

6. Cavell on Color

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Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable gradations of color. Imagine a world before “the beginning was the word.”

STAN BRAKHAGE, *Metaphors on Vision*

One of the special challenges in approaching Stanley Cavell’s writing on the arts is how to understand the relation between what are often read as theoretical generalities with Cavell’s particular interpretations of individual works. The latter are not presented as mere applications of the former, while the former are clearly meant to be something more than mere generalizations from the latter. When it comes to Cavell’s writings on film, we find a representative methodological statement in the Foreword to the 1979 enlarged edition of *The World Viewed*, where he asserts that “what constitutes an ‘element’ of the medium of film is not knowable prior” to discoveries by filmmaking and criticism itself.¹ He refers to this “reciprocity between element and significance” as “the cinematic circle.”² But how are we to orient ourselves within the cinematic circle? What about those places in Cavell’s own writing where theoretical generalities and individual readings seem divorced?

Let us consider the case of color in film. The thirteenth chapter of *The World Viewed*, “The World as a Whole: Color,” appears to be a chapter especially characterized by theoretical generalities regarding what color means on film: Cavell speaks from his experience of “serious color films” as involving a “de-psychologizing or un-theatricalizing of their subjects,” something that is also supposed to account for the

1. Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), xiii.

2. *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

“feel of futurity,”³ or the creation of a “world of an immediate future” in then-recent color films.⁴ Such determinate commitments about general features of color film can be striking, even refreshing, over the course of reading *The World Viewed*. But what connections do they have with individual films? As George M. Wilson asked in his 1974 review of the book, regarding “two temporally proximate John Ford Westerns”: “Does *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (in color) de-psychologize and un-theatricalize its subjects more than *Fort Apache* (in black and white)?”⁵

Wilson does not take up Cavell’s related claim about the futurity of “recent” color films, and his examples (from 1948-9) are not relevant to the connection Cavell wants to draw between those then-recent films and modernism. But in a vital new intervention, Daniel Morgan addresses the claim of futurity and its evident conflict with Cavell’s claim earlier in the book that film communicates a “world past,” much like still photography: or, we might add, Cavell’s claim that the tense of filmic narration is past.⁶ Morgan’s proposal is that those earlier statements were a response to classical cinema, whereas the later statements—broached while addressing the-then recent emergence of color film as the medium’s dominant mode—are responses to a modernist cinema characterized by radical openness and radical sensitivity to viewers’ relations to individual films. He says, “[...] everything that Cavell says about the ontology of cinema in the first part of *The World Viewed* simply does not apply to the situation being described in the second part;”⁷ and “The temporality of cinema is radically open—at least once we factor in the experience of the viewer’s engagement with the film.”⁸

We can agree that the book’s second half is marked by a radical temporal openness and still ask what specific aesthetic features of color are meant to ground Cavell’s observations about temporality (as well as de-psychologization and un-theatricalization) in the color chapter. Or should the lesson rather be that color only functions to open the medium up, beyond the more contained ontological conditions of

3. Ibid., 89.

4. Ibid., 82.

5. George M. Wilson, review of *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, by Stanley Cavell, *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 2 (1974): 240-244, 243, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2184141>.

6. Daniel Morgan, “Modernist Investigations: A Reading of *The World Viewed*,” *Discourse* 42, nos. 1-2 (2020): 209-240, <https://doi.org/10.13110/discourse.42.1-2.0209>. See Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 23, 26.

7. Morgan, “Modernist Investigations,” 231.

8. Ibid., 232.

the book's first half (where black-and-white film was the implicit paradigm)? In other words, is color even sustained as the topic of the book's thirteenth chapter (ostensibly about color)? That would seem to be the core question behind Wilson's insistence on comparisons between individual color vs. individual black-and-white films. After all, Cavell is immediately willing to attribute futurity to then-recent black-and-white films (Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*, 1965) and pastness to then-recent color films (Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968).⁹ If these are mere exceptions to generalities, we still need to know what sustains the generalities. And if the color chapter functions to dissolve the temporality of previous chapters, does it equally function to dissolve the issue of color as a substantial theoretical concern?

My aim here is to argue that Cavell's writing on color does not have that last consequence. It is a consequence that would amount, in the case of color, to the full embrace of one half of the cinematic circle (attention to the achievements of individual films) at the expense of the other half (articulation of those achievements' general significance for the medium itself). But in order to understand how Cavell's writing does not have that consequence, we have to recover the general aesthetic features of color that Cavell is depending on throughout the color chapter: including an association between color and abstraction, as opposed to black-and-white's association with line and figuration, as well as the specific kinds of harmonies (and relations among harmonies) that color's abstractions can facilitate. Though these features are only partially articulated by Cavell, bringing them out will help to make evident how they mediate the two sides of the cinematic circle: how they mediate the relations between Cavell's responses to individual films and his theoretical generalities about color.

What is at stake here is not just the question of the color chapter's contribution to the rest of *The World Viewed*, but also the question of whether any vision of medium specificity undergirds Cavell's writing on film. Some commentators have insisted that it is probably for the best that Cavell's ultimate focus be understood as less the medium itself than the "world." For example, in perhaps the most important such Cavellian reflections, Martin Shuster has stressed that "the concept of 'world,' more than the mechanical automatism of the camera or the fact of the screen, orients dis-

9. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 84.

cussions of film, including of its modernism.”¹⁰ He goes on to say that, “Of utmost importance to the survival and likely prosperity of film in its modernist phase is therefore not the productive automatism that have emerged and will continue to emerge (say, the mechanical automatism of the camera, computer-generated imagery, 3D cameras, and so forth), but rather exactly the continued possibility of automatic *world* projection, with the stress in that phrase above all, but not thereby solely, on ‘world’.”¹¹ As I hope will emerge, though: Cavell thinks there is a non-arbitrary relation between a specific kind of “*world* projection” (the projection of a “world of an immediate future”—itself related to modernism) and a specific medium, namely color film. As long as there are such non-arbitrary relations, our attention to *medium* should be coeval with our attention to *world*.

