Of metaphor and machine: some nuts and bolts behind *Modern times* as philosophy

Martin P Rossouw

Lecturer, Programme in Film and Visual Media, University of the Free State.
PhD candidate, Department of Arts, Culture and Media, University of Groningen, the Netherlands.

rossouwmp@ufs.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In this article, I examine numerous figurative manifestations of "the machine" in *Modern times* (1936), directed by Charles Chaplin. I focus in particular on the film's varied expressions of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE conceptual metaphor, tracing its presence from the first quarter of the film, which I label "Life in the factory", to what follows thereafter in "Life beyond the factory". The role of this conceptual metaphor in *Modern times* is identified in response to Thomas Wartenberg's (2007) influential analysis, in which he argues that the film provides a valuable illustration of Karl Marx's theory of worker mechanisation. While not denying the philosophical value that he attributes to *Modern times*, I question Wartenberg's assumption that the film illustrates a theory in itself. Instead, I propose that the film mobilises a more general and fundamental concept – the conceptual metaphor that the film and Marx's philosophy happen to share – and that it is only by means of this underlying concept that Wartenberg can identify *Modern times* as a cinematic illustration of the philosophical theory. I conclude with a few implications that my analysis and assessment of Wartenberg hold for the broader film as philosophy debate.[1]

Keywords: Film as philosophy, Thomas Wartenberg, conceptual metaphor, Chaplin, *Modern times*, mechanisation, Karl Marx.

Introduction

My point of departure for this article is the "film as philosophy" debate, central to which is the contested idea that films can contribute to philosophy in ways that are distinctively cinematic.[2] There are numerous angles to the debate, as both supporters and detractors of the idea define different possible conditions for films to "do philosophy". One discussion, for example, is whether films can serve as arguments and thought experiments.[3] Another discussion revolves around the more adventurous notion that films can enact their own form of philosophical thinking.[4] But whatever the angle, supporters of the idea agree that films as philosophy should be seen as more than "mere illustrations" of pre-existing philosophical views; quite the contrary, they say, such films make "genuine contributions" by virtue of actually "doing philosophy" (see Wartenberg 2007:32-44).

However, the manner in which philosophers' separate films as "genuine contributions" from those that are "mere illustrations" assumes an under-theorised dichotomy that begs for critical deconstruction. This point is argued persuasively by Thomas Wartenberg (2006; 2007:32-54; 2011:17-18). Just because something is an illustration, Wartenberg contends, does not give philosophers reason to conclude that it is not illuminating. Cinematic illustrations of philosophical theories and positions can be interpretative and, with that, highly original. In such cases, he argues, illustrations help develop philosophical positions and should thus be counted as noteworthy contributions to philosophy.[5] To demonstrate this claim, Wartenberg (2007:44-54) tracks down illustrations of Karl Marx's theory of worker alienation in the Charles Chaplin classic, *Modern times* (1936). He takes special interest in Marx's theory of worker mechanisation and what he argues to be the film's valuable visualisations thereof: *Modern times* shows how the human being in the factory system, by becoming an "appendage of the machine", is ultimately also transformed into a machine (Wartenberg (2007:49-51; cf. Marx & Engels 1988:216).[6]

It is hard to disagree with Wartenberg on how cinematic illustrations can contribute to philosophy. However, film philosophers still have more thinking to do on what exactly it is that such illustrations in fact express. More specifically, I want to challenge the assumed view that the cinematic illustration of a philosophical viewpoint must necessarily involve recognised philosophical theories. The film as philosophy debate generally overlooks the conceptual conditions that enable films to engage with philosophy. Even in claiming that films can do philosophy simply through illustration, as described above, the focus remains on the illustration of established theories, positions and problems – and not the expression of basic concepts that possibly

facilitate that illustration. I therefore wish to propose this alternative: namely that when a film, like *Modern times*, illustrates a philosophical theory, it does so by mobilising more fundamental concepts that play a constitutive role in both the theory and the film narrative alike.

Conceptual metaphor, as famously advanced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980; 1999), is paradigmatic of the kind of concept I have in mind. Therefore, in response to Wartenberg's treatment of *Modern times*, I examine the role of metaphor both in the film and in the illustrations of philosophy that it is claimed to provide. I do so to contest the essential material that the film is assumed to present: what Wartenberg identifies as an illustration of a theory (the mechanisation of workers) is rather the cinematic expression of a conceptual metaphor, a deep-seated figurative concept with a cultural reach extending far beyond Marx's theory and philosophical discourse in general. The conceptual metaphor is the basis upon which *Modern times* illustrates this particular piece of philosophy, and it provides the means for the film to enrich and extend the philosophy that it illustrates.

In order to drive my argument home, however, I must delve thoroughly into the various narrative- and figurative inner-workings of *Modern times*. For this reason, I devote all of sections I and II to a close examination of what I demarcate as the two main "acts" of the film. Next, in section III, I evaluate Wartenberg's analysis of *Modern times* in light of my findings. Finally, in the concluding section, I outline a few important implications of my analysis for the broader film as philosophy debate.

I. Life in the factory: the machine

Modern times marks a number of significant "lasts". It is Charles Chaplin's last silent film. Indeed, as Philippe Truffault (2003) observes, *Modern times* is the last great silent movie to come out of Hollywood. After it, Chaplin would no longer be able to hold off the inevitable transition to "talking pictures". He always doubted whether his famous comedic persona would remain appealing with talk. For this reason, *Modern times* is also the last appearance of his iconic Tramp character. As an artefact of its times, furthermore, *Modern times* bespeaks many lasts for a world that in the 1930s had to come to terms with the Great Depression: the end of prosperity, of financial security, and of social stability. Chaplin never lacked a social conscience. A year-long world tour after the release of *City lights* (1931) only served to quicken his social conscience, as he learned the extent of the global plight – epitomised by the unemployment,

homelessness, and consequent social unrest that ravaged his own America upon his return home. It was against this social backdrop that Chaplin's ideas for *Modern times* took shape.

Of all these social ills, however, *Modern times* is best known for how it takes critical stock of the machine and its dehumanising effect in the Industrial Age. This is certainly the theme that is spotlighted the most in philosophical interpretations of the film (e.g., Falzon 2002:165,168-169).[7] In the period that led to the film's production, Chaplin had indeed become preoccupied with large-scale industrial automation, especially how it seemed to have prompted unprecedented mass unemployment. In a highly publicised meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, for example, he discussed the use of industrial machinery in India, a development to which Gandhi was opposed. In the meeting, Chaplin recognised the miseries that come from machines – when they solely serve profit, or when they put people out of work – but argued that when used properly machines could still be a boon to humankind (Truffault 2003). A more concrete influence on *Modern times* in this regard was a conversation that Chaplin had with a journalist about the automotive assembly lines in Detroit. As Chaplin relates in his autobiography, the role of the dehumanising machine in *Modern times* found its genesis in the thought of 'healthy young men off the farms who, after 4-5 years at the belt system, became nervous wrecks' (cited in Stephens 2011).

