The Conception of Film for the Subject of Television: Moral Education of the Public and a Return to an Aesthetics of the Ordinary

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STANLEY CAVELL WAS NO DOUBT THE FIRST to account for the transformation of theory and criticism brought about by reflection on popular culture—such as so-called mainstream cinema. However, Cavell is less concerned with reversing artistic hierarchies or inverting the relation between theory and practice than with the self-transformation required by our encounters with new experiences. Robert Warshow, Cavell's inspiration on these matters and the author of remarkable analyses of popular culture, put it thus:

> We are all "self-made men" culturally, establishing ourselves in terms of the particular choices we make from among the confusing multitude of stimuli that present themselves to us. Something more than the pleasures of personal cultivation is at stake when one chooses to respond to Proust rather than to Mickey Spillane, to Laurence Olivier in *Oedipus Rex* rather than Sterling Hayden in *The Asphalt Jungle*. And when one has made the "right" choice, Mickey Spillane and Sterling Hayden do not disappear; perhaps no one gets quite out of sight of them. There is great need, I think, for a criticism of "popular culture" which can acknowledge

its pervasive and disturbing power without ceasing to be aware of the superior claims of the higher arts, and yet without a bad conscience.[1]

Is there still any sense in talking about "popular culture?" Or has this sense been transformed to the extent that we now use the expression without really knowing what we are saying—or, to take the title of one of Cavell's essays, without *meaning* what we say?[2] In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell defined philosophy as the "education of grownups," parallel to his goal in his major works on cinema—*The World Viewed*, *Pursuits of Happiness* (on remarriage comedies), *Contesting Tears* (on melodrama), and *Cities of Words* (which covers the entirety of his teaching at Harvard, alternating between lessons in philosophy and studies of films)—to give popular culture (Hollywood movies in particular are his main interest) the power to change us.[3]

According to Cavell, the value of a culture lies not in its "great art" but in its transformative capacity, the same capacity found in the "moral perfectionism" of Emerson and Thoreau.

Philosophy consists in "bring[ing] my own language and life into imagination," in "a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life . . . and at the same time to confront my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me: to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in me."[4]

How can we imagine continuing to grow after the end of childhood? Cavell's philosophy defines growth—once childhood and physical growth are over—as the capacity to change. This capacity is at work in Cavell's favored object of study, the apparently minor genre of remarriage comedies, which stage characters' mutual education and their transformation through separation and reunion: "In this light, philosophy becomes the education of grownups. . . . The anxiety in teaching, in serious communication, is that I myself require education. And for grownups," he writes, "this is not natural growth, but *change*."[5]

Cavell also gives this philosophical enterprise the outdated name "moral education," or "pedagogy," as in the subtitle to *Cities of Words*. For Cavell, whose childhood and youth were haunted by Hollywood movies, the culture in question is popular cinema, whose productions reached the greatest number at the time. The educational value of popular culture is not anecdotal. Indeed, it seems to me to define what must be understood both by "popular" and by "culture" (in the sense of *Bildung*) in the expression "popular culture." Within such a perspective, the vocation of popular culture is the philosophical education of a *public* rather than the institution and valorization of a socially targeted corpus. The way in which Cavell has claimed the philosophical value of Hollywood cinema—placing it on the level of the greatest works of thought without, however, thinking of cinema as great art—may have seemed too easy, demagogic, or populist, as if such

a claim could not be real. What Cavell claimed for mainstream Hollywood cinema in the 1970s has been transferred to other practices and bodies of work, such as television series, which have taken over for cinema, if not replaced it, in the task of educating adolescents and adults.

Philosophy has not yet adequately observed or analyzed the democratization of art in the digital age, nor has it addressed the blurring of the distinction between amateur and professional in certain artistic settings and practices. This is because philosophy has lacked the necessary analyses and theoretical tools and has not clearly grasped the pragmatic shift of culture toward the public space. Thus, it is essential to use and invent new tools to examine the democratization of art and, conversely, the emergence of artistic practices as resources for renewing democratic claims and forms.

In 1939, Walter Benjamin reflected on the consequences of new techniques of mechanically reproducing visual and musical works of art. Erwin Panofsky stressed that "film was first and foremost a medium of popular entertainment, devoid of aesthetic pretention, which reestablished the 'dynamic contact between art production and art consumption'" that is "sorely attenuated, if not entirely interrupted, in many other fields of artistic endeavor."

A profound change is underway in the field of culture and its hierarchies, and it is marked by the change in attitude toward television series, which are now seen as spaces where artistic and hermeneutic authority can be reappropriated and where viewers can be reempowered by constituting their own unique experiences. This is what the critic, Robert Warshow had in mind when he wrote in *The Immediate Experience* (1962) that "culturally, we are all 'self-made men': we constitute ourselves in the particular choices we make within the dizzying array of stimuli that offer themselves to us."

