

# The Legitimization of Movies: Stanley Cavell on the Classical Hollywood Cinema

KIHARA Keisho

*The Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University, Tokyo*

---

## Introduction

For American philosopher Stanley Cavell (1926- ), when it comes to considering “reflections on the ontology of film,” he has always looked to the classical Hollywood cinema from 1930 to 1940 as his subject of analysis. This is evident in all of his major publications; *The World Viewed* (1971), *Pursuits of Happiness* (1981), and *Contesting Tears* (1996), which deal with the classical Hollywood cinema from the period. Although Cavell has done some analysis of French films (Renoir, Truffaut, Godard et al.), he has continually discussed them in relation to Hollywood. Here we can find some unity in Cavell’s writings, as Stephen Mulhall argues Cavell’s work on cinema is divided into two parts, that is analyses of specific films, and examinations of the medium of cinema itself. According to Mulhall, Cavell’s work nevertheless possesses a real unity. “[I]n part, this is because he finds that the films he studies themselves study their relation to their medium and its audience, but it is also because his work focusses upon precisely the same issue at both levels—that of scepticism” (Mulhall 223). The positions of *The World Viewed* as a “theoretical base” which reflects on the nature of cinema in fundamental ways, and *Pursuits of Happiness* and *Contesting Tears* as texts on “genre studies” consisting of analyses of individual films, seem to be generally accepted. However, does Cavell’s philosophy of film surely constitute a real unity of theoretical base and practical criticism?

The aim of this paper is to discuss the decisive change in Cavell’s attitude towards the classical Hollywood cinema between *The World Viewed* and *Pursuits of Happiness*. The sign of the coming change can be seen in the latter half of the chronologically ordered *The World Viewed*, or more precisely, from his analysis of the films known as New Hollywood and *Nouvelle Vague*. In his analysis of these “modern cinemas” he acquired a new method and then applied this method to the classical Hollywood cinema retroactively in his later books. Although Cavell previously considered that the avoidance of modernism was what characterized the classical Hollywood cinema despite it being a product of modernity, he changed to the position of acknowledging that cinema is, and always has been, a condition of modernism along with the other arts. John Mullarkey has already pointed out the amendment of Cavell’s position itself (Mullarkey 120), but we need to investigate its significance in more detail. For it is a decisive conversion for Cavell’s study of film. More importantly, in acknowledging that cinema is a condition of modernism, he thought that it could be legitimized as *art*. This conversion, on the one hand, encouraged development of not only his film philosophy but also academic film studies as a discipline. On the other hand, he also abandoned his assumption that cinema is a worthwhile art form for analysing mass culture. In the following, firstly, I will investigate Cavell’s

earlier film philosophy regarding his analysis of classical Hollywood films. Secondly, I will discuss the period of modern cinema in *The World Viewed*. And finally, I will review Cavell's later period, that is, his analysis of classical Hollywood films as modernism, especially concerning the analysis of *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940) in *Pursuits of Happiness*. [1]

## 1. The Classical Hollywood Cinema as Mass Culture

One of the most significant concepts in Cavell's film philosophy is arguably that of *automatism*. First of all, it indicates the mechanical quality of cinema that originates from the camera; yet, at the same time it also means "convention" which often signifies the concept of "genre" typical to Hollywood cinema. Although the concept is often unclear, the two meanings are basically regarded as the underlying principles of automatism. However, it is only in *The World Viewed* that we can see Cavell use the term automatism quite frequently. The fact that it rarely appears in his later books on film clearly indicates his change in approach to cinema. Therefore, to begin with, we need an investigation of the content of *The World Viewed* in which he analyses the classical Hollywood cinema in terms of this concept of automatism. [2]

As previously stated, Cavell consistently reflects on the classical Hollywood cinema in his books on film, and the underlying theme of *The World Viewed* is that of how we should understand cinema *as mass culture*. In other words, how the classical Hollywood cinema could have avoided modernism? For Cavell, modernism is a condition that means each medium is conscious of its own characteristics. Despite the fact that other arts evolved into a state of modernism in twentieth century, cinema, as he argued in *The World Viewed*, remained traditional without questioning the nature of its own medium, thus continuing as popular culture. Yet if art includes cinema, the concept of art must be transformed, or as Cavell states, "[i]f film is seriously to be thought of as an art at all, then it needs to be explained how it can have avoided the fate of modernism" (WV 14). In addition to this, Cavell raised the essential question of why film undoubtedly has artistic value despite that it might not be considered as art. Or that is to say, why are films so interesting? Moreover, why is it that not only film masterpieces but also "ordinary films" are worthy of academic investigation? It is exactly this mysterious mode of cinema that has intrigued Cavell and he states in chapter one of *The World Viewed*:

[T]he more we learn (from the Hollywood memoirs of Ben Hecht, say) of the corruptions and stupidities in the industry that formed to produce those objects, the more we are likely to wonder how the films we care about can ever have been made. This is not a problem if the only films you care about are carefully chosen masterpieces: few regimes are so perfectly terrible and efficient that they prevent every drop of originality from leaking through their clutches. But if one's range of care is wider, then *how is one to explain the effect of those ordinary instances, which seem just to have been made for the industry to make?* What is the power of film that it could survive (even profit artistically from) so much neglect and ignorant contempt by those in power over it? What is film? (WV 15, my emphasis)

From the above we can see that cinema has become a critical philosophical problem for Cavell due to the fact that not only are there masterpieces that align with the other arts, but a number of “ordinary instances” that are just as valuable. We might assume that Cavell was sympathetic to the idea of film as a “culture industry” which Adorno and Horkheimer despised in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*; however, he could not help but concede the artistic value of “the products” coming out of the studio system. The critical question of Cavell’s “What is film?” uses André Bazin’s argument of the ontology of the photographic image as his point of departure in *The World Viewed*, considering the characteristics of cinema that make it different from other arts such as the mechanical quality, or automatism, as Cavell puts it (WV 16-25).

In addition, Cavell also raised the question of how did cinema acquire artistic qualities so easily, and he suggests this was due to the mechanical property of the medium. He cited James Agee, who for Cavell was the most distinguished critic that properly understood the automatic nature of cinema. In *The World Viewed*, Cavell referred to Agee’s criticism and praised “[h]is gift for finding and describing *something* to like, in no matter of what yards of junk” (WV 7, author’s emphasis). He later acknowledged Agee again bearing in mind the power of the camera; “the objects it manufactures have for us the same natural interest, of fascination, or boredom, or nothing, or poignance, terror, as the world itself” (WV 104). It is no coincidence that Agee was referred to above in the chapter on automatism with Cavell arguing that Agee’s criticism is not just outstanding, but also contains a full understanding of the automatic nature of cinema.

*The World Viewed* might be sometimes considered as abstract or too theoretical, and that it lacks a close analysis of individual films due to the argument being centred on the mechanical quality of cinema. However, according to Cavell, unlike other arts, cinema cannot be understood by analysing individual films. Following Cavell’s argument, we must grasp it as a kind of *mass*, because, as he states, “[t]he impact of movies is too *massive*, too out of proportion with the individual worth of ordinary movies” (WV 154, my emphasis). In chapter one of *The World Viewed*, for instance, Cavell enumerates monotonously about thirty classical Hollywood films that he watched when he was younger (WV 10). Yet this does not merely present his nostalgia for his youth or give credit to his cinephiliac knowledge. This style of writing is Cavell’s unique rhetoric that clearly shows that classical Hollywood films must be recognized as not individual films but as a whole unity. [3] Thus Cavell’s argument inevitably led to genre theory.

Cavell considered the concept of automatism to contain also the concept of genre, the studio system and tradition of classical Hollywood. He considered this mass-produced system equally as important:

[T]he familiar historical fact that there are movie cycles, taken by certain movie theorists as in itself a mark of unscrupulous commercialism, is a possibility internal to the medium; one could even say, it is the best emblem of the fact that a medium had been created. For a cycle is a genre (prison movies, Civil War movies, horror movies, etc.); and a genre is a medium. (WV 36)

The fact that Hollywood made not one masterpiece but equivalent works in a certain period regularly means that the cycle or genre determined its own significance of existence. Cavell

argues that it is our faith in automatism (of genre) that the classical Hollywood cinema is based on.

