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## **Stanley Cavell, Classical Hollywood and the Constitution of the Ordinary (With Notes on Billy Wilder)**

**Abstract:** When in his Tanner lectures Stanley Cavell sets out to define Ordinary Language Philosophy or – rather – to explain how it demarcates philosophy as such, he takes up psychoanalytic literary criticism in order to articulate the terms of this task. Yet the constitution of the ordinary, in Cavell, is never quite accessed from within psychoanalysis-cum-literature alone; instead, it takes another relation, that of psychoanalysis and literature to classical Hollywood, for Cavell to address the ordinary in terms of its constitution. I propose to discuss this complex using two films by Billy Wilder as a passageway to Cavell's analytic procedure.

**Keywords:** Stanley Cavell, classical Hollywood, the ordinary, psychoanalysis, Gilles Deleuze, Billy Wilder

“Do you have a good ending for this thing?”  
Billy Wilder

### **1.**

There is a distinction structural to Roland Barthes' vision of American cinema.<sup>1</sup> It surfaces in his essay on Greta Garbo, when he analyzes Garbo in the register of language, and then observes that her “singularity was of the order of the concept,” while the singularity of Audrey Hepburn “is of the order of the substance.”<sup>2</sup> Put otherwise, “[t]he face of Garbo is an Idea, that of Hepburn, an Event.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The research for this essay was supported in part by funding from the Croatian Science Foundation (Project no. 1543).

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, London, MacMillan, 1972, 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

I find Barthes' comment suited to approaching Stanley Cavell's philosophical engagement with cinema. Like Barthes, Cavell depends on associating cinema with a theory of language, to traverse this assemblage towards or alongside philosophy, where philosophy depends, for its rationale, on negotiating the relation of concept and event. That Barthes was similarly preoccupied by philosophy as the destination of his cinematic argument can be deduced from his remark, that "Garbo offered to one's gaze a sort of Platonic Idea of the human creature":<sup>4</sup> the Platonism more explicit in the French original where the creature, and therefore the issue of creation, is cleansed of its humanity, as "une sorte d'idée platonicienne de la creature."<sup>5</sup>

Both Barthes and Cavell perceive Garbo as critical to their line of reasoning. Barthes acknowledges this position nowhere so pointedly as when he takes the name given to Garbo, *the Divine*, not as a reference to "a superlative state of beauty," but to "the essence of her corporeal person, descended from a heaven where all things are formed and perfected in the clearest light," so that "her face was not to have any reality except that of its perfection, which was intellectual even more than formal."<sup>6</sup>

There is a threat in the concluding phrase, and it bears on the semiosis that Barthes wants to promote. Garbo's perfection, that is, is situated in the rift between form and intellect, as if intellect assumes, via Garbo, a critical overload unchecked by form (which may be one way of approaching the operation of the uncanny). Barthes can hardly contain this threat, and it keeps disrupting his piece on Garbo. It surfaces conspicuously when the sliding of the intellectual against the formal finds its equivalent in the sliding of Garbo's sexuality, so that Garbo's sexuality for Barthes is not the sign so much as a situation, the situation of intellect as excess. Thus Platonism, according to Barthes, "explains why her face is almost sexually undefined, without however leaving one in doubt."<sup>7</sup> Sexuality, in other words, serves to signal the 'almost' of Platonism, just as its leaving no one in doubt is premised on the doubt being signed away from the Platonic grasp of form. The crisis Garbo thus situates for philosophy is further explored by Barthes when he says that her face "represents that fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty [...], when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman."<sup>8</sup> Again, Garbo as Woman seems to signify not the sex so much as the crisis occasioned by the intellect overriding the demands of the concepts like clarity or essence, which is to say the demands of concept to begin with. Significantly, this womanhood emerges in Barthes as lyricism, as if to suggest that it should be addressed in terms of voice rather than face, which is also how Barthes smuggles melodrama into his essay on Garbo, now honed into a critical instrument.

Barthes' reading of Garbo adumbrates a similar argument in Cavell. When arguing for the preeminence of film for philosophy, Cavell associates with film the

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 56–57.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 57.

