Philosophy Leaves the Movie Theater: Or, Stanley Cavell at the Doors of a Discipline

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Abstract: This article explores the idea and practice of philosophical criticism in Stanley Cavell's work on cinema. Building on recent scholarship on Cavellian criticism, it stresses its origins in an anxiety whose sources are medium-specific, historically specific, as well as internal to the general project of philosophical criticism. It argues that these anxieties may serve to explain Film Studies' resistance to criticism in the sense discussed here, and may continue to pose a challenge to its practice even as the work of Cavell itself receives belated recognition from the discipline. The article also begins to draw similarities between the critical practices of André Bazin and Cavell, while examining the differences in the institutional contexts of their work.

Keywords: Stanley Cavell, André Bazin, film criticism, film theory, cinephilia, Classical Hollywood

Over the past decade, Stanley Cavell's presence in debates in Anglophone Film Studies may have arrived at a point where it has ceased to be a scandal, at least within the sub-discipline of "film and philosophy." Special issues, edited volumes, standalone essays, and now entire monographs dealing with Cavell's work on the subject are numerous enough to warrant a separate bibliography. Within this, the work of Andrew Klevan, Daniel Morgan, D. N. Rodowick and Catherine Wheatley, in particular, has come to bear upon the question of philosophical criticism as elaborated and exemplified by Cavell's body of work, and the need to find space for this mode of criticism in the disciplinary work of Film Studies. Apart from through an engagement with Cavell, other scholars such as Dudley Andrew (*Concepts* 172-190) and Daniel Yacavone (229-268) have also argued that films call for criticism as the privileged mode of engagement with them.[1] The impetus for these arguments is the sense that Anglophone Film Studies has been resistant to its practice.

In this essay, while accepting and building on much that the above scholarship makes available for a deferred disciplinary encounter with Cavell, I want to outline the difficulties that are likely to remain in the way of the discipline's embrace of philosophical criticism in practice; or at least to describe the difficulties internal to his work that Cavell had to overcome in his critical project only to remain marginal to the discipline for around four decades. In his autobiography, he recalls a 2007 meeting with Francesco Casetti at a conference where the latter apprised him of the fact that his work is now well-accepted in Italy, even if it took decades for the discipline to catch up with it. Cavell, though "buoyed" by the fact, writes, "But I do not understand what the difficulty has been, given the implication that some difficulty has been overcome" (*Little* 305). I propose to take this question seriously by locating those difficulties within Cavell's own writings and in the project of criticism it models, as opposed to locating them in the intellectual trends that eclipsed it, as many commentators tend to do (Fay and Morgan; Cavell, "Responses" 174-176; Rodowick 204; Stewart).

I

Dudley Andrew contrasts the space of Bazin's work with the study of cinema within the university with reference to Cavell.

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> [I]n 1971 I hurried to locate *What is Cinema? Volume II* at the bookstore; there it sat alongside its pink predecessor. But just beside it was Stanley Cavell's just published *The World Viewed*, which I remember thumbing through on the spot. Immediately apparent was a set of shared presuppositions and tastes, as well as a talent for elaborate prose; but the tone of the books couldn't have been more different. After all, Cavell, as a philosopher coming to grips with the cinema from his Harvard office, hardly knew his readers, who effectively eavesdropped on his personal ruminations. Bazin's audience, by contrast, pressed constantly around him, reading him every day…, every week…, or every month. He had to be attentive to their interests and to the topics of the day. ("Foreword" xiii)

It is not clear if Andrew is contrasting writing about cinema as part of the kind of public culture Bazin had with writing about cinema from Philosophy departments or with writing about it from the university in general. If Bazin's treatment of neo-realism, as Andrew suggests, is unsurpassable in its insights into that body of work because he responded to it in a live context, are we in the discipline of Film Studies similarly placed to produce such writing about films in our own time by virtue of knowing our readers as colleagues in the discipline? If we are, then why the persistent sense of a crisis in criticism? I believe we should take Andrew's comparison seriously because when some of us claim to miss André Bazin's voice in making sense of the developments in cinema in our own time, we do need to reflect on what kind of a discipline would be able to make room for a voice like his (MacCabe 94-96).

Cavell is intensely conscious about writing in ignorance of an audience; writing brought about by a certain anxiety whose source however was not the university. Cavell actually acquired a consciousness of film's audience and film criticism's readership, at the same time as he acquired an uncertainty of identifying these two, on the way from the movie theater to the university. *The World Viewed*, as almost every recent commentator on it has remarked, begins with Cavell's admission that his natural relation to movies is broken; what caused this break, what that relationship was, and how it might be repaired or commemorated are the burdens of the book (xix). A consequence of this break was that he felt like watching fewer and fewer films. A prospect of something comparable to Lionel Trilling writing about Ingmar Bergman without having watched any of his films looms here (Trilling).

Cavell's anxiety in going to the movies in the 1960s is, for him, at odds with the fond memories of the weekly visits to the movie theater with friends and family that haunt him. He locates the source of this anxiety in the fact that people now went to movies for reasons different from the ones they had earlier (*World Viewed* 11). Earlier moviegoing was "casual," and entrance and exit did not need to be punctual (*World Viewed* 11). But at the same time moviegoing was habitual and indiscriminate. In *Contesting Tears*, he speaks of going to the movies every week, "both Friday nights and Sunday afternoons (rain or shine), where *Stella Dallas* or *Mildred Pierce* or *Mrs. Miniver* were as likely to be playing as *Stagecoach* or *Citizen Kane* or *His Girl Friday*" (209). The emphasis here is on known companionship, regularity of attendance and the variability of genres on offer on any given day.

Now (in postwar United States), for reasons assumed but not specified, people choose whether to go to the movies or not, as opposed to doing something else, based on what was playing. In the background was the fact of the long decline of movie spectatorship in the United States on the back of the breakdown of the classical studio system, the flight of the middle classes to the suburbs, the emergence of alternate forms of recreation, not the least of which was the television. So, now, when people gather in front of the screen, they come with specific expectations: those that are no longer signaled by the stability of genres, and so potentially much more heterogeneous and liable to be met or frustrated in unexpected ways.

