

'What Becomes of Thinking on Film?'

Stanley Cavell in conversation with Andrew Klevan

Andrew Klevan: How have Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin been important to your work and, more specifically, why might their work, or your understanding of their work, be helpful to us when thinking about film? Why might it be beneficial for a film student to have a sense of these writers?

Stanley Cavell: The general fact about my encounter with them is that they convinced me, so to speak, to stay in the field of philosophy. I don't know whether I would have managed to leave, perhaps bought another saxophone and tried to make a living, but I was very dissatisfied with the work I was doing in graduate school. I didn't realise *how* dissatisfied until Austin visited Harvard in 1955, as a result of which I threw away what might have been half of a dissertation. I had read Austin, but it never hit me *hard* until we talked and I went to his various classes. So the question about Austin's importance to me, and Wittgenstein's several years later, is a question about philosophy's importance to me altogether. These two let me, encouraged me to, think about anything I was interested in, as very much opposed to almost all the rest of the philosophy that I was working at, where I felt to match the tone, the strictures, the agenda, the conventions of professional philosophy dictated a certain kind of response, a certain kind of research paper, a certain kind of sequence of chapters for a dissertation, that both gave me a subject but deprived me of having any say in the subject. I was rewarded for the work I was doing as a graduate student, but I didn't really believe what I was saying. I didn't feel that I was starting at fruitful places, or formulating topics that really moved me, nor leaving myself satisfied with my conclusions. Austin changed that, decisively but not completely. He allowed me to think about fascinating things all the time, but I was unsure whether this was philosophy.

Philosophy is a peculiar thing to want to do and I had to keep thinking that there was a motive in me, some fantasy in me, of what it was like to examine myself and be able to use this in some sort of scholarly rational way at a depth at which other subjects didn't permit. But Austin did directly inspire a substantial paper from me that is the first I am grateful for and still use, the title essay of my first book, *Must We Mean What We Say?* I knew that, whatever I was going to do, I could take that with me, let it guide me. An important effect of it was that it allowed me to read Wittgenstein for the first time with any sense of fruitfulness. (I'm still sometimes surprised by this, given their great differences of temperament and of ambition for philosophy.) I had tried reading *Philosophical Investigations* several years earlier and it meant essentially nothing to me. I thought it was interesting, inventive, but really nothing more than a kind of unsystematic pragmatism. A large number of philosophers still think that about Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. The step Wittgenstein took beyond Austin for me lay in his distrust of language as well as his trust in it and that began to open for me what it is I felt I needed from philosophy, that combination of absolute reliance and absolute questioning of every word that came out of me.

I might say that the promise of freedom I felt in these writers is epitomised in the surprise of their enabling me to think with some point and consecutiveness about film. Yet this did not happen at once. *The World Viewed* does not explicitly feature their work, but it was explicitly in preparation while the later essays in *Must We Mean What We Say?* were showing up and while the idea of writing a little book about Thoreau's *Walden* was forming. This means that I was gathering implications of Austin's and Wittgenstein's work in allowing contemporary philosophical access to the achievements of Beckett and Kierkegaard and Shakespeare and Thoreau, and this access I count as essential to the writing of *The World Viewed*.

I might specify three issues I recognise as exemplifying the kind of encouragement Austin and Wittgenstein lent to the progress of my thinking about film. One was allowing me to resist the idea that the relation of a photograph to what it is of is well thought of as representation; another is the role of the ordinary, or say the uneventful, in the motion picture camera's interests in things, especially in the human face and figure; the third, most general, issue is their enabling me to feel that I was at once philosophising and being responsive to, open to, the endless events (uneventful and eventful events, as it were) of film. Without that openness, I would not have achieved any conviction that I was talking about the unprecedented fact of film.

I might call this the conviction that film shares with the other great arts the proposal that everything matters – and you do not know what everything means.

AK: You've talked about the 'unsummarisable' examples of Wittgenstein and Austin, and how Austin would demonstrate distinctions with daunting, haunting dramas. Could there be a connection between your observation about Austin's examples and the process of describing films? When we describe films we are partly trying to find the best way to summarise them, but we also feel they are unsummarisable (and daunting), so how can we summarise them in ways that satisfy us?

SC: Here are a couple of immediate links that occur to me to follow up. One is to ask what it means to quote a film. Discussing a film differs from discussing a painting, where you can stand before an object, or sit with a slide on a screen indefinitely, and *that* is what you're thinking about. With music you can quote a passage, whistling or at the piano. But when the film is gone again it is again gone. But then we should look at quoting more closely. Even with literature, the home of quotation, you're saying words in your voice, in a particular moment, to some point. Professors of English used to be tempted to think of themselves as Shakespearean actors when they read speeches from the plays. Is this quoting or performing?

Paraphrase is another obvious device for bringing a moment of a work to the table for discussion. Paraphrase had been a target of literary instruction since what's called the New Criticism, and although the French onslaught of theory beginning in the late 1960s was importantly an attack on the New Criticism (it was for a while called the New New Criticism), it joined hands with its enemy in teaching contempt for paraphrase. This has produced generations of students who are mostly incapable of, anyway unpractised at, thinking about and executing the feat of putting a text in other words, which is like being unable to describe an object. In the world of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, this amounts to depriving oneself of the capacity to think philosophically, since '[In philosophy] we must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.'¹ This is one form in which Wittgenstein insists on the difference between philosophy and science – to the dismay of many philosophers. Part of its liberating effect on me was its permitting me to pay full attention to what struck me as the almost wantonly poor descriptions philosophers habitually give of their examples, in aesthetics and in moral philosophy no more than in

epistemology. To understand this chronic condition can be said to be the task of the first three parts of my *Claim of Reason*.

AK: In the University where I teach we are encouraged to use a standardised form when we grade student essays. The form breaks down the assessment of the essay into different categories, and two of these categories are 'description' and 'analysis.' Description is presupposed to be separate from analysis, and often description is seen as a weakness, or at any rate, weaker than the thing we call 'analysis'. Therefore, if you've done a lot of analysis that is good, but if you merely seem to be describing then that's bad. Yet, I *want* my students to describe. I would like a whole essay of description, but it would have to be description of a certain type, or quality.

SC: That's good. Very hard to teach

AK: Yes absolutely. Like most of the best things, it can't be taught directly. One encourages seminar discussions, week after week, where the conversation hinges on the refinement of each other's descriptions of specific moments in films (rather than, say, around general thematic disputes). If the students get used to responding to each other (and the films) in this way then this process becomes habitual. Of course, it is another step for them to translate those skills into the more cogent form of an essay.

I wanted to return to what precisely was 'unsummarisable' in the examples of Austin and Wittgenstein. What do you think is being lost in summarising?

SC: I can't remember the context in which I said that they were 'unsummarisable'. There are two obvious things that I would mean now if I said that. One is that in order for the example to have its effect you have to *give* it. That is, you have to take one through the narrative of the example and see whether the effect of the example is there. I give you a favourite pair of mine as an instance of this from Austin's essay on excuses, one of his greatest essays.² If the subject of excuses had been thought of as a topic in philosophy on the continent of Europe Austin's material would have occupied a very large volume. In Austin it's twenty-three pages. But it is an enormous topic and he knows all he's doing is giving you notes for this topic (they were some of his notes for a seminar that he gave at Oxford over the years). The idea of excuses is of considerations that mitigate, extenuate, the

slips or mishaps or lapses in actions so familiar in everyday life. The reticulation of terms of excuse reveals, I have wished to say, the inherent vulnerability of the human being, even, given the existence of the inexcusable, its openness to tragedy. I believe this description of Austin's work on excuses would offend many colleagues of mine. It makes Austin's work sound pretentious, something Austin was himself worried about. I think that his work on slips is as important to Austin as the idea of slips is to Freud, although they have completely different sensibilities and goals. It is, however, uncontroversial to say that the value of Austin's work is a function of his examples. Here is the pair of stories I had in mind, meant to show the difference between excusing oneself by claiming to have done something by mistake and claiming to have done it by accident.

First story. There are two donkeys, mine and my neighbour's, in a field there beyond the fence. I take a sudden dislike to my donkey and decide to shoot it. I take careful aim at one of the donkeys, fire, and the donkey that I aimed at drops. I walk over to the fence and discover to my horror that it's my neighbour's donkey. Have I done this by mistake or have I done this by accident? Wait before answering.

Second story. Same two donkeys; same sudden dislike. This time I take careful aim and just as I fire the donkeys shift and to my horror I realise I have shot my neighbour's donkey. I run up to it but it's dead. Now have I done that by mistake or by accident?

I have no doubt, going back over the thing, that when you have aimed and the donkey you aimed at drops dead and it turns out to be your neighbour's, what's happened is that you have *mistaken* yours for your neighbour's donkey. When they shift and you didn't intend to shoot the donkey that you aimed at, but he just got in the way of the bullet, something happened and you did it by accident. In my experience, telling the stories in a large class, if you ask beforehand whether people think there is a clear and distinct difference between doing something by mistake and doing it by accident there is a lot of disagreement, and if those who think there is a clear difference are asked to specify it, they understandably cannot manage it. Then when I have told the stories, the agreement is high, not perfect, but high enough to produce appreciative laughter. There are many reasons why agreement is not perfect – some weren't listening, some are not interested, some are suspicious or are imagining the examples differently from others.

Then what do I take myself to have learned from the examples, I who after the examples had absolutely no doubt in my mind which was which? There was nothing I failed to know that I have been

informed of. I merely, let's say, could not articulate, or did not understand, what I knew. Does this mean that I go around saying things, allowing words to flow from me, without really knowing what I'm saying? That does not seem exactly to be a moral Austin wished to draw. On the contrary, what he says is that philosophers (or, say, any of us in a philosophical corner) are lazy, haven't done their work responsibly, are drunk with false profundity, and so on. I was not especially interested in these particular interpretations, matters I identify as chronic in philosophy and which I call the proposal of particular terms of criticism. But that I was unknown to my own language and contrariwise, that did sink in. And I still find myself every other day having to recognise that kind of blindness to myself. That one gets to oneself through an examination of one's language should be no surprise. What is in question is to what extent getting to oneself is philosophy's proper business.