The democratization of artistic production promised by Romanticism would thus be realized in the new artistic forms and modes of participation and interaction that digital technology allows, opening the way for new forms of subjective authority. The question of democracy is thus also a question of our capacity for individual expression and unique aesthetic actions and choices. Art and film have gone from being elitist to being essential drivers of social intervention and innovation. In this, they have become creators of true democracy—if by democracy we mean not an institution but, rather, the demand for equality and participation in public life.

What is meant by popular culture today is no longer exactly popular in the social or political sense in which certain arts—for example, songs or folklore—were popular, even if it draws on the resources of these arts. When it comes to defining our shared, accessible heritage, we must think, instead, of the material of ordinary conversation. At a certain time—and still today in certain milieus—this could have been a recent film or a controversial book. Today, among the young and a good number of adults, it is just as often a television series. Popular culture turns out to be a site for "the education of grownups,"

who, through this intermediary, return to a form of education and cultivation of the self: subjective improvement (*perfectionism = meliorism*); more exactly, a subjectivation that takes place through sharing and commenting on public and ordinary material that is integrated into ordinary life. It is in this sense that "we are all self-made men" and that cinema, for Warshow and Cavell, is at the heart of "popular culture" and the stakes of its criticism, as Warshow notes: "Such a criticism finds its best opportunity in the movies, which are the most highly developed and most engrossing of the popular arts, and which seem to have an almost unlimited power to absorb and transform the discordant elements of our fragmented culture."[6]

In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell defined philosophy as the "education of grownups," in parallel with his goal in his major works on cinema— *The World Viewed*, *Pursuits of Happiness*, *Contesting Tears*, and *Cities of Words*—to give popular culture the function of changing us.[7] According to Cavell, the value of a culture lies not in its "great art" but in its transformative capacity, the same capacity found in the "moral perfectionism" of Emerson and Thoreau.

Philosophy consists in "bring[ing] my own language and life into imagination," in "a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life" and at the same time "to confront my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me: to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in me."[8]

Cavell's philosophy defines growth—once childhood and physical growth are over—as the capacity to *change*. This capacity is at work in Cavell's favored object of study, the apparently minor genre of remarriage comedies, which stage characters' mutual education and their transformation through separation and reunion. There is here a new assessment of importance, which Wittgenstein called for when he asserted the importance of ordinary language philosophy and attention to real life:

> Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.[9]

In *Cities of Words*, Cavell writes:

> "Importance" is an important word for Tracy's former (and future) husband C. K. Dexter Haven, who applies it, to Tracy's chagrin, to the night she got drunk and danced naked on the roof of the house—it is her saying impatiently to him that he attached too much importance to that silly escapade that prompts him to say to her, "it was immensely important."[10]

And said earlier, in *The Claim of Reason*:

> What feels like destruction, what expresses itself here in the idea of destruction, is really a shift in what we are asked to let interest us, in the tumbling of our ideas of the great and the important.[11]

Cavell's main point is a reassessment of importance, which implies the collapse or *relocation* (just as radical) of hierarchies between great art and ordinary cultural practices. He remarks parenthetically: "(This relocation of importance and interest is what in *The Claim of Reason*, following my reading of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, I call the recounting of importance, and assign as a guiding task of philosophy)."[12]

The Democracy of Cinema

In *The World Viewed*, Cavell's starting point was the popular nature of cinema, which he connected to a certain relation to ordinary life: an intimacy with the ordinary. A first aspect of this intimacy lies in cinema's integration in the ordinary lives of movie enthusiasts. In an excellent essay on the ontology of cinema in Cavell, Emmanuel Bourdieu defined cinema's realism by its entanglement with our ordinary life: "Cinema is common, ordinary, shared aesthetic experience, implicated in and bound up with everyday life (a movie before or after dinner and before returning home; a night perhaps spent dreaming of it; breakfast, etc.)."[13]

One of Cavell's goals, and one of his greatest successes, is to make apparent the intelligence (understanding) that a film has already brought to bear in its own making, which also amounts to "letting a work of art *have its own voice* in what philosophy will say about it." This is not only a methodological point, for it supposes that cinema is equal to philosophy as a mode of approach to the world. Consequently, cinema interests us as *experience* and not as *object*, and this is the basis of an ordinary criticism and theory of cinema.

