

Stanley Cavell on Recognition, Betrayal, and the Photographic Field of Expression

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ABSTRACT: The ideas of expression and expressiveness have been central to Stanley Cavell's writing from the beginning, joining themes from his more strictly philosophical writing to the role of human expression as projected in cinema. This paper explores a thread running through several different parts of his writing, relating claims he makes about the photographic medium of film and its implications for the question of expression and expressivity in film. There is an invocation of notions of necessity and control in the context of cinema that should be understood in the context of related ideas in his writings on Wittgenstein and others. The paper pursues some thoughts about the power of the camera, the themes of activity and passivity in expression, and the human face as the privileged field of such activity and passivity.

KEY WORDS: photography, cinema, Stanley Cavell, expression, activity and passivity, Barthes, acknowledgement, Wittgenstein, Heidegger

The ideas of expression and expressiveness have been central to Stanley Cavell's writing from the beginning, joining themes from his more strictly philosophical writing to the role of human expression as projected in cinema. His earliest essays on ordinary language philosophy investigate the necessities governing expression in words, the difficulties in the thought that "what we ordinarily say and mean may have a direct and deep control over what we can philosophically say and mean."¹ This theme is deepened in his reading of Wittgenstein's investigations of the conditions for giving ex-

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pression to a sensation or to a thought, and the conditions for reading, acknowledging such expressions in others; and carried through his Shakespearean explorations of the interplay between the withholding of expression and its theatricalization.

In this paper I wish to explore a thread running through several different parts of his writing, relating claims he makes about the photographic medium of film and its implications for the question of expression and expressivity in film. There is an invocation of notions of necessity and control in the context of cinema that needs to be understood in the context of related ideas in his writings on Wittgenstein and others. The paper pursues some thoughts about the power of the camera, the themes of activity and passivity in expression, and the human face as the privileged field of such activity and passivity.

I begin with a footnote discussion from the second edition of *The World Viewed*² of Terence Malick's first film, *Badlands*, which had just been released a few years before in 1973. Speaking of *Badlands*, he says "It is a film that invokes the medium's great and natural power for giving expression to the inexpressive, in everything from the enforced social silence, or shyness, of Chaplin and Keaton to the enforceable personal silence, or reserve, of Bogart and Cooper" (245n62). In this footnote remark, Cavell is referring back in the text to what he earlier calls "the mismatch between the depth to which an ordinary life requires expression and the surface of ordinary means through which that life must, if it will, express itself" (180).

These remarks assert a connection between the photographic medium of film and the idea of the expressive, specifically the interplay between activity and passivity in expression. In the text of the book, the immediate context of these remarks is a discussion of the different relations of actor and role in the theater and in cinema, the different importance of the physical individuality of the actor in film, and the special possibilities this allows for the use of non-professional actors in film. In connection with the use of non-professional actors in the films of Bresson and De Sica, Cavell says that "particular people who are successful subjects for the screen may also be accomplished actors," but that fact about them may be irrelevant to the camera's ability to bring them to life. In the phrase "giving expression to the inexpressive" Cavell is alluding to the special place of the ordinary, the unrehearsed, and the spontaneous as film subjects, as though in the world captured by film, not only are the smallest human gestures amplified, but even silence and immobility themselves are transformed into fields of expression. Early on in *Badlands*, the Martin Sheen character, Kit, identifies himself as an individual, as someone with "something to say." When he first picks up the Sissy Spacek character, Holly, he asks her to take a walk with him, and she hesitates and says, "What for?" His reply is to single himself out in a way that is both particular and utterly unspecific: "Oh, I've got some stuff to say. Guess I'm kind of lucky that way. Most people don't have anything on their minds, do they?" Even the unspecificity of this self-description is belied when later, after he has shot her father and before they take to the road, he goes to a Record-Your-Own-Voice booth to explain his actions, but cannot fill up the sixty seconds of time he has paid for, as camera shows the machine marking the seconds being used up.³ And yet the very fact of the camera's presence makes his very inarticulateness, the very grain of his silences and hesitations, into inescapable vehicles of expression. It is not simply that the camera records and presents the ongoing career of the human voice and face, but that it finds more there than the possessor himself found to say, and makes everything potentially expressive, revelatory.

