

# STANLEY CAVELL: A RETROSPECTIVE

**September  
23<sup>rd</sup>- 24<sup>th</sup> 2021**

Conference

*Stanley Cavell: A Retrospective*

**Vita-Salute San Raffaele University of Milan**

Palazzo Arese-Borromeo, Cesano Maderno

**September 23<sup>rd</sup>- 24<sup>th</sup> 2021**

**Organizing Institution:** Centro ICONE / Facoltà di Filosofia

**Organizers:** Raffaele Ariano (Vita-Salute San Raffaele University of Milan),  
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## ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

**ZED ADAMS - NAT HANSEN**



*The Hope of Agreement: Cavell on Aesthetic Judgment*

### ABSTRACT

Aesthetic judgment is a thread that connects several themes in Stanley Cavell's thought, from his discussion of what warrants ordinary language philosophers' claims about "what we say" (1976, 2005) to his discussion



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of the groundlessness of our knowledge of other minds (1979). What is it about aesthetic judgment that unifies Cavell's account of these seemingly disparate philosophical topics? Answering that question, we argue, involves recognizing that Cavell's conception of aesthetic judgment is less focused on the content of the judgments themselves than the activity of making and disputing them. As he puts it, it is a mistake to "dissociate the exercise of taste from the discipline of accounting for it" (1976, 87). Moreover, although he thinks "the hope of agreement motivates our engaging in these various patterns of support" (1976, 94), it is clear that he does not think that actually arriving at agreement is necessary: in his words, "disagreement is not disconfirming" (1976, 95). Taking these comments as a whole, one is left with an account of aesthetic judgment that is, we might put it, process-oriented. In this paper, we develop and defend Cavell's account of aesthetic judgment by putting it in conversation with three recent accounts that are similarly process-oriented: Sianne Ngai's account of aesthetic judgment as involving "a plea for extending the period of the act of aesthetic evaluation" (2014, 169); C. Thi Nguyen's claim that "in aesthetic appreciation ... we value the activity of forming judgments more than we do getting our judgments right (2020, 3); and Nick Riggle's proposal that "the end of aesthetic discourse is not convergence but a distinctive form of community, a kind of harmony of individuality" (2021, 1). As a test case for distinguishing these process-oriented accounts of aesthetic judgment, we consider Clement Greenberg (1984) and Michael Fried's (1998) criticism of the sort of attention that "theatrical" or "merely interesting" minimalist and conceptual art requires.

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#### BIOS

Zed Adams is associate professor of philosophy and department chair at the New School for Social Research, as well as a director of the Institute for Philosophy and the New Humanities. He is the author of *On the Genealogy of Color: A Case Study in Historicized Conceptual Analysis* (Routledge 2015) and a co-editor of *Giving a Damn: Essays in Dialogue with John Haugeland* (MIT 2016). His research focuses on questions at the intersection of aesthetics and the philosophy of perception.

Nat Hansen is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Reading and co-director of Reading's Centre for Cognition Research. He has been an external faculty fellow at Stanford's Humanities Center and a visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Language and Information. He currently holds a Humboldt



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Fellowship for Experienced Researchers. His research focuses on ordinary language philosophy, experimental semantics and pragmatics, and the meaning of color terms.

**SASHA BLICKHAN**



*Taking ethics personally: Perspectival virtue ethics*

## ABSTRACT

In exploring ethics as a human phenomenon, we must recognise how our ethics are entangled with our perceptual and epistemic access to the world, ourselves and other people. Such entanglements make impersonal and a-perspectival neutrality impossible both at the level of meta-ethics and within the moral positions of agents, their perspectives and points of view, and their practices. On both levels, ethical theorising and practices can only proceed amelioratively: The question is how we *ought* to go about conceptualising and discussing ethics. This, in turn, is an ethical as well as a meta-ethical question, which raises the stakes for moral philosophy (Baz, 2008; Williams, 2006). We, as philosophers, are not merely detached thinkers in search of abstract truths, but rather personally implicated in the complexities of moral and epistemic perspectives. I follow Stanley Cavell (1999), Iris Murdoch (1970/ 2014), and G.E.M. Anscombe (1958a) in suggesting that true meta-ethical neutrality is impossible. Any ethical or meta-ethical framework necessarily imposes an evaluative structure on the phenomena to be accounted for: What counts as rational? What is considered to require external justification, what to be taken seriously as a moral consideration, and what as morally irrelevant? What even ought to be up for debate in ethics? The scope of ethics is not limited to a particular domain in life, the ‘strictly moral’, but rather shapes and structures our lives and our position in the world (Chappell, 2009; Diamond, 1996; Midgley, 1972;



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Murdoch, 1970/ 2014). In human morality, our perception, cognition, emotions, and motivations are complexly entangled.

I propose that conceptualising the complexities of human moral psychology can best be done in the framework of a broadly Aristotelian virtue ethics, which I take as a starting point for my exploration of moral perspectivism. I argue that subjective positions, perspectives, and points of view must take centre stage in an empirically and phenomenologically grounded account of what it is like for human beings to actualise virtues and values.

In really thinking through what it is like to develop and actualise particular virtues, we must centre the inner life and *perspective* of the individual. I draw on Murdoch's and Cavell's thoughts on moral vision and moral positions, respectively, and follow Piergiorgio Donatelli (2019) in arguing that the cultivation of character is not exhausted by habituation and induction into pre-existing practices, but requires creativity and personal growth in integrating and internalising virtues.

This allows us to make better sense of the way in which moral appeals are *personal*, and broadens our understanding of ethical responsibility beyond a narrow conception of indeterministic freedom centred on voluntary intentional action. Perspectivism extends the scope of ethical responsibility to habituation, epistemic attitudes, and limitations in one's perspective where one *could* know better but is not in a position to do so – not as the direct result of intentional action but what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls 'sedimentation of character' (1945/ 2002).

Because character is plural as opposed to categorical, and because actualising particular virtues relies on habituation and the cultivation of particular perspectives, developing one's character is to prioritise the points of view, logics, or grammars of some virtues and values over others. Thus, for instance, truly *becoming* a brave and bold person internally contradicts becoming a cautious and prudent person, since these virtues favour competing styles of automatic processing and self-regulation.

Aristotle stipulates that such internal conflict is to be mediated by prudence and deliberation, and acknowledges the situational particularity and indeterminacy of ethical challenges. Centring prudence and deliberation, however, is not meta-ethically neutral but prioritises inhibitive regulatory strategies over approach-oriented and exploratory ones, thus siding with caution against boldness. Taking the plural grammars of the particular virtues seriously means that not only prudence can have this meta-regulatory role in a person's moral development and character. An ethical perspective may also be structured, for instance, around care (Gilligan, 1982), love (Chappell, 2009), loving attention and a sense of inexhaustible mystery (Murdoch, Diamond), or even humility (Aquinas, trans. 1981).

## BIO

Sasha Blickhan holds a Joint-Honours BA in Philosophy and Modern Languages from the University of Oxford, an MA in Philosophy of Psychology from King's College London, and an MSc in Applied Positive Psychology from Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge. She is completing her doctoral thesis as a PhD fellow in the TRT project on human flourishing at Munich School of Philosophy, and works as a certified trainer of Positive Psychology (DACH-PP).



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LÉA BOMAN



*Emerson's claim for inconsistency:  
moral perfectionism and rationality in Cavell's philosophy*

## ABSTRACT

In *Self-reliance* Emerson declares “I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me. I should write on the lintels of the door-post *Whim*. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but cannot spend the day in explanation.” This Emersonian famous claim for whim and absence of explanation appears to be central for Stanley Cavell in *Cities of Words* to understand what he named the moral perfectionism. This claim for no explanation, justification as much as pure rationality, calculation and abstract thinking expresses the radical alternative to traditional moral philosophy that Cavell found in Emerson’s moral perfectionism. However, Emerson’s philosophy is less the paradoxical defense of irrationality than the conception of thinking as an unprecedented experience of the self and an original apprehension of subjectivity. Furthermore, Emerson explains how “the other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency [...] with consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do” to qualify *Self-reliance* as an intellectual virtue philosophically crucial to Cavell. From the early *The Claim of Reason*, where Emerson is rather absent of Cavell’s thinking, to his *Pursuits of Happiness* where eccentricity appears as a moral perfectionist feature, to the late *Cities of Words*, this paper suggests revisiting Cavell’s philosophy through this progressive Emerson’s influence on Cavell and Cavell’s specific reading of Emerson’s *Essays*. The Emersonian value of anti-conformity on the one hand, and Emerson’s images or wordplays on the other hand, aren’t only what interest Cavell in this American central voice that he contributes to rediscover through his own views of the ordinary language philosophy and ethics. According to Cavell, Emerson’s position is neither pragmatic nor a romantic exaltation of irrational feelings. How is the Emerson’s claim for inconsistency supposed to redefine moral reasoning in the moral perfectionism drawn by Cavell? I would like to focus in this paper on the ethical problem of



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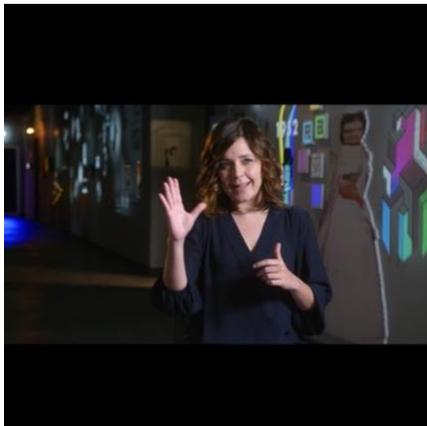
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rationality in the conception of the moral subject that comes up with Cavell interpretation of Emerson.

## BIO

Ph.D Candidate in Philosophy at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, with a doctoral thesis in progress on Emerson's moral philosophy and his conception of subjectivity, former Student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (Lyon), Agrégée de Philosophie, co-organizer of a Young Scholars Seminar of American Philosophy at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University.

## SIMONA BUSNI - EMILIANO MORREALE



### *Stanley Cavell, philosopher of melodrama*

## ABSTRACT

Our proposal aims to read Stanley Cavell's approach to cinematic melodrama, exemplified in *Contesting Tears* (1996), through a comparison with the theories of literary melodrama and film genres, particularly as regards Peter Brooks' concept of "melodramatic imagination" (1976) and Rick Altman's "Semantic/ Syntactic/ Pragmatic" approach (1999). What is the sense of talking over genres in a philosophical perspective on cinema? What are the implications on a possible re-reading of the American tradition? What is the relationship with the classifications of genres, concerning themes, forms, the effect on the audience or film internal working? The characteristic of Cavell's approach – and its difference from any "theory of genres" – also lies in its strong constructivist (and almost performative) value, in the reflection he made upon the creation of the genre itself at the same time of its making: according to Cavell, cinema has an intrinsically reflective nature, so the theory of cinema has a meta-theoretical dimension.



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Furthermore, the choice to focus on melodrama implies a comparison with gender perspectives, which were interested in women's films at that time (from Linda Williams to Mary Ann Doane). From this point of view, Cavell's vision allows a sort of genealogical reinterpretation of Feminist Film Studies' schemes, shifting the reflection to the level of knowledge and acknowledgment.

