

***(And if cinema can do what Kant could not do,  
then where does that place us?):***

**Five Remarks on Two of Stanley Cavell's  
Parenthetical Questions, or,  
The Remains of the Spectator's Condition**

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Of course — it is more or less the point of the enterprise — I begin with afterthoughts.

CAVELL, *Philosophical Passages*

[T]he underlying subject of what I take criticism to be is the subject of examples. I suppose it is the underlying subject of what I take philosophy as such to be.

CAVELL, *Themes Out of School*

I am assuming, that is, that criticism is inherently immodest and melodramatic [...].

CAVELL, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*

If there is melodrama here, it is everywhere in [Wittgenstein's *Philosophical*] *Investigations*.

CAVELL, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*

At any rate, a theory of criticism will be part of a personal attachment (including a theory of one's attachment to theory, a certain trance in thinking).

CAVELL, *Pursuits of Happiness*

[A]s if the origins of philosophy were hardly different in age from the origins of movies.

CAVELL, *In Quest of the Ordinary*

(What cloud of philosophy?)

CAVELL, *The Claim of Reason*

And the question is raised.

It is not then answered. There is no answer, of the kind we think there is. No answer outside of us.

CAVELL, *Must We Mean What We Say?*

Because I evidently require such clouds of history in order to adumbrate my conviction about these topics, let me at least avoid the appearance of thinking I have established more than is here.

CAVELL, *The World Viewed*

Cynics about philosophy, and perhaps about humanity, will find that questions without answers are empty; dogmatists will claim to have arrived at answers; philosophers after my heart will rather wish to convey the thought that while there may be no satisfying answers to such questions in certain forms, there are, so to speak, directions to answers, ways to think, that are worth the time of your life to discover. (It is a further question for me whether directions of this kind are teachable, in ways suited to what we think of as schools.)

CAVELL, *Themes Out of School*

So another question has arisen: What will it mean to be the reader of such a writer?

CAVELL, *The Senses of Walden*

(If you do not ask me, I know; if you ask me, I do not know).

CAVELL, *Must We Mean What We Say?*

What is film?

CAVELL, *The World Viewed*

Then I would like to say that what I am doing in reading a film is performing it (if you wish, performing it inside myself). (I welcome here the sense in the idea of performance that it is the meeting of a responsibility.)

CAVELL, *Pursuits of Happiness*

Because what I want in writing philosophy [...] is to show that whatever discoveries are in store, they are not mine as opposed to yours, and in a certain sense not mine unless yours.

CAVELL, *Philosophical Passages*

What I found in turning to think consecutively about film about a dozen or so years ago was a medium which seemed simultaneously to be free of the imperative to philosophy and at the same time inevitably to reflect upon itself — as though the condition of philosophy were its natural condition. And then I was lost.

CAVELL, *Themes Out of School*

What is film? What is a film?

CAVELL, *Contesting Tears*

[Thoreau's] problem — at once philosophical, religious, literary, and, I will argue, political — is to get us to ask the questions, and then to show us that we do not know what we are asking, and then to show us that we have the answer.

CAVELL, *The Senses of Walden*

If we have earned the right to question it, the object itself will answer; otherwise not. There is poetic justice.

CAVELL, *Must We Mean What We Say?*

The question remains: What makes philosophy possible?

CAVELL, *Must We Mean What We Say?*

## 1. A moving image of skepticism before Kant

Stanley Cavell's philosophical-historical definition of cinema as "a moving image of scepticism"<sup>1</sup> finds what could very well be its most extraordinary contour in the context of his 1988 Postscript to "Naughty Orators: Negation of Voice in *Gaslight*," a reading of George Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944) first presented as a conference in Jerusalem (1986).

Explanation of the connection between gaslight and spirit may be taken as the tenor of the explanation given by the cook Elizabeth when Paula, drained, manages to scream down the stairwell for Elizabeth to come up. Entering Paula's room and, in response to Paula's question, assuring her that there's no one in the house to cause any dimming, Elizabeth adds: "But the gas comes in pipes; and I expect there gets more gas in the pipes at some times than there does at others." Paula sees the possibility: "Yes. Yes. I suppose that could explain it." It does not explain the ensuing noises, however, and it does not really in itself match what calls for an explanation: it does not connect the specific conduits between the seen and the unseen. (And can film do what Kant could not do?<sup>2</sup>)

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1. "Film is a moving image of skepticism: not only is there a reasonable possibility, it is a fact that here our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not exist — even, alarmingly, *because* it does not exist, because viewing it is all it takes." Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film (Enlarged Edition)*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 188-189. For the return of this definition in Cavell, see "What (Good) is a Film Museum? What is Film Culture?" (1983), in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 110; and "What Photography Calls Thinking," in *Cavell on Film*: 118. For a (too) brief commentary on the definition's implication in Cavell's thought on film, see William Rothman & Marian Keane. *Reading Cavell's The World Viewed: A Philosophical Perspective on Film* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2000), 68.

2. Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 75. Cavell is alluding here to Kant's distinction between nomenon and phenomenon presented in *Critique of Pure Reason*. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition (with all the variants from the 1781 and 1787 editions)*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, intr. Patricia Kitcher (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996). For a preamble to the logic and implications of this distinction, see Rudolf Eisler. *Kant-Lexikon, II*, trans. Anne-Dominique Balmès and Pierre Osimo (Paris: Gallimard/Tel, 2011), 745-748. Regarding certain placements of Kant in Cavell's thought, a longer study would have to confront the vast question of a certain reconfiguration of Kant through Emerson, as well as Kant with Poe. See Cavell. "Emerson's Constitutional Amending: Reading 'Fate,'" in *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Oxford & Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1995), 20, 29, 32; "Being Odd, Getting Even (Descartes, Emerson, Poe)", in *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 122. In "Knowledge as Transgression. *It Happened One Night*," Frank Capra's film

Cavell raises this extraordinary question in the context of a description of the “paranormal” phenomena provoked by Gregory (Charles Boyer) in order to drive his wife Paula (Ingrid Bergman<sup>3</sup>) mad, and alongside this peculiarly interrogative connection of Kant and cinema reconfigured as a revision of the film’s “allegory of spirit,”<sup>4</sup> there also lingers the suggestion that this allegory could say something (maybe even a lot) about the parenthetical question. On the other hand, what is markedly philosophical about the film’s events becomes clearer the moment one acknowledges that the parenthetical question rises before a narrative of detours conceded as an allegorical, and hence political, melodrama.<sup>5</sup> As a posthumous and parenthetical diversion in the

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also presents a peculiar opportunity to reconfigure the issue of Kantian conditions. See Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 99. In another direction, it would also be relevant to confront Cavell’s Kant with the severe reappraisal of *Critique of Pure Reason* conducted by Maurizio Ferraris. See Ferraris, *Goodbye Kant! Cosa resta oggi della Critica della ragion pura* (Milano: Bompiani, 2004).

3. For Carlos Clarens, *Gaslight* is above all concerned with “the basic premise of a couple bound together by madness as much as by marriage vows.” See Clarens, *George Cukor* (London: Secker and Warburg/British Film Institute, 1976), 79.

4. See Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 73. Regarding the question of allegorical functions, it would be necessary to study the vast implications of the recurrent rhetoric of the allegory in Cavell’s thought. *Contesting Tears* includes one of several examples concerning cinema and allegories: “I have formulated the field of feminine communication effected by the film screen, as allegorized by the lit window at the end of [King Vidor’s] *Stella Dallas*, as a search for the mother’s gaze.” See Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 214-215. For two other examples of allegorical placements, see Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 147, 181.

5. Although the question of history does not seem to occupy a preeminent place in Stanley Cavell’s thought, the diversified recurrence of its issue is constant throughout all of his books, from the use of the term “history” to the very relevant meditations on slavery and the atomic bomb (it remains however to be seen if those allusions and references are enough to (re)compose Cavell’s thought as a historical one). As a set of examples, *The World Viewed* is particularly relevant. See Cavell, *The World Viewed*, xx, xxiv, xxv; 4; 8, 11-12, 21, 25, 36, 48, 56, 71, 60-62, 66, 72, 81, 105, 110, 114, 165, 167, 195, 197, 210, 214-215, 217-218, 225, 230. With particular relevance to any reading of Cavell’s reading of *Gaslight*, the following considerations from the “End of the Myths” chapter have a particular weight in relation to Ingrid Bergman’s performance. “One recalls further that the leading woman of the Bogart character — Mary Astor, Ingrid Bergman, Lauren Bacall — while two of them have been among the most desirable public women of our time, are each possessed of an intelligence that gives them an independence from men, hence makes them worth winning, worth yielding independence for.” See Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 63.

Later on, Cavell very precisely connects the issue of a star’s filmography (let’s say, a certain *politique de l’actor et de l’actrice*) with “the internal history of the world of cinema”: “(The outlaw past underlying the Bogart character is only the purest instance of a familiar route: the interpretation of lawman and outlaw winds through figures as various or distant as James Cagney and Lloyd Nolan and Howard Duff. Their histories become part of what the movies they are in are about. So an account of the paths of stars across their various films must form part of the internal history of the world of cinema.)” See Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 71. These remarks also lead in the direction of *Contesting Tears*, particularly when it comes to Ingrid Bergman’s photogenesis: “So the question becomes: How has this star, this human figure of flesh and blood, call her Ingrid Bergman, called upon the camera to lend her this transfiguration? Part of the answer would be to say what a star is, what it is about such human beings that invites this favorable photogenesis. It is not knowable a priori, but this film should be consulted on the matter.” See Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 70.