For the camera to hold him in the frame is to create a zone, within which even the empty running out of time in the recording booth counts as expressive, at least for us watching on the other side of the frame. This is to identify the power of the camera as at one and the same time liberating (“giving expression to the inexpressive”), and a form of relentless capture, since within its gaze nothing, not even holding still and keeping silent, can count as withholding expression.

In speaking of a “field” or zone of expression, I have in mind the difference that is made for both the possibilities and the necessities of meaningfulness that are specific to different media, and which alter with developments in the different media themselves. The difference between what we call “still photographs” and what we call “motion pictures” is not that in the first case the image is still and does not move, whereas in the second case the image is in motion. For of course in a given stretch of a “motion picture” the image may not be moving at all; what the film camera may be presenting is an image of stillness, a reflection on stillness or immobility rather than an image that is still, or immobile, as condition of the medium itself. The difference is that the medium of the motion picture camera makes the stillness of the projected image subject to a range of possibilities of significance and self-consciousness that do not pertain to the still photograph. Given the possibilities of motion inherent to the filmic medium, the *fact* of a given projected image being motionless now represents the realization of a specific possibility within a field of *other* possibilities, and hence the choice of stillness in the scene, or a freeze-frame, inherits a burden of significance distinct from those of the still photograph itself. In looking at a set of still photographs in a gallery, for instance, and in looking at the filmed projection of a still photograph, or a motionless landscape, or a freeze-frame, the relation of the image to time, and the audience’s relation to watching, waiting, and anticipating are necessarily different, and inescapably subject to distinct categories of significance (these issues being explored with particular beauty and brilliance in Chris Marker’s 1962 film *La jetée*, for instance). In a similar way, the transition from “silent” to “sound” films means that the existence of a stretch of silence in a “sound” film is now bound to a range of possibilities of significance and expression that were not imposed upon the fact of silence in the medium of film in the “silent era.”

In thinking about photography and the photographic basis of cinema, many writers have returned to the themes of activity and passivity, specifically as this applies to the *human* subjects of photography. The camera is said to have the power to capture, to reveal, to *make expressive* the human body or the human face, which is in turn pictured as helpless not only to conceal itself or to keep silent, but also unable to exert any control over one’s expressions, either in their content or form. There are the familiar, perhaps apocryphal, stories of people who have felt that the camera image could steal their souls, which even if apocryphal are importantly not part of the common mythology of other forms of image-making. In speaking of the camera as creating a zone within which even silence and immobility are rendered expressive, there are obvious lines of connection with the framing of the psychoanalytic session and the silence of the analyst.

Just as for the duration of the sixty seconds of the recording session, the silences and absences of the Martin Sheen character reveal their significance to the camera, so for the analyst and everything that happens within the fifty-minute hour of the analytic session, including his withholding of expression, continues to express itself to the figure of the analyst. (And what goes for sixty seconds or fifty minutes, inside or outside the room, must surely continue to apply outside of that frame.)

In “A Small History of Photography,” Walter Benjamin famously describes the camera as possessing the power of revealing another unconscious, distinct from the psychoanalytic, which he calls the “optical unconscious,” exposed for the first time by the camera’s “devices of slow-motion and enlargement.”⁴ The camera relates to a human subject, forcing it to reveal itself, not through a kind of *active* power, not by interrogation or forcing anything to happen, but rather by its very passivity, by somehow bringing *whatever* is going on in the visual field into the realm of the expressive, the revealing. It is not a matter of forcing the human subject to speak, but rather of creating a space within which either speaking, hesitating, or not speaking at all are all equally forms of expression.

