air of well-born, well-bred boys, the passionate histories in the looks and manners of youth and early manhood, and the varied power in all that well-known company that escort us through life, — we know how these forms thrill, paralyze, provoke, inspire, and enlarge us. (Emerson, 2015, para. 886.33)

Fiona Hughes lays down Kant’s notion of aesthetic judgement in a more comprehensible context. She shows that our acquisition of the sense of the beautiful is not just an emotional faculty as it may appear but it is manifested as a link between inner mental faculties and the beautiful object dealt with through the sensory input. Accordingly, she expels the idea that aesthetic judgement is merely subjective in nature (Hughes, 2010, p. 9). In accordance with this claim, Chris’s individual impulses are deliberately exposed through his dealing with beautiful characters in the image of Tracy Tatro. Chosen among many of American actresses, Kristen Stewart, known for her delicacy and beautiful presence on the screen, infused the narrative with a delight that carries the viewer into other dimensions beyond the place the scenery proposes. With no introductions, she performs beautiful musicals and shows her interest in art in an alerting manner. Chris deals with her not as an object of art per se, but we are invited to know more about his exploration and use of aesthetic judgment in real circumstances. To emphasise distinction and show that he is interested in the real art project and its transcendent magical realms and not the object of love, in its hedonistic sense, Chris is assertively repulsed from any objectified appeal, as the following scene demonstrates:

01:40:58,100 --> 01:41:00,100  
No, I mean we can't do that.  
01:41:01,400 --> 01:41:02,600  
Why not?  
01:41:09,900 --> 01:41:11,400  
How old are you?  
01:41:12,400 --> 01:41:13,600  
Eighteen.  
01:41:16,800 --> 01:41:18,200  
Seventeen.  
01:41:20,100 --> 01:41:22,000  
What year were you born?  
01:41:28,900 --> 01:41:30,500  
So I'm 16.  
01:41:44,700 --> 01:41:47,100  
You want to do something together?  
01:43:01,100 --> 01:43:05,700  
You can send mail to this address  
in South Dakota.  
01:43:07,400 --> 01:43:11,700  
I don't know when I'm going to get it,  
but I'll get it.  
01:43:16,100 --> 01:43:17,800  
You're pretty magic. (Penn, 2007)

Chris's circumscription with the beautiful as compared to the pleasurable defines his approach to life and society as one based on aesthetic judgement rather than conception and pure reasoning. In fact, what makes a transcendental different is his very view on the nature of one's relationships with his own society, including family and friendship. Transcendentalism is not a mere contemplation in the realms of nature, but it views society as an organism that melts all the differences within. From this stand, Chris actually has no hate for his biological family, but he is a critic of the way such social unit has turned to be, one that is practically mechanised in the image of the whole American society at the turn of the twenty-first century. While the phenomenon is not really new, Chris

endeavours to ring the bells as an alert and call for the return to the basics of human relationships, a kind of ties that cherishes purity and simplicity. This could be achieved by moving away from the complexity of conception, often institutionalised, reasoning, and the highly considered conscious status of individuals in a loosely tied society. In many ways, this reflects, to a good deal, Kantian critique of reason. Instead of seeking rules and generalisations, Chris embraces Kant's universal subjectivity and approaches the world as an artist and some other times as a refined interlocuter, or an Aristotelian observer. We find this inclination representative not only to Kant, but to later Romanticists who developed such idealist tenets to become more practical and feasible. Chris, therefore, often engages with the beautiful not in what the Greeks referred to as eros, but as agape. He purely loves and waits for no gratification and in this line his love stories stretch throughout the narrative and makes him truly become a reflection of his original name, with all its biblical dimensions. In many occasions, he shows his disinterest in earthly rewards and advances steadily towards his final project that goes deep into his inner world. Saying this means definitely that Chris detangles himself from the conscious state that prevailed in American society and ushered in growing powers of domination that eventually risked individual agency. Such critique of society reaffirms the transcendentalists rejection of the materialist understanding of the world and calls for a personal approach to its truths. If the beautiful has become often associated with the material and gratification, the transcendental, by nature, goes to the deep meanings and the purity of human nature, as one contemplates the very essence of humanity. No wonder then, Emerson and his followers found good reasons in embracing Kant's

idea on the universality of aesthetic judgement, simply because all humans approach the object of art based on their taste and through their senses. Universality, then, finds ground as we as humans share the same faculties of sensory experience. Yet, what makes us different is the way we refine our faculties through education, the other essential element that Emerson called for in his *The Scholar*. Chris, undeniably, answers such call and carries on his studies and keep reading books to the latest moments of his physical life.