Sitting amongst such an "audience," as opposed to classical cinema's "public," Cavell finds that in choosing to watch a particular movie, the implication is that he, and everyone else in the audience, has declared a private choice publicly. Therefore, while earlier, "we took our fantasies and companions and anonymity inside and left with them intact[, n]ow that there is an audience,

a claim is made upon my privacy; so it matters to me that the responses to the film are not really shared" (*World Viewed* 11). A dissatisfaction with the film is now likely to be an affront to one's judgement (since one has to be made) in choosing to watch it; a disagreement with another spectator about what the experience amounted to is a rebuke of the judgment formed in the act of watching it; in either case, it is a rebuke to one's subjectivity.

In the earlier situation, both agreement or disagreement happens on an unreflexive ground—that of the habit of going to the movies whose quality of being shared with known companions preserves one's privacy even in talking about films with them. And, in these circumstances, film is as likely to be carried out by the spectators in enactment—such as through instinctively adopting a new way of walking or speaking, or children acting out bits from films in play—as in conversations with friends with whom we share concerns besides films (*World Viewed* 9-10). But now that our companions in the movie theater are unknown, we either have to remain alone with our fantasies or risk sharing them with strangers and so expose our subjectivity to unpredictable encounters that risk making us incomprehensible to them, and of meeting with indifference.[2] And, as Cavell's philosophical preoccupations throughout his body of work make clear, to remain unacknowledged by others, and to not be able to acknowledge their subjectivities in return, is to remain in doubt of one's existence.[3]

Cavell does not speak of distaste for the new situation, but of an anxiety, as if he needs to account for the mere fact of watching a film, depriving him of a quality of movie experience that he would go on to cast in philosophical terms. For him, the appearance of photography and film marks a shift in the terms of the problem of skepticism in modern philosophy, understood as a doubt about the existence of the world independent of our assertion of it, and in the face of the diminishing power of shared transcendental structures to provide the conditions for its existence. Our relationship with the world becomes dependent on our subjectivity. This is what Romanticism calls for in art. Photography and film change the terms of this relationship by producing a world mechanically, independent of our subjectivity. (*World Viewed* 21-23)

The consequence of the mechanically produced image is not just an assertion of the world's existence, but of its existence without us. This sounds like a price to be paid, as Wheatley understands it (71). However, as Morgan too underlines, the consequence of this exclusion is not the experience of a price paid, but a sense of "magic" and "relief" (*World Viewed* 101; Morgan 222-224). The relief comes from being able to view the world "unseen", to no longer be responsible for it. However completely a film captivates us, its world and its characters are indifferent to our presence; indeed, it can captivate us all the more completely precisely because it, and they, are entirely indifferent to our presence or absence, let alone our individuality and punctuality (or otherwise).[4]

Before proceeding further, an important clarification of the word "world" in Cavell's work on film. The "world" on screen is not to be understood as a passive recording by film of reality. A world on film is, to put it schematically, whatever the diegesis is (however improbable), but built out of the camera's transformation (what Cavell calls "photogenesis") of objects and bodies that appear to it; transformation of them potentially into anything at all (Cavell, "What Becomes"). The word "camera" stands here for all aspects, including editing and other processes right up to the conditions of projection, that produce the film on the screen (*World Viewed* 182-186). Star bodies are particularly exemplary products of these powers of film since the personae they project exceed any particular character they inhabit. What this means, for example, is that the mystique of solitude that is Greta Garbo's star persona precedes and survives any of the characters that Garbo plays, and is not reducible to the life of Greta Lovisa Gustafsson who is transformed into Garbo by film. Ultimately, film "escapes Aristotelian limits according to which the possible has to be made probable" (*World Viewed* 156).

In its classical phase, film's indifference to its spectators is not a matter of concern for us. Film's mode of assertion of the world's existence is not in response to "a wish for power of creation of

the world (as Pygmalion's was), but a wish not to need power, not to have to bear its burdens" (*World Viewed* 40).[5] What then requires explaining is the need to be free of our responsibility for the world, for that privacy and anonymity in the movie theatre whose loss had plunged Cavell into anxiety. In more straightforward terms, the freedom *from* the world that Cavell argues cinema has offered us is the granting for the wish to escape from our responsibility towards it. This wish is, therefore, also indirectly a wish to not be responsible for explaining publicly why the cinema or its particular instances have the significance they do apart from accounting for the need for the escape route they provide. There is no *call* for an autonomous practice of criticism in this experience or even theory, beyond conversations with known companions. It does not mean that in this context people do not criticize or theorize; it is just that so long as they maintain this "natural relation," they do not feel the compulsion to argue for those views publicly that Cavell says he did. This natural relation may have been broken for a few people in the preceding decades as they too reflected on cinema's place in society, but Cavell is speaking about such a break for an entire generation. Also, that this relation is broken does not mean that people necessarily argue for their idea of cinema and the value of specific films publicly. As we will see later, Cavell suggests that one response to the break is to adopt a deliberate distance from our attachment to films.[6]

To account for the wish for escape from the world, Cavell describes it as "an expression of *modern* privacy or anonymity, of our forms of unknownness and of our inability to know." It is a product of the anxieties of a modernity that promises a democratic share in the fate of the world but fails to deliver upon that promise; or the world simply makes too many demands upon us to arrive at a condition that we would like it be in: for example, to preserve itself as a just society. In catering to our wish to escape responsibility, cinema emerges as a way of dealing with a sense that "democracy itself, the sacred image of secular politics, is unliveable," making it "inherently anarchic" (*World Viewed* 214; my emphasis).[7] It is only when this wish for escape is no longer sufficient to go to the movies does the question of film criticism as an autonomous practice arise. Given this context of *The World Viewed*, the book begins with a nostalgia for a time when neither theory nor criticism as public discourse were required. And this is how Cavell ends up writing from the university, intensely conscious of having to write as well as of where he is not writing from. The solitude of the university is an extension of solitude at the movie theater.

