CHAPTER TWELVE

Aesthetics and Receptivity: Kant, Nietzsche, Cavell, and Astaire

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In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously writes that "[our] knowledge springs from two fundamental sources of the mind; the first is the capacity of receiving representations . . . the second is the power of knowing an object through these representations. . . . the *receptivity* of our mind . . . is to be entitled sensibility."[1] The present essay is a chapter in the history of post-Kantian philosophy's reception of Kant's concept of receptivity. Specifically, I concentrate on two renderings of receptivity, one gendered and one raced. In *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (hereafter *Zarathustra*), Nietzsche revises Kant's concept of receptivity and, ironically, adapts it to a critique of Kantian and Cartesian notions of the thinking subject.[2] More precisely, he presents a genealogy for these notions that roots them in the male body's estrangement from its power of receptivity, a power he identifies with the mythical Ariadne. Like Nietzsche, Stanley Cavell has also attempted to rethink Kant's concept of receptivity, drawing inspiration from Thoreau, Emerson, Heidegger, and, of course, Nietzsche. In his 1996 presidential address to the American Philosophical Association, and then again in his 1998 Spinoza lectures, Cavell continues this line of thinking by invoking the idea of receptivity to interpret two Fred Astaire routines from the Hollywood film *The Band Wagon*.[3] In the second routine, as

Cavell views it, an aging, melancholic Astaire regains his power of receptivity through his encounter with a black bootblack—a shoeshine man. Part 1 of the present essay explains Nietzsche's revision of Kant and feminizing of receptivity. Part 2 recounts and complicates Cavell's reading of the Astaire routines, which finds Astaire finding receptivity through blackness. Part 3 consists of critical reflections relating to both Nietzsche and Cavell, and to Cavell's sense of Emerson as finding and founding philosophy for America.

Part 1. Sublimity, Beauty, Femininity

In the first chapter of the first *Critique*, Kant writes that "the science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility I call *transcendental aesthetic*." It is well known that Kant follows this remark with a footnote relating to his use of the term *aesthetic*. Specifically, he contrasts Baumgarten's use of that term "to signify what others call the critique of taste" to his own, more traditional use of it to designate "that doctrine of sensibility which is true science."[4] It is equally well known that Kant later adopts Baumgarten's terminology in the *Critique of Judgment*, where he describes the judgment of taste as aesthetic. In the third *Critique*, Kant aims to give beauty its due not by elaborating the first *Critique*'s treatment of the mind's power of receptivity but by explaining the judgment of taste. Here, then, it seems not to occur to him to treat the first *Critique*'s transcendental aesthetic as a contribution to *aesthetics*—e.g., to the theory of beauty—as if the point of such a theory were to explore different ways of bearing, or living, the mind's power of receptivity rather than to justify aesthetic judgments.[5] By subordinating aesthetics to a critique of judgment, Kant forgoes an approach to aesthetics that would treat beauty as a mode of comportment.

In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche develops such an approach and ties it to a power of receptivity that he attributes to the human body.[6] Because I elsewhere analyze that approach in detail, through a section-by-section interpretation of, roughly, the first half of *Zarathustra*, Part 2, I limit myself here to outlining its key elements.[7] Specifically, I concentrate on Zarathustra's analysis of a version of the modern will to truth, his interpretation of that will as a form of self-estrangement, and his suggestion that a body ceases to be sublime and becomes beautiful when it discards its will to truth and acknowledges its power of receptivity.

In Part 2 of *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra argues that the culture of modern Europe is a "sterile" (*unfruchtbare*) affair that, while recognizing all past faiths, celebrates no faith, no passion of its own ("On the Land of Education"). Thus, it takes emasculated, passionless contemplation (*Beschaulichkeit*) to be essential to the perception of beauty ("On Immaculate Perception") and sees the dry, passionless spectator (*Zuschauer*) as the paradigm of scholarly excellence ("On Scholars").[8] Bent on banishing passion and the possibility of experiencing passional chaos from human life, the culture of modern Europe is the repressive, ascetic regime that Zarathustra first describes with the figure of the last man. Building on this earlier portrait of the modern world, Zarathustra now suggests, especially in his treatments of the modern scholar and the modern conception of beauty, that modernity rationalizes repression by representing a more or less Cartesian or, better, Kantian notion of suprasensible, dispassionate subjectivity as characterizing the proper basis of scholarly, moral, and aesthetic judgment.

Zarathustra ties the modern representation of human beings as suprasensible judging and knowing subjects to a quasi-idealist will to truth that reduces reality to what the human subject can know and limits knowledge to what the human subject creates, or "makes." At the beginning of Part 2—and, importantly, before he recognizes that modern representations of the subject rationalize repression—he himself endorses this will to truth, thus envisioning himself as a spontaneous, suprasensible subject who knows no "given" element in experience. Reminiscent, perhaps, of Fichte, who radicalizes Kant's idealism by denying the existence of given intuitions, he views objects of knowledge as effects that the knowers who know those objects have generated.