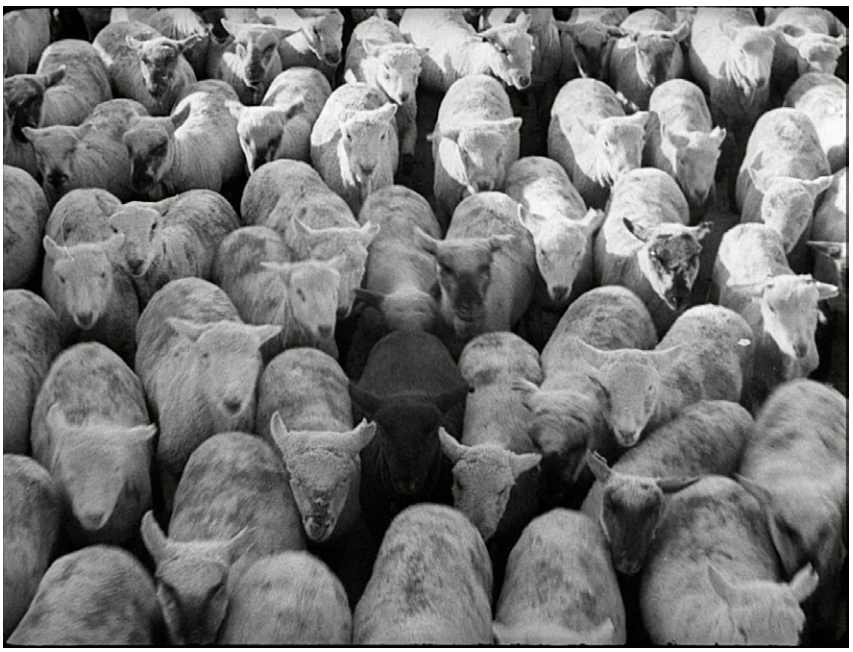
Yet this anti-technologist theme of *Modern times* – celebrated as it may be – is concentrated in only the first quarter of the film: "life in the factory", starting with an opening montage of workers on their way to a factory and ending with Charlie's (Charles Chaplin) catastrophic mental breakdown. The bulk of the film, in contrast, details how Charlie, having regained his sanity, seeks a means of livelihood in a 1930s society more broadly plagued by economic depression, poverty and civil unrest – not only the dangers of mechanisation. Still, Charlie's breakdown does mark a significant threshold in the film, necessitating that I first focus on events depicted up to this point (henceforth the "First Act"). I will then use my conclusions about the First Act as a springboard for examining the remainder of the film. For it is in its First Act that *Modern times* establishes the literal parameters for what will later play out on a figurative level in "life beyond the factory".

The First Act opens with a clock face, nearing six o'clock, with superimposed credits, followed by a foreword: '"Modern Times". A story of industry, of individual enterprise – humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness'. It then fades to a montage sequence, starting with a flock of sheep pushing and shoving in a stream (Figure 1), followed by factory workers just as hurriedly on their way to work (Figure 2). The next shots are noteworthy for their compositions: first, the workplace – a colossal factory that towers

above the workers (Figure 3); and then a similar halving in the subsequent shot, where pipe-like metal constructions inside the factory fill in the upper half of the frame, with the men positioned below (Figure 4). The two following shots emphasise huge industrial machines in the foreground, the sheer stature of which make the human figures seem like a colony of ants (Figures 5 & 6). The montage bestows an undeniable air of supremacy to the factory buildings and gigantic machines as they loom over dwarfed human figures. Its visual compositions set up, right from the outset, the theme that runs throughout everything encountered in the First Act, namely the subjection of people to machines.[8]

The theme of subjection to machines derives just as much from the use of sound effects in the First Act. As previously noted, Chaplin made *Modern times* silent despite the fact that the technology for "talkies" had already been available for some time. Yet he still took considerable liberties with the soundtrack (Truffault 2003). The film is only silent insofar as there is no dialogue: while the characters are "silenced", sounds constantly ring from machines. Moreover, human talking is heard, but only when filtered through machines – for example, the company president's (Al Ernest Garcia) orders on television monitors and the recorded sales pitch for the "Billows Feeding Machine".[9] These selective applications of sound thus reinforce the vivacity, agency, and dominance with which machines are presented in the factory context.

Of course, the theme of the First Act is most clearly conveyed by what happens throughout this section. Every event in the First Act relates the same basic story – a kernel narrative, if you like – which can be summarised by the thematic principle, "technology determines personhood".[10] This statement springs from a well-known critical-ideological concern: in the industrialised "modern times" in which the film is set, technology has become an autonomised power that, as a hegemonic end in itself, circumscribes the nature of basic human interests and cultural pursuits.[11] The First Act of *Modern times* continually presents some form of technology that governs either people's actions (especially work, rest and eating[12]) or their states of mind – whether this be the work of a surveillance monitor, the feeding machine, or the infamous assembly line that eventually swallows Charlie whole, driving him to his mental breakdown. "Technology determines personhood" is thus the guiding principle behind not only the narrative events of the First Act but also, as I have shown, its visual compositions (notably in the opening montage) and its selective use of sound.

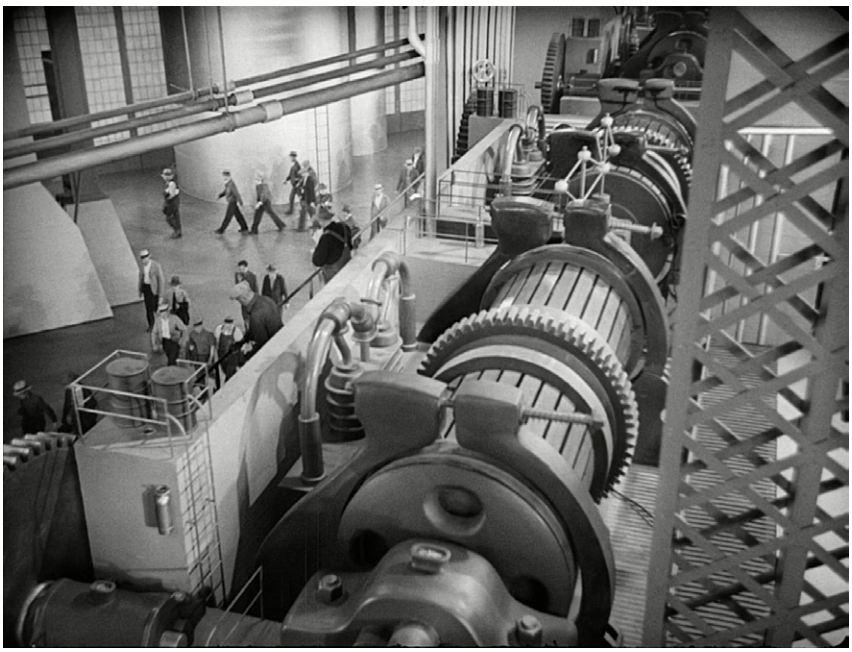


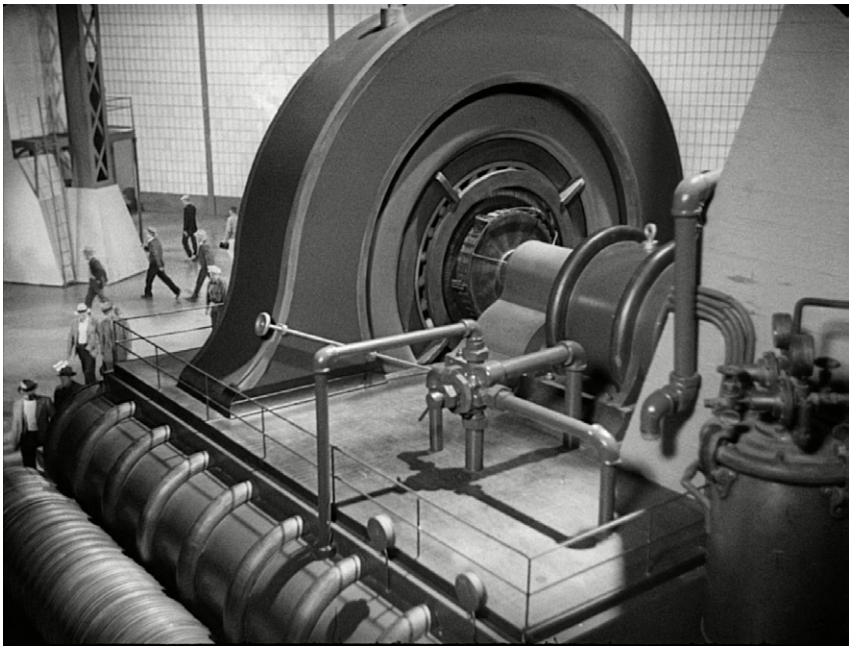
FIGURES **Nº 1 & 2**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

FIGURES **Nº 3 & 4**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).