reading of an “allegory of sprit,” the question “(And can film do what Kant could not do?)” has therefore already been exposed to a system of thought regulated by the issue and definition of cinema as “a moving image of skepticism,” i.e., a condition that cannot be mastered by either rules or means, Kant or cinema (itself), without sooner or later drawing them into further questions (as well as, inevitably, categories),<sup>6</sup> but which also implies that no strains of this question can preclude a historical role for its allegorical value (an ordering similar to a history conceding itself a further gesture, in this particular case in the form of a Postscript). And that is to say that as a certain contour of this “allegory of sprit,” the parenthetical question could also be displaced as an allegory of an allegory (a spirit of a spirit?) and be repeated under the aegis of cinema as “a moving image of skepticism” (for instance *as if* there were no essence of this allegory other than the one displaced alongside Cavell’s history of reading *Gaslight*).<sup>7</sup>

The question, therefore, implies not only what will become of this “allegory of sprit” as its end in the context of a re-reading of *Gaslight*, but also the possibility of raising other questions before this parenthetical one; for example: 1) How can cinema be delineated by orderings when its cases can be altered, deformed, displaced, decomposed, and reformed by conditions that no longer obey a strictly cinematographic status?; 2) How does in fact a ghost story survive (by) (itself) as an allegory, and can its end survive besides a posthumous re-inscription without reclaiming its narrative condition? 3) What happens to the gas-like traces of the parenthetical question, particularly if one disregards the silliness of what some would feebly term “the pure vision of a film” (one that very likely knew as little about its own history as it did about

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As for the relation of cinema with the political, only one quote among many possible ones: “The myth of movies replaces the myth according to which obedience to the law, being obedience to laws I have consented to and thus established, is obedience to the best of myself, hence constitutes my freedom — the myth of democracy. In replacing this myth, it suggests that democracy itself, the sacred image of secular politics, is unliveable.” See Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 214. It would however be necessary to consider if this gesture of substitution should not also imply the refusal to use the term “myth,” unless its use is too dependent upon Cavell’s history as a (strict) spectator.

6. The issue of categories and allegories in relation to Film history is presented in Amorim. *A Catalogue Fatigue Sampler for an Im-pertinent History of Cinema, take one* (unpublished, 2013); “Notes for the re-inscription of Plato’s *The Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics* before Film Theory.” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 69/3 (2013), 583-610.

7. In that sense, it would also be necessary to reconsider *Gaslight*’s repositioning in other books. See Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 134-136; *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 102-118, 208, 285 (in this instance as a counter-shot to John Stuart Mill).

a supposed history of cinema as a whole, since it is far too obvious that any proposed purity remains a puerile trend)?

If the question “(And can film do what Kant could not do)” is indeed a possible actualization of Kant’s philosophy through cinema, then it not only concerns Cavell’s *Gaslight* re-reading as an “allegory of spirit,” but also directs the figure of gas according to which the film organizes itself as it leads each of its repositions in the direction of a “spectral” agent interrupting female sanity (particularly when this possibility is interfered with by the parenthetical detour of the question). The question not only provides an immeasurable pause in the Postscript, but works as if it were a suspension which, related to gas, also turns it into a condition which bears the question (and which up to a certain point counter-inscribes *Gaslight* “itself”). But if the question that this Postscript bears is indeed a detour through the “figure” of gas, it also complies with the matter of the question designating a philosophical-historical pause for cinematographic possibilities alongside the issue of a gas that, although it does not belong to the significant traits of the visible in a strict sense, does indeed belong to the traits of Cavell’s reading of it (at least within the corpus presented in *Contesting Tears* as a set of pauses and interruptions).

Alongside the “figure” of gas, the parenthetical question belongs to those traits of Stanley Cavell’s philosophy (one could almost be tempted say, (almost) an affirmatively conventional materiality) which, as the suspension of philosophically determined writing, remain accessible for its reading beside both *Gaslight* and cinema as “a moving image of skepticism” (a definition which, without remaining the same, can be repeated, declined, and inflected by certain (nearly) pornographic markings of the melodrama). The question thus concerns not only a “melodramatic” pause that announces no ready(-made) answer, but also complies with the shots in *Gaslight* where the question of gas assigns to this re-reading the status of both a parenthesis and a melodrama displaced before and within the question. (The parenthetical question does not imply or mean a digression analogous to a footnote in the so-called main text, rather the condition of a re-reading marked by a detour in which gas can be inflected as a repetition — a gesture, therefore, that comes into consideration not so much as a final revision but as a bearer of its cinematographically historical possibilities).

## 2. Before the spectator's condition

Taking into consideration another parenthetical question in the Postscript, the entire movement of the film can also be described as a gesture proceeding from what could be termed *the spectator*.<sup>8</sup>

The extent to which, or sense in which, such domestic melodramas are ghost stories — a matter coming to another head, in Ibsen, in *Ghosts* — is laid out in the question the detective asks the constable after they have followed Gregory only to have him disappear into the fog, like a ghost: “You don’t suppose he could have gone into his house do you? [...] Why should a man walk out of his own house, all the way around the corner, just to get back where he started from?” If we translate this as: “Why would he wish to enter his house unseen?” the answer is irresistible: in order to haunt the house, which is a way of inhabiting it. Here the path is opened for considering Paula to be responding to lowering lamps and noises in the attic as to a ghost story, or ghost play. (Then where does that place us?)<sup>9</sup>