II

Cavell's anxiety about, in a sense, becoming visible to others in the audience is also compounded by, in another sense, becoming visible to the film on the screen too. This comes about through the new kinds of films not only circulating in the arthouses but also from a post-classical Hollywood. Films become more self-conscious and less confident in the ability of their images to assert the self-evidence of what they show. A certain aggressiveness, or alternately withdrawal, of the camera from the world it presents ends up soliciting the spectator's attention explicitly, as if it were a prerequisite for appearance of a world on screen. We are now called to acknowledge the inventiveness of a particular technique or to fill in ellipses that the camera is helpless to capture with any conviction.

In its classical phase, the cinema "promises the exhibition *of the world* in itself. This is its promise of candor: that what it reveals is entirely what is revealed to it, that nothing revealed by the world in its presence is lost" (*World Viewed* 119; my emphasis). There are two keywords here to which Cavell gives very particular meanings: candor and exhibition. Candor is the quality by which the world appears on screen "independently of me or any audience, that… [is] complete without me, in that sense *closed* to me" (*World Viewed* 111). His use of "exhibition" is even more interesting, given the term's centrality in the film trade and in Film Studies to refer to the spaces and processes of screening films. He says films "are simply not exhibited (or performed) but distributed and screened and viewed" (*World Viewed* 122).

The denial of the quality of exhibition in classical cinema is required by the meaning Cavell attaches to the word "exhibition" in any art's modernist condition, whereby each work of compensates for its sense of loss of connection with its traditional forms by including a new, unforeseen justification within itself for its existence, for the particular form in which it exists. It becomes aware of its inescapably "exhibited" character, as if the validity of its particular justification, and so its existence, is in question with every spectator/reader/listener encountered (*World Viewed* 120). If classical cinema could rely on the "automatic" powers of its physical medium and those of its supplementary media of genres, stars, screen types etc. in summoning a public which is not required to intervene, and also powerless to intervene, in its workings, it means that it could not have existed in the condition of exhibition; rather, it simply "allow[ed] the world to exhibit itself." With a loss of this confidence, films in the new era started "taking over the task of exhibition" (*World Viewed* 132).

The "sudden storms of flash insets and freeze frames and slow-motions and telescopic-lens shots and fast cuts and negative printing and blurred focusing" end up explicitly soliciting the spectator's assent, withdrawing from us that cloak of privacy that cinema had granted us (*World Viewed* 122). The unease that this gives rise to is not idiosyncratic with Cavell. We can find another well-known expression of it in an essay by Roland Barthes, starting with its title, "Leaving the movie theater." Barthes's brief essay evokes anxieties very similar to Cavell's: the increasing transformation of visits to the movie theater into "specific cultural quest(s)," "the frustration of so-called private showings" that impinge upon the anonymity, and constrain the sense of irresponsibility, he seeks at the movie theatre (Barthes 345-346). I will return to Barthes's essay below in distinguishing Cavell's critical procedures from cinephilic criticism.

III

Wheatley provides a rich synthesis of the various modalities of Cavell's philosophical criticism as understood broadly. Just to list some of these: criticism is rooted in one's personal experience of the film; it involves conversation as an attempt to make oneself comprehensible and so to gain a recognition for one's own experience; despite speaking out of a personal experience, the critic speaks for everyone; for one's interlocutors, it is as much about them becoming interested in their own experience as in grasping the critic's; criticism is a performance and a "passionate utterance." Each of these aspects receives its due attention from her. My concern is that, even if these modalities become clear because of the recent work of Wheatley and others, even if the discipline manages to remind itself what this criticism is and what its value is, not confronting the deeper anxieties attending film criticism, and the challenge to disciplinarity it poses, will hide from us the difficulty of the practice of criticism in the university. I will also, in going over these anxieties, distinguish philosophical criticism from the rather different response by cinephilic criticism to the anxieties discussed here.

Let us return to the question of Cavell's ignorance of his readers. In *A Pitch of Philosophy*, he broaches the subject of philosophy's audience: "Philosophy is essentially uncertain whom in a given moment it seeks to interest. Even when it cannot want exclusiveness, it cannot tolerate common opinion" (5). There are two movements here, one towards an uncertain audience, and the second an impulse to withdrawal from the "common opinion" it is bound to encounter in its search for an audience. But why look for an audience at all? The answer is because of philosophy's intuition that what it does is do-able by anyone: "Science can be said to have no audience, for no one can fully understand it who cannot engage in it…" (*Pitch* 5). In other words, philosophy, since anyone *can* tap into the import of its topics without being a professional philosopher, and indeed that most people to variable extent come up against the questions it takes as its subject, is necessarily on *common* ground, with no greater claim at the outset to what it wants to speak of than anyone else.

Film, like philosophy, is common ground. As Cavell underlines, there is a "requirement for a *certain* indiscriminateness in the acceptance of movies," so 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" (*World Viewed* 13, 6.) In the case of the other arts, the hierarchies of seriousness are strictly defined, so that the appreciation of the popular does not generally go with a taste for the serious.[8] Films, therefore, belong to everyone. Anyone can be a critic, even a compelling critic, as is abundantly clear in the digital age. But just to remain with professional film critics, they derive their authority through, at first, their utility in helping readers pick and choose what they watch, so they cannot be *seen* to place themselves outside common opinion, whatever the sophistication of their insights. That is what Andrew emphasizes when speaking of Bazin's grounded-ness in the film public of his time. Without some such alibi, the fact that philosophy arrogates to itself the right to speak for everyone is apt to appear arrogant even when "[there] is a humility or poverty in this arrogation, since appealing to the [ordinary]… is obeying it—suffering its intelligibility and alms of commonness…. (Cavell, *Pitch* 8)," and thereby suffering others' experience of it.

Film Studies, as a university discipline, like philosophy, has to contend with the radical fact that it has no a priori authority over its objects. A discipline in the humanities cannot exempt itself from the common ground, which is why, when, in the classroom, we stick to the experience of a film as a way to its significance, our disciplinary authority remains vulnerable to the authority of the students' experiences in a way that the authority of a teacher of the sciences is not.[9] This is where we need to take Cavell's doubt seriously about whether cinema has, even after the 1950s, ever really existed in the modernist condition as absolutely as the other arts have and as we are sometimes inclined to think.

