Conversations 7

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Contributors
Introduction: Acknowledging Stanley Cavell

A year has elapsed since Stanley Cavell died, and in that time those who knew him and read his work, have been coming to terms with his permanent departure. For many it has not been easy, and part of this difficulty includes trying to say something in writing about what the loss has meant, or might entail, or perhaps better, what it stirs in us.

Shortly after Cavell’s death, I was in conversation with the editors of this journal, and we were all thinking similar thoughts, namely, that a commemorative issue was in order. The editors graciously invited me to guest edit, and accepting the honor, I turned in kind to the community of Cavell’s readers—his friends, colleagues, admirers, and others beyond the immediate circle—to solicit reflections. The idea, a familiar one for those inclined to commemorate the loss of a beloved, esteemed writer and thinker by offering further words, was to invite a small, representative, and willing group to share remarks in the wake of Stanley Cavell’s death—that is, with an eye toward how his work lives on, and how he and his work have given us life. The present collection of dispatches is the result. There are, and have been, several similar initiatives afoot, and I believe, I hope, the benefactions here assembled are a fitting complement to those efforts.¹

As we have individually and collectively been processing what it is like to inhabit a world lived without Cavell—without his peerless company, without his unmatched philosophical aid and insight—we are all now, no doubt, thrown back upon his works, his words (a pleasure, to be sure) but also turned to them this time with me-

mories of our earlier encounters of reading, and in some cases, in many cases also en-
counters with the man himself. Perhaps it is not surprising then, that the tone of
many of these pieces might be taken up as variations on the genre known as Ackno-
wledgments—so often arriving in the algorithm, “I wish to thank x for doing y and
inspiring z.” The conceptual affiliation with Cavell’s master-word acknowledgment is
palpably evident, and I hope to say something about the significance of that connecti-
on. But first, I don’t mean to suggest that the pieces for this special issue were conceived in the spirit of Acknowledgments, nor was my prompt to contributors framed
along such lines, and yet, and yet, commemoration—“remembering together”—seems
to have allowed for and encouraged a space of thinking and thanking (re-thinking, remem-
bering, re-remembering, that is, re-cognizing coupled with the gesture of appreci-
active recognition) that feels kin to the kinds of things one wants, tries, to say in
Acknowledgments. In this prefatory note, I am just putting a little more pressure on
this resonance partly because I have long been fascinated—in Cavell’s own work—
with the particular tone, registration, detail, cadence, and duration of his many, many
(formal, published) Acknowledgments ... and Prefaces, Forewords, Afterwords, and
similar occasional pieces that functioned in a similar vein (e.g., “Words of Welcome”).

What I did say to the contributors was inspired by a conversation I had with
Cavell in the months when he was just beginning to compose the autobiographical
remarks that would become Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory. As Cavell re-
lected on his method for writing this work, he said: “I’m seeking those moments
from my life that rise to the level of philosophical significance.” Such a rich observa-
tion can turn us anew to Little Did I Know, and give us a fresh point of reference on
how, say, a personal memory finds its way into the conversation of philosophy—and
now, in Cavell’s case, a permanent home in the history of philosophy. For our purpo-
ses here, though, since we are all readers of Cavell’s work, we all have our own memo-
ries and moments to draw from; our first question will be to discern what of those
thoughts and recollections we might wish to share with others, which may be worth
sharing (by what criterion?)—rising to the level of philosophical significance. The dis-

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cernment is not easy in easier circumstances; it is that much more trying in a state of mourning.

Thinking over Cavell’s remark, and as I tried to understand the method it conveyed, in so far as such a thing is possible from a single statement (yet, later, it would be triumphantly glossed in the pages that form *Little Did I Know*), I suggested to the prospective contributor to this special issue of *Conversations* that she feel free to adapt the following strands of “approach” to her piece—deciding, as she preferred, to make them distinctive, or as a braid or weave. The nature of how each strand might be gathered, and how it could be related to other strands, remained an open question, and at that, one for experimentation and exploration. (I did also welcome other forms of prose, such as correspondence, journal entries, poems; and solicited ideas that might not be captured by familiar categories of type and genre).

So, a few words to define or refine a first “approach,” or strand of thinking: I imagined that a contributor might select a passage, or passages, from the breadth of Cavell’s writing that taught her something formally and conceptually. I inquired: how did this piece or passage tutor you—that is, by way of Cavell’s distinctive literary-philosophical voice—for instance, to think for the first time, or anew, about some crucial element worthy of philosophical discernment? And then another approach might be drawn in: If you knew Cavell personally—were in his classes or among those he mentored; if you collaborated with him, or shared his company in some other capacity—please do integrate reminiscences that are pertinent to your thinking out of these reflections. If you only “encountered” Cavell in his writings, then perhaps you can draw from memories of salient moments in your life with his writings—among them the first time you read his prose, the first time you taught his work in a course, or other occasions that befit your reply to the first approach.

I continued: with these pathways in mind, you can take up a topic or theme or problem as it relates, for example, to Cavell as philosopher, as pedagogue, as scholar, as writer, as reader, as critic, as colleague, as advisor, as mentor, as musician, as composer, as improviser, as cinéaste, as opera lover, as traveler, as public speaker, as correspondent, as American, as Jewish, as Harvardian, as friend, and befitting the spirit of the journal, as conversationalist. A further possibility, yet another approach, could share the spirit of the much-needed, incisive remarks offered in the immediate
weeks after Cavell’s death by Nancy Bauer, Alice Crary, and Sandra Laugier, thereby becoming a piece that explores Cavell’s legacy on some enduring topic, or as a contribution to a contemporary trend or vexing problem that would benefit from his work. However the contributors chose to take up or innovate from these suggestions, one thing is common and clear: we have before us a dynamic, unforgettable session of thinking further with Cavell as part of remembering him.

For those convened here, Stanley Cavell, in his personable, companionable presence, and to be sure, now and evermore in his writing, was and remains a gift to the gratifications of thinking itself. He was exemplary and thus provided a model to learn from while also prompting us to do our own work (which in many cases meant coming to terms and responding to his). For some, Cavell’s interests were so compellingly conveyed by him—in his speech, in his writing—that we may have, on occasion, or for longer than that, lost sight of our own; more than a few students, acolytes, and fellow scholars have cited his achievements as an obstacle to their productivity, their own satisfactions (even happiness) in the midst of their attempts to independent scholarship. Like his work, Cavell himself, in his person, in the pitch and inflection of his voice, often proved magnetic and for that disorienting. We are familiar with the ersatz Emerson quotation “Who you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying,” which feels apt. But so do Emerson’s own words: “The attitude, the tone, is all. [...] Let us not look east and west for materials of conversation, but rest in presence and unity. A just feeling will fast enough supply fuel for discourse, if speaking be more grateful than silence.” Now, in Cavell’s absence, it remains to be known whether the attributes of his written work sustain a similar effect: that though we know it is worth our time and attention, saying precisely how and why may be beyond us. Let it not be behind us.

Fittingly, the following dispatches from the minds and memories of those who knew and loved Cavell, or contended in some fashion with his influence, are all, in some measure, “scenes of instruction”—even for those who met Cavell as adult colleagues and for those who never shared his company. If most of the contributors have

4. Emerson wrote, with his italics: “What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary,” “Social Aims,” in Letters and Social Aims in The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1903), 96.
5. Ibid.
had the pleasure and privilege of a personal relationship with Cavell, what is more striking is the continuity of the experience one has encountering Cavell’s work in the classroom, in the lecture hall, and—far from his living presence, during his lifetime and after it—in print: these disparate spaces convey a sensibility of a mind launched upon inquiry, and so where or whenever one joins Cavell, one will be launched as well. Whether one’s encounter, then, was in person or on-the-page, the effect can evidently be much the same, which is to say: education with Cavell is, or can be, an ongoing, lifelong process. “Being his student,” in the strict, literal sense is too limiting for what he has made possible for his readers—and continues to make possible, despite all, after his death.

Once, in conversation with Cavell, I pitched the idea that he might, because he could, one day prepare a volume comprised solely of his Prefaces, Forewords, Afterwords, front matter and back matter, including Acknowledgments, from many books (his own and not his own). He readily admitted that the sheer quantity would amount to a book, though we pondered—daydreamed—together what kind of book it might be: serial solicitations, each next one sustaining a mood of hospitality and cheeer? How lovely. What a congenial context for philosophy’s ongoing labors. In this imagined collection (that one can summon in one’s own mind), I came to appreciate that its effect—albeit here as a moment of conceptual art, perhaps later as a printed artifact—would help to generate the feeling he conjures in the reader as a matter of course: namely, that she is welcome, a party to company she should like to have, holding fast to it now and into the future. For the complaints made concerning the “difficulty” of Cavell’s prose, his style, there can be little doubt that one thing was never obscured: the ways in which his words made one feel invited, a legitimate partner for thoughts worth dwelling upon and sharing. For me, and so many others, such a gift has proved a grace.

Our collective remarks may be figured as Afterwords in themselves—or some variant: sketches composed in the wake of an auspicious experience, a veritable post-script, a kind of journal entry or notes from an expedition jotted down eagerly, aiming to capture the vitality of a crucial moment of mind and heart. From each new perspective, we catch a glimpse of recollection and remembrance married to sentiment and insight. Given that there are so many new readers yet to come, that is to say
posterity, an audience emerging anew from “tomorrow and the day after tomorrow,” perhaps we can take a measure from Cavell himself and think of these words, our words, as contributing to the spirit of welcoming. Not just consultations with ourselves, or shared reminiscences among friends and colleagues supplied as a votive for support and succor, but perhaps most importantly, as an invitation to all of those for whom Stanley Cavell’s work awaits. And how.

June 19th, 2019
DAVID LA ROCCA

Acknowledgments

It is not an afterthought—how could it be?—to inscribe my own Acknowledgments at the end of these remarks, at the head of this issue. For me, it has been a genuine privilege to liaise this congress in honor of Stanley Cavell and a pleasure to collaborate with its generous members. Let me convey my sincere thanks to the contributors for taking the time to amplify Cavell’s many gifts to us by acknowledging them. This gathering of “congenial spirits” formed, as it should, a group effort. So many of the contributors helped me connect to promising prospects; if you see a name of someone you recommended, I send my thanks for the vote of support. In the scale of things, we are a relatively small community, and it seems even more important now, in Stanley’s absence, that we know one another, or at the very least, know of one another. I am deeply grateful to the editors of the journal, Amir Khan and Sérgio Dias Branco for entrusting me with this project and for shepherding it through production. Moreover, several members of the journal’s advisory board have been crucial in facilitating the development of content for the special issue.

An Extended Invitation

A note to readers and prospective contributors: if you wish to have your remarks on Stanley Cavell’s legacy considered for a future supplement in *Conversations*, along the lines of the pieces collected in the present volume, or some other, please contact me directly at davidlarocca@post.harvard.edu and I will be happy to receive your proposal.
1. Apologies to Stanley Cavell

P. ADAMS SITNEY

I read *The World Viewed* as soon as it was published in 1971. Although I was outraged (and even at times disgusted) by that first reading, I was touched by its eloquence. My hostility was undoubtedly the premature judgment of a champion of avant-garde cinema toward a critic whose taste differed so radically from mine. I could hardly attend to what Cavell actually wrote at that time. My rage began with the opening chapter’s claim that “in the case of films, it is generally true that you do not really like the highest instances unless you also like the typical ones.” Here, I thought, was a parodic example of a professorial movie buff, taking what the Brattle Cinema in Cambridge happened to screen as the art of film. He amply declares that only a fool would judge paintings or music on the same basis. I wondered would he would say to someone who took the full range of books in the “philosophy” section of a typical Boston bookstore as the parameters of his disciple, noting at that time that there would be nothing by Cavell himself on such a shelf. (His 1969 collection of essays, *Must We Mean What We Say?* had disappeared by then. I had to order the book—hardcover only—from the publisher a year later.)

The fifteenth of *The World Viewed*’s nineteen chapters, called “Excursus: Some Modernist Painting,” drove home to me what a loss Cavell’s mind and pen were to what I then considered serious film study. In that chapter he brilliantly enacted the characteristic moves of his best writing, above all, by investing aesthetic distinctions with moral values. It didn’t take the copious footnotes to that chapter to show how indebted his choice of privileged paintings was to Michael Fried’s controversial (and dubious) taste. Yet his way of writing about them was astounding, and very moving:

Acceptance of such objects achieves the absolute acceptance of the moment, by defeating the sway of the momentous. It is an ambition worthy of the highest
art. Nothing is of greater moment than the knowledge that the choice of one moment excludes another, that no moment makes up for another, that the significance of one moment is the cost of what it forgoes. That is refinement. Beauty and significance, except in youth, are born of loss. But otherwise everything is lost. The last knowledge will be to allow even that knowledge of loss to vanish, to see whether the world regains. The idea of infinite possibility is the pain, and the balm, of adolescence. The only return on becoming adult, the only justice in forgoing that world of possibility, is the reception of actuality—the pain and balm in the truth of the only world: that it exists, and I in it.¹

I had never read such Emersonian eloquence in defense of—in the description of the experience of—abstract painting. Sure: I had known that Cavell was a figure of the Harvard Philosophy Department who was beginning to bridge the abyss that then separated the readers of Anglo-American post-Wittgenstein analysis from the work of Heidegger. In the “Excursus” one could see that bridgework in operation, as Cavell pitted the “moment” against the “momentous” in the passage above, and even more brilliantly in his extensions of the words of “automatism,” “candid,” “medium,” “representation,” and “abstract” in that same chapter. He marshalled asyndeton to spin out the “abstract” nouns for the psychological and moral distractions such paintings obliterated, and then capped the observation poignantly with a verbless riff of inner rhyme: “Because these abstractions retain the power of art, after the failure of representations to depict our conviction and connectedness with the world, they have overcome the representativeness which came between our reality and our art: overcame it by abstraction, abstracting us from the recognitions and engagements and complicities and privileged appeals and protests which distracted us from one another and from the world we have constructed. Attracted from distraction by abstraction.”² His diction echoes and twists key terms previously used in the chapter. Earlier he had boldly conflated representation as mimesis with political representation [praesens] without the slightest Heideggerian pretense to philological authority or

² Ibid., 117 (my italics).
to the recovery of an ancient synthesis. The paintings alone were sufficient authority and the language of the philosopher represented the depth of his response to them.

Luckily, the intensity and acuity of his moral vision of art impelled me to acquire *Must We Mean What We Say?* as soon as I was able. I write “Luckily”—because otherwise I might never have found a reason to read his essay “Kierkegaard’s *On Authority and Religion.*” That essay allowed me to complete the dissertation I was struggling to write on Maurice Blanchot and Charles Olson. At that time, the scholarship and writing on Blanchot was scarce and thin. Most of what there was was French, and none of its authors seemed interested in tracing Blanchot’s references. I had been able to pick out of his early writings unattributed phrases that he culled from Hegel, the Latin Vulgate, Heine, Ponge, and Kierkegaard, but it wasn’t until I read Cavell’s essay that I knew what I might do with that arcana. Cavell had read Kierkegaard on Authority as a proleptic text on modern art (among many other things, of less pertinence to me). Suddenly in the light reflected from Cavell’s pages I saw all those oblique quotations of Blanchot’s as attempts to define the impossible task of writing and representation in literature. That made my mundane task of academic writing possible.

Without meticulous biographies it would be impossible to untangle the priorities in the Cavell/Fried relationship. Fried might not have known Cavell’s Kierkegaard essay when he published “Art and Objecthood” in 1967. Cavell might not have even written it by then: it appeared in his 1969 collection of essays. By opening that essay with a quotation from Perry Miller, the Harvard historian of Puritan theology, and ending with the dictum, “Presentness is grace,” Fried had earned the contempt of such colleagues as Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster for his capitulation to the language of religion, while I found that hint of the metamorphosis of Puritan theology to the theory of art the most fascinating aspect of his polemic. But the explicit claims of Cavell were nevertheless more illuminating, as when he writes “[...] our serious art is produced under conditions which Kierkegaard announces as those of apostleship, not those of genius. I do not insist that art has become religion (which may or may not describe the situation [...] ) but that the activity of modern art, both in production and reception, is to be understood in categories which are, or were, religious.”

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I believe my attitude toward Cavell’s film writing began to change when I read his lengthy discussion of Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du jeu*, 1939) in “More of The World Viewed” in the *Georgia Review* in 1974. Then two years later, in the same journal, he published “Leopards in Connecticut” a definitive study of Howard Hawks’ *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). It was the first, and utterly convincing glimpse, we had of what would become his *Pursuits of Happiness*, the finest study of a film genre ever written, and all the more impressive because Cavell actually discovered and delimited the genre: comedies of remarriage.

There was still one more bump in the path of my full appreciation of Cavell: between *The World Viewed* and *Pursuits of Happiness* he wrote *The Senses of Walden*. It was an insightful and often dazzling book on the second-best thinker of Concord. But I could not understand why he was focusing his mind on Thoreau and ignoring Emerson, the primary poet-philosopher of America. Of course, I did not realize then that I was repeating my previous error of judging the book by its critical subject. It took *Pursuits of Happiness*, a book utterly outside of my academic domain and territorial interests, to make me an avid reader of all that Cavell published.

At the time that I was reading *The Senses of Walden*, one of my preoccupations was the Americanness of the American avant-garde cinema. The chapters of my dissertation on Olson had brought me to a deeper understanding of Emerson and of his Puritan influences, convincing me that he had pioneered a pervasively influential national aesthetics by infusing everyday perception (and thereby art) with the visionary intensity of the tradition of Jonathan Edwards and the Mathers. Because I was so obsessed with the tropes filmmakers had forged from walking with a movie camera, or turning it upside down, or filming from cars, trains, and airplanes, a hitherto overlooked passage in the “Idealism” chapter of Emerson’s 1836 book *Nature* drew my attention:

Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us. Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position apprizes us of a dualism. We are strangely affected by seeing the shore from a moving ship, from a balloon, or through the tints of an unusual sky. The least change in our point of view, gives the whole world a pictorial air. A man who seldom rides, needs only to
get into a coach and traverse his own town, to turn the street into a puppet-show. The men, the women,—talking, running, bartering, fighting,—the earnest mechanic, the loungers, the beggar, the boys, the dogs, are unrealized at once, or, at least, wholly detached from all relation to the observer, and seen as apparent, not substantial beings. What new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar, in the rapid movement of the rail-road car! Nay, the most wonted objects, (make a very slight change in the point of vision,) please us most. In a camera obscura, the butcher’s cart, and the figure of one of our own family amuse us. So a portrait of a well-known face gratifies us. Turn the eyes upside down, by looking at the landscape through your legs, and how agreeable is the picture, though you have seen it any time these twenty years!

In these cases, by mechanical means, is suggested the difference between the observer and the spectacle,—between man and nature. Hence arises a pleasure mixed with awe; I may say, a low degree of the sublime is felt from the fact, probably, that man is hereby apprized, that, whilst the world is a spectacle, something in himself is stable.4

Consequently, a statement by Tony Smith disparaged by Fried in “Art and Objecthood” where I first encountered it, thrilled me:

When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the ’50s, someone told me how I could get on to the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn’t be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never

done. At first I didn’t know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there which had not had any expression in art.5

The aesthetic results of these “experiences” are positively manifested in avant-garde cinema and polemically misapplied to sculpture and painting by Fried. One of my mistakes was thinking then that Cavell’s closeness to Fried and his insistence on the priority of Hollywood films, and their escape from the demands of Modernism, blinded him to this, and generally, to the aesthetic dimensions of Emerson’s philosophy. But when he turned, eventually, to Emerson, he revealed profundities in the bard of Concord that I hadn’t been able to see.

Every few years in my long tenure at Princeton University I would offer a course in Film Theory. The World Viewed was usually included on the syllabus, making me fonder of it with each iteration. One time, co-teaching the course with Thomas Levin, a delightfully good-natured agonist whose perpetual disagreements with me enlivened such collaboration, I saw, as in a funhouse mirror, my own earlier prejudices toward Cavell incarnated by my colleague, who also deposed the objects valued in that book, but not for the same reasons I had discarded. It was great fun to become, at last, Cavell’s advocate, and illuminating to have revealed the irrelevance of the objects of discussion.

By then I had met Cavell a few times. His generosity and kindness were outstanding. Over time the logic of his inquiries brought him to accept and champion what had been my own youthful enthusiasms, Emerson and Heidegger—and in so doing he gave us very useful instruction in what was most valuable in them—although he never “acknowledged’ the importance of avant-garde cinema. Now that “film,” as we both knew it, is a matter of the past and Modernism is no longer an arena of high-stakes contention, the grounds of our ideological opposition have dissolved into the atmosphere of critical history where my dispute will be an irrelevant footnote to his permanent eminence.

2. Cavell as a Way Into Philosophy

RICHARD MORAN

Opening remarks given at a memorial event, “Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell,” convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

It is of course a great honor for me to say a few words about Stanley on this occasion, and to say a few things about what he has brought to philosophy, what he has meant to me, and what his work contributes to American writing. And it is also clear that I have been given an impossible task, as anyone will know who has so much as an inkling of the variety and sweep of the texts, the questions, and the human phenomena that he has made available to philosophical reflection over the course of his many books.

And there are other difficulties in making such an address, and one for me personally, or a particular difficulty anyway, in saying something about Stanley Cavell’s contribution to philosophy, and this arises from the fact that for me his body of his writing and his example plays a concept-determining role in my access to the idea of philosophy as such. I mean not only that without his example, I wouldn’t have an understanding of what philosophy is, or can be, such that I could aspire to be part of it. I also mean, in thinking of his work as a paradigm, that it has the status of a standard or a measure, against which the various achievements of twentieth century philosophy are to be understood. On every subject that he has contributed to, he has raised the stakes on the level of intellectual seriousness with which they are pursued, and the kinds of questions that it is possible to ask about them.

For the plain truth is, I would never have tried for a career in philosophy, or to have formed the idea of being a writer of philosophy were it not for his example. I mean many things by that, perhaps chiefly that his daring, and his sense of philosophy as an adventure and not only a set of problems, inspired and sustained me over
many years when I was reading philosophy, writing in notebooks, but before I considered applying to graduate school. And when I finally did, it was on the gamble that if a great spirit like his had found some kind of home in the academic world, then perhaps it wasn’t as inhospitable to life as my previous experience had led me to believe. Like many of us, I suppose, I was an unhappy, alienated undergraduate, prone to disappointment in myself, in my teachers, and in the books I was trying to read. Philosophy inspired me, but I was going to need a special kind of encouragement to think that I could take the risk of seeing if I could make some contribution to it myself. —“Philosophy inspires much unhappy love.”

But I mean also something even more specific than that. In a literal and specific sense, I owe my first philosophical education to Stanley Cavell, even though it was many years before we met and he was never a formal teacher of mine.

As a college sophomore, I was drawn to the movies (it was the 70s, youth culture was movie culture) and I was both drawn to and intimidated by philosophy. And through luck I learned that there was this book about movies written by a Harvard philosophy professor called *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. I had no idea what “ontology” was, but as I started reading the first chapters I knew that I wanted in. It’s hard to describe the excitement of discovering that intellectual voice, one for whom sophistication was not a pose, erudition not a hoard of possessions, brilliance not an avoidance of vulnerability and self-questioning but rather the means to make such vulnerabilities yield their insights. I remained intimidated, of course, but I also felt taken into the confidence of this voice, and eager to learn how I myself could earn that kind of confidence, as a reader, as a beginner. This was heady stuff for someone barely twenty years old.

*The World Viewed* was the first book of any kind which I immediately began re-reading as soon as I finished it. I just wanted more, and was eager to see how those first chapters would sound to me now that I had made it to the end of the book in a state of semi-comprehension. It’s the book that taught me what reading and re-reading in philosophy are. That alone has been an invaluable, lifelong lesson. All through college and afterwards it was never out of my sight. I wanted it all, and I made the

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contents of that book my lesson plan. For years I made it a point to see every movie even briefly discussed in it, read every critic he mentioned, see the work of the painters he discussed, and begin reading the philosophers he was in dialogue with. As with Stanley’s writing in general, its impact is not only in what he writes himself but what he makes available and puts you in touch with.

So, when my college courses were boring me or irritating me, I re-read *The World Viewed*, and tracked down everything in the endnotes. The education I received from that one book is incalculable and took place over many years. There are, of course, the films themselves which the book introduced me to: the films of Bresson, Truffaut, Bergman, Antonioni, Howard Hawks, *Children of Paradise* (Carné), Astaire and Rogers, Godard, Chaplin, Keaton, and W. C. Fields, Terrence Malick, Carl Dreyer, Fellini, Jean Renoir, Alain Resnais, Hitchcock, Kubrick, Kurosawa, Welles, Chris Marker, Jean Vigo (whose *L’Atlante* [1934] is the source text for films of remarriage) and Murnau.