The probing anxieties about a suspicious act that may very well turn out to be an excuse to become a ghost at one’s so-called own house — but would that imply, or at least provide, the means or the ends of this “allegory of spirit”? — and concern the functions of gas as it turns Paula into the “recipient” of gaseous repetitions, but also prevent her from fully being (there) for others, and, in particular, the spectator(s) implied in the question “(Then where does that place us?).” As a renewal of Cavell’s reading, this other parenthetical question also expands his definition of cinema with-

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8. In several moments of his books, Cavell concedes the possibility of the reader as a fantastical figure with implications that ought to be amplified in the direction of the cinematographic spectator. See, e.g., Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 184. The implications of this possibility are developed in a work-in-progress titled *A Brief Cinematographic Critique of the Spectator’s Reason*, where some examples from the recurrent gesture of haunting in Cavell’s thought are considered alongside formulations from the early media reception of cinema after its so-called invention by the Lumière brothers, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Gilles Deleuze, Laurence Rickels, and Enrico Ghezzi. The issue of the fantastical reader in Cavell, on the other hand, leads into one of several considerations regarding Sigmund Freud’s take on the Copernican revolution. The implications of this gesture are developed in another work-in-progress titled *Candidates, Castings, And Variants for a Permanent Copernican Revolution*.

9. See Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 73-74.



out concluding it, particularly if one considers this melodrama as a rhythmic sequence of gas traces displaced in-between (nearly) nothing, fire, and its extinction. Furthermore, what could be termed *the melodrama of the spectator* announces through this other question a peculiar re-entry into the film, for the spectator stands before a re-reading of *Gaslight* he (it?) was unable to conclude once and for all.<sup>10</sup> A reading of gas as the condition for this other question, therefore, can be stated as a re-reading that aims at this “allegory of spirit” but only as the pause in which the melodrama of the spectator conditions this act in order to assert its (re)condition without any horizontal end(s) for both questions. At the same time, this gesture as a skeptical claim is amplified in the typographical space of the parenthesis by a movement that can no longer be dominated by straight intentions, since the question of the spect(r)ator is crossed by gas as a condition to which it is exposed, even as it is split apart.

Within the parenthetical question, both *Gaslight*, gas, and the spectator are displaced alongside what the articulation of the question could not manage as subject or theme (or which, in another sense, it cannot re-state without reclaiming a possible answer), therefore preventing the thematically formal illustration of a gas whose oddity can only mark the suspension of any gaze. By means not only of both parenthetical questions but also of what Cavell terms “variations,”<sup>11</sup> every element of this re-reading of *Gaslight* retrospectively becomes the condition for both a suspension and a suspended relation in which the “variations” retain the gesture which they pervade (this relation of the suspension of their relation to both the reading and the parenthetical questions thus remains able to be affected by its themes and movements as a consequential problem). The “variations” are also a “variation”: they suspend and give themselves up, hardly different from the spectator’s disfiguration in a medium of both ghostly and mundane designation (in a way, the spectator questions his (its?) possibility while articulating the exorbitant theme of gas as both surplus, ascent, distance, spatial and temporal indetermination *for* a melodrama re-cast as an allegorical trait).

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10. A gesture somewhat dissimilar from Fredric Jameson’s claims about his spectatorship signature: “I may also say that this kind of analysis also resembles Freud’s mainly in the way in which, when successful, it liquidates the experience in question and dissolves them without a trace; I find I have no desire to see again a movie about which I have written well.” See Jameson, *Signatures of the visible* (London: Routledge, 1990), 3-4.

11. See Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 73.

Furthermore, the re-entry of the question between cinema and Kant, as well as the virtual impossibility of closing both the two parenthesis and the 1986 reading (let's say, the space in-between both these questions and Cavell's re-reading of *Gaslight* as a *counter-crypt*), are already indicated on the near side of other statements concerning the film.<sup>12</sup> And if the parenthetical questions remain at the edge of both visibility and readability, that happens because at the very least they are concerned with the activity of gas as it makes common cause with the house as a marital space and impart their dispersed effects without assembling them into the identifiable unity of a form. The counter-crypt thus makes common cause with the gas as the stalling of parenthetical questions in their positing, as well as with the accident of cinema as a philosophical-historical instance where Cavell's brand of skepticism can remain displayed. This way, the questions make common cause with *Gaslight* since they are concerned not only with what, in a certain "Kantian" reading, seems to remain inaccessible, but also with a ruptured and partial cinematographic haunting of cinema by philosophy. (The re-reading can be interrupted, no doubt, but only because *Gaslight*

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12. Not only the references to the Foucault-Derrida Cartesian *polemos* (Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 61-65), but particularly, in view of the history of Cavell's thought, J.L. Austin's "Other Minds." See Austin, "Other Minds," in *Philosophical Papers: Third Edition*, ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 76-116. For references to Austin's "Other Minds," see Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 39, 58; *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 49, 132-133, 224, 240; *Pursuits of Happiness*, 119; *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 51, 68, 83, 161; *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 97; *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, updated edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 201; *Cities of Words*, 80; *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 195; *Little Did I Know: Excerpts From Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 320, 359. It would however be necessary to infer if references to "other minds" which do not explicitly allude to Austin's text are independent from that frame. In this regard, see *The Claim of Reason*, 86, 425; *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 119; *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 55; *Contesting Tears*, 90.

