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# *Heidegger's Conception of Art and Cavell's Hollywood*

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I assert continuity between Heidegger's conception of art and Cavell's philosophical engagement with Hollywood film. My claim is that despite Heidegger's animosity to photography and film, his doctrine enables and calls for engagement with them as media of true art. First, I show that Heidegger and Cavell's common understanding of artistic medium – as created rather than applied within the artistic event – undermines the widely unquestioned preclusion of Heideggerian approach to photography-based-media in artistic context. Second, I claim that in view of Heidegger's doctrine of the turning from danger to saving power, Heidegger's critique of photography and film as embodying the danger of technology does not forbid such approach, but rather calls for it. In the final part of the paper, I expose the constitutive Heideggerian elements of Cavell's philosophy of film. Besides the general concept of artistic medium and the logic of the turning that informs its realization in the medium of film, Cavell, as I show, is committed to a recognizably Heideggerian notion of the world-disclosing and community-forming function of art.

## **1. Introduction**

In this lecture I am concerned with exposing and substantiating the continuity between two major projects in philosophy of art in the 20th century. The first project bears the name of Martin Heidegger, who had probably invested art with greater philosophical significance than any other thinker of his time, famously posing its essence in "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935-36) as advent of truth and describing its operation as "opening up the world" of an historical people. My belief motivating this paper is that Heidegger's philosophy of art captures the core of what we – moderns, late moderns, or whoever we are – still understand art to be, and that

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Heidegger is *the* philosopher to whom a committed art-lover should turn for clarification of her fundamental intuitions. The second project is that of Stanley Cavell, specifically his film- or Hollywood-project – beginning with the exploration of the ontology of film in *The World Viewed* (1971), and proceeding to the critical analyses of particular genres in *Pursuits of Happiness* (1981) and *Contesting Tears* (1996). I take this project to be an exemplary philosophical engagement with particular artistic phenomena – that is, an exemplary project to philosophical criticism. Exploring these two philosophical undertakings and feeling committed to both, I became increasingly convinced that Cavell's project is a continuation – or is best to be read as continuation – of Heidegger's philosophy of art, sharing its basic methodological assumptions and fulfilling its most profound promises. This is the general thesis towards which I will be moving in this talk.

The greatest challenge for the vindication of this thesis is also what I find to be the most deplorable aspect Heidegger's philosophy of art and its legacy: the reverse side of Heidegger's grandiose claims is that the methodological relevance of Heidegger's doctrine to the art of our age – or, indeed, of his own age – remains largely unconsummated. One of the ideas most consistently associated with Heidegger's philosophy of art is the twofold placement of art "in the highest possibility of its essence" at the Western humanity's Greek origins and in the future overcoming of the contemporary "age of being." In other words, Heidegger's conception of art is not taken seriously to provide a framework for positive engagement with the art of contemporary world.<sup>1</sup> Cavell's project, on the other hand, concerns film – which both he and Heidegger took as a paradigmatically modern medium. For Heidegger, however, this was just the reason to reject photography and film as artistic media, for they exemplify the understanding of beings, which the artistic event – would it take place in the modern age – is destined to overcome. At the center of my presentation today is an argument claiming that, rightly interpreted, Heidegger's philosophy of art – despite what he himself has apparently thought – both enables and calls

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<sup>1</sup> Among the few exceptions – neither of which coincides in its strategy with the argument of this paper – I wish to mention the work of Diarmuid Costello, especially (2012) where he tackles specifically the question of the Heideggerian stance on photography, and of Iain Thomson (2011), whose sharp formulations of some Heidegger's ideas we shall adopt.

for critical engagement with photography-based-media as media of true art.<sup>2</sup> At the concluding part of my presentation, I will show why I think that it is *this* particular call which is answered in Cavell's engagement with Hollywood by articulating the constitutive Heideggerian elements of this project.