Cavell returns to this theme in a later essay, “What Photography Calls Thinking,” which contains a discussion of the Frank Capra film *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, concentrating on the complicity between the camera and the “world-historical shyness” of Gary Cooper, specifically with respect to the question of how people reveal their thinking in their unconscious gestures, in their fidgeting.⁵ Here Cavell’s description of the powers of the camera is accented less on the liberatory potential of “giving expression to the inexpressive,” than on the inescapability of the expression under the camera’s gaze, and on the fact that *what* is thereby revealed is not under the control or understanding of the human subject himself. He begins by referring to “a power and possible glory natural to the moving picture camera, that the most apparently insignificant repetitions, turnings, pauses, and yieldings of human beings are as interesting to it as is the beauty or the science of movement.” (126). But the valence of this “interest” and this “power” of the camera’s gaze is depicted in terms suggestive of a threat as much as a “glory” a few lines later:

Think of this interest or power as the camera’s knowledge of the metaphysical restlessness of the live body at rest, something internal to what Walter Benjamin calls cinema’s optics of the unconscious. Under examination by the camera, a human body becomes for its inhabitant a *field of betrayal* more than a *ground of communication*, and the camera’s further power is manifested as it documents the individual’s self-conscious efforts to control the body each time it is conscious of the camera’s attention to it. (126, my emphases)

I would like to relate the idea of a “field of betrayal” to a couple of other themes from Cavell’s work, that I do not believe have been explicitly related to his interest in the photographic medium of cinema, and the special powers of film to render the human figure expressive. I have in mind the theme of shame and exposure in Cavell’s early essay on *King Lear*, and the centrality of the human face, in particular the eyes of the face, in rendering the human figure readable by another.⁶ For the face is the paradigmatic filmic subject in good part because it so thoroughly embodies both the active and passive poles of the idea of “expression” that we have briefly looked at. The face, primarily through the eyes and the voice, is the place from which the world, including the world of others, is encountered, addressed, interrogated; hence the locale of the active pole of self-expression. But in its outsideness to its possessor, and the infinity of what it registers, it belongs to what the camera captures of the passivity of human expression. For it is not only that the face is utterly *exposed* (as any surface might be said to be), but utterly unable not to be continuously expressive, to be always giving itself away.

It is well known to readers of Cavell’s essay on *King Lear*, that his reading of the play is organized around the themes of the fear of the exposure to the gaze of others, and the disaster of the various attempts, by the King and others, to assert a kind of unilateral control

over their own self-revelation and visibility to others. Early in the essay, in discussing the opening scene of abdication in *Lear*, Cavell announces the theme in these terms:

My hypothesis will be that Lear's behavior in this scene is explained by—the tragedy begins because of—the same motivation that manipulates the tragedy throughout its course, from the scene which precedes the abdication, through the storm, blinding, evaded reconciliations, to the final moments: by the attempts to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation. ("The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," 286)

In this connection, the theme of eyes and eyesight has already been fully developed in the essay so far. There is one such passage in *Lear*, however, that Cavell does not mention in the essay, but it gathers together so many of the themes of Cavell's essay that its omission seems to place it as one of those elements of a text which initiate and animate a certain line of thought, without making an explicit appearance in the presentation of the reading itself. In this scene, Lear is addressing his hated daughter Goneril, at the end of the first Act of the play, in the culmination of the scene where Lear has been insulted by Goneril's servant Oswald, where Goneril chides her father for his own behavior and the behavior of his knights, and Lear learns that fifty of his knights have just been dismissed on her orders. At this point he explodes in tears of disbelief and impotent rage:

Lear: Life and death, I am ashamed
That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus!
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!
The untented woundings of a father's curse
Pierce every sense about thee! Old fond eyes,
Beweep this cause again I'll pluck ye out
And cast you, with the waters that you loose,
To temper clay. (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, I, iv)