It was through this book that I first encountered the criticism of James Agee, Robert Warshow, Andre Bazin, Michael Fried, William Empson, Northrup Frye, Clement Greenberg, Annette Michelson, and the criticism as well as the poetry of Baudelaire, beginning with his great essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” the basis for a pivotal chapter in the book introducing modernism. It was from this book that I first discovered the paintings of Manet, Courbet, Delacroix, Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski. And finally, though I needed to work myself up to it, I first began trying to read philosophers like Rousseau, Heidegger, Hume, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Marx. Of course, this is not to say that I would never have encountered these figures, or at least some of them, had I never read *The World Viewed*. But Stanley’s writing gave me a kind of permission of access, somehow combined with a sense that these could be my own personal discoveries.

Part of what I mean by the “concept-determining status” of his writing as philosophy is that whatever philosophy was, or whatever reading philosophy was, it had to, just as a reading experience, demand and reward going back over it again and again. This also meant that the writing had to bear up under any possible pressure of interrogati-
on, of meaning, truth, relevance, seriousness, as well as the reader’s demand for pleasure and delight as well as instruction. And since any writing presenting itself as philosophical or of high intellectual seriousness will also be encountered in a milieu subject to its specific forms of disappointment, even of fraudulence and fakery, for Stanley Cavell’s writing to bear up under the weight of demands and promise I placed upon it, it had to be writing that could earn and keep the trust of a youth quick to disappointment (and feeling betrayed) by the representatives of intellectual life on offer that one encounters along the way. What this has meant for me is that philosophical writing that didn’t place all these simultaneous demands on itself, I have forever afterwards found difficult to take seriously as philosophy.

So this is part of what I mean by its “concept-determining” role in my life. But I also mean that the questions and the writers he has made available to philosophy are for me definitional of the subject of philosophy.

A self-conscious task Stanley took upon himself, pretty much all his life, is that of making a place within philosophy, as studied or practiced in the universities, for a number of writers and texts, which just about everyone agrees are of some kind of greatness and importance, often even canonical, but which nonetheless occupy an uneasy place considered as an academic subject. There are many such writers—Kierkegaard, Emerson, Montaigne, Rousseau, Freud—who are points of reference in philosophy as well as literature, and who are difficult to accommodate institutionally, (thematically related to their different concerns with the difficulties in making oneself intelligible.) This is part of what Stanley means in a late essay of his (“The Wittgensteinian Event”) by the “pedagogical recalcitrance of Wittgenstein’s text”: “In such a case, in an academic context, the existence of such writers raises the question: just what counts as teaching these texts, what is learning from them?”

Here, in a deeply characteristic virtue of Stanley’s, what would for others be a purely rhetorical question is in his hands taken perfectly seriously, and constructively. We will take this very question as our task, as readers, and as thinkers, and find ways to make progress on learning what teaching this text could mean. And one thing we will do at the beginning is look to the text itself to articulate its lesson of how it is

to be read. If the text if fully serious, it will be committed in its meaningfulness everywhere, and if as readers we are as demanding on our own responsiveness as we are on the text, we will be instructed in how to read it. Simple as that, really. It just helps to be possessed of the mind and heart of Stanley Cavell when you’re doing it. What his writing provides, in countless instances, is the kind of intellectual feat of both patience and brilliance that you wouldn’t believe was possible until you have seen it done yourself. And once you have seen it done, writing of that depth of responsiveness, serious down to its very syllables, after that encounter nothing else will do really. Writing that falls short of that, whether philosophy or criticism, will simply seem anemic and unserious by comparison. Hence this is another part of what I mean by saying that Stanley’s writing is for me paradigmatic of philosophy as such.

This is not a gathering of people who need to be introduced to the work of Stanley Cavell, so I may be permitted not to review his accomplishments here and now. But people come to the writing of Stanley Cavell from a remarkable variety of directions, something which is itself one of his special accomplishments, and I would wager that no two people in this room have read all and only the same works by Stanley Cavell. So, this means that we don’t all know the same things.

It is well known, for instance, that Stanley’s work reflects on an astonishing variety of subjects, from Barbara Stanwyck to Descartes’ cogito, but because his readers come from so many different places, they don’t always know what is going on in the neighboring fields. So, for instance, those who primarily know his work on Wittgenstein, will be aware of his writing on Shakespeare, or film, or Thoreau, . . . and likewise, an admirer of his writing on Henry James or opera, will know that the author of these works is an important American philosopher, but may not be in a position to know just how crucial an interpreter of Wittgenstein he is, to go no further.

And so there may yet be point in underlining, even in this learned and distinguished company, the difference there is between (on the one hand) being, perhaps brilliantly eclectic and generous in one’s intellectual sympathies, or taking an interest in Shakespeare or movies, and on the other hand, producing these works, writing unsurpassable books like The World Viewed, Pursuits of Happiness, and Contesting Tears, as well as the body of writing on Shakespeare first collected in his book Di-
sowning Knowledge. These are not just any books about film or about Shakespeare. Nor are they simply a gifted philosopher’s reflections on literature or film. These are books that both absorb and respond to the wealth of writing on film or literature that precedes him, some of it, after all, by some of the most gifted writers or scholars in the language, and yet these are books which manage to raise the level of intellectual ambition for these topics and achieve something that future writing on them is now forever to be measured by.

As he writes near the beginning of The Claim of Reason, “A measure of the quality of a new text is the quality of the texts it arouses.” Well, for devoted readers and writers like me, aroused, raised, and cheered by writing of Stanley Cavell, a measure, a standard like that really puts us on the spot. Which is where we belong, I suppose. I am personally and profoundly grateful for his example and for his friendship these many years, for providing so many points of entry to the subject of philosophy, so many ways in; and for providing so many ways forward.

A year after the publication in 1969 of *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Stanley Cavell observes in the elegant Preface he wrote for the 2001 edition, the effect on him, as he put it, “of putting the book behind me, or perhaps I should say, of having it to stand behind, freed me for I suppose the most productive, or palpably so, nine months of my life, in which I recast the salvageable and necessary material of my Ph.D. dissertation as the opening three parts of what would become *The Claim of Reason* and completed small books on film (*The World Viewed*) and Thoreau (*The Senses of Walden*). I consider those small books to form a trio with *Must We Mean What We Say?*, different paths leading from the same desire for philosophy.” If those three books form a trio, I take the fourth part of *The Claim of Reason*, completed in 1978, and *Pursuits of Happiness*, which in 1978 he was already writing, to form a duo—not, I would say, different paths leading from the same *desire* for philosophy, but from the trio’s *achievement* of philosophy.

1978 was also the year Cavell wrote “Thinking of Emerson,” in which he experienced a new-found sense of Emerson’s philosophical seriousness. He followed that essay two years later by “An Emerson Mood,” which goes further in acknowledging, and exploring, the profound affinities with Emerson he had come to intuit. It was not until the late 1980s, however, in *In Quest of the Ordinary, This New Yet Unapproachable America, Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, and the essays later collected in *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes*, that the full magnitude of Emerson’s impact on Cavell’s understanding of his own aspirations as a philosopher became clear. And with the publication in 2004 of *Cities of Words*, based on lectures in the course on “moral reasoning” he had first given in the late 1980s, Cavell affirmed that Emerson had assumed a privileged place in his thinking.
In *Cities of Words*, every chapter on a thinker presents a powerful, original interpretation of that thinker’s work, an interpretation that reveals why it is illuminating to pair the thinker with the particular film—in almost every case, a remarriage comedy or an unknown woman melodrama—Cavell chose as a match—given, in each case, his powerful, original interpretation of that film. Taken together, these paired chapters compellingly make the case that although America has not inherited the European edifice of philosophy, its movies have engaged—do they still?—in conversations with their culture that are no less serious, philosophically. And Emerson is the linchpin that holds together this remarkable book, in which Cavell uses Emerson’s writing, and only Emerson’s, as both an object and as a “means, or touchstone,” of interpretation—as a tool for reading, and for *teaching* reading.1

In the “Acknowledgment” section at the end of *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell tells us that “thoughts of remarriage as generating a genre of film began presenting themselves to me during a course of mine on film comedy I gave in 1974 at Harvard’s Carpenter Center for Visual Studies.” It was in 1975 that Cavell presented his reading of *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). In 1976, he gave a version of the film comedy course designed to “test out those ideas as rigorously as I knew how.”2 Thus, Cavell conceived of the book that became *Pursuits of Happiness* on the eve of his discovery of Emerson. Surely, his immersion in thinking about the distinctly American movie genre he named “the comedy of remarriage” was instrumental in motivating him to return to Emerson, only differently this time, and in enabling him to read Emerson’s essays in a way he had never been able, or willing, to do before.

In *The Claim of Reason*, Emerson’s name appears only once. In *Pursuits of Happiness*, he is invoked more than a few times. And yet, if Cavell had written “Thinking of Emerson” and “An Emerson Moment” before he had started writing *Pursuits of Happiness*, I don’t doubt that Emerson would have played as privileged role as he does in *Cities of Words*. Already in his 1983 essay “Thinking of Movies” and in “The Thought of Movies” and in “A Capra Moment,” both written two years later, Emerson does take center stage.

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In *Pursuits of Happiness*, one key invocation of Emerson is the quote Cavell chose to caption the wonderful frame enlargement, in the chapter on *The Awful Truth* (1937), of Cary Grant, who manifestly does “carry the holiday in his eye” and is “fit to stand the gaze of millions.” When Cavell writes, near the end of the *Philadelphia Story* chapter, “Dexter’s demand to determine for himself what is truly important and what is not is a claim to the status of a philosopher,” Emerson, the champion of “self-reliance,” is surely the kind of philosopher Cavell takes Dexter to be. And although he’s not yet prepared to claim this in so many words, Cavell is Emerson’s kind of philosopher as well. The passage goes on: “But is what Dexter claims to be enormously important, a matter of one’s most personal existence, to be understood as of national importance? How is the acceptance of individual desire, his form of self-knowledge, of importance to the nation?” And these questions motivate the chapter’s closing pages, which go on to answer them. Or do they?

Cavell writes: “I take Dexter at the conclusion of *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), when he says to Tracy ‘I’ll risk it. Will you?’ to be saying that he’ll both risk their failing again to find their happiness together, and also finally risk his concept of that happiness.” Is such happiness possible? Is it even conceivable? It is in this context that Cavell invokes Matthew Arnold’s concept of the “best self.” “Arnold wishes to work out,” Cavell writes, “the rule of the best to mean the rule of the best self, something he understands as existing in each of us. It is of course common not to know of this possibility, but more natures are curious about their best self than one might imagine, and this curiosity Arnold calls the pursuit of perfection. ‘Natures with this bent,’ Arnold says, ‘emerge in all classes, and this bent tends to take them out of their class and make their distinguishing characteristic not their Barbarianism or their Philistinism, but their humanity.’”

Here, Cavell does something rare in *Pursuits of Happiness* by drawing explicitly on ideas about the ontology of film he had worked out in *The World Viewed*: “the photogenetic power of the camera as giving a natural ascendency to the flesh and blo-

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4. Ibid., 150.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 157.
7. Ibid.
od actor over the character he or she plays in a film”; “the camera’s tendency to create types from individuals, which I go on to characterize as individualities.” In this way, Cavell sets up his point that:

[...] there is a visual equivalent or analogue of what Arnold means by distinguishing the best self from the ordinary self and by saying that in the best self class yields to humanity. He is witnessing a possibility or potential in the human self not normally open to view, or not open to the normal view. Call this one’s invisible self; it is what the movie camera would make visible. The originality inspired by the love of the best self Arnold calls genius. So much he might have been confirmed in by Emerson, whom he admired, and by Thoreau, if he read him. But when he goes on to call the best self ‘right reason’ he parts company with American transcendentalism. The rule of the best self is the source of the new authority for which Arnold is seeking, the authority of what he calls culture, of what another might call religion, the answer to our narcissism and anarchy. It was his perception of society’s loss of authority over itself [...] that prompted Arnold to write Culture and Anarchy. In it he distinguishes two forms of culture or authority, the two historical forces still compelling us on the quest for perfection or salvation; he names them Hebraism and Hellenism.

The governing idea of Hellenism, Cavell goes on, “is spontaneity of consciousness; that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience.” The world “ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them.” Arnold finds that his moment of history requires a righting of the balance in the direction of spontaneity of consciousness more than it needs further strictness of conscience. “The more one ponders what Arnold it driving at,” Cavell writes, “the more one will be willing to say, I claim, that Dexter Hellenizes (as, in their various ways, do Shakespeare and Tocqueville and Mill) while Tracy Hebraizes (as Arnold says all America does).”

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 158.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
Emmanuel Lévinas had a different take on the distinction between “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.” He criticized philosophy, born in Greece, for always “Hellenizing,” always denying or repressing the ethical standpoint particular to the Jewish tradition and rooted in the Hebrew language. For Lévinas, an Orthodox Jew, ethics, philosophy’s “other,” is higher than philosophy. His goal wasn’t to convert Gentile philosophers to Judaism, of course; but it was, in effect, to convert philosophy, not to “right the balance” but to transform philosophy from a “Hellenizing” into a “Hebraizing” practice that acknowledges the primacy of ethics.

In “What is the Scandal of Philosophy?,” Cavell, reflects on the striking resemblance—yet the strikingly different conclusions or morals the two philosophers draw—between Lévinas’s pivotal use of the passage in Descartes’s Third Meditation designed to prove the existence of God from the otherwise inexplicable presence within him of the idea of an infinite being, and Cavell’s own use of the same Descartes passage in The Claim of Reason in connection with the role of God in establishing for myself the existence, or relation to the existence, of the finite Other.13

Lévinas’s idea is that my discovery of the other, my openness to the other, requires “a violence associated with the infinite having been put into me”—“put into me’ being Lévinas’s transcription of Descartes’s insistence that “the idea of God I find in myself I know cannot have been put there by a finite being, for example, by myself.” In Cavell’s words, “This event creates as it were an outside to my existence, hence an isolated, singular inside.”14 At the same time, “it establishes the asymmetry of my relation to (the finite) other in which I recognize my infinite responsibility for the other.” But when the idea of the infinite is “put into me,” Cavell asks, why should it be infinite responsibility for this other that is revealed, rather than, as Cavell believes, “infinite responsibility for myself,” together with “finite responsibility for the claims of the existence of the other upon me, claims perhaps of gratitude or sympathy or protection or duty or debt or love? In an extreme situation. I may put the other’s life (not just her or his wishes or needs) ahead of mine, answerable to or for them without limit.”15 Although my responsibility to the finite Other is finite, I

15. Ibid., 145.
have an infinite responsibility to myself, in Cavell’s view—an absolute obligation to express myself, to make myself intelligible to myself as well as to others, apart from which I cannot know myself, cannot make myself known to others, cannot achieve the acknowledgment of others (my acknowledgment of them, their acknowledgment of me), cannot walk in the direction of an unattained but attainable self, as Emerson liked to put it.

Cavell writes, “What the marriage in *The Philadelphia Story* comes to, I mean what it fantasizes”—or what Cavell is fantasizing that the film is fantasizing—is “a proposed marriage or balance between Western culture’s two forces of authority, so that American mankind can refind its object, its dedication to a more perfect union, toward the perfected human community, its right to the pursuit of happiness.” And Cavell adds:

> It would not surprise me if someone found me, or rather found my daydream, Utopian. But I have not yet said what my waking relation to this daydream is, nor what my implication is in the events of the film. Our relation to the events of film can only be determined in working through the details of the events of significant films themselves. And specifically, as I never tire of saying, each of the films in the genre of remarriage essentially contains considerations of what it is to view them, to know them.17

These last words help to set up the chapter’s splendid conclusion, which calls attention to “the events of the ending of the film,” events that have, as Cavell puts it, “a peculiar bearing on the issue of viewing.”18 Reluctantly, I’ll resist the temptation to spend all the time I have left reading Cavell’s reading of the ending of *The Philadelphia Story*, and cut directly to the chapter’s last sentences:

> The ambiguous status of these figures and hence of our perceptual state will have the effect of compromising or undermining our efforts to arrive at a conclusion about the narrative. For example, shall we say that the film ends with

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17. Ibid., 159.
18. Ibid.
an embrace, betokening happiness? I would rather say that it ends with a picture of an embrace, something at a remove from what has gone before, hence betokening uncertainty. Will someone still find that my daydream is not sufficiently undermined by this uncertainty, and still accuse me of Utopianism? Then I might invoke Dexter’s reply to George’s objection to his, and all of his kind’s, sophisticated ideas: “Ain’t it awful!”

Cavell’s shot-by-shot reading of this passage, another rarity in his writings about film, identifies the film’s aspiration—or its fantasy of its aspiration—to be a marriage of Hellenism and Hebraism that might “bring American mankind a step closer to reclaiming its right to pursue happiness.” And isn’t Cavell declaring this to be his own aspiration in writing this chapter, or his own fantasy of his aspiration, as well?

Cavell is claiming here that The Philadelphia Story is intended to leave us in a state of uncertainty as to whether it is merely a daydream, as opposed to a daydream we can bring closer to reality. Shouldn’t that uncertainty be enough to keep the film, or Cavell’s account of the film, from being dismissed as a Utopian fantasy? And yet, by giving Dexter the last word, by indeed letting Dexter speak for him, isn’t Cavell overcoming or transcending that uncertainty by taking Dexter’s side? Isn’t Cavell in effect saying—saying to us—“I’ll risk it. Will you?” Or is this little scene Cavell is sketching, in which he responds to someone accusing him of spinning a Utopian daydream, part of the daydream he is spinning?

What I’m suggesting is that the uncertainty Cavell locates within The Philadelphia Story is mirrored by the uncertainty I am locating within his reading of the film. Then what is my “waking relation” to Cavell’s daydream? If it convinces me of the film’s “national importance, if I don’t take it to be merely a daydream, couldn’t someone accuse me of Utopianism? Then I would have to determine for myself how to respond. And I, too, might find myself saying: “I’ll risk it. Will you?”

In saying that Matthew Arnold diverges from American Transcendentalism by identifying the best self with “right reason,” Cavell doesn’t explicitly take sides. But surely, he’s on the side of Thoreau and Emerson. At least, his best self is. And although it seems accurate enough to say that Tracy Hebraizes, is it really true that

19. Ibid., 160.
Dexter Hellenizes? That would suggest that Tracy and Dexter are equal in moral authority. They once were, but at some point between the brief prologue and the body of the film, Dexter undergoes a transformation, a conversion to humanity—although this happens off camera, as a comparable conversion does in Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1946). (It’s not until *North by Northwest* [1959]—and, I might add, Leo McCarey’s *An Affair to Remember* [1957], made the same year—that a Cary Grant character undergoes such a transformation on camera, in front of our eyes.) By the time Dexter walks into Sidney Kidd’s office, he has already become a philosopher of Emerson’s—and Cavell’s—stripe.

If Dexter has truly become an *Emersonian* philosopher, he does not need his “spontaneity of consciousness” to be balanced with Tracy’s “strictness of conscience.” He has already found in *himself* that “saving balance” between “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.” That’s what gives him the authority to help empower Tracy to find that “saving balance” in herself. The “wonderful way of life” Emerson champions is to be strictly followed. Surely, in writing this chapter, Cavell sought, and found, a “saving balance,” a true marriage, between “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.” Hasn’t he always? His equal commitment to saying what he means and meaning what he says is his aspiration to marry “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.”

Arnold calls himself a perfectionist. But he’s not Cavell’s kind of perfectionist. Emerson is. At the time he wrote *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell had gone far on the path that was to lead him to give the name “Emersonian perfectionism” to the kind of perfectionism that he, like Emerson, believed in and aspired to practice. He wasn’t quite there yet when he wrote *Pursuits of Happiness*. But he was a lot farther along that path than I was. In *Pursuits of Happiness* Cavell observes that in 1978 “William Rothman and I offered a course jointly that took off from the material I had developed about remarriage and related it to other genres in (primarily) the Hollywood constellation of genres and to other films in which the actors and directors worked who were mainly responsible for the comedy of remarriage.”

The course we co-taught seemed to me at the time, through no fault of Cavell’s, a failure. By 1978, his understanding of the remarriage comedy genre was already largely set. This meant, for example, that what most piqued his interest in Ozu’s *Late*  

20. Ibid., 275.
Spring (Banshun, 1949) was its focus on a father for whom his daughter’s happiness is the most important thing in the world—not a traditional Japanese father, but a kindred spirit to the woman’s father in a remarriage comedy, as is the father in Hitchcock’s Stage Fright (1950). I understood why, given Cavell’s concerns, he would gravitate to the father-daughter relationship in these films. But I didn’t yet understand why, given my concerns, I should find it thought-provoking too.

Cavell was born in 1926, a year before The Jazz Singer, so the films Cavell watched during the quarter of a century in which going to the movies was a normal part of his week were, with few if any exceptions, “talkies.” And while “talkies” are films and thus subject to the ontological conditions The World Viewed explores, it was also a medium unto itself, a medium that film’s material basis is capable of supporting. And, for Cavell, the comedy of remarriage is itself a medium, one of the media the medium of the “talkie” is capable of supporting. Thus, Pursuits of Happiness’s claim that it is a “law” of the genre—that the comedy of remarriage has “laws” that each of its members must strictly follow is what is “Hebraizing” about the genre—each film at some point must acknowledge the woman in the film as the flesh and blood actress who incarnates her, thereby acknowledging that it is a film, not unmediated reality. But what Pursuits of Happiness primarily focuses on, what remarriage comedies themselves primarily focus on, as Cavell reads them, are the ways, different for each film, they find to obey the “law” of the genre requiring each film to earn its membership by entering into conversation with the other members. Obeying this “law” requires each film to achieve its own perspective on the genre as a whole, to enter the ongoing conversation among the genre’s other members. It is no wonder, then, that Cavell, for whom ordinary language is both a medium of philosophy and an inescapable subject for philosophy, should find the comedy of remarriage, which revolves around conversation, takes the form of a conversation, and is about conversation, to be not only a subject of interest to philosophy, but to be itself a medium of philosophy. For Cavell, as he put it in a 1989 interview, “philosophy is at all moments answerable to itself, that if there is any place at which the human spirit allows itself to be under its own question [...] indeed, that allows that questioning to happen is philosophy.”

But I am saying all this after the fact. In the course Cavell and I taught together, my lectures were at cross-purposes with his. I had already begun writing Hitchcock—The Murderous Gaze, and my way of thinking about authorship was as firmly set as his way of thinking about genre, which was in any case so different from any of the theories of genre that then prevailed—and largely still do—within film study, and so different from the way I was thinking about film, that I didn’t know how to make my lectures responsive to his, even though I was talking about films I loved and had a lot to say about, such as Griffith’s True Heart Susie (1919), Chaplin’s City Lights (1931), Sternberg’s Morocco (1930), Lubitsch’s Trouble in Paradise (1932), Hawks’ Twentieth Century (1934) and Only Angels Have Wings (1939), as well as Late Spring, Stage Fright, and Sunrise (1927). The task I faced was all the more challenging for me because Cavell’s own thinking had become so unsettled by his new encounters with Emerson that he was at a pivotal moment of his philosophical life. He was blazing a path through unexplored territory—a path I wasn’t yet ready to take myself.

Cavell writes, “Film is an interest of mine, or say a love, not separate from my interest in, or love of, philosophy. So when I am drawn to think through a film, I do not regard the reading that results as over, even provisionally, until I have said how it bears on the nature of film generally and on the commitment to philosophy.” My own writing, too, manifests a commitment to saying how my reading of a film casts light on the nature of film generally. And yet, although I was well-trained in philosophy, having been taught by the best, and have a taste for its pleasures, my writings do not manifest Cavell’s further commitment to saying in each case how his reading of a film casts light on “the commitment to philosophy.” My own further commitment, rather, is to saying in each case how my reading casts light on the art of writing film criticism that acknowledges film’s poetry and thereby achieves its own poetry. From the outset, I have taken my philosophical bearings from Cavell’s writing and teaching, without feeling the need to think through for myself the ways my kind of film criticism bears on philosophy, its significance for philosophy. I think it is accurate to say that my writing about film, like Cavell’s, marries film criticism and philo-

sophy, but that his is philosophy that is also film criticism, while mine is film criticism that is also philosophy. Cavell didn’t teach me how to write about film. What he taught me was that by writing film criticism that was “under its own question,” I was doing philosophy.

In *Must We Mean What We Say?* and *The World Viewed*, Cavell declared his affinity with the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* and with J. L. Austin, Cavell’s own professor of philosophy. By characterizing his own writings as *modern* philosophy, Cavell, who was then in regular conversation with Michael Fried, also declared his affinity with modernist artists, declaring himself to be writing from within what he called the “modernist situation.” In *Pursuits of Happiness*, though, references to modernism are altogether absent. Nor would the concept of modernism ever again figure prominently in Cavell’s writings.