Yes, the separation of serious and casual audience by venues of spectatorship may have made possible films that are required to reflect upon their procedures and to betray their awareness of an audience. But the arthouses are haunted by the continued viability of the classical forms, not just in the fact that they continue to commemorate the achievements of the classical era (so do museums of the plastic arts) but in the fact that conventional films continue to be made and viewed in large numbers. The arthouse *audience* exists exclusively in the condition of modernism in having to be reflexive in its relationship to cinema, but cinema as a whole does not, not even in the arthouse. This sense is what once prompted Miriam Hansen, speaking as a champion of non-classical early cinema, to bemoan the fact that, "Ironically the European art film has become one of the more likely places for contemporary viewers to expect a relatively high degree of classical absorption" (199n4). The "*de facto* exclusiveness" of the other arts has caused all their serious instances to deliver themselves bound hand-and-foot to the judgment of small groups of connoisseurs; cinema, largely, has not. In fact, cinema's new "audience" may not be its old "public" but it is still an audience, whereas contemporary art generally exists without a significant audience (*World Viewed* 4).

The fact that serious films continue to be made for mass publics is a continual source of anxiety for a modernist audience that flits between elaborate critical gestures of resisting the suggestions of hierarchy in the new situation and an assertion of hierarchy accompanied by an almost resentful denunciation of the power cinematic conventions continue to enjoy. This, among other reasons, is why Cavell clarifies that the concept of modernism cannot be applied to cinema in the same way as in the other arts (*World Viewed* 215-219). This makes for a strange situation in which a modernist audience confronts an artform that is not itself straightforwardly modernist. Therefore, a critical community has no a priori claims to arguing for the significance of films. The disciplinary avoidance of criticism in the sense being discussed here may just be a consequence of films' stubborn refusal to heed announcements of the death of cinema.

In explaining why he writes the way he does, Cavell speaks of the inevitability, given the commonness of its ground, of the autobiographical as the source for the authority to speak

philosophy. "Philosophers who shun the autobiographical must find another route to philosophical authority, to, let's say, the a priori, to speaking with necessity and universality (logic, Kant says, is such a route)…" (*Pitch* 8). Autobiography here must not be understood as necessarily the critic's recounting specific experiences, but her signaling an investment, even indirectly, in the film, and so in her argument.

Autobiographical or not, philosophy does attempt to speak with necessity and universality, precisely because, being on common ground, it cannot lay claim to private truths. Looked at another way, if one speaks without an awareness of the requirement for necessity and universality, one is fated to remaining with private truths, deprived of the recognition of those who share the common ground, and so subject to doubts about the truthfulness of those truths.[10] The universality in question here is not an abstract one, but one that assumes an interlocutor willing to examine the occupation of that common ground with the critic. This is the universality of "friends," except that such friends are no longer only determinate persons, but ones to be imagined in the act of criticism, strangers who might be friends (*World Viewed* xxv; *Contesting* 11-12; *Cities* 42). Even so, the claiming of necessity and universality is necessarily and universally fated to failure, but not for all time to the extent that it can contend with, be shaped by and survive for a time the alternate accounts of its topics that emerge in the quest of an argument. The same holds true for philosophical film criticism.

The source of anxiety in speaking of films in this way—striving towards necessity and universality from the grounds of the autobiographical and the assumption of unknown friends—is not the eventual evanescence of its claims; open-endedness and provisionality are acknowledged as necessary accompaniments of even scientific knowledge. But what is subject to the threat of evanescence in philosophical criticism is the value of the subjectivity that has been shared publicly. Cavell elsewhere announces another anxiety that beset his writing early in his career that made him delay its publication. At one point, when Arthur Danto asked him if he has not published much because he does not like writing. Cavell says:

> I could not protest that I had written more than I had published, because I seemed to recognize that that might only prove the truth of Arthur's surmise, not that I hadn't in some sense written, but that what kept me from offering it to strangers was not simply my fear that it wasn't good enough but, compounded with that, *the fear that my pleasure in it would show, which for some reason would constitute a worse exposure*. I guess it is not news that philosophy is as forbidding as it is attractive. ("Crossing Paths" 363-364, my emphasis)

Wheatley cites these lines, too, but to emphasize that Cavell loved to write (217). But they also suggest consequences of that love that she underlines a little later. Pleasure as a mark of subjective investment leaving traces in the arguments is in excess of the logic of the argument. When someone refutes the logic, your subjectivity is compromised beyond the extent to which it is caught up in concerns of the professional standing of the argument. It becomes "rebukable" (Wheatley 237). The idea here is that love may betray.

IV

Love in criticism, disciplinary or not, betrays for a few reasons to do with the nature of its object, apart from the fact of the threat of rebuke by interlocutors. The first reason is that, when we love a film, we love a world it projects and from which we are screened. As seen earlier, this allows us to secure our subjectivity by granting autonomy to that world, by recognizing its otherness. When we then provide an account of it, we need to speak in a way that allows that world to have a say in its reading, even as we seek a voice for our own experience of it (*World Viewed* 13).[11] What we have to say may "[go] beyond anything the film knows about itself" (as what we have to say about others may exceed what they know about themselves), but it still needs to be measured

against the film as it stands (Cavell, *Cities* 116). We grant the text a say in its own reading because its otherness is a precondition for the autonomy of our own judgment and subjectivity; one can be implicated in a film and remain autonomous.

But it remains a fact that, while a film may make itself available for examination by experience and criticism, it is incapable of vouching for our arguments about it. Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that allowing a film to have a say in its reading is also sharing the responsibility for that reading with it. Which is why it is important to identify the corollary to Cavell's claim that in art, "we treat certain objects, in ways normally reserved for treating persons" ("Music" 189). We treat organizations too as legal persons, and they can be represented and be made to respond to specific demands for clarifications. A work of art can only repeat itself (something that has become generally possible with films only recently) and we can hope that with each repetition we might come to understand what it means to say. In criticism, we may lose the promise of irresponsibility towards the world on film, but a film, however reflexive, cannot overcome the limits to its responsibility towards us.[12]

The second reason is that films, at least in their theatrical form, are as much events as texts. How you relate to them is bound up with where, when and with whom they are watched. Films, therefore, are not just analogous to ordinary life because of their availability to large masses of people, but also entwined with ordinary and particular lives (*World Viewed* 10). When we go to watch a film, what we do on the way to it and after it, who we watch it with, the weather that day, all intervene in our experience and, therefore, memories of the film. Under these circumstances, "This is an epitome of the nature of conversation about film generally, that those who are experiencing again, and expressing, moments of a film are apt at any time to become incomprehensible (in some specific mode, perhaps enthusiastic to the point of folly) to those not experiencing them (again)" (Cavell, *Pursuits* 11). What this suggests is that film, because of the intimacy of its experience, easily invites ways of speaking about it not through appeal to an examined subjectivity proceeding through a careful reexamination of films, but through a *recapitulation* of subjectivity and its assertion.