In *The Claim of Reason*, the issue of alterity is very precisely asserted as a historical issue: "The idea is that the problem of the other is discovered through telling its history. Then how could this history be recounted; what would it be a recounting of?" See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 468. In another direction, "the history of the other" ought to be confronted with the following definition of history: "I might ask how it is that we have recovered from such outbreaks of irrationality, which dot the religious history, i.e., the history, of the Judeo-Christian world" (*The Claim of Reason*, 422). For the minimal elements in the Foucault-Derrida dossier see: Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* [1961] (Paris: Tel/Gallimard, 1977), 56-59; "Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu" [1972] in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald with Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Quarto/Gallimard, 2001), 1113-1136; "Retour sur la Première Méditation de Descartes" [1973], ed. Philippe Artières et al, *Cahiers de l'Herne: Foucault* (Paris: L'Herne, 2011), 92-94. On Derrida's side, see "Cogito et histoire de la folie" [1964], in *L'écriture et la différence* [1967] (Paris: Seuil, 1979) 51-97. This *polemos* was later restaged as Derrida & Freud vs. Foucault in "«Être juste avec Freud» : L'histoire de la folie à l'âge de la psychanalyse". See Derrida, *Résistances de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), 89-146.

also provides this interruption in order that the second parenthetical question as the condition for a spect(r)ator can support the counter-crypt of both an indissoluble closure and a rational reason for gas — as if both were to be interrupted not by an act of arbitrariness, but only by an interval from which no final meaning for an autonomous spectator may be adjoined.)

On the other hand, one could also consider that the parenthetical questions precede the re-reading as the borderline position of the spectator in order to request both its contour and the issue of shots that concern a cinematographic thought. In that sense, the counter-crypt regards history as a conditional allegory, and since its condition has been contracted as both the measure for its survival and disappearance, this interval, in order to be itself at all, must indeed materialize itself as an “allegory of spirit.” Furthermore, since this provision of the counter-crypt before an allegory is (almost) immanent, at least if it has to be there for the remains of the film, it also complies with its subtraction before the precarious possibility of a history for an allegory. (If it were not the subtracted delay of its transience, gas as an allegory could never “be,” since only under the condition that it be slightly more than gas as an allegory can it survive as the condition for the two questions’ counter-crypt — after all, its condition is only given retrospectively by its ending as history, maybe even before the end of the means for history presented in the counter-crypt as an allegorical re-entry into cinema).

### **3. Before the signature effect of an auto(cine)bio(thanato)graphy**

Since the rupture of the first parenthetical question is preceded by the reconsideration of an “allegory of spirit,” it also provides a certain disclosure concerning the belated recognition which is imparted by it, particularly as it is linked to the recognition of the economy of both the 1986 Jerusalem conference and the events of *Gaslight*.

The allegory of spirit through images and consequences of gaslighting may, if it does not put one off, put one on to wanting some (further) explanation of the connection. (The founding connection, for the work represented in my text, is always the fate of spirit as the fate of voice; so that strangulation and vampir-

ism — the victimization, respectively, of the aunt and of Paula — are psychically linked thefts, say of freedom, or separateness, difference.)<sup>13</sup>

Since this “allegory of spirit” provided the reading of *Gaslight* with conditions to which Cavell did not hesitate to attribute the impact of symptomatically historical moments,<sup>14</sup> the Postscript would have merely had the slight significance of recollected intentions, were it not that it is factually grounded in the conference’s text and could be re-read as a further occasion to work out the film. But it is not only *Gaslight*’s events that are conjured up in it; more precisely, it is their condition as it survives through what Cavell (re)cites as his (its?) re-reading’s counter-crypt: a cinematographic condition of gas-like effects, or, in short, of cinema before (its) history. (What speaks in both parenthetical questions as the signature effect of the spectator named Stanley Cavell concerns cinema in regard to a case such as *Gaslight*, but does so since the film (still) can be shown beyond itself.)

The Postscript, reciting a previous reading which in a way designates itself at (as?) the limit of a phenomenal cognition concerning, but not only, the issue of a ghostly gas, therefore contains this “allegory of spirit” as the condition for the two parenthetical questions that it must (re)cite in order to recompose itself as if its conditions were limited by a fictional status. And since gas in *Gaslight* can indeed be regarded as an allegorical figure, its occurrences as partings *from* this film do not reduce it to a ghostly *ghost film* (of (redundant) ghosts, as if they could be reduced to a single referent within a historically describable context), but are misaligned before the counter-crypt as if this “allegory of spirit” were more than a referential, maybe even reverential, end misplaced as the withdrawal of the film’s apparent theme. It therefore concerns not only a film which seems to be “about” gas and ghosts, but stands for the trace of a cinema that, in the wake of Kant’s philosophy as read by Cavell, comprises a counter-crypt that is no longer, or maybe even not yet, death or the condition of the film “itself.”<sup>15</sup> The two question’s counter-crypt, as if detached from

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13. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 73.