intellectual overload that philosophy cannot fully accommodate precisely where philosophy depends, for its rationale, on the form and format of its concepts. According to Cavell, the figure where this overload is most acutely articulated, in and for film, is the unknown woman of the Hollywood melodrama, the genre “an essential feature of which is a woman’s knowledge of the world against which the one she is offered appears second-rate.”<sup>9</sup> That this other knowledge, offered to woman, entails the knowledge specific to philosophy can be discerned from Cavell’s remark, that “one form in which men must and must not hear the woman’s voice” is “that philosophical self-torment whose shape is skepticism, in which philosopher wants and wants not to exempt himself from the closet of privacy, wants and wants not to become intelligible, expressive, exposed.”<sup>10</sup> Again, Garbo is crucial to his argument. She is “the greatest, or the most fascinating cinematic image on film of the unknown woman.”<sup>11</sup> “It is in the figure of Garbo”, says Cavell, “that the idea of the woman’s unknownness most purely takes on its aspects of the desire of a man for a woman’s knowledge, as if to know what she knows may be taken as the answer to the question what a man after all wants of a woman and does not want after all.”<sup>12</sup> Given Cavell’s remark on the philosophical self-torment, the above reads also in the following terms: it is in the figure of Garbo that the idea of film’s unknownness most purely takes on its aspects of the desire of philosophy for film’s knowledge, as if to know what film knows may be taken as the answer to the question what philosophy after all wants of film and does not want after all.

## 2.

This is how an interesting perspective opens on Cavell, in the position where he cultivates the threat to which Barthes merely alludes (the sliding of the intellectual against the formal, occasioned in or by classical Hollywood) into a full-blown crisis, to do with the constitution of philosophy. Cavell identifies this crisis as skepticism, and invariably relates it to an understanding of the ordinary, also to the ordinary language philosophy. According to Cavell, skepticism refers to “the capacity, even desire, of ordinary language to repudiate itself, specifically to repudiate its power to word the world”,<sup>13</sup> the capacity and the desire habitually shunned from philosophy, “as though philosophy is insisting on, driven to, some form of emptiness.”<sup>14</sup> The threat of skepticism therefore entails “the possibility that the world we see is not the world as it is, that

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy. Autobiographical Exercises*, Cambridge, Mass. –London, Harvard University Press, 1994, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears. The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*, Chicago–London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*, Chicago–London, The University of Chicago Press, 1988, 154.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 163.

the world is not humanly knowable, or sharable"<sup>15</sup> – the inference Cavell traces back to Kant, but finds irresistible in the writings of Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Wittgenstein, says Cavell, points out not merely that “we, say, underestimate the role of the body and its behavior, but that we falsify it, I might even say, falsify the body: in philosophizing we turn the body into an impenetrable integument.”<sup>16</sup> He then continues: “It is as though I, in philosophizing, *want* this metamorphosis, want to place the mind beyond reach, want to get the body inexpressive, and at the same time find that I cannot quite want to, want to without reserve. Wittgenstein is interested in this peculiar strain of philosophy (it may be philosophy’s peculiar crime) to want exactly the impossible, the thought torturing itself, language repudiating itself. In Wittgenstein’s philosophizing he seeks the source of this torture and repudiation in language – what is in language that makes this seem necessary, and what about language makes this possible.”<sup>17</sup>

This is why Cavell detects “[a]n urgent methodological issue of ordinary language philosophy” to be “that of accounting for the fact that we are the victims of the very words of which we are at the same time the masters; victims and masters of the fact of words”; he adds however that it is “the issue about which this cast of thought is philosophically at its weakest.”<sup>18</sup> It is the weakness that bears on the constitution of the ordinary, for philosophy, because the ordinary and the everyday are therefore to be accessed only in terms of oddity and uncanniness, as “a horrified vision of ordinariness.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Cavell hails Heidegger for his interest in “the surrealism of the habitual” and Thoreau for his “vision of the oddness of our everyday,” just as he identifies Wittgenstein’s originality in taking “the drift toward skepticism as the *discovery* of the everyday,” “as if what philosophy is dissatisfied by is inherently the everyday.”<sup>20</sup> Consequently, “the everyday is not merely one topic among others that philosophers might take an interest in, but one that a philosopher is fated to an interest in so long as he or she seeks a certain kind of response to the threat of skepticism.”<sup>21</sup> Cavell’s appreciation of cinema is in line with this. “Film is a moving image of skepticism,” he says: “not only is there a reasonable possibility, it is a fact that here our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not exist – even, alarmingly, *because* it does not exist, because viewing it is all it takes.”<sup>22</sup> This is why “film’s drama, or the latent anxiety in viewing its drama, lies in its persistent demonstration that we do not know what our conviction in reality turns upon,” so that yielding “to the familiar wish to

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness. The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge, Mass.–London, Harvard University Press, 1981, 271.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary...*, op. cit., 163.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 163–164.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 154, 169–171.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, Mass.–London, Harvard University Press, 1979, 188–189.

speak of film as providing in general an ‘illusion of reality’ would serve to disguise this latent anxiety.”<sup>23</sup>