It is likely that there was little room for the views Cavell held toward cinema within the academic field of film studies in the early seventies. Mainstream film studies were caught up with the criticism of bourgeois ideology built into cinematic mechanism such as “apparatus theory” (Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean-Louis Comolli) and textual analysis of films such as John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln* by the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Therefore, it is not surprising that Cavell—who argued affirmatively for the convention of the classical Hollywood cinema—received little attention in those days. Rosalind Krauss, for instance, criticized *The World Viewed* severely because it exclusively focused on classical Hollywood films so that avant-garde films, that did not put emphasis on convention, were not taken into consideration (“Dark Glasses and Bifocals”). [4]

However, Robert Warshow, one of the most acclaimed critics in the United States, contributed to Cavell’s argument and went against the trend of the times. Although Cavell did not clearly refer to Warshow in *The World Viewed*, in the epilogue to the 2001 edition of Warshow’s posthumous book *The Immediate Experience* (1962), Cavell wrote about the influence Warshow had on him and his way of viewing popular culture (Warshow 289-300). Warshow insisted that both the sociological critic such as Siegfried Kracauer and the aesthetic critics such as Rudolf Arnheim or Sergei Eisenstein were so far incompetent as an approach to cinema and sought a new methodology of criticism. Admittedly he had an affinity for the aesthetic critic because they dealt with individual films straightforwardly, that is, they needed “immediate experience” of works. However, on the decisive difference of his stance he stated:

The aesthetic critic [...] may be perfectly willing to acknowledge his relation to the object—but *only after he has transformed the object*. For what he seeks in the films is almost always something that he can recognize as “legitimate” to the world art forms—which is to say, analogous to the effects of other art forms on their highest levels. (Warshow xl, my emphasis)

Although the aesthetic critic understands films as art, they fundamentally change the nature of films. Instead, Warshow insisted that we must understand films as not art but as *film itself*, or following his expression, as “the bastard child of art” (Warshow xli). It is a similar notion to what Cavell called “the value of illicitness” which he proposed in *The World Viewed* (WV 11). [5]

## 2. End of the Classical Hollywood Cinema and “Creation of a Medium”

In *The World Viewed*, the understanding that the classical Hollywood cinema had avoided modernism was a precondition for considering the cinema’s unique nature that threatens the traditional concept of art. In the enlarged edition of *The World Viewed* published in 1979, however, Cavell changed the precondition fundamentally:

I am prepared to modify my claims about film’s modernism by saying either that movies from their beginning have existed in a state of modernism, from the beginning have had to

achieve their power by *deliberate investigations* of the power of their medium; or else that movies from their beginning have existed in two states, one modern, one traditional, sometimes running parallel to and at varying distances from one another, something crossing, sometimes interweaving; or else that the concept of modernism has no clear application to the art of film. My feeling is that none of these modifications need weaken *my insistence on film as the last traditional art*, but on the contrary that each would be a way of explaining that insistence. (WV 219, my emphasis)

As this quote clearly indicates, Cavell radically changed his attitude towards the classical Hollywood cinema, that is, from the understanding that it had avoided modernism to the viewpoint that modernism intervened in it, or more precisely, that we should deal with the classical Hollywood cinema as modernism. In his context, “traditional art” means art that has a potential for shifting the modernistic state. While he emphasized the particularity of cinema in saying it is the *last* traditional art, at any rate, he qualified cinema as art. In the first edition of the book, Cavell said with a conditional clause, “*if it is art*, it is the one live traditional art, the one that can take its tradition for granted” (WV 15, my emphasis). As the quote above showed, however, he changed his opinion and *insisted* that film has always been art.

By this conversion, Cavell came to consider that great classical Hollywood films were not works that follow a tradition (automatism) but “those films that most clearly and most deeply discover the power of the medium itself,” that is, “those that give complete significance to the possibilities and necessities of its physical basis” (WV 104). Here the critics are required to discover and establish “a new medium” or “a new automatism” in analysing the individual films and the value of film was no longer assured automatically. Instead, we need *deliberate investigations* of the medium, in other words, our voluntary participation in making meaning of films.

Why, then, did Cavell change his opinion of the classical Hollywood cinema so radically? In facing the historical fact of the decline of the studio system—which had supported the classical Hollywood cinema for years—Cavell broadened his perspective by seeking new methods for evaluating modern cinema appropriately. We can understand his change as a result of applying new perspectives and knowledge to the classical Hollywood cinema retroactively. This new methodology stemmed from the concept of “creation of a medium.”