FIGURES **Nº 5 & 6**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

However, for me to infer the theme "technology determines personhood" requires more than only the mentioned narrative events and their articulation through particular patterns of picture and sound. The thematic statement made by the First Act also relies on the mediation of particular figurative concepts. On one side of the equation, viewers derive the abstract agent of "technology" from its metonymic expression in the concept "machine" – particularly machines of the robustly mechanical kind, dominating the First Act *mise-en-scène* in a variety of forms. On the opposite side of the "technology determines personhood" equation, *Modern times* calls upon a corresponding figuration of "personhood". Charlie, the factory worker, has little choice but to conform to the image of the machines that determine his existence. In being determined by the metonymic "machine" that is technology, personhood responds to this power with a matching metaphor: the person who becomes a "machine".

What goes into the viewer's understanding that Charlie acts like a "machine"? Even the most ordinary understanding of a person in terms of a machine relies on a particular conceptual metaphor; the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor. A primary claim of conceptual metaphor theory is that the main locus of metaphor is not language, but the domain of concepts and thought (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993). The essence of metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:5). Conceptual metaphor, more specifically, refers to the inference patterns from one conceptual domain whereby people reason about another conceptual domain – a cross-domain mapping within a conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:246; Lakoff 1993:203). These mappings arise from people's physical and cultural experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:14). In the HUMAN IS A MACHINE mapping, the concept of "machine" thus serves as the source domain that structures how people think and talk about the target domain, "human". A relevant set of correspondences are thus mapped from the one conceptual domain to the other. The resultant conceptual metaphor generates a host of corresponding verbal expressions: for example, my body could "seize up"; I could have a "breakdown" of health; or I may "run out of steam" and suffer "burnout" (see Goatly 2007:104-106).[13] Such everyday statements, in all their diversity, are expressive of a single, comprehensive conceptual mapping: the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor governs how humans can be conceptualised in terms of machines and how this can be articulated in a variety of linguistic forms. Individual metaphorical expressions in language are thus secondary to the general conceptual metaphor that sanctions those expressions (Lakoff 1993:208-209).

Yet the role of conceptual metaphor need not be limited to verbal discourse. As Charles Forceville (2006; 2007) points out, scholarship on conceptual metaphor theory has neglected the extent to which conceptual metaphor can have multimodal and even

purely non-verbal forms of expression.[14] The First Act of *Modern times* no doubt provides a clear case in point, as it articulates the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor in richly cinematic forms. This is most evident in the famous depiction of Charlie as he gets stuck in a state of uncontrollable nut tightening. The high-paced, repetitive demands of his assembly line work turns Charlie into a "robot" of sorts, a mere extension of the greater machine. The implicated metaphor is then articulated by Charlie "literally" acting like a machine. His twitchy bursts of irrepressible nut tightening constitute a novel enactment of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor. In fact, these comical acts would not have been intelligible to viewers without this metaphor as their cognitive condition.[15]

Verbal expressions of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor add further backing to the First Act's visual depictions of Charlie as "machine". When Charlie takes a smoke break, the company president drops in on the television screen and orders him to 'quit stalling'. More significant is when the film later relates that Charlie had in fact suffered a 'nervous breakdown' after being swallowed by the machine.[16] Whereas these verbal expressions could have simply reflected an incidental metaphor, their contextualisation in the First Act unavoidably supports the film's figurative articulations of the principle, "technology determines personhood".

Bear in mind that while this conceptual mapping enables an understanding of one concept in terms of another, it simultaneously conceals other aspects of the target concept. Any single metaphor frames (or "highlights") its target concept in a particular way (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:10-13). One entailment of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE mapping, therefore, is that it hides or obscures aspects of free will and responsibility in personhood (Goatly 2007:111). When taken too far (or used in isolation from other complementing metaphors), the metaphor depicts human beings as determined or "automated", with no choice or accountability in what they do. For this reason, the associated vocabulary of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor includes a significant number of pejorative terms – think of someone who is labelled a "tool", an "instrument", or even a "robot" (Goatly 2007:106). This particular entailment of the "machine" metaphor is perfectly consistent with what unfolds in the First Act of *Modern times*. Involuntary action is the most salient feature of Charlie as "machine". Initially, it is simply a lingering nut-tightening reflex, but after being devoured by the assembly line, he emerges as a "machine" gone haywire, exhibiting a mad state of uncontrollable impulses: nut-tightening everything in sight, squirting people with oil and riotous lever-pulling. On top of that, he still punches his time card with automatic diligence. Yet how could we hold him accountable for these actions? With no apparent choice or say in what is happening to him, we understand him to be a robot-like servant to his circumstances. The involuntary action that typifies Charlie as "machine" also sheds more light on the flock of sheep featured in the film's opening montage. Wartenberg (2007:45) finds that the sheep, 'being forced up a chute

that leads to a slaughterhouse' (although the shot does not, in my view, offer enough evidence for this), gives the symbolic message that the factory workers face a similarly dreadful end. Yet when viewed in the light of mechanised personhood in the First Act, the symbolic montage hints, rather, at the "automated" mindlessness of the factory workers' behaviour – that, like the sheep, they do not act from any freedom of choice.

II. Life beyond the factory: the societal "machine"

The First Act of *Modern times* exhibits a concise thematic principle – "technology determines personhood" – that finds central expression in the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor. But how does this principle play out in the rest of the film? How does "life in the factory" in the first quarter of the film relate to "life beyond the factory" thereafter?

After recovering from his mental breakdown, an optimistic Charlie leaves the hospital only to be confronted by the hard realities of the Great Depression: unemployment, poverty, and daily hunger. Like the First Act, the remaining section of the film commences with a montage sequence, albeit this time a more frenzied one: it opens with a heavy duty drill that fades into racing fire wagons, followed by three shots of crowds and motor vehicles in rivers of motion – a new set of machines, evidently, framed by a new, frantic context.

Most of the ensuing narrative is characterised by greater societal powers dictating (or frustrating) the activities of the two main protagonists – Charlie, the recuperated factory worker, and the street orphan Gamin (Paulette Goddard), whom he meets along the way. This section of the film can be usefully broken down around another threshold event, namely Charlie and the Gamin's shared dream of an ideal home. Before this sequence, both characters, on their separate paths, are continually swept along by greater societal powers over which they have no control. In whatever they do, they are at best only responding to these powers – whether embodied in circumstances such as unemployment and political unrest, or in physical agents such as the police and orphanage officials. After the "ideal home" dream sequence, however, Charlie and the Gamin take the initiative and actively pursue the happy home-life that they envisage for themselves. Yet, resolute as they may be, the couple's gains are short-lived. Any effort at realising their dream is thwarted by those same determining powers, which always have the final say.

The kind of determinism entailed by the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor in the First Act thus appears to be carried over to the rest of the film: the two heroes are in many ways still controlled by their circumstances. Although they are not specifically subjected

to machines anymore, the couple nevertheless shows the same signs of unavoidability, lacking free will and not being accountable for their actions that earlier resulted from domination by machines.