It is for this reason that the ordinary language philosophy, in Cavell, targets principally loss, mourning and the uncanny as the tenors of its coherence. Because “[t]he everyday is what we cannot but aspire to, since it appears to us as lost to us,” Cavell insists, “accepting the everyday, the ordinary, is not a given but a task.”<sup>24</sup> It follows that “I lose the world in every impulse to philosophy,” he says; the world therefore “must be regained every day, in repetition, regained as gone.”<sup>25</sup> Hence Cavell’s repeated invocations of “Emerson’s and Thoreau’s ‘silent melancholy’ and ‘quiet desperation,’” especially of *Walden* where Thoreau most acutely “proposes human existence as the finding of ecstasy in the knowledge of loss.”<sup>26</sup>

### 3.

What thereby emerges in Cavell is a peculiar drift toward psychoanalysis. He acknowledges this drift, repeatedly, and claims it as critical to the ordinary language philosophy. Indeed, when he proposes to analyze the ordinary in terms of uncanniness, in the Tanner lectures, Cavell starts with a critical reading of Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” and all but appropriates Freud for philosophy. To be sure, he dutifully notes that Freud is reluctant to embrace philosophy for psychoanalysis, and vice versa, but he engages this reluctance as psychoanalysis would engage a symptom. In Cavell’s words, “Freud’s repeated dissociation of psychoanalysis from philosophy” should be addressed as a dissociation “in which Freud seems to me to be protesting too much, as though he knows his own uncertainty about how, even whether, psychoanalysis and philosophy can be distinguished without fatal damage to each of them.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Cavell suggests that Freud’s identification of the uncanny with “the threat of castration” is flawed, because Freud thus occludes that about the uncanny which hinges on the ordinary and on the threat of skepticism (skepticism as threat). Put differently, rather than uncovering the raison of psychoanalysis, as Freud would have it, castration anxiety seems to be the symptom of psychoanalysis, in the position where psychoanalysis fails to acknowledge its affinity with philosophy.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Cavell finds no such flaw in Freud’s approach to mourning, which he affirms as a

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary...*, op. cit., 171.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 155, 171.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>28</sup> That Cavell is pressing psychoanalysis into a symptom wherever he perceives it to be dodging the threat of skepticism can be evinced from his bold casting of Freud into the role of Ophelia – when he says that “Freud seems to be protesting too much.” It is the casting that says a great deal about Cavell’s own argument, in which Freud as Ophelia assumes the position that Cavell elsewhere assigns to the unknown woman, while Cavell could be identified as Hamlet (of or for philosophy).

proper philosophical response to loss. When he remarks that “the world must be regained every day, in repetition, regained as gone,” Cavell notes “that Freud too thinks of mourning as an essentially repetitive exercise,” so that “[l]earning mourning may be the achievement of a lifetime.”<sup>29</sup> Equally, he welcomes Freud’s and Breuer’s insight into hysteria when, in *Contesting Tears*, he analyzes the overwhelming responsiveness to the world on the part of the unknown women in Hollywood melodrama.

As a result, psychoanalysis too suffers a kind of reconstitution in Cavell. His seemingly random forays at Freud reveal that his preference lies with pre-1920s psychoanalysis, the one before Freud’s discovery of the death drive, as if psychoanalysis based in the death drive had little to say about the constitution of the ordinary and the threat it organizes for philosophy. Since the death drive entails that the logic of metaphor be granted analytic preeminence, it follows that metaphor fails to capture the tenor of Cavell’s argument on the ordinary, and that a figural inflection is called for if one is to engage it.

#### 4.

Barthes again provides a conduit into Cavell, when he slips away from metaphor in his discussion of Garbo. This happens when Barthes distinguishes Garbo from Audrey Hepburn not in terms of an opposition, but from within an inflection Hepburn traverses in this semiotic operation: an inflection Barthes describes as Hepburn’s peculiar susceptibility to morphology. In Barthes’ words, “the face of Audrey Hepburn [...] is individualized, not only because of its peculiar thematics (woman as child, woman as kitten) but also because of her person, of an almost unique specification of the face, which has nothing of the essence left in it, but is constituted by an infinite complexity of morphological functions.”<sup>30</sup> Morphology in this context evokes the figural logic of metonymy, in the position where metaphor best captures Barthes’ understanding of concept and essence, or, indeed, of concept as essence. By extension, metonymy captures the semiotic operation that Barthes associates with the Event and that Cavell associates with the ordinary.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary...*, op. cit., 172. Cavell’s perspective on Freudian mourning dovetails significantly with the one Jacques Derrida later elaborates in *Specters of Marx* (1993). Cavell notes this affinity in *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* and remarks that it occasions a certain nervousness in him (Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, Cambridge, Mass.–London, Harvard University Press, 2005, 108–109), in the positions where Derrida’s residual messianism curbs the logic of loss. Derrida, on the other hand, omits acknowledging his philosophical debt to Freud’s mourning in his book on Marx – an omission more symptomatic perhaps than Cavell’s acknowledged nervousness when the unsettled score is thus brought to light.

<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, op. cit., 57.