Understanding cinema's relation to philosophy thus implies two tasks:

1) Learning what it means to "check one's experience," to use an expression from *Pursuits of Happiness*, that is, to examine one's experience and "to let the object or the work of your interest teach you how to consider it."[14] This means that it is necessary to educate one's experience in such a way that one can be educated by it. There is an inevitable circularity here, which Emerson pointed out: *having* an experience requires having confidence in one's experience.

2) Finding the words to express one's experience. This theme is central in Cavell's work: the will to find one's voice in one's story, against

the temptation of inexpressiveness.[15] The possibility of *having* an experience is inseparable from the question of expression and the possibilities, which cinema explores, for human beings' natural expressivity. This discovery, rooted in a reading of Wittgenstein, is Cavell's mode of approach to cinema and it serves as his entry into its different genres: the conversations in remarriage comedies do not duplicate ordinary conversations, but *express* a relation to ordinary words. "A mastery of film writing and film making accordingly requires a mastery of this mimesis of ordinary words."[16]

The fact that this conversation is not "only" discourse, and implies what Cavell calls photogenesis—the projection of living characters onto the screen to speak these words—shows that this conversation can only exist in cinema, that it even constitutes the experience of cinema, and that it inscribes the ordinariness of language in cinema: (talking) films put us in the presence of a body and a voice, of ordinary language. Thus, to find the ordinary would be to find an adequacy between our words and our world; it would be to come closer to our experience. This is the claim of popular and democratic culture, already expressed by Emerson: "I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; Greek art or Provencal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low."[17]

For this, it is not a matter of the critic interpreting, but, rather, letting the film say what it has to show and hearing what it says: its voice. This means letting oneself be educated by the experience of the film and finding passivity in the experience and its repetition. For Cavell, cinema is a response to skepticism, to the loss of an experience that escapes me, but it is not a way of recovering an inaccessible experience, of regaining the world in the projection of the world: it is, instead, a mode of recognizing the loss. The paradox of the idea of a *return* to the ordinary is that one returns to something one never had, where we have never been.

The genre of remarriage comedies expresses this aspiration to return to the ordinary— acceptance of repetition, and of the everyday—which in these films is only possible through death (the loss of the other and of the world), and then rebirth. The genre marks a unique proximity between the experience of cinema and what constitutes our experience as ordinary. The experience of these films makes it possible to "be interested in one's own experience." People bear these films "in their experience as memorable public events, segments of the experiences, the memories, of a common life. So that the difficulty of assessing them is the same as the difficulty of assessing everyday experience, the difficulty of expressing oneself satisfactorily, of making oneself find the words for what one is specifically interested to say."[18]

Cinema, answering the Emersonian call for democratic and ordinary art, is able to describe everyday reality. Our experience as spectators comes out

of an ordinary, shared culture—access to the "physiognomy" of the ordinary: to quote Emerson's "The American Scholar" again, "the literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life."[19] The idea that the highest culture is shared culture is one of the fundamental values Cavell defends in "Film in the University," the afterword to *Pursuits of Happiness*. Cavell teaches us that an ordinary aesthetics of cinema must defend not the specificity of the individuals who created a work, nor the singularity of a work, but, rather, our common aesthetic experience—for example, the experience of a movie viewer who goes to see a movie less for its director than for the actors in it, whom he or she liked in earlier films and now wants to see again in new incarnations ("the same, but different," as Cary Grant says in *The Awful Truth* [1937, dir. Leo McCarey]).

The experience of cinema is at once mysterious and ordinary. Here, we touch on the very finitude of the experience of film, which is always repeatable but also always circumscribed. In spite of new viewing conditions that have been established over the last several decades (with videos, DVDs, etc.), the temporality of film is always the temporality of finitude. There is always a moment when it stops, and this feeling is part of the experience of a film, making it a type of the ordinary experience of life.

This proximity between the experience of cinema and what makes our experience ordinary—its evanescence and endurance—constitutes the pedagogic and democratic aspect of the cinematographic experience, which comes out of shared *care*. As Cavell writes in *The World Viewed*: "Rich and poor, those who care about no (other) art and those who live on the promise of art, those whose pride is education and those whose pride is power or practicality—all care about movies, await them, respond to them, remember them, talk about them, hate some of them, are grateful for some of them."[20]

Another democratic characteristic of the experience of cinema is that in cinema we like the exceptional as much as the common: the movie enthusiast is by definition eclectic (in a way the art or literature enthusiast is not always). As Marc Cerisuelo reminds us, Panofsky had already noticed this element: if cinema is important for us, it is because it has not lost contact with a wide audience, unlike the traditional great arts. Panofsky was the first to insist "on the fact that film was first and foremost created as popular entertainment without aesthetic pretension, and revitalized the connections between artistic production and consumption, which are more than tenuous—if not broken—in many artistic disciplines."[21] This is the basis of the relation of cinema to its genres. "In the case of films," Cavell writes "it is generally true that you do not really like the highest instances unless you also like typical ones. You don't even know what the highest are instances of unless you know the typical as well."[22]