These words are the first explicit admission by Lear himself that he is ashamed. In fact, as near as I can determine, this scene is the *only* time in the play when he uses those words to describe himself. But it's congruence with Cavell's reading goes deeper than this. Specifically, Lear declares that he is ashamed, not of what he has *done*, say, in his earlier banishment of Cordelia, but rather of being moved to feeling by this other daughter, and ashamed of the public display of this feeling. And he says he is ashamed because this public display seems to prove that she is *worth* this response of his, because it proves his investment in her response to him. Hence he is ashamed of his tears because he sees that they count as a public acknowledgement of her, an acknowledgement of her importance to him, all the more convincing for the involuntariness of its expression. And after his devaluing of Cordelia to France in the previous scene, his tears are visible proof to himself and to others of the worth he accords to Goneril, a value which his very tears confer upon her, as it were in spite of himself. He honors her with these tears, when he wishes to curse her. The curse is ineffective, of course, but it is noteworthy that he chooses to aim his curse at her *senses*:

Th' untented woundings of a father's curse / Pierce every sense about thee!

for it is her senses which he is subjected to, and which make for the exposure and the shame of his tears.

Lear is betrayed by his face, specifically by his eyes, and not primarily the eyes as organs of sight, taking *in* the world, but rather the eyes as vehicles of expression, giving

involuntary utterance to what is within, to his rage and confusion and dependence on a daughter who should count for nothing for him, but who still has the power to “shake his manhood,” and force this confession from him. Here it is Lear’s face, his eyes, which are the “field of betrayal,” brought into being not by the presence of a camera but by the silent, glaring presence of Goneril, who declines to address any words to him at any time in this scene, while pointedly speaking *about* him to Albany, even though Lear’s own words are consistently addressed to her. One of the crueler ironies about shame, as exemplified in this scene is how, out of the very desire for concealment, the reaction of shame makes a person *more* rather than less visible, through the blushing and coloring of one’s face, the shaking in one’s voice, and the “hot tears” from one’s eyes. This insures the failure of what Cavell speaks of in connection with *Mr. Deeds* of “the individual’s self-conscious efforts to control the body each time each time it is conscious of the camera’s attention to it,” for all such efforts only serve to bring one’s distress and dependence further to the surface.

In Part Four of *The Claim of Reason*,⁷ Cavell relates the fantasy of a private language to the idea of a fantasy of inexpressiveness, and this provides one of the links in the book to the theme activity and passivity in knowing others and in being known by others. For the fantasy of inexpressiveness is pictured by him not only in the perhaps more familiar terms of the experience of oneself as a closed chamber, unable to give external manifestation to oneself, but also equally in experience of finding one’s self-manifestation to be utterly ongoing, beyond one’s own knowledge and control, something at the disposition of others.

So the fantasy of a private language, underlying the wish to deny the publicness of language, turns out, so far, to be a fantasy, or fear, either of inexpressiveness, one in which I am not merely unknown, but in which I am powerless to make myself known; or one in which what I express is beyond my control.

—as though if I were expressive that would mean continuously betraying my experiences, incessantly giving myself away. (351)

In these passages, the emphasis is on the publicness of *language*, whereas in the essay “What Photography Calls Thinking,” the emphasis is on how the *camera* renders a person inescapably public, something essentially self-revealing. He speaks there of a “perpetual visibility of the self, a theatricality of my presence to others, hence to myself.” and says that “The camera is an emblem of perpetual visibility” (131).

The face is of course privileged in several ways as such a field of betrayal, the surface with which one *faces* the world, exposing oneself to the gaze of others. My face is what I look out from, the array of my senses which relate me to the world. It is this position I imagine for myself when I conceive of myself transcendently as a point of view on the world, rather than an object within it. But for that very reason my face is something that I myself normally don’t see. And of course, I am the *only* person from whom my face is normally hidden in this way, precisely because I look out *from* it. My face is strictly for others. But there is more to this dependence than the fact that my face is normally out of my range of vision. My face exposes me to others not only because they see it when I can’t. For *that*, after all, might be said of the back of my body as well. But a person’s back is not revelatory, or expressive of him. It is the face which is the paradigmatically expressive