It is even doubtful whether the specific relation that Cavell imagines between world-projection and color could be carried over, in anything like the same terms, to other familiar ways of screening color. On the one hand, Cavell clearly abjures from making relevant distinctions among color film stocks: his discussion moves rather freely between early films made using three-strip Technicolor and those made using later Technicolor processes, and he only mentions one film made using Eastmancolor (Godard’s *La Chinoise* [1967]),¹² but without flagging that difference.¹³ On the other hand, Cavell’s responses to color film—grounding his understanding of the forms of abstraction, harmony, and unification that facilitate a specific sense of world-projection—tend to be obscured as we move further away from the category of celluloid projection, and the contrast with black-and-white that Cavell is making within that category. (Similar issues of historical context and medium specificity arise for André Bazin’s and Roland Barthes’s observations on color photography and its supposed appearance of artificiality.)¹⁴

For example, as we touch on analog color television (especially analog television contemporary with the writing of *The World Viewed*), color becomes less relevant

10. Martin Shuster, *The New Television: The Aesthetics and Politics of a Genre* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 41.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 101.

13. Cavell’s chapter on color never mentions films made using Agfacolor or its variants. Neither does Cavell mention tinting or toning. (More on that below.)

14. André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967/2005), 12. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 81.

as an ontological constituent of the object viewed, and more relevant as a contingent attribute of the viewing or monitoring apparatus. (Color television signals can be picked up by analog black-and-white receivers.) And if we read *The World Viewed* retrospectively in light of digital video, we find that all constituent parts of the digital image resolve into ontologically equivalent information, eviscerating the distinctions between color and black-and-white—or at least their basis in the constitution of the cinematic image—that Cavell appears to depend upon. (As D. N. Rodowick points out, “Where analog video registers light values and records them as analogous changes in voltage values, digital video samples light values and encodes them as symbolic notations of color.”)¹⁵

Orienting ourselves in the cinematic circle, when it comes to color, requires recalling at least this much about the medium itself, including its historical conditions. It is only in thus situating what Cavell says about the relations between individual films and his general theoretical statements about color that those relations will appear non-arbitrary, and hence as projectable into new contexts—including contexts of new media.

1. A Story about Figuration and Abstraction

We should begin by adumbrating Cavell’s most basic, general claims about color in film. He opens the chapter by calling color a “major property of film which can serve to declare its recording of a total world.”¹⁶ But it soon becomes clear that the “total world” he thinks color is suited to declaring is not the physical world captured automatically by the photographic mechanism, but in fact a world somehow unified by the filmic work itself. Thus, after recognizing, in order to set aside, the issue of color as “packaging” or marketing—which he associates with *Gone with the Wind* (1939)—he then mentions three other 1930s-40s Technicolor features (*The Wizard of Oz* [1939],

15. D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 135. Even a strong case for the relevance of the color design of three-strip Technicolor to contemporary digital color design would have to presuppose these ontological differences: see Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow: Color Design in the 1930s* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 213-224.

16. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 80.

The Adventures of Robin Hood [1938], and *Henry V* [1946]) in relation to the discovery that “color can serve to unify the projected world in another way than by direct reliance upon, or implication toward, the spatial-temporal consistency of the real world.”¹⁷ In addition to the worlds of *make-believe* projected in *The Wizard of Oz*, etc., Cavell will develop across the chapter the idea that color-based world-unification is especially suitable for projecting worlds of the “immediate future” (*Red Desert* [*Il deserto rosso*, 1964], *Fahrenheit 451* [1966], *Petulia* [1968], *Bullitt* [1968]) and worlds of “private fantasy” (*Vertigo* [1958], *Rosemary’s Baby*).¹⁸

These passages suggest that a paradigm of black-and-white photography was implicitly in operation when, earlier in the book, Cavell had said that, “A painting is a world; a photograph is *of* the world.”¹⁹ Thus, much like painting, color film makes available kinds of world-unification (and hence world-creation or world-projection) that are not otherwise available in those forms of photography and cinematography (paradigmatically, black-and-white) that are strictly “*of* the world,” or that depend for their “worldliness” on continuity with the physical world. Earlier in the book Cavell had also marked the difference between painting and photography by saying, “You can always ask, of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area,” a question that “generally makes no sense in painting.”²⁰ Thus, world-unification is presumably characterized by its specific way of yielding questions about some world that have no “answers in reality.”²¹ But we still need a positive account of such unification and its connection to color.

Cavell’s associations between film color and unification, via some relation to painting—as well as his association between monochrome and spatial-temporal consistency with reality—are not unusual. For example, Bazin accounted for Henri-Georges Clouzot’s procedure in *The Picasso Mystery* (*Le mystère Picasso*, 1956) of filming Picasso’s painting practice in color and the surrounding world in black-and-white by saying that Clouzot leads us to accept “as a natural reality that the real world is in

17. *Ibid.*, 81. All of these films from the 1930s-40s that Cavell mentions used the three-strip Technicolor process, and all were supervised by the same color consultant, Natalie Kalmus (though Kalmus’s name does not appear in the credits of *Henry V*).

18. *Ibid.*, 82, 84, 89.

19. *Ibid.*, 24.

20. *Ibid.*, 23-24. See also Richard Moran, “Stanley Cavell on Recognition, Betrayal, and the Photographic Field of Expression,” in *The Philosophical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 88-100, 98.

21. *Ibid.*, 24.

black-and-white, ‘excepting for painting.’ The chemical permanence of the positive color film gives the whole its necessary and substantial unity.”²² A natural response to these passages by Cavell and Bazin is to imagine that they are specifically thinking of the unification afforded by color harmonies. And I do think that something like that appeal to harmonies is important for understanding Cavell, especially what he says about the unifications allowing film to communicate worlds of private fantasy (a point I will return to shortly). At the same time, the appeal to harmonies does not get us very far in understanding why there should be any special relation between color and world-unification. After all, black-and-white can allow for geometric harmonies, which can in turn facilitate such ideologically distinct forms of unification and world-projection (across still photography and cinematography) as the works of Tina Modotti, Alain Resnais, Fritz Lang, Busby Berkeley, and Leni Riefenstahl. What, then, is the relevant difference between color harmonies and (figurative) geometric harmonies?