## **Conclusion**

In a time of great fascination with the materialist impulse, Penn's *Into The Wild* represents more than an adaptation of a bestseller, to otherwise acquire acclaim or even lucrative ends. While many aspects of the film's narrative rely on Krakauer's account for Chris's journey, the cinematic representation of an adventurer goes beyond the simple reutterance of a given number of life events. Based on our reading of the film and even some extra components that stretch to the filmmaker's inclinations and philosophical perspectives, we believe such artwork exceeds the marvellous representation of Thoreauvian thinking, which often referred to explicitly in the narrative to innately embrace the tenets of transcendental style in cinema as an extension to a living admiration of the philosophy behind. Through the outline that we followed in this chapter we have actually endeavoured to highlight the different categories that build up the signs within the film. In the back of our thinking, we laid a certain scheme that captures the essence of one's search for the truth within as to discover reality beginning with the self. Within this journey our endeavour intersects with *Into The Wild's*

protagonist's will to unveil the real problem not only of American's today, but that of us all as humans. Actually, our initial interest in the philosophy of Transcendentalism in its American perspective finds grounds in its universal appeal. As such the different signs that we made an effort to decode are universal in the sense they represent contemporary civilisation that is essentially defined in many cases by the values embraced by the founding fathers of America and universally acknowledged as human in nature and thus undeniably fall under common sense ascription. For this reason, we have implicitly attempted to bring the roots of transcendental thinking as to show the influences of German idealism, British romanticism, and Asian philosophy. Thus, we think that Penn's portrayal of Chris and his journey represent much of the struggle between modern individuals with the different social institutions, including family and government. Not necessarily this struggle means a conflict but its representation in the film, to us, shows a perpetual endeavour seeking negotiation of meanings and the pursuit of the perfection of one's life that finds freedom from within and avoids blind acceptance of the social norms. It is within this process of oppositions that new meanings surface and action brings about change. Of course, not evident to everyone but only to those who are ready for acceptance of revelation to use Emerson's words. Penn's narrative, therefore, we believe, revisits Transcendentalism and affirms the need for questioning the established notions on oneself and society. It revives a certain human need for union rather than division. In a sublime manner, cinema takes us not only to follow Chris's story, but to elevate us through his eyes to transcendent vantage points as to look to ourselves and our position in society and the world by extension. Such moving

impact on the audience affirms the epistemological perspective that made much of Kant's thinking and by extension Emerson, Thoreau, and other idealists.





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## **General Conclusion**

Avoiding teleology in the fashion of the transcendentalists, it is captivating to synthetically reiterate the main ideas as they developed throughout the process of building this thesis— namely, the intellection of the elements linked to a question that has haunted the thinkers and philosophers of this world since the recorded intellectual history found traces. The inquiries on individuality versus conformity through the lens of American Transcendental thinking proves to be of paramount interest not only to us as researchers but to all refined readers and audiences. The common ground of appeal is the deep interest in the workings of American thinking in relation to universal questions that tantalise humanity as a whole.

In this thesis, we sincerely attempted to examine the way two concepts at the centre of the philosophy of Transcendentalism could possibly be manifested in two artworks belonging to the cinematic genre. Our choice was directed to the last couple of decades belonging to this new millennia, which is being given sharp criticism. Offering a multi-perspective approach and revisiting some philosophical conceptions anew, we are not to enunciate the obvious when we tackle a topic that brings to the forth questions of the encounter between the individual and his society. Since the antiquity, many philosophies have actually dealt with notions in relation to freedom and conformity, each on its own merit. Among the main parameters that come to our mind are the delimitations of such concepts within the workings of society. It is, indeed, in this space that Transcendentalism, in our view, justifiably finds sound grounds to do justice to the perennial quest for the establishment of boundaries between the individual as a member of society and

the rest of such grouping we humans tend to recognise as a must to define ourselves as a nation. So, if in general terms, all science-based inquiries have attempted to dissect the different parts of one's being, seeking understanding of the complexity of such marvellous creation, Transcendentalism, actually sought something else—unity, or the unification of that sense of fragmentation within that separates oneself from the World. In writing the latter in capital letter, we go beyond the simple use of the word, often referring to either the physical content of earth or the life that takes place within.