AK: I was smiling through the example, and my amusement might have something to do with the 'unsummarisable.' I've got this vision of the fence and I am picturing the donkey suddenly moving in front of the other donkey and oh dear...The set-up and the development of the situation is amusing...I am also amused by the choice of using donkeys. If it had been horses, the example would have been different, or I might have felt differently.

SC: Yes. It would not have been different with the concepts of 'mistake' and 'accident' but the seriousness of horses would have pushed into flower the sadism or sadness of the dramas. Austin characteristically plays his examples for laughs. It is very important that many of his examples carry an air of whimsy. This raises the point of humour in his, and in Wittgenstein's, philosophising. Sometimes it resembles the laughter of Lewis Carroll with nonsense rhymes, language taking us for a ride. Various streaks in modern philosophy have been concerned with philosophy's mission to detect nonsense. The moral that I was drawing, of becoming unknown to my language, was more important to me than logical positivism's discovery of nonsense in classical metaphysics. What motivated me to philosophise was my own capacity for emptiness, or for rigidity, for inhabiting (I sometimes picture it to myself) a little shed, or outpost, of language, instead of reaching the open panoply of expression that my language offers as (potentially) *mine*. To show me differences as Austin does typically requires my recognising the humour of my mistakes, the humour of accidents, hair's breadths away from tragedy. I'm just agreeing with you that the humorousness of the donkeys is internal to Austin's teaching.

AK: Yes, but I hope we're not being anti-donkey! Of course, I might feel differently about the whole thing if it were a real life incident, or if my relationship to the incident was different and so on. I certainly don't think that horses would capture the neighbourliness in the story. It seems a real possibility that they would both own a donkey, and it evokes some sort of small community.

Your feelings about the importance of the humour in the examples of Austin prompts me to bring up something you have written about your father, and his propensity to tell jokes. Your father never told a joke without it having a telling pertinence to an immediate passage that had just occurred in a social context. This struck a chord with me because my father did something similar. It made me wonder what my own father was doing. I was wondering what the impulse to tell a joke in these contexts was. Why would he? What sort of offering was the joke?

SC: My father was uneducated, unentitled to intellectual authority, but had the ability to make others laugh, to make others respond. That's power and that's authority. That's exercising some intellectual dominance, some emotional dominance that translates into some intellectual dominance in this moment. A point is made and a point that he could not have made intellectually or that he felt would have been lost. The human craving for narration is about as primitive a wish or form of interaction as exists. How early does a child want to hear a story? My father was not capable of intimacy with me when we were alone of anything like the intimacy he could create at a small gathering by telling a story. Intimacy, commonality, parabolic point and dominance are all achieved in these so-called jokes. But Yiddish jokes often require long narration; I remember a couple that seemed to last as long as ten or fifteen minutes. Perhaps I exaggerate.

AK: That is a *very* long time. That's a whole screenplay!

SC: What it means is you cannot always depend on a punch line. You have to be consumed in the telling of the thing. And then exhausted when it's over.

AK: Yes, *experiencing* the unfolding of the joke is important (like experiencing the 'unsummarisable' example). A good joke teller will be adept with rhythm and pace (knowing which bits to stretch and which bits to speed up). Jokes can be a communally shared short hand to express dynamics and consequences. They can transport you quickly to another

place or position and speedily move you through various, sometimes extreme, events. We can easily go with the teller because it elides our usual fear of changes in perspective (these changes are offset by the humour) and we open up because the medium promises – gives us an anticipation of – a gain at the end. They are little fictional worlds that are described and narrated. There's an impulse to concreteness in a joke, but also to abstraction as well.

SC: Parable!

AK: Yes, like that, and like The Philosophical Example. Good jokes may be a popular form of giving philosophical examples. Your work has been eager to establish films as philosophical examples. My father was also a great lover of Hollywood movies and this love may be connected to his fondness for story jokes. I have just made a series of observations about jokes, for example, that they can transport you quickly to another place or position and speedily move you through various, sometimes extreme, events. These observations on jokes also sound like descriptions of films, especially those from Hollywood. Hollywood films and jokes both dramatise simple stories that are accessible. They may come from an impulse to please, and they are happy to be popular, but they need not be simplistic, and they may be *exemplary*.

SC: The ability to *tell* a story; it is *clear* that this is a talent. It is a talent that everybody has to some extent. I sense in myself, sometimes, a certain guilt in rewarding sheer talent, as if, if that's what we do, it's just too undemocratic to be in the university. In the sciences, somehow it's all right: We all understand that some people can do mathematics in a way that others can't, you accept that it is a form of virtuosity. But there's something that's against the grain for me in thinking that virtuosity is required in philosophy. It must be something that anyone can participate in. At the same time I feel I am looking for what Emerson calls genius – the thing just this person has it in himself or herself to do.

AK: You refer to Wittgenstein's claim that in philosophy we do not seek to learn anything new (distinguishing philosophy from science, since science is the unsurpassable source of paradigms for learning something new about the world. We want to understand what's already in plain view. The film criticism I admire most helps me to understand what is in plain view.

SC: Yes, I agree absolutely. What's the sense of something in front of your eyes that you do not see. Wittgenstein also says that what's hidden is of no philosophical interest to us, as though philosophy were a game of getting hot and getting cold – the object of its inquiry from the beginning a perfectly familiar object. But film dramatises 'all in front of your eyes' in a way painting does not. Film is *put* in front of your eyes and *persists* in saying something to you in front of your eyes. I suppose it is a source of film's popularity, as if we knew what this meant. Popularity is such a weak and misleading idea of what the power of film is to destroy false barriers within audiences, within individual viewers of film. This power is something that film in some way shares with music, in some way shares with drama, in some way shares with sports (evidently in some way with gladiators, inviting its popular critics to give individual films a thumbs up or thumbs down). But this power of, let's say, physical impression also makes possible a reticence that great film makers also have – the capacity of film to await your response, instead of tipping you off about how to respond. Of course all of these things can be abused.

The reverse, the absolute negation, of what one would mean by a film criticism that takes you to what is in plain view is, I judge, the familiar tendency to approach a film by producing an anecdote about it. This is familiar from the presentation of historical films on television, for example on the Turner Classics channel. The billionaire Turner has bought up an extraordinary, a priceless one would say, library of films, films it is on the whole a comfort to think are being preserved, and in good prints, in that place, and I hope in others. Invariably these films are introduced by way of anecdotes of casting or of some amusing misadventure during the shooting of the film. But what's interesting to me is that this can be done. You can in fact interest a certain large audience of a film by giving some tiny anecdote about its making. The equivalent would be hard to find with a painting or a novel or a piece of music. One could say there are no anecdotes about such things – beyond Proust's being oppressed by noise or Flaubert's looking for the precise word. Hardly very illuminating. It's tried of course: Mahler was saddened by one thing or another when he wrote this symphony; he always wrote in the morning, with strict orders that he not be disturbed until he appeared for lunch. So what is it about film that yields to this banal touch? Insipid and predictable in principle as many of these anecdotes are, what they are pointing to is something about film's fascination with, craving for, something like the accidental, the contingent, the subjection of human existence to

indescribably many possibilities of catastrophe or joy. As in Austin's vision in *excuses*, in which we become conscious that for human actions to be what they are, for things to work out as they do, endless conditions have to be in place. Such thoughts reveal that film is about how things happen, or happen to happen, or happen just here and now, or happen to look. The anecdotes teach you nothing, yet they are not even boring, which is quite amazing. What difference does it make that this is the first film in which Tony Curtis appears and has no lines? This was the entire content on television the other night of the introduction to a really quite interesting film noir called *Criss Cross*, from just after World War II, and the way of introducing it was to alert the audience to notice this good looking young man who's dancing with Yvonne De Carlo (until Burt Lancaster comes along); this sixty seconds was the making of Curtis's career. But this film is about how people look and about the accidents of a career and about being able to appear and say nothing. All of these things are deeply part of the grain of film. The gossip anecdote, about essentially nothing, of which nothing is made, nevertheless gives the audience a specific stake in the film. It breaks the smooth, hard, undifferentiated surface, like a dive. And the most serious criticism also needs to do that.

AK: I wonder why so many of the serious things we feel about films are mysteriously diverted when we speak or write about them. Why are our thoughts and words about film deflected? Anecdotes seem to be one of the many instances of diversion. I was just thinking of that anecdote about the Renoir film *Partie de Campagne*...

SC: ...Yes. 'It rained that day.'

AK: Actually that is not necessarily an unhelpful anecdote if it leads one, as it led me, to be even more astonished at how Renoir made use of the rain (on the water) in the film. Indeed, we are more alert to the complexity of its integration.

SC: Exactly, but instead I have heard the anecdote used as reductive, by saying 'Oh he didn't intend to film the scene in rain. He was just lucky.' In that case one might say that wonderful filmmakers are perpetually lucky. How can that be?

AK: In many places in your work you've explored or implied matters of avoidance and evasion: our capacity to avoid or evade the emo-

tional particularities of what is before us. You've now given an example of one of these types of evasion in talking about film. Of course, it is not only true of film discussion, but it seems pervasive. Why is that?

SC: I don't know that I have wisdom about it. I suppose it is connected with the inherent emotionality of film. Austin and Wittgenstein, though they don't flaunt the matter, were the first philosophers whom I read who in their descriptions of cases included feeling, passion. As if philosophers believed implicitly that feeling and passion always interfere with reason, philosophy's aegis. The positivist revolution made this explicit – regarding all non-scientific assertions, that is to say religious, ethical, aesthetic assertions, as expressions of feeling and therefore not cognitive, not rational. Now if you just say that, you wonder how anyone could believe it; and in my years in graduate school, people tended to say *just that*, and other people, helplessly, tried to refute it. But the fear of nonsense, the fear of the irrational, is in some way pervasive in western philosophy, part of its origination. The idea that passion and reason are antithetical to one another seems to me a libel on human nature and conduct. As if passion were a form of superstition. But that was the avant-garde when I came into philosophy. A.J. Ayer's book *Language, Truth and Logic* preaches that doctrine, and it is the single most successful text-book of philosophy in modern times. There are more than a million copies of that book in print.

AK: It is one of the first texts encountered by first-year students at Oxford studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics.