## 2. Art as Event of Truth

Heidegger's main thesis about art is that art is event of truth: "the essential nature of art is the setting-itself to work of the truth of beings" (Heidegger 2002, p. 16). What is meant by "truth" here is the unconcealment of beings as the beings they are, Dasein's – that is, ours – fundamental understanding of reality: of "what is and what matters"<sup>3</sup>. In *Being and Time*, such understanding is analyzed as a fundamental structure constituting Dasein's Being-in-the-world: circumspective and network-like realm of significance, the "always-already" of meaningfulness which underlies all of our ordinary practical engagements as well as most far-reaching theoretical or existential pursuits. The major idea that becomes dominant in Heidegger's thought of the 1930's and that informs Heidegger's conception of art is that our fundamental understanding of reality so construed is historical: it is inaugurated at a certain point, having thus a beginning, an origin. Heidegger's main thesis about art amounts to the claim that, in its essence, art is such an origin, one of essential ways in which a new understanding of beings is being inaugurated (Ibid, p. 32). It is in this sense that an artwork is said to "open up the world" of an historical people – an idea most famously exemplified in Heidegger's discussion of the Greek temple in "The Origin": the temple, so it is claimed, "first structures and simultaneously gathers around itself" the unity of material nature and social values that determines the existence of an historical community of the Greeks (Ibid, pp. 20-21). We must leave undecided here – as it is in Heidegger – the precise political scale on which the community sharing the world of sense should

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of my argument I conflate photography and film into one category and refer to them as "photography-based media" – a methodic unification, to be sure, justified by the fact that for Heidegger and Cavell alike there is an ontological continuity between these media, and the issues they raise form a single problematic field.

<sup>3</sup> Iain Thomson should be credited for this concise formula (Thomson 2011, p. 43)

be taken. My argument will assume its interpretation somewhere in the range between a community of a particular polis, a nation (as Heidegger sometimes conceives of “the Greeks”), and “Western humanity” broadly construed.

What I wish to focus upon is the very idea of inauguration – captured by Heidegger’s term *event* (*Ereignis*) – and to accentuate its radical metaphysical content. The event of truth claimed to take place in art is not a happening of a particular occurrence within a given realm of meaningfulness, but the coming to be of such a realm as a whole. It is a point of an absolute origin not conditioned by anything but itself; it is in this sense that the work of art “belongs uniquely within the region it itself opens up” (Ibid, p. 20). It is important to make explicit that the absolute self-origination Heidegger ascribes to the event of work of art can’t be empirically given, for we can never experience something not preceded by anything but itself.<sup>4</sup> Phenomenally, event of truth in this radical sense comes about as “upheaval of the ordinary” (Heidegger 1994, p. 39), the absolute beginning is given as transfiguration of what already is. It is one sense in which “the turning” defines for Heidegger the innermost constitution of the event (Heidegger 2012, p. 322). It is also the reason why adequately conceiving of the work of art, as Heidegger admits, amounts to “thinking everything in reverse” (Heidegger 2002, p. 21). The originary world-setting ascribed to the temple is a reversal of natural causality: the forces of nature, as well as some communal existence that empirically precede and condition the erection of the temple, are claimed to be its outcome; the temple “*first* gives to things their look, and to men their outlook of themselves” (Ibid, p. 21).

The same logic of the turning informs Heidegger’s doctrine of the *earth* – the second essential feature of the artwork alongside world-opening, according to the model of “The Origin.” Earth stands for the dimension of concealment that plays a constitutive part in the unconcealment of beings in Heidegger’s doctrine of truth. As far his conception of art goes, earth

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger tackles this problem in his analysis of Kantian transcendental freedom (Heidegger 2002a) – the paradigmatic case of such absolute spontaneity – on which the notion of the event may be said to be modelled. For critical analysis of this modelling I refer to Jay Bernstein’s reading of “The Origin” in *The Fate of Art* (Bernstein 1992, pp. 166-135).

refers to the artwork's material existence, suggesting the way to think of what we would usually call artwork's medium not in terms of physical causality, but in terms of event. In the unconcealment of all beings which the world-opening is, one thing that necessarily comes to its own is the material opacity of concealment as its persisting condition of possibility and, indeed, as the unfathomable source of everything unconcealed (compatible, Heidegger thinks, with *physis* of the Greeks [Ibid, p. 21]). Although what thus comes to be manifested is a most general ontological principle, in the "coming-forth-concealing" of earth (Ibid, p. 24) the artwork's materials are disclosed not as uniform "staying-in-the-dark" (Ibid, p. 25), but as distinct regions of material meaning, integral of the world that is being set. In the world of the temple the materials of which it is wrought become what they are in truth for the first time: for example, "the rock comes to bear and to rest and *first* becomes rock" (Ibid, p. 24) – which is to say, comes to its being as a medium of architecture. Heidegger believes that (1) such creation of a medium is an inherent (logically necessary) part of the event of truth in art, and (2) only as an outcome of such an event does the material basis of the artwork become an artistic medium. This dual thesis – which is Heidegger's theory of medium in a nutshell – is one of the central ideas Cavell inherits from Heidegger and a major point we must have in view for elaborating a Heideggerian theory of photography based media.