14. *Ibid.*, 76.

15. In this direction, it is certainly not accidental that another extraordinary moment concerning Cavell’s approach to cinema takes place in the last pages of *Little Did I Know* in the form of a rapprochement between Howard Hawks’ *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) and Maurice Blanchot’s *L’Écriture du désastre*. See Cavell, *Little Did I Know*, 545-546; and Blanchot, *L’Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980). This gesture, on the other hand, urgently needs to be amplified according to

itself, concerns both the end of this “allegory of spirit” and the condition that it outlasts, both as a departure from the possibility of a meaning reduced to gas and its eventual return (or: both the subtraction of the spectrator and the trace he (it?) leaves behind,<sup>16</sup> except and very precisely as a parenthetical question).

The Postscript rephrases the conference but does not reduce all the cinematographic instances that could be imagined, foretold or anticipated before (“Kantian”) pasts that cannot be exceeded by a further (strictly cinematographic?) future of, and for, cinema as a philosophical question. The two questions therefore remain before the history of a spectrator, one whose skepticism also concerns the re-entry of finitude, and, regarding both the film and the conference, what remains of their disappearance (as) (and before) the Postscript. (As he re-reads his conference, Cavell also survives its historical context so that he can comply with an almost endless series of revisions as moments of a life dedicated to the (necessarily) provisory auto(cine)bio(thanato)graphy of a spectrator).<sup>17</sup>

As a particular textual instance, the Postscript provides the way to an allegorical condition that has overtaken both cinema and history (extended both into what cinema, *Gaslight*, and the conference are meant to say), and doubles (as) a re-reading that splits its elements into a gas-like outline confronting itself with what is meant in it as the (re)citation of irreducibly parenthetical questions (not forgetting other cinematographic cases that may be concerned with it as pathways to “the whole of cine-

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what Cavell considers to be a peculiarly skeptical trait in Blanchot’s thought (*Little Did I Know*, 528), and furthermore ought to take into consideration the only three films explicitly referred to by Blanchot throughout his writings: Frédéric Rossif’s *Le temps du ghetto* (1961); Marguerite Duras’ *Détruire, dit-elle* (1969); Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985). See Blanchot, “Le cours du monde” [1960-1964] in *Écrits Politiques 1953-1993*, ed. Éric Hoppenot (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 121; “Détruire”, in Maurice Blanchot *et al*, *Marguerite Duras* (Paris, Albatros, 1975), 100; “N’oubliez pas!” [*La Quinzaine Littéraire* n° 459, 16 March 1986], in Blanchot. *La Condition critique. Articles, 1945-1998*, ed. Christophe Bident (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 433; “L’écriture consacré au silence” [*Instant* n° 1, 1989], in Blanchot, *ibid.* 433. In an interview published in the issue of *Cahiers de l’Herne* focusing on Blanchot, Jacqueline Laporte describes the writer as someone with quite classical tastes in terms of cinema. See Jacqueline Laporte & Éric Hoppenot, “Le meilleur des amis”, in *Cahiers de l’Herne*. Maurice Blanchot, ed. Éric Hoppenot (Paris: L’Herne, 2014), 102.

16. “Les films ne parlent que d’absence présente.” See Cavell “Le cinéma colle à la peau de l’Amérique: Entretien avec Stanley Cavell (par Antoine de Baecque),” *Cahiers du cinéma hors-série: Le siècle du cinéma* (November 2000): 58.

17. A spectral autobiography recomposed in-between cinema and films. “Le temps était venu de produire des réponses qui signifieraient quelque chose. Soudain j’ai eu besoin de cela. C’est alors que j’ai commencé à aller au cinéma seul.” See Cavell, “Le cinéma colle à la peau de l’Amérique: Entretien avec Stanley Cavell (par Antoine de Baecque),” 59.

“Je n’ai plus cette impulsion proprement physiologique qui me poussait à *aller au cinéma*. Je vais désormais *voir un film*.” See Cavell, “Stanley Cavell: un philosophe au cinéma (entretien par Jean-Loup Bourget et Marc Cerisuelo),” *Positif* 464 (October 1999), 190.

ma,” whatever that could possibly mean and include). The fact that the Postscript counter-inscribes the questions among other instances of textual hauntings (Kant, Ibsen,<sup>18</sup> Freud, Austin, Derrida vs. Foucault...) and, moreover, that structurally it is (almost) nothing other than a self-proliferating reciting of a (previous) reading, also implies its condition as a (benign?) “self-vampirism” as soon as it is read in relation to “itself.”