<sup>31</sup> Barthes’ description of Hepburn anticipates Deleuze’s and Guattari’s interest in *devenir-femme*, the woman as a spectacle of becoming: “a molecular woman” who does not as yet yield the imaginary of organs. This is why the girl, not the woman, best describes this femininity: “[t]he girl is certainly not defined by virginity; she is defined by a relation of movement and rest.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis–London, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 276.

Cavell's perspective on Audrey Hepburn corresponds to Barthes'. If Garbo is "the greatest, or the most fascinating cinematic image on film of the unknown woman," Hepburn is listed among the actresses who process this cinematic figure away from concept and into morphology.<sup>32</sup> Cavell classes her with Carole Lombard, Rosalind Russell and Katharine Hepburn, who "convey an intelligence that animates their presence."<sup>33</sup> He then proceeds to attribute the 'magic' of Audrey Hepburn in Billy Wilder's *Sabrina* not to her so much as to her relating to Humphrey Bogart.<sup>34</sup> Her intelligence is not meant to engross or captivate, like Garbo's, so that the threat Garbo puts forward is all but contained by its evolution into a concept or essence. Instead, Hepburn serves to morphologize the threat as it were, away from herself and into a metonymic grid, until film, not merely one of its figures, is exposed as a threatening morphology. Which is also how film is irreducibly pressed into a moving image of skepticism: precisely the position that Cavell wants for it, and for philosophy.

This in turn maps an impasse in Cavell: why the fascination with Garbo if Hepburn brings cinema to the conditions that Cavell wants for philosophy? To address this impasse, recourse to Hollywood cinema seems proper and necessary, more precisely, to two Hepburn films directed by Billy Wilder: *Sabrina* (1954) and *Love in the Afternoon* (1957). The fact that Cavell himself refers to *Sabrina* is significant, because it testifies to his derivation of Audrey Hepburn from Wilder.

Cavell's passing reference points to a complicated cinematic order that Wilder has arranged around Hepburn, the order singularly suited to a discussion of Cavell's philosophy of film. Firstly, Wilder authored the Hollywood narratives both for Garbo and for Audrey Hepburn: he co-wrote Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* (1939), the film tailored to Garbo, as well as his own Hepburn films. It follows that Wilder mobilizes the Hollywood presences of Garbo and Hepburn into an assemblage – that he is critical to promoting them into a metonymy. *Love in the Afternoon* is particularly interesting, because its story, as well as its directing style, owe a great deal to *Ninotchka*, so that Wilder's Hepburn in this film is in fact made to respond to the world created for Garbo.

Secondly, in both *Sabrina* and *Love in the Afternoon* Hepburn galvanizes her male co-stars into a cinematic presence unsheltered by the genres where their cinematic meaning was previously defined and regulated, so that their performance in Wilder is based in their baring themselves to film as if for the first time; this is also how film in Wilder is being bared to its own conditions. In *Sabrina*, Bogart is exposed to the world of comedy; Wilder is clearly playing with the proposition that the Hollywood noir with its sinister resonance, which has profiled Bogart for cinema, is actually

<sup>32</sup> That Garbo to Cavell designates concept, even more acutely than she does to Barthes, can be inferred from Cavell's comment that "Garbo has generalized" the woman's unknownness in classical Hollywood "beyond human doubting [...], so that the sense of failure to know her, of her being beyond us (say visibly absent), is itself the proof of her existence." Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears...*, op. cit., 106.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, Mass.-London, Harvard University Press, 1979, 51.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

a protective formula compared to the threat of Bogart shedding this protection and baring himself to film.<sup>35</sup> The same is true of Gary Cooper in *Love in the Afternoon*. The staple of the American Western as the ‘strong silent type’, Cooper is exposed not merely to comedy but to the mad pace of its conversation, which is reminiscent of the Hollywood screwball tradition. As a result, Cooper signals residual madness in this comedy’s flair for language; this in turn is how the language of this comedy is pushed towards psychoanalysis as well as towards Cavell.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, one can hardly propose a better description of Wilder’s cinema than the one Cavell proposes for philosophy, when he identifies its task to be a response “to the fantastic in what human beings will accustom themselves to, call this the surrealism of the habitual” and “to the necessity, and the lack of necessity, in the sense of the human as inherently strange, say unstable, its quotidian as forever fantastic”<sup>37</sup> – which is also how Cavell understands the *raison* of the Freudian uncanny. Wilder’s films, that is, are compulsively about acting and role-playing; tellingly, they end when they arrive at the position where this compulsion shows as irreducible to make-believe, or to belief for that matter, and when surrealism itself has been espoused as habit.