part of the body; that is to say, the most revealing part of the body. It is not just exposed to others and hidden from me, but is also the locus of a person's most deeply and complexly revealing physical manifestations. Hence although the fact that my face is a surface, totally exposed to the elements, is important for the meaning of shame, it is at the same time true that it utterly manifests my *interiority*. And this is not purely an accident either. We saw that my face is exposed to others and hidden from me precisely because it is what I identify as my point of view on the world. And we can now say that it is also the paradigmatically revealing part of the body precisely because it is the location of the major sense organs, the eyes, mouth, nose, ears. Primarily the eyes, which relate me to the visible world, but which also in their expressive capacity reveal the continuous impact the world is making on me, which ways I am directing my eyes, and which I myself cannot see. Finally, my face is necessarily what I present to others when I address them. So my shame is not just that I happen to be seen in a way I cannot see myself, nor even that it is the most visibly expressive part of myself that others see and I cannot, but also that I *put myself* in this position. I placed myself before them, I present my face to them, knowing that it will betray me. In this sense to face the other person is to relinquish control of oneself.

When it is said that "the eyes are the windows of the soul," we should think of windows as openings that are looked *into* as well as looked out of. That seems obvious enough, but it means that even for someone without sight, a blind person, the eyes are the windows of his soul even so. He doesn't look out from them, but the movements of his eyes are expressive anyway, and we look into them to see what his face reveals. The area of the eyes is the most expressive area of the human body whether or not the eyes are used for seeing. Even in sighted persons much of what is expressed by the eyes is the registration of what is received from *other* sense organs (reacting to what is heard, or tasted, or felt), or reacting to memories or fears, etc., rather than things seen. The eyes register and express much more than is taken in by the eyes themselves, virtually everything that the person thinks or experiences, including the deliverances of all the other senses (the play of the eyes in response to pain, or a sudden noise, or a bitter taste). By contrast, the ear, the tongue, the nose do not express even what they do take in through their own proper channels, let alone provide a field of expression for what is taken in by sense organs other than themselves. As Wittgenstein remarks in the context of a discussion of physiognomic perception, the consciousness in the face of another person: "one can terrify with one's eyes, not with one's ear or nose."⁸ The very suggestion is surreally comic. This is one of Wittgenstein's observations whose impact wavers between the obvious and the astonishing, one of the registers that his writing has an uncanny access to. The nose, the ears, are purely receptive and are barely expressive parts of the face at all. The primary sense in which the eyes are the windows of the soul does not depend on their being visual sense organs at all. In their capacity to register and express what is going on with a person at a given moment, the eyes remain sense organs, though not visual ones, the way the mouth which smiles or scowls is a sense organ, something responding to the ongoing course of what the person is thinking and feeling. (In different animals it is different organs that may be at once receptive and expressive. For us it is mainly the eyes, and not e.g., the ears. But, for instance, the ears of some dogs are expressive as well as receptive. About fish we might say that all their sense organs are only receptive and not expressive at all.)

In *Camera Lucida*,⁹ Roland Barthes gives expression both to the sense that the camera imposes a form of significance upon one's posture, forcing a pose upon one, and the sense that it belongs to what is shown within the frame that no *escape* from significance is possible.

Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of "posing." I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. (10)

If only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing! Alas, I am doomed by (well-meaning) Photography always to have an expression: my body never finds its zero degree. (14)

As with Cavell's remarks on *Mr. Deeds* and the idea of the camera as "somatograph," here the idea of the photographic is associated with the idea of being the passive victim of a form of significance, as it were imposed from without. What Barthes registers here in terms of exhibition and "pose" is continuous with what Cavell speaks of in terms of the camera's power to register "a theatricality of my presence to others, hence to myself" ("What Photography Calls Thinking," 131). And the idea of the unavailability of what Barthes calls a "zero-degree" of signification means that not only am I subject to forms of significance that are not my own to control or dispose of, but that the field of meaning here is strictly inescapable, that any forms of *refusal* of signification I may engage in before the camera will simply be taken up by it and themselves turned to forms of expression, like the reticence or silence of the figures played by Gary Cooper or Martin Sheen.¹⁰

This aspect of the photographic, as a medium that *forces* a question of expression on the human figure, and hence raises in an acute form the question of that activity and passivity in human expression, is part of what relates Cavell's interest in the photographic medium of film to the issues of shame, exposure, and acknowledgement in the Lear essay, and later in his work. I want to close by saying a few things to draw these connections more explicitly.