#### 4. Before further allegories

This suggestion is confirmed by Gregory’s last accusation of Paula, that her madness is inherited from her mother, who, he claims to have discovered, died in an insane asylum — himself now the fabricator of a ghost story, fictionalizing Paula’s history as well as her perceptions. (In not considering Gregory’s own story, I am not considering the extent to which he seems to come to believe his fabrications.) Paula said to Gregory the morning after their wedding night that her mother died in giving birth to her, and that she never knew her father. It is a very questionable tale, not to say a haunting one, since Paula’s “aunt” might have had her reasons for telling Paula the story: it could cover such a fact as that Paula’s mother was indeed mad; or the fact that Paula is the “aunt’s” child, whom it would have been most inconvenient for a famous actress, in a secret liaison with a royal figure, to acknowledge as hers (as theirs?). But the question for us is what Paula thinks of the story, why she speaks of it as knowing no more than these few words about so massive a matter of her life. She attaches great feeling and significance to the memory of her aunt’s going over for her, on special occasions, the stories associated with her collection of theatrical mementos; but the child seems not to have asked about, nor to have had, mementos associated with the figure she calls her mother. As if she does not feel she has the right to know something, or as if he already knows something. Now consider again: Who does Paula know to be in the attic? And before all: Who did she know was there before she knew? And who am I to

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18. See Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts*, trans. Michael Meyer (New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1997).

want to know what Paula knows — to speculate, for example, about Freud’s observation, in discussing second marriages in his 1931 essay “Female Sexuality,” that a woman’s problems with her (first) husband will repeat her problems — Freud says, “disappointments” — with her mother. (A poltergeist is a ghost that manifests itself by noises and rappings. Evidently also by thumps and scraping. It stems from a word meaning to cry out.)<sup>19</sup>

Although the “spectral” attacks directed by Gregory against his wife under the form of gaslighting can be framed as a patriarchal gesture within this “allegory of the spirit,” this possibility leads Cavell not only to the recognition of a modification within a history of marital relations, but to the experience of the particular means and ends of this family history. The death of the mother as a probable cause for the exhaustion of those means alongside the stalling of marriage comes under the form of a connection between “to haunt,” Paula’s aunt, and a right to speculation taking its cue from Sigmund Freud’s “Female Sexuality.”<sup>20</sup> If one concedes that this re-reading of *Gaslight*

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19. See Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 74-75.

20. See Sigmund Freud, *La vie sexuelle*, introduction by Jean Laplanche, trans. Denise Berger et al. (Paris: PUF, 1969), 139-155. Besides Cavell’s allusion to Freud’s “Female Sexuality” (*ibid*: 75), one should also take into account another parenthetical moment in the Introduction to *Contesting Tears*: “If we thereupon take as an answer to the sublimer question, What does a woman want? that what she wants is to be known, or to know that her separateness is acknowledged, we may see the epistemological mismatch for which the genders have been headed: whatever will count as her being known — and I suppose this is quite undefined — it is precisely not to be satisfied by her having at once to tell and not to tell what she knows. At best this changes the subject.” (19-20). And: “In thus raising the question, What does the woman want to know and to be known? The suggestion is lodged that the answer may be more than men can imagine on their own. (Should I rather say?: what the feminine wants known is more than the masculine can imagine. This seems at once trivial and evasive.)” (*Contesting Tears*, 23).

As a preliminary approach to this (very likely) endless question, see Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). For its counter-shot, see Felman, *Le Scandale du corps parlant: Don Juan avec Austin, ou, la séduction en deux langues* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), as well as the reissue of the English translation and its replacement in-between a foreword by Stanley Cavell and an afterword by Judith Butler. See Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Cavell, “Foreword to *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*”, in Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, xi-xxi; and Judith Butler, “Afterword”, in Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 113-123. Stephen Mulhall’s introduction to Cavell’s reading of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, “Prologue: The Avoidance of Love (The Abdication Scene)” (from *Must We Mean What We Say?*) presented in *The Cavell Reader* rightly places the issue of gender and skepticism as a *de facto* recurrent concern in Cavell’s thought. See Cavell, *The Cavell Reader*, ed. Stephen Mulhall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 22-23.

Furthermore, one should also pursue the relation between that question and the issue of genders and skepticism as presented in the chapter from *Contesting Tears* focusing on Max Ophüls’ *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), “Psychoanalysis and Cinema: Moments of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*” (*Contesting Tears*, 101), and then reframe it in-between Jean-Luc Nancy’s peculiarly

displaces the appropriation of events by Gregory in regard to the authoritative stance of a patriarchal insanity, then the husband's measures do conform to the power to project and control through "strangulation and vampirism" and must give way to the (nearly) incalculable effect of gaslighting. In this way, what is at stake is not only this "allegory of sprit," but also the means for allegory as a category of appropriation whereby the shifty lines of recognition dislocate the projection of gas<sup>21</sup>. But since this "allegory of sprit" as the revised history of a reading does include the two parenthetical questions, then the means for further questions must have been inserted all along into a context that has never been completely covered by its allegorical stance since it exceeded the limits of its outset and efficiency according to a range that could no more be defined by this "allegory of sprit" than the social, and also allegorical, infrastructure of that to which that context was explicitly related to. (However, one should not disregard the possibility that this new wave of questions ("Who does Paula know to be in the attic? And before all: Who did she know was there before she knew? And who am I to want to know what Paula knows") has been exposed to the possibility of addressing what in every film inscribes *a priori* the possibility of further questions that, even without programmed directions, ought to remain effective as cases of, and for, "a moving image of skepticism.")