SC: I am not answering your question about avoiding emotional particularity. Sometimes people say that we lack an adequate vocabulary of passion. What would it mean if that were actually true – that humankind has forever overlooked the need for exact expression in human speech? Or that, like the beasts we are incapable of much more articulation of expression than cries of rage, fear, pain, and hunger? And here we are to deal with the medium of film, in which feelings are not just the topic and the mode of interaction with these objects, but in which the possibility of having our feelings manipulated by them is incessantly present. Spencer Tracy's demonstration to Katharine Hepburn at the close of *Adam's Rib* that men can fake crying as well as women is a brilliant exposition of the truth that

faking crying may cost producing real tears. The intimacy of this pair is expressed in her recognition that these tears of his, produced didactically, nevertheless betoken that she has hurt him. The denial of their importance is the male's way of calling attention to them, to one who can understand.

A good reason for evading emotionality is something that I lay at Pauline Kael's door – the incessant, seemingly exclusive insistence on nothing but the 'kiss, kiss, bang, bang' sense of what a film can do, the kick in American films as opposed to what she called European films. And that's done very heavy disservice to both professional and unprofessional views of writing about film, marring the good service she did in establishing film, among educated readers generally, as a body of work to be taken seriously.

I've just heard a lecture by a professional, indeed leading, scholar of film, who kept pressing upon the audience that film is a dramatic, an emotional, thing. And I wondered where I, or this scholar, have been all these decades? Why would anybody bother to say that now? I was just alluding to a male skittishness about feeling, but there is also a female, or feminist, distrust, women's distrust, not of feeling in general, but of film's feeling. I think of Laura Mulvey's tremendously influential paper, from 1975, on the male gaze.³ What primarily is famous in that paper is its stress on the idea of the male gaze, and there are plenty of objections and exceptions to be taken to the stress, and I've taken some. But something much more interesting to me in that paper is Mulvey's direct advice or her fervent direction to destroy the pleasure of film. And that, I thought, was a really revolutionary, effective thing to say. The effect went beyond perhaps, or perhaps not, what was said. There she is saying beware of this pleasure that is poison, it's part of what's subjecting you to false views of yourself and of the world. That a certain kind of pleasure can be addictive or poisonous is certainly true. But I think Mulvey's view helped to cause a violent misreading of, especially, Hollywood film in particular. Many of these films contain the kind of poison she detects, but many – I think the best – are at least as opposed to that poison as she is. It is a task of criticism to explain how this can be the case. But something this means is that criticism has as an obligation to provide a criticism of false pleasure. Mulvey's indiscriminateness was, I thought, harmful. It hindered critical arguments about film from developing, anyway as I would have like to see them develop.

AK: You have written about interpretations that condescend (specifically in relation to the *Unknown Woman* films). You have made a

distinction between interpretations of a work that do and those that do not allow the work a say in its interpretation.

SC: The idea of a film's having a stake in its own interpretation is meant to capture, and to refuse, the temptation to condescend to these works. I have had the impression in so much film criticism that it thinks it is better, higher-minded (which is what condescending says) than the objects of its attention. Perhaps instead of speaking of having a say in its interpretation, we might say that a serious film, like any work of art, *resists* interpretation, as it were insists upon being taken in its own terms. Resisting interpretation in these objects is another way of understanding what their stake in their interpretation is. They are no more transparent to criticism than persons are.

AK: I suppose I was also referring to the tendency in film writing to avoid particularity *per se*, not simply the particularity of a film's emotional effect: the particularity of what is before us. Film study seems to have gone to great lengths to avoid talking about what might be in plain view (and maybe the medium deviously encourages it). I should make a distinction here. Sometimes in our criticism, it's apt to be sensitive about avoidances because the film itself has been sensitive about them. We don't want to use words that betray the film's suggestiveness. I found this when writing about Joan Bennett in *The Woman in the Window*, Fritz Lang's film made in 1944. It seems that the woman, played by Joan Bennett, is some sort of prostitute, but the film remains ambiguous about the matter in a variety of ways. Initially, I used the word 'prostitute' in my writing. Then I decided that I shouldn't use the word because the film does not use the word (so to speak). I needed a way of implying aspects of her livelihood that would be sensitive to the film's handling.

SC: But there you're not avoiding anything. You were justly wary of being false to the experience.

AK: There is another way I want to put this. You have a rich and detailed film and then you will get an academic piece on that film that barely acknowledges any of that richness or detail (and richness is not necessarily caught in apparent close attention to the film; through, for example, shot breakdowns). I might announce that the piece is bad for failing to make an effort to acknowledge the film appropriately, but primarily my feelings are bewilderment and loss. When I'm studying a good film, it seems to demand of me that I give it attention and detail.

This is what I'm seeing and hearing. My eventual writing on the film will be woefully insufficient, partly necessarily so, partly because of my own problems with expression but I'm never in doubt about the nature of the pursuit. This lack of doubt is not because of arrogance, but because good films won't let me doubt it. They take a hold of me. When I leave the screen, and go and do something else, the film follows me. Sometimes it rudely interrupts my enjoyment of other films, or it accompanies me into the shower: 'Hey there, don't forget me. I'm sure you're simplifying me to make it easy for your writing. Are you *really* doing me justice? Oh, the inescapable responsibility, and the worry! Do others not similarly experience this intensity?

SC: That film is overwhelming is also a fact about it, the richness is overwhelming, 90 or 100 minutes and you have been taken through a larger span of passion and feeling than really 90 minutes of almost anything else. (Not more than Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*. No indeed. But what kind of concession is that?) And you have the sense often about how terribly little of a film is articulated, as if, if you don't say anything about the film now, the experience of the film will vanish with the film. The density of stimulus is a fact about what's happened to you. Not to come to terms with it is to have something that has happened to you go unremarked, as if intellectually oppressive. Multiple re-screenings do not always help. They may confirm wordlessness. The sense of wanting to have something to say that matches the richness of experience is itself daunting. I think of Victor Perkins' response *just* to the Linz sequence in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948, US) [where the pair are isolated in a corner of the square and he proposes and she rejects him]. The intricacy of what Perkins can show of what is actually going on in that sequence is something that only a handful of people are capable of doing. So that cannot be an example of what you are asking of a decent non-evasive academic response.

AK: I find that after I've watched a film I normally have a few moments or maybe just one moment that really strikes me.

SC: Start there...

AK: Yes, I'll start there. I try to encourage my students to go with the moment that struck them.

SC: Absolutely. Another good exercise.

AK: Yes, although it wasn't an exercise for me. It feels intuitive. Anyway, I'll only have a dim sense of what it is about that moment. I'll just go 'hmmmm.'

SC: A moment you care about, however apparently trivial, can be productive. Why did the hand do that? Why did the camera turn just then?

AK: And why is this niggling me? Our direction of thought here reminds me that you have discussed Emerson's feeling that primary wisdom is intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. The occurrence to us of an intuition places a demand on us for tuition. You call this wording, the willingness to subject one self to words, to make oneself intelligible. This tuition so conceived is what you understand criticism to be, to follow out in each case the complete tuition for a given intuition. There's a moment that really stuck me in Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Frank Capra, 1936, US). I read your piece on the film after re-watching it, and was pleased to see you mention this moment. It is when Mr Deeds (Gary Cooper) is lying on his back on his bed talking to Babe Bennett (Jean Arthur) on the phone. He has his right calf and ankle resting on the knee of the other leg, and he's playing with his foot while he's talking to her. The camera is behind his head so that most of his face is obscured (this shot is repeated a number of times). Then when the phone call is over you see him playing his trusty tuba and his face is even more hidden than in the previous version of the shot. Why did they think to execute it like that...*like that*?

SC: *Like that*...

AK: And *why* was I drawn to these shots? I suppose there is something unusual about seeing someone on their bed playing with their foot in a film, or with their tuba, and not seeing their face. Yet, I didn't only think the shots were unusual, or striking. I thought they were gently mysterious, and that they were significant. They asked questions of me. As the film continued, the memory of the shots kept returning. My intuition was that because these shots were *like that* they might give me a key to the whole film, and open it up in new and rewarding ways.

SC: I like it. I share it. It is always important that one is drawn, that a memory keeps returning. I'm inclined to say further that there is always a reason. But wordlessness may be as significant a response as

an essay. You remind me of a little private concept of mine – ‘the nothing shot’. Sometimes just rhetorically it makes a break in the narrative at certain times. In another Frank Capra film, *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934, US), with the pair Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, we find them walking together down a road *away* from us, an empty road, and that’s a shot that over and over I came back to in my mind. I had nothing to say about it. I knew that it punctuated a moment in the film; it was the end of something and the beginning of something. It could have been months, maybe years, until I just stopped and asked myself, in the right mood, what is it about a couple together at dawn walking down a road together away from us? Where are they coming from (what is dawning), and going to; why are they – are they – silent? They direct brief words to each other, but what are they thinking about? And suddenly every word seemed to mean something and at that stage I could hardly keep up with thoughts that I was having about it. I then wrote a brief essay about simply that shot, *simply* that shot, which seemed to me to raise every issue in the whole film. *But as an exercise*, it is so hard – isn’t it? – to characterise in such a way that a group of people each can follow it, get something out of it. It’s not to be counted on.

AK: That’s what’s interesting about it. Yet, we both, I hope, would be reluctant to say it is some special privilege of our own to see these moments, or recognise them.

SC: Positively, I refuse to.

AK: Yes. And yet one knows from teaching...

SC: ...that anyone can draw a blank about anything. Especially with such a question as, ‘*What does that sequence mean?*’ The question is why one is stopped. It is a question that marks something I think of as philosophical criticism, given the extent to which I think of philosophy as inherently a matter of stopping and turning and going back over (call this conversation rather than linear, monological argument). It is a portrait of philosophy I find stretching from the events in Plato’s *Myth of the Cave* in *The Republic* to the practices recorded in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, with their depictions of being lost, stopped, and the recurrent demand to turn and to return. It goes with a view I have advanced on a number of occasions, of philosophy as responsiveness, as not speaking first. There I am taking as exemplary Socrates’ characteristically being

drawn into conversation by being accosted, perhaps in the public street. I grew up with so many colleagues, fellow students and teachers, who seemed to me to hector and pester each other and strangers with their philosophy, demanding answers to questions about what exactly the other means when nothing turned on getting more precise at that moment. In Socrates’ recounting of the opening events of *The Republic*, he depicts himself being accosted, stopped – his cloak is grabbed from behind – by the slave of a friend, to give him the message that his master urgently wants to speak with him, is eager to ask him something. Socrates tells the slave that he can release his cloak, implying that this is the sort of request that a philosopher will not willingly refuse, namely to attend to someone’s need or desire for a response, sensing themselves at a loss.