Starting with "The Night Song," roughly the middle sections of Part 2 mark a turning point in Zarathustra's appraisal of his will to truth. In Part 1, Zarathustra teaches that, the ravages of modern asceticism notwithstanding, human beings can overcome themselves by revaluing the passions that commonly claim their bodies. Moreover, he maintains that these passions constitute the natural furniture of human facticity, a dimension of the human condition that is given and not created and that he calls "the earth" in the prologue with which Part 1 begins. It is ironic, then, that Zarathustra espouses idealism at the beginning of Part 2, for by doing so he tacitly denies that such passions exist and contradicts his earlier teaching. In "The Night Song," Zarathustra expresses and begins to diagnose the suffering caused by this denial. Singing his song, he figures himself as a sun that suffers because it can no more feel the warmth of its own light than it can feel the light of other suns. Estranged from the light of others, Zarathustra is also a self-estranged stranger to his own light. Considered allegorically and in a Kantian idiom, Zarathustra's double estrangement is a form of in-sensibility, a numbness that affects him because he has disowned his power of receptivity. Oblivious to that power, nothing—not even his body's given, uncreated passions—can sensibly affect or move him. Coming in the wake of his turn to idealism, Zarathustra's night song shows that his will to truth, precisely by denying that his passions exist, has alienated him from his ability to sense, feel, and revalue those passions.

In further submitting his will to truth to critical appraisal, Zarathustra relates that will to his image of himself as knowing subject through a revision of Kant's disclosive conception of the dynamical sublime. As Kant analyzes it, the experience of the dynamical sublime has a compensatory quality such that our apprehension of physical incapacity is accompanied by the revelation of a suprasensible ability to resist what we cannot resist physically. We delight in our sublimity, when we discover that, as agents able to act from principles, we are immune to the might to which nature may subject us as physical creatures. For Kant, the dynamical sublime heralds human transcendence by disclosing human beings to be suprasensible, rational subjects who exist independently of nature. Zarathustra revises Kant by proposing that the sense of suprasensible transcendence that the latter associates with the dynamical sublime is an illusion caused by a self-estranging will to truth. In Zarathustra's view, the sublime is a mode of experience that, far from disclosing human beings to be suprasensible subjects, prompts them falsely to picture themselves as such.

Zarathustra sets forth his "theory" of the sublime in "On Those Who Are Sublime" (Part 2, §13), a speech that relies on the figure of the hero to depict the modern will to truth as a heroic will to personal sublimity. Zarathustra's description of this figure has self-critical implications, for it so clearly echoes his previous self-descriptions. Figuring the sublime hero as possessing a "swelled chest [*erhobener Brust*] . . . like one who holds in his breath" and as harboring "knowledge" [*Erkenntniss*] in the manner of "a wild beast" [*ein wildes Thier*], Zarathustra quite explicitly recalls his

portrait of himself—his chest heaving and he proclaiming the wisdom of a wild animal—in "The Child with the Mirror": "Violently my chest will expand [*wird sich meine Brust heben*], violently will it blow its storm . . . and thus find relief . . . Indeed, you will be frightened, my friends, by my wild wisdom . . . Would that my lioness, wisdom, might learn how to roar tenderly."[9] Similarly, when Zarathustra suggests that the hero's retreat to the "woods of knowledge" was prompted by nausea and contempt at being close to "the earth," he reminds us of his portrait of his own nausea-fleeing flight to the "cold wells" and "strong winds" of knowledge in "On the Rabble." The sublime hero, Zarathustra says, is one "who withdraw[s]." Repenting an "earthly" life that disgusts him (he is, we are told, a "penitent of the spirit"), he seems to have invented a life—a life of "hunting" for knowledge—that compensates for the life he has renounced. Withdrawing into himself and asserting his heroic will to truth and knowledge, the sublime hero projects the *image* of a deathly and otherworldly life, appearing to be a shadowy phantom whose essence is suprasensible.[10] Standing aloof from the world of appearances, he seems to reside wholly beyond the reach of warm sunlight, and even beyond the touch and warmth of *his own* sunlight, reminiscent of Zarathustra in "The Night Song": "And only when he turns away from himself, will he jump over his shadow—and verily into *his* sun. All too long has he been sitting in the shadow, and the cheeks of the penitent of the spirit have grown pale; he almost starved to death on his expectations."