Then, too, in *The World Viewed*, Baudelaire played a central role in the book’s reflections on film’s emergence at the moment in the history of the traditional arts in which realism was the burning issue and modernist painting was emerging. And yet, as Cavell would observe in “An Emerson Mood,” Emerson came as close as Baudelaire did—closer, really—to prophesying the advent of film’s mode of viewing the world. How different would *The World Viewed* have been if Cavell had written it after the encounter with Emerson that led him to write “Thinking of Emerson” and “An Emerson Mood?” And how different would *Pursuits of Happiness* have been had Cavell begun writing it after completing those two essays? But perhaps this last question is moot, given that he’d been thinking about the genre he was to call “the comedy of remarriage” as early as 1974, and that, as I’ve suggested, his thinking about this quintessentially American genre surely played a role in leading him back to Emerson, and in empowering him to read Emerson in a way that enabled him to recognize that his writing is “under its own question.”

By the end of the 1980s, Cavell had written *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, and the essays later collected in *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes*. In these books, Cavell paid in full the tuition for his intuition, first expressed a decade earlier in “Thinking of Emerson” and “An Emerson Mood,” that his own writing had profound affinities with Emerson’s. All of this thinking, and writing, about Emerson led Cavell to a further intuition. When he
was writing the trio of *Must We Mean What We Say?*, *The World Viewed*, and *The Senses of Walden*, and preparing for publication the first three parts of *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell, like Wittgenstein and Austin, found himself in a “modernist situation” in relation to the tradition of philosophy in which he was trained. He felt he had no choice but to write philosophy in a way that broke radically with the mode of philosophical analysis that was, and largely still is, dominant within English-speaking philosophy departments. But Cavell had also inherited, at first unknowingly, concerns and procedures of an alternative philosophical tradition, founded in America by Emerson, embraced by his great reader Thoreau and, in Europe, by his devoted readers Nietzsche (and, through Nietzsche, Heidegger) and Bergson (and, through Bergson, Deleuze), and kept alive within American culture, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, by the films Cavell watched during the quarter of a century in which going to the movies was a normal part of his week. Cavell did not find himself in a “modernist situation” in relation to this tradition. And by the end of the 1980s he was finally ready to give the name “Emersonian perfectionism” to the way of thinking philosophically he had come to recognize as his own, no less than Emerson’s. Looking back from this altered perspective, *Pursuits of Happiness* can be seen as a new departure, but also as a transitional work, a way station on the path that would lead to *Cities of Words* and, finally, his philosophical memoir *Little Did I Know*.

In *The Murderous Gaze*, my chapter on *The 39 Steps* (1935) raised the question of the relationship between the Hitchcock thriller and the comedy of remarriage, but approached it very differently from the way Cavell did in a 1980 essay called simply “North by Northwest.” To achieve conviction in the philosophical seriousness of Hitchcock’s films, Cavell felt the need, in effect, to derive the Hitchcock thriller, as a genre, from the remarriage comedy genre, just as in *Contesting Tears* he was to derive the genre he calls the “melodrama of the unknown woman” from the remarriage comedy. I argued, rather, that what keeps a Hitchcock thriller like *The 39 Steps* from being a comedy of remarriage was the role of the villain, which was inextricably linked with the role, tainted with villainy, played by the author himself—that is, by Hitchcock, with his instrument, the camera.

In this context, it is worthy of note that I wouldn’t have written my chapter on *The 39 Steps* at all had not Cavell not made it clear to me, tactfully, of course, when
he read the manuscript after I had finished the chapters on *The Lodger* (1927), *Murder!* (1930), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), and *Psycho* (1960) and was convinced that the book was finished, that those four films, and the way I had written about them, did not fully acknowledge an essential dimension of my love for Hitchcock’s art: the “matchless pleasures,” as I liked to call them, that Hitchcock’s films so generously offer. I knew Cavell was right. And so, I wrote the 39 Steps chapter and strove to make my prose evoke the “matchless pleasures” of the British music hall, whose joyful mood Hitchcock’s film lovingly captured, and thus cast.

For Hitchcock, *The 39 Steps* was a bridge connecting—and thus acknowledging the gap between—the Hitchcock thriller and the comedy of remarriage and the Hollywood genres Cavell understood to be derived from it. And my chapter on *The 39 Steps* was a bridge connecting, and acknowledging the gap between, Cavell’s way of thinking about genre and my way of thinking about authorship—between ascribing a film’s thoughts to the laws governing the genre itself, and ascribing them to an author’s act of self-expression.

Cavell came to Harvard in 1963, my junior year. Film was already my great passion, and this charismatic young professor, newly transplanted from Berkeley, allowed me, a callow undergraduate, to enroll in a graduate seminar in aesthetics devoted to film. In *The World Viewed*, he calls that seminar as a failure. As I never tire of saying, it didn’t fail me. Cavell agreed to be the advisor on my senior Honors Thesis. That it was on Wittgenstein is all I remember about it, other than that in my first draft I had numbered every paragraph as if I were writing the *Tractatus*, a reflection of a long-standing interest in logic—my father was a mathematician, while my mother had the spirit of a great tragedian. In my subsequent years as a student in Harvard’s doctoral program, I enjoyed to the hilt the privileged vantage being a Harvard Ph.D. student in philosophy afforded on the tumultuous events taking place in America, sometimes inside Harvard Yard, no less than in Paris, in those wild and crazy years. For much of that time, dissertation and job market were barely on my radar screen, but I was thinking, and writing, seriously. I was living the life of an American Scholar, as Emerson extolled it.

When I was a student, Cavell’s teaching already exemplified that “saving balance” between “Hellenizing” and “Hebraizing.” My parents were wonderful people,
but to the best of my knowledge, neither of them ever “Hellenized” or “Hebraized.” Cavell was, indeed, the first person I’d ever known, certainly the first who ever knew me, whom I saw as a figure of real authority—the kind of authority I believed directors like Hitchcock, Renoir, and Ozu possessed. I didn’t see him as bald; I saw him as having, to invoke what an admiring contemporary said of Kant, “a broad forehead built for thinking.” And what did Cavell see in me? He saw in me then, as he always has, as he has always encouraged me to see in myself, my “best self.”

And yet, the dissertation into which I poured my heart and soul, for all its Cavellian elements, was rooted in ways of thinking, deeply personal to me, that predated my first encounter with Cavell. The central section was an expression of a deep-seated sense, which I believed—not wrongly—I shared with Hitchcock, that something all-important for human beings—something that Cavell, like Dexter in *The Philadelphia Story*, fervently believed to be a human possibility, however difficult to achieve—the possibility of going from haunting the world as if from the outside to really living within it, a metamorphosis so profound as to be tantamount to death and rebirth—was actually an impossibility—as impossible as it is for a viewer, or for the beings who dwell within a film’s world, to cross the barrier-that-is-no-real-barrier of the movie screen.

In my dissertation, I presented this central section as if it were an illustration of the general theory of artistic expression, worked out in the first section, that I derived from reflections on a paradox inherent in expression. In creating a work of art by an act of self-expression, the artist changes, becomes other than what he or she was. Then what “self” performs the act? What “self” does the work reveal?

All the time I was writing this first section, I had the gnawing feeling that there must have been a philosopher who had expressed such thoughts. How was I to know that this philosopher was Emerson? And far from exemplifying my theory of artistic expression, predicated on the idea that artistic self-expression changes the artist, my view of the art of film was incompatible with it, predicated as it was on the idea that authoring a film leaves the author unchanged. I concluded the dissertation with a close shot-by-shot reading of Hitchcock’s *Notorious*, but that reading failed to acknowledge, or address, the conflict between the what I can now recognize as the Emersonianism in the first section and the skepticism in the second. Nor did the revised rea-
ding I published in *The Georgia Review*, with the addition of numerous frames from the film, which I was to use as the model for the readings in *The Murderous Gaze*. As a consequence, a skeptical thread runs through *The Murderous Gaze* that co-exists uneasily with expressions of the affinity I had come to feel with the affirmative dimension of Cavell’s philosophical outlook, to which *Pursuits of Happiness* gives fuller expression than any of his previous writings.

Just when I had finished the 39 Steps chapter and was again satisfied that I had completed the book, news reached me that Hitchcock had died. That day, I began writing a “Postscript” that meditated on the welter of emotions his death aroused in me. The depth of my own feelings told me—I didn’t need Cavell’s prodding this time—that my book, intended to pay the tuition for the intuition that for Hitchcock film was first and foremost a medium of self-expression—would be incomplete unless I found a way to express how personal the writing of this book was for me, the strength of my attachment, not just intellectually but emotionally, to Hitchcock’s films. It is a theme that runs through *The Murderous Gaze* that in a Hitchcock film, just because something is a fantasy doesn’t mean it isn’t also reality. The Postscript I composed, in a Hitchcockian spirit, accounts for the book’s writing by spinning what is unabashedly a fantasy—Cavell might prefer to call it a daydream—without making any claim as to that fantasy’s relationship to my waking reality. This is how the Postscript ends:

Film, in Hitchcock’s work, is the medium by which he made himself known, or at least knowable—the bridge between himself and us. But it is also a barrier that stands between Hitchcock and us. It stands for everything that separates Hitchcock from his audience, and indeed for everything that separates any one human being from all others. By dedicating his life to the making of films that are calls for acknowledgment, while doing everything in his power to assure that such acknowledgment would be deferred until after his death, Hitchcock remained true to his art, and true to the medium of film.23

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In its insistence that Hitchcock art is about an impossibility, not a possibility, of the human spirit, this Postscript is the purest expression of what I’ve called the skeptical thread that runs through *The Murderous Gaze*, binding it to my dissertation. What the Postscript’s final words consign to silence, the claim they authorize by that silence, is that in writing this book I had been true to *my* art. For all its melancholy mood, the Postscript thus declares the book to be an affirmation—if only an affirmation of the art of writing film criticism that is also philosophy.

Thirty years after I put *The Murderous Gaze* behind me, or had it to stand behind, I found myself again thinking almost obsessively about Hitchcock. For a new edition of *The Murderous Gaze*, I wrote a chapter that follows *Marnie* from beginning to end in the manner of the five original readings. In the Introduction to the first edition, I had observed that I could imagine the readings engendering a sense that Hitchcock’s philosophical outlook never changed, as if, to paraphrase Norman Bates, Hitchcock was in his own private trap within which, for all he scratched and clawed, he never budged an inch. I recognized even then that a tension between two incompatible worldviews ran through Hitchcock’s work, but argued that the inevitability of being suspended between those views was Hitchcock’s worldview. When I wrote the new chapter on *Marnie*, I was well aware that I had originally favored the dark side of Hitchcock’s art, encapsulated in the Oscar Wilde line he loved to quote: “Each man kills the thing he loves.”

When I wrote *The Murderous Gaze*, I had no name for the affirmative side of Hitchcock’s artistic identity. By the time I wrote the *Marnie* chapter, Cavell’s writings on Emerson had given me a name, Emersonian perfectionism, and a historical and philosophical context in which to place it. And I could see that *The 39 Steps* and the series of Hitchcock thrillers he made before departing for Hollywood aligned themselves with comedies of remarriage, but only up to a point. Hitchcock couldn’t simply embrace the American genre’s Emersonian outlook because he wasn’t yet willing to abandon the idea, which had always attracted him and on which his artistic “brand” was based, that we are all fated to kill the thing we love. In *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?*, the book I published two years after I wrote the *Marnie* reading, my central claim is that Hitchcock’s ambivalence toward Emersonian perfectionism, and his ambivalence toward overcoming that ambivalence, was the driving force of his art.
The book discerns a progression from his British thrillers to his earliest American films (made when the Emersonian outlook was starting to suffer repression in Hollywood); to his wartime films; his postwar films; his masterpieces of the 1950s; and ultimately to *Marnie* (1964), in which Hitchcock overcame his ambivalence and embraced the Emersonian perfectionism he had always resisted.

When I was writing the original five readings, I was in almost daily conversation with Cavell. But as drawn as I was to his philosophical and moral outlook, I had always also been as drawn as Hitchcock was to the idea that we’re all in our private traps and are fated to kill the thing we love. After all, the Postscript I wrote after Hitchcock died spun a darkly Hitchcockian fantasy in which it was my writing that had killed him. I began *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?* with the intention of balancing the scales, but in writing the book I found, happily, that, as I put it in the introduction, “the Moving Finger, having writ, tilted the scales in favor of the Emersonian perfectionism I find myself no longer resisting.”24 I had joined the club. I had become an Emersonian perfectionist. And unlike Groucho Marx or Woody Allen, I found myself happy to belong, for the first time in sixty-five years, when I was Vice President and my sister Judy President of the Two Club, to a club that would have me as a member.

In 2006, the first part of the “philosophical memoir” Cavell had begun appeared in *Critical Inquiry* under the title “Excerpts from Memory.” This was to be the subtitle of *Little Did I Know*, the book he completed and published four years later. In telling the story of his life, Cavell’s aspiration was, as he put it, to compose “a philosopher’s or writer’s autobiography, which tells the writer’s story of the life out of which he came to be a (his kind of) writer.”25 To tell this story, he writes, “I would have to show that telling the accidental, anonymous, in a sense posthumous, days of my life is the making of philosophy.”26 Because our memories of movies are “strand over strand” with memories of our lives, to tell the story of the life out of which he became his kind of philosopher, he found it necessary to evoke every moment with such concrete particularity, that the resulting memoir reads like an elegantly written scre-

26. Ibid.
enplay. How else could he have learned, and taught, that it was possible for the story of a life to be written in a way that made philosophy?

For Wittgenstein, philosophy’s goal is to bring philosophy to an end. For Cavell, too, philosophy is inescapably concerned with endings. In an essay called “Precious Memories in Philosophy and Film,” I wrote: “in The World Viewed, he brought to an end the period of his life in which going to the movies was a regular part of his week. In Little Did I Know, he told the story of the period of his life that ended when he was reborn as the only kind of writer, the only kind of philosopher, who could have written such a book (or could have wanted to).” In writing this philosophical memoir, too, Cavell brought to an end a period of his life—the period that began where the story the book tells ends— the period in which he fully yielded to his longing for philosophy. Writing the book that tells this story is inseparable from the story it tells. In this writing, Cavell was as committed as ever to walking in the direction of the unattained but attainable self but, as I put it, “his way of moving forward was by looking back.” In telling this story, he brought its meaning home. This “philosophical memoir” is “not only ‘under its own question’”; it finds the answer it had been seeking with an all but unappeasable yearning. For Cavell, philosophy had achieved its end.

I’m still journeying on.
I first came across Stanley Cavell’s writing in the fall of 1974 in a senior seminar in the philosophy of mind at Middlebury College, co-taught by Stanley Bates and Timothy Gould. We spent most of the term reading Gilbert Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind* and P. F. Strawson’s *Individuals*—books that at that time, before the widespread reception of Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity*, Putnam-style functionalism, and central state identity theory, still counted as contemporary philosophy of mind. It was then felt by Bates and Gould, I conjecture, that something more lively and something having to do with subjectivity might be order. Both of them had been Ph.D. students with Cavell at Harvard, and so we turned to “Knowing and Acknowledging.”

I had already read J. L. Austin’s “A Plea for Excuses” and “Other Minds” with Bates a semester earlier, so the ground for my reception of Cavell was somewhat prepared by Austin’s enterprise of attending to what we would really say when, in a spirit of diagnosing philosophical confusions. But Cavell’s essay was different. He did suggest that the problem of other minds was somehow confused or ill-formed. But he also tried to figure out seriously how someone, anyone, might honestly and genuinely say and mean that he or she can never know, never really know, whether another human being is in pain. The answer turned out to be that one could really say and mean this if, but only if, one had failed to acknowledge another person, or failed, as it were, to acknowledge human existence in another. And that, in turn, could happen, if but only if one had fallen out of human relationship with the other and into narcissism, alienation, or what Cavell called (I was soon to learn) avoidance. In a yet further turn, that fall is not a simple mistake or confusion that can readily be avoided if one is simply careful with oneself. It is instead something that is all too liable and likely to happen to anyone. (This is the line of thinking that Cavell came to call, in *The Claim of Reason*, the truth of skepticism.) Partly this liability is a function of modern social
conditions, where there are radically differentiated and mutually opaque forms of labor and hence of social stance and identity. In *The World Viewed*, which we went on to read in the seminar, Cavell refers to the human wish, intensifying in the West since the Reformation, to escape

subjectivity and metaphysical isolation—a wish for the power to reach this world, having for so long tried, at last hopelessly, to manifest fidelity to another. [...] At some point the unhinging of our consciousness from the world interposed our subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world. Then our subjectivity became what is present to us, individuality became isolation.¹

As a late adolescent, studying philosophy in relative social seclusion and uncertain of what would come next, I was certainly ready to recognize myself in this picture. Partly this liability is a function of ego formation as such, as one comes to take up a discursively structured point of view on things and to engage in claim-making activity only under the scrutiny and corrections of others, so that one both desperately wishes to please others (the grownups) and desperately wishes to acquire a form of authority in claim-making performance that is absolute, metaphysically immune to challenge. (This is one of the sources of Lear’s avoidance of the claims of others, especially Cordelia, on his own emotional responsiveness that is to him both unruly and frightening, as I soon came to learn from Cavell’s “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear.*”)

And yet, however socially, psychoanalytically, and even metaphysically formed and persistent the experience of isolation, the wish for presentness, and the reactive temptation to avoidance are, it is also not true that nothing can be done about them. In “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” as well as somewhat less explicitly in “Must We Mean What We Say?” and “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,”—texts to which I soon turned during that epochal fall of 1974—Cavell argues for the possibility and importance of honesty in giving voice critically to one’s difficult responses to things (other people, modern works of art), including giving voice to

one’s intimately entangled attractions, aversions, confusions, and bursts of identification. He contrasts the achievement of attentive critical voice with inattentive standings on dogmatic formula for defining the essence of poetry on the parts of Cleanth Brooks (poetry is inherently unparaphrasable) and Yvor Winters (poetry is necessarily paraphrasable). Both Brooks and Winters, he suggests, are defensively, reactively, and fruitlessly insisting on their respective formulas as a way of both claiming authority and avoiding coming to full terms with the unsettling details of specific pieces of difficult modern poetry. We can do better, Cavell suggests, if we avoid formulas for response and instead do the hard, patient, troubling, but also rewarding work of focusing on details in specific poems that either attract or repel us and then trying to figure out how and why these attractions and aversions happen. (In 1981 I learned from Pursuits of Happiness that a marriage could be built and rebuilt, day after day, through a kind of mutual criticism, improvisation, and wit via intimate attentiveness to one another and that that could be fun.)

Cavell goes on in “Aesthetic Problems” to extend this thought to philosophy as well, or at least to the kind of philosophy that appeals to what we say. Pattern and reason-giving are possible, and we may hope for agreement from others, but proof on the model of mathematics is never in view. In a justly famous passage, he sums up his conception of how the critic, the artist, and the philosopher might do their work in a humanly possible and plausible way.

The problem of the critic, as of the artist, is not to discount his subjectivity, but to include it; not to overcome it in agreement, but to master it in exemplary ways. Then his work outlasts the fashions and arguments of a particular age. That is the beauty of it. [...] [P]hilosophy, like art, is, and should be, powerless to prove its relevance; and that says something about the kind of relevance it wishes to have. All the philosopher, this kind of philosopher, can do is to express, as fully as he can, his world, and attract our undivided attention to our own.²

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This passage—and the conception of philosophy as critical-expressive-persuasive activity that aims at (but never fully achieves) fullness of attention to the difficult phenomena of one’s life with others that it expresses—has been the lodestar of my entire philosophical career. Together with some related passages about modernism in the Foreword to *Must We Mean What We Say?*, it was the basis for my personal statement in applying to graduate school about what I wanted to do in philosophy. My 1981 Ph.D. dissertation, written at Chicago under Ted Cohen (another Cavell student) explored and defended this view, in arguing (by way of critical readings of major philosophical texts by Descartes, Frege, Davidson, and Wittgenstein) that we are always in pursuit of self-reconciliation and community and that this pursuit might most fruitfully be carried on critically, expressively, and conversationally rather than by trying to grasp vainly after proofs. In *A Pitch of Philosophy*, Cavell characterizes his “conception of philosophy as the achievement of the unpolemical, of the refusal to take sides in metaphysical positions, of my quest to show that those are not useful sides but needless constructions”—as in the constructed formulas of Brooks and Winters. When followed out carefully (as it can be), the somewhat odd grammar of this sentence makes it clear that the quest to show the emptiness of dogmatic formulas and to do something else instead is itself something to be achieved. I have found myself working, early and late, from within the grip of this quest.

Along the way I got to know Cavell personally, first at an evening at Ted Cohen’s coop apartment in Chicago, where Cavell met with a group of somewhat starstruck students that included Stephen Melville, Paul Gudel, Mary Deveraux, Jeff Wieand, and Danny Herwitz. Still myself somewhat under the spell of a reading of Wittgenstein as some kind of communitarian—a reading I now regard as mistaken, in offering only another distorting summary formula that betrays the richness and expressive ambivalence of the text—I asked Cavell why he didn’t take the private language argument to point to a more Hegelian conception of language, thought, and social life as all necessarily interrelated, with Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, say, as the fundamental object of study. (Perhaps only a graduate student would or should say something like this.) Gently, but memorably, he replied, “Sometimes a man’s just got to

get up, shake the dust off his shoes, and get out of town.” (It was at this time that Cavell was working out his interest in Emersonian aversiveness, the positive flip side, as it were, of avoidance.) Later on there were some six or eight conferences (Penn State, Atlanta, Bloomington, Boston, Edinburgh, and a few others), where there were group dinners or lunches that included Ted Cohen, Stanley Bates, Tim Gould, Paul Guyer, Jay Bernstein, and Charles Altieri, among others. Cavell was unfailingly interested in and attentive to whatever I might be up to, despite the like demands of others on his attention that he repaid equally well. His genuineness and generosity of interest in and attention to others were perhaps his dominant character traits, along with his fierce intelligence and extraordinary ear. He supplied a two-sentence blurb for my 2008 book *Literature, Life, and Modernity* that is a masterpiece of insight, depth, and brevity. I could not then and could not now characterize my aims and (I hope) my achievements any better than he did in that brief remark.

As this rehearsal of influence and acquaintance makes clear, my philosophical work and much of the course of my life would not have been possible without Cavell’s continuing presence in it, enabled and mediated by Gould, Bates, and Cohen (my teachers, his students) along with his writing. Cavell’s conception of philosophy as an ongoing, open-ended, never fully dischargeable task of achieving responsiveness and responsibility, where moves can be made, insight and intimacies can be achieved, and fun can be had, if we are but attentive enough, but where finality is never in view, has been central to everything I do. I wish it were more central to the discipline and to our general culture. But perhaps we, or at least some of us, can still hope and work for that.
I AM HONORED TO BE HERE, with members of the Cavell family, with friends and with colleagues, to celebrate the life and work of Stanley Cavell, to whom I owe inestimably large debts of gratitude and whom I remember with the greatest affection and admiration.

Cavell’s role in my life was that of a philosophical parent. He is well known to have held that “philosophy is the education of grownups,”¹ and the sort of parenting I am talking about involved opening the door of philosophy for my young adult self. This was not a matter of induction into a theoretical research program of the type that then already dominated academic philosophy. Cavell’s way was to prompt students to confront and interrogate our own intellectual responses, leading us to ask “why we do what we do, judge as we judge,”² and positioning us to think for ourselves. This is a demanding pedagogical enterprise, and Cavell devoted singular amounts of time and energy to supporting the young thinkers around him. What I am going to recount is the story of two extraordinary things that he did as my teacher, circumstances all the more arresting in that I was not officially his student.

I first encountered Cavell at Harvard in the late nineteen eighties when I was an undergraduate. He had then already been one of the world’s most admired and beloved philosophers for some decades, so there’s nothing surprising about the fact that I was intrigued and that I enrolled in a course he was offering on Emerson, diligently scribbling down notes while he lectured about things like aversion to conformity and self-
reliance. Although I didn’t then have any clear sense of what it might be to bring these ideas to bear on one’s own life, I felt an excitement I couldn’t account for and wanted to hear more. I was, however, too timid to approach him or to go to his office hours. My professors generally struck me as otherworldly beings—not an unusual experience for a student from a non-academic background—and, in light of the simultaneously jubilantly playful and pointedly serious manner in which he carried off his extreme breadth of learning, Cavell was especially terrifying. Especially beguiling and therefore especially terrifying, I didn’t ask him to advise my undergraduate thesis, even though it was dedicated in substantial part to his work. Yet, when it came time for the oral defense of the thesis, for which he was roped in as an examiner, he took pains to tell jokes and introduce asides with an eye to putting me at my ease. When, having received my A.B., I took a teaching job at an international school in Ecuador, he encouraged me to apply to Ph.D. programs in Philosophy and wrote in support of my applications. And, when, because my partner—Nathaniel—was at Harvard Medical School, I took a leave from my Ph.D. program at the University of Pittsburgh to spend an academic year back at Harvard, Cavell hired me as his research assistant and also as one of the teaching fellows for his iconic Moral Perfectionism lecture course. That is a quick overview of my earliest interactions with Cavell, and, although I would have an enormous amount to be grateful for if this were all there was to say, it is merely the backdrop for the more remarkable episodes I want to relate.