What is wrong with criticism as appreciation (or diminishment) is not that the critic expresses his or her taste but that this taste is not allowed to be questioned by the work in question, and nor is the work declared as unworthy to be given this privilege. A rooted condescension toward film is encouraged by the (reasonable) assumption on the part of daily or weekly critics of film that their readers will view the film just once. So they present a sort of tiny travel guide of the film’s events, with a tip or two of what to like or avoid. Nothing wrong with good tips; and some critics obligated to provide them observe and write memorably enough to elicit gratitude. But the short notice seems by its nature debarred from the project of getting viewers to stop, to consider, to check their own experience – to ask, for example, whether the reader shares the sense that the ending kiss in *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938, US) is awkward and to speculate about why that may be meant; or ask whether there may be an ulterior motive for Preston Sturges incorporating the opening strains of the Pilgrim’s Chorus from *Tannhäuser* to accompany the sequence on the honeymoon train ride out of Connecticut in which Lady Eve (Barbara Stanwyck) wraps her pious bridegroom in tales of her lurid past, and ask further why virtually no one remembers those strains in remembering the film, lost among the thousand-and-one other conditions and decisions that have made this film the film it is (*The Lady Eve*, Preston Sturges, 1941, US). The harm of once-over film criticism is that it is the only sort of writing about film that most filmgoers will encounter.

AK: You seem to be drawing a distinction between viewing critically and viewing philosophically. This sense of being stopped underpins your idea of viewing philosophically. I am stopped by the shots of

Deeds on his back on the bed, and then my questioning or investigation of the shots is influenced by that sense of being stopped. If I then say to you, or to a class, look at this shot of Deeds on his back playing his tuba – ‘Look at his leg’ or ‘Look at him on his back’ – then I have already given illustrations. I’ve told you what to look at. We could then say all sorts of fine things about the shot, and, in your terms, we would be viewing the moment critically, rather than philosophically as such. In the classroom, I often find myself prompting critical questions of this sort, but I hope I also encourage situations where we start with only a dim idea of why we have stilled the frame in this place, and we all help each other discover why we have stopped.

We can contrast the sort of moment like the one of Deeds on the bed or the moment in *It Happened One Night* to another instance, and that is the moment that you don’t realise at first, but later seems to be an important occurrence in the film. You mention a moment in *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937, US) where, at the beginning of the film, Irene Dunne throws an orange to Cary Grant. This orange is part of his gift to her. He has brought oranges back from Florida, where he was supposed to be visiting, but they’re stamped with CALIFORNIA. They therefore reveal his deceit. You say something to the effect that initially you hadn’t taken the action of her throwing the orange very seriously and then it became much more important to you. You say that she is not giving the fruit, but returning it. A train of questions then arose about what it is each wants the other to know, and who is to go first in trusting the other, and why each are perpetually tempted to test the other.

SC: It was only in the introduction to *Contesting Tears*, about the melodrama of the unknown woman, that it occurred to me that I wanted to say this about *The Awful Truth*, years after publishing my essay on that film. That’s a reason to write more than one book or one sentence or to go to more than one film or to live more than one day. I sometimes wonder whether I am slower on average than others in being able to recognise with clarity and usefulness what’s on my mind. I pride myself, in any case, on having a good memory for my inadequacies.

AK: It is a wonder to me how the great films keep pulling me back when they might appear to have exhausted themselves (other works of art pull one back, of course, but they don’t appear exhausted in quite this way).

SC: Think how that goes with the ingrained habit of movie going, that lasted decades before someone broke it, and it still exists in many households, which is that you don’t go to see a film that you’ve already seen. That is the idea that it doesn’t matter how great or moving this film was; there is nothing to learn from seeing it again. And of course if the only reason to see it again is to learn something, maybe you don’t learn what we’re talking about. But the sense that a film is eaten up and the wrapper can be thrown away on one viewing is very deep.

AK: Although we should note that thousands of people do re-view films like *It’s a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946, US) every year and thousands of people buy videos of them. In fact films are often returned to more than books.

SC: Certain films are, and this is important. But isn’t this apt not to happen because of a sense that one has not exhausted the issues of the film but rather because of something like the reverse, that one wants the sheer pleasure (or reassurance?) of finding it unchanged?

AK: The matter is importantly related to teaching because it must be true for me that these films are able to open up each year to different students. Every year a student will say or write something new about a film I’ve taught many times. This is why teaching is, or should be, continuous with our criticism. The fact that the films can be reinterpreted, provide new interpretations and new patterns, is intimately connected to the idea that you re-teach them. Students mustn’t think that the object of study has a meaning that is fixed (and fixed by me, or you). Each cohort of students, each class, must feel they are participating in an ongoing, unfolding conversation.

SC: We expect this of every art but film. It would be impossible for me to go into a classroom and talk about any object, or text, if I didn’t have some new suggestion to make about it. It can be the smallest detail, but if the compass needle just jogs, and you walk just a bit out of the way, everything can come out fresh, one’s relation to the familiar is enlivened, the hard surface is broken. Yes, it’s about teaching, about friendship, about marriage, about one’s life, about taking an interest. If for a given class I draw a blank or find myself unhappy with my notes for an opening, I say so (I hope), and ask for someone else for a beginning response. This is placing trust in my view that philosophy does

not speak first, but is responsive. Part of the sense of this is that on the whole it is easier to take an interest in another's response rather than to report and articulate a response of one's own. And without interest, philosophy as I care about it most cannot proceed.

AK: You've written the idea that films think, and further the idea of films thinking philosophically. One can imagine this sounding obscure. How can films *think*?

SC: Well, of course, that is to begin with just a somewhat provocative way of saying: Don't ask what the artist is thinking or intending, but ask why the work is as it is, why just *this* is *here* in just *that* way. The implication that the way the work is is a matter of its own thinking or intention may be brought out by noting that to ask 'Why has the artist done that?' (namely, modulated to the subdominant, held this shot longer than one would have expected, used a canvas whose vertical is many times longer than its horizontal span), and to ask 'Why does the work modulate, prolong the shot, employ this format?' are differently emphasised formulations of the same demand. Intending something (as in Anscombe's book on the subject⁴) is a function of wanting something. My formulation employing the work's thinking or intending or wanting something, is meant to emphasise the sense that the work wants something of us who behold or hear or read it. This is a function of our determining what we want of it, why or how we are present at it – what our relation to it is. It and I (each I present at it) are responsible to each other. As a music student, I was familiar early with thinking of a work as developing in response to itself. I shy away from the idea of a 'work of art'. But I do mean 'work of art', something made, if only made present, with reason, perhaps to defeat reason.

Why is one so shy these days? 'Work of art' is a term almost never used in my hearing any more, what is used is 'artwork'. Artwork is spelled as one word and, unless it's just or simply or only a mispronunciation of the German word *Artwerk*, I find it an odd turn. (It is certainly not a translation of 'object d'art'.) It seems to me a mark of a significant shift in sensibility over the past several decades, in response to, let's call it, the end of modernism. The English word 'artwork' used to, and as far as I know still does, designate a sort of embroidery, and also the matter in a magazine layout that includes everything but the words, everything that requires a design decision. What is critical about what I called this recent shift of sensibility is that *artwork* is a

different kind of noun from *work of art*. It's called, I believe, a mass noun. It's like the noun 'salt'; you wouldn't say, I'd like *a* salt, you'd ask for *some* or for *more* salt. And you wouldn't say you've got *an* artwork if what you have in mind is the design layout or the embroidery around the edge of a fabric, you would have *some* artwork and *more* artwork. So the shift from work of art to artwork seems a shift away from regarding a work as singular, as though nothing is (any longer) irreplaceable. I resist the idea.

I would not be inclined to ask about artwork what it is thinking about. That it is attractive, lucid, dramatic, is sufficient to justify its existence. (Though I might find that a given layout is thinking about, or say an homage to, Mondrian.) It's hard for me not to invoke here an idea I broach concerning *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, concerning Deeds' saying 'Everybody does something silly when he thinks.' This is said in a courtroom as Deeds begins to mount his defence against the charge that he does outlandish, incomprehensible things, like playing a tuba as he lies in bed, or feeding doughnuts to a horse. Taking its cue from Deeds the camera goes on to illustrate his examples as he picks out characters in the courtroom who are doodling, cracking their knuckles, drumming their fingers on a table, twitching their noses, and so forth. What we witness are human beings in various states of nervousness or restlessness, as if the human body and the human mind are not wholly at one with each other. Where Descartes says that nothing is more human than thinking, that thinking is the human essence that proves its existence to itself, this film is saying, 'Indeed. And what thinking looks like is *this*, namely a property provable upon the body.' (This is a perception congenial to Austin in the theory of excuses.) Descartes defines the human as a thing that thinks, and film retorts that it is an essentially restless body that thinks. I raise this not to argue it but to observe that in directing the camera to provide this proof by way of the body, Deeds is simultaneously showing that film is thinking about thinking, that is, about what it is to be human.

AK: I think it's fair to say that Hollywood films specialised in this sort of insight. How beguiling that the integrity of oneself, or the integrity of thinking, would be conceived, or proved, through silliness. It's charming, to put it mildly...and it is also profound.

SC: About silliness. I also have picked up that word reading so serious a critic as Paul de Man, who remarks that 'silliness is deeply associated with reference', that is, using language merely to say something that

purports to be true or false. And I put that together with Wittgenstein's remark, collected in *Culture and Value*, 'Always climb from the heights of cleverness into the green valleys of silliness.' The valleys of silliness are part of the magnificence and the pity and the vulnerability and the waste and the beauty of human existence.

AK: The great clowns – Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin – remind us of this repeatedly in endless creative variations.

SC: Endless. And they show that the highest and lowest moods may be separated by the thickness of a membrane. They join hands here with Shakespeare.