The last element, connected to the previous ones, regards the (subterranean but constant) preeminence given by Cavell to Opera (*A Pitch of Philosophy. Autobiographical Exercises*, 1994, e *Opera in, and as, Film*, 2000). By this issue it is possible, on the one hand, to clarify the questions of the voice and of the *voicelessness* (one of the main steps in the genealogical process staged by these films) and, on the other hand, to open an investigation on the possibility of adapting cavellian reflection on different cultural contexts, starting from Italian cinema.

### BIOS

Simona Busni taught History of cinema at University of Salento and Contemporary Image at University of Calabria, where she gained her PhD and is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher. She furthered her research work in France as *Visiting PhD Student* (Université Sorbonne Paris 1) and *Visiting Postdoctoral Researcher* (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3). She is author of many essays for journals such as «Comunicazioni Sociali» and «Bianco e Nero». She was editor of *Lessico del cinema italiano. Forme di rappresentazione e forme di vita* (Mimesis, 2014-2016) and she is currently editor of «L'avventura. International Journal of Italian Film and Media Landscapes» (il Mulino), «Fata Morgana» (Pellegrini) and «Fata Morgana Web». She wrote two books, both for Edizioni Ente dello Spettacolo: *La voce delle donne. Le sconosciute del melodramma, da Galatea a Lucia Bosè* (2018) and *Michelangelo Antonioni. L'alienista scettico* (2019), which got the Limina Award 2020 for Best Italian Film Studies Book.

Emiliano Morreale is Associate Professor at the "Sapienza" University of Rome. He is Film Critic for «la Repubblica». He is part of the editorial board of many scientific journals. He was chief curator of Cineteca Nazionale (Italian National Film Archive) from 2013 to 2016. Among his works: *Mario Soldati. Le avventure di un libertino* (Cineteca di Bologna 2006), *L'invenzione della nostalgia. Il vintage nel cinema italiano e altrove* (Donzelli 2009), *Così piangevano. Il cinema mélo nell'Italia degli anni '50* (Donzelli 2011), *Cinema d'autore degli anni sessanta* (Il Castoro 2011), *La mafia immaginaria. Settant'anni di Cosa Nostra al cinema 1949-2019* (Donzelli 2020). He is the Italian translator of Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness (Alla ricerca della felicità*, Einaudi 1999) and he was editor, with Mariapaola Pierini, of the anthology *Racconti di cinema* (Einaudi 2014).



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FILIPPO CASATI



## *A Cavellian Solution to a Heideggerian Problem*

### ABSTRACT

In our everyday life, we are surrounded by all sorts of entities: among all these entities, there are stars, hammers and human beings. In the long history of Western philosophy, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* represents one of the most radical attempts to articulate a theory which can explain how we know *that* entities *are* and *what* such entities *are*. Unfortunately, it is well-known that Heidegger fails in developing such a theory and, as it has been argued by Braver (2015) and Dahlstrom (1994), this failure is well-exemplified by his inability to write the Third Division of *Being and Time*. At this point, following McManus (2013) and many other interpreters, it is tempting to conclude that, since Heidegger fails in articulating a theory which can explain how we know *that* entities *are* and *what* such entities *are*, Heidegger's philosophical enterprise does not appear to be particularly fruitful after all.

By taking inspiration from Cavell's treatment of skepticism (1979), I resist this conclusion. In so doing, I argue that, far from turning Heidegger's philosophy into an unserviceable intellectual enterprise, his failure is philosophically fruitful. To being with, in light of Cavell's remarks about the skeptic, Heidegger's failure demonstrates that our *basic* relation with entities should *not* be understood as a function of *theoretical* knowledge in any possible way. This means that our *primary* engagement with stars, hammers and human beings is neither the subject matter of what Minar calls 'inferential knowledge' (2013) nor does it escape what Mulhall calls 'certain beliefs' (1998). For this reason, I also argue that, according to both Cavell and Heidegger, our basic relation with entities should be characterized by a set of 'compartments' which I deem to be the Heideggerian face of Cavell's notion of *acknowledgment* (Cavell, 1976; 1979; 1987). For our *primary* engagement with stars, hammers and human beings is represented by those *pre-theoretical* behaviors which characterize our contemplating the heavenly vault, hammering a nail and caring about our friends.

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## BIO

Filippo Casati is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Lehigh University (USA). His areas of specialization are Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, with a passionate interest in Meinong. He has published in such venues as *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, *Synthese*, *Logic et Analyse* and *Philosophy Compass*. He has an edited volume which is forthcoming for Cambridge University Press on *Heidegger on Logic*, and a monograph which is forthcoming for Routledge on *Heidegger and the Contradiction of Being*. In 2013, he will edit a volume for *Philosophical Topics* in honor of Stephen Mulhall.

## BAPTISTE CORNARDEAU



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## *The Limits of Practice. Stanley Cavell, Pragmatism, and the Value of Action*

### ABSTRACT

“I have not found that much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. Here lies, according to Stanley Cavell, a “negation of the primacy of practice” which distances pragmatism, and especially John Dewey, from the kind of philosophical voices that may be heard in Emerson’s writings, in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later works, and probably also in his own oeuvre. But what exactly are the reasons behind Cavell’s dissatisfaction with the pragmatism he studied in his younger years? Recurring in Cavell is the desire that Emerson should not be read only as a forerunner of pragmatism, and this, though not exclusively, has to do with a faith in practice mediated by science and intelligence pragmatism per se is not entirely able to justify. Unaware of its own limitations, it stands without questioning the value of action itself. This “benightedness” entails a banishment of the skeptic as a “fool,” an erasure of the patient and silent paths traced within us, a neglect of the unvoiced work of grief and mourning, which does not amount to lifting obstacles to the continuation of action, since their import escapes the realm of practice. Through a discussion of Cavell’s insightful though disputed account of the insufficiencies of pragmatism, this paper aims to provide a balanced vision of the enduring and powerful significance of Cavell’s philosophy, and of the possible merits of pragmatism.

### BIO

Baptiste Cornardeau is a PhD candidate at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (ISJPS, CPCS, EXeCO). He graduated from École Normale Supérieure and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and was a visiting student at Harvard University, the Sapienza University of Rome, and the University of Konstanz. His research interests focus mainly on American philosophy, pragmatism (especially George H. Mead), the philosophy of language, and social theory.

### LUIGI CORRIAS



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*Acknowledgement after Dehumanization:  
Cavell and an Ethos of Reconciliation*

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to draw upon the work of Stanley Cavell in order to shed new light on the interdisciplinary field of transitional justice. More specifically, the paper builds on Cavell's notions of soul-blindness, aspect seeing, and acknowledgement in order to illuminate the ethical preconditions for a successful process of reconciliation. The argument unfolds in three steps.

First, I take my cue from Cavell's and Wittgenstein's notion of soul-blindness to characterize the situation between oppressor and oppressed. The oppressor's violence is a form of soul-blindness: the oppressed is not seen as an equal member of humanity. As a consequence, an asymmetry between oppressor and oppressed exists, preventing all forms of reconciliation.

Second, I argue that the notions of aspect seeing and acknowledgement help explain the transition to a state in which reconciliation becomes possible. With the help of aspect seeing and aspect change, one grasps situations in which something within the other strikes one anew and radically transforms one's relationship towards the other. Furthermore, I submit that Cavell's notion of acknowledgement captures what is needed to prepare the ground for reconciliation. As a claim to justice, acknowledgement requires seeing the other as a fellow member of humanity. This shows itself in the concrete way in which one stands towards the other, as becomes evident in a practical and bodily attitude.

Third, I consider a number of exemplary cases of successful attempts at reconciliation to demonstrate that it were small, tangible acts of acknowledgement that played a pivotal role in the larger process of reconciliation. I conclude that an ethos of acknowledgement turns out to be a crucial, albeit often overlooked, precondition for reconciliation.

## BIO

Luigi Corrias is Assistant Professor of Philosophy of Law at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He has a background in both law and philosophy. His research falls broadly within the field of the philosophy of international law. He is the author of *The Passivity of Law: Competence and Constitution in the European Court of Justice* (Springer, 2011), for which the Netherlands Association for Philosophy of Law awarded him the Prize for the Best Dissertation in Legal Philosophy in the Netherlands and Belgium in 2009-2010. In his dissertation, he drew on the work of Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein to reinterpret constitution-building. Currently, he is working on a (book) project on humanity and dehumanization in international law. For this research, he received a fellowship from the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS-KNAW) in 2019-2020.



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**MICHELLE DEVEREAUX**



*Orders from an Unborn Baby:*

*Maternal Scepticism, Vengeance and Voicelessness in Alice Lowe's Prevenge*

## ABSTRACT

In *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*, Cavell writes of the sceptic 'haunting the world' (1996: 143), unable to rectify the desire to be known and acknowledge others with the fear of these very same things. In order to avenge the accidental death of her baby's father, the murderous protagonist of Alice Lowe's film *Prevenge* (2016), Ruth, suffers such a fate. By articulating her own vengeful thoughts and desires through the imaginary voice of her unborn child, Ruth evinces both the need for acknowledgement and the wish to be erased. Rather than removing sceptical doubt, pregnancy and impending motherhood become mysterious and threatening, leaving her uncertain of herself and her position in the world. By placing Cavell's writing on scepticism and self-reliance in the unknown woman melodramas in dialogue with Julia Kristeva's notion of the 'split' found in maternal identity, this paper explores the relation of maternity, scepticism and 'unknownness' in *Prevenge*. Like Stella Dallas for Cavell, Ruth finds a sense of *jouissance* in supposed maternal sacrifice, a sacrifice in which she gains more than she loses. But if, according to Cavell, Stella has sure knowledge of herself and her actions, Ruth denies such knowledge, relinquishing the power to think for herself and instead performing under the command of paternal law. While her actions could be characterised as a mad 'aria of revenge', a way of creating herself, her insistence that she is merely a human sacrifice to her baby's will absolves her of the capacity to count. Ultimately Ruth's murderous vengeance is characterised by her voicelessness, and in Cavellian terms she becomes 'a moving image of scepticism', visible only in her absence.

## BIO

Dr Michelle Devereaux is a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow at the University of Warwick's Department of Film and Television Studies. Her current research considers gender, trauma, and philosophical scepticism



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in contemporary film and television. She received her doctorate in film studies from the University of Edinburgh and has taught film theory and history at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Birmingham. Her first monograph, *The Stillness of Solitude: Romanticism and Contemporary American Independent Film*, was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2019.