The Importance of Film

Cavell's goal is to propose a change of perspective—which he sometimes calls a *revolution*—on cinema and popular culture in general. In order to do this, it is necessary to truly take cinema seriously, to see its importance—to accept, for example, as Cavell indicates in his essay "The Thought of Movies,"[23] that Hollywood movies have as much to tell us about certain questions (such as the possibility of establishing contact with the world) as philosophy as we know it does; that reflection on skepticism in Capra is as radical as it is in Hume or Kant. We must take Cavell seriously when, in *Pursuits of Happiness*, he associates the argument of *It Happened One Night* (1934, dir. Frank Capra) with that of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Obviously, there is something shocking in this, and this very scandal is what interests Cavell. It is not the association of cinema and philosophy that is scandalous (it has become all too common), but, rather, making them equal in their competence and capacity to educate and shape. The philosophical relevance of a film lies in what it itself says and shows, not in what criticism discovers in it or develops in relation to it. The "nightmare of criticism" is to be unable to see "the intelligence that a film has *already* brought to bear in its making." The perspective on popular film introduced by Cavell now applies to television series and to everything that comes out of the exploration and mixing of "genres": art forms that not only maintain contact with the public, but also educate it, possibly through the creation of a specific universe based on its own culture, which it produces (the cult series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is an example of this).

Cinema is not (or for Cavell, not foremost) a matter of art: it has to do, rather, with shared experience. In this respect, cinema heralds the reign of television series. Cavell does not speak of seeing a film but of "moviegoing." It is less a matter of aesthetics than of *practice*, a practice that connects and reconciles public and private, subjective expectation and sharing in something common. Cinema's relation to popular culture shifts as a result. From the outset, Cavell nullifies a response that would claim that every art, in its youth, goes through a "popular" phase. He sees two biases in such a response: first, in the possibility of measuring the lifespan of an art and seeing it as a living being with a youth and adulthood, and second, in the hierarchy between or evolution from popular to great art. Panofsky wanted to show that cinema took up the popular genres of tragedy, romance, crime, adventure, and comedy "as soon as it was realized that they could be transfigured . . . by the exploitation of the unique and specific possibilities of the new *medium*."[24] The word "transfigure" can here be understood as the creation of another figure, another representation or expression ("dynamization of space" or "spatialization of time," the ability to show several events unfolding at the same time, "possibilities of the

cinematographic *medium*.") The theme of cinema as the exploration of new aesthetic possibilities is fairly central to the philosophy of film, but does not interest Cavell. For him, cinema is important because of its place in our lives and its exploration of genres, and because of its capacity to absorb and produce fragments of our experience—an essential aspect of popular culture and which ordinary criticism must account for.

Emmanuel Bourdieu, in the essay cited above, explains that one of the characteristics of cinema is its internal reference to genres, as a specific modality of its examination of its own expressive potentials. Of course, other arts also appeal to the notion of genre, but retrospectively, in order to classify the productions of the past or to distinguish themselves within a genre. For Cavell, on the other hand, cinema only exists in its genres, and this defines its popular nature: there is no essence of cinema or authorial mystique. In contrast to aristocratic distinction popular culture opposes the model of the self-made spectator who creates his or her taste through his or her favorite genres: action, romantic comedies, Westerns, science fiction, vulgar-comedies-for-teens, vampire movies, etc.

For Cavell, the constitution of these genres, and their pregnancy, rests on a specific property of film creation: its collective nature. The production of a cinematographic work is a collective enterprise that mobilizes not only the film's team, led by its director, but also, indirectly, the entire community of other filmmakers and all their works, since team members are always likely to participate or to have participated in the making of other films produced by the community in question. Henceforth, the system of reference relative to which the work of art was understood—that is, the author and his unique inspiration—dissolves. To understand a cinematographic work, it is necessary to find a system of reference that transcends individual wills and inspirations. This system of reference is the collectively constituted genre.[25]

Stephen Mulhall has convincingly described what sets Cavell's approach apart from those of other philosophers of cinema.[26] The dominant approach consists in describing essential properties of the medium in order to prescribe its possibilities and possible genres. Cavell, on the other hand, advocates describing certain artistic successes or certain genres in order to describe the possibilities of the medium—just as for Wittgenstein there is no "essence of language" that would prescribe its norms and usages, and no definition of our concepts that would determine their possible future application. We may here turn to Victor Perkins' analysis:

> I do not believe that the film (or any other medium) has an essence which we can usefully invoke to justify our criteria. We do not deduce the standards relevant to Rembrandt from the essence of paint; nor does the nature of words impose a method of judging ballads and novels. Standards of judgement cannot be appropriate to a medium as such but only to particular ways of exploiting its opportunities. That is why the

concept of the cinematic, presented in terms of demands, has stunted the useful growth of film theory.[27]

Cavellian genres are a posteriori reconstructions of structures that have functioned in practice, and they are defined in relation to a certain body of actual works—for example, a group of comedies produced within a given period, the 1930s and 1940s, within a certain structure of production, the large Hollywood studios of the time. As Bourdieu notes: "The expressive possibilities of cinema as an aesthetic medium are created by their realization. Thus, for Cavell, the potentialities of the medium—in particular its technical potentialities—are not even possibilities as such as long as they haven't been given meaning within a particular work."[28]

A genre of cinema or television is thus not an a posteriori principle of classification, or a normative system, but, rather, a creative force. The genre strives "toward a state of absolute explicitness, of expressive saturation. At that point the genre would have nothing further to generate."[29] Thus, none of the traits that enter into the definition of a genre is a necessary and sufficient condition for belonging to this genre—the list of characteristic traits is "radically open-ended." And the absence of a trait characteristic of a given genre (for example, the absence of a heroine's mother in remarriage comedies) can always be made up for by a "compensating circumstance." However, belonging to the remarriage comedy genre does seem to suppose that the heroine be a woman on a quest for perfection and that the starting point of the film be a divorce, or something of that order, and its endpoint be (something like) her remarriage. But this structure does not constitute a set of properties necessary and sufficient for a given work to belong to a genre; the list of properties that defines a genre is never closed.

It is a genre's openness and creativity that allows for its productivity, including in the derivation of new genres: for example, the perfectionist quest in the genre of melodrama; remarriage or the equivalent (reconciliation/conversation) in romantic comedies or comedies for teens such as *Knocked Up* (2007, dir. Judd Apatow) and *Superbad* (2007, dir. Greg Mottola).

Not to mention the productivity of genres in television series, which have clearly inherited the conversational capacities of couples in Hollywood comedies, which provide them with the grammar of their expressions, interactions, and emotions.

There is thus, in genre, an aspect of empowerment for later generations of characters. In an apparently banal comedy, *The Holiday* (2007, dir. Nancy Meyers), genre has a determining role, allowing the heroine of one of the storylines (Kate Winslet, whose character discovers an entire series of remarriage comedy films during a trip to California, where she meets an old screenwriter and a young composer) to find the strength to reject her former, toxic lover and to express new confidence in herself. *The Holiday* is sprinkled with micro-extracts of films (including *The Lady Eve* and *His*

Girl Friday), which underscores this heritage and the expressive fecundity of the genre.

A genre provides an expressive grammar, including for the spectator, who—like the heroine of *The Holiday*—finds within it resources for his or her own sentiments and situations. This ordinary pedagogical aspect has been radicalized in television series, which are explicitly sites of ordinary expression. They are themselves fed by moments of conversation in recent or classic comedies, which make up their referential and moral universe (think, for example, of the constant allusions to television or movie characters in *Buffy*, *Lost*, or *How I Met Your Mother*, or the more recent *Love*). The spectator's ordinary expertise turns out to be a capacity for expression that comes from knowledge, even mastery, of a genre. Once again, a genre is not an essence—its worth lies in the expressive possibilities it opens up for actors and spectators. Thus, the remarriage comedy genre proposes a grammar of moral education, which Cavell elaborated in *Cities of Words*. The democratic nature of cinema and television series is also found in this capacity for education. This is because, as Cavell notes, cinema shows the important moments of life, when life changes imperceptibly—moments which, in real life, are fleeting and indeterminate, or whose importance it takes years or an entire life to understand. In order to rethink the concept of popular culture, it is necessary to understand that cinema is not a specialized art and that it can transform our existences by educating our ordinary experience.

The Public

No reflection on popular culture can ignore the question confronted by Cavell, who rejects both the critic's contempt for forms seen as degraded and the condescension of the intellectual who claims interest in television series or popular movies while remaining certain of a position of superiority over the material. Cavell bases his hermeneutic work on "the intelligence that a film has *already* brought to bear in its making." The perspective Cavell introduces on popular cinema and the demand it places on criticism is now, in my opinion, valid for television series and for everything that emerges out of the exploration and mixture of "genres" of culture. The education provided by these series comes from the fact that they are polyphonic, contain a plurality of singular expressions, stage arguments and debates, and are permeated by a moral atmosphere.