Because I have argued the concept at length elsewhere (“Automatism’ and ‘Creation of a Medium’”), here I will only briefly confirm the main thesis. Creation of a medium is, first and foremost, a critical succession of “medium specificity” which is an idea unique to modernism. For Cavell, although modernism in art is almost the same as Greenbergian reductive thought (which puts emphasis on the physicality of each medium) it was the crucial problem of how did we get rid of the sense of stagnation of “medium specificity,” and he was going to overcome this by using the concept of “creation of a medium.” That is to say, he did not deal with the modernism of art as the argument of medium specificity which determines the nature of the medium according to each material basis in advance, but as a process which the filmmakers or the critics discover and create new possibilities of the medium each time. [6]

The essential point is that this concept was introduced for understanding *modern cinema*

after the classical Hollywood cinema had gradually declined. For Cavell, modern cinema undoubtedly embodied modernism in cinema that did not follow traditions but renewed them. Of course it is true that in a state of modernism that changed rapidly, we cannot argue cinema *as a whole* as before. Each film struggles to establish their distinctive originality. Thus, Cavell analysed “auteurist” individual films such as those from the directors Godard, Truffaut, Resnais and Antonioni, and investigated how they created (or failed to create) a new medium.

For example, in chapter eighteen of *The World Viewed* entitled “Assertions in Techniques,” Cavell discussed cinematic devices such as slow motion and freeze frame, and he pointed out how great films realized the potential of such devices by noting specific scenes. Above all, his analysis of the *Nouvelle Vague* film that is Truffaut’s *Jules et Jim* (1962), the longest analysis of individual films in the book, is very important in that he paid particular attention to a scene which used freeze frame, a privileged device that invokes and reveals photography (photogram) as the material basis of film. Furthermore, not only that scene, he expanded the analysis to include an interpretation of the whole narrative over “community” which formed the characters. As I will argue in the next section, it is the very same method of criticism that Cavell practiced in *Pursuits of Happiness*. He amplifies the significant details of films that reveal the possibilities of the medium on the analysis of the whole narrative. Therefore, if we want to find the connection between *The World Viewed* and *Pursuits of Happiness*, we need not point out the fact that both books analysed classical Hollywood films (Rothman 211-12). Rather, in terms of the methodology used in the analysis of individual films, we should emphasize the connection between the analysis of the *Nouvelle Vague* films and the films discussed in *Pursuits of Happiness*. That is, *Pursuits of Happiness* is an attempt to prove that classical Hollywood films can be analysed by the same methods as the *Nouvelle Vague* films. [7]

Thus Cavell achieved a new method for evaluating modern cinema by introducing the concept of “creation of a medium” in his thought and then applied the concept to the classical Hollywood cinema so that he regarded those films as artistic masterpieces and chose to analyse each film individually. Through the analysis of modern cinema, Cavell discovered *after the fact* that the classical Hollywood cinema had always been modernistic works of art that revealed the possibility of the medium.

How, then, did Cavell’s attitude to the classical Hollywood cinema change exactly? In the next section, as a typical example of his textual analysis, I will discuss Cavell’s investigation of *The Philadelphia Story* that is included in *Pursuits of Happiness*. Cavell clearly shows that finding new possibilities in the medium is the most crucial criteria for evaluating the films by analysing the intervention on photography (and camera) in the last sequence of this film. In other words, he dealt with the film not as “the bastard child of art” that follows a tradition (automatism) of Hollywood, but as a masterpiece of modernistic film that pursued the possibilities of the medium and discovered its new significance as a legitimate work of art.

### **3. The Classical Hollywood Cinema as Modernism: Interpreting the Ending of *The Philadelphia Story***

In *Pursuits of Happiness* which analyses six films—generally referred to as “screwball

comedies”—such as *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), and *The Awful Truth* (1937), Cavell posits a new genre for these films, that is, the “comedy of remarriage,” and he has a great interest in interpretations of the narrative of each film rather than the cinematic technologies and devices. Although this fact might mean that his study of film has shifted from the theoretical reflection in *The World Viewed* to the criticism of narrative, as Yoichiro Ishihara who translated *The World Viewed* in Japanese noted, there are many cases in *Pursuits of Happiness* where Cavell pays attention to the scene which film itself is conscious of the nature of its own medium. [8] In the analysis of *The Philadelphia Story*, he also paid attention to a photograph used in the last sequence and discussed the meaning of its emergence. At first sight, his analysis appears rather unclear and unsatisfactory in terms of elaboration, but the emergence of photography is a crucial point for Cavell. While the photograph works to assist the narrative, it also shows that film can invoke in us a reconsideration of the meaning of “viewing” in film.

