

Cavell and History

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Grounding Cavell's work within the historical forces that shaped it is a curious task that each of the contributors to this issue is up to. We begin with a magisterial overview of Cavell's writings on film and beyond (particularly his reading of George Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944)), in multiple languages (counting footnotes), by Miguel Amorim. The historical lens here is certainly not linear, but *centripetal*, compounding layers of irony by building on Cavell's insistence that we read gas as allegorical of film and hence of spirit, all three being ethereal — hence to read film as, ultimately, unable to achieve what philosophy has longed to do (that is, to join phenomenal and noumenal worlds) — though perhaps through historical re-visitations (hauntings), rather than dialectical uncovering, comes the true good of film. Next, we have an investigation into film's indebtedness to opera by João Pedro Cachopo, who reminds us that according to Cavell even skepticism has more to do with a loss of voice and expressiveness, and *hence* the world, and that because of this trajectory of disillusionment, an agonistic battle between opera and film, in pursuing different means to reclaim that expression, ensues. Though João reminds us the latter (film) could not exist without the (failure of the) former.

Moving away from film and toward philosophy, Peter S. Fosl similarly argues for skepticism's indebtedness to David Hume, trying to infuse a Cavellian debate on skepticism with greater Humean purchase than perhaps is currently the norm in Cavellian scholarship. And from philosophy onto American studies, Rachel Malkin apprises us of the prevailing social, cultural, and intellectual climate of the 1960s and 70s, particularly at UC Berkeley (where Cavell was affiliated until 1962), and, subsequently, Harvard (which included, for Cavell, a stint at Tougaloo College during the "Freedom Summer" in Mississippi). And lastly, the ghosts and echoes of Vietnam haunt Robert W. Tate's Cavellian close reading of war sloganeering, past and present (i.e., "Support Our Troops"). From film, to opera, to philosophy, to American studies,

to ordinary language, Cavell belongs in and amongst many historical threads, or, perhaps many historical threads are worth picking up when attempting to historicize Cavell. We have merely scratched the surface here.

With best wishes for continued meet and happy conversation,

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