ANDREA DI GESÙ



*Cavell, Wittgenstein and the possibility of an ecological biopolitics*

## ABSTRACT

Stanley Cavell's seminal reading of Wittgenstein has not only inaugurated the family of interpretations of wittgensteinian scholarship known as *New Wittgenstein*, but it has also developed a thoroughly new understanding of the ethical and political import of Wittgenstein's thought. In what is arguably his most important reflection devoted to the subject, *Declining decline: Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture*, Cavell illustrates his political reading of Wittgenstein through an innovative interpretation of the concept of form of life. In that essay, he famously argues that the idea of form of life shows two distinct meanings within Wittgenstein's philosophy. According to the first one, which Cavell names "horizontal", a form of life is the web of cultural, linguistic and ethnological patterns of a community, and the accent is stressed on the plurality of possible *forms* of life; the second, "vertical" meaning identifies on the contrary the biological features of the human form of *life*, with the accent put rather on its singularity. Cavell claims that the political interpretations of Wittgenstein have so far restricted themselves to the first meaning of form of life, and have accordingly developed different versions of a politics of forms of life in the "horizontal" sense. Examples of



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these positions include the ironical relativism and multiculturalism of Rorty and Lyotard – where the irreducible pluralism of the concept of form of life is opposed to the universalist pretensions of the rationalist tradition of western political thought -, but also the conservative interpretations of scholars such as Bloor and Nyiri – where the specificity and uniqueness of a form of life is interpreted rather as a cultural tradition to be politically defended and preserved. Now, against these theoretical stances, Cavell argues that the political meaning of Wittgenstein’s philosophy must be rather found in the invitation to think a politics of forms of life in the “vertical” sense, i.e. based on the acknowledgment of the finitude of the human form of life rather than on the differences between cultural forms of life. In my talk, I claim that this politics, with its attention to the limited nature of the human and to the corporeal and biological concreteness of forms of life, constitutes what I’ll define as an ecological biopolitics. I’ll furthermore show how this biopolitics could furnish a non-relativist, strong answer to the universalist political tradition, and I’ll finally propose a comparison with Foucault’s biopolitics, highlighting affinities and differences between the two models and pointing to possible further developments.

## **BIO**

Andrea Di Gesu is a PhD candidate in philosophy at Scuola Normale Superiore (Pisa, Italy) and Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University (Paris, France), under the supervision of Roberto Esposito and Sandra Laugier. His actual research project deals with the concept of political community in the thought of Wittgenstein and Foucault, but he also works on Judith Butler, Stanley Cavell, Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, and furthermore in the current debate about Italian thought. He has published essays and articles with University of Cà-Foscari editions, Quodlibet, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Quaderni Materialisti* and *Theory, culture & society*.

## **PIERGIORGIO DONATELLI**

*Filming democracy: reciprocity and irony*



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# STANLEY CAVELL: A RETROSPECTIVE

**September  
23<sup>rd</sup>– 24<sup>th</sup> 2021**

**RICHARD ELDRIDGE**



## *Cavell and the Achievement of Selfhood*

### ABSTRACT

In *The World Viewed*, Cavell famously wrote that the value of art lies in its fulfillment of “the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneous granting of otherness).” Building on Cavell’s own encounters with Freud, I will trace the roots of this thought to a generally Hegelian-Freudian understanding of the nature of selfhood as a status concept, elaborate Cavell’s understanding of its fraught but possible achievement, and contrast Cavell’s understanding with the pictures of psychic-practical health on offer in Hegel and Freud.

### BIO

Richard Eldridge is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Swarthmore College. His publications include *On Moral Personhood* (Chicago, 1989), *Leading a Human Life* (Chicago, 1997), *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, 2003), *Literature, Life, and Modernity* (Columbia, 2008), *Images of History* (Oxford, 2016), and *Werner Herzog* (Bloomsbury, 2020). He is also editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford, 2009), *Stanley Cavell* (Cambridge, 2003) and, with Bernie Rhie, of *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies* (Continuum, 2011). He is also the Editor of the Oxford Studies in Philosophy and Literature series, which has already published volumes on Emily Dickinson’s poetry, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Jane Austen’s *Emma*, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and other important works.

**MATTEO FALOMI**

## *The Paradox of Reading*



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## ABSTRACT

Cavell sometimes refers to the “paradox of reading”. While he claims that the paradox is merely apparent, he also implies that working through it is essential for understanding the nature of perfectionist authorship. What, exactly, is this paradox, and why does Cavell claim that it is merely apparent? I will argue that the paradox arises only for texts that aim to teach the reader to think on her own (hence, for a certain kind of perfectionist text). The paradox emerges when we approach these texts through two natural assumptions: first, reading the text means understanding what it says; second, understanding can either be a matter of understanding something imitatively, or a matter of understanding something on one’s own. Once these assumptions are in place, the paradox ensues: If understanding a text means understanding it *on one’s own*, then it seems that I must already be able to think on my own in order to understand the text: but then, the text cannot *teach* me to think on my own; and if understanding the text means to understand the text *imitatively*, then I will not *learn* from the text to think on my own. It will seem, then, that if I can read the perfectionist text, then I will not need to; and if I need to, then I will not be able to. I argue that, in Cavell’s perspective, we can begin to address the paradox by dislodging the two assumptions identified above. Cavell argues that there is a mode of reading – “reading as being read” – which cannot be reduced to understanding what a text says, and which straddles the distinction between understanding on one’s own and understanding imitatively. I will use Cora Diamond’s notion of “imaginative understanding” to illustrate the content of this mode of reading. While this allows us to dissolve the paradox from a theoretical standpoint, a version of the paradox recurs in our relation to Cavell’s text: understanding what Cavell means by “reading as being read” requires us to read Cavell’s own text in this mode. This does not mean that the paradox is reiterated, but rather that its difficulty is shown to be practical: to overcome the paradox of reading means to allow oneself to be read by Cavell’s text.

## BIO

Matteo Falomi is a teaching fellow at the School of Philosophy and Art History at the University of Essex (UK). He has held post-doctoral positions at the University of Oxford and the University of Essex, and has published on Cavell, Wittgenstein and their significance for moral and political philosophy. He is currently working on a book on Cavell’s notion of Moral Perfectionism.



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CHRISTOPHER FENWICK



*Stanley Cavell and Ethical Criticism*

## ABSTRACT

Ethical approaches to literary studies fell out of favour during the surge of anti-humanist poststructuralist theory in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the field of “ethical criticism” has enjoyed a renaissance since the 1990s, with approaches falling into two main camps. Firstly, “deconstructive” critics continue to work within the poststructuralist paradigm, focussing on intersections between Derrida’s work and Levinasian ethics (e.g. Robert Eaglestone and Derek Attridge). Secondly, “neo-humanist” critics have returned to older issues concerning literature’s contribution to moral thought, attempting to employ more robust philosophical argument than older humanists (e.g. Martha Nussbaum and David Parker). Both approaches respond to poststructuralist anti-humanism. The first highlights its implicit ethical elements. The second tries to move beyond it by reframing the discussion in broadly communitarian terms.

This paper considers the importance of Stanley Cavell for the “ethical criticism” debate, within which he has been neglected. I argue that Cavell’s work, in particular his thinking on skepticism and the nature of moral language in *The Claim of Reason* (1979), lets us overcome the shortcomings of both “deconstructive” and “neo-humanist” approaches. Cavell lets us see what is at stake in the anti-humanism to which they respond, itself a form of skepticism. “Deconstructive ethics” perpetuates this skepticism and, while resonating with Cavell’s themes, remains abstractly distant from ordinary language, providing repetitive readings that fail to respond to texts appropriately. By contrast, neo-humanism asserts universalisms that take the skeptic and the fragility of community insufficiently seriously – for instance, in Nussbaum’s figure of the “ideal reader.” They hence offer no satisfying response to anti-humanism and do not provide an adequate portrait of the ethical relations between readers and texts.

By attending to Cavell’s philosophy and readings of literature, we can better think through the possibilities open for ethical criticism after the wave of “skeptical” anti-humanist poststructuralism.



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## BIO

Christopher Fenwick is a doctoral student at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduiertenschule of the Freie Universität Berlin. His thesis considers the status of ethical literary criticism after poststructuralism, focusing on Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond. He completed a BA in English at Queens' College, Cambridge and studied literature and philosophy in Paris while a scholarship holder at the École normale supérieure.

## NIKLAS FORSBERG



### *Two Historical Periods Within One Human Breast*

## ABSTRACT

A central, yet surprisingly neglected, theme that runs through Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* is the historical dimension of human life and language. For Cavell, this theme enters most significantly as the moral and political undertow to the text as a whole, since it sets the frame of how we, people of a community, *convene* in language. The topic of and how changes of our ways of thinking and speaking come about, is, in the literature, normally approached as a more or less strictly linguistic issue, understood mainly in the light of his discussions of how words must allow themselves to be "projected" into new contexts. Such readings downplays, I will argue, the ethico-political dimension to the work as a whole, due to the neglect of the historical dimension. One central passage where this is expressed, and from which I have borrowed my title, is this:

Perhaps the idea of a new historical period is an idea of a generation whose natural reactions — not merely whose ideas or mores — diverge from the old; it is an idea of a new (human) nature. And different historical periods may exist side by side, over long stretches, and within one human breast.

In this paper I will trace the implications if this Cavellian form of co-temporality of moral life in the framework of present moral life. Central to his thinking, is that these forms of conceptual changes of our moral frameworks must come from within. ("Only a priest could have confronted his set of practices with its origins



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so deeply as to set the terms of Reformation.”<sup>1</sup>) Moral advancement, and philosophical understanding of moral change, can thus not be achieved in a “top-down” way. Thus, in this talk we will arrive at Cavell’s thinking by means of a series of examples.

## BIO

Niklas Forsberg is Head of Research at the *Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value*, Department of Philosophy, University of Pardubice, Czech Republic. A large portion of Forsberg’s research deals with problems found at the intersection between theoretical philosophy, ethics and aesthetics. He has written papers about thinkers such as Austin, Cavell, Coetzee, Collingwood, Emerson, Murdoch, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, discussing various topics such as pain, sin, love, language, and literature’s relation to philosophy and philosophical argumentation. He is the author of *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013 [pbk. 2015]) and *Lectures on a Philosophy Less Ordinary: Language and Morality in J. L. Austin’s Philosophy*, forthcoming October 25 2021 (New York: Routledge, 2021).

## FRANCESCO GANDELLINI



*Between Transcendental and Grammatical. Cavell reader of Kant*

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.



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## ABSTRACT

*Proposal.* In his early writings, and in particular in some essays of *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Stanley Cavell stresses the similarities of his approach to philosophical problems, shaped by the later Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations, with Kant's transcendental enterprise. In these works, Cavell moreover lays the groundwork for the subsequent development of his philosophical trajectory, which brings him to confront again Kant (e.g., in *Disowning Knowledge* and *In Quest of the Ordinary*), with a mixed feeling of deference and dissatisfaction. In short, Cavell may be taken to consider Kant as failing to draw the right implications out of the potentially good grounds on which he puts philosophy. Making sense of this rather abstract claim, and of the philosophical relation of Cavell to Kant, constitutes the purpose of my talk. In the first part, I will briefly introduce Kant's prototypical doctrine of Transcendental Idealism and how it is supposed to deal with the 'scandal' of external world scepticism. Following Cavell, it is however possible to argue that, contrary to Kant's intended results, his theory does not offer a plausible response to scepticism, but instantiates a further version of it. In the second part, I will make a comparison between Kant's and Cavell's philosophical methods and, specifically, between the Kantian notion of 'transcendental concepts' or 'categories' and the Cavellian reading of Wittgenstein's 'criteria'. Although Kantian concepts and Cavellian criteria share some similarities – that involve their being 'conditions of possibility' of objects –, they however differ in substantial ways. Finally, drawing on what discussed, I will show that the points of convergence and divergence of Cavell with Kant lead him to continue, by reinterpreting, the Kantian theme of human reason as inherently burdened by questions, which it cannot ignore but is not able to answer, because they transcend its cognitive powers.