From his earliest writings, part of Cavell's interest in Wittgenstein's idea of the grammatical, is in its connections with the early Heidegger's idea of the "existential," as ways of drawing the distinction between the various qualities and attributes which a thing may happen to have, and the *categories* within which things of that (grammatical or ontological) kind *must* have some qualifying attribute or other. Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is (*Investigations* 373), when it tells us, for instance, that, for an object of this sort, it must be at *some* spatial location or another, and of some determinate color and weight; and grammar describes a *different* kind of object for thought (e.g., a sensation) when it tells us that it must be of a *certain* intensity or other, must belong to *some* unique person or other. One of the lessons of the private language argument is that prior to knowing the grammar of the kind of thing we have in mind (for instance, a "sensation" of "pain"), we can't so much as point to something or give it a name.¹¹ Outside of the determinations of grammar that provide us with objects of different kinds, there are neither similarities nor even differences between things. Relatedly, early Heidegger will tell us that it characterizes what sort of entity Dasein is to say that it always finds itself is *some* situation or other, that its already *understands* its situatedness in some ways rather than others, and that "understanding always has its mood," it's *stimmung*.¹² These characterizations are said to be "existentialen." Cavell draws on this idea near the end of "Knowing and Acknowledging," when seeking to characterize what he means by "acknowledgment" as a category.¹³

The point, however, is that the concept of acknowledgement is evidenced equally by its failure as by its success. It is not a description of a given response but a category in terms of which a given response is evaluated.

and adds parenthetically

(It is the sort of concept Heidegger calls an *existentiale*.) (263–64)

One way to describe what these ideas share is the idea of a characterization that determines a range of questions to which there must be some answer or other. (He goes on to say here: “A ‘failure to know’ might just be a piece of ignorance. A ‘failure to acknowledge’ is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness.”) Near the beginning of *The World Viewed*, Cavell gives what we can now see as a specification of the grammar of the photographic image, specifically in terms of being subject to a range of questions to which there are necessarily answers of a certain form.

You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph—a building, say—what lies behind it, totally obscured by it. This only accidentally makes sense when asked of an object in a painting. You can always ask, of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area, beyond the frame. This generally makes no sense asked of a painting. You can ask these questions of objects in photographs because they have answers in reality. (*The World Viewed*, 23–24)

Here we are given a contrast between a question which might accidentally make sense as directed toward one kind of object, and a question which, directed toward *another* kind of object (framed this way) *must* make sense, must have some answer or other, must have some determination or other. The necessary applicability of a certain form of question determines an object as photographic, and distinguishes it from other kinds of images.¹⁴

It is sometimes said that, for any moment in the waking life of a human being, there is an answer to the question “What are you doing? What have you been doing?”¹⁵ This will be true, even when the answer to that question is “Nothing” or “Nothing much.” In this sense, performing actions is not something we engage in fairly regularly, not itself an occasional feature of our existence, but rather a category of significance we are perpetually subject to. A thought from Elizabeth Anscombe is that an intentional action is anything from that stream of human life to which a certain range of questions necessarily has application; questions such as “Why are you doing that? And what is the point of it?” And here as well, even the response “No special reason, I just felt like it,” counts as a proper *answer* to the question, counts as acknowledging its sense and appropriateness.¹⁶

Cavell applies something like this same thought to the idea of expression, a few sentences after the description in *The World Viewed* of the silence, and the camera’s capture, of the Martin Sheen character in Terence Malick’s *Badlands*. “For in the end, something must be said for our lives. We are saying something now, always, or allowing it to be said.” (245). Within this field, then, silence, understood as the refusal of or immunity from expression altogether, is not an option. For within this frame, what Cavell applies to the idea of acknowledgement applies to expression quite generally, that it is “not a description of a given response but a category in terms of which a given response is evaluated” (“Knowing and Acknowledging,” 264).