The film that revolves around the romance of C. K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant) and Tracy Lord (Katharine Hepburn)—a recent divorcee whom is “remarried” in the end—has an impressive last sequence prior to the couple’s wedding ceremony. Being that Tracy comes from a distinguished family, at that moment, Sidney Kidd (Henry Daniell)—who plays the role of editor for the gossip magazine *Spy*—presses the shutter and takes a sudden snap-shot as he wants to get the scoop on this ceremony. Dexter, Tracy, and Mike Macauley Conner (James Stewart) notice the shutter sound and turn their eyes toward the camera located in left side of the foreground off-screen (figure 1), then the film cuts to an image of the photograph just taken (we can assume) (figure 2). Actually, the photograph is part of a magazine, the page is turned and another photograph is presented that shows Dexter and Tracy alone embraced in a kiss (figure 3). The page is turned again to reveal the closing still marked with “The End.” Considering this final scene Cavell questions why Dexter and Tracy continued to allow Kidd to take a picture of their embrace *as if they had desired it* after the first unexpected photograph.

While Cavell came to interpret this question in terms of acknowledgement of marriage, we need to discuss the problem with a full understanding of the important quality of a comedy of remarriage that marriage is an enterprise that only the two persons concerned take part in. That is, the barrier on the way to marriage is not from the outside—society, community and their parents, but on the inside, in themselves, so that they must overcome it alone. Therefore, there is also no guarantee on the



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

outside that the marriage will succeed, thus they must acknowledge the justice of marriage alone, a fact that emphasizes why Cavell regarded remarriage as important. That is, such unsponsored, unstable situation barely maintained its justice by only the repetitive act of remarriage as he often said elsewhere (Cavell “Benjamin and Wittgenstein” 243). Therefore, the endings of the comedy of remarriage films are by no means happy endings but they are a disquieting restart of married life which continues to acknowledge the justice of marriage constantly for pursuing happiness, and at the same time, the endings mean that married life is always subject to the threat of divorce (*PH 2*). According to Cavell, the fact that the protagonists in *Bringing Up Baby* or *The Awful Truth* went into the “the green world” [9] located far from society in the latter half of the story also supports his argument that marriage is their personal private matter. The protagonists in *The Philadelphia Story*, however, do not go into such a world. Instead, the acknowledgement of marriage has more to do with being accepted socially and through the community act of a wedding. Despite the fact that they are *in* the existing society, then, how can their marriage be confirmed if we follow Cavell’s argument? Here Cavell insists that the photograph made it possible. That is to say, the photograph of their embrace excludes the other characters in the narrative from the screen image, and as a result, he interpreted this photograph as proof that marriage was a private matter for only the couple (*PH 123*). Although Cavell shows that the specific quality of the medium of photography (and film)—which excluded the beholder from the world of the film image—is used as part of the narrative, we must always keep in mind that he never applied the determined nature of the medium of photography to the interpretation of narrative. In fact the reverse is true. It was this film itself that specified the nature of the medium of photography (or still images). [10]

What’s more, his interpretation of the photograph continues. By inserting the still image into the film, we are withdrawn from the diegetic world in which we have been absorbed and then we recognize after the fact that the narrative which we have seen was a past event. As Garrett Stewart says, contrasting two media, Cavell often emphasizes “the prevailing lifelike kinesis of film [...] over against the stasis of photographic mummification,” so that “[i]t [the still image of *The Philadelphia Story*] thus operates to divorce us, so to speak, from the thrall of the medium’s prevailing effect” (131). In other words, the audiences here are allowed an opportunity for reflecting on the moving images they have seen so far. Cavell states as follows:

[W]hat does it mean to say that these final two shots are pictures or photographs? How is the rest of what we have seen different? The rest was every bit as much a function of the photographic. Of course the rest was in motion whereas these are still. But that is the question. What is the difference? This question directs us to think about the ontological status of what we have seen and hence about the mode of our perception. (*PH 160*)

Considering the above and the impossibility of the meaning of the rhetorical question “What is the difference?” it clearly shows, that we are forced to continue to ask the unending question about the difference of cinema and photography. As a result, Cavell thought that cinema and photography led us to the madness of skepticism that of course is a loop of repetition in seeking certainty. Moreover, Cavell interpreted that this ambiguous state of perception, namely, the fact



that the film ended by not an embrace but a photograph of the embrace suggested less their happiness than their uncertainty.