### **3. Heidegger's Critique of Modernity and Photography-Based Media**

Heidegger's conception of art as event of truth, as we have seen, is based on his belief that the understanding of beings that defines our Being-in-the-world is historical. To use Iain Thomson's helpful distinction, this is Heidegger's thesis of "ontological historicity," which is specified in Heidegger by the quite distinct thesis of "ontological epochality" (Thomson 2012, p. 8). The latter thesis claims that our fundamental understanding of beings comes (or came so far) in a succession of several epochs, each unified by a single ontological principle, that constitute the very history of being: the understanding of what is as *physis* in Greece, as God's creation – in the Medieval epoch, in modernity – as objects of representation, and at mod-

ernity's later stages – as standing reserve. This thesis determines some of Heidegger's further claims about art beyond the event thesis as we have presented it. Although I find it necessary to point that "ontological historicity" does not necessitate "ontological epochality," and the former can (and, I believe, should) be thought in much more flexible terms, we must accept the latter thesis for the sake of our argument here, since it is the premise of Heidegger's critique of photography based media and – to a great extent – of Cavell's appraisal of them.

Heidegger describes the modern age of being in visual terms, immediately relevant to photography, as "the age of the world picture." "The grounding event" of this age, however, took place not in an artwork, but in the metaphysics of the philosopher-mathematician Descartes, where, as Heidegger puts it, "what it is to be is first defined as the objectiveness of representing" (Heidegger 1977, p. 127). In the modern world beings are understood as external objects that gain their sole meaningfulness from the certainty of their representation for the subject, who by the means of science aspires to mastery over the inert objective realm. The objectivity of mathematical physics as a paradigm of access to material nature, Heidegger argues, is the other side of the modern subjectivism, in which "man becomes the relational center of that which is as such" (Ibid, p. 128). This subjugation of material nature stands in sharp contrast to its appearance in art as the non-subjective and forever "un-mastered" ground of meaning (Heidegger 2002, p. 21). Regarding the medium as transparent means of representation, and denying it thus the status of earth, is a major reason that makes the modern age inimical to the truth-disclosing essence of art.

The relation of art to the modern age is taken one step further in "The Question Concerning Technology," where, in the aftermath of the atrocities of the 40s, Heidegger provides his account of modern technology as an ultimate manifestation of the modern understanding of beings in its transition to its later stages. The essence of modern technology – dubbed *Gestell*, and aptly rendered in Lovitt's translation in quite photographic terms of *Enframing* – is the "gathering principle" governing all of the dominant practices of the late modern society. This principle is the understanding of beings as meaningless standing reserves, given to whatever human ends that may be imposed on them (Heidegger 1977, p. 24). For Heidegger, the self-posing of man as "the lord of earth" amounts to the most ex-



treme danger that threatens not only our physical existence (by the ways of atomic bomb and ecological crisis), but the very essence of man: our essential receptiveness to the unconcealment of being (Ibid, pp. 26-27). What Heidegger underlines in this essay, however, is that Enframing is itself a mode of revealing (i.e., surprisingly, a kind of *aletheia*), and thus is akin to, indeed rooted in, *poiesis* – a more primordial form of bringing into unconcealment which does not oppose itself to nature, but rather works in agreement with it to bring forth what is coming to pass. While Enframing is the mode of revealing manifest in modern technology, *poiesis* is the principle manifest in art – and since, as Heidegger argues, “the essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it,” art, in the conclusion of the essay, is posed as the realm from which the salvation from the technological nihilism is to be hoped for (Ibid, p. 35).

Let us now situate photography in this picture. Being a medium of mechanical reproduction, striving for the first decades of its existence to acquire the status of an art, photography seems to be at the pivot of the critical opposition between art and technology. Yet, Heidegger seems to have thought that photography based media fall on the wrong side of the art/technology divide, and far from being a possible “earth” of the future event of art, exemplify the ontological impediments for its emergence. Indeed, due to its automatic process and intrinsic realism (praised by photography’s advocates from Niépce to Walton), photography seems to be the quintessence of the process of “objectification of beings” in representation, characteristic of modernity.<sup>5</sup> Heidegger directly relates photography to the modern alienation in the opening passages of “The Thing,” exem-