## 5.

There is another reason why Wilder’s Hepburn is symptomatic for a reading of Cavell: because Wilder cast her repeatedly as a Cavellian unknown woman. Although *Sabrina* and *Love in the Afternoon* are comedies, both are premised on the assumption that Audrey Hepburn, like the Cavellian women of the Hollywood melodrama, mobilizes the narratives of the two films by successfully translating her unhappiness into unknownness: the unknownness which takes on the aspect of the desire of a man for a woman’s knowledge, as if to know what she knows may be taken as the answer to the question what a man after all wants of a woman and does not want after all. Moreover, both Wilder films with Hepburn mobilize her as the woman whose narrative function corresponds to the narrative function of the women in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The*

<sup>35</sup> “‘Bogart’ means ‘the figure created in a given set of films’” says Cavell: “After *The Matese Falcon* we know a new star, only distantly a person.” Ibid, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Wilder was aware of Cooper’s having accumulated the iconicity of the Western; he described this visual contaminant as a “superimposition” which had lost him some of the audiences (Cameron Crowe, *Conversations with Billy Wilder*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1999, 91). Cooper was important to Wilder in yet another way: his role in *Love in the Afternoon* was possibly also a tribute to Lubitsch. Wilder co-wrote for Lubitsch *The Bluebeard’s Eighth Wife* (1938), a comedy with Cooper in a similar role. (Wilder’s film resounds with another Lubitsch Cooper, the earlier one of *Design for Living*, of 1933, not least where Wilder’s Cooper invokes the pre-code sexuality of Lubitsch’s comedy.) That Wilder appreciated Cooper for his sexual flair, united with an elegant linguistic performance, see Cameron Crowe, op. cit., 146. That the language of Wilder’s comedy, in the scenes to which Cooper was decisive, was perceived as excessive and unwarranted, see ibid, 190–191. Interestingly, Wilder wanted Cary Grant for the roles that eventually went to Bogart and Cooper, just as Lubitsch wanted Cary Grant for the male lead in *Ninotchka*, the role that eventually went to Melvyn Douglas. (See ibid.) This too signals that these films work as an assemblage, that the logic of their coherence resides in metonymy and morphology.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary...*, op. cit., 154.



*Sandman* – the story that Freud engaged to explain the uncanny, and that Cavell then employed to translate Freud's the uncanny into the ordinary.

Indeed, both films climax when Hepburn tips the narrative into 'the surrealism of the habitual'. In *Sabrina*, she reinvents herself, from a charming American girl next door into a charming woman from Paris, in order to attract the notice of the suave and debonair William Holden; yet she ends up with the grim Humphrey Bogart who appreciates the surrealism of her reinvention only to fall prey to a similar reconstitution himself, for her, until the two of them together can no longer yield the everyday untainted by surrealism – call it the Cavellian uncanny, or the threat of skepticism. In *Love in the Afternoon*, she does the same to Gary Cooper: she reinvents herself from a Paris girl next door into a woman from Paris, in order to renew the notice of the suave, debonair Gary Cooper (who in many ways repeats the role of *Sabrina*'s William Holden), until he has reconstituted himself into a Humphrey Bogart. Both films conclude with the crisis of reconstitution thus affecting their leading men – call it their reconstitution into the ordinary as the uncanny. Still, this crisis is inaugurated by the critical melodramatic/ melancholy episode of their Hepburn. In *Sabrina*, her reconstitution is preceded by a lengthy episode of her attempted suicide following lovelorn melancholia; in *Love in the Afternoon*, by a lengthy episode of lovelorn melancholia preceded by *Sabrina*'s suicide attempt.<sup>38</sup>

This is important, because Wilder's Hepburn comedies are otherwise consistent with the Hollywood comedies of remarriage. Cavell privileges the remarriage comedy as the platform from where to address skepticism as a sociopolitical issue. If "philosophical skepticism" could be "cast as a wish to transgress the naturalness of human speech," he says, his discussion of the remarriage comedy "shifts the wish to transgression from what might be called the natural to the social plane."<sup>39</sup> Put differently, if "human knowledge" is equated with the capacity "to use language", then "the will to knowledge and the will to marriage may be seen to require analogous limitations in order to perform their work of social constitution, limitations that combat their tendencies to privacy or their fantasies of privacy."<sup>40</sup>

This is why Cavell's discussion of the remarriage comedy goes hand in hand with his interest in conversation: because conversation, according to Cavell, is the political use of language *par excellence*, mobilizing the logic of contract, always also as social contract, just as it designates the use of language that is definitive to marriage.