A more promising approach can be derived from writing by Brian Price on the wider significance in western culture of the distinction between color and monochrome for framing the difference between abstraction and figuration. Price traces debates about color’s liquidity and its ability to bleed “across line” to the Italian Renaissance and the access that sixteenth century Venetian painters like Titian had to thicker paints.²³ Until that time, color “was typically considered to be mere supplement to drawing, to the faithful reproduction of forms in the hands of the master draughtsman. The mimetic accuracy of drawing had been consistently privileged over the decorative charm of color.”²⁴ Thus, western aesthetic debates about color have been shaped by anxieties about its powers for abstraction and formlessness versus the contained forms and lines proper to draftsmanship. The hypothesis for understanding Cavell would then be that it is exactly thanks to these aspects—formlessness, the possibility of bleeding over line—that color harmonies allow for special possibilities of world-unification or world-projection (beyond those available to formal or geometric harmonies).

22. Bert Cardullo, “A Bergsonian Film: *The Picasso Mystery* by André Bazin,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 1-9, 6-7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3333668>. Reprinted in *Color, the Film Reader*, eds. Angela Dalle Vache and Brian Price (London: Routledge, 2006), 57-62, 60.

23. Brian Price, “Color, the Formless, and Cinematic Eros,” in *Color, the Film Reader*, 76-87, 78.

24. *Ibid.*

Indeed, Cavell appears to associate classical cinema with a kind of figuration and modernist cinema with a kind of abstraction. Earlier in *The World Viewed* his model for classical cinema and its types (the “Military Man,” the “Woman,” the “Dandy”) was “The Painter of Modern Life,” Charles Baudelaire’s 1863 essay on the journalistic draftsmanship of the Dutch-born French artist Constantin Guys.²⁵ It is possible to miss the extent to which Cavell continues recurring to an idea of draftsmanship in his understanding of classical cinema, especially since upon gathering Baudelaire’s responses to Guys, he had said that Baudelaire “is not describing anything a draftsman showed him; he is having a prophetic hallucination”—namely, of cinema.²⁶ But there the departure from literal draftsmanship specifically had to do with Baudelaire’s descriptions of film-like movement, as inspired by Guys’s drawings. Despite attributing to Baudelaire that prophetic vision, Cavell’s writing on “The Painter of Modern Life” remained framed by categories of figuration.

Nor should we let the fact that many of Guys’s drawings were watercolors discount the relevance of Baudelaire and Guys to Cavell’s understanding of classical, black-and-white cinema and its reliance on dramatic types. We should indeed recognize that Baudelaire’s attention to Guys’s use of color places his essay very far from the “chromophobic” tradition of reducing color to mere decoration that Price (following Jacqueline Lichtenstein and David Batchelor) discusses.²⁷ But Cavell never mentions color in his discussion of Baudelaire.²⁸ It is as though, for Cavell’s Baudelaire, colors were ultimately subordinate to figuration, line, and distinctions of type.

In any case the connection between draftsmanship and dramatic types is sustained when, in the color chapter, Cavell offers sweeping historical considerations that also serve to explain how he, along with other filmgoers, had come to see black-and-white as more realistic than color. For much of western history, “Black and white was the natural medium of visual drama”:²⁹ a connection that makes further sense once we understand that Cavell is operating with a larger category of form or figurati-

25. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 41–60.

26. *Ibid.*, 44.

27. Price, “Color, the Formless, and Cinematic Eros,” 79–80. Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

28. A minor exception proves the rule. In his chapter on how post-classical films have moved beyond the myths he has connected to Baudelaire’s types, Cavell mentions their “dreamier color.” Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 61.

29. *Ibid.*, 89.

on that includes not only black-and-white's possibilities for defined lines but also the defined lines of draftsmanship, which have supposedly suited the defined types or distinctions constituting a dramatic (or as he sometimes put it, "theatrical") conception of history or reality. This is the very conception of history or reality articulated in Baudelaire's response to Guys's draftsmanship and later captured in black-and white-film. Our "conviction" in figuration (in that wide sense) depends on its suitability in capturing those dramatic explanations.

Thus, for Cavell, losing faith in those types or distinctions—or dramatic explanations—is also to lose faith in that kind of figuration. Moreover, the introduction of color in film "masked" the kind of figuration he had associated with dramatic types: that is, color "masked the black and white axis of brilliance, and the drama of characters and contexts supported by it, along which our comprehensibility and event were secured. Movies in color seemed unrealistic because they were undramatic."³⁰ When Cavell discusses the supposed "de-psychologizing" and "un-theatricalizing" effects of color, he is therefore describing a kind of abstraction that is opposed to the wide category of figuration that had been the traditional aesthetic basis for those dramatic categories and distinctions—which themselves had traditionally been used in making sense of reality and history, including human psychology.

Here Cavell appears to depend on not only a particular idea of figuration (one that connects draftsmanship with black-and-white), but also a particular idea of color's suitability to abstraction (much like what Price would later discuss). But it is also an idea of color likely grounded in Cavell's experience of color on celluloid, and above all Technicolor. The three-strip Technicolor process used until the 1950s had an international reputation for results that were, as Dudley Andrew puts it, "purer than reality, needing strong artificial light, aggressive."³¹ These expectations of color in Hollywood films were maintained even as Technicolor moved away from the three-strip process and adapted its transfer process to other stocks. In a 1957 review of Ni-

30. *Ibid.*, 91.

31. Dudley Andrew, "The Post-War Struggle for Colour," *Cinema Journal* 18, no. 2 (1979): 41-52, 46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1225441>. Reprinted in *Color, the Film Reader*, 40-49, 44. Despite three-strip Technicolor's reputation for assertive color, we should recognize that it was in fact used to explore a wide range of styles and aesthetic models. See especially Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*. Of course in approaching Cavell we are trying to understand his memory of three-strip Technicolor films in 1971: the experience he is speaking from would not likely have incorporated the 1930s debates about Technicolor that Higgins dissects.

cholas Ray's post-three-strip Technicolor *Hot Blood* (1956), Godard praised "the deliberate and systematic use of the gaudiest colors to be seen in the cinema."³² That is, there remained an association between Technicolor and a conception of color as calling attention to itself (as something beyond figuration), or as promising "nothing beyond itself" (as Eli Friedlander puts it in a compelling Cavell-inspired analysis of color in the post-three-strip Technicolor *Vertigo*).³³ Cavell is thus at once speaking from a general sense of color's possibilities for abstraction and a specific moment in the medium's material history. If there is a special connection between abstraction and "world-projection," then we cannot ignore the specific mediums that have historically yielded special possibilities for abstraction.