<sup>5</sup> This is the starting point of Costello’s argument regarding the relation of Heidegger’s doctrine to photography. We agree with Costello that the question whether photography, despite the fact that it “embodies precisely the problem that great art is supposed to contest”, could fulfill the role of the “saving power” “depends largely on what is involved in understanding photography as an art” (Costello 2012, p. 101). For Costello, the solution lies in accentuating the “artistic character,” i.e. the irreducible role of artist’s creative individuality, suppressed in both Heidegger’s conception of art and the realist theories of photography – from Talbot’s “pencil of nature” to Walton’s “mind-independence” (Ibid, p. 112). Our solution is making place for Heideggerian theory of photography by bringing the non-subjectivist agenda of his doctrine to its utmost conclusions.

plifying the technological shrinking of all distances in our age (that is, our loss of meaningfully articulated dwelling place) by the work of film that, as the example goes, exhibits "the germination and growth of plants, which remained hidden throughout seasons ... publicly in a minute" (Heidegger 2001, p. 165). However, rather than bringing remote things closer to us, Heidegger argues, the representation in the medium of film deprives us of the things nearest to us. This critique is not confined to the scientific use of film, suggested by the latter example. As it is made clear by the brief exchange on Kurasawa's *Rashomon* in "Dialogue on Language," Heidegger regards the film as "technical-aesthetic product" in which (in this case, Japanese) "world is captured and imprisoned ... in the objectness of photography" (Heidegger 1971, pp. 16-17). As it seems implied in both instances, and as Julian Young correctly underlines in his comments on the latter one, Heidegger's critique of photography is directed not towards its particular uses (not any artistic failure on Kurosawa's part), but towards the nature of its medium itself (Young 2000, p. 149).

How can we, then, positively apply Heidegger's conception of art to photography-based media?

#### **4. The Turning: Heidegger and Cavell**

The answer resides in Heidegger's account for the *manner* in which art is supposed to help us in overcoming the danger of technology. This overcoming, according to Heidegger, should take place as "the turning" which, as we already know, signifies for Heidegger the innermost structure of the event, and which in this particular historical context is manifested in a principle Heidegger finds announced in his favorite Hölderlin's lines: *But where danger is, grows/ The saving power also* (Heidegger, 1977, p. 42). What this means, for Heidegger, is that the overcoming of the technological understanding of being should take place from within the possibilities essential to its epoch (and not, as some may think, as a retrieval to a pre-modern understanding of being). Indeed, the turning from the technological challenging of being to new poetic disclosure could happen only when the danger of Enframing "first comes expressly to light as the danger that it is" (Ibid, p. 41). Now, if, as Heidegger seems to have thought, photography-based media are the exemplary manifestations of the danger of Enframing, the

true disclosure of their essence would be a part of the awaited safekeeping event. Since, as we already know, the coming to itself of artwork's material basis is for Heidegger a necessary feature of the artistic event (point (1) of his conception of artistic medium as outlined above), such disclosure of the photography based media may be legitimately expected, *if* an artistic event would take place in these media.

Point (2) of Heidegger's conception of medium is key to resolving the seeming contradiction, which appears to threaten our right to such expectation, not to say the celebration of its fulfilment which I claim to find in Cavell. The contradiction is the following one: Heidegger's account of the photography-based media seems to both – promote their candidature for the medium of the redeeming artistic event and to preclude its realization, since what makes these media exemplary of the danger of technology makes them at the same time essentially unfit for the artistic role. But now recall that in the event of art the medium of the artwork becomes what it is for the first time: in the event of the temple rock is first disclosed in its essence (“comes to bear and to rest”) and is constituted as a medium of architecture. Cavell expresses this very idea stating that “the invention of the photographic picture is not the same thing as the creation of photography as a medium for making sense” (Cavell 1979, p. 38). Creation of a medium, rather than an application of a medium, as Cavell repeatedly emphasizes, is what takes place in art, and, indeed, is definitive of what art is. If we take this Heidegger and Cavell's conception of the event-nature of the artistic medium seriously enough, we would see that an essential preclusion of self-disclosure within a medium contradicts a major implication of this conception: we do not know what a medium of art essentially is before the artistic event had taken place within it. In the artistic event in which the danger of Enframing should *first* come to light as the danger that it is, photography based media, as the expected earth of this event, would disclose themselves with some essential truth-content exceeding the meaningfulness of their prior, non-artistic existence. Ontological considerations regarding the exemplarity and the danger of photography-based media on the basis of their pre-artistic meaningfulness may reasonably support the expectation of their role as the medium of the future event, but they cannot preclude the possibility of such an event, for what event implies is precisely a new determination of the world as a realm of possibilities, and

of the medium as a mode of material meaning.