<sup>38</sup> Again, Wilder shares this strategy with Lubitsch. In his (later) comedies Lubitsch repeatedly inscribed into his heroines the threat of suicide, which then went into the making of the happy end. See Alenka Zupančič Žerdin, "Kaj je 'Cluny Brown'?", in: Ivana Novak and Jela Krečič, (eds.), *Zadeva Lubitsch*, Ljubljana, Slovenska kinoteka–Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2013, 179, and Tatjana Jukić, "Film, politika, psihoanaliza: slučaj Lubitsch", in: Ivan Majić, Andrea Milanko and Ana Tomljenović (eds.), *Dosezi psihoanalize. Književnost, izvedbene umjetnosti, film i kultura*, Zagreb, Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2015, 90. Furthermore, in both his Hepburn comedies Wilder engages the narrative premise of Max Ophüls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948): that the man meets the woman he has already met as an unknown woman. (Cavell finds this narrative premise critical to his discussion of the Hollywood melodrama.)

<sup>39</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness...*, op. cit., 74.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

(Hence Cavell's repeated references to Milton's understanding of marriage in terms of conversation – to the understanding of marriage as “a thirst for talk.”)<sup>41</sup> Equally, this is why Cavell is interested not in marriage so much as in *remarriage* of these comedies: because remarriage, rather than marriage, signifies the willingness to reenter conversation against all odds and thus affirm the value of contract and, with it, the value of “the democratic social bond.”<sup>42</sup> In addition, conversation is how these comedies principally intervene into cinema, with the advent of the talkies in the 1930s and the 1940s, until a reconstitution of film itself is effected. Cavell rightly notes that these comedies do not merely feature conversation but are obsessed with it – that they exhibit a thirst for conversation similar to the one that Milton attributes to marriage<sup>43</sup> – which is also how film shows to be obsessed with its potential for reconstitution. Because the reconstitution of film is effected through conversation, the character of this reconstitution shows as political; because film is a moving image of skepticism, cinematic skepticism is how philosophy most intimately encounters the political.

## 6.

There is another remarkable aspect of the Hollywood remarriage comedies. The fact that they yield a coherent cinematic template and invite to be analyzed together, as an assemblage or a collective, is taken by Cavell to mean that there is a structural quality to their insight into contract, conversation and remarriage. Consequently, the knowledge thus generated in Hollywood is acknowledged by Cavell to be relative to the political and the philosophical project of America or, put otherwise, to America as the project in which philosophy is indivisible from politics – which is also how America is a laboratory of politics in and for modernity. (The title of Cavell's book on the Hollywood comedy of remarriage, *Pursuits of Happiness*, is a straightforward derivation from the American Declaration of Independence.) Equally significant is the implication that knowledge thus obtained is morphological and metonymic in character, insofar as morphology and metonymy determine the logic of coherence of the comedies thus assembled into a collective.

Again, Wilder exemplifies *and* challenges this grouping in Cavell. His two Hepburn comedies are companion pieces, whose coherence depends on a variety of morphological and metonymic contacts. By virtue of this companionship their focus on marriage is always also a focus on remarriage, before the fact as it were. Yet remarriage informs Wilder's narratives consistently as a threat, and is comparable actually to how Cavell conceives of the uncanny. *Sabrina* opens with William Holden, as David Larrabee, promising marriage casually and serially: the film opens with marriage as remarriage to begin with, but foregrounds the irreducible violence and violability of promise that

<sup>41</sup> See *ibid*, 87, 146, 152.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

remarriage thus brings into play. Holden's script here is the one of Don Juan, whose linguistic performance Shoshana Felman compares to that of J. L. Austin, and thus relates to the heart of the ordinary language philosophy. (Interestingly, when describing Austin's performance, Felman, like Cavell, insists on the commerce between the language of philosophy and the language of psychoanalysis. Unlike Cavell, Felman espouses the post-1920 psychoanalysis, the one reconstituted around the death drive, and insists on metaphor as the figural logic appropriate to analyzing Austin. Both Cavell and Felman however zero in on marriage as the conduit to the ordinary language philosophy. After all, Cavell wrote a foreword to the second English edition of Felman's book.)

According to Felman, the Don Juan script is eventually contained when the paternal figure, associated equally with law and with metaphor, puts an end to serial promises of marriage (and therefore to remarriage). In Wilder, this script is contained only if its woman remains unknown, cultivating the uncanny and the threat of skepticism, until she has reduced the leading man to the operation of this threat – until the man has been reduced to a philosophical self-torment, as Cavell calls it. To be sure, fathers do surface in Wilder's Hepburn films, but only to dissolve as instances of authority. They are reduced to children or kitten, by Hepburn, which is what she does to her lovers too (to Bogart and Cooper), precisely in the instances where they could have assumed paternalist authority over her, being markedly older and wiser.