In this realm of investigation that coincided with our spectre of inquisitive drive just as it has been for the great philosophers in Western tradition and even beyond, we meticulously attempted not to address the question in simplistic terms, but we keenly searched for the different elements and tenets that shaped the transcendental tradition since its genesis. For this reason, in the first chapter, we carefully endeavoured to look at the way the founding fathers of American transcendentalism in the image of Ralph W. Emerson assertively gave meaning to the Self through its workings, cognition, and interaction with Nature. As it is widely acknowledged and accepted, things and organisms can be defined through the exquisite observation of their behaviours and eventual transfer of data from one another. The human being is no exception when it comes to his very complex immersion and position in the workings of Nature. While, in ordinary thinking, nature promptly represents just a concentration of trees and some physical elements such as the soil and mountains, for the transcendentalists, as we have attempted to demonstrate and prove, Nature is a whole and is no separate entity

that we are to defy or challenge. Perhaps, it is this very detail that at first glance makes the protagonist of Sean Penn's *Into The Wild* come to the verges of defeat. The film's portrayal of Chris's decline in health is definitely an allusion to the failure of humans in understanding their stand in Nature. This phenomenon is especially stressed in our times when technology has offered opportunities to challenge the universe through some actions like recent travel trips to the space. One could only see how humans have become so excited to defy their natural roles in such huge space we call the universe. In our view, as we attentively followed the journeys of Chris and Theodore in *Into The Wild* and *Her* respectively, the truth that the institutionalised society tends to hide becomes evident to us. Both films refer to the name of Chris as a reminder for the need for salvation and truth. With much assertion, such truth resists revelation or description in simplistic terms, but definitely, in the image of Emerson's guidance and approach to incite humans to become themselves and to search individually for meanings in life, our analysed works manifest a certain deep reflection on the Self and the horizons of freedom. We can also see how the two works of art take the disposition to function not as mere didactic tools or entertaining devices, but as infusing lighthouses that call for our sense of meditation.

The epistemological nature of the films studied ascribes them to a line of philosophy that combines thought and art and seeks harmony of being through the encounter with the object of art that is beautiful in essence. Thus, no wonder then, the economy in action, words, and underscoring, associated with a certain delicacy of cinematic representation interestingly coincide to a great deal with

Schrader's framework and, thus, his elements of Transcendental style find space and manifestation in these artworks. Both films boast a great deal of sincere investigation into spiritual concerns. As we investigated the journeys of the main characters, namely Theodore and Chris, we additionally extricated their leaning as one of transcendence. Subtly resorting to Kantian aesthetic judgement and Husserlian phenomenology, as we demonstrated in different instances of this research, they both left the hedonistic worlds to the benefit of one that is sincere, pure, and deep. We found their projects in life in harmony with the message that early American transcendentalists in the image of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henri David Thoreau called for. In a beautiful manner, filmmakers Spike Jonze and Sean Penn transported us through their narratives to certain realms we can refer to as worlds of being. No matter how society has evolved and technology has prevailed, they succeeded much in reaffirming that humanity needs a sincere reminder to get back to the track leading to real happiness rather than the superficiality of intent. In many ways, these works, in a Thoreauvian tradition, serve as a critique of the contemporary society and culture that has become severely materialist and frivolous. More importantly, through their adherence to Schrader's transcendental style in cinema, both works, subtly and convincingly, manifested difference and individuality, but ultimately fused together education and science, on the one hand, with spirit and contemplation, on the other. The message is one of unity and harmony, often offering a certain peace of mind in which one's multi-dimensional growth is found in the midst of difference.

In our view, the two filmmakers have demonstrated that not necessarily a philosophy or an ideology is what society has come to perceive as accepted norms. Their return to the true ideals of Transcendentalism, in the image of self-reliance, intuition, and aesthetic sensibility, has opened new venues and solutions to the dilemmas of contemporary society not just in America, but in the world as a whole. The questions of compliance and individuality —that have haunted not only philosophers, but every single citizen in modern social entities we have come to call countries—represent essentially the core of the transcendental project. For this reason, we have endeavoured to project Emerson and Thoreau’s visions on the multifaceted delicate workings of modern society. We found then that the contemporary citizen, in the image of Theodore and Chris, when refined as an individual and ready for revelation, to use Emerson’s words, can exhibit through his work and education a genius link with the world that is essentially organic and not mechanical. It is in this very realm and approach to life that one could make a fine line between conformity and individuality. While for ordinary persons such notions reveal difference and opposition, they beautifully and naturally merge and become two facets of the same reality. It is so amazing to see how transcendentalists succeed, to a large extent, in answering the real problems of the World of today. In their views the problems and struggles that appear at a certain level through our modest eyes are simply natural facts and organic necessities of the good workings of the universe.