There is an education provided by the very form in which television series are presented, and the radical turn that took place with series produced beginning in the 1990s (e.g., *ER*, *Friends*, *The West Wing*): the integration of characters into viewers' ordinary and familiar lives; viewers' initiation into new forms of life and new, initially opaque vocabularies that are not

made explicit, without any heavy-handed guidance or explanation, as there was in earlier productions.[30] This methodology and the narrativity of series are what make for their moral relevance and power. But this leads to revising the status of morality—to seeing it not in rules and principles of decision-making, but, rather, in attention to ordinary behavior, to everyday micro-choices, to individuals' styles of expressing themselves and making claims. Some philosophers, weary of an overly abstract meta-ethics, have already called for such transformations. The material of television series allows for even greater contextualization, historicity (regularity, duration), familiarization, and education of perception (attention to the expressions and gestures of characters the viewer learns to know; attachment to recurring figures integrated into everyday life; the presence of faces on the "small screen").

This answers the question raised by Cavell concerning the moral function of "public" works and the form of education they generate in the public *and* the private they create. This intertwining of the private and the public is also an intertwining of modes of constituting a public. The address to the public/audience also becomes the constitution of a public discourse and its norms. Morality is constituted by the claims of individuals, and by the recognition of others' claims; the recognition of a plurality of moral positions and voices within the same world. Hence the polyphonic nature of television series, the plurality of singular expressions, the staging of arguments and debates, and the moral atmosphere that emanates from them.

Television series rearticulate the private and public differently—they create their audience by slipping into private life.[31] In order to understand this, it is necessary to take seriously the moral intentions of the producers and scriptwriters of television series and movies, as well as the constraints imposed on these fictions—here again in line with Cavell's reading.

Breaking with traditional criticism, which made the intelligence and meaning of films a by-product of critical interpretation, Cavell affirmed the importance of the collective writing of films, and of the function of screenwriters, directors, and also actors in creating films' meaning and educational value. It is therefore necessary to show, within the moral expression constituted by television series, the moral choices—both individual and collective—negotiations, conflicts, and agreements that are at the basis of morality: the choices and itineraries of fictional characters, plot twists, conflicts, reconciliations, slips of the tongue, and repressions. To see this, we need only think of the importance, within adolescent culture, of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, conceived by its creator, Joss Whedon, as a feminist work intended to morally transform a co-ed adolescent audience by showing an apparently ordinary girl who could also fight; or, of the show *How I Met Your Mother*, which makes it possible to take different perfectionist trajectories across various ordinary life situations of young adults and the variety of regimes of expression that constitute their grammar.

The perspective on ordinary culture inaugurated by Cavell and Warshow makes it possible to perceive the moral importance of television series, which now generate immense interest in the intellectual world, but for which a critical discourse befitting the richness of the material and the creativity of the discipline has not yet been found. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that those interested in these series lack the resources for reconciling the moral education they gain from frequenting these series and their characters with their status as enthusiastic fans and with the conceptual overstimulation generated by the material's richness and diversity, typical of popular culture.

If we also recall that in *The Public and its Problems*, John Dewey defines the public on the basis of a confrontation with a problematic situation where people experience a particular difficulty which they initially perceive as coming from private life and where the answer, never given in advance, emerges out of the play of interactions of those who decide in turn to give it public expression, we realize that television, understood in this way, inherits the moral education at stake in popular cinema. The characters in television fiction can be "let go" and opened up to the imagination and usage of all; "entrusted" to us, as if it were up to all of us to take care of them by taking care of ourselves; this is particularly clear at the conclusion of a show. Indeed, characters show trajectories of personal transformation and exigency and testify to a hope for the educability of the spectator, who is obliged to pay attention, familiarize him- or herself, and little-by-little shape him- or herself, like the child Wittgenstein (citing Augustine) describes at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*, who is integrated into a form of life, and has to let go, or, as in *The Americans*, to accept to be left, abandoned.

When seen in this light, popular television is not a primal state or inferior version of culture but a democratic culture that creates shared values and acts as a resource for education of the self—becoming a subject by virtue of discussing public material that is integrated into everyday life. The digital revolution has allowed for new forms, agents, and models of artistic action that contest both elitist conceptions of "great art" and "populist" conceptions of popular art. Television shows, and the serial format, are, however, special. Television series are spaces where ethical and hermeneutic authority can be reappropriated and where viewers can be empowered by constituting, sharing, and discussing their own unique experiences; as democratic spaces for developing the capacity for individual expression, tastes, and choices.