The eventual (re)marriage of this man and this woman, thus secured through the woman's unflinching cultivation of the uncanny and the man's reduction to philosophical self-torment, departs indeed away from the law and into the contract (the contract Cavell hails as the vehicle of America's politics and philosophy), but the contract now exposed as based in the fantasy and the reason of masochism. Gilles Deleuze, who shares Cavell's philosophical affinity for film and for America, claims that the contract between the man and the woman is essential to the fantasy of masochism. The contract is needed to regulate the relation in which the woman secures the threat and the torment; the contract departs away from the law because the woman assumes the prerogatives of fatherhood (punishment, cruelty, inaccessibility), but remains sexed, which is also how she does away with paternalism and the law implicit to it, while the contract is assigned the work of regulation.<sup>44</sup> The man in this relation

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<sup>44</sup> Cavell emphasizes the importance of the father-daughter relationship in the remarriage comedies, just as he maintains that this relationship is erased from the melodrama of the unknown woman. Deleuze in turn provides the script where the Cavellian negation of fatherhood could be reclaimed as a feature of masochism. See Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, New York, Zone Books, 2006. If Deleuze's masochism is not properly Freudian in its explication, it nonetheless owes to psychoanalysis: Deleuze's presentation is based in a critical reading of Freud (just as Cavell's explication of the uncanny is based in a critical reading of Freud). This seems to be of a piece with Cavell's affinity for Freud before the 1920s, as if Freud's masochism, typical of the post-*Todestrieb* psychoanalysis, needs to be reclaimed at a remove from the death drive. Moreover, the phantasmal character of Deleuzian masochism points to affinity with the spectral character of cinema and all but adumbrates it; the two visual regimes intersect in the position where Cavell welcomes cinema into his discussion of the ordinary as the uncanny, "the moving image of skepticism". Finally, the phantasmal character of masochism tallies with the compulsive role-playing in Wilder's films – the compulsion irreducible to belief or make-believe, until surrealism has been espoused as habit.

is thereby liberated from the law even as he pursues the limits of its language and its reason, exposing himself to revolutionary education and reconstitution: the operation which Deleuze perceives to be critical philosophically and politically.<sup>45</sup> In turn, the analytic pursuit thus invested in masochism corresponds, almost uncannily, to the pursuit Cavell identifies in Wittgenstein's philosophy – when he associates with Wittgenstein the wish to place the mind beyond reach, and to get body inexpressive (without quite wanting to without reserve), which is how the thought is brought to torture itself and the language to repudiate itself. Like Deleuze's masochist, Cavell's Wittgenstein seeks the source of torture and repudiation in language, the implication being that liberation is the ultimate ambition of this philosophy – the condition that Cavell, symptomatically, associates with weakness.<sup>46</sup>

The raison implicit to Deleuzian masochism corresponds also to the structure of Cavell's philosophical investment in cinema, nowhere so pointedly perhaps as in Deleuze's nuanced appropriation of woman. While Freud sacrifices the woman of the masochist fantasy for a metaphor of fatherhood (so that she becomes expendable, a father substitute), Deleuze recovers the woman of masochism in her uncanniness, as if to pave the way to Cavell's configurations of gender and sexuality. Deleuze, like Cavell, affirms this woman as a function of language; she contributes to masochism primarily as a figure of orality, in a zone of resonance which is not unlike the conversational situation in Cavell. Furthermore, the zone of resonance, or of conversation, where this woman regulates the fantasy and the raison of masochism, is described by Deleuze as morphological in character. This is why Cavell's decision to split the woman of the masochist relation, into the talker of the remarriage comedy and the isolated unknown stranger of melodrama, is critical. By explaining the unknown woman as the *negation* of the talking one,<sup>47</sup> Cavell fails to appreciate the metonymic and the morphological logic of this world. His incision of negation into this woman is an attempt to reintroduce the raison of metaphor into the arrangement that depends on renouncing metaphor and law; this in turn injures Cavell's own initial explanation of the ordinary as the uncanny and, by extension, the groundwork of his philosophy.<sup>48</sup>

That the injury covers up for unacknowledged masochism can be evinced from Cavell's reaction to Felman, whose approach to Austin's speech act theory, as noted,

<sup>45</sup> In both Wilder's Hepburn films, especially in *Sabrina*, contract is first introduced as a vehicle of the capitalist reason, with America as its hotbed, so that the marriage contract follows as secondary to it. Hepburn however serves to sex the contract away from the capitalist everyday and into its uncanny, which is also how she exposes capitalism to be a sexual fantasy, a veritable imaginary.

<sup>46</sup> The torture that Cavell attributes to Wittgenstein resonates in Cavell's decision to describe his own analytic encounter with the woman's voice as the philosophical self-torture.

<sup>47</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears...*, op. cit., 6.