I left Pittsburgh two years before I finished my Ph.D. Through no fault of my own, I could no longer stay there, and the circumstance was the occasion of the only seriously unhappy stretch of time in my life. With an eye to getting me out of Pittsburgh, Nathaniel arranged to do a fellowship in public health at Harvard, and together we got positions as resident tutors at Mather House. In theory this was an extremely satisfactory setup for me to finish the Ph.D., but in practice things were not good. I was no longer able to work. My standard method involved an exercise of visualization in which I mentally map out a set of conceptual connections, and then, as it were, walk around the relevant space until I feel confident that I know it well. But I had been shaken in my ability to confidently move among a set of concepts. I couldn’t do it, and for at least a good part of a year I gave up the idea of a career in philosophy, hoping only to finish a tolerable dissertation. Not that I was inactive during this peri-
od. I was teaching and interacting with philosophy peers, and this included checking in with Cavell from time to time. But even with close friends I didn’t talk much about what I was going through, and I wouldn’t have dreamed of burdening Cavell. For his part, he was, in my experience, capable of merrily expectant silences, intended to draw out a partner in conversation. But he wasn’t inclined to ask uninvited questions. Nonetheless, he was one of very few people in my life who not only registered that I was not the same person I had been but also openly acknowledged that they knew this. Cavell was of course aware that this gesture of acknowledgment was anything but ethically insignificant—he is, after all, the philosopher who wrote the book about such matters—and, far from shying away from the demands it imposed on him as my friend and teacher, he embraced them, finding ways to help me build back to my self-respect.

Once, when I was at my lowest, I met him in the late morning at the diner across Beacon Street from his house, where he used to meet students and colleagues, the Busy Bee. We mostly talked about the sorts of things we in those days mostly talked about—writing, philosophical texts we had in common, mutual friends, feminism, politics, literature, movies, and so on—but I had been working up my courage to say something to him, and I did finally manage, with great effort, to utter something like: “I need someone to tell me that they believe that I can do this.”

He showed his appreciation of my words by responding to me in his slow, winning manner. “Any day,” he said, “any day.”

After a moment, we went on speaking of other things. But he meant what he said to me, and he lived up to it.

They say no good deed goes unpunished, and my second anecdote does nothing to disconfirm this bit of conventional wisdom. Back when I was his research assistant, in 1994, I had asked Cavell whether he would officiate at a ceremony celebrating the relationship between Nathaniel and me. At the age of thirteen, I had recognized the label “feminist” as fitting my image of my own aspirations, and—taking my cue from a vision of the gendered social world that I won’t discuss here—I had de-


4. I am indebted to David Cavell for reminding me of the name of this establishment.
terminated never to marry. When I read Cavell’s work on marriage, his distinction between the institution and the ideal of marriage made a strong impression on me. Even before I had come across the phrase “commitment ceremony,” his writings on these topics had suggested to me the possibility of a non-institutional fête in honor of the ideal. So, if Nathaniel and I were to have such a gathering, I reasoned, Cavell was the only person who could rightly preside. During the difficult period after I left Pittsburgh, I simply let the idea drop, but, when things again became easier—a circumstance for which I am significantly indebted to Cavell—I revived the plan. Cavell himself reports that he “gladly accepted [my] request that [he] take on the role of leading what has come to be called a commitment ceremony,” and, although that accords with my memory of events, I remembered being awed by how seriously he thought over our invitation. In 2000, Nathaniel and I had moved to Manhattan to take up our respective first assistant professorships, his at Cornell Medical School and mine at the New School for Social Research. When I again approached Cavell about our idea for a ceremony, he suggested that I come up to Boston to discuss it with him, which I of course did, though not without a little fear and trembling.

Nathaniel and I ultimately invited friends and colleagues to the grounds of a country house of Nathaniel’s parents, in upstate New York, for September 15, 2001. Four days before our gathering, planes flew into the World Trade Centers, just a few blocks north of the Battery Park City apartment in which we then lived. Even as, with thousands of others, we were trying to make our way on foot west and north of the towers, we decided that, if at all possible, we would go ahead with our plans. Although some friends and family members who had been planning to fly to New York were unable to join us, the party—which included, in addition to a good number of philosophers and doctors from Boston, more or less the entire philosophy faculty of the New School for Social Research—wound up being bigger, not smaller, than expected, swelling to more than two hundred guests. It was not a day on which anyone had scruples about bringing an extra friend, neighbor, or family member. Cavell him-

7. Within *Little Did I Know*, Cavell describes the ceremony as having taken place in Western Massachusetts. Although this is an error, it is an understandable one. The property at which the ceremony took place is in Hillsdale, NY, which is very close to the Massachusetts border, and the inn in which we put the Cavells up is indeed in Massachusetts.
self later said he had doubts about his performance as our master of ceremonies. Noting that he of course could not say “I pronounce you husband and wife,” he said that afterward he berated himself “for not having been nimble enough to provide a closing statement involving all present [something that] would have achieved what Austin calls ‘up-take’ in a performative utterance.” Cavell’s qualms notwithstanding, his conduct at the event was, as I have it memory, brilliantly magisterial, making the proceedings seem utterly natural and authoritative, and Cathleen Cavell was there with him, the two of them smashingly elegant, lending their effortless grace and dignity to the whole affair. Nathaniel and I had no doubt that the effect we wanted—that our union had been given the imprimatur of collective recognition—had been attained.

Cavell died at a time at which, with the rise of hate-driven, far right movements in the United States and elsewhere, political discourse and practice are becoming more sinister and violent. I know I am not alone among the philosophers assembled here in believing that it is now urgent to identify and employ resources for effective critique. Nor I am alone in holding that it is imperative to be willing to turn on and examine the philosophical tools we have inherited, leaving room for the possibility that we may need to reject some of them as unhelpful or even as themselves ideological. This exercise of self-scrutiny is the thing that Cavell taught most fervently, consistently underlining its importance for democratic society. I close with my boundless gratitude to him, not only for inviting me into a fellowship of socially engaged philosophers, but also for helping me to overcome a blow to my self-conception that once made this philosophical life seem out of reach—and, indeed, for showing with such virtuosity that, far from being incompatible with joy, the seriousness of the endeavor is one of life’s most glorious and happiest pursuits.

8. Ibid., 520.
Let me start by saying how significant it is for me to take part in this conference commemorating and celebrating Stanley Cavell. I am grateful to Cathleen Cavell and Richard Moran for this opportunity, not only to speak, but mainly to listen to dear friends, friends whose companionship was indelibly marked by our common love for Stanley, by the admiration for his thinking, and by the inspiration and sustenance he provided for our own work.

What I will say will be inflected by the way Stanley touched my life and work. I must apologize therefore for having to speak, in the short and precious time I have, also a bit about myself. As I wrote these remarks I thought that I will most likely not be the only one to choose to speak of the ideal, the paradigm of the unity of person and thought that is Stanley Cavell. It is what was so striking to me when I first encountered him; it also became central to my dissertation project with him, and it remains to this day that through which I think of his continuous presence in my concerns with philosophy.

My dissertation bore everywhere distinct signs of this fascination with the coming together of the individual and universal that Stanley exemplified and thematized, this even though I availed myself of Harvard’s “three papers option,” writing, instead of a proper thesis, separate essays on Rousseau, Kant, and Wittgenstein. I can trace my concern with the intersection of the biographical and the political in Rousseau to the impact of a passage close to the opening of *The Claim of Reason* where Cavell presents Rousseau’s writing as “a way to use the self as access to the self’s society” (26). “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy” was the inspiration for my se-
cond paper on the universal voice in Kant’s account of aesthetic judgment, in which what is most intimately mine, that is, meaning which manifests itself in feeling, is also that through which I can speak for all. Surprising as it was, especially for me, my work on Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* eventually also gravitated to the truth of solipsism as that uniqueness of the “I” encapsulated in what one could call the logical expression of the autobiographical: “Life and World are one,” or “The World is my world.”

As it was nearing its completion, Stanley referred to my dissertation, in one of our regular meetings in the Chinese restaurant on Beacon Street, as my “three headed monster.” This reference to the guardian of Hades, was, I take it, his witty and affectionate way of indicating both the disparity between its different parts, and because of that, its potential to be further formed. I would not exaggerate if I said that my work, conducted under Stanley’s supervision, absorbed without my quite knowing how, his subterranean influence, and was since, material for about twenty-five more years of thinking and writing, followed by his attentive responsiveness, and then only partially represented in three books on Wittgenstein, Rousseau, and Kant into which the three papers evolved.

Heading back for Israel, upon the completion of my thesis, in the summer of 1992, I hoped for a new beginning but also dreaded the prospect of looking for an academic position, that is of justifying, upon returning home, my departure from the procedures of philosophy I was taught there before I left for Harvard. My return was eased by Stanley’s visit to give the Harvard University press lectures in Jerusalem in November of that same year. Earlier discussions of the intersection of the personal and the philosophical could still fall under what Cavell calls “abstract autobiography,” or “the autobiography of a species.” There was also, for sure, the endlessly thought-provoking “autobiography of companions,” the exploration of the conditions of film out of the memory of the experience of films, in *The World Viewed*. But, in these lectures, later published as *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*, the impression of the utterly concrete universality demanded by the autobiographical could not be missed. It is the impact of these lectures that led me to conceive of continuing the work I did on Rousseau in the thesis, with a consideration of his last autobiography, the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* as a work of Cavellian “moral perfectio-nism.”
What moved me in writing on the *Reveries* was in part the need to account for the dark side of representativeness, suggested in the same passage of *The Claim of Reason* I already referred to: “You will have to decide,” Cavell writes, “about [Rousseau’s] bouts of apparent insanity. Are they merely psychological problems? [...] Or are they expressions of grief that society should conduct itself as it does? Not grief for himself, but for society, which willfully denies knowledge of its own conspiracies, and not just those directed against him.”¹ The *Reveries* was Rousseau’s ultimate measure in the face of the unanimous agreement of society to reject him. It is thus an autobiography that Rousseau writes for himself alone, and which opens with the words: “Here I am then, alone on earth.” The time of writing, that is of the transfiguration of life in memory, is posthumous, after all has ended, making its truthful readability inescapably a matter of what I called “the afterlife of words.”

Cavell’s turn to autobiography in *A Pitch of Philosophy* became important for me in yet a different way. In the “Overture,” added to the lectures upon their publication, he relates how upon the occasion of his visit to Jerusalem, he read some essays of Gershom Scholem. He suggests the pertinence of Scholem’s concern with the power of the Jewish mystical tradition to regenerate modern spiritual existence, to his own questioning of the “potential regenerativeness of Emerson and Thoreau as thinkers.”² Each of the three chapters of the book was further introduced by an epigraph from one of Scholem’s essays. As Cavell puts it in the overture: “These epigraphs represent an entire mode of approaching aspects of matters I dwell on that is not directly or consecutively taken in my own text—matters of voice, ephemerality, the inexcusable, name, dedication, the latency of the self.”³

The epigraphs are from the essay “Walter Benjamin and His Angel,” and so the mode of approaching matters, Cavell refers to in the quote just above, is not Scholem’s but Benjamin’s. After Benjamin’s death, Scholem’s friendship for him translated itself into the task of rescuing his writings for posterity, challenging his Marxist reception, and as it were guarding the afterlife of his writings. The epigraphs Cavell chose thus quoted Scholem, yet still referred further back to what I perceived as the

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3. Ibid., xiii.
regenerative potential of Benjamin’s writings. I was struck by how the son of Jewish immigrants to America was also relating himself thereby to two sides of Jewish existence in the twentieth century, to the one who, in the late twenties became a Zionist and established himself in Jerusalem, and the one who remained in Europe and took his life after a failed attempt to cross the border into Spain, fleeing the Nazi invasion of France.

I will not hide that these two sides were on my mind in part probably through my early, maybe too early, knowledge that my father’s parents also tried in these fateeful years to cross the French border, and upon being captured were sent to their deaths. My father through many detours and changes of names, later narrated in his memoirs, made his way to Israel. And my full Hebrew name “Elchanan” is made of the names of my grandparents “Elisheva” and “Hans.”

Given the importance of Jerusalem as the setting of A Pitch of Philosophy, I should mention, in a different spirit, that a few years later, upon my invitation, Stanley spoke to an auditorium filled with young and attentive students at Tel Aviv University. I think that it is not only out of local patriotism that I cherish how he later referred with noticeable excitement and enthusiasm to our dinner with some of these students on a sandy beach of the Mediterranean. Tel Aviv became in his mind, I would like to believe, another half of the place, which he knew only as Jerusalem.

Further reading Benjamin, led me to tell Stanley, when we met next, in the same Chinese restaurant on Beacon Street, that I think I found my Emerson. He replied unforgettably: “Lucky Walter.” Under certain conditions, that is, when the right person says that, it is enough to send you on your way for life. But, one shouldn’t forget, that paired with the richness of Stanley’s mind, as he endlessly absorbed and incorporated matters small and large, his recurring gesture was to recount his philosophical trajectory, always relating every new departure to its sources, insisting as it were on a philosophical diet as a necessity of the unity of a life in philosophy (I say this thinking of Nancy Bauer’s so precise diagnosis of the predicament of being a student of Stanley caught between his love of what Stanley loves and the need to find for himself his own objects of devotion).

In taking on Benjamin as a departure from the circle of concerns that I relate to Cavell’s immediate influence on my work, I searched for signs of continuity: for
instance in a short and inspiring essay he wrote on the occasion of the English translation of the first volume of Benjamin’s *Selected Writings*, “Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities.” I was further encouraged by conversations with Stanley on such parallels, not only between his *The World Viewed* and Benjamin’s “Work of Art” essay, but also between his exploration of marriage and melodrama in film and Benjamin’s essay on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, as well as on the central presence of *Hamlet* in his book on the German baroque mourning play.

It was as I was sitting next to Stanley at Alice Crary’s wedding reception, of which she so movingly told us about earlier today, that I heard of his investment in reading, from beginning to end, Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*. This was a prelude to the writing of his own autobiography, to his taking up the incredible project described in the following terms: “I would have to show that telling the accidental, anonymous, in a sense posthumous, days of my life is the making of philosophy, however minor or marginal, impure, which means to show that those days can be written, in some sense are to be called to be written philosophically.”

Opening again *Little Did I Know* to prepare for this memorial conference, I was drawn to the book’s opening moves, in particular to its astounding first paragraph beginning—“The catheterization of my heart will no longer be postponed”—and ending with—“We must actually look at what is going on inside the heart.” I soon gave up my plans to conclude these remarks with a short reading of the opening entry of these *Excerpts from Memory*, in part because (not for the first time in reading Stanley Cavell), I was stunned by the dense, so delicate yet so exact, weave of meaning, that unfolds in these opening pages.

Instead of the reading I envisaged, I will therefore end with a reflection on the specific character of this language, that is of its thoughtfulness, and speculate on its possible relation to the idea of writing a life accompanied by philosophy. Stanley Cavell thinks in language, which is no more and no less than following the implications of the knowledge that words are needed to express thoughts. The commitment of thought to language comes in different modes: it is evident in the importance Cavell attributes to ordinary language philosophy. And in the register of the voice, of telling,

5. Ibid., 1.
of recounting, as well as of the anecdotal that is omnipresent in his memoirs. Import-
antly, the gift of storytelling, so evident in his narration, is an inheritance that Stan-
ley traces to his father. But here I want to recall other moments, just as Cavellian,
crossroads in the text, where the line of the story seems to be traversed by different
threads, and through their interweaving, raised to partake in another plane of mean-
ing. Such latitude in meaning, even as one is going on to tell the uncertain gains and
losses of a life advancing in time, cannot be delivered or freely improvised, but must
be written. (Indeed, the return to what was written day after day, necessary to create
this weave is the allowable exception to the pre-compositional pact that makes for the
daily rhythm of beginnings and endings in the memoirs.)

The opening entry is in that respect, the first, exemplary moment, where an
obstacle in the path of life, a thoroughly real, anxiety-provoking contingency is
transmuted into a “departure in [...] writing.” But departure, entry, beginning, no
longer postponing, become part of a pattern crafted by the threads of directness and
delay, immediacy and detour, invasions and defenses, waiting and precipitation. And
the forming of that pattern is not external to what it takes for Cavell to “write [his]
way into and through the anxiety.” It stands for work to be repeated in addressing
“accidents avoided and embraced, strangers taken to heart or neglected, talents im-
posed or transfigured, malice insufficiently rebuked, love inadequately acknowled-
ged.” I would even chance to say, that it is essential to achieving the “balance betwe-
en remembering and forgetting” that Stanley speaks of in the last line of the first en-
try. It is that form of meaning in which remembering, as difficult as the memory is, or
comes, is redeemed in being dissolved in the writing of the surroundings that are its
original home.

6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 4.
9. Ibid., 5
How many times in my life have I re-encountered my teacher, Stanley Cavell? The most memorable, the first encounter with him was in the winter of 1996 at Harvard—the image still vivid in my memory, the snow falling outside the window of his room, with me sitting in front of Stanley. At the suggestions of a teaching assistant of Hilary Putnam, who had read my term paper, I made an appointment with Stanley and introduced myself along with my abiding question regarding American philosophy. When I presented this as my being “torn” between Emerson and Dewey, Stanley reacted immediately and expressed his sense of sympathy with me. That was the beginning of a kind of continuing education for me and of the lifelong task I consider myself to have shared with him.

Since then, Stanley had a deep impact on my life and career at various crucial moments. One of them was the defense of my dissertation, *Democratic Education for Holistic Growth: Dewey’s Naturalistic Philosophy of Growth Reconstructed in the Light of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism*, which took place at Teachers College in 2000. Stanley was one of the examiners. Another was my translation into Japanese of *The Senses of Walden*, which was published in 2005. I cannot remember how many times I had talked to him in order to accomplish this baffling task of translating his English into a foreign language (this with the help of Paul Standish who translated Cavell’s English into a translatable English). The publication of the collection I edited with Paul, *Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grownups* in 2012 was also momentous in my connection with Stanley. This was a product of a colloquium we organized at Harvard with Stanley and Hilary in the fall of 2007.
Most recently I cherish the memory of Stanley holding in his hand the book that Paul and I presented to him in March 2017: *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: The Truth is Translated*.

Without his presence over many years, when I went back and forth between Japan and the United States, and after I had physically settled and apparently settled down in Kyoto, I would not have been able to establish my career as a Japanese female researcher of American philosophy. I would like briefly to say that my encounter with Stanley cannot be separated from what I see as a cross-cultural dimension in his words and life.

**Cavell as an Orienter: American Philosophy in Translation**

In my academic work, with its tensions between Dewey and Emerson (and Thoreau), and between pragmatism and American transcendentalism, I have explored Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy from the perspective of translation. Dewey’s notion of communication contrasts with and is destabilized by the Emersonian and Thoreauvian notion of translation. As a Japanese person, I see Cavell as an “orienteer” within America (“orienteer” being a word he applies to Thoreau). He encourages America to open its eyes to diverse cross-cultural dimensions. Anxieties about what America can become—both carrying its inheritance from Europe and freeing itself from that past—are inherent in Cavell’s conception of America, and this crucially conditions his ordinary language philosophy. Cavell is a translator between different strands of thought and language, including the “dissonant voices” of American philosophy. He has described himself as working in “the tear in philosophy,” the rift that has been left, in the wake of Kant, and hence connecting Anglo-American and continental philosophy.

His cross-cultural sensibilities are manifested even within American philosophy, in intra-cultural and intra-linguistic ways. He resists any facile account of the lineage between Emerson and Thoreau and pragmatism, which might indeed consti-

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tute a further failure in their reception. Emphasizing this tension, he has helped me to see that American philosophy has always been in the process of translation. My most recent book, which has the title *American Philosophy in Translation*, feels like a continuing gift from Cavell.

When it comes to the understanding of other cultures, Cavell invokes a deflationary yet apt, distinctively American idiom: riffing on the baseball terms “home” and “base,” he suggests that the point may not be to hit a “homerun,” not to understand another culture as a whole, but at least to try to get to “first base.” He rejects the mindset that is intent on finding equivalences. What is at stake is to be found in what happens as paths of thought intersect: in how each of us is to confront such moments in reorienting our ways of thinking; how each moment may turn us around, so that we learn to go on in new ways. His philosophy is then cultural criticism from within—and, that is, from within a certain sense of shame. His critical stance within his own “native” culture has seemed to resonate, for me, with my own stance with my apparently native culture, Japan. His oblique cultural criticism has been a model for me for what it means to be a cultural critic at home.

**Translating *The Senses***

In the light of these observations it will be apparent that my own experience of translating his *The Senses of Walden* has been most enlightening. What is written in the book as well as my struggle with the work of translation has shown me that translation is at the heart of his ordinary language philosophy.

Cavell hardly ever talks about translation explicitly, and yet in his pursuit of ordinary language philosophy, the idea of translation appears both as a substantive feature and as itself thematized. In the aforementioned edited collection, Paul and I

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have explored Cavell’s work via the idea of *philosophy as translation*. Cavell’s language itself enacts this process of translation, in all its transitivity and volatility. What Cavell means by translation is beyond any simple sense of linguistic exchange. Indeed the fantasy of any idea of equivalence brings with it the tacit assumption that languages are pure, stable, and more or less complete in themselves, which settles easily into a correspondence theory of truth, in a representationalist view of the world. In reality, translation involves an attunement to what happens in the encounter between different languages (Japanese, English, French, etc.), and this inevitably involves ordinarily the experience of a gap—a gap of the “untranslatable.”

Language is open to new possibilities all the time, and hence, it both surprises us and disappoints us. Indeed, Cavell says, any sign opens to new possibilities—it has a “projective” nature—and this is at the heart of translation. In Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy, translation is at work not only inter- but intra-lingually. It involves experiencing “the difficulty of knowing that we do not know”: we are surprised by what is beyond our grasp. Translation is not simply a substitute or metaphor for human transformation. Rather, as the experience of rebirth in rewording the world and of taking new interest in the world, translation *is* transformation: it is a *metonym* of our lives.

It is this very rich sense of translation that I acquired in my own experience of translating *The Senses of Walden*. Cavell’s language asked to be translated in multiple senses—not simply from English into Japanese, between distinct language systems, but also from English to English! In “Walden in Tokyo,” an essay Stanley wrote in 2005, in commemoration of this translation, he says that translation involves “the transfiguration from one form of life to another.” This is the experience I underwent

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5. See Standish and Saito, *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation*.
in the process of translation, a holistic conversion of the way I am engaged with language—both English as a foreign language and Japanese as my apparently native language, which belong to completely alien language systems. The distinctive experience here is that Cavell’s language never allowed me to settle down on any fixed ground: it kept asking me to be outside—outside of the conventional definition of a word, of language in its dictionary definitions—as if I were at a border, poised unsteadily above an abyss. It was the experience of being outside within the language: or in Thoreau’s words, the experience of acquiring the standpoint of a “double.”12 I perceive Stanley to be a philosopher who teaches his reader and his students to stay outside within the familiar: and who encourages us to speak, to borrow Thoreau’s words, in “extra-va-gance”13—that is, to wander outside.

This is related to his sense of immigrancy, both in the everyday sense of his father being an immigrant to the United States and in the philosophical sense of embracing “immigrancy as the native human condition.”14 In his autobiographical writings, Stanley expresses the sense of being caught in the abyss of culture, of being foreign in the native.15 (“Immigrancy of the self” is the title of my chapter in Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation.) The radicalism of his philosophy is the voice of cultural criticism from within. He always reassures me that there is a certain way in which one can be an outsider inside and that one can still raise a voice of criticism, while standing precariously on the border—within Japan, between Japan and America.

**The Teacher Who Leaves: Kindred from Distant Lands**

To say, “Follow me and you will be saved,” you must be sure you are of God. But to say, “Follow in yourself what I follow in mine and you will be saved,” you merely have to be sure you are following yourself. This frightens and cheers me.16

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Cavell’s text always allows me, the reader, to save space for something new to be discovered: there is always, to borrow Emerson’s words, “a residuum unknown, unanalyzable.” Since the time of my first encounter with Stanley, more than twenty years have passed. The last time I paid my annual visit to Stanley and Cathleen, in Boston in March 2018, at a time when he was nearing the end of his life, his warm affection was again extended toward me. He had been and still is for me, in Thoreau’s words, “kindred from a distant land.” And so there remains the poignant sense that “what is most intimate is what is furthest away” and that “the realization of ‘our infinite relations,’ our kinships, is an endless realization of our separateness” (The Senses of Walden). The greatness of Stanley Cavell as a philosopher and as a teacher is that he always leaves his student with the hope of (and sometimes in despair at the need for) finding her own words, instead of repeating his words. I confront what it is that I have to follow in my own way. He has left me with a sometimes desperate sense of singularity. I always felt that his words left me with new tasks. This time he has suddenly left, quietly and permanently: and again, I am left with the thought of what he calls “the pain of individuation.” This is the lesson of his many exemplary texts, and it requires continually to be read and re-read, and to be translated.

8. Cavell as Mentor
SIANNE NGAI

These remarks originally appeared in the Los Angeles Review of Books, January 5, 2012, and are reprinted here with the generous permission of the editors at the LARB.