Though it is a constant theme in *The World Viewed*, Cavell is not very clear about exactly what historical conditions have led to a general loss of faith in figuration. At the end of his sweeping considerations about the connection between a dramatic conception of reality and black-and-white, Cavell says, "When dramatic explanations cease to be our natural mode of understanding one another's behavior [...] black and white ceases to be the mode in which our lives are convincingly portrayed."³⁴ Nevertheless, this is the place where Cavell most explicitly relates those considerations to a loss of faith in figuration, especially as it has manifested itself in modernism in the plastic arts: "Painting and sculpture found ways to cede human portrayal in favor of the unappeasable human wish for presentness and beauty."³⁵ This thread will be picked up in the book's fifteenth chapter, "Excursus: Some Modernist Painting," where some loss of faith in figuration makes abstraction not just an option for painters, but an absolute necessity.³⁶ But before then, in the color chapter, we already see Cavell relate those issues of abstraction to color in film. Here again, in the case of film, abstraction is not simply one artistic option, but *the* way of convincingly going on in the medium. Abstraction in film is necessitated by a modernist loss of faith in figuration.

32. Jean-Luc Godard, "Nothing but Cinema," in *Cahiers du Cinéma, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 116-117.

33. Eli Friedlander, "Being-in-(Techni)Color," in *Vertigo*, ed. Katalin Makkai (London: Routledge), 174-193.

34. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 94.

35. *Ibid.*

36. In his 1965 essay "A Matter of Meaning It" Cavell had already signaled the importance of color's abstracting powers for modernism. Discussing some uses of color shared by Anthony Caro's sculptures and modernist painting, he says, "It is almost as though color helps de-materialize its supporting object. [...] The] color is simply *there*, as the canvas is." Cavell, "A Matter of Meaning It," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969/2015), 213-37, 217.

The difference from painting and sculpture is that Cavell thinks what he calls “movies” cannot cede figuration altogether, at least (presumably) without becoming a different medium. (This place in his argumentation is particularly open to dispute, especially from the angle of avant-garde cinema.)³⁷ In any case, so long as movies need to move toward abstraction while retaining human figures, color is available to facilitate that breakthrough: “Movies in color cede our recently natural (dramatic) grasp of these figures, not by denying so much as by neutralizing our connection with the world so filmed.”³⁸

Thus, despite some lacunae in these considerations, Cavell has made somewhat clearer the relation between color and futurity. Projecting a world of the future is not merely one possible use of color film, any more than abstraction is merely another option for painters in modernist conditions. Neither is it merely a natural tendency of color film. Rather, “it is only logical to project [de-psychologized, un-theatricalized human figures] as inhabiting the future”³⁹ because by the time of *The World Viewed* cinema had had forced on it the modernist question of how to continue in the medium without relying on the traditional kinds of figuration that had previously placed the medium closer to draftsmanship (according to Cavell’s reading of Baudelaire).

No filmmaker in modernist conditions can simply abjure from the question of how to project a future world.⁴⁰ This makes color’s abstracting, world-unifying possibilities a vital resource for modernist filmmakers.

37. Ibid. Cavell does leave open some interesting possibilities, including that movies can “fragment [human figuration], or can animate something else.” Cavell is obviously moving rather quickly here between ceding figuration and ceding *human* figuration, as though on film they were somehow equivalent. For important considerations related to that latter thought, and discussing Cavell in connection with avant-garde films that indeed cede human figuration (but not figuration altogether), see Dave Burnham, “Turning to Nature: Cavell and Experimental Cinema,” *Discourse* 42, nos. 102 (2020): 173-208, <https://doi.org/10.13110/discourse.42.1-2.0173>.

38. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 94.

39. Ibid.

40. Cavell certainly appears to muddle this point when he says that the “greatest [directors] will probably resist” futurity (ibid., 95). One possibility is that he is exempting the “greatest” directors from responsibilities to modernist conditions, which is somewhat in keeping with his complicated views on film and modernism. But it is also somewhat out of keeping with his praise on that same page of Antonioni for having “his own manner of projecting the future.” More important is how Cavell qualifies his statement about the greatest directors: “for the future has replaced the past as the object of timely elegy.” This is rather a specific way of relating to the future, one that treats the future as already settled or projected. It is this idea of a “false” futurity to which Cavell will later return in criticizing minimalist or literalist art for effecting a “nostalgia directed to the future” (ibid., 240, n. 42), and, as we will see, in his criticisms of Godard.

2. Fantasy and Futurity

But we still need to understand better why color's powers of world-unification are significantly different from those of black-and-white. Or more precisely: we need to understand better why color's capacities for abstraction make color film such an important touchstone for Cavell's conception of world-unification and world-projection. Another idea only partially articulated by Cavell is that, if color can bleed over line and move beyond figuration, it can also do so in multiple directions. That is, if we think there is a connection between color's world-unifications and its harmonies (as I mentioned above), it is surely relevant that color allows for gradations—continuities—between multiple harmonies. Walter Benjamin, discussing color's powers of abstraction in "A Child's View of Color," said that "Where color provides the contours, objects are not reduced to things but are constituted by an order consisting of an infinite range of nuances."⁴¹ Eli Friedlander, likewise discussing color's abstractions and drawing on both Benjamin and Cavell, asks us to "Think of how colors can provide us with the occasion of experiencing a continuity of change that does not involve loss or destruction. Color combinations just form another color."⁴² A geometric harmony in black-and-white can stand alone as a self-sufficient unity. But our conceptions of color spectrums allow us to project continuous color harmonies out of the ones that might be before us. Color can surpass self-sufficient unities just as it can surpass line and figuration.

These considerations are an important background for understanding Cavell's writing on color and private fantasy.⁴³ He raises this topic in connection with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920):

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari serves another manner of creating an artificially unified environment. But it competes with reality by *opposing* it—as its sub-

41. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, 1: 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 50.

42. It should be recognized that Friedlander does not frame his views in terms of color "harmonies," since he objects to an overly close analogy between color and musical harmonies, something he associates with Isaac Newton. But I think that interpreting Cavell on color is best pursued by understanding a connection between harmonies and world-unification while keeping in mind Friedlander's warnings about using music as our model.