## BIO

Francesco Gandellini is a postgraduate student at the University of Southampton. Before joining it, he completed his BA at the University of Trento and his MA at the University of Turin, with a master dissertation on the Paradox of Being in Heidegger's metaphysics. His doctoral work, which is supervised by Prof. Denis McManus, mainly concerns the notions of human finitude and the limits of sense-making, as they are taken up in the philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, elaborated through the doctrine of Transcendental Idealism, and filtered through the lens of Stanley Cavell's interpretation. His main interests include, moreover, the topics of ineffability and inconceivability across the different branches of philosophy.

**RICO GUTSCHMIDT**



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## *Cavell and Theology. Skepticism and the Fallen State of Mankind*

### ABSTRACT

Cavell draws a connection between his reading of skepticism and the notions of God and Original Sin. I argue that Cavell's references to these religious notions mirror structural analogies between the existential dimension of skepticism and central facets of theology. In addition, I refer to recent work on Cavell in which it is argued that his interpretation of skepticism has important connections to theology. Proceeding from these arguments, I demonstrate that Cavell's notion of 'acknowledgment' can be understood as referring to an attitude of humility that strongly resembles faith. Cavell points to this religious dimension of his reading of skepticism when he speaks, for example, of the necessity "[...] to rid us of the prideful craving to be God—I mean to rid us of it, not to replace it with a despair at our finitude" (Claim of Reason (1979), p. 237). The attitude of acknowledgement can be interpreted as a way to overcome the craving to be God without falling into despair; it is thus a form of faith. However, since for Cavell and for theology the longing for God's knowledge belongs to the human condition, neither the Cavellian attitude of acknowledgement nor the religious attitude of faith is a stable position. In theological terms, we remain sinners even in faith. Although the longing for the absolute is unfulfillable and can be appeased through an attitude of acknowledgement or faith, we do not get over this longing once and for all. This is a striking analogy between Cavell's reading of skepticism and the theological notion of the fallen state of mankind.

### BIO

-2009 PhD (philosophy) at the University of Bonn, dissertation on reductionism in physics  
-2015 Habilitation (philosophy) at the Dresden University of Technology, thesis about the late Heidegger and a post-theistic understanding of religiosity  
-publications on skepticism (ancient and modern), Wittgenstein, Cavell, philosophy of religion, negative theology, Heidegger, philosophy of science  
-current research: philosophical reasoning as transformative experience



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-positions at Bonn, Dresden, Chicago, Hamburg, Valparaíso (Chile)  
-currently assistant professor at the University of Konstanz

## GARRY HAGBERG



*Stanley Cavell, the Language of Selfhood, and his Writings on Henry James*

### ABSTRACT

In this talk I will consider (1) some of the observations Cavell makes on the nature of selfhood and the connection of this issue to what he discusses as our relationship to our language, (2) some self-descriptions that James gives in his *The American Scene* and the importance that Cavell sees in them, (3) Cavell's reading of James's "The Jolly Corner" and its psychically divided character Spencer Brydon, and (4) how, drawing from all this, we might understand what one might call Austinian-Cavellian self-descriptive performatives. Cavell drew philosophical insight from literature throughout the body of his work, and this talk will offer a sketch of how, for him, literary sources can illuminate the linguistically negotiated aspects of selfhood.

### BIO

Garry L. Hagberg B.A., M.A., Ph.D., University of Oregon. Postdoctoral research, Cambridge University. Author, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory and Meaning and Interpretation: Wittgenstein, Henry James, and Literary Knowledge*; contributions to *Historical Reflections, Henry James Review, Philosophy, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Journal of Aesthetic Education, Mind, New Novel Review, Philosophical Quarterly, Ethics, Perspectives of New Music, Encyclopedia of the Essay, and Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships and grants: Dartmouth College; Cambridge University Library; British Library, London; St. John's College, Cambridge University.



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PETER HAJNAL



*Tact, Touch, and Playfulness:  
Anti-Cartesian Concepts for a Materialist Aesthetics of Digital Media*

## ABSTRACT

It is fair to say that the concept of tact (*Taktgefühl*) becomes divorced from any straightforward way of relating it to its etymological origins in the Latin word for “touch” from the time of its very introduction into aesthetic discourse by Hermann von Helmholtz in 1862 (Helmholtz and Cahan 1995). (This is perhaps as true of our everyday use of the word, as of its aesthetic use. (Naukkarinen 2014)) This “divorce” is sustained philosophically in Georg Lukács’ adoption of Helmholtz’s concept in his later aesthetics (Lukács 1963) as much as in Gadamer’s ontological critique of Helmholtz’s concept in *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 1998).

My paper will take up a suggestion by Stanley Cavell in *Contesting Tears*, according to which a decisive scene in *Now Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942) effects precisely such a philosophical move in re-connecting the aesthetic/psychological meaning of tactfulness to the sense of touch (in the sense of bodily/tactile) (Cavell 1996). I would like to show, first, that this is not an isolated idea in Cavell’s film criticism, but part of a broader anti-Cartesian aesthetic strategy which ties Cavell’s philosophy of art to the tactile/somatic tradition of aesthetics in general and is further coupled with an idea of second immediacy, or second naïveté which distinguishes it from pragmatist, psychological, or other philosophically inflected ideas about embodiment (such as hermeneutics or Marxism). Finally, I would like to apply these Cavellian ideas of second naïveté and tactility to sketch some ideas about how we can understand digital media and to be indeed “mediating” rather than transcending materiality. (I will focus on Cavell’s remarks on cartoons in *More of the World Viewed* (Cavell 1979) together with his views on gender and film in *Contesting Tears* in the light of recent developments in digital animation, such as *Frozen* (Disney, 2013) and *Moana* (Disney, 2016).

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## BIO

Peter Hajnal received his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Columbia University (2003). From from 2007-2012 he was Co-Dean of the College and of Academic Affairs at the European College of Liberal Arts, Berlin, where he developed the Values Studies approach to liberal education together with Thomas Norgaard. The BA in Value Studies based on this approach was introduced in 2009 and the College (now Bard College, Berlin) received official recognition as a University by the Berlin Senate Department for Education in 2011 under their leadership.

Peter has since held fellowships and taught at UC Irvine and Occidental College, and is now working at Warsaw University, Artes Liberales while residing in Berlin. Peter's current research and teaching interests focus on the development of a conception of aesthetic education inspired by the work of Stanley Cavell relying on a conception of naïve learning. This pedagogy is based, in turn, on Cavell's concept of philosophical criticism wherein the artworks are taken seriously as partners in dialogue with philosophical texts and issues.

## PAUL JENNER

### *Scepticism and the Ordinary in Stanley Cavell and Marilynne Robinson*

## ABSTRACT

My paper compares the philosophies of selfhood and knowledge found in Marilynne Robinson's novels and essays with Stanley Cavell's work on scepticism. Focusing on questions of the ordinary, inwardness, and scepticism, I argue for productive affinities between Robinson and Cavell, characterised by their reactivation of transcendentalist modes. Robinson and Cavell trace what Robinson describes as 'the subtle and splendid process of consciousness in continual encounter' with 'the inexhaustible ordinary' ('Reformation'). Internal to



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this encounter, for Cavell, is the no less inexhaustible threat to the ordinary posed by scepticism, with its bafflements of language and of consciousness. This scepticism is not to be defeated but represents a truth to be acknowledged: that the mind's alignment to world and to others in language is not best described in terms of certainty. The salient opposite of certainty, moreover, for Cavell as for Robinson, is not uncertainty but mystery. Drawing on Cavell's work on scepticism, I unpack Robinson's insight that, whilst 'understanding frays', a language is called for 'that will acknowledge that it does fray, and where it does, and those things we do not understand are not mere gaps to be closed by existing ways of thinking, but are sphinxes and, riddles, their solutions likely to be astonishing and full of implication' ('Language is Smarter'). Exploring questions of acknowledgment in Robinson's four Gilead novels, I contrast Robinson's foregrounding of a mysterious, numinous ordinary with the sceptical discovery of the ordinary traced by Cavell. (Robinson's most recent novel, *Jack*, lends itself to this approach through its emphasis on unsettling, ordinary impulsiveness, aligning with Cavell's conjuring of a sceptical 'impulse'.) Both Robinson and Cavell, further, give a decisive voice to transcendentalism in this conversation of the ordinary, Cavell's claims for the philosophical precision of Emerson and Thoreau's responses to scepticism consonant with Robinson's admiration for the 'rigor with which they fasten on problems of language, of consciousness.' ('The Hum Inside').

## BIO

Paul Jenner is a Lecturer in English in the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Loughborough. His four most recent publications are book chapters on Stanley Cavell, David Foster Wallace, Marilynne Robinson, and the essay form within American philosophy (in *Fictional Worlds and the Moral Imagination* (Palgrave, 2020); *Marilynne Robinson* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming in 2021); *David Foster Wallace in Context* (Cambridge, forthcoming in 2021); and *The Cambridge History of the American Essay* (forthcoming in 2022)).

## VIKTOR JOHANSSON



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*An Exercise in Sámi Philosophising:  
Indigeneity, the Young Child, and an Ethics of Cultural Translation*

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how philosophy is exercised by Sámi children and how such philosophising can be translated to contexts outside the Sámi culture. The paper begins by discussing the ethics of writing about indigenous children's philosophies and the acts of cross-cultural translation suggested in Cavell's writings on Thoreau (Cavell 1992; Saito 2020). The paper suggests that going on from Cavellian translation this involves the writer on indigenous children's philosophies in a philosophical exercise of decolonising cultural translation. Moreover, the paper explores how Pierre Hadot's idea of philosophy as a form spiritual exercises (Hadot, 2020, 1995) can be understood in and through the context of how Sámi philosophies are expressed through translating oral storytelling and poetry into further contexts (Gaski, 2020) showing how exercising indigenous philosophies is inseparable from connecting to particular places in the land (Simpson 2014). In conclusion the paper discusses how this involves non-indigenous philosophers in Thoreauian-Cavellian forms of translation as a form of spiritual exercise when engaging with indigenous children's thinking.

## BIO

Viktor Johansson is docent (associate professor) in pedagogy at Södertörn University in Sweden. He has written on philosophy of education, children's philosophical thinking, early childhood education, children's literature, and ordinary language philosophy. His books include *Literature and Philosophical Play in Early Childhood Education* (Routledge, 2019) and *Filosofi i tidig barndom* [Philosophy in Early Childhood] (Gleerups, 2019). His current research involves indigenous philosophies of education, philosophical aspects of oral story telling traditions, and indigenous children's philosophical thinking, as well as decolonising readings of Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell's philosophies.