It is thus no surprise that, along with the theme of determinism, various expressions of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor persist in life beyond the factory. It is as if the film retains a lingering memory of how people can become "machines". Hence, the metaphor presents a significant thematic bridge from the First Act to the rest of the film. Consider the sequence in which Charlie, with the goal of going back to jail, opts to "purchase" goods for which he cannot pay. First, he glides along the counter, with two packed trays, in a manner that recalls the assembly line (Figures 7 & 8). Then, after handing himself over to the policeman (who is now trying to make a call), Charlie purchases a cigar and, billowing with smoke, hands out goods to two passing boys, and automatically sticks the cigar back into his mouth when the policeman removes it – all of which allude to Charlie's uncontrollable lever switching in the engine room of the factory. When the policeman once again removes the cigar, Charlie, in a quasi-robotic motion, flicks his arm, touches his Derby hat and then tweaks his ear to "release" a puff of smoke from his mouth (Figures 9-12). (To reiterate Charlie's machine-like puff, perhaps, the police wagon that takes him away also leaves a considerable amount of smoke in its wake.) The logic of the implicated HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor is clearly congruent with what happens here: Charlie's criminal behaviour comes across as an "automatic" response to a situation over which he has no control. Since he has little choice but to try to get back into jail, we are not inclined to hold him responsible for these actions.

Further clear expressions of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor appear in and around the Gamin's and Charlie's work in a restaurant. A week after Charlie's latest imprisonment, the Gamin dances in the streets for an income as she catches the eye of a restaurant owner. The shot opens with a revolving carousel (Figure 13), and slowly pans rightward to reveal the Gamin, who also turns round and round in a simple dance to the carousel's music (Figure 14). In what amounts to a similar effect as the sheep/worker juxtaposition in the film's opening montage, an undeniable relation is established between the Gamin and the machine. Note that circular movement emerges in the First Act already as a prominent visual motif of the "machine". Think of the industrial machinery that mainly consists of turning cogs and wheels. When Charlie goes down the throat of the assembly line, his meandering body becomes fused with the rotating motions of the machine's inner workings. Furthermore, when the Tramp emerges from the machine in a state of breakdown, he is suddenly prone to making elegant little twirls like a ballet dancer. This motif of circularity is also inherent to the nut-tightening motion that Charlie is stuck in at that stage.

FIGURES **Nº 7 & 8**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

FIGURES **Nº 9 & 10**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

FIGURES **Nº 11 & 12**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

FIGURES **Nº 13 & 14**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

Next, the Gamin arranges a job for Charlie as a waiter at the restaurant where she is a dancer. As Charlie performs his duties, the restaurant exhibits striking resemblances to life in the factory, even though a "machine" of a different nature must be driving this bustling new work context. An initial association with his factory days is the seemingly out-of-place carpenter sawing away in the restaurant kitchen, together with Charlie having to drill holes in a huge block of cheese to "produce" Swiss cheese. As in the factory, Charlie's work is also dictated by severe time pressures. An annoyed customer grumbles, 'I've been waiting an hour for roast duck'. When Charlie finally brings the customer's dinner on a tray, he gets caught up in a circular stream of people dancing. A slightly elevated shot displays his rotating tray as he is drawn around the dance floor – Charlie becomes a "turning cog" in a "wheel". Like *déjà vu*, the viewer relives Charlie's entanglement with the circular inner workings of the factory machine that swallowed him earlier on (see Figure 21).

Until the extended restaurant scene (the penultimate of the film), sounds and noises are only audible from machines and inanimate objects. This setting, however, marks the first time in *Modern times* where the cheers, laughter, and handclapping of people become audible. The introduction of these sounds invites the viewer to consider the more elusive societal nature of the "machine" that is at work here.

Later that evening, Charlie, having had to sell himself as a singer, must perform. When his song starts, he realises that he has lost his written lyrics, but he is left with no choice: he has to sing. The significance of the moment must not be underestimated. Here, for the first and last time, we hear the voice of Chaplin's iconic Tramp character. Yet the viewer who is not too distracted by Charlie's flashy pantomime will notice that his lyrics are nothing but a load of French-Italian-Spanish sounding gibberish. The Tramp is in essence only making a noise. It could then well be that this nonsensical singing underlines how Charlie is yet again forced to become a "machine" – this time, under the pressure of a greater machine that far exceeds the confines of the factory.

The above examples call attention to further instances of involuntary, spontaneous action that may also be suggestive of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor. Two likely events in this regard are Charlie's drunken spell in the department store and, as Stephens (2011) calls it, his 'coke-fuelled fit of heroism' in prison (which is preceded by his walking in indicative circular movements, reminiscent of a "loose cog"). Both events suggest a "machine" malfunctioning because it is running on the wrong "fuel", and both events result from circumstances beyond Charlie's control.

Nevertheless, there is more than enough evidence that the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor does not disappear after the First Act of *Modern times*. It continues to make its presence felt in passages of the film that do not explicitly deal with mechanised industry. This

finding, coupled with evidence that the main characters are constantly subject to powers beyond their control, leads me to conclude that, in *Modern times*, people do not become "machines" only in the factory. Therefore, I propose that the greater societal conditions that turn people into "machines" should themselves be understood as a greater "machine". I base this claim on what the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor entails of society. The metaphor arose with the Enlightenment as part of an entire cultural shift towards a mechanistic worldview. The sixteenth century onwards thus also marks the change from the medieval view of society as a "body" to society understood as a "machine". A notable example is Thomas Hobbes who, under the influence of Galileo, saw humans as machines and consequently considered society, the "body politic", as also functioning like a machine (see Goatly 2007:102, 363-364). Therefore, if humans are "machines", then by implication they must collectively make up a greater "machine". This metaphorical logic is also reversible: the larger predominant "machine" implies smaller "machine components" – humans – that form part of its inner workings. Accordingly, *Modern times* projects the "machine" metaphor onto those societal conditions that determine "life beyond the factory", by continuing to render Charlie in the image of some implied superordinate "machinery" that determines his life.

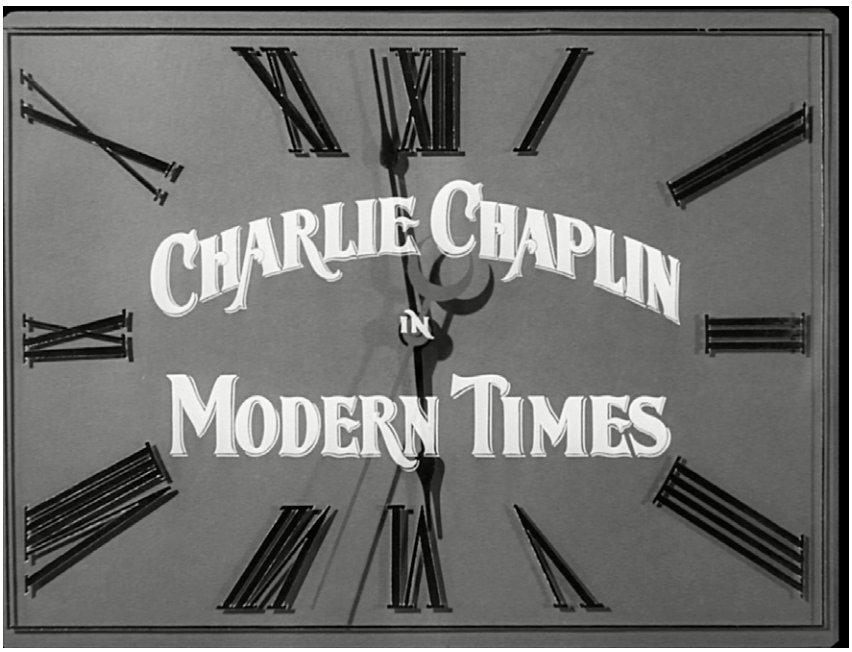
Yet what exactly is this all-pervasive "machine" that governs the rest of the film? I take my cue from the thematic principle of the First Act, "technology determines personhood". If one takes "technology" to be but one possible manifestation of power, one can abstract from this an even more general thematic configuration that can account for the film as a whole: "power determines personhood". Important about this admittedly broad thematic standpoint is that the abstract agent of "power" assumes two distinctly different forms in the two main sections of the film. In the First Act, as I have shown, the power that determines personhood is technological power, signified by the metonymic figure of the mechanical factory "machine". The remainder of the film, however, sets its sights on the rule of economic- and administrative powers within modern capitalist culture.[17] After the First Act, Charlie and the Gamin are consistently confronted by state authorities (police officers and welfare officials) and socio-economic factors (such as unemployment, strikes and crime) in tandem – as the industrial machinery from the opening sequences, for the most part, retreats from sight.