43. Friedlander is of course well aware of this since his views emerge in a discussion of *Vertigo* that is influenced by Cavell's writing on that film and private fantasy.

jects do, as Germany did—with images that compose a conventional expression of madness, not by filtering reality through a normal stage of fantasy. Its feeling of constriction, of imagination confined to the shapes of theater, is a function of its existence in black and white, a point to which I will return.⁴⁴

Particularly with his reference to “Germany,” Cavell is likely alluding to Siegfried Kracauer’s well-known argument in his 1947 book *From Caligari to Hitler* regarding the reactionary effects of Robert Wiene’s separating the artificial, theatrical world of *Caligari*’s framed story from the supposedly more natural world of its framing story.⁴⁵ Thus, part of Cavell’s innovation on Kracauer is to propose that *Caligari*’s treatment of fantasy as world-separating madness is somehow determined by its being in black-and-white, as though black-and-white limited filmic expressions of fantasy.⁴⁶ (I will later return to Cavell’s relation to Kracauer as it bears on color.)

Although Cavell is here preparing for his discussion of black-and-white’s connection to dramatic types (which I sketched in the previous section), his point about the connection between black-and-white and theatrical artificiality is somewhat different. He is here referring to how the expression of a world of private fantasy in black-and-white will tend to result in a separated world: inviting comparison with the sepa-

44. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 82.

45. Though Cavell never explicitly cites Kracauer’s book, the relevant discussion of *Caligari* was excerpted in one source that *The World Viewed* cites: *Film: An Anthology*, ed. Daniel Talbot (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959). Discussions of Kracauer’s argument also appear in two other sources cited in *The World Viewed*: Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema* (London: Spring Books, 1967), 94–95, and Robert Warshaw, *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), xxxix. Cavell’s conception of *Caligari* likely diverges from Kracauer’s in one significant respect: while Cavell emphasizes the film’s separation between worlds as a mark of madness, Kracauer’s critique ultimately depends on how the artificial world of the framed story bleeds into the supposedly natural world of the framing story at the film’s conclusion, thus evoking Germany’s “general retreat into a shell.” See Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947/2004), 67, 71, 75. For a recent Cavell-inspired treatment of the framing device in *Caligari*, see David LaRocca, “Weimar Cognitive Theory: Modernist Narrativity and the Metaphysics of Frame Stories (After *Caligari* and Kracauer),” in *The Fictional Minds of Modernism: Narrative Cognition from Henry James to Christopher Isherwood*, ed. Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).

46. An interesting question is how much Cavell’s considerations would be affected by recognizing that the first prints of *Caligari* were individually tinted and toned in various colors, a fact likely unavailable to him in 1971. See Peter Monaghan, “Reproducing Film Colors, and Their Significances,” *Moving Image Archive News*, March 17, 2016, <http://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/reproducing-film-colors-and-their-significances/>. For a wide-ranging analysis of such applied-coloring techniques in early film that also develops many of the same considerations about color and abstraction that I am arguing underlie Cavell’s writing, see Joshua Yumibe, *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

rated world of the theatrical stage, these forms of self-imposition or self-division are best suited to representing madness on film.⁴⁷ (The psychotic, as Cavell elsewhere puts it, is someone who “distorts his entire grammar.”)⁴⁸ The unavailability of a wide range of unified world-relations—i.e. color’s wide range of continuities between harmonies—limits the worlds of fantasy expressed in black-and-white to relatively contained worlds.

For Cavell, the contrast between this consequence for fantasy in black-and-white film is with the worlds of private fantasy explored in such color films as *Vertigo* and *Rosemary’s Baby*. In these films, we see the possibility of taking advantage of color’s “infinite range of nuances” (as Benjamin put it) in order to communicate a range of inter-world relations that are not necessarily abrupt or violent: or, when they are abrupt or violent, they need not suggest psychosis or absolute separation. (Regarding different treatments of fantasy in *Vertigo*, Cavell says, “Each of these ways of handling fantasy has its psychotic leanings, but neither of them need tip over.”)⁴⁹ Showing the distinctive way in which color allows one to “move from one world into another” is Cavell’s aim in connecting, on the one hand, the famous moment in *Vertigo* of Scottie opening the storage room door onto the Podesta Baldocchi Flower Shop with, on the other hand, *Rosemary’s Baby*’s “showing the modernizing of one apartment in the Dakota building, then moving between its open chic and a darker elegance.”⁵⁰ Color allows worlds to bleed into each other.⁵¹

The topic of *Rosemary’s Baby* forces a return to and clarification of the relation between color and futurity, since Cavell calls it a film “firmly rooted in the imme-

47. Indeed, there are at least three different kinds of invocations of “theater” in *The World Viewed*, having to do with: (1) dramatic types or categories, (2) the artificiality of the stage, and (3) an insufficient independence of the beholder or spectator. These are in addition to the many ontological observations on differences between film and theater throughout both *The World Viewed* and “More of *The World Viewed*.”

48. Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 44–72, 69, n. 10.

49. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 85.

50. *Ibid.*, 84.

51. Obviously somewhat different issues arise for the relations between the colorful world of Oz and the monochrome world of Kansas. Cavell seems to be aware of this problem (and of how to distinguish the self-enclosed world of Oz from that in *Caligari*). In “More of *The World Viewed*” he addresses what we might call the *commensurability* of the two worlds in *The Wizard of Oz*: that they tap “the same source of power, call it the human craving for reality, call it the craving for our fantasies and reality to complete or to project one another.” Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 197. Here Cavell’s considerations would probably be aided by recalling that the scenes of Kansas were originally in sepia rather than black-and-white (as he recalls them, likely thinking of later reissues or of television broadcasts).

diate past.”⁵² It is as though the film’s supposed diffusiveness among worlds prevents it from having the unity needed for future world-projection. (He says that the “point” of the film’s color, despite its being used to “establish a world of private fantasy [...] is not so much to unify a world as to juxtapose opposing moods and to symbolize mutually exclusive environments.”)⁵³ But there are also reasons, which I will soon come to, for doubting that this is Cavell’s final view of the film. In any case, framing these statements first requires connecting what I said earlier about modernism and abstraction to the black-and-white films Cavell discusses as projecting futurity: Godard’s *Alphaville* and Antonioni’s black-and-white trilogy with Monica Vitti (*L’Avventura* [1960], *La Notte* [1961], *L’Eclisse* [1962]). These films will also help us to understand how Cavell conceives the relation between general theoretical statements and exceptions when it comes to color.