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**LYRA KOLI**



## *Stanley Cavell's Untouchable Othello: Scepticism and Suspension of Disbelief*

### **ABSTRACT**

In “The Avoidance of Love”, Stanley Cavell is troubled by a question which never gets completely settled: In what sense is Othello not real? What difference does it make that he is a character in a play, ungraspable for the audience, even if they would rush up onto the stage and attempt to hinder him from murdering Desdemona? In other words: What does it mean that Othello is fictional?

In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell's central question is: What is sceptical doubt an avoidance (and a recognition) of? The conclusion “that scepticism concerning other minds is not scepticism but tragedy” has already been suggested in earlier texts, but the path towards that conclusion is supposedly worked out in the book at hand. Tragedy, however, is a form of fiction. In what might be called the closing scene of his magnum opus, Cavell returns to Othello, and demonstrates how his tragic ending shows us that scepticism concerning other minds is an avoidance of love. But the unease concerning Othello's status as fictional has now somehow been bypassed, and the character is simply presented to the reader as a direct representation of something very real. In this paper, I aim to throw some light on the tension between the epistemology of fiction and the problem of scepticism. Through a discussion of Coleridge's concept of suspension of disbelief, I examine how Cavell's understanding of fiction as teaching us immersion into reality develops Coleridge's notion of poetic faith, a comparison which also highlights some problems with what Cavell calls “literary facts”. Zooming in on the untouchable Othello, who nevertheless finds himself in the hands of the philosopher, I criticise Cavell's famous concluding attempt to question the boundaries between literature and philosophy.

### **BIO**

Lyra Koli is a PhD-student in Philosophy at the Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value, University of Pardubice, Czech Republic. Her dissertation project investigates the ancient quarrel between literature and philosophy, primarily following Iris Murdoch. Lyra Koli is also a fiction writer, who has published a total of six books in Swedish. Her latest book is a auto-fictive meta-novel which explores the relationship between fiction, larp and desire (Blödningen, 2020).



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**FRANCO LA CECLA**



*The influence of Cavell on Anthropology,  
with Special Reference to Veena Das*

**DAVID LAROCCA**



*Reflexiveness and Self-Reflection in Cavell's Memoir*



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## ABSTRACT

Little Did I Know, Cavell's late-in-life memoir, features a series of reflections on his fate as a scholar, philosopher, and writer. Of course, we are also reading a work—his memoir—that exhibits some of the qualities and characteristics of his writing that called out for comment by others (e.g., self-aware prose). Looking at a selection of these passages, and what they suggest about Cavell's aspirations for his work—what it might claim for itself, how it might be of use to others—I aim to explore the extent to which Cavell's meta-critique serves this specific valedictory autobiographical project and the wider reception of philosophy as a mode of autobiography.

## BIO

David LaRocca is the author, editor, or coeditor of a dozen books. Advised by Stanley Cavell during doctoral research, he later edited, annotated, and indexed Cavell's *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (2003) and worked as Cavell's research assistant during the time he was completing *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of a Moral Life* (2004) and *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (2005), and beginning *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (2010). He has contributed chapters to *Stanley Cavell, Literature, and Film: The Idea of America* (2013), *Stanley Cavell and Aesthetic Understanding* (2018), and *Understanding Cavell, Understanding Modernism* (2021). LaRocca has also served as guest editor of a commemorative issue of *Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies* 7 (2019): *Acknowledging Stanley Cavell*, and edited *The Thought of Stanley Cavell and Cinema: Turning Anew to the Ontology of Film a Half-Century after The World Viewed* (2020) and *Inheriting Stanley Cavell: Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (2020). He is the author of *On Emerson* (2003) and *Emerson's English Traits and the Natural History of Metaphor* (2013). His articles have appeared in journals such as *Afterimage*, *Conversations*, *Epoché*, *Estetica*, *Liminalities*, *Post Script*, *Transactions*, *Film and Philosophy*, *The Senses and Society*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies*, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, and *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

## SANDRA LAUGIER (KEYNOTE)



*Reinventing Ordinary Language Philosophy*



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# STANLEY CAVELL: A RETROSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

It may be time to question analytic philosophy's structural ignorance of the methods of ordinary language philosophy. Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say?* upsets the analytic tradition to this end, pursuing a "linguistic phenomenology" that focuses on ordinary language as a resource for describing the world and its differences – that is, "the ordinary world". Cavell thereby entrusts this tradition with a more ambitious and concrete philosophical task, to analyze "what we say" and "The fact that a thing is said; that it is (or can be) said (in certain circumstances) is as significant as what it says".

## BIO

Sandra Laugier, a former student at the Ecole normale supérieure, is Professor of Philosophy at Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris, France, and a Senior Fellow of Institut Universitaire de France.

She is the PI of the ERC Advanced Grant Demoserries.

She has extensively published on ordinary language philosophy (Wittgenstein, Austin, Cavell), moral and political philosophy, gender studies and the ethics of care, and popular culture: film and TV series.

She has translated most of Stanley Cavell's work and is among the editors of his Nachlass.

Her recent publications include :

Why We Need Ordinary Language Philosophy, The University of Chicago Press, 2013

Recommencer la philosophie. Stanley Cavell et la philosophie en Amérique. Vrin, 2014

Etica e politica dell'ordinario, LED, Milano, 2015

Formes de vie (ed. avec Estelle Ferrarese) CNRS éditions, 2020

Le pouvoir des liens faibles (ed. avec Alexandre Gefen) CNRS éditions, 2020

Politics of the Ordinary. Care, Ethics, and Forms of life, Peeters, Leuven 2020

Concepts de l'ordinaire (ed. avec Pierre Fasula), Editions de la Sorbonne, 2021

Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say?* at Fifty (ed. with Greg Chase and Juliet Floyd), Cambridge University Press, 2021

She is a columnist at the French Journal Libération. [www.liberation.fr/auteur/6377-sandra-laugier](http://www.liberation.fr/auteur/6377-sandra-laugier)

## INGEBORG LÖFGREN

*The Truth in Skepticism and the Truth in Formalism:  
Stanley Cavell, Cleanth Brooks, and the Acknowledgment of Interpretative*

## ABSTRACT



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Other-minds skepticism is tragedy disguised as epistemology, Stanley Cavell (1926–2018) tells us in *The Claim of Reason*. What lies at the heart of Othello's deadly jealousy of Desdemona, and his frantic search for proof of her infidelity, is not lack of knowledge but the avoidance of the *vulnerability* of love.

In this paper I will argue (i) that a kindred form of avoidance haunts literary studies. This avoidance, the avoidance of *readerly vulnerability*, results in a form of *interpretive skepticism*. I will furthermore argue (ii) that Cavell addresses this form of skepticism, especially when discussing New Criticism.

Recently, Rita Felski and Toril Moi have both fruitfully appealed to Cavell's work while challenging skeptical attitudes in literary theory and critique. They have, in particular, criticized various forms of *formalism* in this regard (Felski 2015, 2019, 2020 & Moi 2017, 2019).

In this paper I want to enter the current critical discussion about formalism – and formalism's eventual skeptical attitudes towards literature and interpretation – by delving into Cavell's engagement with New Criticism in some central essays in *Must We Mean What We Say?* In doing so I will argue (iii) that Cavell – importantly – never attempts to *refute* or debunk New Critical formalism. Instead, he carefully reminds us of (what I would like to call) “the ‘truth’ in formalism” – a formulation consciously alluding to Cavell's notion of a “truth” in skepticism. This “truth”, however, is easily lost in criticisms of formalism, even when that criticism draws heavily on the works of Cavell. By offering a two-aspect-reading of Cavell's criticism of Cleanth Brooks' “The Heresy of Paraphrase”, I will argue that Cavell not only reveals what is skeptical and flawed in Brooks' formalism, but just as importantly, what is also *right* in it.

References:

Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* [1979], updated edition (New York 1999)

- *Must We Mean What We Say?* [1969], updated edition (Cambridge 2002)

*Disowning Knowledge: In Seven Plays of Shakespeare* [1987], updated edition (Cambridge 2003)

Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago 2020)

- “Identifying with Characters”, in Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, Toril Moi, *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, (Chicago 2019)

- *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago 2015)

Toril Moi, “Rethinking Character”, in Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, Toril Moi, *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, (Chicago 2019)

- *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago 2017).

## BIO

Ingeborg Löfgren is a Swedish postdoctoral literary scholar. Her research interests include the intersection of philosophy and literature, Ordinary Language Philosophy (OLP), Ordinary Language Criticism (OLC), hermeneutics, and literary theory. She is currently working on an OLC-project about the Swedish novelist and activist Sara Lidman (1923–2004) called “Con-science and the Whole: Sara Lidman's Literary Philosophy”. She has published *Interpretive Skepticism: Stanley Cavell, New Criticism, and Literary Interpretation*, Uppsala 2015, and “Two Examples of Ordinary Language Criticism: Reading Conant Reading Rorty Reading Orwell – Interpretation at the Intersection of Philosophy and Literature,” in *New Directions in Philosophy and*



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*Literature*, Ridvan Askin, Frida Beckman, and David Rudrum, (eds.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019). She is currently teaching and researching at the Department of Literature, Uppsala University, Sweden.

**RACHEL MALKIN**

## *Stanley Cavell's Critical Afterlives*

### ABSTRACT

My paper will consider Cavell's imprint – sometimes a matter of overt influence, also something more subterranean – on contemporary literary and Americanist criticism. Amid disagreement over the question of his eccentricity, Cavell's impact on this critical scene is more pervasive than we might expect. Not only this, I will suggest, his thinking acts as a figure in the carpet in influential works where its presence might least be anticipated.

Cavell's master themes resonate with criticism now, and in some cases even directly inspire its turns. These themes include his embrace of undejected moods and tones, his identification of reading and writing as transformative, his desire to work outwards from affective attachments, his refusal to separate the style and content of his thought, a stress on experience as a basis for judgement, and running as a thread through these, a preoccupation with the ordinary, and with practices of attention.

I will look at some significant examples of the ways Cavell is inherited, including the legacies of his project for the approaches of agenda-setting critics in the field of (mostly North American) literary and cultural criticism. In doing so, I will ask what is carried along with this influence. A key instance is a revived role for the thinking of Ralph Waldo Emerson. But there are less evident entailments that my paper will aim to highlight. I will also ask what risks we run in inheriting Cavell. My paper will conclude by looking at the ways Cavell's more dissenting disciples put his concepts and themes to work in new contexts, specifically pushing them in the direction of what could be considered his own project's blind spots, comprised attachments, and omissions. This mode of inheritance, which assimilates and absorbs while breaking free, could perhaps be called the most faithful.