In this regard, we might say that what the camera discovers, or creates the occasion for, is that, just as the human body must be in *some* posture or other, either moving or at rest, and if moving then moving in a *certain* way, and if sitting down then sitting down in a certain way, whether slouching or sitting up, just so it reveals that any posture of the body

is expressive of the person whose posture it is, and that in this way, one is indeed “incessantly giving oneself away” (*Claim of Reason*, 351). And hence from this it follows, if not logically, then cinematically, that for a simple activity such as sitting in a chair or walking across a room, there will be worlds of difference revealed by the camera, depending upon whether it is Buster Keaton sitting in a chair, or Marlon Brando walking down the waterfront docks, or Fred Astaire walking up a wall. What the camera may be said to reveal is that there is no “zero-degree” of bodily posture or movement, that one is always inhabiting one or another of the possibilities of this existentials, and that any such possibility is itself irremediably specific and characterizing.¹⁷

The camera does not *create* the human face as field of expression; that is, something which is always in some physiognomy or other, is never devoid of any and all expression, since even its blanknesses and withholdings are themselves forms of self-manifestation. In some sense, this was always a categorical truth about the readability of the human form and human face. But it does seem true that the photographic both lives off that categorical fact about the human form, and somehow heightens it, intensifies it, and insists that within the frame of the photographic a category of the expressive is posited, within which even the tiniest deflections of one’s glance or posture count as part of the manifestation of the self, whether actively or passively. One version of the idea of being “condemned to meaning” is expressed by Barthes in the desire for a “neutral, anatomic body,” a “zero-degree” of significance, and the sense that the regime of the photographic contains no place for such an opting out of the field of meaning. In the classic Kuleshov experiments, where a single shot of an actor’s face is intercut with various other shots (such as a bowl of soup, or a little girl’s coffin), the viewers were said to ascribe a different form of expression to the face, according to the “reaction shot” it had be juxtaposed with. We can see this, then, as a paradigmatic formulation of the idea that the camera forces the issue of expressiveness on the human face, and that the expression is imposed from without. But this discovery of the of camera’s framing of the expressive is of course also a function of its own passiveness, its dependence on the utter specificity of what comes within its frame. As with the idea of human action, or the ineluctability of bodily posture, the inescapability of certain *forms* of meaning, the necessary applicability of questions of a certain range, is not the *same thing* as the imposition of meaning from without, but rather one of its essential possibilities. The violent, interrogative power of the camera is indeed one of cinema’s great subjects (one could begin with the names of Hitchcock, Michael Powell, and Antonioni), as is the camera’s imposition of alien forms of expression on the captured human figure (beginning with Keaton and Eisenstein). And the interplay between activity and passivity in Cavell’s writing, both philosophic and cinematic, helps us to see the dependence of that active power of interrogation on the corresponding power of the camera to hold still, to withdraw from assertion. The forms of expressiveness are inescapable even when not imposed from without, when they are rather the conditions of visibility within the frame. One theme explored throughout Cavell’s writing on film is that of the various ways in which the very power of the filmic experience, and the realism of the photographic medium, makes film such a natural representation of classic “external world” skepticism, seeing film as the very image of a visual substitute for the world, empirically indistinguishable from the “real one,” something that screens us off from reality. Just as pervasive in his writings, however, is the theme of the film experience and its photographic basis as a natural representation for forms of skepticism about other minds. In *The Claim of Reason*, skepticism about other

minds has its passive as well as its active forms; roughly, the form where the question for me is whether I can gain access to or conviction in the mind of another, and the form where the question for me is whether *anything* I do or manifest could possibly make my *own* mind known to another, because all these words and gestures seems merely external to me, to take place and find their meaning without me. Both the active and the passive forms of skepticism are part of Cavell's philosophical engagement with movies, investigated most concentratedly, perhaps, in *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*.¹⁸ Cavell's lifetime of reflection on the relations of philosophy and film make available the thought that, insofar as we recognize a "fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness," such a fantasy is both part of what draws us to the cinema, something that movies themselves examine in countless ways, and something that the experience of cinema itself turns inside out, by forcing the issue of self-expression and self-revelation through the capture of the human figure within that frame, within the categories of significance given by the requirements of being in motion or being still, speaking or being silent, releasing or suppressing what comes to the surface.¹⁹