Certainly, one cannot deny that *Modern times* concerns itself with the dangers of subjugation to industrial technology. Yet, at the same time, the concentration of this theme in its often-celebrated First Act seems to pave the way for a more encompassing perspective that is still to come. The First Act can, therefore, be seen as something of an allegorical prologue to the broader "power determines personhood" outlook that the film stages. Chaplin's comical view of machines turning people into "machines" is set in place in order to show how people also function as parts of a much more

pervasive societal "machine". In the First Act Charlie is a "machine" because of the determining influence of machines; in the film overall, Charlie is a "machine" because of the overwhelming economic-, bureaucratic-, legal- and political systems that regulate his fate. The literal influence of machines in the factory thus plays out figuratively in the broader society beyond it. This is not simply an interpretative ploy on my part – the film itself suggests this by persisting with the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor in contexts where no physical machines are in sight. Everything in the film up to Charlie's mental breakdown, therefore, stands in a figurative relation with what happens thereafter: "life in the factory" becomes an extended image for "life beyond the factory".

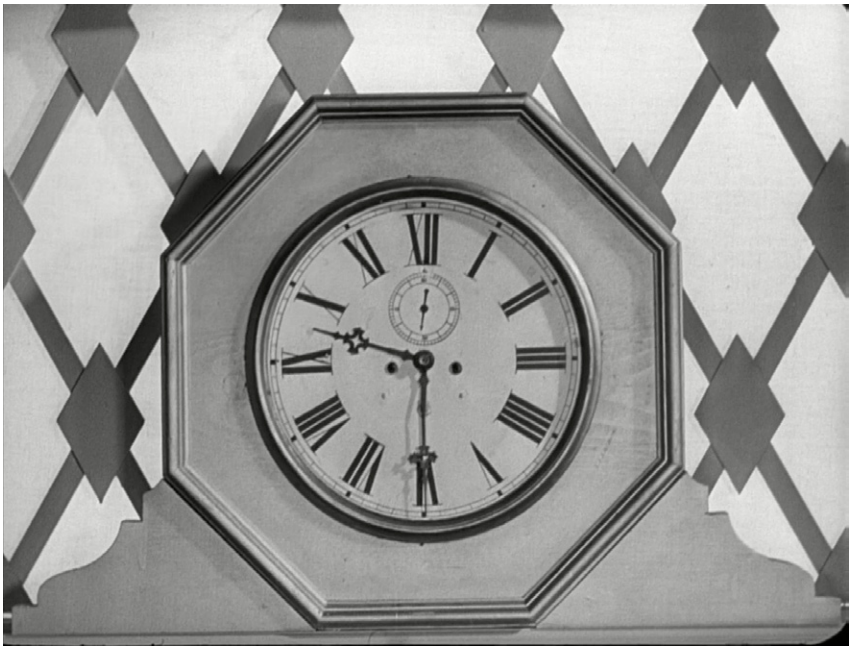
Note, then, the decisive hierarchy between the themes posed by each of the film's two acts: the powers that rule "life beyond the factory" control the power that characterises "life in the factory". Technological power is secondary and subservient to economic-administrative powers. The economic-administrative powers in the film come to expression through manifestations of technological power, and thus sit at the top of a chain of influence that ends in the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor expressed by Charlie in the First Act. Charlie is, after all, not at the mercy of machines as such, but rather at the mercy of machines in a factory serving economic demands. The motif of dominant technology in the First Act is thus never a matter of technology in and for itself. Every instance of "technology determines personhood" – all the imposing industrial machinery, the speeding assembly line, the surveillance of workers, and the Billows feeding machine – answers to the higher dictates of economic-administrative powers.

From the very first frame of *Modern times*, there is a key symbol, a form of technology, which captures this hierarchy of powers: the clock. In regulating human enterprises collectively, the first automated machine in history came to steer 'the conception of time away from the rhythms of nature into something far more mechanical and quantitative, an economical necessity for industrial life' (Goatly 2007:64). The clock, an ultimate accomplice of economic-administrative powers, shows up at regular intervals in *Modern times* (Figures 15-20), acting as a continual reminder of scheduled time and the foundational influence that it has on events (see North 2009:189). Like most of the imposing machinery in the First Act, the clock exerts its influence specifically on the basic human acts of work and eating. As the clock in the opening credits nears six o' clock, the film shows workers on their way to the factory. An anonymous horn prompts the foreman to activate the machinery of the factory. Lunch, in the factory, in prison, and later again in a factory (where Charlie has a second stint as a mechanic's assistant), takes place in strict accordance with a siren. When lunch is signalled, all machines come to a standstill. Time fatefully determines Charlie and the Gamin's short-lived "home-life" in the department store, much like an obsession with speed rules Charlie's work in the factory and restaurant.