I was a Grad student in English at Harvard in the mid-90s, but physically there for just three years, anxious to move to Brooklyn for a relationship as soon as I became ABD. In that brief but intense period of time, I tried to take as many courses offered by Stanley Cavell as possible. In my last year, I asked him to be a member of my dissertation committee. Looking back I’m still flooded with gratitude (and astonishment) by the fact that he said yes.

At the time I couldn’t have said why I felt so attuned to Cavell’s writing. I just knew, after reading his essay on moods in Emerson and Nietzsche (“Aversive Thinking”) and then his books on Thoreau and remarriage comedy (The Senses of Walden, Pursuits of Happiness), that I wanted to read more, and to think and talk with him as much as possible about the things he thought were interesting. All the more so when I realized that, in person, Stanley Cavell was exactly like the voice his writing projected. That voice, no matter what it happened to be speaking about—Shakespeare and the avoidance of love, Jacques Derrida and J. L. Austin, the Hollywood women’s film of the 1930s and 40s—was unfailingly generous and infectiously interesting. It was a meta-philosophical voice, preoccupied less with the wrongness of skepticism (that is, with skepticism understood as intellectual error, thereby capable of intellectual correction) than with its status as a basic condition of human life and also as a kind of madness, a denial of our shared reality with other minds. Cavell’s voice was a kind of therapy against that madness. It was also an utterly and profoundly non-snobby voice: the voice of a philosopher concerned with philosophy’s aversion to the ordinary, and with the nondiscursive aspects of ordinary language—its affect and for-
ce, its ontology as action—that seemed to interest so few other philosophers of language at the time. It was, finally and significantly, the voice of someone deeply interested in how gender inflects both of these problems.

I took four courses in a row with Cavell, all in the philosophy department: two graduate seminars on Lacan, an undergraduate lecture called “Aesthetics: Opera and Film,” and a graduate seminar on King Lear. I loved these courses, even when I wasn’t sure I understood what they were truly about. (It’s called “Opera and Film,” but what’s it about really? I kept asking myself.) This was mostly due to my ignorance; I was still playing catch-up, in part by reading as much of Cavell’s work as possible. But I think it was also due to the genuinely open and experimental nature of the courses Cavell taught. He was trying to work out certain questions in them, with us. This felt really thrilling.

“Opera and Film” was one of my favorites. The syllabus, as was always the case in Cavell’s courses, was not so much eclectic as complex. We listened to and/or watched Carmen, Don Giovanni, Tannhäuser, The Lady Eve, Now Voyager, Moonstruck, Smiles of a Summer Night. We read J. L. Austin’s How to Do Things with Words with Shoshana Felman’s The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages, Catherine Clément and Susan McClary on women in opera, Baudelaire on Wagner, and selections from Cavell’s own The World Viewed and A Pitch of Philosophy. Sometimes, delightfully, he would pause during a lecture, walk to the piano on stage, and play a passage or two from the score discussed in the reading. And as the semester progressed it became clear that what the course was “really about” was the peculiar ontology of what Cavell (adapting J. L. Austin) called passionate utterances: how they demand a response in kind, how words can be “owed,” or thought of as a form of indebtedness to others. All of this was linked to the question of whether the split between words and music in opera was gendered, and to what became of the female voice in Hollywood melodrama.

Similarly, the grad seminar on King Lear was really about what Cavell called problematic praise, which was, in turn, another way to think about the complexities of aesthetic judgment and criticism. In addition to Shakespeare’s tragedy, which foregrounds the consequences of false praise and ingratitude, we read Heidegger on
thinking and thanking (“What is Called Thinking?”) and Henry James’s remarkable story about mass-cultural author worship (“The Birthplace”). One day Cavell showed us a scene from The Band Wagon (1953) in which Fred Astaire, as Cavell read it, tries to find a way to express his indebtedness to African-American dance. Cavell noted the way in which Astaire, a song and dance man, is shown, strangely, in ¾ shot (cut off at the thighs) for the beginning of the film. It’s not until after a routine in a penny arcade, in which Astaire does an extended duet with a black male dancer, that, as Cavell put it, pointing to his image on the screen, Astaire manages to “find his legs.” Cavell read this performance as an act of praise, or as an expression of aesthetic indebtedness and gratitude; thinking also, as Cavell often did, about issues of race and appropriation, I wondered if it wasn’t also readable as a kind of reparation or apology (which we often refer to as something “owed”). Both praise and apology belong to the class of what Austin called “perlocutionary” utterances, in which, as Cavell notes, the felicity of the action is dependent less on the “I” than the “you.” In other words, if you do not accept my compliment or apology, then I haven’t successfully complimented you or apologized.

Cavell’s Lacan courses were more straightforward, organized around the French psychoanalyst’s own famous seminars. The first, “Freud After Lacan,” was on Book III: The Psychoses (Freud’s reading of Daniel Schreber). The second, whose name I can’t remember, was devoted to Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (Kant, Sade, Antigone).

I was the only first-year English grad student in “Freud After Lacan.” This made taking the course feel a bit lonely (so much of grad school is about learning alongside the people in your cohort) and that much more intimidating. It was Lacan, after all, and I didn’t have a buddy to confide in, to talk with about my confusions. I was too much in awe of the philosophy Ph.D. students in the class, especially the many advanced ones in their fourth and fifth years, to make friends with them. Above all there was the difficulty of Lacan himself: those daunting quasi-mathematical algorithms, that sublime, inaccessible Real. But offsetting all of this was the fascinating question: What was it about Lacan (and Lacan’s interpretation of Freud, in particular) that Cavell felt he had to grapple with philosophically? The fact that it was Stanley Cavell—someone who constantly wrote about language and gender, but who no-
netheless was not on the chart of poststructuralists I’d been supplied with as an under-grad (a chart that included Lacan but not Cavell)—suddenly made Lacan all the more interesting.

In the classroom, Cavell was intense and serious, though often smiling. He had an amazing flash of a smile. While his syllabi were intricately structured, his pedagogy was open to the point that if he were struck by an issue in a text mentioned in someone’s presentation, he would immediately revise the syllabus to assign that text in order to bring everyone else into the conversation. His way of thinking was explorative as opposed to combative, which is not to say that he never took issue with other thinkers. And though he was generous with his students, he didn’t pretend to like everything they said. I once mentioned Theodor Adorno during a seminar, and Cavell, irritated but also showing a sense of humor about that irritation, said that Adorno always felt like a “flea in his ear.”

In seminar I always tried to snag the seat right next to Stanley, on his left. (Mostly so I could hear him clearly; at the time I had a note-taking obsession, which involved transcribing every single word the professor said.) There was always a ring of auditors sitting around those of us at the table, and often these auditors were visiting from other countries. There were also professors and graduate students from various departments at BU and MIT. Once the philosopher Hilary Putnam was there; another time it was Stanley’s wife. Cavell would talk first, in a directed but relaxed way, and student presentations on the reading followed. People worked really hard on the presentations, and they were almost always good. Somewhere in a file cabinet I still have all of their handouts about Freud and Lacan, including ones by Nancy Bauer (author of *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*) and William Bracken (now in the philosophy department at UC Riverside).

I was inchoate and jelly-like in graduate school (kind of like a slime mold), but Cavell was kind to me anyway. He seemed to take me seriously. He gave me a lot of his time. Once, after having lunch together, he said to me, “You’re very dutiful.” The gentlest of criticisms. Of course, I—dutifully—tried to be less so.

We have stayed in touch, albeit loosely and intermittently, over the last seventeen years. Here’s the last email I sent him:
Dear Stanley,

Just a note to say hello and also how much I wish I could be at the conference on your work this October! (I committed myself to something else in Montreal on the same date, otherwise I **would** be there).

I actually had a dream last night in which I ran into you at a dog park. (Do you have a dog?) The dogs were happily playing somewhere off on the field, and you asked, “Did you put your name on the list to get my family newsletter?” I hadn’t. First thing I did when I woke up was to refind your email address on the internet, and that’s when I found out about the conference. Which kind of **is** a family.

Best wishes to you,

Sianne

Stanley wrote back and said he did indeed have a dog, Kaya, who always stays by his side during his days of writing. He said he didn’t have a family newsletter, but he did have an autobiography he was expecting to appear soon; if I sent him my address he’d send me a copy.
9. Remembering Stanley Cavell

BYRON DAVIES

This memorial notice for Stanley Cavell was first published on the Harvard Philosophy Department website on June 25, 2018 and appears here with the department’s permission.

For over four decades one of the most distinctive and original contributors to American letters—and one of the world’s most significant proponents of what philosophy could learn from the arts—was a member of the community of Emerson Hall. But so long as Stanley Cavell is best known just as a philosopher who wrote about Shakespeare and movies (as he was first introduced to me), and even if his unassailable institutional legacy is as the advisor of generations of accomplished philosophers (and film and literary scholars), the task for philosophers memorializing Cavell is to communicate what he taught us, and in particular what he taught us to do.

We can begin by saying that Cavell was a reader of Wittgenstein. In particular, Cavell was a reader of the methods of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* as methods for understanding ourselves. This not only opened that text to readers for whom frustrated attempts to locate a body of doctrines had closed it off; it also opened up lines of communication between that text and older understandings of philosophy as a method for arriving at self-consciousness (especially Kant’s transcendental philosophy) as well as the methods of self-avowal characteristic of psychoanalysis.

Given that Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is often read as conservative or quietist, it is important to note that Cavell’s writing also located the emancipatory potential of *Philosophical Investigations*, particularly in Wittgenstein’s exhortation that we turn our inquiry around our “real need.” In a conscious rebuke to misunderstandings of

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what it meant to be an “ordinary language philosopher,” Cavell saw, in his reading of Wittgenstein, the ordinary as precisely the site for philosophical criticism: “Wittgenstein’s appeal or ‘approach’ to the everyday finds the (actual) everyday to be as pervasive a scene of illusion and trance and artificiality (of need) as Plato or Rousseau or Marx had found.”

One human need that Cavell articulated with particular poignancy was the need to speak for others (to constitute a community through one’s speech), as well as the correlative need to be spoken for by others (to find oneself in the community of another’s speech). In the first four essays of his first book, Must We Mean What We Say?, the significance of this need emerged through Cavell’s interrogating the practice of Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin of asserting “what we say,” apparently without empirical linguistic evidence. What could entitle them to such assertions? What criteria could they be relying on? Particularly as these questions were developed in Part One of The Claim of Reason (1979), Cavell insisted that our understanding of them will be distorted so long as we think of the ground of intelligibility as always given, as opposed to always at stake in—and as constituted by—our aiming to be intelligible to others. That is, the charge for being intelligible to others lay in us, in our ability to project criteria into new contexts (often requiring creativity and improvisation), and it could not—as Cavell reminded us, against persistent philosophical fantasies—lie in criteria alone. Consequently, whereas others would have understood the question of what entitles us to assertions about “what we say” as a narrowly epistemological question, Cavell insisted that its full significance could not be understood without seeing its affinities with certain political questions—some of them familiar from Rousseau—including that of how to constitute a community when a pre-existing Social Contract is not assured, as well as when we suspect that “we are exercising our will not to the general but to the particular, to the partial, to the unequal, to private benefit, to privacy.”

Indeed, one of Cavell’s abiding concerns was to draw attention to the ways in which the formulation of a philosophical problem might distort the real need or interest motivating that problem in the first place. This is most evident in his writing on skepticism, and in his arguments that the problem of skepticism about other minds (“How can I really know you are in pain?”) is in fact a theoretical registration of our separateness from others—a feature of the human condition that cannot be “solved,” though nothing is more characteristic of humans than to deny it or try to overcome it. Among those, in their jealousy and possessiveness, who have struggled with this separateness are King Lear, King Leontes, and Othello, though it was in the book immediately following Cavell’s plaintive reading of Othello at the end of The Claim of Reason that he began to give us his positive vision, not of tragedy but of comedy, and of how we might create a community founded on our shared separateness. Thus, in Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage (1981), Cavell argued, through readings of seven Hollywood romantic comedies, that, just as we cannot depend simply on preexisting criteria in order to be intelligible to one another, “There is no place to go in order to acquire the authority of connection...You cannot wait for the perfected community to be presented.” And yet, for the seven couples examined in that book, sometimes despite themselves, a community happens.

I did not get to see Stanley in the last year of his life. But in the nine years at the end of his life in which I did know him, I was inspired as he approached his aging with the happy spirit of an inveterate improvisor. He could always be relied on to ad lib. I remember in 2010—after a large standing-room-only occasion at Harvard celebrating the publication that year of his memoir Little Did I Know—the very last of us were filing out of the lecture hall: I turned around to find behind me the very man who had been fêted for the last two hours—only this time alone, human, and unguarded. “Ha, I didn’t realize who was behind me!” I said to Stanley, to which he replied, “Don’t worry—we’re all behind you.”

The fact that in the course of the deepest readings of some of our most public texts and films we can also find such authentically private assurances is surely a big

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6. Cavell, “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” in Must We Mean What We Say, 96.
part of what will keep many of us permanently pinned to Stanley Cavell’s writing. In that way, his writing shows us how to go on.\textsuperscript{8}

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8. I acknowledge the support of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program at the Institute for Philosophical Research, in which I am under the supervision of Carlos Pereda.
In February of 2000, Stanley Cavell came to Amherst College to present two public lectures as the John C. McCloy ’16 Professor of American Institutions. (I had nominated him for the lectureship the previous year, and he had been approved by a College committee and the president of the College at the time, Tom Gerety, who was himself a legal philosopher.)

It was a big deal. In the fall, the lecturer had been Ronald Dworkin. Others who had lectured through these early years of the lecture included such luminaries as Martha Nussbaum and George Kateb. (The first McCloy lecturer had been Fred Korematsu, who had unsuccessfully sued the U.S. government during World War II to end the Japanese internment program. Korematsu’s invitation had been a sort of historical reparation, since John McCloy, for whom the professorship had been named, had directed the internment camp program for FDR, famously saying, when asked about its constitutionality, “Compared to my country, the Constitution is just a piece of paper.”)

Stanley gave two lectures, “Night and Day: Heidegger and Thoreau,” on February 10, and “Passionate and Performative Utterance: Extending Austin’s How to Do Things with Words,” on February 17. Both of these lectures, in modified form, eventually found their way into print in Stanley’s Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow (Harvard University Press, 2005) as “Passionate and Performative Utterances” and “Thoreau Thinks of Ponds, and Heidegger of Rivers.”

My intention here is not to discuss the substance of these two major essays. Instead, I want to tell two stories about Stanley and his character as both a thinker and person, occasioned by the events of those lectures.

Stanley presented these lectures in the Converse Hall Assembly Room, also known as the Red Room, one of the College’s larger gather places, an amphitheater
that usually holds about 200 people maximum, but which, for both of Stanley’s lectures, was filled to overflowing, with people hanging out at the room’s multiple entrances to listen in.

For the first lecture, on Heidegger and Thoreau, the attention of the audience was total, and Stanley persisted in answering questions for some forty-five minutes after the lecture, before I finally insisted (as his faculty host) that we needed to head out to a dining hall on campus where there was a dinner in his honor, with about forty members of the faculty from Amherst and other Five College schools across various disciplines in attendance, each one of them wanting a chance to speak with him. He barely got to eat his meal that evening. But at long last, after hours in which he had been gracious and generous with his responsiveness to his interlocutors—some of whom were more than interesting and engaging, some less so—I finally was able to bring the festivities to an end, and we left the dining hall to walk back to the inn where he was lodged (then called the Lord Jeffrey Amherst Inn, but subjected to a recent and largely welcome name change, given the genocidal inclinations of the original Lord Jeff).

As we went into the night, my head was buzzing a bit at the sheer thrill of the event, one of those major intellectual events some of us live and hope for. But before we had walked more than a few yards toward the hotel, Stanley stopped dead in his tracks, grabbed me by the arm, turned me toward him so he could get my full attention, and asked, “Tom, was that all right?”

I was floored. Here was one of the most justly celebrated living philosophers, who had just delivered himself of hours of stimulating and deep insights into two crucially important thinkers, and he sincerely was concerned that he may not have adequately performed, may not have fully and clearly expressed himself, may not have done as well as he might have. I thought to myself, if Stanley Cavell suffers from such self-doubt, such levels of what some call “intellectual imposter syndrome,” what hope is there for mere mortals like the rest of us (like me)? But upon reflection, it seemed to me that Stanley wasn’t expressing self-doubt so much as he was expressing his deep sense of the inadequacy of all of our communications, all of our language never quite reaching where it aims, a consistent and deep Cavellian theme. But also, a pos-
ture that has as its price a constant self-questioning, a constant self-doubting, or self-checking.

The following week Stanley returned, and again delivered himself of a major lecture, this time revisiting the themes of Austin, the philosopher who, when Stanley was a graduate student at Harvard, had delivered the William James lectures, that eventually were published as *How to Do Things with Words* (Harvard University Press, 1955, 1962) and thus changed the course of Stanley’s life. The major difference in the reception of that lecture is that rather than a large public dinner, a smaller, more intimate dinner was held at the president of the College’s home.

Now, a little bit of context. That previous fall, as I mentioned, Ronald Dworkin had been the McCloy professor, delivering a lecture entitled “Do Values Conflict?” His lecture was fantastic, exploring a deep argument concerning intellectual and moral authority and its relationship to power, among other things, but what I remember most clearly is not the substance—it can be found in his subsequent book by that title—but his style of lecturing. He spoke at length without notes, in fully formed sentences and paragraphs, with clarity and precision. (I was later told that this was a signature style associated with Oxford and Cambridge University dons. I have no idea whether that is true.) After his lecture, a group of about twenty-five of us gathered at the president’s home for a formal sit-down dinner. It was spectacular—waiters and waitresses with *hors d’oeuvres* on platters, a full bar, a multiple course meal—all a sign and seal of President Gerety’s admiration for this prominent legal philosopher.

Upon arriving at the president’s house this time, however, there was no sign of any such elaborate preparations. It turned out that the only faculty invited to the dinner were members of the philosophy department, along with myself and a visiting assistant professor of political theory in my department, about twelve of us all told. Indeed, there was no one tending bar—there was self-service for drinks and wine—nor was a table set for a meal. Instead, Tom Gerety greeted us at the door in open shirt and sweater (he had not attended the lecture), and showed us into what he called the library, a room to the side of the formal dining room, where TV trays were set up. We were invited to fill our plates from a buffet that had been set up in the dining room, and sit wherever we could find a seat, dragging our trays with us.
The food itself wasn’t memorable—of course often College food wasn’t—but there were elements of the dinner discussion that were. What I best remember is an assistant professor of philosophy button-holing Stanley to ask him if he had ever read this book that he, the young professor, had once read about performative locutions by a philosopher named Austin, because a lot of what Stanley was saying in his lecture seemed to be a lot like what Austin seemed to want to say. Maybe Stanley ought to read that book, he suggested. If Stanley liked, he’d send him the reference. Stanley sat there and nodded, and thanked the young professor for his advice.

The evening seemed to go along those general lines, with (fortunately?) few members of the philosophy department caring to engage Stanley in conversation. It was, mercifully, a brief evening. This time, as we were walking back to the inn, it was my turn to stop Stanley, having him turn to me so that I could express my apologies for what felt to me to be a deeply insulting and demeaning event. Stanley laughed. And then laughed some more. “Tom,” he said, “Not to worry. I’ve experienced lots worse.”

This was an illustration of something else—not Stanley’s worry about an inability to overcome the problem of other minds, at the heart of his concern about communicating clearly in his Heidegger and Thoreau lecture—but his appreciation, based on hard experience, of the depth of the division between the analytic and Continental traditions in philosophy, and the difficulties someone like him constantly had to face when addressing a typical American philosophy department steeped in the analytic tradition, blissfully ignorant of anything beyond that narrow, oh so narrow, beam of light.

We returned to the inn, had a drink, and I walked home. Stanley went back to Brookline the next morning, and our friendship, at least, was more secure than ever. I would have later occasion to suggest (ironically) that he maybe would want to read Austin’s *How to Do things with Words*. He would usually reply by suggesting that it may well be time for me to read “A Plea for Excuses.”
11. Undoing the Psychologizing of the Psychological

ARATA HAMAWAKI

Remarks given at a memorial event, “Celebrating the Life and Work of Stanley Cavell,” convened in Emerson Hall 105, Harvard University, Saturday, November 10, 2018.

In “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” first published in 1965, and later collected in Must We Mean What We Say?, Stanley Cavell wrote:

We know the efforts of such philosophers as Frege and Husserl to undo the “psychologizing” of logic (like Kant’s undoing Hume’s psychologizing of knowledge): now, the shortest way I might describe such a book as the Philosophical Investigations is to say that it attempts to undo the psychologizing of psychology, to show the necessity controlling our application of psychological and behavioral categories; even, one could say, show the necessities in human action and passion themselves. And at the same time it seems to turns all of philosophy into psychology—matters of what we call things, how we treat them, what their role is in our lives.¹

Frege, of course, insisted on distinguishing between what is thought in any act of thinking, the content of thought, which he conceived of as having a propositional form, and the thinking of it. A thought is what can be common to different acts of thinking, whether of one’s own or of another. It is thus essentially public, essentially shareable, unowned. By contrast the thinking of a thought is necessarily someone’s,

necessarily owned, and so in that sense private. Frege deppsychologized logic, by excluding the psychological from it. The logical must bear no trace of the psychological, for if that were not so, there would be nothing that could be true or false—and so no judgment, no belief, no propositional attitude, as thoughts have subsequently come to be called. There would be in Thomas Rickett’s memorable words, merely “mooing.” The first person is consequently banished from the logical order, for a first person thought is constituted by the thinking of it. But in deppsychologizing logic as he did, Frege seemed to have psychologized psychology. Thus, in speaking of the Investigations as undoing the psychologizing of psychology, I take it, Stanley meant that it seeks to undo what Frege did. However, this doesn’t mean undoing what Frege undid, that is, erasing the sharp boundary between the logical and the psychological, but rather to not cede the psychological to psychology: what the *PI* calls for is to further what Frege began, but, as it were, against Frege. In other words, Stanley saw Wittgenstein as reintroducing the first person as essential to the logical order, the order of what we think.²

The passage I read above immediately follows a discussion of the part of Kant’s third *Critique* in which Kant introduces the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable. There, Kant notes, if someone is challenged on her judgment that something is agreeable, it is perfectly appropriate for her to retreat to saying, “well, it’s agreeable to me.” But if someone is challenged on her judgment that something is beautiful, it would, far from being appropriate, be “laughable” to retreat to saying, “well, it’s beautiful for me.” “For,” as Kant says, “he must not call it beautiful if it merely pleases him.”³ “What,” Stanley asked:

are these examples supposed to show? That using a form of expression in one context is all right, and using it in another is not all right. But what I wish to focus on is the *kind* [my emphasis] of rightness and wrongness invoked: it is not a matter of factual rectitude, nor of formal indiscretion but of saying something laughable, or which would be folly. It is such consequences that are taken to display a difference in the kind of judgment in question, in the nature

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² Although this idea is still somewhat heterodox, there are some recent philosophers who have followed Stanley’s lead. These include Sebastian Rödl and Irad Kimhi.
of the concepts employed, and even in the nature of the reality the concepts capture. [...] And how can psychological differences like finding something laughable or foolish (which perhaps not every person would) be thought to betray such potent, or anyway, different, differences?

Rightness and wrongness here are not measured by the norms of truth, meaning or pragmatic appropriateness. And yet, these judgments are not merely a matter of psychology either, even though, as Stanley observed, it can seem that way. There is such a thing as rightness or wrongness here, even though our judgments of rightness and wrongness are necessarily unsponsored in the familiar ways, by sensory evidence, proof, testimony, expertise, and so on. Like judgments of the beautiful themselves, the philosopher who appeals to everyday language “turns to the reader not to convince him without proof but to get him to prove something, test something against himself. He is saying: Look and find out whether you can see what I see, wish to say what I wish to say.”

Philosophical statements, like aesthetic statements, are essentially first personal—are mine to make. And the risk we bear in making them is not the risk of error but the risk of alienation and exposure, the risk of isolation—the discovery that I speak only for myself. What we may find is not that we disagree about a matter of fact, but that we do not share a world. Unlike my relation to the order of facts, I have a world only insofar as I bring it to expression, bring it to words. In that sense, it could be said, “the world is my world.” To use Kant’s language, such judgments have, or purport to have, necessary universal “subjective validity.” And, according to Stanley, it is only against the background of necessities of this kind that there can be necessities of the logical kind. You might say that it is only against the backdrop of such subjectively universal necessities that propositions have their life, so that it is so much as possible for us to have propositional attitudes. Contra Frege, the domain of the logical cannot be insulated against the first person. (Or, in Kant’s terms, reflecting judgment is a necessary condition of determining judgment.)