### BIO

I have held lecturing posts in English and American Literature at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and am currently a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. I have been researching Cavell and publishing on his work since undertaking a PhD at Cambridge which contextualises his writing in light of the work of North American contemporaries. The revised version of this project is forthcoming as a book with Edinburgh University Press. My research interests include philosophy's role in relation to American culture (art/literature/film), afterlives of American romanticism, experiential aesthetics, the politics of the 'ordinary', C20th American fiction, and intellectual history. Essays in progress consider Cavell alongside the poet Claudia



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Rankine and the critic Sianne Ngai. I am also completing an article on Wallace Stevens' idea of joy, and the poet's links to Henri Bergson.

**ANDREA MAISTRELLO**

*Ordinary vs Commonplace:  
Cavell and Danto on Everydayness and Art*

## ABSTRACT

Explicit comparisons between Cavell and Danto are very few. In their early writings, both reacted to Andy Warhol's works: what for Danto was revealing, for Cavell was fraudulent. According to Cavell, "our serious art is produced under conditions which Kierkegaard announces as those of apostleship, not those of genius". The apostle's position characterizes in detail the genuine modern artist as someone "pulled out of the ranks by a message which he must, on pain of loss of self, communicate". Art thus produced, i.e., according to the inner urgency of conveying a message the artist himself has no clear access to, leads Cavell to elaborate his celebrated notion of a medium as a material-in-certain-characteristic-applications. In this perspective, Cavell dismisses Pop Art as non-serious painting, not because painting is not forced to change, "but because the way it changes is determined by the commitment to painting as an art", as "an effort not to break, but to keep faith with tradition". In Danto, too, religious language appears frequently and admittedly, but it differs profoundly in significance. Commonplace transfigured, as *Brillo Box*, do is the transformation of an ordinary thing into an artwork as, in religion, an ordinary human being is disclosed to his followers as a divine being; however this implies only that "it is the everyday world of reassuring things [...] in which we should seek our peace and find our happiness". On Cavell's reading, the return to the everyday happens not in terms of a quietistic or hedonistic confirmation of the world as delivered by our common sense, but as an exploration of the uncanniness of the everyday. The actual work of the artist-apostle on his medium, continuing and countering its traditional (ordinary) conventions, corresponds to the rediscovery of the inherent, unheard-of potentiality of the medium itself, hence, of art.

## BIO

I got a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Padua in 2016 on the philosophy of Wittgenstein and his influence on Anglo-American aesthetics. I was a visiting student at the University of Berkeley in 2001/02 and studied with Richard Wollheim, eventually his philosophy was the subject of my dissertation thesis. I published several papers on peer-reviewed journals, such as *Studi di Estetica* and *Philosophical Inquiries*. I was invited to an international aesthetic conference (temporarily cancelled due to Covid-19) with a talk on the concept of the artistic medium in Cavell's and Wollheim's philosophies. I was one of the editors of *Universa – Recensioni di Filosofia*, the journal of the graduate students of the University of Padua (2013-16). I translated



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some academic papers for *Discipline Filosofiche* (XV, 2, 2005 – *Elementi di estetica analitica*) and served recently as peer-reviewer for *Studi di Estetica*.

**LISA MCKEOWN**



*Acknowledging Passionate Utterances*

## ABSTRACT

To date, prominent attempts to theorize the injustice of misunderstood refusals - stemming from but not limited to Langton's application of speech act theory to argue that pornography silences women - has been overly narrow. This approach takes two things for granted. One main assumption underpinning these views is that if we can just locate the specific conventions, or beliefs, or concepts, then we can locate the problem. Correspondingly, if we get rid of the wrong beliefs, or concepts, or stereotypes, then we can prevent such injustice, or at least minimize it. The second, related assumption, is that a kind of mutual transparency is even possible. Cavell's reflections in his essay *Passionate Utterances* on the 'disorders of desire' offers an overlooked set of considerations, namely that any communicative dynamic requires constant, active interpretation, and that the force of our words in highly charged emotional contexts cannot, by definition, be entirely within our control. I argue that surprisingly, he doesn't connect his thoughts here with his previous discussions of acknowledgement from *Must We Mean What We Say*. Acknowledgement, I argue, is a practical, emotional skill that emphasizes the importance of responding correctly despite never achieving perfect transparency - forming the guiding ideal for successful exchanges, and providing a necessary lens through which to view systematic, gendered miscommunications.

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I am completing my PhD in Philosophy at the New School for Social Research, under the supervision of Alice Crary. To date, my work bridges the ostensibly disparate areas of feminism, phenomenology, and ordinary language philosophy.

In my doctoral thesis, *Interpreting Illocutions: Rethinking How Speech Acts*, I analyze current theories about why women's refusals are systematically misunderstood in sexual or romantic contexts. I argue that current theories presume interpretation functions formulaically, as a function of conventions, beliefs and stereotypes. Through a careful examination of other examples taken from literature, philosophy, and contemporary conversations arising from #MeToo, I argue that the problem is not merely toxic conventions or concepts, but the ways that women's very subjectivity is obscured in these contexts.

I have also recently started writing in the areas of Wittgenstein, Cavell, and humour, with a continued interest in the significance of performativity.

## PHILIP MILLS



### *Poetic Perlocutions: Poetry after Cavell after Austin*

#### ABSTRACT

Although perlocution has received more interest lately, it seems to be the great unthought of Austin's theory. The privilege he gives to illocution over perlocution, rather than being a necessity of his linguistic theory, is a rather contestable philosophical position. In this paper, I argue that Austin's underestimation of perlocution is one of the reasons for the exclusion from his consideration of poetic and other so-called 'parasitical' uses of language. This exclusion has caused quite some controversy, epitomised in the famous Derrida-Searle debate, and it seems that poetry remains a challenge to ordinary language philosophy nowadays. Unlike Searle, I do not believe that calling on the fiction/nonfiction distinction helps in defending Austin against Derrida's attack insofar as this distinction is far from being obvious in the case of poetic utterances. If a lyric poem is, following a rather general definition, the expression of the poet's own emotions, how can it be fictional?



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Cavell's reconceptualisation of perlocution as 'passionate utterances' however provides a more fruitful theoretical framework to approach poetic phenomena. Reading Austin through a Cavellian lens offers keys to make space for the parasitic uses Austin rejected. There are three parts to my argument: first, I briefly recast the illocution/perlocution distinction and outline two ways of revaluating it: by abandoning it or by inverting the hierarchy; second, I elaborate on the second option by drawing on Cavell's conception of passionate utterances; third, I show how poetic utterances fare with this theory of perlocution.

## BIO

Philip Mills is a postdoctoral fellow in French Literature at the University of Lausanne. He completed his PhD in Philosophy on Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and poetics at Royal Holloway, University of London. Rooted in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical thought, his work lies at the intersection of philosophy of language, aesthetics, and poetry. There are two intertwined axes to his research: on the one hand, a philosophical investigation of how poetry disrupts ordinary language and affects our ways of being in the world; on the other hand, an exploration of the poetics of the ordinary at play in contemporary French poetry.

## STEPHEN MULHALL (KEYNOTE)



*Scepticism and Modernism, Philosophy and Literature*

## ABSTRACT

In this lecture, I want to explore the ways in which the work of Stanley Cavell (viewed in conjunction with work by the theorist, historian and critic of art, Michael Fried) uses the idea of theatricality to conceptualize the complex interconnections between the sceptical impulse as it expresses itself in modern philosophy and in modern art, and the strategies of acknowledgement that aspire to overcome that impulse in both cultural



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fields. In this way, I hope to show that the respect these thinkers show for modernism, within and without the arts of painting, sculpture and literature, has not been rendered obsolete or otiose by the cultural advance of postmodernism.

## BIO

Prof. Stephen Mulhall is the Russell H. Carpenter Fellow in Philosophy at New College, Oxford. His research interests include Wittgenstein; Heidegger, Sartre and Nietzsche; the philosophy of religion; and the relations between philosophy and the arts (especially literature and film).

## FRANCESCO PESCI



*Cavell on the distinctiveness of moral language*

## ABSTRACT

In the past ten years or so, within analytic philosophy, there has been a resurgence of interest in what, following Williams (1985), we now call ‘thick ethical terms’. The interest has spurred from novel arguments for their reducibility. The renovated debate has seen a polarization in two camps. On one side we have the separationists, who argue that thick terms can still be reduced to a nonevaluative component and a purely evaluative component. On the other we have the nonseparationists, who argue that some of our thick terms express irreducibly evaluative concepts. In this talk I argue that the current debate on thick terms is governed on both sides by a twofold assumption, which I call representationalism. Representationalism says that i) the main point of ordinary moral language is to “get things right” about the moral situation and that ii) philosophy can elucidate the meaning of moral sentences by articulating their correctness conditions. Under this assumption the question of the separability of thick terms is an important and live one, because it is a case of the deeper question of what, in general, are the correctness conditions of our moral language.



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I then offer, with Cavell, reasons for thinking that representationalism about ordinary moral language is wrong. Using an example from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* I show that ordinary moral language has (at least) a different point, which does not have to do with "getting things right" about the moral situation, but rather with articulating our moral positions to one another, by making particular moral moves in particular contexts of utterance. I hence suggest that understanding the particular moral move and point of a speaker in a context is essential to understand what she means with her moral words. I then argue that, even when we do "get things right" by using the correct moral terms, we do not fully understand what we are saying without understanding the particular move we are making with those words. But if all of this is on the right track, it follows that neither separationism nor nonseparationism is true of ordinary moral language and that the current discussion about the separability of thick terms is moot. The contemporary debate is hence, at best, a debate about an "artificial" moral language, not the language of ordinary moral agents.

## BIO

I did my undergraduate studies in Philosophy at Sapienza University of Rome. I have worked on the History of Early Analytic Philosophy (I have a paper titled "Epistemic Realism in Bradley and Early Moore" just published in the *Journal for the History of Analytic Philosophy*) and my main area of interest is moral philosophy. I am currently a Ph.D candidate at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I taught classes in Logic, Biomedical Ethics and Philosophy of Mind. My dissertation is titled "Thick concepts and the search for ethical intelligibility" and it defends a Cavellian view of moral language starting from the puzzles of the contemporary debate on thick concepts. I have given talks across Europe on the topic of thick concepts.