Although Cavell vaguely put forward the uneasiness in this scene, it is not entirely due to the emergence of the still image. We can make up for his argument more specifically by pointing out a sort of distortion that was invoked by the insertion of the still image. To elaborate further, the (moving) image of the moment that the three characters turned around to look at the camera is not the same as the photograph that followed (Note the candle is missing in the left foreground of the screen). There is a clear difference in the direction of Mike's eyes in the moving image than in the photograph. Just before the photograph is taken Mike turns his eyes to the left of the screen (figure 1), but in the still, his eyes are to the front of the screen facing the audience (figure 2). Although Cavell undoubtedly noticed this subtle difference, he did not explore this difference or base his argument on the fact any further. [11] Given that gap, however, we can compensate and support his idea that he comes to find by reconsidering cinema itself through the analysis of individual films. *The Philadelphia Story* is a story about the staff of a gossip magazine trying to get a scoop in the mansion of Tracy's wedding ceremony. That the three eyes turned from the camera in the diegetic world to the movie camera which is now shooting the very this film places us—the audience, in the same position as the photographer Mr. Kidd. That is, the presence of Kidd who is peeping in on the event of this film from the outside, as an outsider, allows for the possibility that we interpret this film as a sort of metacinema by indicating the presence of us (the viewer) who is peeping in on the film itself from the outside literally.

In fact, Cavell treated the whole film as a work of metacinema in interpreting that Dexter's absolute power of controlling the narrative—he took back the bride on the very day of her wedding—represented the film's directorial power (*PH* 139-40). [12] Cavell's argument of metacinema is not that of a film about film but a film about "cinéma" which means the whole institution of cinema including the individual films, the structure of the industry, and the role of the spectator. For example, in the analysis of *Bringing Up Baby* in which the same actors of *The Philadelphia Story* appear, Cavell suggests that the perspective of metacinema is reflected in the relationship between Grant and Hepburn. The questions Grant has of his relationship; what on earth am I doing here? Or why am I in such a predicament and why do I remain here, are closely connected with our doubt as to why we continue to see this film (*PH* 130). As Cavell stated, "each of the films in the genre of remarriage essentially contains considerations of what it is to view them, to know them" (*PH* 159), and this states means that it is one of the proof of his insistence that good films is inherently self-reflexive (*PH* 13-4).

What I have attempted to show is not exactly a validity of Cavell's interpretation itself; rather, it is more important that we should recognize that photography as a material basis of film also has a crucial role in interpreting the narrative of the classical Hollywood cinema as well as modern cinema. That is, in the interpretation of *The Philadelphia Story* Cavell found the nature of cinema itself the very moment that he discovered the possibility of the medium of photography that is consistent with the narrative of this film. [13] It shows that this film can be understood in terms of not only the content of this narrative but also the reflective nature that invokes us to reconsider the meaning of the act of viewing a film. Thus, the classical Hollywood cinema is no longer considered "the bastard child of art" that threatens the very concept of art, but should be

regarded as sheer “works of art” that are worthy praise and criticism.

## Conclusion

In “Film in the University,” the appendix to *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell noted that if he had known the work Walter Benjamin—in particular his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”—when he was writing *The World Viewed*, he would have gained plenty because their ideas were similar (PH 266). Cavell confirmed Benjamin’s insistence that we should think about not whether film (and photography) is art or not, but how film and photography transformed the concept of art, because, as I showed in section one, the insistence was more crucial for him than we might imagine. [14]

In his essay on Benjamin published in 1998, however, Cavell had come to have more of an affinity for Benjamin’s doctoral dissertation *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism* which deals with the “criticizability” of works of art, and argues that criticism is a part of the work and needed to complete it. In contrast “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” which does not analyse any individual works in detail by a means of criticism (“Benjamin and Wittgenstein” 242-44). Cavell’s change of interest in Benjamin clearly indicates the idea that the classical Hollywood cinema as art replaced the idea of the classical Hollywood cinema as mass culture in his study of film as this paper has presented.