That said, *Into The Wild* and *Her* detach themselves from a commercial culture that has prevailed much of the motion picture industry to embrace art in

its pure sense. Their purpose was art itself to use Kant's words. Without much investment in action, as most of cinematic products tend to do, they earned the respect and acclaim of prestigious art institutions. To separate the latter from those institutions we referred to as indoctrinating entities that separate the individual from his reality, we ascribe them to communities which are well balanced in terms of judgement and imagination, as viewed by the idealist tradition, both in Europe and America. Essentially, the transcendentalists are idealists who took what previous philosophers and thinkers left and built on their individualised visions. To us, this is one of the greatest attributes that make real distinction when it comes to the transcendentalists. In contrast to many of other cultural movements, they really and sincerely embraced the World and looked at it as one of good nature. American transcendentalists opened their thinking to the east and Europe without any pre-decided sense of rejection, or stereotypical inclination, earning themselves a certain organic vitality. In their writings, we find their pure admiration and sense of belonging not only to America but to humanity as a whole. The scenery of Jonze's film involves much of Asian people and as part of our readings on the filmmaking process, we know that many parts of such artwork were filmed in Asian countries. This is a fact that shows the way the filmmaker has followed in Emerson's steps and tradition. The latter for instance endeavoured to meet such eastern cultures through their revealing texts. Within the film, the enigmatic character Charles, who in a certain Hitchcockian manner, appears like a flash of light and is portrayed in a Tibetan meditative position and that said it all.

The return of Charles to the east marks the cultural difficulties that America, the epitome of modern society and culture, is facing. With regard to science as one's approach to problem solving, this thesis as one instance of academic research in the field of humanities is by no means final. Thus, it is limited by the perspective it embraced and the method it followed. Hence, what it revealed in terms of philosophy, art, and science engenders a certain homogeneity of conception *vis-à-vis* its central question of investigation, that is the Self and its connectedness with society. From this point, the humans' inclination to adhere to the socially-accepted norms, on the one hand, and the possibilities that computer-based entities of characters and advanced cinematic devices could offer, on the other, manifest themselves as interesting notions and launching grounds for further studies on the Self. As main variables of study, intuition and consciousness, as features of the Self and elemental constituents of the transcendental project, prove to be of intriguing quest. The improvement of humankind's understanding of their inner workings not as mere free individuals, but as parts of a shared physical and virtual space, is a vital concern that no one has assertively made plain, failure to extrapolate its yet hidden categories. Artificial intelligence and the holographic representations in cinema may offer marvellous possibilities of the study of the fusion of imagination and cognition as a reflection of the intersections of transcendental and empirical dimensions of the World.





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## **Filmography**



Jonze, S. (Dir.). (2013). *Her* [Film]. A. Pictures; Annapurna Pictures.

Penn, S. (Dir.). (2007). *Into The Wild* P. Vantage & A. L. Productions;



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# Appendix

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Image 1: Emile Hirsch in *Into the Wild* (2007) © Paramount Vantage.



Image 2: The family of Christopher McCandless © Courtesy Carine McCandless (Via People.com)

# مُلَخَّص

## دَيُمُومَةُ الْفِكْرِ التَّجَاوُزِيِّ الْأَمْرِيكِيِّ:

الإلتزام والفردية في "إلى البرية" (2007) لشان بين و"هي" لسبايك جُونز (2013)