Notes

1. From the opening sentence of the title essay of his book *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
2. Enlarged edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).
3. "My girl Holly and I decided to kill ourselves. The same way I did her Daddy. Big decision, you know. Uh, the reasons are obvious. I don't have time to go into right now. But, one thing though, he was provoking me when I popped him. Well that's what it was like. Pop. I'm sorry. I mean, nobody's coming out of this thing happy. Especially not us. I can't deny we've had fun though. That's the end of the message. [pause] I've run out of things to say. [pause] Thank you."
4. Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," in *One Way Street* (New Left Books), 243.
5. Reprinted in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 126.
6. "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," in *Must We Mean What We Say?*
7. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
8. *Zettel* 222, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967).
9. Trans. Richard Howard (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981).
10. With regard to the issues of posing and theatricality, see the discussion of Barthes in chapter 4 of Michael Fried's *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008).
11. In this context, see Barry Stroud, "On Wittgenstein's 'Treatment' of the Quest for 'a Language which Describes My Inner Experiences and which Only I Myself Can Understand,'" in his collection *Meaning, Understanding, and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
12. State-of-mind is one of the existential structures in which the Being of the 'here' maintains itself. Equiprimordial with it in constituting this Being is *understanding*. **A state of mind always has its understanding, even if it merely keeps it suppressed. Understanding**

always has its mood. If we Interpret understanding as a fundamental *existentiale*, this indicates that this phenomenon is conceived as a basic mode of Dasein's Being.

Possibility, as an *existentiale*, does not signify a free-floating potentiality-for-Being in the sense of the "liberty of indifference." **In every case Dasein, as essentially having a state of mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities.** As the potentiality-for-Being which it is, it has let such possibilities pass by; it is constantly waiving the possibilities of its Being, or else it seizes upon them and makes mistakes. But this means that Dasein is Being-possible which has been delivered over to itself *thrown possibility* through and through. Dasein is the possibility of Being-free for its outmost potentiality-for-Being. (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [Oxford: Blackwell, 1962], §31, p. 144; boldface emphasis added)

13. The essay appears in *Must We Mean What We Say?* The appeal to the category of "existentialen" continues to inform Cavell's later writing on film. In the context of thinking about the shifting identities of selves in certain Hollywood melodramas, Cavell says:

It might help to consider that this goes into why Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* (and after him, in his way, Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*) insist that Dasein is not characterized by predicates but by existentials: it "is" what it is, whatever it is, in a mode other than, say, a stone is what it is, in a different mode of being (for instance) heavy, stationary, dangerous. (*Contesting Tears: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 138)

14. In a different register, Gilles Deleuze argues in a similar fashion for a categorical claim regarding the face and expression in cinema, in terms of the applicability of a form of question: "There are two sorts of questions which can be put to a face, depending on the circumstances: what are you thinking about? Or what is bothering you, what is the matter, what do you sense or feel?" (*Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (The Athlone Press, 1986).
15. "At any time, when a man is awake and conscious, there is at least one, and generally more than one, answer that he would give to the question 'What are you doing?'" (Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* [Viking, 1959], 93).
16. *Intention* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976).
17. I explore some related ideas in connection with human freedom in "Iris Murdoch and Existentialism," in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, ed. Justin Broackes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
18. I explore the relations between the active and passive forms of other minds' skepticism in Cavell's Claim of Reason in "Cavell on Outsiders and Others," *Revue Intentionale de Philosophie* 256 (2011–2012) (special issue edited by Sandra Laugier): 239–54.
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