AK: With regard to *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* you have just discussed the expressiveness of the body while it thinks. You discuss the expressiveness of the human body in the *Unknown Woman* films, and how the self manifests itself in its embodiment. As you would say, film has found one of its important subjects. For you Garbo is the representation of absolute expressiveness, some extraordinary unity of body and mind. Charles Affron has written something instructive (and vivid) about Greta Garbo: 'Her acting is of a complexity that makes it difficult to assess in the context of standard technique. Yet she herself supplies the clue in the model of concentration that we must emulate if we are to perceive her properly. Lodged within the triteness of most of her vehicles, the glamour of a pristine shell, and the authentic image of solitude she projects are areas of sentiment that are attainable if we are prepared to pitch our tension of awareness as high as that of the actress. Garbo sheds the seductive veils of the love goddess, but only for those who are willing to share her intricacies. Punished with the numbness of adoration if we are lax, we visit the depths of her being if we can withstand the painful intimacy of her method. Garbo often seems lost in the labyrinth of her own privacy.'⁵ In your own work on Garbo, you emphasise that Garbo's absolute expressiveness is impossible to acknowledge, but I take it that you don't mean that the viewer shouldn't try, or try to experience the detail of her behaviour. I like the way Affron brings *our* responsibility into the picture, and the way we have to rise to her, if she, and the film, is to be revealed.

SC: Learn from her how to think about her. I don't want to miss what's unique about Garbo, but to learn how to think about a character from

the character is something like an ancient preoccupation of mine. I have said this about Cordelia in *King Lear* and said it in effect in comparing Garbo with Dietrich and, in all seriousness, with Mae West (in 'More of *The World Viewed*').⁶ When Affron expresses the idea of Garbo's shedding the veils of the love goddess and promising intimacy, he also speaks, admirably, of her as lost in her privacy. So to withstand her intimacy is to find her – not to know her but perhaps to acknowledge her unknownness. To find her in her power of intimacy is to recognise the splendour, the reality, of the human other. That there are others is not something one recognises at just any time (much as philosophy would like independent assurance of their presence). Film joins the great arts in harbouring this fact in its own way – beginning perhaps with its insistence on mortality, on the permanence and transience of the past.

AK: You've illuminated what we might mean when we say that a work of art is thinking. We have an instance from *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* where thinking is one of the film's themes or subjects. You've also said that film is inherently self-reflexive. This is of course a very important topic in *The World Viewed*. What's our link here?

SC: What I wanted to capture by saying that film is inherently self-reflexive is simply the significance of the fact that what you're given in film is a view of a place or a person or an object that is from one place rather than any other, at this time and not another, for this interval rather than another, in this light and with this texture and not others, and so on. Choice – thought, reflection – is on the surface. Obviously there are homologous choices in the other arts, but with film the alternatives (of angle, distance, lighting, interval, etc.) are in principle so obvious as to be imponderable. The reason for emphasising this, even so brusquely, is that it is just the thing that is invisible about film. It's on the surface, you can't miss it, but you inveterately miss it. Film trades on this, on missing it; it is part of film's emotionality. Call it the false transparency of film. If we say that this transparency is achieved through film's power to induce trance-like states, then our next task is to uncover the sources of this power. Should we relate false transparency to a resistance to the recognition of reality's independence of us?

AK: Another way to associate philosophy with film is by the application of a philosophical thesis or a philosophical text to a film. This is

another occasion where philosophy and film meet each other. For example, you associate Descartes with *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*. Can you take me through the process here? You are not simply applying Descartes...

SC: No, that's right.

AK: Ha!...Sorry to interrupt but I'm just thinking of Gary Cooper's simplistic answers during questioning by the House Committee on Un-American Activities...

SC: Yes. What we see there is that *this* is Gary Cooper thinking. Yet his uncensored embarrassment at his ignorance of the intellectual stakes in play (what does he confess to the House Committee he has never read? – not alone Marx) is so much more agreeable and illuminating than the self-presentations of Robert Montgomery and Adolf Menjou as deep thinkers. This goes with the revelation that on film Gary Cooper's portrayal of embarrassment can become a realisation of what philosophy calls self-consciousness, what Descartes specifies as my awareness that I think – that I cannot think that I do not think (for example, doubt it).

AK: Yes, look at the transformation in the film. Watching his silence at the end of *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* – he is astute about when one might speak or not speak or when one might want to show what one knows (or what one doesn't know). Anyway I'm sorry, you were talking about Descartes...

SC: I was agreeing with you that I do not invoke Descartes in my discussion of *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* as something the film illustrates. It is rather that the film rediscovers what it is that Descartes changed philosophy by discovering. It's a rediscovery of philosophy. It is important to me to show that film can do this, important both about film and about philosophy. It's important to me to say that philosophy can be discovered. Indeed what I want to say is that there *is* no philosophy *unless* it is discovered. Otherwise, it's just something that takes place in a classroom. The sense of film's intervention in human culture as an unprecedented event in the history of the arts is something recapturable in the experience of a significant film, for example in an unprecedented revelation of the body's restlessness as an expression of the essence of mind. It presents thinking itself as an embarrassment as well as a glory.

AK: The danger is when all this becomes institutionalised: this week I'm teaching *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* and this week the accompanying reading is Descartes, and, oh dear, you get some strange things happening, and it is not at all like the 'discovery' you're describing. After the class, every poor student tries to write an essay contriving the connection, and both Descartes and the film are mauled. The question therefore is: how does one keep the spirit of discovery within a more formalised teaching environment?

SC: This sounds again like the problem of naming the prostitute. You want Descartes to be there, but if you just say 'This is Descartes' you've killed it. Can one teach tact? Think of it as learning what constitutes the right to speak. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is concerned about what *can* be said, when silence *must* not be broken.⁷ Nietzsche opens Book II of *Human, All Too Human* by declaring: 'One should speak only where one *may* not be silent.'⁸ In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein is more explicitly concerned with one's standing toward the object of one's speech. He keeps coming upon the moment at which the teacher has to recognise that the one being instructed or informed has to go on alone. To allow the other the freedom for her or his own discoveries is then the mark of a good teacher.

AK: I have a Laurel and Hardy example. *The Music Box* (James Parrott, 1932, US) is the film where they take the piano all the way up the stairs and it keeps falling back down again. The critic Raymond Durgnat says the film is the myth of Sisyphus in comic terms. One significant difference from the myth of Sisyphus is that there is not one person but two, and the acknowledgement of this is important to the appreciation of the aspect of togetherness in Laurel and Hardy. Yet, it is still a fascinating insight and an example of how the film seems to have discovered the myth itself, or rediscovered it, and reframed it.

SC: Yes. Although in general film's discovery of myth seems somewhat better recognised than its discovery of philosophy. The register of the mythic in film is part, perhaps, of what Thomas Mann distrusted in it. He found film too drastic, and too easily manipulative in its effects, to count as an art. For the author of *Joseph and his Brothers*, and with Joyce's *Ulysses* in mind, the achievement of the mythic can seem too easy to achieve when, for example, Sean Penn at the end of *Dead Man Walking* (Tim Robbins, 1995, US) looms up virtually bound to a cross before the witnesses of his execution. To achieve the discovery of tragedy in the myth of Cinderella took the novelistic genius of Dickens

in *Great Expectations*. To achieve the discovery of its comedy cinematically takes no more than the talents that went into the making of *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990, US) in which Julia Roberts keeps having trouble with one of her shoes.

AK: In *The World Viewed* you write: 'Given the feeling that a certain obscurity of prompting is not external to what I wished most fervently to say about film...I felt called upon to voice my responses with their privacy, their argumentativeness, even their intellectual perverseness, on their face; often to avoid voicing a thought awaiting its voice, to refuse that thought, to break into the thought, as if our standing responses to film are themselves standing between us and the responses that film is made to elicit and to satisfy.'⁹ I think there is something very suggestive in all this and I think it does fit with some of the things we've been discussing. Could you unpack it for me?

SC: My first response to it is just to realise how early *The World Viewed* is in the effort to write about film in some sustained way. The book was published in 1971 and the writing had started in the late sixties, some thirty-five years ago. There were already some wonderful things to read about film, but not, as now, a sense of a body of significant work from which to look for companionship. I am expressing in the citation you read there a sense of isolation from my intellectual and aesthetic worlds, in which taking film with whatever philosophical seriousness one might bring to the subject was an eccentric thing to do, measured either by lovers of film or by professors of philosophy. (I won't attempt to characterise the state of my moral and political worlds, marked by the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement begun in the earlier 1960s, but the ambience of these events is also to be felt in such a passage as the one you cited from.) I was just completing the essays that make up *Must We Mean What We Say?*, which continues, even anticipates, the defence of Austin and Wittgenstein worked at in my doctoral dissertation completed in 1961. Since they seemed to show me a path into the present of philosophy, and at the same time caused alarmingly hard feelings in much, most, of the philosophical community I inhabited, I had already been forced to some recognition of my eccentricity. There were ample opportunities for me to feel a mystery to myself as much as to others.

AK: Would it be fair to say that 'avoid voicing a thought awaiting its voice' is associated with the idea of being torn between wanting to

evoke as precisely as we can, as truthfully as we can, but also wanting to maintain a vagueness, a sense of the incomplete, or the uncertain? We don't want to articulate in such a way that runs away from the inexact nature of our feelings. We want words that are more precise because we know they're a good way of rendering the experience, but we also don't want to go too far. Yet, moreover, we also know that feelings which feel justifiably inexact at one time, become less inexact with further observation and thought, or by seeking help from others, and then we no longer want to express them inexactly...You can see the problem here?

SC: Positively. And we owe an explanation of what *too far* is.

AK: Maybe another way of opening this out – 'avoid voicing a thought awaiting its voice' – is that good films prompt mysterious thoughts and feelings in us, amorphous, latent thoughts and feelings, and this is one of their achievements. All the arts can do this, but film seems to have a particular talent for it, and is drawn to it. The films are not simply prompting clear thoughts in us, or even clear ambiguities. They encourage us to take notice of those feelings that have yet to be voiced, which are 'awaiting' their 'voice.' They encourage us to keep a hold of that sense, not to lose it, or forget it; to keep a hold of the murmurings, the rumblings, that are the route into discovery, not simply the discovery in itself.