Moreover, we should also pay attention to Cavell’s study of television, which was published at almost same time as the publication of *Pursuits of Happiness*, to further understand his change of thought. In the essay entitled “The Fact of Television” (1982), Cavell noted the difference between cinema and television as the difference of the concept of work by which each medium can be applied:

To say that masterpieces among movies reveal the medium of film is to say that this revelation is *the business of individual works*, and that these works have a status analogous to traditional works of art: they last beyond their immediate occasions; their rewards bear up under repeated viewings; they lend themselves to the same pitch of critical scrutiny as do any of the works we care about most seriously. This seems not to be true of individual works of television. What is memorable, treasurable, criticizable is not primarily the individual work, but the program, the format, not this or that day of “I Love Lucy,” but the program as such. (“The Fact of Television” 62-3, my emphasis)

As the title indicates, the main point of this essay is to argue the nature of television, to understand its medium specificity; likewise, he also reconsidered the specificity of film and argued the difference as a medium. [15] Among those considerations, he clearly stated that, unlike television, good film could be a work of art worth analysing individually. [16]

Needless to say, we should not accept the philosopher’s matters so easily. We cannot insist that Cavell abandoned the fascination of cinema as popular culture completely after he regarded the classical Hollywood cinema as works of art, and vice versa. That is, it is not impossible to consider the influence of a modernistic idea in his early thought because Cavell wrote on the

classical Hollywood cinema in *The World Viewed* after his experience of modern cinema (yet he claims this had no affect and he wrote with ignorance to the experience). At any rate, however, we should recognize the fact that his attitude to the classical Hollywood cinema has two phases, and moreover, we can begin to finally discuss the meaning of his analyses of individual films.

## Notes

- [1] In recent years, one of the main criteria of evaluating Cavell's study of film takes the form of an argument of spectatorship. Since Linda Williams' "body genres" and Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body*, the research on film and body has increased rapidly. The reevaluation of Cavell's study of film has probably been relevant to this stream, for Richard Rushton and Gabriele Pedullà argued that the spectator's body when viewing a film is the essential point of Cavell's study of film (Rushton 106-25; Pedullà 101-22).
- [2] As for the concept of automatism, See Rodowick, 41-73; Trahair.
- [3] Therefore, as I will discuss in section two, the main reason why the concrete analyses of individual films increase in the latter half of *The World Viewed* which deals with modern cinema seems to be by a natural process of the collapse of the classical Hollywood cinema.
- [4] Later, Krauss herself overturned this criticism on *The World Viewed*, and she found the new possibility of the concept of medium in the book (Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea* 5-7).
- [5] In this sense, while I use "the classical Hollywood cinema," it seems that Cavell himself never accepted the title fully. The term "illicitness" may provide an alternative to the "classical" in Hollywood cinema. For inadequacy of calling the Hollywood cinema at the time as "the classical Hollywood cinema," see Miriam Hansen's influential argument of the concept "vernacular modernism."
- [6] "The first successful movies—i.e., The first moving pictures accepted as motion pictures—were not applications of a medium that was defined by given possibilities, but the *creation of a medium* by their giving significance to specific possibilities" (*WV* 32, author's emphasis).
- [7] Cavell interpreted this freeze frame of face of Jeanne Moreau that appeared early part of the film as men's desire to maintain women *as statue*. As I discuss in the next section, he pointed out the fact that Katharine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* was also acknowledged as a "goddess made of stone" by men. However, he also emphasized the significance of woman as "flesh and blood" which propelled the narrative (*PH* 140-42).
- [8] "'Screen' which partitions off the bedroom of man and woman in *It Happened One Night*, the mirror in *The Lady Eve* (1941), and the home movie, the motif of film-within-film in *Adam's Rib* (1949). Because of the self-reflective structures, these films are very conscious of their own medium, as it were, these films know themselves 'to have been written and directed and photographed and edited'" (Ishihara 341).
- [9] Because Cavell understands the comedy of remarriage as a successor of the tradition of Shakespeare's works he calls the place which transforms the protagonists "the green world" following the argument of Northrop Frye. According to Cavell, in more than half of the remarriage comedies the place is Connecticut (*PH* 49).
- [10] Of course, because we can readily recall the nature of photography that excludes the beholder from the image, it is difficult to think that he didn't keep the nature in mind in advance. Cavell calls this interactivity of the "element" of medium and its significant use "cinematic circle." For him, it is the investigation of the cinematic circle that is the meaning of investigation of medium (*WV* 6-7).
- [11] "The first photograph is of the trio, Dexter, Tracy, and Mike, startled by, and looking in the direction of, the camera (*which camera? Kidd's or Cukor's?*)" (*PH* 159, my emphasis).
- [12] Andrew Klevan, whose criticism has been greatly influenced by Cavell's methodology, analyses the