At this point, we can distinguish the sort of criticism modelled by Cavell from cinephilic criticism. To return for a moment to "Leaving the movie theater," Barthes's response there to the anxiety of the new moviegoing situation was also compounded by his sharing the suspicion of films' realist-ideological "lure" (Barthes 347). His coping strategy was to watch the film, as it were, at a glance, fetishizing the light-beam and images and sounds displaced from their integration into the film's plot. Philip Watts reads Barthes's contribution as a first step in breaking away from post-1968 cinephobia that criticized such integration on ideological grounds. Watts, therefore, see this essay as opening the way to writings on cinema by Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière (66-67).

What is strikingly clear about the works of Deleuze and Rancière is their reconnection with the French cinephilic experience in the postwar decades that was the context of their own moviegoing. Therefore, Barthes's essay is as much a way of reconnecting with the pre-cinephobic moment, without overcoming the grounds of cinephobia, as it is about marking a way out of the paranoia of ideology critique. If this is indeed the case, it should point to the anxieties inherent in the cinephilic mode of spectatorship itself, making it no longer possible to oppose cinephilia to cinephobia.

Christian Keathley glosses Paul Willemen's idea of the "cinephiliac moment," the cornerstone of cinephilic criticism, as "the fetishizing of fragments of film, either individual shots or marginal (often unintentional) details in the image, especially those that appear only for a moment" (7). The catalogue of such moments will differ from cinephile to cinephile, and that is its promise of intense subjectivization of films. Cinephiles are interested in describing and sharing these moments, but seemingly only to the extent of announcing them to their peers, not so much to have everyone else (beyond a small circle of friends) share in them as for others to recognize their sovereignty

over them. Thomas Elsaesser argues that this battle over ownership over *auteurs*—and films that furnished cinephilic critics their privileged fragments—may have tipped a later phase of postwar cinephilia over into the cinephobia of ideology critique (31-32). If a cinephile's catalogue of privileged moments were to become generally shareable, it would be experienced as a loss of the uniqueness of their own experience. D. A. Miller, in his recent work as a late-blooming cinephilic critic, exemplifies cinephilic criticism as a product of the "Too-Close Viewer" whose itinerary of fragment-hunting is defined by personal eccentricity that "can afford no… pretension to speak for everyone: universality would abolish him!" (11). Cinephiles, like Barthes and Miller, looking to rescue images or sounds from the flow of a film, give themselves over to films in exchange for the promise of being able to have unique claims on them.

Elsaesser writes, "Cinephiles were always ready to give in to the anxiety of possible loss, to mourn the once sensuous-sensory plenitude of the celluloid image, and to insist on the irrecoverably fleeting nature of a film's experience…" (33). But Elsaesser does not have a convincing explanation for why cinephilia as this symbiosis of enchantment and disenchantment in response to the fleeting character of film experience emerges as a wider phenomenon in film culture only after World War II.[13] Fandom, even when finding intensely personal expression in the keeping of scrapbooks, is not as jealous of its attachments as cinephilia is. Noting the sources of Cavell's and Barthes's anxieties allows us to read this as a response to the changing context of spectatorship.

As young postwar cinephiles assembled to watch films screened by familiar programmers like Henri Langlois, waiting to parse the unpredictable crisscrossing of a then five-decade old film history, they fetishized not only personal tastes in films, but also the act of watching films from as close as possible, as if to recover the quality of films as personal events and the privacy among known companions (Truffaut). But because films do become, as Barthes put it, "specific cultural quests" for the young, perhaps *the* primary terrain of such quests at this point in history, such privacy must be *claimed* on the terrain of public culture, as opposed to it being *available* publicly as in the classical moviegoing experience. We see these contradictions leaving a mark in the legendary pages of *Cahiers du cinéma* (hereon, *Cahiers*). Here, the young critics, even as they erect canons that would define film conversation for a long time, seem to bear out the truth of Cavell's claim that the logic of assertions is that "my saying of them makes their meaning private" even if saying them makes the objects of assertion widely available (*World Viewed* 127).

The battle over tastes in 1950s' France has left a permanent mark on film discourse everywhere, so I don't think the fixation of the younger critics (I don't mean Bazin here) on fragments of films in their assertions of taste, and so the priority of the *mise-en-scène* as a criterion of judgment, needs much recounting. This is one way of claiming a public recognition of a personal experience; but the writings of these critics, in their fixations, often enough borders on the incomprehensible even if you are intimately familiar with the images they are talking about. What holds our attention and makes us go over them repeatedly is their passionate investment in seeking recognition for certain images. They are straining for the classical experience of moviegoing, seeking the world without having to be publicly answerable to/for it. And the density of their writing signals the anxiety of having become answerable. I will only place one example of this criticism here alongside Cavell's characterization of criticism as the practice of aesthetic judgment.