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5. Ibid., 96.
Kant famously said, “it must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all of my representations,” thereby affirming that self-consciousness is not something that is opposed to objectivity but is, on the contrary, constitutive of it. I think of Stanley as inheriting, while transforming, Kant’s dictum. For Kant the “I think” is the act of theoretical judgment; it is the “I assert” or the “I hold.” For Stanley it would be more appropriate to say, “it must be possible for the ‘I voice’ or the ‘I express’ or the ‘I appreciate’ to accompany all of my representations.” Giving voice to one’s experience in the relevant sense is a matter of making a claim, but it is not making a factual claim, or even a practical one. It is giving expression to my appreciation of significance; in so doing I am not simply reporting something, but am making a claim on others to appreciate what I do. What is it that calls for appreciation? If I say, for example, “you have to go see this movie,” say, Ozu’s _Late Spring_ (Banshun, 1949). How are we to understand the “must” here? The “must” is not in a broad sense theoretical—that is, a matter of what one must believe, for if it were, it ought to be possible for me to take another’s word on the matter. Nor is the “must” in a broad sense practical, a matter of something I ought to do, for a failure to do it would have to constitute a rift in our relationship, a breach of the mutual trust that is necessary to constitute a community. When I tell a new friend, “you must read Stanley Cavell,” I believe that the “must” here is the same as in “you must see Ozu’s _Late Spring_,” which is the same “must” as in Rilke’s “you must change your life” (from “The Archaic Torso of Apollo”). What calls for appreciation is neither theoretical nor practical, neither factual nor normative, neither cognitive nor conative, but somehow all of these at once. And it is not only that those familiar dichotomies are inadequate to a grasp of the phenomenon; it is that our sense of what calls for appreciation is, you could say, the common root from which the theoretical and practical orders spring and from which they cannot liberate themselves, the pivot on which “the whirl of organism” whirls.

The philosopher’s remarks, as the critic’s, may not only be met with disagreement but with worse, with complete indifference—with what Kant in the (first edition) Preface of the first _Critique_ called “the mother of chaos and night”—since, unlike the sciences, neither have a guaranteed audience, but this does not render them dependent on individual fancy or whim. Far from it, as Stanley wrote, “philosophy, like art, is, and should be, powerless to prove its relevance; and that says so-
mething about the kind of relevance it wishes to have. All the philosopher, this kind of philosopher, can do is to express, as fully as he can, his world, and attract our un-divided attention to our own.” It is impossible for me to imagine a philosopher who has expressed as fully as he can his world as did Stanley, and for us all he stands, as a further self, attracting undivided attention to our own—if we could only heed his warm, cheerful, hopeful, patient, invitation.

Like Kant and Wittgenstein, I don’t view self-consciousness as a separate topic in philosophy but rather as central to understanding our relation to the world and to others. For both philosophers, the self is not a separate topic of thought—self-consciousness is not a separate content—but constitutes our relation to the world and to others. I believe that seeing how this is so requires unpacking Stanley’s elusive but intriguing idea of “undoing the psychologizing of the psychological.” Ever since my days as a graduate student, and as an advisee of Stanley’s, I have found his work, in this and other respects, to afford the most compelling way of reading Wittgenstein as inheriting Kant’s philosophy, and in turn to represent the most compelling way of inheriting and going on from the work of both. He has been a model for me of how to learn from the history of philosophy, how to make it relevant.

6. Ibid., 96.
12. The Child’s Claim to the Transmission of Language

YVES ERARD

Sandra Laugier describes Stanley Cavell’s contribution to philosophy as the bringing back of the human voice into central consideration: “For Cavell, the stakes of ordinary language philosophy (particularly Wittgenstein’s and Austin’s work) are to make it understood that language is spoken; pronounced by a human voice within a form of life.” How can I then express my own voice when all of my expressions are those of others? In other words, how is it that a child becomes part of her or his form of life? How does she or he claim her or his own voice? Presenting the transmission of language this way implies another way of seeing what language is, what learning language is, and finally what subjectivity in language is.

The Claim of Linguistics

Linguistics, born with Saussure, has not much to say about childhood and has traditionally left the study of language acquisition to the psycholinguistic. In my book Des jeux de langage chez l’enfant, I review the state of affairs by showing a relationship between Saussure, Wittgenstein, Cavell and the study of ordinary language that initiates, let’s say briefly, a modern view on language at the end of the nineteenth century.

If we look for mentions of words like “child” or “language learning” in Saussure’s Cours de linguistique générale, we would not find anything. Childhood seems indeed to be totally absent from the book that gave birth to linguistics. The refusal of

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a diachronic point of view on language by Saussure seems to discard any interest in language learning. But if we take a closer look at his thoughts, it would appear not to be the case. It is in fact quite the opposite: the transmission of language will turn out to be a central insight of his linguistics.

At a conference in 1891, Saussure avoided defining languages as objects. He prefers to give some principles that will determine a point of view. The first principle lies in the fact that languages present continuity and transformation through time and space. In other words, languages are stable and unstable; they vary historically as well as geographically. These two facts are correlated, and the first task of linguistics is to take the infinite variations of languages into account and to recognize that: “By themselves, they are unperishable. It means that there is no reason their transmission stops due to a cause depending on their proper organization” (« En elle-même elle est impérissable, c’est-à-dire qu’il n’y a aucune raison pour que sa transmission s’arrête pour une cause tenant à l’organisation de cette langue. »).²

This enduring feature of language doesn’t depend on an individual’s will but relies on the “speaking mass,” on the approval of the collectivity: “Languages are inevitably social, language not inevitably. The language cannot exist without languages. Likewise languages imply the existence of a faculty of language” (« La langue est forcément sociale, le langage pas forcément. Le langage ne saurait exister sans la langue. De même la langue suppose l’existence de faculté du langage. »).³ Saussure illustrates the relations between language, languages, and speech by this diagram:

To complete this picture of Saussure’s thought we can add that language can only be observed in individual speech acts with at least two people involved. In these remarks, I focus on this intermediate zone of language where languages are transmitted and ask myself what precise role the child plays in this process.

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By reading a key scene of instruction in Stanley Cavell’s *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (2010), I will interrogate this intermediate space in terms of a “linking of generations.” This transmission has something to do with comprehension between generations; in that double meaning, children and adults understand and comprise or acknowledge each other (in French, the word *comprendre* can have these two meanings). This agreement between generations—this social contract, in a way—is described by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*: “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. [...]” ("Richtig und falsch ist, was Menschen sagen; und in der Sprache stimmen die Menschen überein. Das ist keine Übereinstimmung der Meinung, sondern der Lebensform. Zur Verständigung durch die Sprache gehört nicht nur eine Übereinstimmung in den Definitionen, sondern (so seltsam das klingen mag) eine Übereinstimmung in den Urteilen.") The English version of the *Philosophical Investigations* translates Übereinstimmung as “agreement.” This translation put too much emphasis on discourse depriving the vocal part of our attunement in language that involves voices, screams, claims, and silences.

The Child’s Claim

A perfect place to hear the child’s voice without too much distortion (caused by adults) are schoolyards. To do so, I will now refer to a video I recorded a long time ago in Lausanne showing the schoolyard of a daycare, which looks after children from five to ten years old—in these moments between school and home. Kids do their homework and then play inside or outside.

In the first video, a girl called Sarah engages in a ball game, the aim of which is to make the others sit by hitting them. The game becomes so loud and the game turn

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so brutal that an educator gets involved. The first thing to mention is the moment when you remove the adults from the children’s world. Relations between children don’t become more equal but, in this example, more brutal. Some children appear to be more childish than the others and certain voices tend to cover the others. Without grown-ups, there is still younger and older and our ways of contrasting grown-ups and children is a hard-line approach of this form of life. The second thing to mention is that some children are unable to follow rules. For example, Sarah pretending that if the ball touches the head, it doesn’t count as a hit. Other children point her out as a cheater to the intervening educator.

In a second video, the educator speaks directly to Sarah. She tries to draw the attention of the girl pointing a threatening index finger at her, telling her she has to follow rules or do something else. The girl steps back, arguing that the one that chooses the game is the one that commands, pointing her finger at the educator. The adult then bends down to be at her height and tells her: “It is not because you chose the game that you have to command. There’s nobody giving orders, the rules apply to everybody the same.”

Is the child’s claim not bringing out a paradox here? Is there not a contradiction in setting the game while giving orders with a finger up and claiming at the same time that there’s nobody ruling the game? Isn’t the child right saying that the one that sets the game is the one that commands the game?

The third video takes place half an hour later. The children have tried to play but they don’t really succeed to set the game. They start a lot of matches that quickly dissolve in unruled actions. The game ends when Sarah asks the educator for help. She gathers together the children of the yard to help them in their will to play. This desire is part of the game; it doesn’t give any reason for one to obey rules. The question should then be reformulated: what if I don’t follow the rules of a game? The issue is now set in terms of my need to follow rules. This type of necessity will show up in the next video, where Sarah continues to argue the rules while wishing to play. She still has something to add to what the educator says, and again the adult doesn’t let her speak, leaving her no other option than to be part of the game or do something.

5. To access the video, visit: http://av.unil.ch/hva/3447/v1-s1.mp4.
6 To access the video, visit: http://av.unil.ch/hva/3447/v1-s2.mp4.
The one that formulates the rules dictates the rules and the child is required to keep silent. The child’s claim is denied. I defended this idea in a paper from 2011, but I now have to confess that I totally missed the point.

In fact, in the first extract, the educator commands, but not for herself: “Nobody commands, Sarah, you play with the others, everybody with the same rules.” The rules are a tool for a collective action. In the second place, when Sarah say “No, no, I’m the one that commands the game, because I’m the one who chose it.” The educator takes Sarah’s claim deeply into account: she first stands in an upright position and then bends down from her grown-up stance to face Sarah at her level. The educator has a democratic manner of seeing the rules: they apply the same to everybody. She also gives a special attention to Sarah. I was later told that Sarah was suffering ADHD.

When asked if the educator will play, she clearly answers “No,” and adds that she will referee. The referee is part of the game but doesn’t play. This figure of mediation is very important in the process of transmission because they represent the interface between the authority of the rules and the normativity of the rules, a difference noted by Descombes in Le Complément du sujet (2004). In setting the rules with authority, the educator enables the child to express her real needs: “I do play” claims the child when asked if she wants to play or not. She obeys the rules by necessity and not by obedience. The rules are not imposed on her by elders. She agrees to follow the rules because it meets her real need to be part of the game.

If we take a closer look at the scene engaging the girl and the educator, two phases have to be distinguished. In the first move, the educator calls out to Sarah in a stance with her finger demanding her to follow the rule. The child steps back and makes a claim. The voice of the adult covers the voice of the child. To find a term for the discussion, the taller person says “Do you hear me?”—that sounds like an order to silence. The child’s voice is not being heard. In the second move, the educator gets closer to the child, squats down below the child’s head, takes her hands and explains to her that the rules apply equally to every player. The grow-up holds a conversation at the child’s level. Does the child learn the collective force of the rules? Impossible to know at this stage. Nevertheless, two conceptions of learning rules show up in Veena

7. To access the video, visit: http://av.unil.ch/hva/3447/v1-s3.mp4.
Das words: first, by reference to Kripke’s note about the educator who “simply stands in for the authority of the community,” and second, a remark by Cavell, where the educator shows “a gesture of waiting” and positions herself where the child stands:

Saul Kripke’s (1982) view of the skeptical question as to how can we know when a child has learned something (e.g. to read) is to assert that we simply accept that learning has occurred when the child’s response is similar to that of the community—the teacher then simply stands in for the authority of the community. For Cavell (1990, 70), there is an air of violence in this solution to the skeptical problematic, and he takes Wittgenstein’s “My spade is turned, this is just what I do” to suggest instead a gesture of waiting. I want to think of an added dimension to this waiting. It is not only that the realization that justifications must come to an end somewhere when accompanied with a gesture of waiting will enable the child to learn, but also that the teacher might find that a different aspect of “knowing” may dawn upon her as the child plays with different possibilities.

The Linking of the Generations

To spread a light on the transmission of language, I will now bring into focus the relation between the child and the adult, and the role of the child’s claim in the comprehension between generations. I will exemplify it with a scene of instruction in *Little Did I Know*:

When the rabbi at my mother’s graveside dismissed the company of several dozen people in attendance [...] Ben refused to leave. As I took his hand he insisted that, “The coffin is still here.” I replied that since Rabbi Epstein had dismissed us he must have his reasons. Ben could not be moved. He and I and the rabbi, and two workmen were the only ones left by the grave. I glanced at

the rabbi, who motioned to me to remain. “The child is right. The service is not over, but we have fallen into the custom of those in attendance as we lower the coffin and cover it with earth.” This admired and distinguished old man had begun walking around to us on the other side of the open grave, and pulling a shovel from the place it had been stabbed into a neat pile of soil, invited Ben to put his small hands on the shovel’s handle between the rabbi’s large hands. Thus enabled to assist one another in wielding the large implement, they repeatedly, as the coffin was lowered, together sent small clumpy showers of earth down surprisingly softly tapping upon the coffin’s lid in accompaniment to the rabbi’s completing the chanting of his canonical prayers. Afterward, as Ben and I held hands to walk over and rejoin the withdrawn gathering of participants, I was, I suppose, undisguisedly, pent with uncomplicated yet mysterious elation at witnessing this inspired, lucid linking of generations before and beyond mine.”

This scene is highly interesting for the understanding of language transmission because Cavell says he is witnessing an “inspired, lucid linking of generations.” The ceremony seems to have come to its end but Ben refuse to leave arguing “The coffin is still here.” His father ties to convince him that Rabbi Epstein has certainly good reasons to have dismissed those in attendance, so the child’s behavior is not unreasonable and his claim is not nonsense in relation to the custom. Here we can feel a kind of suspension of time in the narrative with Cavell looking questioningly at the rabbi and the two workmen, whose assistance is giving publicity to Ben’s stubbornness. The child’s voice is a dissonant voice in the sense Viktor Johansson defines it in his beautiful book *Dissonant Voices*:

> Sometimes we just do not know how to go on with each other; we hear voices that we just do not know how to respond to, but that seem to compel us to respond. Sometimes we are that dissonant voice and whatever we do we cannot make sense to the people we live with. There are times when a voice seems to

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play a different tune than is played by the voices of a seemingly harmonious practice. It is a pedagogical difficulty, but it is a pedagogical difficulty not only because those voices disrupt our teaching, or is part of my learning. Dissonant voices disrupt our natural reactions, ways of interacting that we take for granted, or as given. Dissonance in a sense disrupts our forms of life.10

The dimension of waiting in this episode appears in the gesture Rabbi Epstein addressed to Stanley Cavell as Ben refuses to leave the edge of the grave. The rabbi plays the role of the mediator between Stanley and Ben. His agreement with the child lies in the coincidence of judgements: “The child is right.” The nonsense of the child’s claim turns out to be highly sensible and creates a link between an old man and a child. Both of them hold a shovel pointing at the grave, with Cavell forced to watch the disappearance of the coffin containing his mother’s dead body. Cavell hears the earth drumming against the coffin’s lid. This is a cruel but meaningful scene for someone who considers the acknowledgment of separation as intrinsic to any acceptance of the limitedness of the human condition. On the edge of the grave, Cavell is surprised that the small clumpy showers of earth are tapping softly upon the coffin’s lid, as if he would have expected something, say, more brutal or more tragic.

This surprise sounds like a relief for Cavell, while Ben and Rabbi Epstein’s insistence, in making him endure the process of separation until its very final end, sounds like a lesson: we show you that you can bear this type of separation as something uncomplicated. The mystery lies in the comprehension that both Ben and Rabbi Epstein demonstrate by the their lucid and inspired linking or, better say, attunement in language that includes Stanley Cavell before and beyond himself. The elation comes from the acknowledgment of the expressiveness of a father looking from above at the deep hole announces separation.

In “Time’s a Trickster,” Veena Das call this scene “the gift.” I understand it as a gift of a son to his father.11 The claim of the child—“the coffin is still here”—allows the father to make himself known: his entire body is in full despair on the edge of the

grave. He contemplates his mother disappearing under the earth, thrown by the waver- ing hands of a little child and an old man with two expert workmen, looking on at the pair of them. A natural body goes down at the same time as the expressiveness of bodies manifest the life of language in a link between Ben and Rabbi Epstein.

To let yourself matter is to acknowledge not merely how it is with you, and hence to acknowledge that you want the other to care, at least to care to know. It is equally to acknowledge that your expressions in fact express you, that they are yours, that you are in them. This means allowing yourself to be comprehended, something you can always deny. Not to deny it is, I would like to say, to acknowledge your body, and the body of your expressions, to be yours, you on earth, all there will ever be of you.12

The scene at the grave is an inverse instruction scene where the adult comes to learn something from the child through the mediation of another adult. The adult’s uncomplicated elation is nothing mysterious: it is the joy that is provided by an understanding of a witty remark such as “the coffin is still here.” Wittgenstein highlights that “The game, I would like to say, has not only rules but also a point” (Das Spiel, möchte man sagen, hat nicht nur Regeln, sondern auch einen Witz).13

The common view of death is a wrong point of view. When one stands at the edge of a grave, one can only see a pile of soil falling softly on a coffin’s lid, and the dreaded moment of separation appears surprisingly ordinary. The spade of our questioning the world is turned, hitting bedrock, the hole of our search has to be fill up again by a shovel. The elation comes with the understanding that enables the learner to say, as in an instruction scene in the Philosophical Investigations—that he “knows how to go on.”14 But Cavell doesn’t continue alone on his path, a child holds his hand. A child that comprehended him so deeply that he is able to teach his father lessons. The linking of the generations is another expression for the transmission of language.

14. Ibid.
I realize now that positioning the camera at a distance, overlooking the yard, gave me a disengaged view of the action. I filmed the schoolyard as if it was a field. Space tends to acquire too much importance and the human down there, in the hole formed by the yard, tends to be defined solely by places without faces. I endorsed Pierre Bourdieu’s structuralism by defining from outside the dominant/dominated of the language game—the adult being the dominant and the child being the dominated. This view is one of a distant neighbor, not a participant of the language game. Neither the normativity nor the authority of the rules applies to this kind of observer, one who contemplates the schoolyard as a squared hole where the living world is about to be buried by objective science. The paradox—“that the one that chose the game is the one that commands it”—only appears at this disengaged height.

My Voice in Other’s Ear, the Other’s Voice in My Ear

Cavell comes to know himself through the eyes of his son watching him on the edge of a grave. We see ourselves in the reaction of others to what we do or say. In this case, of how one should reply to a remark as “the coffin is still here,” Cavell’s question “must we mean what we say?” could now be paired with the question “must we mean what we reply?” —giving us a more complete picture of the transmission of language:

This illustration of the speech circuit comes from a diagram that Saussure drew on the blackboard in his course of 1911. The meaning of what I say is located between my expression and what I perceive in the other’s reaction to it, but also in this intermediate space between what the other asks and what I perceived of my answer. The other could indeed complain about my answer: “that’s not what I was asking you.”
My subjectivity lies in an intermediate space, *ein löchriger Raum, un espace troué*, as Sandra Laugier calls it—referring to Wittgenstein, in her paper of 2005 “*Le privé, l’intérieur et l’extérieur*.” The signs of languages are not dead signs as long as they circulate in the speech circuit. We could also express that idea in a more ordinary way by saying that signs live in living conversations where I come to know myself through a multiple holed space that lets light come through in an intimate flow, as described by Veena Das:

The obvious place to begin is by asking what it means to be in conversation with a younger generation whose future I will not be there to share, but which decisively defines the feel of my present. In this, a scene of some forms of ressentiment that one must feel as one contemplates one’s absence, I also discover what it is to abandon my words to these other lives, and hence find myself by abandoning myself to the trust of the intimate other.15

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When I received the invitation from David LaRocca to contribute to this special issue of *Conversations*, to commemorate and celebrate Stanley Cavell’s life and thought, I felt flummoxed, overwhelmed by the possibilities. There are so many different reasons I feel gratitude, deep gratitude, for Stanley, so many ways his writings and voice have left a profound mark on my intellectual development and career and even daily life. What text or moment or effect should I single out? Where to begin? Indeed, if I had not stumbled across *Must We Mean What We Say?* three years into graduate school, despairing, as I was at that time, of ever feeling at home in the academic world of literary studies (this was in the late ’90s in the English Department at the University of Pennsylvania, where New Historicism was very much enjoying its heyday), I think there’s a good chance that I would never have finished my Ph.D. I had great respect for my teachers and peers, but as hard as I tried (and I did try very hard; after all, it felt like the very possibility of a career was at stake), I could not see myself reflected in their scholarly interests or outlooks.

After reading “Knowing and Acknowledging” for the first time, however, I felt or intuited, even if I did not yet fully comprehend, what had been missing in the first few years of my graduate training (the self, voice, acknowledgment), and it was as though I could, for the first time, glimpse my own reflection, recognize *myself* or some *self* I would want to be, in the voice and words of a published scholar: in Stanley Cavell’s voice. Without this experience of recognition and acknowledgment, I doubt I
would have stayed in the game (for graduate school had come to feel like merely a

game). In a very literal sense, then, without Stanley’s writings in my life, I don’t belie-
ve I would be getting invitations to contribute anything at all to any scholarly journals
whatsoever. Reading Stanley on acknowledgment, and in doing so, receiving the gift
of acknowledgment itself, is what made it possible for me to finish graduate school
(to even want to finish it). In the end, I wrote a dissertation, inspired by his example,
on Wittgenstein’s notion of physiognomy, and somehow, with that degree in hand,
ended up landing the position I now hold, as a Professor in the English Department
at Williams College, where I teach courses in “philosophy and literature” (some of
them, happily, on Cavell!). Reason enough, don’t you think, to feel deep, deep grati-
tude?

When I received David’s invitation to write something for this commemorative
issue, this particular story about my intellectual and professional indebtedness to
Stanley is what first flashed to mind. And quickly, many others followed. But it didn’t
take long (just a good night’s sleep) for me to realize what I really wanted to do with
this invitation: to pass it along to others, in particular, to the students I had taught in
my undergraduate courses on Cavell. And so, that’s what I’ve done.

Every few years, I teach a course that is basically an introduction to Cavell. It
goes by various names: once, I called it “Ordinary Language and Literary Theory,”
another year I called it “Contemporary Literature and Ordinary Language,” and most
recently (Spring 2018), I called it “Wittgenstein and Literary Studies.” We read a lot
of different things in this course. A lot of late Wittgenstein, of course, and J. L. Austin
too. Texts by Cora Diamond, Stephen Mulhall, Toril Moi, Sarah Beckwith, and Naomi
Scheman make appearances as well (along with many others; too many to name). But
the heart and soul of the class (its raison d’être) is Cavell.

In his editorial invitation, David asked contributors to this special issue to
consider “how Stanley’s work lives on, and how he and his work have given us life.”
I’ve already suggested how his work has given me life, but I can think of no better way
to show how Stanley’s work lives on (and how his work promises to live on, well into
the future) than by providing a venue for some of my Williams students to describe
the transformative effect reading Stanley has had on them ... how his work has given
them “life.”
My Spring 2018 section of “Wittgenstein and Literary Studies” was full of especially amazing, bright, intellectually adventurous students. It was a joy to teach, and teaching Cavell over the years to undergraduates, seeing how deeply he can touch and transform new generations of readers, is one of the clearest testaments to the inexhaustible vitality and ongoing importance of his work. For this piece, I invited four students whom I knew were especially deeply affected by Cavell’s work during this seminar. Two of them are philosophy majors, but none of them, I believe, intends to pursue philosophy at the graduate school level. When I emailed them to ask if they might be interested in contributing to this commemorative issue, all four of them immediately jumped at the opportunity. Like me, they feel deep gratitude to and for Cavell, and they were delighted to have this opportunity to share some of that appreciation with others.

I think—I hope—that Stanley would have enjoyed reading these four personal accounts of young thinkers and readers encountering his writings and voice for the first time. On behalf of these four students, and on behalf of the many students I’ve taught at Williams over the years who have been transformed and given life by their encounter with your writings, thank you, Stanley.

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Isabel Andrade, ’18

The morning after Donald J. Trump’s election to president our college felt like a funeral home. We spoke in hushed voices and whispered our condolences. Over the next few months, this pain turned into anger, the stillness into uproar. Our campus was on edge with growing racial tensions and widespread distrust. At the time, my peers and I thought that the best response to a rising wave of racism and misogyny was to wield our intellectual strength against bigoted theories and justifications, bringing to light their inconsistencies and falsehoods. This was the context in which I first read Cavell.
In “Knowing and Acknowledging,” Cavell reflects on the philosopher who “begins with a full appreciation of the decisively significant facts that I may be suffering and no one else is, and that no one (else) may know (or care?).”¹ However, instead of pursuing these facts, the issue becomes deflected into the language of philosophical skepticism as the philosopher delves into questions of whether we can have the same suffering. Cora Diamond describes deflection as “what happens when we are moved from the appreciation, or attempt at appreciation, of a difficulty of reality [experiences that are hard to get one’s mind around, painful or astonishing in their inexplicability] to a philosophical or moral problem apparently in the vicinity.”²

This notion of “deflection” has helped me understand myself and my community better. I have started noticing how sometimes we deflect from feelings of hurt, separateness, or powerlessness into arguments about structures of oppression and hierarchies of power. Sometimes that deflection provides a bird’s eye view, helping us see structures at play which are unavailable to us when we just focus on the particular individuals that are here and now. However, we sometimes forget that this is but one possible perspective, and confuse our reality with the maps we’ve created of that reality.