SC: Another clause in the sentence you read says something about voicing a thought in its confusion.

AK: You say, 'to voice my responses with their privacy, their argumentativeness, even their intellectual perverseness.'

SC: All of that. I'm not worried about going too far in conveying the perverseness but just about going exactly right up to the perverseness and getting that out. That would set the table for assessing whether it is I or the aspects of the world I was drawn to write in opposition to that is the perverse party. Take the thought expressed as 'avoid voicing a thought awaiting its voice'. Don't we all have the sense sometimes of being vulgar about our experience, loud mouths, cowardly in expressing ourselves, hence losing forever experiences that are, or might have been, of extreme value to us? This is something Nietzsche warns about in *The Birth of Tragedy*. This strikes me as something I was particularly

aware of in writing *The World Viewed*. I wondered – oftener than usual even for me – whether anyone would ever stop over such a formulation to ask whether its oddness was worth understanding, that it is meant to say something other than that I should for some reason not say what is on my mind; it is meant rather to say that my impatient expressions do not allow me to know what is on my mind, that a standing formula is ready to take over thinking for us, that what is of distinct importance to us is masked by us.

AK: The subtitle to *The World Viewed* is *Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Why do you think considerations of ontology are helpful to our readings of films, and how are they helpful to the critical process?

SC: Two things. No doubt I used ontology in part to be somewhat provocative and mysterious. But there are two immediate interests that I was hoping would be served by the term. One interest is to ask what makes film the specific thing it is, like – as I believe I said earlier – nothing else on earth; but to ask this without asking, at least too soon, ‘What is the medium of film?’, which inspires, or dictates, answers such as that it is essentially a visual medium or a dramatic medium, or more portentously, that it is a medium of light and shadow. Let’s avoid these voices awaiting to be voiced. Let’s do something about saying concretely and in detail what its differences from everything else on earth are. Shall we ask what the conditions are that a thing has to satisfy to count as a film? Does it help to add: what conditions are essential to it?

The second interest I had in mind specifies the question by linking it with a remarkable formulation from Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*: ‘It is grammar that tells us what kind of object anything is.’¹⁰ (This can be taken as the founding insight of what Wittgenstein means by the ordinary, of his characterising his philosophical procedures as meant to ‘bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’.) One of Wittgenstein’s early examples of this theme opens the *Blue Book* from 1934, one of the main drafts of material recognisably preserved in *Philosophical Investigations*. He asks ‘What is the meaning of a word?’ and proposes to attack the question by asking what an explanation of the meaning is, for what that explains will *be* the meaning – a grammatically related expression will tell you what kind of thing the meaning of a word is. In *The Claim of Reason* I say that to know what faith is *is* to know, for instance, how faith is acquired, how weakened, how lost. Accordingly I am proposing that to answer the question ‘what is (the

ontology of) film?’ we have to investigate such questions as, ‘what is the audience of film?’ (as opposed to audiences of plays), ‘what is the director of a film?’ (as opposed perhaps to the director of a bank), ‘what does the film screen screen?’ (in contrast with what the support of a painting supports), ‘what role does the script of a film play?’ (measured against what role the libretto of an opera plays), ‘what counts as remembering a film?’ (as compared with remembering a poem, or a novel, or an argument, or what happened yesterday), ‘what is a remake of a film?’ (as opposed to a new production of a play), etc. Wittgenstein says of grammar (a grammatical investigation, which his investigations are) that it expresses essence (a remark I believe that has not much attracted the attention of philosophers). He is there claiming to satisfy, by educating, an ancient intellectual craving.

AK: So in what ways do you think that our more specific thoughts about individual moments, individual films, and individual moments in films, are helped by our thoughts about what the medium is, that is to say the ontology of the medium?

SC: Well, part of the continuing claim in the book is that it is only in films – and in the evolving criticism of films – that you care about, that the medium reveals itself. There is no fixed, mysterious thing underlying all of these manifestations (individual moments). I should add that I distinguish the medium of film from the material basis of the medium or media.

AK: One knows that criticism, even good criticism, can make intelligent observations about a film without acknowledging the medium’s ontology. On the other hand, am I wrong? This is exactly what it will be doing: one feature of intelligent criticism is that it *is* acknowledging the medium even though it may not explicitly refer to it? Will our criticism be better for it being an explicit concern? I suppose I am also wondering about whether ontology is something that students should be aware of.

SC: I guess my best answer is that it should come with experience. I suppose this means that I put criticism first, and distinguish this from theory, which has to consider such things as the role of the real in film (as opposed to painting, theatre, and writing); and why certain genres and types occupy the history of film; and why certain subjects tap the depth of film. This ordering goes with my claim that the films we care

about most are those that most surprisingly and richly reveal their medium

AK: Thinking about the medium in more general terms may lead us to understand it in ways that enhance our appreciation of specific elements. So for instance, if we understand that characters in films are real, live human beings then this leads us, or should lead us, to talk about these characters differently, say, to characters in novels. I've written criticism where I make continuous references to the characters' names, which is sometimes fine for my purposes, but sometimes reveals that I'm not adequately acknowledging the ontological particularity of characters: a human being, a performer, is moving and talking and gesturing....

SC: Exactly.

AK: Or another example. You have an observation in *The World Viewed* about the way that objects can be equal to humans in films, and they are not the same as 'props.' You give the example that in the theatre, two brooms can also represent two trees, or they can represent a forest, but on film, they will simply be two brooms. You call this 'ontological equality' and that opens up the *particular* ways in which elements relate to each other in film: the medium's *particular* achievement of synthesis, the *particular* relationship between the performer, his décor, the camera and so on and so forth. An ontological insight may sharpen our critical responses.

SC: Sharpen as well as complete. It's so in my marrow by now that I may skip over a step in responding to your questions. But you've been catching me out, you've been taking me back to something. I don't want to skip over the fact that the eventual appeal to the medium also works back and alerts you to what there is for criticism to respond to, as well as provides a necessary and explicit depth.

If you think of film as drama then, unlike what happens on a stage, the drama is carried more by actor than character, and more by what the camera does than what the actor does. Which again means that acting on film is specific to film. A work for the stage like Beckett's *Endgame* is thinking about how far acting and plotting can be stripped from human character, so that our differences become sheer matters of separateness or isolation. A work for film like David Mamet's *House of Games* is thinking about how far acting and plot can take over human

character, so that we lose interest in others and in ourselves (and in such a film). I seem to be veering back to my insistence that we need to talk about the essence of differences but that what counts as essential has to be reconsidered, in each case has to be discovered. Otherwise you repeat what you think you already know. As soon as somebody learns that I've written about film I immediately start getting a lecture about what film is. There is something about film that makes it unbearable for people not to consider themselves experts about it. At a reception the other evening I was told, 'It is important to define what film can do that no other art can do' I said I agreed. My informant went on: 'Film is visual.' But last year I attended a crowded lecture by a renowned scholar of film the burden of which was that film is a thing of the past, and that what is of interest now is the visual as such. I take this to indicate that experts about film find it unbearable not to be inexpert.

AK: We must not lose sight of the point you made earlier: specific films will reveal the medium. Once you start forgetting that and start simply positing or reflecting on the medium separate to specific instances of it, you are going down a bumpy road. I suppose it should be a virtuous circle: particular films prompt thoughts about the medium, and those thoughts in turn reveal more about the films, and so on...

You have written two books on specific genres: Remarriage Comedy and The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman. You also make relevant observations on genre in your piece *The Fact of Television*. How helpful is a conceptual understanding of genre to our appreciation of specific films?

SC: Let's see concretely what help it can be. *It Happened One Night* opens with a woman's father attempting to prevent his daughter from marrying a particular man by stranding her on his yacht and trying to force her out of her hunger strike. Compare this with the opening of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which a father demands from his sovereign the enforcing of a law that requires a daughter to obey her father's wishes for her marriage or else be put to death. In remarriage comedy, the father, if he is present, is always on the side of his daughter's desire. I cannot but believe that so massive a difference betokens something about the medium of film revealed in the genre of remarriage comedy – something about what I have called film's infantilising of its viewers, and been led to call the maternal gaze of the screen, here something about the maternal possibilities of certain fathers. Genre is

one way of articulating the endless invisible forces or conditions or laws that our actions and passions obey, for all our sense of singularity. Such are the divinities that shape our ends; or that rough hew them.

I suppose I am talking about an idea that is as old as Plato, that you know things by knowing the concepts they participate in. For example, I don't find it helps much to conceptualise what an Antonioni film is, or a Rohmer film, or an Ophuls film, by asking what genre their films belong to. You have to begin, if the question interests you, by considering each in the light of their other films. *It Happened One Night* is a Capra film; it is also a remarriage comedy; it is also a Clark Gable film. I have forgotten who the writer of the film is ...

AK: As we normally do... (In fact it is by Robert Riskin, based on the story *Night Bus* by Samuel Hopkins Adams).

SC: Yes. As we normally do, and inexcusably.

AK: Yes inexcusably. And we feel guilt about it...

SC: ...as we should.

AK: And then we repress it rather quickly, I find.

SC: Yes, it's a blunder. So perhaps this comes back to the fact that film studies is still just beginning to get straight about what its responsibilities may be. Then if these questions open up, further questions follow. How, for example, does allegiance to a genre or being conceptualisable by appealing to a genre, relate to a film's capacity for being popular? The genre of remarriage allows room for the expression of the commonest, most conventional, of human emotions, and between the most primitive or comprehensible of human actions, including moments of a slapstick loss of control. Yet their range of variation serves to align these common human themes or frailties with their most refined expressions.

AK: What fascinates me about both the genres that are most associated with you, Remarriage Comedy and The Unknown Woman, is that they are associated with *you*! We did not particularly use these labels until you wrote about them in this way. Yet, there *is* this generic relationship between the Remarriage Comedies and between the Unknown Woman films. The generic features must have existed before Stanley Cavell,

and were presumably part of the way they related to each other when they were made, but Stanley Cavell has now discovered the features. Acknowledging this is to acknowledge an important strand in your work and to acknowledge something about the critical process. Your work on genre could profitably be linked with your writing on intention. Put briefly, we don't necessarily find out about intention by asking the filmmakers, or by researching the studio documents, or by conducting any other investigations outside the work itself. The viewer, or the critic, discovers intention in the work, by looking further *into the work*. Stanley Cavell discovers this genre, but the genre was intended in some sense, even if that is not how the people at the time talked about the films, or how the studio talked about them – maybe they talked about 'screwball comedies' or 'women's weepies.' There is something liberating here for the viewer and the critic. Am I making any sense?