> It is essential to making an aesthetic judgment that at some point we be prepared to say in its support: don't you see, don't you hear, don't you dig? The best critic will know the best points… At some point, the critic will have to say: This is what I see. Reasons—at definite points, for definite reasons, in different circumstances—come to an end. ("Aesthetic Problems" 93)

Reading Cavell on the comedies of remarriage and on specific Hollywood melodramas is to see a critic postponing the moment when a helpless assertion of judgment and, therefore, withdrawal from conversation becomes inevitable. Jacques Rivette *begins* his famous piece on Howard Hawks with:

> The evidence on the screen is the proof of Hawks's genius: you only have to watch *Monkey Business* to know that it is a brilliant film. Some people refuse to admit this, however; they refuse to be satisfied by proof. There can't be any other reason why they don't recognize it. (126)

Cinephilic criticism as exemplified in the case of the Young Turks at *Cahiers*, and by others in their continuing lineage, may be proof that we are not yet immune to film's promise of giving us a world that does not need us for its existence. But it is also apt to be at some level a protest against having to become answerable for it. While acknowledging the contradictions inherent in the situation of film criticism, Cavell also says, "The love that philosophy can teach is the power to accept intimacy without taking it personally" and also that "philosophy is the achievement of the unpolemical" (*World Viewed* 100; *Pitch* 22). Therefore, criticism based on love in the philosophical sense is to be distinguished from cinephilia.[14]

V

The two reasons I have laid out so far for the claim that love for films as the basis for criticism betrays the writer's subjectivity, in the sense of making it questionable, not simply palpable, are that a) films cannot vouch for our readings, and b) the event-like character of moviegoing that entwines films intimately with our lives and so increasing the stakes of criticism beyond the logic of our arguments. The third, and perhaps the most important reason, is that the objects of our love are inevitably compromised in the ideological realms they lead us into. This was not the great discovery of ideology critique. Episodes of moral panic in the history of cinema are one sort of outrageous response to this knowledge, and a paranoid ideology critique another; and both are not quite reconciled to the inevitability of ideological compromise. If moralists believe they can moralize cinema, political modernists believe there must be another kind of cinema, or another kind of spectatorship, that could help us escape the ideological compromises of most cinema.

Cavell and Bazin were deeply aware of the inescapability of an "illicitness" in the cinema. Cavell is clear that the new audience does not escape it either. When he contrasts the "casualness of moviegoing" in the classical phase with the "casualness of movie-viewing" in the new situation, he is certainly not suggesting that the new audience is not serious about the films it watches. On the contrary, its seriousness takes the form of vigilance and skepticism towards the fantasies that films offer. When that vigilance does not translate into denunciation, he seems to be suggesting that it takes the form of a forced casualness of response as a way of disavowing our implication in those fantasies (*World Viewed* 11-12).

Bazin, whose essay on theater and cinema Cavell's words seem to echo, offers a fascinating exposé of the wish for escape and voyeurism at the cinema.[15] Some of his words cannot go uncited here:

> An honest appraisal of the respective pleasures derived from theater and cinema… forces us to admit that… *in the best of films* something [of the moral quality of experience] is missing. It is as if a certain inevitable lowering of the charge, some mysterious aesthetic short circuit, deprived us in the cinema of a certain tension which is a definite part of the theater. ("Theater and cinema" 98, my emphasis)
>
> —
>
> Incontestably, there is in the pleasure derived from cinema and novel a self-satisfaction, a concession to solitude, a sort of betrayal of action by a refusal of social responsibility. ("Theater and cinema" 100)

As if this inescapable illicitness in the film experience itself weren't enough of a disincentive to making our love of films public, there are the ideological contradictions in which specific films entangle us, and a criticism based in the love of those films needs to acknowledge those contradictions without disavowing our attachment to the films. Bazin's complete body of work is a repeated demonstration of this practice, but an obvious example to illustrate it would be in his account of the development of the myth of the western on film. In particular, he demonstrates how the genre, after World War II, betrays a greater awareness of its myth's roots in the genocide

of Native Americans and a misogyny that often appears as an idealization of the genre's women ("Evolution" 151; "*Outaw*"). Despite this, Bazin still hopes that generations to come will have the chance to watch and appreciate the mythic force of the western ("Evolution" 157). Does that make him a racist or a misogynist? We can look at some roughly analogous circumstances in Cavell's work before arriving at a nuanced answer.

Cavell too, as is well known, was deeply invested in the mythology of "America" as an ambiguous promise, but a promise nonetheless. The writing of *The World Viewed* coincided, as he recalls in a 2000 interview with *Cahiers*, with a crisis not just in the experience of moviegoing for him, but also "the loss of America with the Vietnam war. It was a matter of re-establishing as best as possible what [he] considered lost" (de Baecque 74 & 79). The idea of reestablishing is not a matter of restoring it to what it was but a matter of reparation "in a dialectical sense," amounting not to the recovery of the lost object but to accounting for and "maintaining the relationship" with what has been lost, and prolonging whatever in it can still seem to us as a promise in new ways (de Baecque 80 & 73). In any case, what was lost was not an idealization.

The twin senses of the loss of America and of cinema coincide perfectly in Cavell's words on *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), which "is the fullest expression of the knowledge of the cost of civilization…. In so fully opening the legend of the West, it ends it." And in ending it, this is what it reveals of its origins:

> The gorgeous, suspended skies achieved in the works of, say, John Ford, are as vacant as the land. When the Indians are gone, they will take with them whatever gods inhabited those places, leaving the beautiful names we do not understand (Iroquois, Shenandoah, Mississippi, Cheyenne) in place of those places we will not understand. So our slaughtered beauty mocks us, and gods become legends. (*World Viewed* 60)

The myth stands exposed as originating in slaughter, but it is also too late for many spectators, especially of Cavell's generation, to disown it, having lived off it for so long. The only way to repair it is to try to see if whatever promise it held can be taken up again in different circumstances and in better faith whose own contradictions will appear in their own time, and they will not necessarily be the ones that seem the most obvious right now.

Being compromised by our love of films in writing about them is to accept our having been unavoidably tainted by them. The "taint of villainy in maleness" is how Cavell characterizes one important source of the shadows that hang over the remarriage comedies as their couples set out again on their pursuits of happiness. But, of course, the taint of male villainy sticks to anyone who is willing to grant the point of promise to which the couples manage to find their way, even if temporarily and ambiguously. And it sticks especially to a *man* who is asking us to grant the films that promise despite the acknowledged taint. That was the charge brought against him by feminist critics, and the charge of being tainted he is not inclined to deny (*Contesting* 109). He even cites John Stuart Mill's claim that a large proportion of men's writing may in fact be "systematic plagiarism" of women's thoughts (*Cities* 100-101; *Pitch* 16). But what he asks in return is for his readers to distinguish "the taint of villainy" from "villainous, intractable, vengeful evil" (*Contesting* 124). He asks us to see that in the comedies "happiness in even these immensely privileged marriages exists only so far as the pair together locate and contain this taint—you may say domesticate it, make a home for it—as if the task of marriage is to overcome the villainy in marriage itself" (*Contesting* 85).