The attic as the secret space for a "spectral" marriage, one that no longer speaks (much), or which, instead of speaking, only allows for the chatter against which Elizabeth's explanation can be heard, works as a sort of block, however much it is intended to maintain this marriage's history as an allegory, and contains its spectatorship since it itself is (re)constructed out of disintegration (at least before the film as both an allegory for history and the deferral of its philosophical-historical def-

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inverted take on Jacques Lacan's somewhat hilarious formula, *il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*, and Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin's programmatically consensual approach. See Jean-Luc Nancy. *L' "il y a" du rapport sexuel* (Paris: Galilée, 2001); and Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin, *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel: Deux leçons sur «L'Étourdit» de Lacan* (Paris: Fayard, 2010); and Jacques Lacan, "L'Étourdit" [1973], in *Autres écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), 449-495. (In a further turn of the screw, all these aspects would need to be reconsidered alongside some scattered considerations from Fredric Jameson and Jean-Luc Nancy regarding the endless issue of pornography.) For Jean Domarchi, "[s]i Cukor s'intéresse tant à la femme, c'est parce qu'elle est *le problème numéro 1 de l'Amérique* (aussi important, en tout cas, que celui de la ségrégation)." See Domarchi. *George Cukor* (Seghers: Paris, 1965), 57.

21. A point to be reconfigured according to Cavell's remarks on Freud and Heidegger in relation to the translation of *The World Viewed* into French under the title *La Projection du monde*. See Cavell, *La projection du monde: Réflexions sur l'ontologie du cinéma*, trans. Christian Fournier (Paris, Belin, 1999); "Conclusion", ed. Sandra Laugier and Marc Cerisuelo, *Stanley Cavell: Cinéma et philosophie* (Paris: Presses de Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2001), 294.



inition). The parenthetical questions destined to set a limit to it pass alongside *Gaslight*, but only in such a way that, while available for history as an allegory set up within a domestically limited sphere of affects, they also comprise a (nearly) uncontrollable net of “connections” whose complexity doesn't allow for the final (re)cognition of the motives or grounds for Gregory's actions. The attic would then be another counter-crypt *for* this “allegory of spirit” as an allegory *of* history, since the crypt contains a counter-crypt — or since Kant stands before cinema as both its possibility and (privileged?) spectator — and vice-versa (or: the crypt can only stand before its counter-crypt; after all, if something remains to be seen in-between the questions, it follows that the possibility of history proceeds from the counter-crypt as it works out, as well as through, this re-reading of *Gaslight* without turning it into a funeral urn, and while thankfully still offering a condition for both philosophy and cinema without a (final) answer.)

##### **5. And then no closure before two parenthetical questions...**

But the dimension Elizabeth's explanation invokes of gas coming in pipes, and of having more or less gas put into the pipes, and not ones joining merely the rooms within this house, but one's linking this house with numberless other houses, is the dimension of a social organism in which this house functions, bound in the networks of dependence of a vast city. Hence the dimension is an allegory of those features of (modern) life that Gregory can depend upon, without planning, that support the deference and secrecy his plans require — the obedience of servants; the nightly visits to a “studio” where he does mysterious, unshareable work; power to exclude all other people and all other places from his marital privacy. I do not have to say that his occupations are, allegorically, characteristic of the society that supports them to observe that his evil is, for all its exotic trappings, utterly, unutterably, unoriginal — like the preoccupations of melodrama.<sup>22</sup>

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22. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 75-76.

As a historically allegorical explanation provided by Elizabeth (Barbara Everest), “the dimension of gas coming in pipes” implies itself as part of a “social organism” in order to bring about the rotation of historical life as a social cycle. Gregory's tricks as acts of unoriginality thus induce a certain impression of theatricality: not because they are performed only as a restaging of what has passed into history, but rather because they act upon its condition in order to turn it into what has passed for history. This “vampirism” re-enters as alteration so that it draws its work under its spell and the allegory articulated in *Gaslight* therefore includes its own, and necessarily improper, *recitation*, particularly because once the (apparent) end of the film is reached, so is the condition of its spectral predictability as the end of a (still) rational, consistent, and sequential (ghost) story of history.<sup>23</sup>

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23. A longer version of this text is part of a work-in-progress titled *Essays on Re-applied Catallegory Fatigue*, and takes its place alongside the following issues: cinephilia's precariousness as a form of cinephagia and addiction; the place of Plato's *The Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* in film theory; Gilles Deleuze and the issue of “science-fiction” regarding some films from Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, and Jean-Luc Godard; Fredric Jameson's politico-cinematographic allegories; Manny Farber's considerations on cinematographic space. See Amorim, “*Catallegory* fatigue re-entries before an introductory *negative space*, or, Here and there space remains the place for cinema”. *Comparat/ive Cinema* 4, “Manny Farber: Systems of Movement” (July 2014).