SC: Yes. Well part of this goes with how perpetually under-analysed the concepts of intention and convention both are. Intention is both prized and despised with next to no analysis of what the concept of intention does, with next to no examples given about how we actually use the concept of intention. (Would it be stuffy to say that it has become irresponsible of a scholar who finds herself or himself putting a certain weight on the concept of intention, not to read Austin and Wittgenstein and Anscombe on the subject?) Derrida recognises it only as familiar grist, New Critics despise or parody it. I am so often asked in response to a claim of mine (often, perhaps less often in recent years, about the existence generally of the genre of remarriage) 'Did anybody really think that?' 'Did they mean that?' 'Directors like Frank Capra didn't have this in mind did they?', with no sense that the concept of intention or of meaning something needs analysis. One might ask, for example: What are you denying if you deny that in *Adam's Rib* Hepburn's response to the ending (and the beginning) question – What's the difference between men and women? – is meant to relate to the earlier implied question, What's (how can you tell) the difference between a slap and a slug?, a relation suggesting both that a small empirical difference can signal a difference of abysmal psychological significance, and that the 'signal' must be perceived by the intuitive faculty of each person for herself or himself – as though we have here a crossing of the ethical and the aesthetic? Does denying the relation suggest that the connection is accidental, inadvertent, distracting, far-fetched, etc.? Each of these suggestions requires its own justification.

What causes the distrust of intention – beyond, I mean, an opposition to an unguarded, or metaphysical, trust in it? I am particularly alerted to this issue because when I came into the philosophical picture, in the 1950s, intention was being attacked by the so-called New Criticism, headed by a once very famous article 'The Intentional Fallacy', co-authored by a professor of English, W.H. Wimsatt, and a professor of philosophy, Monroe Beardsley.¹¹ I take up their article in my paper 'A Matter of Meaning It', collected in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, where I claim that what they say about intention in the region of literature makes it unlike the concept of intention in other regions of interest, in law or morality or sports. A more persistent issue for me concerns the concept of convention. There is a considerable controversy at the moment, in which I am involved, about whether Wittgenstein's idea of grammar and criteria are grounded on ideas of convention, say of actions as rule-governed, or grounded in some other way. On my view, Wittgenstein serves to break down aspects of the distinction between what is conventional and what is natural.

AK: I'm particularly interested in the way your understanding of the concepts is useful for people studying films. For example, with genre, there is so much work telling us what constitutes this or that genre (e.g. shadows in Film Noir), and these lists of features become institutionalised, and are perfect for textbooks. This is what the genre is, and it can be learned. Similarly with intention: we might be told what happened on the set; or told that the studio did this and that; or told about the actor's life; or told that this was going on in America at the time... And this is why the films contain what they do. My problem with these observations is not necessarily that they are unhelpful, because we all know that they may offer us insights of many sorts. My problem with them is that they can be taken in the wrong way, and excuse us from our own responsibilities for finding out what a film is about, what we see and hear in a film, and what might be important in it. They can restrict us from seeing aspects at an early stage of viewing and that can close down the possibilities for interpretation, hence viewing, and this may restrict our capacity to discover where the achievement in a work may reside. Such observations need not necessarily have this effect, but I see it happening repeatedly, especially with students. They think they can learn what a film is about, from outside the film, that they can somehow have the film explained separately from their own involvement with it. When you have a paper to hand in or an exam to pass with pressures of time these *explanations* are seductive.

SC: I would like to teach students to be unafraid of their language. If they are moved to invoke large ideas such as intention or convention or philosophy or essence, they should remind themselves that these are their words, and that the meaning and the use of words is no more transparent than, say, the significance of a gesture in a film. They have to make themselves familiar both with what they want of a word and of the various ways the word works in our language. Wittgenstein's *Investigations* is a wonderful help in getting us to realise that we become estranged from our language, even frightened by it. So are certain papers of Austin – I recommend to begin with 'Other Minds' and 'Excuses', even before *How To Do Things With Words*, on performative utterance, despite the fact that this work is greatly influential now in cultural studies.

AK: I've been reading some of your more recent work on Moral Perfectionism. Can you explain what you understand it to be, and why it is a helpful concept for understanding films or appreciating films? It's been important, for example, in developing your ideas on remarriage comedy.

SC: It took me rather a long time to become conscious of its importance. The conversations in, for example, remarriage comedy, are cases in which one soul is examining another, cases of moral encounter. These people are rebuking one another, questioning one another about how they live, specifically about how they live *together*. At some point, after publishing my book on remarriage comedy, it dawned on me to ask: What moral theory actually describes the point of these conversations, conversations that I had already argued are a fundamental, paramount feature of the genre of remarriage, and that, moreover, are among the permanent glories of world cinema. The principal moral theories in professional philosophical pedagogy are Utilitarianism and Kantianism, and neither illuminates what draws these pairs to commit themselves to each other and to confront each other as they do. Most generally, the pair at the centre of a remarriage comedy are not asking themselves whether the consequences of their marrying are likely to be good measured by utilitarian standards of the greater promise of pleasure over pain. That seems more pertinent to whether a pair might choose to spend a weekend together or buy a new car. Or can we elicit a Kantian principle that explains why it is we marry? Do we wish to attest that all who can marry should marry? This sounds like an attempt to overcome single-parent families, which just might, but

cannot in general be thought to, bear on our own decision to marry and perhaps eventually have children. What our pair are talking about is who they want to be and what they want to be together and what kind of world they want to live in, in short whether they are being true to themselves in seeking each other out. But such questions are exactly what moral perfectionism asks us to ask of ourselves. This realisation about perfectionism awaited on my part my late discovery, or rediscovery, of Emerson's thought. In sum, since the nature of the conversation is fundamental to the films of remarriage, and since perfectionism illuminates these conversations more fully and precisely than any other moral theory, perfectionist writing articulates these films more fully and precisely than any other moral theory. For example, one of the earliest features of moral perfectionism, as early as Plato's *Republic*, is that education is essential to it. Well, nothing could be clearer about remarriage comedy than that education is essential to it.

AK: Let me now put the emphasis slightly differently. How might an understanding of Moral Perfectionism in relation to these films help us to understand why they are good?

SC: I don't see is how you could possibly have a satisfying answer to whether these films are good without a developing sense of what they *are*. So am I saying that any film that contains conversations of a certain kind is therefore good? No, of course I don't say that, both because for this to be part of the goodness of the film the conversation itself has to be good, and also because conversation of a certain kind is not the only feature that contributes to the value of these films. I point to two ways in which thinking of the thematics of moral perfectionism may help to comprehend the force of film. First, it picks up the pertinence of such bluff and unedifying concepts as 'screwball' or 'madcap' as applied to remarriage comedies. Which is to say, these comedies really are about marriage, about the terrible risks there must be in two intelligent people committing their intelligence to a shared life. (Intelligence does not mean intellectual.) These films think better of democratic citizens, of their intelligence and imagination – adapting a rebuke Tracy Lord (Katharine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* – George Cukor, 1940, US) levels at the man she had tried to convince herself she should marry – than they think of themselves. Second, it reveals *how* deep the comedic pitfalls of aspiration to a life better than one has so far achieved for oneself run in Western philosophical thought.

AK: My feeling is that Moral Perfectionism is a moral theory or a moral conceptualisation that is responsive to the style and tone of the films, to their detail, to their suggestiveness, and to their modesty (in not declaring their relevance). The application of some moral theories to films can lead to schematic understandings, or alternatively they are applied to schematic films. Your thoughts on Moral Perfectionism allow one to consider, for example, Cary Grant in his billowing night-shirt as the wind blows through the rooms in the final scene of *The Awful Truth*. There are few moral theories, or positions, that would find a way of handling it, or registering it, registering its significance. One of the reasons the Remarriage films might *not* be studied or thought to be important is because they don't obviously dramatise moral issues or deal with lofty matters (draughty, but not lofty). The nightgown might be seen as irrelevant or unimportant, which it is and it isn't (importantly unimportant). This is partly a matter of finding moral importance in the routines of the everyday, of which conversations are a part. Although a crude example, we might think a film about capital punishment has much to teach us, whereas Cary Grant revealing himself in a big nightshirt at a doorway...well...fun perhaps, but insubstantial.

SC: The Problem movie...

AK: The Problem movie, yes, would be an overt example. But it could apply to any film that appears Significant.

SC: An obvious difference of remarriage comedy is that *what* is a significant problem is not *given*. That abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, whistle-blowing, etc. are significant problems is not news. The news in remarriage comedy is that we help and hurt and interest and bore each other in our everyday lives in countless unremarked and fateful ways, that while we have to learn to tolerate clumsiness in one another – say inadvertent, heedless, thoughtless, careless slaps in our ignorant or uneducated responses to frustration – we have also to learn not to tolerate slugs, meaning any one of a hundred ways we have of dealing out little deaths of rejection. Such things require not calculation or generalisation but perceptiveness and responsiveness. About your wonderful example of Cary Grant in the nightshirt, we should distinguish this from the negligee he wears in *Bringing Up Baby*. In *The Awful Truth*, the pair are both in nightclothes that are too big. They are in effect repeating childhood. It's a part of remarriage comedy that

childhood plays a particular role in the pair's life together. They regard themselves as having known each other forever. The thought is capped when we are given these little figurines at the end, behaving abstractly but childishly, retreating into a clock, as if they owned time. In *Bringing Up Baby* what there is to think about, as part of the intimacy demanded of marriage, is not childhood but gender indeterminacy.

AK: At one moment in the final scene of *The Awful Truth*, the door opens and Grant, in his nightshirt, outspreads his arms, lifts his body slightly and takes one foot off the ground as if he were floating away in this draughty house. It is silly, it is playful, but it is also a suggestion to her, a tentative intervention in their ongoing negotiations over their remarriage. Among other things, it is, perhaps, a declaration of lightness. We might say that from the point of view of Moral Perfectionism, this moment, this scene, suggests that they have all sorts of wonderful ways of communicating, of holding a conversation, of making themselves intelligible to each other (without necessarily making themselves fully known). The related question here is: How did the filmmakers and performers come upon these particular wonderful ways?