<sup>48</sup> Deleuze acknowledges a similar contact of the ordinary and the uncanny, as integral to masochism, when he identifies ritual, with its delirious and hallucinatory aspects, as the destination of the masochist fantasy. Also, similarly to Cavell's intervention into the Freudian uncanny, Deleuze suggests that castration in this world is misplaced, possibly redundant (Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, op. cit., 100). Finally, Deleuze points out that humor is integral to masochism, which is also how to relate it to the humor of the remarriage comedy.

is based in metaphor and the paternal principle.<sup>49</sup> To Felman's assertion, that she was seduced by Austin, Cavell replies by "identifying her speech act also as demanding a response to her pleasure."<sup>50</sup> "That is a cruelty," Cavell continues, until Felman has been reconfigured into the demanding woman of Deleuzian masochism: the maneuver Cavell explicitly associates with "perversity."<sup>51</sup> That he is fully part to the (contractual) logic this implies can be inferred from the concluding sentence of his foreword: "I share further the sense [...] that philosophy's cruelty is inherently seductive, or said otherwise, that philosophers have to bear the recognition that in their defense of reason they may not know why one guise of reason has come to attract them more than another."<sup>52</sup>

## 7.

If there is a good ending to this thing, I propose to situate it in the challenge Deleuze presents to my argument. His masochism ensues from an insight into Austro-Hungarian literature. Cavell on the other hand is the philosopher of America and, by extension, of democracy as it is inflected in its language. He repeatedly situates his entry into philosophy around his acquisition of this language, emphasizing that this was not the language of his father or of his parents, as if understanding America is based in linguistic disinheritance – hence perhaps the uncanny as the ordinary of this language, also as the precondition of democracy. What this language accommodates, consequently, is precisely the event of disinheritance, or disinheritance as the event forever eluding the philosophical safety of a concept.

Disinheritance haunts Cavell's philosophical memoir, titled aptly *Little Did I Know*: the haunting caught up in the timbre that Cavell traces back to his mother's Austro-Hungarian immigrant history, from which he has adopted and adapted his family name. Symptomatically, Cavell returns, repeatedly, to the importance of music in his evolution as a philosopher: the music he inherited from his mother's family just as his American language was securing him disinheritance and emancipation. Music, which is inalienable to and in language even as it constitutes its outside, thus emerges in Cavell as the critical point of entry into America and philosophy alike: the point of entry resurfacing in Cavell not only when he discusses music, but also when he keeps

<sup>49</sup> "The paternal promise is (...) a promise of metaphor," says Felman (Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body. Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, 24).

<sup>50</sup> Stanley Cavell, "Foreword", in: Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body. Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, xxi.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, xxi–xxi.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, xxi. When Cavell writes that "[i]n Derrida's heritage we 'cannot' truly escape from the tradition of philosophy; in mine we cannot truly escape to philosophy" (Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary...*, op. cit., 174–175), he seems to be attributing to Derrida the intellectual groundwork of (Deleuzian) sadism, as he is assuming, for himself, the raison of masochism.

addressing the woman's voice, or conversation as its flip side, or the reconstitution of cinema after the advent of sound. If music in Cavell corresponds to the scope of woman in Deleuzian masochism and the orality of this woman, it corresponds also to Deleuze's appreciation of the Austro-Hungarian linguistic makeup, whose many metonymizing languages present philosophy with a challenge similar to that of America.<sup>53</sup> Cavell acknowledges this position in Deleuze, and in his own writing, when he takes up a comment by Henry James, about the Eastern European immigrants swarming the early twentieth-century New York: "What, oh, what again, were he and his going to make of us?"<sup>54</sup> Cavell duly notes that "making something of America" is "at once a matter of interpreting it and a matter of changing it."<sup>55</sup> What he implies, unwittingly, is that Austria-Hungary engages the American pursuit of happiness as a promise of masochism – the implication already there in his espousal of Vienna as the "city that fashioned Wittgenstein"<sup>56</sup> and his commitment to the Austro-Hungarian narrative of Ophüls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, not to mention his lifelong philosophical interest in Freud.

A good ending requires also a concluding note on Wilder. An immigrant to America born in the eastern expanses of the Austro-Hungarian empire, formerly an aspiring Viennese journalist who had visited Freud in 19 Berggasse for an interview (Freud refused and showed him the door), Wilder acquired English and became one of the most important scriptwriters and directors of classical Hollywood. Significantly, in both his Hepburn films, Hepburn is a European import to America; she infuses the language of America with a peculiar music, so that her language is the one she shares and does not share with the American men to whom she proves threatening, as if the threat – her coming at them as the uncanny from the heart of their everyday – resides in this musical inflection, in the oral excess preying on their understanding.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> It could be argued that Deleuze's presentation of masochism and his understanding of minor literature constitute an assemblage.

<sup>54</sup> Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, op. cit., 105.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary...*, op. cit., 1988, 181.

<sup>57</sup> As significantly, Wilder wrote and directed his Hepburn as metonymic to music in film: the music he carefully tagged with the tidbits of Austro-Hungariana (references to Viennese operetta and Hungarian Gypsy quartets...). See Cameron Crowe, op. cit., 107 about Wilder's structural engagement with music in his films.