Cavell’s remarks on *Alphaville* are central to the themes I have been developing. After saying that the film “turns on the premise that the cities we now inhabit are the future,” and yet this futurity is commuted in black-and-white, Cavell says:

But in *Alphaville* the black and white are made to function like colors. Visually this is accomplished by confining the interiors largely to bright metallic and glass and plaster expanses or passageways, and the exteriors to scenes at night; dramatically it has to do with Godard’s presentation of character—in particular with his ability, or disability, in de-psychologizing or un-theatricalizing the characters⁵⁴ [...]

Cavell’s comment that in *Alphaville* “the black and white are made to function like colors” can at first seem mysterious or arbitrary. But it is significantly less so if we grasp that Cavell is grounding his experience of *Alphaville*’s blacks-and-whites in both their abstractions and in their being used to project a unified, future world. Those abstractions include the film’s attention to surfaces, and thus to visuals that promise “nothing beyond” themselves (again to use Friedlander’s phrase). (We can also mention in this connection the film’s sharp shifts between extreme overexposure—

52. *Ibid.*, 84.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 84.

abstract whites—and extreme underexposure—abstract blacks.) Those abstractions also help to “mask” (as Cavell will put it later in the chapter) those dramatic types and explanations that he associates with figuration: an effect that he here again calls “de-psychologizing or un-theatricalizing.” Moreover, the world of *Alphaville* is projected from the current one—even changes in language and expression are accounted for in the film—and in a way that requires enough of a unified world (especially unified by the film’s abstract visual style) for there to be a question of world-projection. (In her famous essay on Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968], which Cavell cites as an influence on *The World Viewed*, Annette Michelson compares the futurity of that film with that in *Alphaville*, saying that “both unflaggingly sustain a coherent visual style.”)⁵⁵ Thus, monochrome can approach what Cavell says about color so long as it is used for abstraction and unified world-projection.

Something similar could be said about Cavell’s understanding of Antonioni’s black-and-white trilogy with Monica Vitti, though he does not go as far as to say that in those films “the black and white are made to function like colors.” Nevertheless, there are two important respects in which Cavell seems to understand these films as preparing the way for the more obvious exploration of color and futurity that he mentions in connection with Antonioni’s later color film *Red Desert*.⁵⁶ First, Antonioni relies on visual abstractions: alluding to a sequence in *La Notte*, Cavell mentions “the abstracted windshield wipers and the mechanical intermittence of passing light on the wet windows measuring the anxiety and the abstraction of the inhabitants from their capacity to feel.”⁵⁷ His mention of “the sheen or finish of the frames” in Antonioni’s films recalls his earlier remarks on abstract surfaces in *Alphaville*.⁵⁸ And these same passages—as well as Cavell’s mention of Antonioni’s treatment of psychological “absence”—show how Cavell understands these abstractions in Antonioni’s visual style as “masking” figuration in the additional sense that he has identified as “de-psychologizing or un-theatricalizing.”

55. Annette Michelson, “Bodies in Space: Film as ‘Carnal Knowledge,’” *Artforum* 7, no. 6 (1969): 54-63, 61. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 13.

56. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 82.

57. *Ibid.*, 96.

58. The idea that Antonioni’s black-and-white approaches the abstractions of color receives a kind of support from Price’s formulations. Here he is on Claire Denis’s *Beau Travail* (1999), though he could just as well be describing *L’Avventura*: “the sea itself is a very telling abstraction. Liquidity is but another way of describing the bleeding of color across line. Moreover, the breakdown of formal harmony is motivated by erotic desire.” Price, “Color, the Formless, and Cinematic Eros,” 85.

Second, Cavell discusses Antonioni's films in terms of future world-projection, and in a way that helps clarify how he may have been understanding that notion. Thus, in discussing the Monica Vitti trilogy, Cavell says, "When love is altogether over, unable even to stir a fantasy of future redemption, then we have forgone the futurity of our future," a notion he explains by discussing the final shot of *L'Avventura*: "the woman puts her hand on the man's shoulder not because she forgives his betrayal, or even his inability to offer tears and beg forgiveness, but because she accepts that there is nothing to forgive, to forgo, no new place to be won on the other side of this moment."⁵⁹ The possibility raised by these passages is that the "futurity" projected by a unified world of abstractions might be better understood as the *question* of whether we can intelligibly project a future world from the present one. But the case of Antonioni shows that it is no shirking of the task of future-projection to raise that question and then sincerely answer it in the negative.⁶⁰

That last suggestion raises the additional possibility that there is something equivocal about Cavell's account of color in *Rosemary's Baby*, and perhaps even something infelicitous by his own lights in his connecting that film to *pastness* as opposed to *futurity*. On the one hand, it seemed (as I mentioned above) that for Cavell the distinct worlds and spaces in that film are too diffuse to constitute a unified world for which the question of future world-projection might arise. On the other hand, it can now seem that Cavell understands *Rosemary's Baby* to raise that very question and yet (as in Antonioni) to answer it in the negative. Thus, in discussing the film's connection to the announcement of God's death in Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, Cavell says of Rosemary, "In the absence of God, it is up to her to create God. And what is thus created, in isolation, is not God."⁶¹ That is, it is only against the background of a coherent question about whether God will survive or be reborn that the proposal of God's

59. *Ibid.*, 96.

60. Cavell marks a further set of issues when he says that "In Bergman's harsh black and white mysteries, the future began a long time ago. The melodrama consists not in watching to see whether death will be victorious, but whether we will arrive to ourselves in time to remove its sting." Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 95. He is presumably referring here to *The Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde inseglet*, 1957) and its suggestion that apocalypses have already taken place in the past. What sets this sense of *pastness* apart from that of other black-and-white film is that it depends on something beyond "spatial temporal consistency" with reality and instead on world-unifications that might ground something like world-*retro-projection*. But it must be admitted that Cavell does not say enough about Bergman's visual style to connect those results to, say, an abstract use of black-and-white. The possibility nevertheless remains of reconstructing those views from what Cavell elsewhere says about abstraction.

61. *Ibid.*, 88.

death makes any sense. By Cavell's lights this background requires a degree of world-unification (aided by color?) that he had earlier denied the film.