SC: Yes, the scene is inspired. You really would like to know about the various sensibilities involved in it. Whoever thought to put Cary Grant in front of the door in that nightshirt needn't be the one who thought to have a wind effect here. Well, I call it a wind effect to relate the wind there to the wind effect in the nightclub, to Dixie Belle's dress blown up to her waist in her '*Gone With the Wind*' routine, climactically imitated by Irene Dunne when she poses as Grant's sister, crashing Grant's so-called fiancée's family's party. Being discovered by the door opening – discovered by the camera, and to the woman – Grant, perhaps without outside guidance, rescues the situation by offering an incipient ballet for both camera (that is, for us, revealing his self-awareness, equal to his self-consciousness) and for the woman. The gesture in effect continues their walk-away from the stuffy party earlier that evening. It acknowledges that she is the one person in the world capable of appreciating his integrity, his emotional aplomb, his inventiveness, his acceptance of the silliness and uniqueness of the world, his readiness for what happiness may happen. (Acknowledges this to her, and simultaneously, as it were publicly, to us; prepared to go public for anyone who needs, and has established the right, to know.) The rapidity, the lightning inspiration from talent to talent, is exploding I think.

And here again I feel like repeating an old tune of mine, that concepts applied to film that are not specifically invented for film (unlike close-up, jump cut, etc.) tend to transform themselves. Film came after lightening came, so to speak. Any traditional concept that you use, from the region of theatre, or from painting, or writing, is going to have a further edge – it will be turned differently – when you apply it to film. Actor does, director does, staging does, marriage does, improvisation does. You can use 'improvisation' lightly and think you know what you are saying if you say 'Well they just improvised that.' Meaning they didn't write it, it was a sort of an accident. But if you really take the idea of improvisation with some seriousness, think what it means for musicians to improvise or for actors to improvise a play. I am prepared to believe that Grant improvised his proto-dance, as I am prepared to believe that it rained unexpectedly on Renoir's day in the country. Another actor would have mugged differently, or assumed there would be a further take (maybe there was); another director would have waited until the rain passed.

AK: I want to bring our conversation to a finish by returning to *Mr Deeds Goes To Town*. We talked about the couple of shots where he lies on the bed with the camera behind the back of his head. Another shot might link with these. Before this scene, Deeds and Babe are on their second date, and they are standing at the top of a Skyscraper looking out over the city, as part of a little tour she is conducting. As they look out the camera is once again positioned behind them so that they have their backs to us. Deeds says, 'What puzzles me is why people seem to get so much pleasure out of hurting each other. Why don't they try liking each other once in a while?' and he's specifically referring to the scurrilous newspaper reporters, of which Babe is one, unbeknownst to him, writing hurtful things about people. It is one of those Capra moments that people dismiss as 'sentimental' or 'cornball,' and it could be taken as corn, but how do we account for the fact that their backs are to the camera, and that we're watching them from behind? How does this perspective effect how we should take his line of dialogue? I haven't developed an explanation of this perspective, but I was fascinated with the contrast between the openness of his sentiment and the hiding of his face (and her face). If the dialogue is straightforward and direct, why is it directed away from us?

There is a sequence in *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937, US), one that I always find painful to watch, and which you discuss in *Contesting Tears*. Stephen Dallas has come home to take Laurel, the daughter,

away for Christmas, and Stephen suggests they might take a later train so they can all spend some time together. Unfortunately, just as he is thinking more highly of Stella, Ed Munn turns up to embarrass everyone and Stephen can't get away quickly enough. Stella stands in that smart black dress, her back to the camera, watching the closed door behind which Stephen and Laurel have disappeared. You write that the shot is held somewhat longer than one might expect, calling attention to itself. You go on to write that, as elsewhere, a figure on film turned away from us tends to signal a state of self-absorption, of self-assessment, a sense of thoughts under collection in privacy. I am taken with the way we are invited to consider – and be considerate of – Stella's thoughts even though we only see her from behind, indeed *because* we only see her from behind. It is often a profitable question to ask of film: how does it make us aware of interiority through various forms of externality, and adjust our sensitivity to characters accordingly?

SC: Otherwise there is no history of film. There is no assured, a priori, way. You just have to see and to think. You take some (or choose some you consider) geniuses, or genii, of the medium, and stir them together and look at what they do, and see how they make this medium come to life. With your prompting, I will add a thought about my wish to relate film with philosophy. I have harped on the fact that they are both preoccupied in their way with the everyday, the diurnal (in relation to something of course, to the fantastic, to the metaphysical). Something this means is that they are both preoccupied with ways in which we miss our lives, miss the density of significance passing by in a film, in our speech, in our lives. And we are allowed to, we survive because we can, remain oblivious to it, sometimes feign oblivion. Freud says as early as *The Scientific Project* that psychic survival is a function of our capacity to protect ourselves from overwhelmingly massive sensory information. The absolutely obvious, to which, at every moment, we are oblivious, is enacted in film in a way that is uniquely powerful, playing with consciousness and unconsciousness.

The oscillation of obliviousness and obviousness is something Austin and Wittgenstein make philosophy of. I am forever grateful to them for it. I see that I am finally getting around to answering something of your opening question to me. Maybe we should start over.

I have lost your question about *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town*. (Yes. Why are they turned away? Hasn't it to do with their discovering an intimacy

with each other they are unprepared for? Together with the fact that Deeds here risks – am I remembering this accurately? – showing in an American way his intellectual tastes, quoting Thoreau and imagining the childhood of Ulysses Grant.)

AK: There's another sequence that occurs before the other two I mentioned, after their first date. The shot is of Babe and her editor in the newspaper office. The editor is sitting at his desk reading out her story about Mr. Deeds and laughing at it, and she is listening in the foreground of the shot. I should say she is *partly* listening because she is also absorbed in playing with a coin (she seems to be rehearsing a magic trick, where the coin vanishes behind her fingers). The scene does not openly acknowledge her activity here and neither character mentions it (she continues playing with the coin, in one way or another, as she gets up and walks around, and until the scene ends). We might take her playing with the coin broadly as a colourful bit of business. Yet, how strange this is: all this messing around is going on in this scene, but it doesn't seem to be part of the purpose of the scene. Considering your interpretation of the final scene where fidgeting represents thinking, or reveals something about thinking, we might want to be moved by her gestures. She may want to present herself in a certain a way...

SC: She's clever, she's manipulative, she's self-possessed, she wants to distinguish herself from the ruffians that she deals with, even from her editor...

AK: Yes, and these same gestures present more than Babe knows. During her playing, she drops the coin, gets off the chair, and starts feeling around on the floor; she finds it eventually, down the side of the armchair, and gets back in her chair again. She is engaged in doing her trick (on Deeds), which she is not quite proficient at, not quite suited to, not quite in complete control of and not quite able to bring to completion. Although she doesn't know it, she's just starting to fall in love with Mr. Deeds. She doesn't know who this man is and she's not yet come around to thinking that her intrusive story on him for the newspaper is necessarily a bad thing. Like the coin, which she has to search for, she has not yet found her thoughts on these matters. We are watching fiddling and fumbling, but we are also watching the early murmurings of an extraordinary change of heart (and mind)...

SC: Another inspiration isn't it? It is not hard to imagine hitting on the idea of associating Babe with doing magic tricks. She could easily have been directed, or thought, to sit through the editor's recitation while practicing a coin trick. But in the moment of filming for somebody to have thought to have her drop the coin, that's a new inspiration.

AK: Or the performer dropped the coin by accident.

SC: Of course. It happened to rain that day. Filming is perhaps particularly subject to this kind of rain; some directors seem to cultivate it. Then the inspiration comes in welcoming it.

AK: You say that one of the interesting things about the final scene is that as Deeds points out the different silly actions people do when they think, the camera very overtly picks them out for us in a series of close-ups. The coin example is from much earlier in the film, and one might say that the theme is still only latent (like Babe's thoughts of love), and so the camera is not *pointing*, not pointing out (or up) her fiddling with a close-up. One might say that this instance is a more subtle variation, whereas the later examples are in a spirit of declaration.

SC: Just the last time I saw *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* I recognised for the first time a blatant gag that may have no depth beyond signalling what else one might be missing. When Deeds first encounters the lawyers who come to see him, he opens a package and declares, 'I've just got a new mouthpiece', and he inserts it into his tuba. But of course lawyers, in American slang, are called mouthpieces. The term is all over movies from the 1930s and 40s. My laughter this time was magnified by the amazement and ruefulness in not having seen this ten or twenty or thirty years ago – however familiar I am with the phenomenon of blankness. You don't need the connection (but seeing it reveals from his opening words, Deeds' quickness, his privacy, his attention, being a writer of verse, to words). Thank heavens for it.

AK: And important to the court scene. Who will be, who should be, his mouthpiece? Other people speak for him, including, most significantly, Babe – his new mouthpiece perhaps? The film explores whether other people's words should speak louder than *Deeds*...

SC: In a film a trivial thing easily becomes a mythical object, probing its own significance. I won't mention a sled or a fake falcon, but in the past

days I happened to have encountered again the cigar box containing a child's collection of objects successfully sentimentalised in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962, US) and the presenting and re-presenting of a hat in *Adam's Rib* (George Cukor, 1949, US). You can say of course that these objects are not trivial but that they are about triviality, about juxtapositions in human existence that either are fateful or are meaningless, and that you cannot know beforehand which any will prove to be.

Well I wouldn't have missed this life, and I'm glad it has incorporated film – it might not have.

AK: I'm very glad too that your life incorporated film. Thank you, so much, for having this conversation with me.

Notes

1. Wittgenstein (1953), §109.
2. 'A Plea For Excuses', in Austin (1961).
3. Mulvey (1975).
4. Anscombe (1957).
5. Affron (1977), p. 8.
6. In Cavell (1971), pp. 206–7.
7. Wittgenstein (1961) 6.53, 7.
8. Nietzsche (1996), p. 215.
9. Cavell (1971), pp. 162–3.
10. Wittgenstein (1953), §373.
11. To be found as a chapter in their (1954).