Criticism's task too is to identify and contain, not deny or disavow, the taints from our attachments, in the hope of domesticating them so that they do not consume us entirely. We must be careful, however, not to assume that criticism is confessional, a temptation given the centrality of the autobiographical to it. A confession hands over the responsibility of the taint to the ones receiving the confession, and the autobiographical can easily become narcissistic and solipsistic, a charge Cavell's critics were too ready to make against him.

In any case, ideological taints are often inherited, even if from our former selves; the objects of attachments that taint us are consigned to history, leaving us with an inescapable responsibility for them. And since you cannot deny that responsibility, you cannot hope to acquit yourself. The thing to realize, as Cavell says, is that there are "arguments that must not be won," even as they are not to be avoided (*Pitch* 22). And so, the critic is at the mercy of the recognition by readers of her good faith, not just of her good arguments. Perhaps that is also what Bazin meant when, at the end of his "Defense of Rosellini" addressed to Guido Aristarco, he writes:

> I do not expect to have convinced you, my dear Aristarco. In any event, it is never with arguments that one wins over a person. The conviction one puts into them often counts for more. I shall be satisfied if just my conviction… serves at least to stimulate your own. ("Defense" 101)

Bazin's continued attachment to the western, similarly, was a conviction that the genre had been able to evolve by confronting its own contradictions, and so modifying its myth as it went along without disavowing it. This internal modification of the myth is what he argues for in postwar westerns by charting the shift from "history as material" to "history as subject" in the genre ("Evolution" 151). And the myth itself, both Cavell and he would argue, was never articulated without the genre's best films' awareness of those contradictions, especially the contradiction that is its central element: the establishment of the law through means outside of it (Bazin "The Western" 145–147; *World Viewed* 58–59).

The possibility that conviction in argument will not be sufficient to receive the benefit of doubt, or that the conviction itself may not materialize, is the tragic, but not regrettable or pitiful, character of aesthetic judgment, and so of philosophical criticism. "Tragedy is the necessity of having your own experience and learning from it; comedy is the possibility of having it in good time" (*Pursuits* 238). Criticism may remain tragic, and therefore already an accomplishment, or succeed in having others share in confronting the tragedies of attachments and so be transformed into the comedic.

VI

Returning to the question of the place of criticism in the discipline of Film Studies, let us take up again the issue of the "common" ground on which films exist. Firstly, quite apart from not having a priori claims to its objects in general, the discipline also needs to contend with the fact that its a priori claim to the study of films even within the university is liable to be bypassed. It is not a matter of small chagrin for film scholars that literature and philosophy professors believe they can write about film without necessarily placing themselves in the lineage of arguments internal to the discipline's history. What is more, a Cavell, a D. A. Miller, and a Lauren Berlant may write compellingly about films in this manner. Cavell's work, of course, has been a prominent object of such chagrin (Musser; Fairfax).

Whether it be the period of high theory in the 1970s or the subsequent archival turn, the Anglophone discipline of Film Studies has sought to secure its identity through a displacement of films themselves. As Rodowick writes, "a discipline's coherence derives not from the objects it examines but rather from the concepts and methods it mobilizes to generate critical thought (ix)." But we have arrived at a point where we aspire to do "film scholarship without films (Smoodin, 2007 2)," and confine "film analysis" primarily to the classroom (Smoodin, 2014 100). As we saw earlier, Cavell's claim is, "Philosophers who shun the autobiographical must find another route to philosophical authority…" (*Pitch* 8). First, Theory, then the archive, alongside analytical criticism, have been the discipline's primary routes to its own authority in the common realm of cinema.

The archival turn, in particular, comes with a claim to inclusiveness as we push aside the privileged subjectivities of film scholars to deal with the dense historical record of that democratic commonness that circulates around films (Karnick and Jenkins). And yet, that claim to inclusiveness

could also be read as a technocratic claim to expertise in conversations around films, or rather film culture, given a degree of inescapable vulnerability of any expert's subjectivity (historian's or philosopher's) on the ground of the films themselves, as against the privileged access to, and the authority of, archives. Film analysis as primarily formal analysis also secures disciplinary expertise by constraining subjective investment. And philosophical film criticism that foregrounds the critic's subjectivity, without becoming solipsistic, as a way of engaging other subjectivities in its objects may well be an acceding to institutional privilege in order to privilege the subjectivities of whatever readers it finds.

There is no space here for exploring at length the resistance from film historiography or any other impersonal framework of scholarship to the kind of criticism that Bazin and Cavell model —one from within a live film culture and the other from the university. Such an exploration would have to engage with the politics of expertise in the study of culture. In any case, the value of history, sociology, anthropology, or any other empirical framework that takes film culture as its object certainly cannot be doubted on its own terms, even if the systematic preference for these terms over those of criticism is bound to give some of us pause. Film criticism can and should learn from this scholarship, even as it resists attempts to define the significance of films primarily through those methods.

A more intimate and insidious resistance may actually show up in an extended exegesis of film critics and philosophers itself. A reflection on disciplinary practices, especially new or rusty ones, is essential to prepare the ground for the practice itself. The relevance of the ongoing re-evaluation of the history of film theory could be a part of this preparation. But if we find ourselves for too long mainly going over the work of film philosophers or critics, arguing for the importance of film philosophy or philosophical criticism, as the present article does, we may find ourselves afflicted by, to borrow a phrase Cavell uses to describe a certain sort of music criticism, "a protracted cough of philosophy" ("Music" 185).

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Notes

[1] I am here conflating the terms "criticism", "interpretation" and "hermeneutics" without denying the possibility of differing characterizations of each of these terms as well as the different cases that various scholars may be making for criticism in film scholarship.