Cavell writes that the ordinary language philosopher seeks to “discover the specific plight of mind and circumstance within which a human being gives voice to his condition.”³ Instead of seeing people as just devices for putting forward ideas which we can abstract and analyze, Cavell shifts focus towards the particular person and the context in which she is expressing herself. For me, Cavell’s writing is a call to sympathetically inhabit the positions of those I disagree with, a call to come into an argument not with the goal of disparaging and refuting, but instead, seeking to understand the complexity of the other.

During debates and arguments, we often forget the humanity of those we disagree with, and we also forget our own human vulnerabilities. Under particular circumstances, certain modes of thought and ways of seeing the world can take a hold of us and grip us. At times, our over-reliance on argumentation is a way in which we may make unavailable to ourselves what it is to be human. This, I believe, is why Ca-

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vell promoted “modes of criticism that [...] do not leave the critic imagining himself free of the faults he sees around him.”

One of the most well-known phrases among young conservatives nowadays is “facts don’t care about your feelings,” a quote popularized by Ben Shapiro in his criticisms of current college culture. This disregard of feelings, particularly the feelings of those we disagree with, is prevalent across the political spectrum, and it is deepening divides within our communities. Cavell’s call to eschew the age-old opposition between emotion and reason is particularly applicable for us now. It is evident that facts alone cannot show us what we need in order to respond well to each other and our shared world.

**Stephanie Brown, ’20**

“How does theory make you feel?” This was one of the first questions I was asked in my class on Wittgenstein last semester. It was also not a question my past two years studying philosophy at Williams had prepared me to answer. In fact, no one had ever asked about how my classes made me feel. At Williams, I am pre-med and a philosophy and psychology double major, with aspirations of becoming a psychiatrist. Feelings have motivated every step along my academic path, yet they were something I had almost accidentally kept private, as my feelings about what I learned never seemed important. Needless to say, I was so excited to answer this question, and to finally have an outlet to explain how philosophy makes me feel so full of wonder and hope that sometimes I worry I might just explode.

So, there was my first answer to how theory made me feel: excited, excited about all the problems I feel theory could solve. Then also frustrated, at all the things I felt I couldn’t figure out yet. And then I realized something else: thinking about how using theory made me feel as though I, just me, had answers to the most important questions in the world. I realized that theory made me feel... powerful. And I felt that perhaps that is something I should question.

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As someone who was bullied for most of my childhood and teenage years, along with coming from a house with an emotionally abusive father, I’ve sought a mixture of things in philosophy—the ability to help myself, the ability to help others, and power. I never recognized my own search for power and control in my philosophical practice until that moment, when I was asked how theory made me feel. Until then, I had disguised my desire for power with my desire to help others.

When I read Cavell’s “Knowing and Acknowledging,” I saw myself in the skeptic’s search for power, and I saw the danger that lay within it. In the separateness and fear, the acute loneliness of our private feelings, I recognized myself, my family, my friends, and my professors. The skeptic’s loneliness feels like powerlessness which, in turn, as Cavell puts it, “presents itself as ignorance—a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack.” I saw my own deflection of other’s pain and my own pain as well, a psychological deflection into medical terminology as a manifestation of my desire to help, misguided by my fear of being powerless.

Being exposed to Cavell has undoubtedly made me a better person. I’m hoping that will translate into making me a better philosopher, a better friend, and a one day, a better doctor. I try not to shrink away anymore from uncertainty, confine myself or others to labels that determine our growth, or use my intellect to spread loneliness, as I see it so often being done by others. In the great space in between myself and the world, I try now to welcome my humanity, to embrace the uncertainty of existence while not allowing it to condemn my empathy. I suppose all that I need to say is that in every academic field I’ve explored, be it biology, chemistry, mathematics, or philosophy, all I’ve learned has seemed to be riddled with an insidious desire to transcend what we perceive as the confines of our humanity. Yet when I read Cavell, I see that when we let go of our need for power—our desire to transcend, to overcome the unknown—then our humanity is beautiful.

Louisa Kania, ’20

When I signed up for Bernie’s course on Cavell in the spring of 2018, I didn’t know that I was signing up for a personal odyssey. As I began to read Cavell, I couldn’t qui-
te place what it was in his essays that struck me, but his words shimmered with beauty, voice, and vital energy. Even when I couldn’t follow all of the twists and nuances of his thinking, I felt his ideas resonating in my body. I found myself coming alive. On several occasions—particularly while reading “Knowing and Acknowledging” and “The Avoidance of Love”—my nose began to tingle and my eyes started tearing up even before I had mentally processed what Cavell was saying. Sometimes I felt the force of his words so strongly that I had to pause in the middle of my reading and lean back in my chair, pushing the text away from me to give his ideas more space to expand. Nor was Cavell far from my mind as I went about my days that semester; more so than for any other scholar I’ve read, I found myself thinking about him and bringing him up on an almost daily basis in conversations with friends.

Yet when I began thinking about writing this piece, now almost a year after having first read Cavell, I found myself worrying that I didn’t know enough about him, that I couldn’t speak to his ideas with any sort of intellectual depth or rigor. When I tried to think back on what I’d learned from him, what I remembered most of all was not a specific concept or idea but, rather, the feeling of reading him—the feeling, I realize now, of being acknowledged. And as I reread his essays and my class notes, it occurred to me that although I have stopped consciously invoking or referring to Cavell, his ideas have seeped deeply into my life and my way of being in the world. Much of the thinking and growing that I’ve done in the past year has emerged in some way from these seeds. In this sense, I have not been thinking about Cavell’s ideas so much as I have been embodying and enacting them.

I spent the first two-and-half-years of college and much of my life before that searching for meaning, analyzing everything, and trying to find the “right” way to think and live—the system or set of rules that would fill up or explain away the emptiness and groundlessness that I felt lurking just below the surface of my experiences. I didn’t trust my own perspectives and voice, and I looked, instead, to external standards and rules for guidance on how to think and act. This was true in my personal life as well as in my intellectual life. I often refrained from expressing myself in social situations, and I denied a place to my subjectivity in my academic pursuits, dismissing the validity of my personal experiences in the classroom and writing and talking as if I existed as a sort of abstract, disembodied mind.
But encountering Cavell and Wittgenstein (especially Wittgenstein as understood by Cavell) changed all of that for me. I began to recognize that my attachment to rules and my quest for some sort of ultimate meaning was misguided, that I had been searching in language and in reality itself for a fixed ground that wasn’t there. As I started opening up to life’s contingency, instability, and groundlessness, I found myself letting go of the incessant search for meaning that had driven me for so long. At the same time, as I explored the idea that meaning does not exist outside specific contexts and the forms of everyday life, I realized that I could not and should not dismiss my subjectivity.

Wittgenstein suggests that if we don’t express our pain, we cannot learn the language to talk about it, while Cavell writes about the possibility that others can acknowledge pain that we are unable to see in ourselves. In Cavell, I found that kind of acknowledgment and, with it, the language I had been searching for—for experiences I hadn’t been able to understand and pain I had been suppressing. Like the skeptic whom Cavell describes with his remarkable empathy and generosity, I realized that all that time I had been seeking a system of knowledge, I had been deflecting a deeper, more existential anxiety—a sense of aloneness. I had been longing for the sort of deep, meaningful relationships that give life color and richness, but the harder I looked, the more those sorts of relationships seemed to elude me.

I found my diagnosis in “The Avoidance of Love.” Acknowledging and connecting with other people requires “self-revelation,” yet I had been unwilling to be vulnerable, to let myself be seen by others. In trying to push away the separation and aloneness I felt, I had been afraid of difference—both of acknowledging differences and of being different myself. I had imagined—incorrectly, as Cavell showed me—that difference necessarily means severance. At the same time, I recognized myself in Cavell’s description of King Lear in “The Avoidance of Love”; even as I was afraid of separation, on another level, I think I was afraid of true connection, of being seen and loved. In reading Cavell’s essays, I saw how my fear of being vulnerable and revealing myself to others was not only a loss to me but also something that could hurt others. In failing to acknowledge my own fears and sense of isolation, I had been unable to offer complete acknowledgement to others. In this way, I had been, by Cavell’s analysis, treating the people around me almost like fictional characters, denying their full
and complex humanity and limiting the depth of the relationships I could form with them. I had been living precisely the sort of tragic paradox that Cavell writes about: in denying difference and separation out of a desire for connection, I had failed to connect because I had not been present with or for the people around me. Moreover, if, as I believe, we become real through interaction with others, by reducing the people around me to fictional characters, I had also been reducing my own existence to a sort of fiction.

As Cavell writes, acknowledgement “is not a description of a given response” (“Knowing and Acknowledging”). It isn’t something we can describe or define as an abstract category; it’s something that we have to live, something that I am trying to live. I have been trying to live a life of presence and of acknowledgement, acknowledgement of both myself and others. Knowledge for knowledge’s sake, with its pursuit of rules, theories, and fixed meaning, no longer holds the urgency or even appeal that it once did for me. Now what I care about is something much more human and embodied—learning to live fully in day-to-day moments, to respond skillfully to whatever is present, and to be in relationship with myself and with others. I am trying to realize—in the fullest sense of the word—what acknowledgment means and looks like in my life.

These reflections feel very personal, not at all like something fit to go into a scholarly journal. But learning is personal, and reading Cavell is especially personal. Stanley Cavell led me to explore some of my most fundamental fears, anxieties, and unspoken beliefs—a journey that, as I reflect on it now, makes me understand just how appropriate it is to describe Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein as “therapeutic.” Cavell wasn’t just another interesting theorist who gave me a neat, new way of thinking; he helped me see myself and my life more clearly. So, when I think back on what it was like to take a course on Cavell, I realize that I wasn’t learning how to think; I was learning how to live.

When I first read “Knowing and Acknowledging,” I wrote in my journal, “Every response is an acknowledgement in some way; a failure to acknowledge is its own type of acknowledgement. [...] Everywhere I am is somewhere; I’m always situated, affecting, and responding to what is around me. Being intentional and aware is so profoundly important. Every day, every interaction, even every moment offers an op-
portunity for acknowledgement. How then will I live? Can I live a life of acknowledg-
ment?” I see now that these are questions I’ve spent the past year trying to answer
with my life, and I know that I’ll continue living with them. And for that, I am, and
will remain, deeply grateful to Cavell.

Nelly Lin-Schweitzer, ’21

I grew up less than a fifteen-minute walk from Stanley Cavell’s house, knowing
nothing of it. Chances are I even saw him once or twice in the street. That never-in-
tersecting physical proximity stands in odd relief against the way that his work has
entered my homes, in the lines from Cavell’s “Excursus” that I read to my girlfriend,
my mom, and my dad. There are strands of his ideas woven into my papers, my con-
versations with loved ones, and this tangle of thoughts and remembrances.

I’m dangled between two homes now—the one at college where I first learned
about Cavell from Bernie and the one where my parents live. The rhythms of college-
to-home involve transitioning from a sort of armored mania (armor cracks, of course,
but I don’t cry in front of other people) to a differently-armed disarmament. I relax at
home, yes, but I still don’t cry in front of other people. It’s a cultural thing, maybe.

When I write “crying in front of people,” I’m feeling around the concept
without really touching it. Performative, but only the silhouette of the performance.
Crying is theatrical but also a response to theater, and also a feeling.

To be honest, I do cry in front of people sometimes. I pretend that trying not to
is a prerequisite for crying’s authenticity, but I just remembered—some actors tell
themselves not to cry in order to cry. Antiperformance becomes performance. Once,
while I was shouting at you (I don’t think I cared about prerequisites then). Once, in a
packed room of sniffling listeners as a person spoke his poem. A bit like a theater au-
dience, that. Neither was acknowledged. Can a body’s expression (no longer suppres-
sible—at least, made to seem so) double as acknowledgement? Is internally-perfor-
mative suppression (which is maybe also expression) really necessary for “authentic”
expression? Or are the tears pain itself, like tears in my papery explanations of inten-
tion and defected performance?
Like. I think I use comparisons a lot to try to make people acknowledge what I’m saying with responses of the right magnitude. The most I’ve ever inadvertently lied was by exaggerating scale because I wanted you to respond with the proper awe that the original size, in my mind, deserved (I knew it would underwhelm you). But what right do I have to the kind of response you give me? I’m still grappling with the ways in which racism, colonialism, globalization, etc. all ought to demand a particular response (or at least acknowledgment), and yet consciously dictating, pulling other people’s strings, strays into puppet-master territory.

What do I do when something real I’m trying to say becomes ammo for jokes? The worst bit is I kind of get why you think it’s funny. The part of me almost laughing makes me sick (or is this me making myself sick? Because it seems like the appropriate response?). I’m afraid you’re not ever going to see what I mean. When I talk to my mom sometimes, it’s like a dam has burst open. She really listens. I’m not sure if I could break down what that means, or if I need to.

When I read Cavell, I let myself wonder.
14. Acknowledgments:
Thinking of and Thanking Stanley Cavell
DAVID LA ROCCA

Thanking well is difficult work. And only someone who has attempted to convey thanks will know of the adversity one finds in trying to find (one’s own?) words of thanks. In an academic or we might say more broadly, bibliophilic context, the name we give to that moment of expressed and explicit (which is to say sanctioned) thanks is (the) Acknowledgments. The Cavellian resonances and overlaps of significance for this capitalized, capstone forum will stand out in high relief, even at first glance. But it is to the deep relationships between what an understanding of the Cavellian concept (or conception or even better, re-conception) of acknowledgment might (or must) betoken about the genre we call Acknowledgments that I turn to in what follows.

In Cities of Words: Pedagogical Reflections on a Register of the Moral Life, Cavell writes of Introductions: “I confess I never skip them.”1 I can say the same about Cavell’s ever-present Acknowledgments: they not only often provide insight into the gestation of his project (who he engaged, where he was working, what he was reading, the places visited, the events he attended, etc.), but also, more unusually, the inclusion of and working out of ideas in this space that is, for many others, merely a perfunctory space for thanks (and sometimes of them). The Acknowledgments as an addendum, and at that perhaps even a chore (because a cause of anxiety: where do I begin?), become in Cavell’s hands, yet again, an occasion for thinking—even as they are, to be sure, for thanking.

In this customary place, a constitutive part of many if not most books, that has come to be called (the) Acknowledgments, I found Cavell’s treatment of the custom

transformed it. And part of the transformation involved distributing or re-distributing the specific labors of acknowledgment. In Cavell’s vast archipelago of dispatches, Acknowledgments go by a variety of names, repurposed to Cavell’s needs. For instance, the Preface to *The World Viewed* and the Foreword to *The Claim of Reason* carry many hallmarks of the Acknowledgments genre (e.g., a pedigree of influence and debts, naming individuals, referencing and charting one’s intellectual path to the book that lies ahead, etc.). And there are numerous occasions in the course of his philosophical prose, that is, when he is “at work” as a professional philosopher, when acknowledgments are made, parsed, and integrated seamlessly into the fabric of the remark—yet, for his art and tact, they may go unnoticed; by contrast, repeated invocations of “my teacher J. L. Austin,” might qualify as a signature instance of an overt mention.²

When I first began reading books by Cavell, it was the Acknowledgments that I first dwelled upon mostly deliberately, with the most curiosity. Looking back, perhaps my fascination, for a young wannabe scholar, this obscure Jude, had something to do with the impression that such writing would be among the more easily intelligible portions of his prose. So, a diversion then, but with good reason. Part of my broader interest lay in the question how such a book as this gets written—what contributes to its making and how the author understands that process. Here was a thinker, it seemed to me, writing with candor about his preoccupations and his influences, and, to be sure, those people and places that occupied his days and nights while creating the book. The preferred and thus default mode of the impersonal and the clinical in (much professional) philosophical prose is traded in, by Cavell, for the personal, even the private, befitting “autobiographical exercises,” as he puts it in the subtitle to *A Pitch of Philosophy*—characteristics endogenous to the nature of any given Acknowledgments. In this delimited precinct, a place liberated from the expectations of argument form, I seemed to follow better the line of his thought since it mostly comprised a very glamorous list of persons and texts, sometimes a narrative of time and place, and just as often, seemingly off-the-cuff remembrances that had the quality of character studies and reports of intimacies, such as we find in private journals as well.

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as novels and, in particular, the best of metafiction: when the author stands beside her work, and perhaps “beside [herself] in a sane sense.” In this regard, Acknowledgments as a genre have the character of an aside, and so they beckon, with uncanny intimacy, as if something profound will be, or at least might be, revealed. And more than novelistic invention, however compelling, however satisfying, there was also an implied promise that an etiology or a natural history of a mind—and its lettered offspring—could be gleaned from a close reading of such behind-the-scenes catalogues of thanks.

For a mind in need of learning how to read such prose as his, the taxonomy of this particular type of paratext—which I first encountered in Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism, a book, at the time, one could buy in print as a recent publication at the legendary Talking Leaves bookstore in Buffalo, New York—provided, let me say, not just a grounding but more specifically an atmosphere, an air, in which to think, and even more precisely, if peculiarly, to thank. To have thoughts profound enough to require a registry of debts incurred and paths taken seemed (then and still does) an enticing, foreign possibility. By contrast, I wondered and worried about what would it be like to write acknowledgments, at length, for work that was not worthy of its gratitude, for example, where one’s thanks would be an admission of one’s vanity and not of one’s generosity toward others; the failure to thank properly, appropriately, with propriety seemed a painful instance of human fallibility and the ironies that stalk us, and as I learned more about Cavell’s work, a particular expression of tragedy.

Of course, as a young philosopher-in-training in Buffalo, under the mentorship of Newton Garver (who studied with Norman Malcolm and Max Black—who welcomed Wittgenstein to Cornell on his only visit to America, and Black who published Cavell’s “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy” in Philosophy in America before it appeared in Must We Mean What We Say?), and Peter H. Hare (a genuine pluralist who studied with the greats of Columbia pragmatism and was long-time co-editor of The Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society), and Kah Kyung Cho (who studied with Heidegger and Gadamer)—I was coming to consciousness that one

could have so many people to thank for the creation of a book. Still, having people to thank is not the same as the act or art of thanking them. Clearly, even at first blush, Cavell’s Acknowledgments were neither issued as a list to be dutifully checked off nor off-handedly submitted as an afterthought; his example proposed something entirely new to me: Acknowledgments as a genre of philosophy. In this encounter, I had not yet realized that, for Cavell, acknowledgment was a mode of disciplined response to an entire strain of Western philosophical thought.

Hare, knowing my youthful dedication to Emerson and what to his judgment (and so many others) was the peculiarity of Emerson as a legitimate subject in and for professional philosophy, said something to me that I could not assess with any depth or perspective at this early stage: as he warily handed over to me his copy of Cavell’s *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, he added the proviso that I remember sounding this way: “since you love Emerson and philosophy, this is the writer for you. Love his work all you want, but do not emulate it.” At the time, I had no bearing on what the warning might mean (especially to me), but it left me curious, if cautious. Even at this instant, I was more interested in what might be causing the scandal: what was it in Cavell’s writing—this book or some other by him—that could lead a professional philosopher to recommend the work while also, somehow, warning against it? The book—and its author—was a gift given then somehow retracted. (Another professional philosopher, a bit later on, and in the same vein of exhortation about his style or method, remarked elliptically, but in a disparaging manner: “Cavell can get away with it. No one else.” I wondered what was being or could be “gotten away with,” and why one might or should want to get away with it.) In Hare’s admonition, I see a classic scene of instruction, of *paideia*, of what we share with the young, what we make available to them and when—and why (as he was saying to me that I was, at last, ready to read something by Cavell). Hare’s intentions, then, as now, feel genuine and uncynical, and absent any personal grudge or malice toward the author. Hare was, after all, a pragmatist and a pluralist, and so he seemed to be simply reporting on “conditions handsome and unhandsome” as he found them in his profession, the one I was trying to train in. As the years passed, I have interpreted his remark as a sign of a mentor’s protectiveness. He seemed to know what the profession was capable of and he wanted to save me some grief.
My first impressions of reading *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* validated Hare’s sense that I was suited to its content, even if it was, in all the ways one would expect, beyond me. I had been, after all, reading Wittgenstein and Heidegger and William James alongside Aristotle and Plato and Nietzsche—and Emerson, of course—so I could see in those disparate writers differences in style and topic, but I could not, as it were, judge their legitimacy or threat to any established professional community or cult—much less to those who would write about them professionally. In fact, if anything *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* seemed perfectly reasonable in its intellectual gregariousness and eclecticism, for there I found Emerson as the philosophical wellspring (I thought fittingly, at last) with robust tentacles outstretched to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Plato and Nietzsche, and even Dewey (though not always in a good way).

“No one thinks thanks,” wrote Gertrude Stein toward the end of *A Novel of Thank You*, yet we have found a few who do: Emerson, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Cavell. In the acknowledgments for *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, one can almost immediately discern a care and deliberateness rare for the form. And more than being thankful, he seemed thoughtful—the two modes or moods were joined. As for the genre as we *typically* encounter it, we could say that people are thanked, often it must be said, somewhat thanklessly, that is with a certain forced quality: in such cases, the demand to speak blanches the potency of what gets said. As the “thanks” pile up so quickly, there is much leaning on the thesaurus and conjugation: I wish to thank, I must thank, thanks are owed to, thanks to all who, many thanks for, with tremendous thanks, I express my gratitude to, I feel grateful for, etc. Bromides and platitudes abound as does the superlative case. By contrast, Cavell wrote with measured appreciation, which meant that one could feel the nuances of his gratitude. The gradations were subtle and for that significant. He did not overstate and so his statements felt honest.

If I found in Cavell’s work a new way of thinking, what I found in Cavell’s Acknowledgments, with their distinctive register of sincerity—and as I began to seek out his books eagerly, reading the Acknowledgments first, *before* the Introduction—was a new way thanking. We could ask: What is called thanking? I realize that the pun in

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English may be tiresome to some, at some point, especially if there is a fatigue with Heidegger who made so much of thinking and thanking (or thancan [to think] and thancian [to thank])⁶, but for me, there abides such a remainder of fervor and fecundity in the relationship—a truly justified proximity, an undeniable intimacy for these two terms—that I risk sustaining it. I couldn’t then, and I still can’t, disentangle the one from the other: to think is to thank, and to thank is to think. What a discovery!

The truth of the equivalency can be expressed or illustrated in any number of cases. Take one, as I understand it, shared by Steven Affeldt: that when Cavell was asked “How do you have time to write?” He replied: “I’m writing right now.”⁷ This sentiment, to my mind, means that writing is predicated on a certain amount of socializing—being good company to one’s friends and one’s spouse, being a descent parent, being a teacher (whatever shape the classroom might take), reading and commenting on the work of others, etc.—and that only after such experiences, or with some amount of them, can one be solitary and take up the task of writing, that is, writing something worthy of one’s commitments beyond the page. When we write (alone, as we must), we hear the voices of our teachers and students, our friends and families, the texts we have read and marked-up lovingly in the margins, and we are not alone (as we cannot be). Writing is a social event, after all, no matter the occasional tremor felt in the face of the endlessly receding white page of the digital word-processing file; still, what may be harder is not the void but contending with what one has, in fact, written. Cavell’s Acknowledgments are distinctly his (again, the sincerity and thus singularity of his voice is unmistakable) but it is the community that surrounds him, that engages him, that he draws insight and support from—even as he himself is so often, as in the pages of this commemorative volume, noted as a rare source of insight and support—that finds its acknowledgment in his notes of orientation and appreciation.

We may bracket for a moment an ancillary (and still interesting) but also distracting aspect of the genre: the way in which Acknowledgments often serve as a kind of curriculum vitae of academic affiliation and patronage along with the registration

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of awards, grants, and the anointing of intellectual and institutional approval by individuals and their various agents and agencies. In today’s lexicon, this may strike us as a humblebrag. And such a thought makes one wonder about the location of the Acknowledgments: it appears as often in the front matter as the back matter, leaving us to ask what the convention of such placement is meant to signal: that one must pass through it in order to qualify for reading the book, or that having read the book, one is now prepared to understand something of its conditions for creation. With these endpoints in play, dialectical styles seem suddenly pertinent, as if we are speaking of “having” the first word or “getting” the last one. Is this predicament a variation on Emerson’s notion that “great geniuses have the shortest biographies”? And so likewise, in the author biographies or list of contributors to books, the academic stars have the one-liners while those without a recognition that precedes them, spend time articulating their efforts and effects; the author biography, it turns out, is a specimen of self-acknowledgment.

Beyond my overt, perhaps all too obvious remarks on the genre of Acknowledgments (especially for readers who notice patterns, and to be sure, who also have participated in making them), I wish to point up and point out how it is that Cavell’s Acknowledgments, despite their extent, managed to do all this thanking with quite a light touch, where, in a paradoxical way, the tone—that is, one that suppresses or displaces a certain drama of gratitude—made the thanks seem so much more genuine, temperate, and enduring than they might otherwise be. It really felt, even from that first or second reading, that Cavell meant what he said.