FIGURES **Nº 15 & 16**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

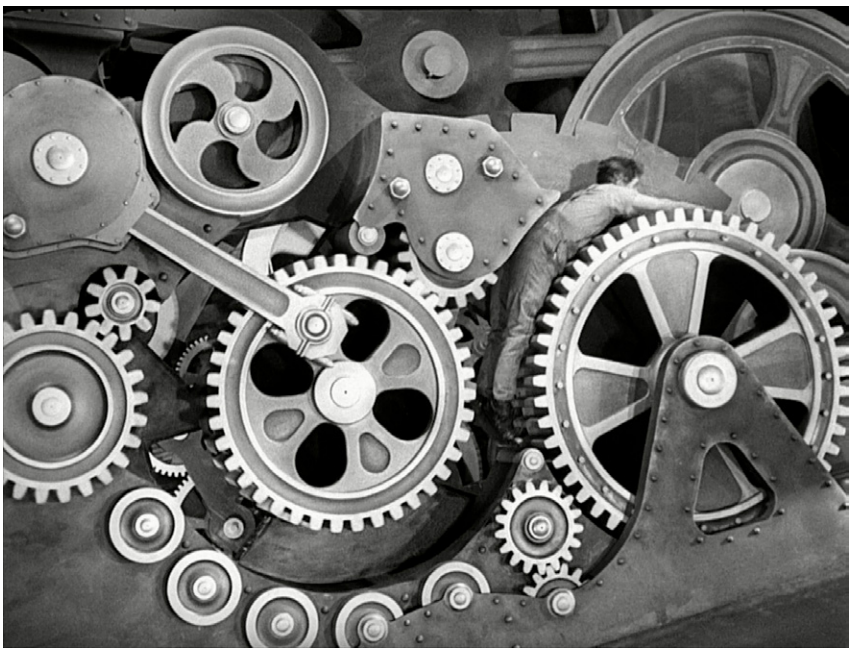


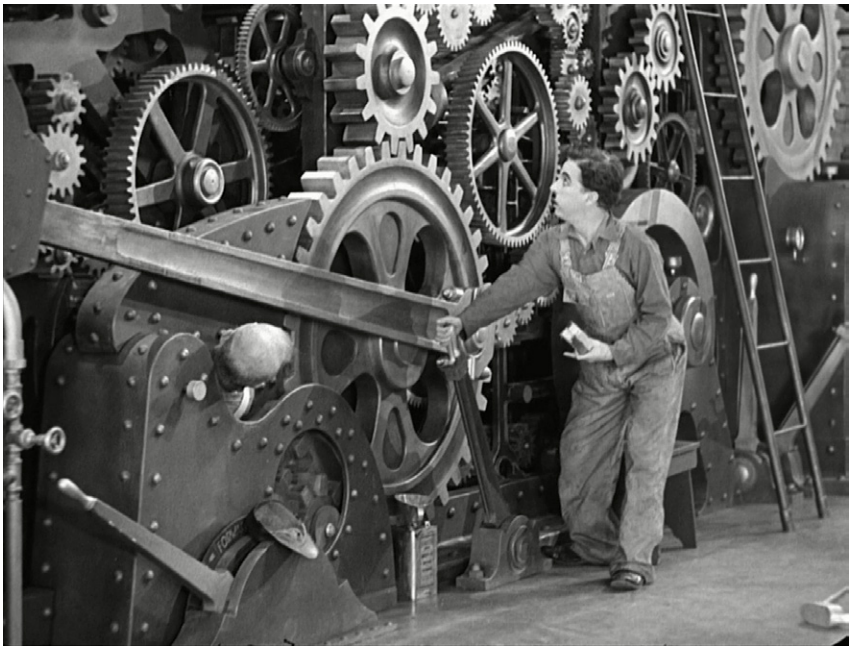
FIGURES **Nº 17 & 18**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

FIGURES **Nº 19 & 20**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).





FIGURES **Nº 21 & 22**

Screen captures from *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936) (© Roy Export SAS).

Intertitles in the film are also consistently concerned with time – and often in very exact terms. Notable examples include: 'Lunch time'; 'As time marches on into the late afternoon'; 'The minister and his wife pay their weekly visit'; 'I must punch the time clocks'; 'Now go to sleep and I'll wake you up before the store opens'; 'The next morning'; 'Ten days later'; 'One week later'; and 'I've been waiting an hour for roast duck'.

It is furthermore noteworthy that many of the hefty factory machines in *Modern times* resemble the inner workings of a clock (Figures 21-22). Moreover, the mentioned motif of circular movement, which is indicative of the "machine" metaphor (exhibited in Charlie's mental breakdown, the dancing Gamin, and the restaurant dance floor), applies just as much to the inner- and exterior movements of a clock.

The figure of the clock is, therefore, the epitome of how, in "modern times", increasingly organised industry exerts its dominance through technology. The recurring hegemony of scheduled, clock-driven time in *Modern times* reaffirms that the film is primarily concerned with oppressive economic-administrative powers – of which a mechanistic slavery to technology is but one symptom. It is therefore fitting that the higher, and visually elusive, economic-administrative powers make themselves felt through the narrative agency of "the clock". This metonymic figure is, after all, a machine: one that ultimately rules over both robust industrial machines and the human "machines" that they produce.[18]

III. On Wartenberg, *Modern times*, and "Marx's metaphor"

Let me now consider, in light of my analysis above, Thomas Wartenberg's appraisal of *Modern times* as a cinematic illustration of philosophy. Wartenberg (2006; 2007:44-54) examines the film as an illustration of Karl Marx's theory of worker exploitation and alienation, and addresses a handful of sequences in the film that he claims exemplify Marx's views. He insists, however, that these are not mere illustrations: these sequences make genuine contributions to the philosophy that they illustrate. As imaginative, concrete illustrations of Marx's abstract claims, they show viewers the tangible human significance of philosophical abstractions. Moreover, they 'enhance the persuasive force' of Marx's theory by giving viewers clear and accessible interpretations of its important elements (Wartenberg 2007:53).

I single out what Wartenberg takes to be an especially prominent illustration, namely the film's portrayal of the mechanisation of the human being under the factory system (Wartenberg 2007:49-51). For Marx, the alienation of workers under capitalism went hand in hand with their transformation into machines. In his *Economic and philosophic manuscripts* of 1844, for example, Marx speaks of the 'machine-like labour' of the

worker who himself is reduced to 'a machine' (Marx & Engels 1988:23 ff.). As he sees it, the worker-as-machine stems not only not only from the division of labour, but also from actual machines that dominate labour conditions: by accommodating itself to human weakness, Marx says, the machine turns weak humans into machines (Marx & Engels 1988:118). A major philosophical achievement that Wartenberg (2007:50) attributes to *Modern times*, then, is that it offers a 'complete visualization' of Marx's metaphor:

> Although we all have an intuitive sense of what Marx's metaphor of a person being turned into a machine means, the use of a metaphor seems to render this claim poetic rather than it being a literal claim being made about the conditions of the working class. What would it mean, after all, for a person quite literally to become a machine?

Through its comical depictions of Charlie, the factory worker getting stuck in mechanical nut-tightening motion (as well as his ensuing breakdown), the film makes a philosophical contribution by 'providing a specific interpretation of the mechanization of the human being that Marx attributes to capitalism' (Wartenberg 2007:50). The fact that Marx did not go into a great deal of detail about what this mechanisation entails makes the film's creative rendering of a mechanised body, and rigidified mind, all the more significant.

However, is Wartenberg accurate in saying that the illustration is of "Marx's metaphor"? In my view, there is a more foundational concept at stake. In my own analysis, I have given considerable evidence of a conceptual metaphor – the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor – that is at work in the film. Charlie's mechanical comics are unique theatrical expressions of this metaphor that invariably lies at the base of any manner in which people may conceive of a human in terms of a machine – and it is the same conceptual mapping at work when Marx claims that the worker under capitalism has become a "machine". This metaphor, although used for a particular philosophical argument, was not invented by Marx, nor was it unique to his philosophy.[19] The rise of Newtonian physics ushered in a mechanistic worldview that promoted the image of the "machine" to an epochal status, thus making it highly common, right up to our information age, to describe human beings in technological "machine" terms. The HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor is, therefore, a product of widespread cultural development and, considering its embeddedness in the continuous technological development witnessed in modernity, appears to be a conception that in our reasoning and discourses we simply cannot avoid. The way in which it finds expression in even our most ordinary everyday language (e.g., 'quit stalling!'), importantly shows that this is not a novel philosophical metaphor – as Wartenberg appears to assume – but rather a deep-seated metaphorical concept with potential philosophical relevance.

A standout claim of conceptual metaphor theory is that metaphor is of a conceptual nature that precedes either its verbal or visual expression; that is, different possible expressions of the metaphor are secondary to its general conceptual constitution. This means that the conceptual metaphor can assume two very different forms in philosophical discourse, on the one hand, and in a film, on the other. Marx's philosophy and *Modern times* can thus be said to share the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor. Neither of the two can lay exclusive claim to it. Whether it is Marx's writings or Chaplin's physical humour, the same conceptual metaphor governs these expressions as well as how people make sense of them. It is the cognitive precondition for either of the two to make any sense at all.