This argument grounds the possibility of applying Heidegger's conception of art to an artistic event in photography based media. But did such an event actually take place? On this point Heidegger and Cavell disagree. Although – as we claim – Heidegger's doctrine of art sets the stage for Cavell's engagement with film, Heidegger did not recognize an event of truth in photography based media, while Cavell did.

## **5. Towards a Heideggerian Reading of Cavell's Philosophy of Film**

I would like now to briefly outline two central Heideggerian moments of Cavell's project that structurally conform to Heidegger's earth and world. First, despite Cavell's celebration of the art of film, he is to a great extent committed to the idea of "coming to light of danger as danger" as the essence of the self-disclosure of the photography based media. Second – and this is the point that induces me to regard this project as *happy* Heideggerianism – Cavell recognizes the actuality of this self-disclosure as an outcome of genuine world-disclosing events of art in Heidegger's sense.

The first point is suggested by the very title of *The World Viewed* that alludes to Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture" (familiar to Cavell in an early translation as "The Age of the World View") and thus acknowledges Heidegger's critique of modernity as immediately relevant to the ontology of film he is set to explore (Ibid, xxiii). Indeed, Cavell's own life-long engagement with the "event of skepticism" as "defining a public history in the modern period" (Cavell 2003, p. 21) bears on some recognizable Heideggerian motifs. Cavell describes the modern condition, where the conviction in its lived world becomes for the "subject" a matter of insatiable demand for certainty of representation, as "withdrawal of the world" (Ibid, p. 19) or indeed our "worldlessness and homelessness" (Cavell 1988, p. 32). In Cavell this withdrawal is first of all the "privatization of the world," our Cartesian individuation becoming unbearable isolation from the world and from others, repudiation of our capacity to share common embodied meaning (Cavell 2003, p. 19). In agreement with Heidegger, Cavell recognizes "the condition of viewing as such" – that is representation – as "our way of establishing connections to the world" in modernity

(Cavell 1979, p. 102). Yet, for Cavell, by making the process of viewing automatic – i.e. "removing the human agent from the process of reproduction" (Ibid, p. 23) – photography takes the modern ontology of representation to the point of the turning, enabling us to reflect on our historically determined metaphysical isolation and, in a certain sense, not less than to overcome subjectivity. By removing the actual self from our "looking out at [the world]... from behind the self," Cavell says, photography "wrest[s] the world from our possessions so that we may possess it again" (Ibid, pp. 21-23).

The term "world" in Cavell is intentionally ambiguous. On the one hand, in the ontological character of photographs as being "of the world" (Ibid, pp. 23-24) and in the definition of the medium of film as "succession of automatic world projections" (Ibid, p. 72) world refers to the uniform material reality inasmuch as it can reflect light. In this sense, the Cartesian understanding of beings is implied in the operation of the photo-cinematic apparatus. On the other hand, in Cavell's central claim that "the films of Hollywood constituted a world" (Ibid, pp. 36), what is meant is a realm of meaningfulness in which the material presence of things is not external and indifferent to human significance but is inherently permeated with it. Transfiguration of the world in the former sense into world in the latter sense is precisely what is at stake in *The World Viewed*, and it is – we may say – *the* Heideggerian turning claimed in the project.

A genre is a central Cavellian notion operative in his analysis of the world-disclosing function of film thus understood. The world of a cinematic genre – in the sense the familiar genres of Classical Hollywood were, and in which Cavell will construe the genres of the re-marriage comedy and the melodrama of the unknown women – is a realm of meaning where the material nature as such ("the world viewed," i.e., photographically representable) is always already configured as a particular realm of human possibilities. One way of phenomenologically grounding this insight is to point that not everything physically representable is possible in a film of a particular genre (no "pie in the face" gags in a melodrama), whereas the necessities of a genre (the re-marriage of the pair in re-marriage comedies) are acknowledged as essential possibilities intrinsic, and in this sense "at home," in material nature.