- scenes of *The Philadelphia Story* in terms of Cary Grant's power to control the narrative in more detail (Klevan 38-46).
- [13] Since *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell has often analysed a "moment" of film in the same way. For example, he argued Stella's self-absorptive appearance when she stood with her back facing the screen in *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937) as a critical moment when she transformed herself and began her strategy to find happiness for her daughter (*CT* 203). As for his criticism of a moment in *Stella Dallas*, see also my essay "The Woman without a Physiognomy."
- [14] Monica Dall'Asta pointed out that Bazin might read Benjamin through the André Malraux's text, and argued their latent connection over montage (Dall'Asta). Given that perspective, it is possible to assume *The World Viewed* that is based on Bazin's ontology also potentially connects Benjamin.
- [15] Samuel Weber argued that whereas we need to consider the specificity of television, it is a task to discern not the "essence" but the "difference" of medium. In this sense, certainly Weber regarded Cavell's argument of television highly but he criticized Cavell in that he didn't describe the difference of television and cinema thoroughly, especially the perspective of reception (Weber 108-10).
- [16] From another point of view, we can understand that his attitude to cinema in *The World Viewed* was replaced by television. This indicates that we can reread not only "The Fact of Television" but also *The World Viewed* as a book on the theory of television.

## Works Cited

### Abbreviations

- [*WV*]: Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Enlarged edition, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979.
- [*PH*]: Cavell, Stanley. *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981.
- [*CT*]: Cavell, Stanley. *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996.
- . "Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities." *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (1999): 235-46.
- . "The Fact of Television." *Cavell on Film*. Ed. William Rothman. Albany: SUNY Press, 2005. 59-85.
- Dall'Asta Monica. "Beyond the Image in Benjamin and Bazin: Aura of the Event." *Opening Bazin*. Eds. Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. 57-65.
- Hansen, Miriam. "The Mass Production of Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism." *Reinventing Film Studies*. Eds. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill. New York: Arnold, 2000. 332-50.
- Ishihara Yoichiro. "Why Can Film be a Subject of Philosophy?" (Translator's commentary) *Me ni utsuru Sekai* (Japanese translation of *The World Viewed*). Tokyo: Hosei UP, 2012. 328-47.
- Kihara Keisho. "'Automatism' and 'Creation of a Medium' in Staley Cavell's *The World Viewed*." *Theatre and Film Studies* vol. 1 (2012): 185-203.
- . "The Woman without a Physiognomy: Criticism of "Moment" in Stanley Cavell's Reflections on Stella Dallas." *Theatre and Film Studies* (2013): 187-99.
- Klevan, Andrew. *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*. London: Wallflower, 2005.
- Krauss, Rosalind. "Dark Glasses and Bifocals, A Book Review." *Artforum*, May 1974. 59-62.
- . "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999.
- Mullarkey, John. *Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Mulhall, Stephen. *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

- Pedullà, Gabriele. *In Broad Daylight: Movies and Spectators after the Cinema*. London & New York: Verso, 2012.
- Rodowick, David Norman. *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007.
- Rothman, William. "Cavell on Film, Television, and Opera." *Stanley Cavell*. Ed. Richard Eldridge, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 206-38.
- Rushton, Richard. *The Reality of Film: Theories of Filmic Reality*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2011.
- Stewart, Garrett. *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999.
- Trahair, Lisa. "Being on the Outside: Cinematic Automatism in Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*." *Film-Philosophy* 18 (2014): 128-46.
- Warshaw, Robert. *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre & Other Spaces of Popular Culture*. Enlarged edition, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001.
- Weber, Samuel. "Television: Set and Screen." *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996. 108-28.

### List of Illustration

- Figure 1 *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), DVD, Warner Home Video, 2008.
- Figure 2 *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), DVD, Warner Home Video, 2008.
- Figure 3 *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), DVD, Warner Home Video, 2008.

This paper is based on the Japanese version printed in *Eizogaku*, No. 89 (2012): 5-21, published by the Japanese Society of Image Arts and Sciences.