For Cavell, films are fully constitutive of spectators' experiences; memories of moments in film are memories. But television inherits this power: television series accompany us over the years as the plot unfolds and evolves, as we unfold and evolve. The importance of television series is further reinforced by audiences' attachment to characters: viewers truly *care* about/for television series' protagonists). Television series also take care of their audience.[32] They provide communities with words for conversations

and a common language to approach the world, empower individuals with moral judgment, and present varieties and differences in moral points of view. The realism of television series, the "pressure of reality" on them, is also connected to the practices of world viewing.[33] Television series belong to both private life and to the public realm: they occupy the most public spaces (for example, some people will watch an episode on their phone on public transportation) and the most private (people watch television series at home, even in bed). That which Cavell claimed in the twentieth century for popular movies has, in part, been transferred to television series, which have taken over for, if not replaced, movies in the task of providing an education to the public. By virtue of their aesthetic format, television series entail viewers' initiation into forms of life that are not made explicit, and are initially opaque and sometimes disturbing. The "pilot" episode (rightly named) of each series of the corpus guides and leads us into a specific universe, with its codes, and vocabularies, and rules (the introduction of a seemingly naïve character in the DGSE quarters in the wonderful French show *The Bureau*).

Television series are the site of an "education for grownups" through the transmission and discussion of material that is widely available and shareable. To put this into view requires taking seriously the intentions of those who create, write, and make television series and again to pursue Cavell's conception of film on the subject of television. Serious study of television undermines a critical tradition that held that the intelligence of a show is a by-product of the critical reading of it, and demonstrates, instead, the intelligence a show brings to its own production—the importance of the function of the screenwriter, the work of actors, the choices made by editors. This also, as television series do in general, transforms the conception of single authorship. Actors' modes of expression and embodiment of characters and moral positions (moral texture, gait, style of speaking and behaving) in television series are central to the moral education made possible by such dramas, through collective and individual moral choices, negotiations, conflicts, and agreements that are at the basis of this education; trajectories of characters or ensembles; narrative turns and arcs; plot twists, and so on.

We can thus account for the powers of influence of television series, along with their potential for the transmission and sharing of meanings and values. This means taking into account and demonstrating their degree of reflexivity: introducing agency into the concept of "reception" by studying some underestimated phenomena (attachment to shows and characters; re-appropriation of scenes and episodes online; online amateur critiques; the influence of series on personal ethical choices or career choices, etc.). Television series and the conversations they initiate are a unique way of depicting the competing moral positions of protagonists as they are lived every day, and help viewers understand another's point of view through the representation of radically different ethical and political positions. For

instance, the Israeli television series *Fauda*, which depicts the hard reality of situations of tension in the Palestinian occupied territories, is appreciated both by Israeli *and* Palestinian viewers.

The movie or television actor or actress has the mysterious ability of what Cavell defined as "photogenesis": the capacity to make him- or herself perceptible to spectators, and thereby to constitute the spectator's experience. In popular cinema as in television series, we can see the emergence of a specific entity that once again subverts the mystique of authors or works: the moral type constituted (on the model of family resemblance) by an actor's or actress's different roles or phases. Television series and the place that they, and their universes, have taken in the existences of spectators have only confirmed this incorporation to experience. The educative force of television series, indeed, lies in their integration into everyday life, in ordinary and repeated contact with characters who become intimates—no longer on the overused model of identification and recognition, but, rather, the model of frequenting, familiarization, and attachment: processes that leave open the possibility of the other's independence and unknowability. In this way, television series continue the quest for the popular cinema's pedagogical task of creating an inseparably subjective and public education. This intertwining of the private and of modes of constituting a public translates into new modes of subjectivation by the public. This brings us back to the question of *what counts* for a given individual. Cavell noted with respect to Warshow that once criticism begins to focus on these public objects, it requires both a specific attention and "personal writing," which can be defined by care for the self.

> While the likes of T.S. Eliot and Henry James . . . are great artists, unlike those who create the comic strip *Krazy Kat* and write Broadway plays and make Hollywood movies, the latter say things he (also) wants to hear, or rather things he (also) can and must understand his relation to; this relation manifests the way he lives, his actual life of culture. He concludes that to say what he finds in these more everyday concerns he needs to write personally, but it seems clear that the reverse is equally true, that he wants to attend to them because that attention demands of him writing that is personal, and inspires him to it.[34]

This does not imply a false revolutionary inversion of aesthetic values, but, rather, a new assessment of importance, which Wittgenstein called for when he asserted the importance of ordinary language philosophy and attention to real life.

To overcome skepticism and this vulnerability is to overcome our inability or refusal to *see what matters*, as Cavell wrote: "To fail to guess the unseen from the seen, to fail to trace the implications of things—that is to fail the perception that that there *is* something to be guessed and traced, right or

wrong." This is at the core of the redefinition of ethics, and of the pursuit of happiness, through the search of importance.