## MICHAEL RAEBER



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*Democratic Visibility: The import of Cavell's aesthetics of film  
to a political philosophy of democratic visibility*

## ABSTRACT

The work of Stanley Cavell has attracted the attention of many theorists of political philosophy and political theory over the past 20 years, who have been drawn to the diversity of themes inherent in his writings. Among these themes, Cavell's interest in voice and conversation as modes of democratic participation has received most of the attention (e.g. Markell 2003; Norris 2006, 2017; Norval 2007, 2012; Zerilli 2016). However, while voice, deliberation and conversation are central modes of human interaction to Cavell, they do constitute only one dimension of democratic participation in his writings. Another important but neglected dimension concerns his explorations of the ontology and the experience of viewing and visibility (Panagia 2020; Dienstag 2016). By attending to Cavell's writings on the aesthetics of film, particularly *The World Viewed*, I want to highlight this dimension and suggest it as a source of reflection of the ontological and aesthetic conditions of democratic participation. In particular, I am interested in his reflections on viewership as absorption, and in how this relates to conditions of social and political visibility. For Cavell, the experience of viewing moving images on a screen includes an act of becoming absorbed in what is seen and an act of acknowledging what is seen that must do without criteria of verification or confirmation. This experience makes available what would be key features of a practice of visibility in a democratic society that promotes inclusive participation, namely, on the one hand, the display of a plurality of aspects of the ordinary and, on the other hand, the expansion of a perceptual disposition of people's 'inner eyes' that guides their ways of seeing or being blind to these aspects (or "souls"). I will situate these reflections on the experience of seeing and visibility in Cavell's ethics of acknowledgment, his modernist aesthetics, and his engagement with the skeptical predicament, and ask what we can learn from them for a notion of democratic visibility

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## BIO

I am currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Political Science UCLA. My doctoral degree is in Philosophy from the University of Zurich (May 2016, “summa cum laude”). I have been teaching practical philosophy at the undergraduate and graduate level in Switzerland. My work broadly speaking focuses on normative and critical political and moral philosophy at the intersection of continental and analytic traditions, on philosophical pragmatism, theories of democracy (aesthetics and politics, political epistemology), and the history of political thought. My submission to the conference is part of a larger project of mine in which I reflect with Cavell, Wittgenstein, Rancière, Foucault, and Honneth on how practices and imaginaries of (in)visibility and narratives of temporality create conditions for participation in democratic societies.

## DAVID RUDRUM



### *Stanley Cavell and performance philosophy*

## ABSTRACT

It is often claimed – quite rightly – that Stanley Cavell’s sizeable contributions to philosophy cannot be parted from his insightful commentaries on culture and the arts. In particular, his writings on literature have attracted considerable praise for the revelatory power of their skilled close readings of text. However, without wishing to detract from Cavell’s stature as a masterful reader with a flair for textuality, this emphasis has arguably obscured the extent to which Cavell is also a redoubtable philosopher of *performance*.

Cavell repeatedly turns to short discussions of the aesthetic nature of performance. He debates the nature of audiences, the conventions of theatricality, and pauses his essay on *King Lear* to ask why audience members can’t save Desdemona from Othello. He attempts, in various ways and from different angles, to understand how the conventions and practices involved in performance differ from the conventions and practices of the



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ordinary and the everyday, as much as they are bound up with one another. In fact, he can be read as an important forerunner of today's turn to performance philosophy – or so this paper will argue.

Performance philosophy is an exciting and growing new field of research. Yet it has only rarely been open to influence from Anglo-American philosophers. This paper will set out to demonstrate that Cavell's writings go some way towards filling this gap. After all, Cavell's engagements with literature are more concerned with drama than with any other genre – covering Shakespeare, Beckett, Ibsen, Shaw, and an assortment of Greek tragedies. His work is also famously preoccupied with another artform grounded in performance – film. His interest in the performance arts additionally extends to discussions of music and dance (specifically, a routine by Fred Astaire).

This paper will demonstrate that Cavell engages with his material not solely as texts to be read, but as performances to be encountered and experienced. It will seek to establish the case for Cavell as a philosopher of the ontological, aesthetic, and ethical aspects of performance as concept and as practice.

## BIO

David Rudrum is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Huddersfield. He is the author of *Stanley Cavell and the Claim of Literature* and has published a number of books and articles on the interdisciplinary relationships between philosophy and literature.

## PIOTER SHMUGLIAKOV



*Cavell and evental thought*

## ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore the structural relations of Cavell's philosophy to the notion of truth-generating event, conceived broadly enough to encompass its iterations in Heidegger and Badiou. Event in the relevant sense is an occurrence of radical ontological spontaneity, rupturing the order preceding it and generating a new framework of intelligibility. According to Badiou, there are four domains in which events of this kind take



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place: art, love, science, and politics. It is my contention that Cavell's philosophical contribution on the first two subjects is implicitly premised on an evental ontology. In both cases the evental structure is signaled by Cavell's characteristic rhetoric of *invention*. Cavell's theory of artistic medium features a paradoxical notion of medium-creation: the essence of the medium, Cavell claims, is established, rather than applied, in a genuine artistic instance. Cavell's theory of marriage features a very similar structure: what constitutes a marriage is not a concept pre-given to its practice in a particular case, but rather something that each couple must "invent for themselves." Reading Cavell against Badiou and Heidegger enables to clarify why such invention should be taken not as a matter of subjective volition, but rather as subject's constitutive receptivity to the evental occurrence. "The medium," as Cavell puts it, "should be invented *out of itself*," whereas the conversation of marriage cannot be practiced just with anyone of sufficient merit, but must originate in a preceding formation of the unique amorous bond. Explicating the evental foundations of Cavellian thought, I wish to suggest, is a productive strategy of inheriting his philosophical legacy.

## BIO

Pioter Shmugliakov is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of Philosophy of Freie Universität Berlin. He holds a PhD from Tel Aviv University, where he has defended a dissertation on Heidegger's philosophy of art. His current research, conducted in aesthetics, film-philosophy, and philosophy of love, revolves around the intersections between Cavell and the Continental tradition – specifically, Heidegger, Badiou, and de Duve. Shmugliakov is also the author of two published books of poetry in Russian and Hebrew under the pen name Petia Ptah.

## DAVID SEBASTIANI

### *Release Formulae: Improvisation and the Dream of Spontaneity*

## ABSTRACT

In *Music discomposed*, Stanley Cavell penned an insightful passage on the apparent paradox behind our conception of improvisation, an activity in which we feel the possibility to unleash our expression by relying on formulae. My speech dwells on that paradox. It starts by assessing the gap between the satisfaction springing from improvisation, which is closely linked to the political action of establishing a living community, and the inveterate, empty dream of spontaneity. Then, I enquire if and how the oxymoronic situation of perceiving freedom under the guidance of grammars and formulae can be highlighted by poetry, a domain where language and musical expression are more than anywhere else intertwined. In doing so, I shall make reference to some contemporary American authors, such as Yusef Komunyakaa, whose works are indelibly marked by jazz, and thereby the political and poetical role of improvisation. This will prompt some



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reflections on the peculiar status of poetical expression and its tendency to challenge ordinary languages without losing the possibility of being acknowledged that their grammars promise.

## BIO

David Sebastiani has just completed a Ph.D. at the Scuola Normale Superiore – Italy. His doctoral dissertation, entitled «Signs of Hypocrisy. Inner Spaces, Language, and Action», proposes a radical revisitation of the notion of hypocrisy, which he uses a hermeneutical tool to investigate the gap between the purported inner world of the human being and the external world in pre-modern and modern Mediterranean cultures. Most recently, he also worked on Elizabethan theater and modernist literature.

## DAVIDE SPARTI

*Projective imagination. Cavell and the improvisatory dimension of language.*

## ABSTRACT

A language everywhere bounded and governed by a set of syntactic and semantic rules, always intolerant towards unusual or unexpected usages, would not be a language at all (Wittgenstein would rather call it a philosophical requirement). Even the very distinction between usual and unusual, expected or unexpected moves cannot be drawn a-priori, as if what can be said (correctly, meaningfully) was predetermined once and for all. The aim of my paper is to show how Cavell, by way of Wittgenstein, exposes and invites us to overcome this picture of language. By concentrating on the ability to put words to new uses (“word projection”), Cavell offers a challenging account of how we operate with words, conceiving language in more improvisatory terms as always open and vulnerable to unforeseeable turns. As occurrences of linguistic usages that do not reproduce established practices, and that nevertheless do not appear to be aberrations but rather instances of achieved communication, projections put the picture of language as a pre-structured system of rules into question. Language is no longer conceived as a self-functioning semantic system but as a field of communicative possibilities expressed by individuals, a field in which the personal aspect, that is, the fact that where there is language, *we speakers are involved*, finds its place and indeed emphasis. This insight about ordinary language (this shift in perspective, from an idealized picture to the rough ground of practice, with its constitutive degree of contingency, indeterminacy, surprise and unpredictable shifts), though, is only the first half of the story. Ordinary language (everyday use) corresponds both to the place where philosophical statements must be relocated (their home, so to speak) *and* the seat of our disappointment and thus, at least potentially, of our skepticism (Cavell calls skepticism the repudiation of the ordinary). The skeptic (in us) desires more from ordinary language, something that language as practice, play, improvisation and projection, seems incapable of securing. Thus we are back to our starting point. We could object that there are no structures, detached from us, that impersonally guarantee agreement, attunement and consonance



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(*übereinstimmung* as Wittgenstein calls it) hence successful communication. There is (only) our mutual involvement, the constant responsibility to find common ground. But this conclusion makes skepticism circularly re-emerge. We are thus left with a (never ending) therapeutic movement.

## BIO

PhD at the European University Institute, fellow of the Humboldt Stiftung and of the Collegium Budapest, Davide Sparti has written extensively on epistemology of the social sciences, matters of identity, improvised action, Wittgenstein, Cavell and Foucault. After having taught at the Universities of Milano and Bologna, he is currently professor at the University of Siena.

## DOMENICO SPINOSA

*Not only Wittgenstein and Thoreau.*

*About some philosophical and literary refractions in The World Viewed*

## ABSTRACT

«To orient my remarks about curriculum, I begin by aligning some quotations from two texts that I find repay study. I had to finish an earlier book about the topics I discuss here - *The World Viewed* - before I realized how much I was indebted to Robert Warshaw's *The Immediate Experience* and how much my book might have gained had I known in time of Walter Benjamin and his essays and been able then to place myself in debt to them, especially to *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*». So, in 1981, Cavell wrote in one of his essays entitled *Film in the University*. This contribution intends on one side to pay attention to what are some of the most meaningful philosophical and literary sources to which Cavell addresses his study on cinema of 1971, then 1979<sup>2</sup> and on the other side to show how by connecting them to each other Cavell founded a methodology that is still a reference today for the film studies.

## BIO

Insegna Estetica presso il Dipartimento di Scienze Umane dell'Università degli Studi dell'Aquila; ha insegnato presso l'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera-Milano, dell'Aquila, di Sassari, di Venezia.

Fa parte del comitato direttivo di "Parol. Quaderni d'arte e di epistemologia" (Mimesis ed.) e della collana "Cinema ed estetica cinematografica" (Aracne ed.); è membro del comitato scientifico della collana "Studies in Neo-Kantianism" (FedOA - Federico II University Press) e della segreteria di redazione di "Archivio di storia della cultura" (Liguori ed.). Collabora, inoltre, con "Estetica. Studi e ricerche" (Il Mulino ed.) e "Segnocinema".



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Ha scritto saggi sul pensiero di Walter Benjamin, Ernst Cassirer, Hermann Cohen, Karl Jaspers, Hugo Münsterberg, Jean-Luc Nancy, Susan Sontag, Jakob von Uexküll come anche sul cinema di Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog.