### مُلَخَّصٌ

تَهْدِفُ هذه الأطروحة إلى بحث كيفية إدماج فلسفة الفكر التجاوزي الأمريكي في الأعمال الفنية السينمائية "إلى البرية" (2007) لشان بين و"هي" (2013) لسبايك جُونز. بالإعتماد على فحص تناول المخرجين لموضوع الطبيعة وطبيعة الإنسان نستشفُّ الطَّرِيقَ لاستنباط واستكشاف الفلسفة التي تخطيطُ النسيجِ الفنيِّ لكلِّ من الفيلمين. إلى جانب النظرية النقدية، فإنَّ التحليل النصي والسينمائي يُفكِّكُ ويُفسِّرُ مشاهد العملين الفنيين لاستنباط الفلسفة التي يعتمد عليها بناؤُهُما. ففي زمننا هذا أين توفرت المعلومة والمعلوماتية في خضم عدد لامتناه من الشبكات الاجتماعية والثقافية المادية التوجه تُظهر قوَّة الرِّسالة المتعددة الأبعاد كيف أن السينما ذات الجودة تسمو بنفسها إلى فضاء فكري تماماً مثلما أقدم الشُّعر على استعراض زخمه أيام نشأة الفكر التجاوزي الأمريكي. وبشكل خاص فإنَّ هذه الأطروحة تهتم بتحليل تأثير الايديولوجية التابعة من هذا الفكر وتناغمها مع الاتجاه الأكاديمي الذي طالما تبنى مكوّنات الإعتماد على الذات والحدس وحاسية الجمالية في سعيه إلى إعادة النَّظَر في علاقة الفرد بمُجتمعِهِ. وَيَخْلُصُ هذا البَحْثُ إلى ان الفكر التجاوزي فرض نفسه في زمن غير زمنه ليُعيد بعث مبادئه من جديد. وعلى وجه الخُصوص يُظهر زخم هذا الفكر قُدْرته على استصدار وجهات نظر مُتكاملة ومصدرها من نفس الأصل. فيُعانق المخرج جُونز اتجاه رالف والدو إيميرسون الذي يحتضن التعاضُّس مع التجربة الإبداعية و يُظهر المخرج بين انبهاره ببناء هنري ديفيد ثورو لتحكُّم الفرد في تلك التجربة. هذه الرؤية الازدواجية تُساعد جلياً في إعادة الإطلاع على الفكر التجاوزي من خلال عدسات مُتجددة لفكِّ شفرة مُعادلتها اللازمية التي طالما ضمنت التوازن بين بحث الفرد الدائم عن هويته وحُرِيته من جهة وحاجة المُجتمع إلى مشروع يجمع أفرادَهُ من جهة أخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التجاوزية، الفردانية، الوعي، الحدس، الذات، الواقع الافتراضي، الإلتلاف، فلسفة الفيلم.



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## Résumé

**La pérennité de la pensée transcendante américaine :  
Conformité et individualité  
dans *Into the Wild* (2007) de Sean Penn et *Her* (2013) de Spike Jonze**

**Résumé**

Cette thèse a pour objet de démontrer la manière dont la pensée transcendante américaine est exprimée dans *Into The Wild* (2007) de Sean Penn et *Her* (2013) de Spike Jonze. L'étude du traitement cinématographique de la nature et la nature humaine fait en sorte qu'on peut facilement reconnaître la philosophie adoptée par le réalisateur. En plus de la théorie critique, l'analyse textuelle, sémiotique, et cinématographique nous permettent de découvrir l'orientation philosophique des films analysés. Au moment où la société américaine du vingt et unième siècle manifeste une multitude de réseaux sociaux et culturels souvent définis par une orientation matérialiste, la puissance du message multi-dimensionnel démontre que le cinéma sincère peut tout de même s'inscrire à des espaces intellectuels qui ressemblent ceux de la poésie à la genèse de la pensée transcendante en Amérique au début du dix-neuvième siècle. En particulier, l'impact de l'idéologie transcendante et le mouvement culturel en relation avec l'individu qui s'identifie avec les traits de l'autonomie, l'intuition, les sensibilités esthétiques, et l'éventuelle négociation d'espace dans la société constituent les variables essentielles de cette étude. Le résultat principal nous projette directement à la période de la genèse de la pensée Américaine, un certain anachronisme qui a survécu le passage du temps. D'une manière précise, des points de vue complémentaires originaires du même berceau se voient manifestes. Tandis que les affinités du Jonze avec Ralph Waldo Emerson célèbrent la coexistence avec l'expérience créative, l'admiration de Penn pour Henri David Thoreau revitalise son appel à l'individu à contrôler cette expérience. Cette perspective bi-angulaire nous aide à revisiter le transcendentalisme à travers un angle différent afin de décrypter sa formule intemporelle qui a parvenu à maintenir une balance entre l'individu et sa quête d'identité et liberté qui ne cesse jamais, d'un côté, et les besoins communautaires justifiés de la société, de l'autre.

**Mots-clés:** Transcendentalisme, Individualisme, Conscience, Intuition, Self-reliance, Virtualité, Unité, Nature, Philosophie du film.