> Any of the arts will be drawn to this knowledge, this perception of the poetry of the ordinary, but film democratizes the knowledge, hence at once blesses and curses us with it. It says that the perception of poetry is open to all, regardless as it were of birth or talent, as the ability is to hold a camera on a subject, so that a failure so to perceive, to persist in missing the subject, which may amount to missing the evanescence of the subject, is ascribable only to ourselves, to failures of our character; as if to fail to guess the unseen from the seen, to fail to trace the implications of things—that is to fail the perception that that there is something to be guessed and traced, right or wrong—requires that we persistently coarsen and stupefy ourselves.[35]

This revelation of one's own pertinence, of the possibility and above all the necessity of making use of who one is, is something that all Cavell's readers and students owe him. This redefinition of the task of philosophy, the pursuit of happiness, through the search of importance (what is important to me, what is important to us) and the recognition of our failures to acknowledge importance, to "guess the unseen from the seen," may be his main teaching. As he writes in *The World Viewed*: "We involve the movies in us. They become further fragments of what happens to me, further cards in the shuffle of my memory, with no telling what place in the future. Like childhood memories whose treasure no one else appreciates, whose content is nothing compared to their unspeakable importance for me."[36]

The injunction to appropriate and re-collect one's experience and *what counts* within it, to take yourself seriously, defines the new demand of the *culture of the ordinary*. As Cavell puts it in his assessment of *The Immediate Experience*: Warshow "expresses his sense of the necessarily personal in various ways in his opening essay ('The Legacy of the 30s')— namely, a sense of the writer's having to invent his own audience, of the writer's having to invent all the meanings of experience, of the modern intellectual's 'facing the necessity of describing and clarifying an experience which has itself deprived him of the vocabulary he requires to deal with it.'"[37] Here again we discover perfectionism in the aesthetic demand to find and invent an audience, as a "personal" search for words to describe an experience that *has precisely deprived you of the vocabulary necessary to deal with it*. This is both a definition of popular culture and the expression of a new requirement for criticism and for ordinary ethics and politics. Popular culture is, indeed, the place for "the education of grownups" who, through it, can arrive at a kind of self-education or self-cultivation, a perfecting of the self: the process of becoming a subject by becoming part of, discussing, and sharing in, material that is both public and private, ordinary, woven into everyday life. It is in this sense that, as Warshow said, "we are all self-made (wo)men."

Notes

1 Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience*, Expanded Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), xxxvii.

2 Stanley Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say?" in *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, reissued 2002).

3 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*: *Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of Moral Life* (Cambridge: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2004). Warshow, *The Immediate Experience*, xxxvii.

4 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 125.

5 Ibid.

6 Warshow, *The Immediate Experience*, xxxviii.

7 See note three.

8 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 125.

9 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

10 Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 40.

11 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, xxi.

12 Ibid., 262.

13 Emmanuel Bourdieu, "Stanley Cavell—pour une esthétique d'un art impur," in *Stanley Cavell, Cinéma et philosophie*, ed. Marc Cerisuelo and Sandra Laugier (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2000), 57.

14 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 10.

15 Laugier, *Le mythe de l'inexpressivité* (Paris: Vrin, 2010); Andrew Norris, *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

16 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 12.

17 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2000), 57. Cited in Ibid., 14.

18 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 41.

19 Emerson, "The American Scholar," 57.

20 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 4–5.

21 See Marc Cerisuelo "L'Importance du cinéma," in *Stanley Cavell, Cinéma et philosophie*, 19.

22 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 6.

23 Cavell, "The Thought of Movies" (1983), in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

24 Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures," in *Film*, ed. Daniel Talbot (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 18. Cited in Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 30.

25 Bourdieu, "Stanley Cavell—pour une esthétique d'un art impur," 44.

26 See Stephen Mulhall, *On Film*, 3rd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

27 V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 59.

28 Bourdieu, "Stanley Cavell—pour une esthétique d'un art impur," 47.

29 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 30.

30 Sabine Chalvon-Demersay, "*La confusion des conditions: une enquête sur la série télévisée* Urgences," *Reseaux* 95 (1999): 235–83.

31 See Laugier, "Séries televises: éthique du care et adresse au public," *Raison publique*, no. 11 (2009), and Norris, *Becoming Who We Are*.

32 See Laugier, "Séries televises"and N*os vies en séries* (Paris: Flammarion, 2019).

33 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*.

34 Cavell, "After Half a Century," in *The Immediate Experience*, Expanded Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 292.

35 Cavell, "The Thought of Movies," *Themes Out of School: Effects as Causes* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), 14.

36 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 154.

37 Cavell, *The Immediate Experience*, 292.