For Cavell, the primary locus of the eventful turning in film is "violent

transfiguration of human beings as creatures of flesh and blood to their projections on the screen" (Cavell 1996, p. 122). The uniquely cinematic mode of human individuality, created in such transfiguration and captured in Cavell's notion of the "star," is the central element in the world-forming operation of the cinematic genres (Cavell 1979, p. 36). According to Cavell, one of the essential features of the medium of film is a unique ontological status of the screen performer. For example, Cavell argues for the essential ontological precedence of "Humphry Bogart" to any character he has played (and which we usually do not remember by name). At the same time Bogart as a name of a star does not refer to an historical flesh and blood individual, but to an individuality immanent to its appearance in this set of films; it is thus not an expression of a subjective act (as a stage performance) but a subject of a study – or an acknowledgment – of an historical figure of human existence (Ibid, pp. 28-29).

My claim that the world constituted by Hollywood in Cavell could be interpreted as the world of Heidegger's temple is supported by Cavell emphasis on the major social scale implied in his interpretation of some of its films as "great art" (Cavell 1996, p. 8). Hollywood classics of the 30s and 40s, which are at the focus of Cavell's discussion, were important not only to small specialized audiences, as the traditional arts in the same period, but to a general audience compatible with what Heidegger refers to as historical people (Cavell 1979, p. 5). Apropos Kafka's short story "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk," Cavell raises the possibility of the singer "creating the people for whom she sings" and claims that this allegory is most apt for the relation "of an artist ... to a movie public (where the public is apparently openly *all* of the people, the populace, whose lives are not different ... from screened lives)" (Cavell 1996, p. 61). The social standing of film is not a sociological fact about a particular community (perhaps, its obsession with entertainment), but an indication of film's ontological status as world-disclosing, community-forming event. The importance of the Hollywood films to their public, Cavell argues, exceeded mere entertainment: classical Hollywood at its best was articulating for its audience the foundational, though at times contradictory, values of its historical community – the "inner agenda" or a "shared phantasy" of a nation (Cavell 1981, pp. 17-18).

Cavell identifies the community, whose inner agenda the Hollywood

films were articulating, with America – both as an actual historical nation (with constitutional democracy as its form of political organization) and as the utopian horizon of a perfected human community (Ibid, pp. 151–52), “this new yet unapproachable America” (an Emerson’s phrase Cavell borrows for the title of his another book) – akin to the Kantian “realm of ends” (Ibid, p. 78). It is the first sense where Cavell’s project is closest to Heidegger’s vision, for as much as the community of the Greek temple, America is taken in this sense to be an actual historical phenomenon. Taking the formation of such a phenomenon as the focus of artistic achievement is the point of Cavell’s Heideggerianism that I wish to claim here. Needless to say, though, that this inheritance goes against the grain of Heidegger’s agenda, and quite dramatically indeed: for just at the time the movies at stake were made, Heidegger was, in the Nazi Germany, not only formulating the conception of art implied by Cavell, but also preaching against America’s “ahistoricity and self-devastation” (Heidegger 1996, p. 54). This fact does not pose a philosophical threat to my argument, however, since redeeming some ontological elements of Heidegger’s legacy by rejection of some of its political elements is part to the “healthy” inheritance of Heidegger I ascribe to Cavell.

Yet, the utopian dimension of America as the world supposedly opened up in Cavell’s Hollywood event may be taken to mark a serious – that is, philosophically problematic – departure from Heidegger. It is essential for Cavell’s notion of this event that “discovery of America,” as well as the very eventness of this event, remains forever negotiable. As Cavell continues about the metaphor of Kafka’s story, it remains a question whether the singer creates the people or her singing is just a by-product of this people’s everyday speech (Cavell 1996, p. 61) – or, more precisely, it remains a matter of judgment and criticism. Cavell speaks of the films he discusses as engaging in conversation with their culture (Cavell 1981, p. 151) – conversation in which the status of these movies and of this nation is continuously put for decision. I deliberately use a Heideggerian expression here so as to underline that even here Cavell may be efficiently related to Heidegger’s model, where the world-disclosing procedure of art is described as putting for decision by an historical humanity of its values, destiny, etc. (Heidegger 2002, pp. 26, 38). Yet, for Cavell, it is not *decision* but *conversation* which is the key-notion. Conversation simultaneously defines the

essential relation of the movies to their culture, extended in Cavell's act of criticism (Cavell 1981, p. 7), and the regulative principle of this culture (the democratic ideal, if you wish), emblemized in the movies by the modes of conversation within the romantic couples whose narratives they depict (Ibid., pp. 141-160).

Does Cavellian open-ended conversation replace the momentary upheaval of Heideggerian event? I prefer to believe that Heideggerian event is the idea in terms of which this conversation is – or should be – conducted.

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