It is possible that what I have read as Cavell's equivocations about *Rosemary's Baby*, pastness, and world-unification reflect an uncertainty about how to approach futurity as a *question* that is not resolved until his treatment of Antonioni later in the chapter. The important point about *Rosemary's Baby* is this: despite what Cavell says about what the film's colors do *not* do, he has also given us the resources for understanding how its colors might nevertheless play a role in raising the same question about survival and futurity that he has throughout connected to color and its abstractions.

3. The Case of Godard

Cavell's discussion of Godard in the color chapter is of great importance for approaching the question of arbitrariness since Cavell's positive assessment of *Alphaville*, as we have seen, depends on that film's coming closer to the abstracting and future world-projecting powers of color, whereas his criticisms of color films by Godard like *La Chinoise* depend on his finding the opposite attributes in those films. But what else justifies these exceptions to Cavell's generalities? We find that Cavell approves of those Godard films that display a kind of Heideggerian "worldliness." This is already clear in his understanding of the importance of future world-projection (and the use of abstract surfaces in unifying a world) in *Alphaville*. Cavell also discusses the Belmondo figure in *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960) as capable of turning spoken phrases into definitions of his world.⁶²

In contrast, Cavell expresses his disapproval of other 1960s Godard films for being *de-worlded*:

For Godard's characters (after *Breathless*) there is no longer any problem of ending or change. They *are* somewhere else, already in a future. Godard establishes this not by altering the psychology of his characters, nor through their

62. *Ibid.*, 98.

responses to their own inability to respond, but by depersonalizing them from the start.⁶³

Notice that these terms allow for *Alphaville* to be an exception: Cavell is friendlier to a kind of depersonalization that is prepared for by projecting a future, depersonalized world from the present one. (Likewise with Cavell's positive reception of future-projecting depersonalization in Antonioni.)⁶⁴ This becomes clearer as Cavell sets up an opposition between the "masking" or "neutralizing" effects of abstracting visuals (including what supposedly allowed *Alphaville's* black-and-white to approach the powers of color) with Godard's pursuit of depersonalization *tout court*:

The neutralization of drama by means of color, or the creation of worlds of make-believe or of fantasy, is not merely useless to his effort but antithetical to it. He has no vision of another world his people may inhabit, his people are without fantasy (hence pastless and futureless, hence presentless)⁶⁵ [...].

Thus, this is a vision of depersonalized circumstances that have somehow already been manifested without doing the work of world-projection. It is a false futurity. The *question* of future world-projection that Cavell associated with Antonioni has, according to him, not even been raised. Further below Cavell characterizes Godard's relation to his subjects in terms of an arbitrary "position."⁶⁶ This can be surprising, since by the time of *The World Viewed's* publication in 1971 Godard was already underway in solidifying his Marxist and anti-imperialist position in his Dziga Vertov Group films (1968-72). It is not clear what Cavell knew of these films, particularly while writing *The World Viewed*. But they provide an interesting test of Cavell's terms: one might agree with Godard's Marxist and anti-imperialist position and yet worry that he has not prepared for their reception by a not-already convinced audience, or that the fu-

63. *Ibid.*, 96-97.

64. The difference between Godard and Antonioni that Cavell sketches is remarkably epitomized by Jonathan Rosenbaum's quotation of a 1964 interview by the former of the latter, occasioned by *Red Desert*. Godard says, "The drama is no longer psychological, but plastic..." to which Antonioni replies, "It's the same thing." See Rosenbaum, "A Cinema of Uncertainty," *Chicago Reader*, April 8, 1993, <https://chicagoreader.com/film/a-cinema-of-uncertainty/>.

65. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 97.

66. *Ibid.*



Figure 1: Screen grab from *La Chinoise* (1967).

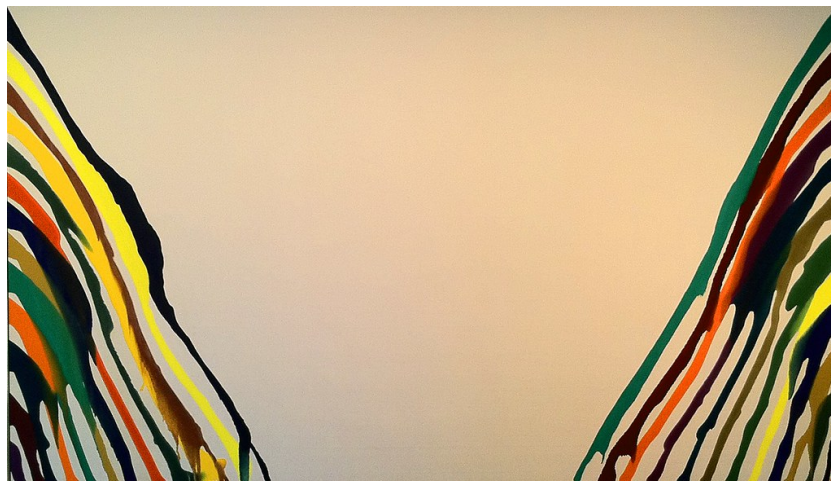


Figure 2: Morris Louis, *Beta Zeta* (1960-61). Source: Creative Commons. Photographer: Dmitriy Sakharov.

ture worlds they imagine cannot be seen in relation to our own.⁶⁷ Thus, the question of Godard's position's correctness is independent of the question of whether he has fulfilled what Cavell sketched as the responsibilities of world-projection in modernist filmmaking.

With his discussion of Godard's *La Chinoise* Cavell presents his last treatment of color in the color chapter: in that film "the color suggests make-believe and so pro-

67. A way of putting this point using terms internal to Marxism (which Cavell, as a non-Marxist philosopher, is not prepared to use) is to accuse Godard of "ultra-leftism."

vides the out that the whole thing is child's play."⁶⁸ We may want to ask about the line between the "out" Cavell mentions and a film more simply *about* child's play.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Cavell's criticism of *La Chinoise* continues the idea that he has been developing all along: color's abstractions can help sustain modernist world-projection, but they cannot guarantee it. We might find in *La Chinoise*'s use of blocks of primary colors what Cavell later in the book describes, regarding Morris Louis's *Unfurled* series, as "the frankness that leaves individual colors not merely separate but separated."⁷⁰ But by Cavell's lights any such "frankness" in *La Chinoise* does not amount to world-projection (Figures 1 and 2). This is not the abandonment of the topic of color in favor of world-projection, but a concern by Cavell with which films fulfill color's natural potential for projecting a unified world.