## TEMENUGA TRIFONOVA



### *The 'Ordinary' in Cavell*

#### ABSTRACT

Stanley Cavell is known for a kind of writing in which philosophy, memories of cinema, and personal memories are intricately connected. This accounts perhaps for the difficulties many Cavell scholars encounter when they attempt to disentangle the ways in which film informs Cavell's philosophical concerns from the ways in which philosophy—particularly ordinary language philosophy—has shaped Cavell's experience of, and writing on, cinema. Cavell's concern with ordinary language philosophy is evident in all of his major works, from *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1969), through *The World Viewed* (1971), to *In Quest of the Ordinary* (1988). The important role Wittgenstein and Austin have played in the evolution of Cavell's thought on cinema is well known. However, it seems to me that more often than not Cavell's writing—especially his engagement with questions of intention, responsibility, and ethics—does not clearly demonstrate the connection between ordinary language philosophy and cinema in a meaningful i.e., non-tautological way. In my paper I will consider some instances of Cavell's conflation of the ways in which words mean (ordinary language philosophy) with the ontology of cinema (cinema as a kind of language), with the notion of the everyday/the banal, and with one particular aspect of the film medium, movement (specifically incidental and insignificant gestures that supposedly reveal 'the physiognomy of the ordinary').



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## BIO

Temenuga Trifonova is Associate Professor of Cinema and Media Studies at York University in Toronto. She is the author of *The Figure of the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema* (Bloomsbury, 2020), *Warped Minds: Cinema and Psychopathology* (Amsterdam UP, 2014), *The Image in French Philosophy* (Rodopi, 2007) and editor/contributor of *Screening the Art World* (forthcoming from Amsterdam UP), *Contemporary Visual Culture and the Sublime* (Routledge, 2017) and *European Film Theory* (Routledge, 2008).

## TIMUR UÇAN



### *Climate Justice, Skepticism and Perfectionism*

## ABSTRACT

During the talk I would be honoured to be able to give, I would seek to establish how the philosophy of Stanley Cavell enables us to understand and address better, the necessarily both social and ecological crisis that lives cross. Indeed, that a recent report on climate change made by the United Nations High Commissioner in 2019 explicitly mentions a scenario of “climate apartheid” clearly manifest our raising consciousness of internal relations between actions, attitudes and practices that drove us into current climate emergency and those that were constitutive of apartheid. In agreement with advances made by intersectionalist and decolonialist studies, I want to explicit how, in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, *The Claim of Reason*, and *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, Cavell brought out that consciousness of the infinite character of the task in which humanity consists, of our inherent inter-relatedness as humans, provides us with means to comprehend both that the



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current crisis could not have been possible and intelligible without blindness with respect to other minds or souls, and that this is exactly that which the current crisis appeals to dispense with. In order to do so, I aim to argue for the relevance of perfectionism as characterized by Cavell to approach the very notion of climate justice, firstly to understand better discrepancies between local grassroots initiatives and resistances in their relations to global finalities and institutions, and secondly to contribute to the delineation and the realization of necessary structural and transformational changes. Drawing elements from the philosophical conceptions of action of Anscombe, Sartre and Wittgenstein to elucidate aspects of the philosophy of Cavell and contribute to the development of common philosophical grounds independently from alleged divides, I would argue that climate justice is future justice, once it will have integrated ecocide amongst crimes against humanity.

## BIO

Timur Uçan teaches Philosophy at Bordeaux Montaigne University and is a member of the SPH research Laboratory. He defended an MA dissertation on the limits of language in the works of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein in 2008. He started a joint Ph.D between the University of East Anglia and Bordeaux Montaigne University in 2011 and wrote a dissertation that he defended in 2016 on the issue of solipsism in the early works of Sartre and Wittgenstein. He contributed to the edition of *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology* (Routledge, 2018) and *Post-Truth* (Nordic Wittgenstein Review, 2019). He published about the philosophy of Sartre (Hermann, 2013 ; Les Belles Lettres, 2015). After a research stay at Leipzig University (July 2019), he carries on research on Philosophy of Action, Ecology, Epistemology, Language, Logic, and Politics, attempting to find within diverse traditions – such as Analytic Philosophy, Phenomenology and Pragmatism – conceptual resources to confront climatic and ecological emergency.

## ANDREA VAILATI



*The ethopoietic of acknowledgment:  
Cavell's Hollywood comedy of remarriage meets Foucault's Hermeneutics of the subject*



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## ABSTRACT

The starting point of my paper is the relationship between Cavell's studies on the comedy of remarriage and Foucault's reflections on ethopoietic models of knowledge. In particular, I want to investigate the link between Cavell's investigations on skepticism and perfectionism applied in the seven comedies he analyzes in *Pursuits of Happiness*. *The Hollywood comedy of remarriage* and the *hic et nunc* perspective of ethopoietic knowledge and acknowledge proposed by Foucault in response to Platonic and Christian models.

These films - and more generally a certain type of cinema framed by Cavell - have the capacity to re-create existential and cognitive scenarios without necessarily binding themselves to a claim of objective and universal knowledge. In them, the relationship with the world and with otherness does not arise as a relationship of well-founded knowledge, but rather the world is to be accepted, as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged.

The re-discovery of the Ordinary that Cavell investigates in several of his works, becomes in the filmic journey "cognitive" essentially in its sense of ethical relationship to the world and to the other. It is, therefore, ethopoietic acknowledgement.

The path of remarriage is a rediscovery of the world and of oneself for the first time in a conscious way, a "getting married" for the first time after having recognized the other and having been recognized, succeeding in making of one's own acquired knowledge a way to produce and perfect one's own *ethos*: it is the achieved ethopoiesis, in the sense of what Foucault defined as "taking possession of ourselves right there where we are".

## BIO

Andrea Vailati was born in Bari on 29/05/1995. He graduated in Philosophy at the University of Milan with a thesis titled "Ethics and Qualunquism" and later in Philosophy of the Contemporary World at the University Vita-Salute San Raffaele with a thesis titled "The Aesthetic Meaning - Cinema between *poiesis* and heterotopia". Both degrees obtained with honors. In 2016 he founded [www.artesettima.it](http://www.artesettima.it) (ISSN: 2532-4217), a webzine that studies cinema as a hermeneutic place for a rediscovery of philosophical issues in contemporaneity. In 2020 the magazine had one million views. He has held workshops on how to approach education through cinema at secondary schools such as the Liceo Aristosseno, in Taranto. He was a member of the jury for the critics' award during the 2018 edition of the Ravenna Nightmare Film Festival. He held discussions during a showcase for the 100th year anniversary of Fellini's birth at the Beltrade Cinema, in Milan.



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**CATHERINE WHEATLEY**



*Coming to Wonder: Stanley Cavell and Film's Renewal of Vision*

## ABSTRACT

In his lecture 'The Good of Film', first presented at the Center for Human Values, Princeton University in 2001, Cavell outlines what he understands to be film's affinity with a certain conception of the good, one that has to do with transformation and Emersonian perfectionism. To put it very simply, for Cavell, films, or at least good films, work out ideas in Emersonian perfectionism – the striving to be the best self one can be – and in working through these ideas on screen they encourage the spectator to do the same. In the course of sketching out these ideas, and the origins of his interest in perfectionism, Cavell describes himself as “coming to wonder.” Upon first encountering it, I found this phrase particularly striking. What might it mean, I asked myself, to “come to wonder”? What might it mean in the context of film? Is Cavell describing here a sudden arrival at a moment of intellectual inquiry or aesthetic appreciation – an experience of being wonderstruck? Certainly, he seemed to me to be evoking a familiar experience, and one that resonated profoundly with my memories of watching certain scenes and moments. This talk offers some thoughts on what it might mean, then, to come to wonder at the cinema, and what good it might serve, drawing connections between Cavell, feminist phenomenology and the nascent discipline of attention studies, to ask how film might help to see the world and those who inhabit as if anew.

## BIO

Catherine Wheatley is Reader in Film and Visual Culture at King's College London and currently a visiting fellow at Cinepoetics – Centre for Advanced Film Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. She has published widely on questions pertaining to film, ethics and aesthetics, and is the author of four monographs, the most



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recent of which is *Stanley Cavell and Film: Scepticism and Self-Reliance at the Cinema*. Catherine also writes regularly for *Sight & Sound* magazine, and is a convenor of the BFI's Philosophical Screens series.

**ATHANASSIA WILLIAMSON**

*Skepticism and the Novel: A Dialogue*

## ABSTRACT

In *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), György Lukács associates the creation of the novel form with a foreclosing of transcendental value that he sees exemplified in Immanuel Kant's critical enterprise. In Lukács's theory, the loss of speculative possibility registered in Kant's project migrates to the novel. Skepticism is kept at bay by the novel's created totality, while a more controlled or "tactful" skepticism is preserved as the novel's essential and dynamic operation—that is, the novel's ironic and critical relation to its created whole. Stanley Cavell never considered novels (and in particular the novelistic treatment of skepticism) with the intensity that he might have. Yet in this early work of Lukács, one finds a vision of anti-foundational skepticism that anticipates themes of Cavell's—made a little ironic, perhaps, by Cavell's own cursory foiling of the later Lukács's rejection of Beckettian modernism in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1958). In *The Theory of the Novel*, the novelistic intolerance of certain styles of negativity conforms to an ideal of prosaic impartiality and tactfully limited passivity that problematizes forms of thought that are deemed too subjectively internalizing and (with Kant's system as an example) excessively formalizing. This problematic of balance or fluctuating settlement of formalization and passivity repeats itself in Cavell's discussion of skepticism. Consider those moments where Cavell faults Kant for his excessive formalization of experience, and where, in *The Claim of Reason* (1979), he privileges Wittgenstein's treatment of skepticism (over existentialism's) for its "continuous effort at rebalance."

Drawing on my reading of Lukács, Cavell, and Kant, I argue that considering a "dialogue" about skepticism between Lukács and Cavell enriches the inquiry into the particular challenges presented by anti-foundational skepticism, and the various ways in which that skepticism gets apprehended, ameliorated, expressed, and with what consequences.

## BIO

Athanassia (Nassia) Williamson is a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature at New York University, where she is writing a dissertation on "Skepticism and the Novel: Affinities of Philosophy and Narrative After Idealism." She has research interests in 19th-century (especially Anglo-American) literature, literature and philosophy, intellectual history, critical theory, and the novel, and has published work on the moral philosophies of George Eliot and Emmanuel Levinas.



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**YO-RAN YANG**



*The Sense of Therapy: Reflections on Glück and Cavell*

## ABSTRACT

What is the relation between art and pain? And more specifically, between the art of writing—philosophy and poetry—and healing? What therapeutic value does the art of writing possess in the face of suffering? In this piece, I explore a challenge to the therapeutic power of writing Louise Glück articulates in her essay “The Culture of Healing.” Drawing on Wittgenstein and Cavell’s conceptions of philosophy as therapy, I attempt to trace some of the limits, perils, and promises of writing in the face of suffering.

## BIO

Yo-ran Yang is currently a PhD candidate in philosophy at Georgetown University. Previously, he obtained his MPhil at the University of Cambridge and his BA from Tufts University. He is currently interested in the philosophy of language and social epistemology, and focused on issues of conceptual loss, conceptual change, and hermeneutical injustice—and his approach is influenced by ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology, and more specifically, by the understanding of concepts and of language that emerges from those traditions.



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