[2] The anonymity of other spectators at arthouses may seem counter-intuitive given the well-known fact that they have been the site for the formation of strong cinephilic communities. However, cinephilic companionship is staked primarily on our relationship with films so that the "privacy" of a companionship defined on grounds outside of cinema is denied in such communities. I return to the question of cinephilic spectatorship later in the argument.

[3] Rodowick misses Cavell's anxiety in watching films in the new situation, which is in fact the stimulus to criticism, when he speaks of Cavell's work as "examin[ing] how the presence of a community frames our pleasurable engagement with these activities [of considering our ontological fascination with screened

images and film's dramatization of moral reasoning" (185). Morgan, too, though otherwise calling attention to Cavell's situatedness in modernism, takes for granted "Cavell's insistence on the importance of… the collective nature of cinematic spectatorship" (2020 209). It is important, indeed, but because it can no longer be taken for granted. This fact is as significant to the modernism of Cavell's criticism as the procedures of outlining the work of acknowledgment by a film of its medium once cinema has lost the powers of its conventions.

[4] A charting of the different actor-spectator relations in theater and cinema helps Cavell describe this quality of the movie spectator's unseen-ness and the film's independence from and indifference to us. But we can also imagine its radical independence of us through his remarks on the earlier modalities of filmgoing whereby you could walk into (or leave) the theater at any point in the film and so stay for as long as you fancied. The part of this which testifies to film's ontological indifference to us is one not entirely lost to us when we go to the movie theatre now. If you find yourselves the only spectator in the theater, and you decide to leave in the middle, it is perfectly possible for the film to carry on with no one present without any effect on how it plays out. Its temporal progression gives it the quality of a world that defines its conditions of change internally. This testifies to its absolute spatio-temporal independence of us, an independence arguably not found in any other art form.

[5] At this point, a question that may arise is that, if film manages to assert the existence of the world without us in it, does this not come at the cost of an annihilation of our sense of our own existence: if the world exists without us, where do we exist? We cannot say the movie theater, because the movie theater, as it is present to us, is not part of the world of any film. And if we find ourselves back in the world, then we are not relieved of it. The fact that a film's assertion of the world's existence independent of us does not negate our own existence will be found in the fact that for the duration of the film, we exist *within* the film without being able to act within it or even be addressed by it. This does not rule out our subjectivity's development in relation to it, as we respond to, without intervening in, what unfolds there. On our presence in the world of the film, compare Cavell (*World Viewed* 25-29 & 155-157) with Bazin ("Theater and Cinema" 95-124) whose work the former builds on. Although they place their emphases slightly differently, their arguments are based on the spatio-temporally exclusive character of a world. We exist either in the theater or in the world of the film; we can act within the former but not within the latter.

[6] Speaking of film theory in the first half of the twentieth century, the most significant early attempts at the institutionalization of the study of film in the United States and in France occurred in the context of the social sciences. Within the early academic context, theory of film, whether in (social-) scientific, practical or even sometimes in humanistic terms, was a significant component, but not criticism as an engagement with the hermeneutic and experiential value of specific films. One or the other of these theories may have called for criticism, but the sort of evaluative criticism that prepared the ground for Film Studies in the context of the humanities after World War II does not seem to have been a significant practice (Lowry; Polan). Professional film critics are a part of the economy of moviegoing so their alibi for criticism was the natural relation of their readers to films, even if their critical ambitions made some of them resentful critics for having to review anything that passed on the screen (*World Viewed* 6-7).

[7] Film theorists whose experience of cinema, like Cavell's, was formed in the classical context invariably knew better than to sneer at cinema's ability to answer to the fundamental wish for escape from the world, even when they sought to make this escape itself as a necessary route to reconnecting with the world on new terms. To stay with only Bazin, he affirmed this need on the eve of France's Liberation after World War II. During the Occupation, he says, French cinema had turned to fantastic or distant historical subjects because "[t[he public wanted the screen to be its window and not its mirror," not a window opening on to the world but out of it. He goes on to say that this demand for a dream world is unlikely to go away with the Liberation since people will continue to be oppressed, no longer by an occupying force but "by life itself" ("Reflection" 98). Bazin elaborates what he means by "life itself" in another essay he wrote during the Occupation years: "In our mechanical civilization where man is devoured by the technicality of his profession, normalized by social and political constraints, the cinema, beyond all artistic concerns, responds to the repressed but indefeasible collective psychic needs." ("Realist Esthetic" 36) On Cavell's formulation, these "collective psychic needs" are met by the classical cinema experience in a condition of privacy publicly granted.

[8] This has to be understood in its precision, since modernist works may incorporate the popular, but they thereby also bar engagement with the incorporated artefacts in habitual/popular ways.

[9] See also Cavell's remarks on the uncertainty of the audience within the university for the study of film at the time he was writing and expanding upon *The World Viewed*. (*World Viewed* xvi-xvii)

[10] On truthful and true statements, see *World Viewed* 157.

[11] "I interpret reading as a process of interpreting one's transference to (as opposed to one's projection onto) a text. That idea implies that the fantasy of a text's analyzing its reader is as much the guide of a certain ambition of reading— of philosophy as reading— as that of the reader's analyzing the text" (*Contesting* 113). Cavell here is speaking in analogy with the psychoanalytic procedure of transference and the possibility of the analyst's counter-transference to the analysand.

[12] See Cavell's remarks on the fact that the director (and so anyone involved in the making of the film) is maybe the first spectator of a film, but has no more authority over its import than later ones, and on the inadequacy of the idea of authorship as a way of understanding the identity of films (*Pursuits* 108; *World Viewed* 9).

[13] Cinephilia as this kind does not *emerge* after World War II. We find it in the avant-garde circles of the 1920s Paris, a small community gathering at the *Studio des ursulines*, but there it remains a rarefied phenomenon.

[14] To be clear, I am not saying that cinephilic criticism necessarily lacks arguments, but that its privileged mode is the isolation of transient moments. Compare this with Cavell's comments about reading of a film fragment versus fragmentary reading of a whole film, and criticism could transition from one to the other (*World Viewed* xiv).

[15] See also Bazin's "Eroticism and cinema".

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