These considerations are continued and extended in those discussions of Godard's 1960s color films by Cavell that follow *The World Viewed*. Importantly, they play a role in what appears to be his special receptiveness to *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, 1967).⁷¹ *Two or Three Things* also uses blocks of primary colors, and it seems that in this case the harmonies they constitute are in the service of serious questions about world-projection.⁷² In this film, we have a detailed attention to how its projected world of commodified persons came to be realized: including, as in *Alphaville*, an attention to the importance of changes in language. Moreover, the question of future-projection is explicitly raised in Godard's voiceover in the café scene that Cavell discusses at the end of his 1978 essay "What Becomes of Things on Film?"⁷³ (In that scene Godard's voice describes circumstances in which "the future is more present than the present," though that

68. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 101.

69. This is roughly how Jacques Rancière understands the film. See his "The Red of *La Chinoise*: Godard's Politics," in *Film Fables (Talking Images)*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), 143-53.

70. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 111.

71. We also know that Cavell played a vital role in a seminar at Harvard taught by Alfred Guzzetti on that film in 1971-72, as well as in encouraging Guzzetti's resulting publication, *Two or Three Things I Know about Her: Analysis of a Film by Godard* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). See Guzzetti's memory of Cavell in Scott MacDonald, "My Troubled Relationship with Stanley Cavell: In Pursuit of a Truly Cinematic Conversation," in *The Thought of Stanley Cavell and Cinema*, ed. David LaRocca, 107-120, 120n13.

72. These color blocks and harmonies are examined in Edward Branigan, "The Articulation of Color in a Filmic System: *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*," in *Color, the Film Reader*, 170-82.

73. Cavell, "What Becomes of Things on Film?," in *Themes Out of School* (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1984), 173-83, 182-83.

idea's resonances are not limited to that scene.) And as late as a 2002 discussion of the visuals and music in that same film ("babbling one- or two-word signs, done with big letters in primary colors"), Cavell foregrounds the question of future world-projection: the question of *Two or Three Things* is whether there is "hope for us in learning how to go on, or [whether] there is not."⁷⁴

In other words, the terms of Cavell's later receptiveness to *Two or Three Things* were already in place with his earlier treatment of color. This is not a variable or arbitrary treatment of different color and black-and-white films, but rather a treatment rooted in a specific idea of celluloid color's potential for abstractions, harmonies, and future world-projection.

4. Conclusion: Color after *The World Viewed*

If I am right about how Cavell employed a connection between color and abstraction in *The World Viewed*, we can also understand his interest in filmic explorations of color's abstractions in later writing, like his 1979 remarks on Bergman's use of fades to complete red in *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskningar och rop*, 1972). It is no accident that this use of red—one of the most astonishing, extended explorations of the abstracting possibilities of a single color hue in narrative film—also elicits some of Cavell's most interesting synoptic reflections on film's powers of preservation. Having already suggested, via a clear allusion to Freud's essay "Medusa's Head," that the self-castration carried out by Karin (Ingrid Thulin) is meant to evoke the figure of Medusa, Cavell says:

And since Bergman's screen in this film fades to red at the close of its sequences, we may take Bergman to be declaring his film screen to a version or container of the severed head of Gorgon, to contain that kind of assault upon us. But what would be his attitude to this possibility? We are quite certain that we are not turned to stone, are we not? If we are not stone, and if the power of the

74. Cavell, "Crossing Paths," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 361-74, 373.

film image is nevertheless what I say it is, then the screen we see it on is a version of the shield of Perseus. Then a film director, like Perseus flying through the air, looking down upon the earth, has in his hands the power to put halls of people to instant death, or to preserve them.⁷⁵

This passage is yet another place, besides his remarks on *Caligari* in *The World Viewed*, in which Cavell is likely alluding to a famous idea of Siegfried Kracauer's: this time to Kracauer's proposal in his 1960 book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* that the film screen is a version of the protective shield that Athena gave to Perseus, since we depend on it "for the reflection of happenings which would petrify us were we to encounter them in real life."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Cavell's use of this image is somewhat different from Kracauer's. Rather than emphasize the screen's power to mirror reality—and thus give us some protective distance from it—Cavell instead emphasizes the relation between director and audience ("halls of people"), which is another way of raising the question of what world they share. Moreover, the idea that filmmaking can be used to bring about either death or preservation is already familiar to us from *The World Viewed's* emphasis on world-projection: the question ineluctably facing modernist filmmakers of whether they can project a future world or not. Thus, "preservation" on Cavell's understanding is not a matter of mirroring a world but instead of projecting a world, a task for which he finds abstracting uses of color (like Bergman's) to be a crucial resource. It is also a task that, in that same essay, Cavell finds taken up by the return to full color at the end of Makavejev's *Sweet Movie* (1974).⁷⁷

The stakes of Cavell's difference from Kracauer are made a little clearer by some remarks on Kracauer's analogy by Gilberto Perez in his 2000 book *The Material Ghost* (remarks which do not mention Cavell). Opposing both Kracauer's conception of the screen as mirror and Lacanian formulations of that idea, Perez instead emphasizes how the screen's images are constructions: "Their picture of reality may

75. Cavell, "On Makavejev on Bergman," in *Themes Out of School*, 106-140, 136. See also Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVIII, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 273-74.

76. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1960), 305-6.

77. Cavell, "On Makavejev on Bergman," 132-133. See also Cavell, "What Photography Calls Thinking," in *Cavell on Film*, 115-133, 123.

be convincing, but in the way fiction is convincing: we respond to the picture not as we would to reality but as we respond to the constructs of representation.”⁷⁸ But as we know from Cavell’s discussion of Godard, a “construction” can bypass the exigencies of projecting a future world. These are the exigencies that the abstracting powers of color are supposed to be especially suited to fulfilling. Thus, any conception of film that depended on a dichotomy between *mirroring* and *constructing* would miss the very problematic that made color and its abstracting powers an important issue for Cavell.

Neither mirroring nor constructing but *projecting* a world (from the one that we can presently share or affirm): that is the distinctive vision of film that Cavell could only have articulated through his specific experience of color.⁷⁹

78. Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 17.

79. Thanks to María José Alcaraz León, Josh Kortbein, and Dan Morgan for conversations about this material, as well as to students in my fall 2021 aesthetics class at the Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana for pertinent conversations.