This underlying mediation by the conceptual metaphor raises the question whether *Modern times*, in fact, illustrates a theory. What is clear is that the film mobilises and give cinematic form to a metaphor that also happened to find its way into Marx's theory. That is, what Wartenberg takes to be an illustration of "Marx's metaphor" is a cinematic expression of the same pervasive HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor that informs Marx's theory of the mechanisation of workers. What is much less clear is whether *Modern times* explicitly draws on Marx's theory. However, in the absence of explicit references to Marx in *Modern times*, this more general metaphor still makes it possible for the film to be interpreted as illustrative of Marx's theory. The metaphor serves as a conceptual condition for recognising Marx's views on worker mechanisation in the film.

Wartenberg seems to overlook this alternative. Since he considers the film to illustrate a particular theory of Marx, he is under pressure to prove the possibility that the filmmaker was indeed influenced by the theory. He thus feels obliged to note that Marx's *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* of 1844 were published early enough for Chaplin to have been cognisant of the issues that they raise (Wartenberg 2007:44n35). For the same reason, he describes the film's philosophical illustrations as 'the result of a great deal of thinking about how to convey many of Marx's claims' (Wartenberg 2007:53). However, it is equally possible, if not more so, that Chaplin was simply led by a general notion of how "modern times" tend to turn people into "machines". He certainly did not need Marx to have the culturally ubiquitous HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor at his disposal. Moreover, Chaplin's depiction of "machine" metaphors in the Industrial Age need not specifically be inspired by Marxism for it nevertheless to be of philosophical significance. Its contribution to philosophy ultimately lies in how the film uniquely interprets and concretises a common concept that happens, also, to be of philosophical relevance. Additionally, as my analysis has shown, *Modern times* maintains a further degree of autonomy from Marx's views, for it departs from the specific metaphor of worker mechanisation and wittily depicts how people also become mechanised in subjection to the "machine" of wider economic-administrative powers.

IV. Some implications for the film as philosophy debate

I conclude this article by singling out a few implications that my findings have for the overall debate on film as philosophy. The first and most obvious conclusion to be drawn is that a cinematic illustration of philosophy need not necessarily be an illustration of a theory. Many philosophers – Wartenberg included – seem to assume that films can only engage with philosophy by relating to a recognised "canonical" text of western philosophy.[20] Yet a film can become an illustration of a particular theory by simply giving form to a more basic concept that happens to be relevant to that theory. In the case of *Modern times*, this basic concept is a conceptual metaphor; and it is through the deeply ingrained HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor that the film can relate to the philosophically recognised theory of Marx. In addition, by highlighting the conceptual condition for this particular cinematic illustration, my analysis suggests that conceptual metaphor has a more general significance to how films may engage with philosophy. Considering the necessary presence of ordinary conceptual metaphors in philosophical reflections on metaphysics, selfhood, ethics and society,[21] films are able to raise philosophically relevant perspectives through their often-unavoidable expressions of those very same metaphors.

A second implication concerns how philosophers understand films to make philosophical contributions: the philosophical insight offered by a film need not be limited to how it contributes to an established theory. The innovative articulations of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor in *Modern times* no doubt amount to interpretative illustrations that, as Wartenberg argues, contribute to Karl Marx's thought. However, it above all interprets a metaphor that, in turn, also helps illuminate Marx's notion of mechanised human beings. Its primary reliance on a general metaphor thus gives the film, as far its cognitive value goes, a certain autonomy from related philosophical theories. As my reading made clear, *Modern times* mobilises, reproduces and frames the "machine" metaphor in a variety of original and complex ways – ways that go beyond Marx's idea of worker mechanisation. The film elaborates on the metaphor of Charlie as "machine" by pushing it beyond the factory context, and thereby creatively expanding the domain that the metaphor illuminates. By spilling over from the First Act to the rest of the film, the metaphor effects a re-orientation of perspective that identifies wider economic- and administrative powers in society as the greater "machine" that control human life. Yet the film illuminates this aspect of the world – an insight with obvious philosophical relevance – only through its manipulation of the basic HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor, and not an established set of philosophical ideas. In this metaphor, therefore, the film has enough raw material for establishing a philosophically relevant perspective of its own, which need not depend on any institutionally recognised philosophical theory.

Related to this is a third implication: the apparent role of conceptual metaphor in cinematic illustrations of philosophy calls into question intentionalist conceptions of film as philosophy. The intentionalist view, as argued for by Wartenberg (2007:12) and others,[22] holds that a film can only "do philosophy" in so far the film's makers do philosophy through the film. As Wartenberg (2007:26) puts it, '[o]nly creator-orientated interpretations of a film can justify the claim that the film itself is philosophical'. According to this condition, films can only be fruitful cinematic illustrations of philosophy if they are somehow intended to be so.[23] As I have already noted, the condition forces Wartenberg (2007:44n35) to give a somewhat stretched explanation of how Charles Chaplin "could" have been aware of Marx's theories.[24] My own analysis shows that *Modern times*' capacity to contribute to Marx's thought need not come down to the supposed intentions of the filmmaker. As a deeply conventional feature of our conceptual systems, the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor had to figure in Chaplin's thinking – and certainly could have done so without the intervention of the specific theoretical notions of Marx. In fact, the metaphor is so basic to modern culture that it need not even be on account of Charles Chaplin's precise intentions that it found its various expressions in *Modern times*. More likely is that the conceptual metaphor simply operates behind the scenes, unnoticed, as part of the filmmaker's 'cognitive unconscious' (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:3-7). Any film can therefore give unintended form to conceptual metaphors – and do so in a manner that, while again not intended, still proves to be significant to recognised philosophical theories. This seems a more reasonable alternative to Wartenberg's suggestion that Chaplin had the intention to develop Marx's theoretical views.

A final important implication is that attention to conceptual metaphor can help restore film's standing in what is often criticised as a relation of subjection to philosophical discourse. The very notion of film as philosophy, for a number of philosophers, runs the risk of reducing film to an inferior "instrument" or "handmaiden" of philosophy.[25] To say that a film can be a productive cinematic illustration of a philosophy, for example, privileges the pre-existing philosophical framework over the singular perspectives that the film itself may raise (see Sinnerbrink 2011b:26, 33). Conceptual metaphor theory, however, points to a pre-discursive space where film and philosophy meet as equals. Different expressions of a conceptual metaphor are secondary to the general conceptual mapping in terms of which people think and reason. Philosophers thus encounter in conceptual metaphor a kind of concept that underlies two distinct expressive forms: the moving pictures and sounds of films, on the one hand, and the verbal discourse of philosophy, on the other.[26] In this sense, then, *Modern times* and Marx's theory of worker mechanisation can be seen as sharing the same conceptual metaphor. As a cognitive common ground, it gives a basis for comparing and connecting the film and the theory. However, since this conceptual domain precedes philosophical

discourse, its presence in the film does not bind it to a particular philosophical framework. Even though the metaphor can be of relevance to a philosophy, it is not exclusive to any philosophical theory, nor philosophical discourse as such. If philosophers base the philosophical value of a film on what it does with such a general concept – and not on posterior correspondences with a particular theory – they restore to that film the potential for "doing philosophy" in its own right.

Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals: Berys Gaut, Julian Hanich, and Judith Vega for their valuable responses to an earlier draft of this article, presented at the Graduate Workshop on Film Philosophy at the University of Groningen in 2015; Johann Visagie for his contributions to a still earlier draft of the article as a chapter in my unpublished MA thesis, completed at the University of the Free State in 2011; and the anonymous *Image & Text* reviewers for their thoughtful feedback.

2. Smith and Wartenberg (2006), Wartenberg (2007:1-31; 2011), Livingston (2008), Falzon (2013) and Sinnerbrink (2013) offer helpful introductions to the film as philosophy debate.