If many writers of fiction and nonfiction alike are familiar with the task (perhaps variously a privilege and a burden) of composing remarks that acknowledge others—and their contributions to a given work—the very nature of how language might be deployed for such labor becomes of immediate and pronounced interest. For one thing, if “thanks” and “thank you” are generic, how do they become, in this brief space of the Acknowledgments, something more, which is to say, less—circumscribed as borrowed words must be for the special purpose of addressing specific people and their specific modes of aid, comfort, and correction? If the genre is so generic,

8. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Plato; or, the Philosopher,” in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 635.
how much one must court parody, even satire, in writing Acknowledgments? Almost at once, the apparently straightforward task of thanking becomes troubled by thinking, as if over-thanking itself might be a form of over-thinking. Such problems, invented or encountered, call for counsel. Where better to look, then, than to one of the maestros of Acknowledgments, one for whom the mode appears to be a natural milieu—not so much as if he invented it than as if it were invented for him. As our greatest theorist of acknowledgment, Cavell can seem called to fulfill the potential of the form. One need not be personally thanked in his Acknowledgments to notice that they are a breed apart from the familiar run of such lines—an education in thanks. Yet, if the forum is pro forma, how can or should we account for this Cavellian difference? And moreover, what it may teach us about the art and effort of acknowledging others? As Cavell was, and likely will remain, our Acknowledger-in-Chief, we can study from his model how one might achieve truly acknowledging Acknowledgments.

The genre of acknowledgments, such as we find it practiced among the standard paratexts of a given book or creative work, announces itself inadvertently as something of a Cavellian pun—doubtless, a striking double entendre on what we are compelled to name a “master tone” in his ouevre.⁹ And indeed, I do mean to invoke and discuss (and acknowledge!) how this forum for thanks—viz., (the) Acknowledgments—is related to Cavell’s understanding of acknowledgment as such, as he theorized it. Yet, once pointed out, the connection may be almost too painfully obvious and facile to repeat. Though I do not wish to belabor the richness of the pun, I am convinced that there remains much else in Cavell’s creation of the Acknowledgment sections of his books that feels worth dwelling on, among many other things, that there appears to be a continuous call upon us—his readers, his audience—to find a way of expressing thanks as a mode of thought. The question we face in composing the Acknowledgments is never far away in Cavell’s exhibition: how was the creation of this work possible? The gesture of answering it, of course, often subsumes a need to state explicitly how we achieved or failed to achieve what we set out to do (perhaps especially when such labor is, in matters of literary and philosophical invention, so rarely guided by a discrete teleology, much less a convincing way of offering proof that objecti-
ves have been reached, satisfyingly so or otherwise). My efforts here are, very evident to me, subject to these same laws.

In Cavell’s Acknowledgments, we may see the ways in which we write for ourselves, that we are, in fact, our own or best or only audience (if only when we get beyond doubts concerning our capacity for expressiveness). Can we hazard to consider that thanking is a ruse—for it insinuates others in a project that is, in fact, foreign to them; that the insistence on the tracing of influences, the accounting for debts, etc., is a distraction from or a distortion of what lead one to this point? For as William Goldman is attributed as having said: “The easiest thing to do on earth is not write.” Writing Acknowledgments, then, may pass as a form of therapy—a conversation in which an author tells a story about who and what feels pertinent. There is something of the séance in the art of such composition. Though these words are public, shared (as noted above), there is some inkling that I can yet claim them for myself, make them mine; again, how could a note of thanks do its work if the words that comprise it are not personal? As Cavell put it, across a span of three decades:

Only in stages have I come to see that each of my ventures in and from philosophy bears on ways of understanding the extent to which my relation to myself is figured in my relation to my words.10

When, in what follows, I feel pressed by the question of my right to speak for philosophy, I sometimes suggest that I am merely speaking for myself, and sometimes I suggest that philosophy is not mine at all—its results are true for every man or else they are worthless.11

In such remarks, we can hear Emerson—“what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,” which he describes as genius—and Cavell’s concern about the interaction between the public and the private, for example, as when we feel, as Emerson did, that “every word they say chagrins us.”12 In Cities of Words, when speaking of

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Emerson’s experience of the “inattentiveness and meanness” that defines the use of the very same words he has at his disposal, we are told that his “language is hence in continuous struggle with itself, as if he is having to translate, in his American idiom, English into English.” Let us submit that one of the special attributes of highly conscribed genres, such as acknowledgments—like love letters and condolences—agitates that “struggle with itself” that language is perpetually undergoing through us. Like all constraints, the rigidity of this particular art of letters exacerbates our desire to say something that is one’s own (to thank another with satisfaction for us both), while keeping a vigil for the cliché, saccharine, vapid, and vain.

We are, by now, familiar with the genre as it is routinely practiced. The thanks tend to be ranked and arranged in some habitual fashion, learned by imitation and osmosis—“when I began this project” inaugurates the mood of reflection, of stock-taking. And then the paragraphs organize the kinds of people or entities being thanked: colleagues, grant-giving bodies, colleges and universities that funded the operation or made leave-time available; editors, staff at the press, rights holders lending permission to reprint, etc. Specific people are noted for their reading of earlier, less refined drafts of the work. Professional debts are registered, and slowly, more personal ones emerge, until the crescendo when the writer’s intimates find their moment in print. Here, variously those who were supportive and (often) neglected during composition—family, friends, spouses and partners, perhaps children and pets—are mentioned for their aid and love and sacrifices, for every book represents some untold number of hours that the writer spent away from all these loved ones. Though solitary writing demands social hours, sometimes the society must only live within—either because one’s audience has perished or because it has become estranged, both often beyond the control and thus the fault of the author. (In the last line of his Acknowledgments for Stanley Cavell and the Claim of Literature, David Rudrum’s heartbreaking dedication to his son stands out in this regard: “Cedric, I only wish I could have spent the time it took to write this book with you instead.”)

13. Cavell, Cities of Words, 8.
14. Cavell’s own acknowledgment of his son, Benjamin, as well as his wife, Cathleen Cohen Cavell, at the end of the Foreword to The Claim of Reason (where he had already invoked his daughter, Rachel), presents the flip side of Rudrum’s unenviable position, for they “took time I thought I did not have and converted it into energy I thought I had foregone,” xxvi.
Somewhere in the mix, there is often a statement of the shortcomings of the work: one can think, surely, of the famous lament Wittgenstein makes at the outset of *Philosophical Investigations*, in his Preface: “After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized that I should never succeed. [...]” but we see it in Cavell too: “That I am alone liable for the opacities and the crudities which defeat what I wanted to say, is a miserably simply fact. What is problematic is the expectation borne by those who have tried to correct them, and to comfort the pain of correcting them.” These admissions of failure, or worry of its reality, may also be seen as prophylactics against failure, for if one signals a work’s shortcomings before the critics arrive (Wittgenstein’s admission appears in the second paragraph of his now-landmark text), there may be a measure of defense in place prior to anticipated attacks. Authors hope, of course, that such labors amount to something (especially if it means one’s child was neglected in the process, or one’s hard-won produce amounted to much less than one dreamed of, and so one’s sacrifices—and the sacrifices of others—were for naught, or nearly so), but if errors, lacunae, or missteps remain, they are in the familiar phrasing, “the author’s own.” Such moments of melancholy and sober responsibility can seem very much like an apology—and not in the classical sense of a defense, but as a genuine admission or confession of lapse, of coming up short, of making a valiant if flawed effort. In these respects, and others, no matter the enthusiasm of the Acknowledgments, it is a tragic genre.

Part of the tragedy, perhaps largely unacknowledged in most Acknowledgments, is the genuine sense of disaffection one feels with the work one is presenting as one’s own; such a mood or gesture would certainly strike out against the motives of the publisher, who should not want shortcomings heralded in the opening lines of the book, nor at the end of it. What one seems to be acknowledging, as one goes about thanking, is that one has fallen short of one’s aspiration for the work, and yet that people who helped make some minimal progress should (still) be thanked for that modest advance. Partly, we can recognize in this spirit of defeat how we are troubled by our use of words, the very matter of the work at hand. As Cavell notes in *Cities of Words*, “[h]ere I recall Emerson’s repeated idea that serious writers write beyond

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themselves, or as he puts the matter, that character (meaning our constitution and our writing) teaches above our will.”

If one spends the better part of a book “writing beyond” oneself, the least one can do is acknowledge it, for worse and, apparently on this line of thinking, for better. For, as Cavell concludes: “to understand serious writing,” which we may say is (always) our mandate in reading Cavell’s work, “will precisely require us to question what a text asserts in order to arrive at the conviction that we are covering the ground gained in what its words actually contrive to say.”

Our words fail us but then “there are no other words to say than the words everyone is saying.” One wants to affirm: I did the best I could with the words I had at my disposal. But then that is what everyone can claim, so what is my excuse?

The underlying tragic timbre is also recognized in the thanking of dead people—namely, that acknowledgment is never too late, though it may be belated. Influential teachers, friends, colleagues, and lost intimates (parents, spouses, children, students)—and non-intimates (one’s heroes)—can all be summoned whether or not they are alive, and so the genre also accommodates quite handily the fugitive expressions familiar to the memorial. Is it too much to say, to claim, that we are what we remember? And if memory is, in part, a choice, something we can cultivate, then what we choose to remember—to commemorate—also speaks to our individual and collective values, priorities, and aspirations. As we are gathered to “remember together”—in this commemorative issue—we see how naturally suited Acknowledgments are to affording access to the expanse of one’s memory: if I can remember it, it can be invoked, and if invoked, then thanked. Whether a person is “around” to read it matters not. (Dedications can go further still, by naming the famous and entirely well-known person that knows, as it were, nothing of one’s work—but whose fame marks out some measure of significance; or, of naming the nonfamous person that very few know—thus assuring that the significance remains insular, largely unavailable. Epigraphs are affiliates to such appropriation-as-acknowledgment—Emerson sits at the lead of Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason* and a century earlier, in the year of Emerson’s death, in the front matter of Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882].) And yet, since it is not clear why such a public memorial should be

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17. Ibid., 9.
18. Ibid., 8.
made at all (why are Acknowledgments written?), one returns to the genre—especially in its most canny, personal moments—as sharing a mood with the epistolary and the diaristic, as a variant of the autobiographical.

For the many people who did write for the occasion of this commemorative issue of *Conversations*—and to whom we all must be grateful—I am also intrigued by the way some people, so near to Cavell intellectually (and in some cases personally), that is, so indebted to him, his work, declined or withdrew from contributing, citing not a lack of time but a sense of not being ready to speak or write of their indebtedness. This notion of “processing” grief, perhaps especially as a person is caught up with the demands of one’s ongoing intellectual and everyday life, is trying. For example, when a parent dies, say, a child speaks most often from *emotional* loss, whereas when a person experiences the death of an *intellectual* mentor (whom one may or may not love like a parent, but often like a mentor, or elder guide or guru), taking up the pen in this double register can be quite difficult. I heard about how some who tried to write were unhappy with what they wrote—the work seeming forced, insincere even. Another description I heard appealed to the image of being “too close” to the memory of his death. Proximity and intensity both would seem to confound our efforts to thank, not liberate and lubricate them. Though we may feel full of thanks, in the face of translating that emotion through intellectual labors, we may grow or go silent—find ourselves speechless. First to lose, then to be at a loss; a tragedy duplicated. Such an affliction must be widespread, for we know the feeling of not being able to thank sufficiently the people we love the most, or respect the most, or by whom we count ourselves influenced the most. What a difficult discovery, the experience that a gift is, or creates, a kind of debt, and acknowledging that gift-as-debt can be the cause of a range of responses: anxiety, resentment, guilt, fear, frustration, desperation, silence, sadness, loquaciousness, procrastination, belaboring, getting it wrong, and forgetfulness.

Even as we thank, we can be haunted by the persistent, underlying sense that we may simply *forget* who to thank, as if (the most) important influences are integrated so well that they can no longer be identified or attributable as “outside” forces. “He ground them all into paint,” wrote Emerson, “As a good chimney burns its smoke, so a philosopher converts the value of all his fortunes into his intellectual perfor-
mannances,” hence, at last, there is “no external biography” to be found.\(^{19}\) With quotation marks in effect, a Freudian might say that such “forgetfulness” is a measure of the importance itself—and as a result that the most central and essential positive influences will, must be, left aside, go under- or even unacknowledged. But why? Narcissism, sure. Or mainly a measure of anxiety, where the fear of forgetting is enough to motivate its realization. And we have already spoken about the troubles with remembering—that one thanks insufficiently or inelegantly or (again tracking self-regard) with too much deference to one’s good fortune in having such people to thank in the first place.

If there is something of an admitted challenge in writing about Cavell’s works—his words—perhaps there is now, also, something of the struggle to write about him as a person. Some have managed to compose a statement, some have asked for more time but come up short; both seem worthy responses to a profound occasion for thinking. In both scenarios, though, we are given a chance to think anew about what it means to have words for our experiences and what it means to lose them. I cannot help but feel both are necessary: to make a bid for articulation (as a mode of self-understanding and/or in an effort to help a community in its understanding of itself) and also to be mindful of the need to remain quiet—perhaps to withhold or even deny words; or, to admit that on some occasions words do not present themselves; one remains speechless, beyond words, because one must. Sadly, all of these predicaments can be the cause of frustration and shame: those who speak, who write, may feel embarrassed by the offering (because it must, necessarily, fall short of the worthy qualities of its object of address), and those who remain silent (because for all their capacity to write—and in these cases, we are invoking significant writers on their own terms—they have not been able to get their emotional and intellectual bearing on a difficult matter). At this cleave point, the harder, harsher interaction between Acknowledgments and acknowledgment—both in a Cavellian mood—make themselves known. The stakes of moral perfectionism, and its aspiration for self-knowledge and human community, are undeniably evident, and imposingly so.

At the very end of Cavell’s Acknowledgments for The World Viewed, we receive a report on the audiences any book can expect to have: “A book is written for two

\(^{19}\) Emerson, “Plato; or, the Philosopher,” in Essays and Lectures, 635.
audiences: the one it may create, whose conversation it invites; and the one that has created it, whose conversation it invokes. Members of the latter may have been dead before the writer was born; if alive, they may be strangers, enemies, or friends he no longer has the right to name. Cavell takes this concluding distinction as a moment to thank Rogers Albritton, “asking him to stand for the rest,” which is to say, asking him to stand as a representative for those who are Cavell’s audience, and for whom he can record his genuine thanks—for dead people cannot care that they are thanked, and living people who are estranged or imbittered or otherwise at odds will not be moved.

But then how quickly Acknowledgments become, despite all, memorial in nature, for who among us has a living memory of Cavell’s beloved friend, Rogers Albritton? A few, perhaps, but not enough for us to understand why and how he should be representative for an audience worthy of such thanks. In short, why he deserves Cavell’s praise remains a perpetual mystery, perhaps forever deferred, or only momentary informed (as, for example, in Little Did I Know and other “excerpts from memory”). So, if one’s audience is truly so small, must be, then what are Acknowledgments for? Do we write them for ourselves, for those being thanked, for the anonymous reader who likely will never know the author nor those whom she thanks? In this run of questions, we are pressed to the disconcerting conclusion that the Acknowledgments are the most temporary and fleeting moment in any book—that they cannot stand up over time because time dissolves both the audience(s) and the author. Far from being the first thing to read (as if for “lustres” and indications of the origins and processing of insight), they should be neglected, even ignored altogether. How quickly we get turned around.

Cavell often takes his time when composing Acknowledgments, which leads us to wonder if the length he devotes should be understood as a form of compensation for the book’s content. In the Foreword to Must We Mean What We Say?, given the name “An Audience for Philosophy,” Cavell’s first line reads, as if responding to a disgruntled, incredulous referee for the press: “If the essays which follow do not compo-

se a book, collecting resonance from one another, nothing I can say in introducing them will alter that fact.” An echo of Wittgenstein’s lament from his Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, invoked above, can be heard, but also a spirit of the conditional that extends into the very pages of Cavell’s work “after” the acknowledgments, for instance, most famously in the opening, paragraph-long question of *The Claim of Reason*, also in reference to Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*: “If not at the beginning [...] then where and how are we to approach this text?” A familiar conditional frame of mind remains decades later, in the bicentennial year of Emerson’s birth, when Cavell writes in his Introduction to *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes*: “It is not for me to say whether the present book, collecting all the writing I have published that is mainly and explicitly devoted to Emerson, satisfies any reasonable image others may have of a book about Emerson.” I, for one, am much caught up in the notion of a “reasonable image others may have of a book about Emerson,” as if such a thing could be articulated, or for that matter recognized, much less achieved. And yet, though Cavell says it is not for him to say what such an “image,” reasonable or not, might be, he does have something to say, in his own words: “What I wish to say is that if I were to write a book about Emerson,” this is “that book, the only one, or kind, it is given to me to write about Emerson’s work.” The achievement of the book, on this occasion, is contained, somehow, in the very limitedness—or we may say, uniqueness—of Cavell’s approach to Emerson. The lines that follow begin “I cannot justify [...],” “I would feel justified [...],” and “The virtue I claim for my procedure [...],” such that the reality of his creation is already being thought of in terms of its audience. And this is something Cavell (innately?) feels called to express.

Let me pick up on the notion that Cavell possessed some kind of special power to adduce Acknowledgments, whether innately or not. For even if the style of his Acknowledgments is self-consciously cultivated (as it is in the lines found in the balance of the book demanding these thanks), and one suspects that in this case an instinct and a practice are not far apart, there is a question that writing Acknowledgments—even if they appear under the guise of a Preface, Foreword, Introduction, or

22. Cavell, first page of Foreword, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, xvii.
25. Ibid.
Afterword—always implies an admission of disappointment in one’s offering. Indeed, Cavell’s Introduction to *Cities of Words* veritably frames the long history of philosophy as a perpetual meditation on the bifurcation that obtains between human desire and disappointment. Acknowledgments, then, are part of a project of compensation for coming up short—as if merely saying what one feels or thinks about the accomplishments of a given work (limited though they may be) might be enough to welcome a reader into the heart of the problem—in effect, to create an audience to share (in one’s own) disappointment. Still, a portion of the work of such an act of compensation, could also be to show others what it is like to acknowledge (e.g., lapses, debts, etc.) and perhaps as importantly, to be acknowledged—that is to say, praised.

The issue of modeling this behavior (for one’s audience) raises two further points. First, that writing lengthy acknowledgments ends up belaboring one’s point. A reader can ask: is all this qualification and elaboration necessary? Is Cavell compelled to write with such magnitude not only to thank but also to protect or preserve the precincts of what he has written; has philosophy, “the profession,” somehow demanded this kind of explanation from him? As Cavell has written, “[p]hilosophy inspires much unhappy love,” and that may be all we need to know: contributing to professional, academic philosophy can, at times, feel like one writes chum for the circling sharks (a striking metaphor offered to me by an elder philosopher that made an impression on me, for obvious reasons; another image, from a different mentor, being that philosophers are like lepers—put to me with the question, “so why would you want to join the colony?”). Chum meet chump.

Moreover, in belaboring thanks, it remains an open question whether a person is capable of holding the note of thanks with sincerity; things begin cheerfully enough, but by the end, a reader (and the writer before her?) becomes fatigued with the duration and multiplicity of benedictions. The second point, then, is that as one belabors—especially in matters of thanks—one perhaps also, inadvertently, dilutes. In this respect, a simple dedication in the front matter may be the highest form of praise and thanks, while a protracted Acknowledgments may find the completist (eager to inscribe indebtedness to all involved) thanking his spouse and the intern who made

27. Cavell, Foreword, in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, xxii.
photocopies. Not that they are placed in equal measure, much less in the same line, but that they share a space at all can seem striking. Can we not assume that copies were made by someone? And yet, and yet, the “organizing and participating in the preparation of pages of mine for publication” is at the heart of making a book, so why not? Belaboring and dilution, then, can be taken as further risks of writing Acknowledgments, and perhaps more generally. Who is to say when enough is said? Likely not the author, though readers are regularly ready with a reply.

Funny enough (and at this point some humor may be called for), it may be noted that often a writer will spend appreciable time on the opening and concluding paragraphs of a book only to dash off the Acknowledgments, which then, seemingly without noticing, but as a matter of form, become the opening or closing paragraphs of the book. That is, the fashions of formatting have it that we commence or conclude our operations with these notes of thanks—as most feature films still retain the habit of opening and closing “credits” (the form’s chosen synonym for acknowledgments), with room made for dedications at either end. Why do I find this humorous? Because in both cases, these very prominent paratexts seldom feel like they are part of the film, either by filmmakers or by those who write about the finished works of art. Critics, for example, seldom remark at length, if at all, on what the titles or scroll say, or mean; these moments of art and information, as it were, speak for themselves. Likewise, for books: how many reviews, or even philosophical meditations, have included extended reflections on the content of Acknowledgments? To be sure, how many Acknowledgments demand our attention as texts worthy of such study? At least in the case of Cavell’s Acknowledgments, the making of them, and the giving of them, is predicated precisely on the conviction that what is written cannot be taken for granted—that is, only Cavell is in a position to say it. And since he means what he says, perhaps especially that he must in this coveted domain of sincere expression, their importance should be as central as anything else “in the book.”

Taking the Acknowledgments seriously, though, may not be enough. “The familiar recognition that famous philosophers have failed to understand their predecessors, or say to do them justice [...]” Cavell writes, may be a goad to us at this time

when interpreting Cavell seems somehow more precious and fragile than ever.\textsuperscript{29} If we readers of his work and writers about it, had the pleasure and privilege of his commentary on our remarks (as some have had), we can be sure no such comments or correctives will be forthcoming now. We are on our own. I suppose we always were. What would it mean to do Cavell justice? As he continues: such a project “should perhaps be seen less as a matter of a need to transcend past achievements than as an effort to discover philosophy for oneself, as if philosophy exists only in its discovery.”\textsuperscript{30} Thus, we are not aiming “to do better” than him (whatever that would mean) so much as to do better by ourselves by appreciating “surprise at the fact that there should be such an enterprise that measures the value of our lives.”\textsuperscript{31} Such are the moments when consciousness—merely being aware that one is a thing that has awareness—is coupled with conscience and judgment. We marvel at the world in the same moment that we deem it worthy of our care; such a pairing has the character of doing justice.

One last, duly salient, example. At the end of the Acknowledgments placed at the beginning of his first book, \textit{Must We Mean What We Say?}, Cavell states: “First books tend to over-ambitiousness, and nowhere more in the bulk of debts they imagine themselves able to answer for.”\textsuperscript{32} What I have said thus far about what we imagine or intend the authorship of Acknowledgments to mean has been in conversation with such a claim, admittedly pushing well beyond the bounds of first books. In the present context, though, I wish to conclude by way of asking what we imagine or intend the authorship of Acknowledgments to mean has been in conversation with such a claim, admittedly pushing well beyond the bounds of first books. In the present context, though, I wish to conclude by way of asking what we, in these pages and elsewhere, imagine to be our ambition (now and seemingly without end) in acknowledging Stanley Cavell? As we estimate the bulk of our debts to Cavell, do we misjudge what we are answerable for? James Conant once spoke in striking terms of the “blessing and the curse of the father,” that is, while Cavell was not just the subject of remarks on Conant’s \textit{Doktorvater}, but also a living audience for his remarks.\textsuperscript{33} The blessings may be obvious to oneself, depending on who one is, but the curse is harder

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\textsuperscript{29} Cavell, \textit{Cities of Words}, 7.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Cavell, Acknowledgments, \textit{Must We Mean What We Say?}, xiii.

\textsuperscript{33} James Conant delivered remarks at a gathering commemorating the publication of Cavell’s \textit{Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory} at Harvard University in October 2010. The pairing of “the blessing and the curse” also appears in Conant’s “The Concept of America,” \textit{Society}, November/December 2003, 25-26.
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to trace and testify to. What, in fact, are we answerable to or for in answering to the
call of Cavell’s now completed corpus? Perhaps these are the sorts of questions we
must ask and then spend a lifetime responding to—sometimes with many words (in
the spectrum from well-wrought to unwieldy and worse), few words, or none. One
reply may be that in so far as one feels answerable, compelled (compulsively?) to
thank and to acknowledge, which in this case means to think continually about, Ca-
vell, one may have stumbled upon a private reply. The debts can feel real and yet re-
sist articulation; the articulation may come and yet fall short. There is no end to fai-
ling, or risk of failure, in the business of acknowledging others. But then this was a
lesson Cavell showed us in his work, and such illumination is a gift, like so many
others he bestowed, that we can be grateful for without qualification or exception. We
can state simply, without belaboring our point any further, without diluting our sense
of the words we were called here to articulate. Thank you.
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P.S. a note to readers and prospective contributors: if you wish to have your remarks on Cavell’s legacy considered for a future supplement in Conversations, along the lines of the pieces collected in the present volume, please contact me directly (at the email address above) and I will be happy to receive your proposal.