3. See, for example, Wartenberg (2003; 2007), Baggini (2003), Russell (2005) and Carroll (2006; 2013:161-193).

4. See Mulhall (2008), Critchley (2005), Frampton (2006) and Sinnerbrink (2011a) as examples of philosophers who work with a notion of the "thinking-" or "philosophising film".

5. Wartenberg (2011:18-22) considers the illustration of philosophical theories to be one of three ways in which films can do philosophy. The other two are the presentation of thought experiments and the performance of real cinematic experiments.

6. Wartenberg's emphasis on the epistemological value of *Modern times* marks a welcome departure from the reigning trends in Chaplin scholarship. Recent major works on Chaplin are limited to biographies (Robinson 2014; Milton 2014; Lynn 2002); production histories, especially of Chaplin's early films (Neibaur 2011; Okuda & Maska 2005); conventional auteur studies (Fawell 2014; Harness 2007; Kimber 2000); and the analysis of Chaplin's comedy (Kamin 2008).

7. Most of Wartenberg's (2007:44-51) analysis of *Modern times* is likewise devoted to this theme.

8. While the opening shot of a flock of sheep may seem out of place with respect to subjection to machines, I note its definite relevance to the theme later on.

9. The one major exception to this – near the end of the film, when Charlie performs a song – is for this reason quite significant and is addressed later on.

10. The kind of thematic configuration that I identify here, and later, draws on Johann Visagie's (1998) theory of 'logosemantics'. What Visagie proposes as a way of detailing the structures of conceptualisation in philosophical discourse (which takes on a basic subject-verb-noun form), I use to identify similar thematic structures at work in a film narrative.

11. This is to say nothing of the hegemonic, self-accumulating stature of technology within the current global landscape. While cultural analysts are still processing the impact of the post-industrial digital "machine" (based on hardware, software, and networks), the information age has now already moved on to the more disconcerting age of "machine learning" (see McAfee & Brynjolfsson 2017).

12. I am indebted to Gregory Stephens (2001) for drawing my attention to eating as a persistent theme in *Modern times.*

13. Further examples include: workers are considered to have "input" and "output"; their skills might become "rusty"; people can be "turned on", "turned off", "switched on", "switched off", "maintained", "mended" or "programmed"; one's lover might be "high maintenance"; and an individual may be "running in the fast lane", living life "at full throttle", or simply be on "automatic pilot".

14. In addition to Forceville's ongoing research on multimodal expressions of conceptual metaphor in films (among other media), Maarten Coëgnarts and Peter Kravanja have done substantial work on conceptual metaphor in the context of cognitivist film theory. See, in particular, their edited collection, *Embodied cognition and cinema* (2015).

15. One could even argue that the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor informs Chaplin's physical humour *in toto*, and that Charlie becoming a "machine" in *Modern times* is but an intensified expression of an acting style which is in any event of a "mechanical" nature. The inherent mechanical quality of Chaplin's humour is a long-established theme in film scholarship, addressed among others by Walter Benjamin (2006), Viktor Shklovsky (1988 [1923]), and André Bazin (2005 [1967]). As Michael North (2009:38) describes it, 'even Chaplin's most ordinary movements, the way he walks, tips his hat, and handles his cane, have a squared-off, machine-like quality'. Charlie's becoming-a-machine in the First Act of *Modern times*, therefore, 'involves a merely incremental increase in the ordinary oddity of his movements and expressions' (North 2009:186).

16. The latter signifies the MIND IS A MACHINE metaphor, a prominent sub-category of the broader HUMAN IS A MACHINE system (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:247).

17. There are indications that this complex of powers also includes that of *political power*. As Stephens (2011) rightly points out, the film depicts a police state that squashes any form of protest.

18. I should add at this point that there is certainly more to *Modern times* than a mere fatalistic vision of humanity at the mercy of the "machine". The film's thematisation of technology and economic-administrative powers is of course not a symptomatic veneration of these forces but a critical depiction thereof. The film gains its critical and satirical thrust, in part, through comic exaggeration and ridicule of these powers. Additionally, the film voices its dissent through two headstrong individuals – Charlie, in particular, but also the Gamin – who manage, if only in the smallest ways, not to fit into the "machine".

19. To mention two famous philosophical expressions of the HUMAN IS A MACHINE metaphor that predate that of Marx: the opening passage of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), where he likens man to a machine, and describes the State as but a larger instance of 'an artificial man'; and Julien Offray de La Mettrie's then-controversial account of the 'machine man' in his *L'homme machine* (1747). Of course, both these cases represent an *endorsement* of the metaphor, and not its *critique*, as is the case in Marx. Yet even in this critical use, Marx is still predated by Romantics like Hamann and Herder who used the machine metaphor as a vehicle for criticism of the Enlightenment. See, for example, Isaiah Berlin's (1979:8,12,16) account of their criticisms.

20. To give a typical example: Daniel Shaw (2006:113) argues that Woody Allen's *Husbands and wives* (1992) 'is philosophical' because it successfully conveys Sartre's challenging ideas. But it does not 'do philosophy', since 'it does not ask deeper questions or propose new concepts or perspectives that Sartre had not himself formulated previously'. Irrespective of what the film may be, therefore, the works of a recognised philosopher remains the decisive point of reference for its philosophical status.

21. See, in this regard, Lakoff and Johnson's monumental *Philosophy in the flesh* (1999) in which they give a substantive account of inescapable metaphorical underpinnings of philosophical discourse.

22. Paisley Livingston (2008; 2009) is another proponent of this intentionalist position. He approaches the notion of film as philosophy from the understanding that 'neither texts nor films really do philosophy, it is people who articulate and convey philosophical ideas and arguments using these and other expressive devices' (Livingston 2008:593). A tacit commitment to intentionalism is also evident in a more general preference for the phrase "philosophy *through* film" (see for example Carroll 2013:3; Falzon 2013; Cox & Levine 2011).

23. Wartenberg has a specific motivation for his intentionalist position: he wishes to protect claims that films can do philosophy from the objection that the philosopher is simply imposing his or her philosophical view onto those films (see Wartenberg 2007:25-28). For this reason, he seems happy to go against the still widespread anti-authorialism within literary studies and film studies, which goes back to Roland Barthes's (1977) proclamation of 'the death of the author' and, before that, the New Critics' rejection of authorial intent as 'the intentional fallacy' (see Wimsatt & Beardsley 1946; Brooks 1951; Elliot 1982 [1919]). This is not to say that Wartenberg stands alone. The death of the author thesis has always drawn its share of criticism, which as of late has been on the increase. For a recent and influential critique thereof, see Seán Burke's *The death and return of the author* (2008).

24. To give another example: Wartenberg (2007:4-9) has an even more difficult case to make with the claim that *The man who shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, 1962) illustrates a Nietzschean critique of progress. He explains that is was not necessary for director John Ford to have Hegel and Nietzsche in mind to present this critique. Rather, we only need to recognise 'that he was thinking about the philosophical views that we can trace back to these great philosophers and that it makes sense to think of him as attempting to respond to one [Hegel] and defend another [Nietzsche] in the specific context of the Hollywood western' (Wartenberg 2007:9).

25. See, for example, Mulhall (2008:7-8), Frampton (2006:9-10), Sinnerbrink (2011b:32-33), Cox and Levine (2011:10), and Carel and Tuck (2011:2).

26. I anticipate the objection that my own perspective, afforded by conceptual metaphor theory, simply subjects film to yet another theoretical framework. However, I can only concede to this point in part, since in my own case I do not subject film to a philosophical framework per se. Conceptual metaphor, as I use it, provides more exactly a *meta-philosophical* framework, since it just as much subjects *philosophy itself* to explanations of its cognitive inner-workings. In this way, at least, I maintain that cognitive metaphor levels the playing field between film and philosophical discourse.

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