Personifying a happiness that "smells" of contempt for the earth, yet *not* of the earth itself, the sublime hero disowns and estranges himself from his body's power to be sensibly affected and so to feel the force of its "earthly," physical existence.[11] To reclaim his power of receptivity, he must (like Zarathustra in "The Dancing Song") "discard his heroic will." In fine, he must forsake his will to truth and knowledge, admit that he is a body gripped by passions, and accept that he is not the incorporeal and shadowy phantom he appears to be: "When power becomes gracious [*gnädig*] and descends [*herabkommt*] into the visible—such descent [*Herabkommen*] I call beauty." Beauty, here, entails the repudiation of sublimity: it is a movement—a mode of comportment—by which a once heroic, truth-willing will to power, having renounced the illusion of suprasensible subjectivity, and having ceased to hold aloof from the "visible" world of appearances, graciously condescends to re-value the passions through which that world stirs and moves the human body. For Zarathustra, beauty is the cure that relieves the self-estrangement of the sublime.[12]

"On Those Who Are Sublime" argues that Zarathustra's sense of himself as a spontaneous, suprasensible subject has been the product of an experience of sublime transcendence that is rooted in self-estrangement. And it suggests that this sort of experience generates the image and illusion of a suprasensible subjectivity, the existence of which Kant's disclosive conception of the sublime presupposes. More generally, Zarathustra's speech on the sublime sketches a specifically *aesthetic* genealogy of the modern tendency to view human beings as judging and knowing subjects who (1) exist apart from the world of appearances, and (2) reduce reality to what can be known. Zarathustra's genealogy is "aesthetic" in both the senses that Kant identifies. Revising the first *Critique*'s transcendental aesthetic (Kant's theory of a priori sensibility), it attributes a power of receptivity to the human body and ties the illusion of suprasensible subjectivity to a will to truth that estranges human beings from that power. Revising the third *Critique*'s theory of aesthetic judgment (Kant's theory of the judgments of the beautiful and the sublime), it interprets sublimity as a self-estranged mode of comportment—that is, of bearing, or carrying, the human body's power of receptivity—and beauty as the manifest act of transforming that mode of comportment by openly avowing the body's power of receptivity. For Zarathustra, the individual who envisions himself as a Cartesian or Kantian knowing subject has reified the fantasy that he transcends the world of sensible objects, a fantasy that has been generated by an experience of the sublime that originated in self-estrangement. Through much of Part 2—in "The Night Song," for example—Zarathustra himself indulges this fantasy. In "On Those Who Are Sublime" he revises Kant and tells us how he was able to renounce it.

Zarathustra concludes "On Those Who Are Sublime" with a sentence that genders the truth-willing, heroic subject of knowledge as male and his body's power of receptivity as female: "For this is the soul's secret: only when the hero has abandoned her, she is approached in a dream by the overhero."[13] I have elsewhere argued that the figure of the hero in this passage alludes to Theseus and that of the soul to Ariadne.[14] Within the context of Part 2 and, specifically, in the aftermath of Zarathustra's night

song, these allusions have a telling significance, for Nietzsche proclaims in *Ecce Homo* that Ariadne would be "the answer" to Zarathustra's night song.[15] Ariadne is the rejoinder to Zarathustra's lament, because she is a metaphor for the power of receptivity that the night song singing Zarathustra or, indeed, any other sublime, truth-willing subject of knowledge, needs to reclaim in order to end his suffering.[16] Gendering the putatively suprasensible subject of knowledge as the hero Theseus, Zarathustra announces that this subject can regain his ability to sense, feel, revalue his passions only if he repudiates his sublime, heroic will to truth and knowledge and acknowledges his Ariadnean power to be sensibly affected by passion and desire. Put in terms of the myth of Theseus and Ariadne, the modern male, Theseus-like, subject of knowledge must "discard his heroic will" and "abandon" his feminine, Ariadnean soul to a life bereft of that will if, through the medium of his soul, he is to be sensibly affected by the soul-rescuing Dionysian passions he has to revalue to become a beautiful "overhero."

I turn now to Part 2 of this paper, and to Stanley Cavell's treatment of *The Band Wagon*, a film whose depiction of a melancholy song-and-dance man very clearly echoes Nietzsche's portrait of the sublime hero. But where Nietzsche feminizes receptivity to counter sublimity, *The Band Wagon* blackens it to counter melancholy. In Part 3 I criticize both renderings of receptivity, building on Kelly Oliver's Irigaray-inspired discussion of Nietzsche and remonstrating against Cavell's appraisals of the two Astaire routines.

Part 2. Melancholy, Ecstasy, Blackness

Cavell offers his readings of the two Astaire routines as adaptations of Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment. According to Cavell, "Kant's location of the aesthetic judgment . . . makes room for a particular form of criticism, one that supplies the concepts that, after the fact of pleasure, articulate the grounds of that experience in particular objects."[17] Thus criticism, which Cavell sometimes calls "reading," is the critic's rebukable effort to justify and so to show to be acceptable the pleasure she takes in some work of art. It is a subsumption of a work under concepts—hence a judgment that the critic adduces and expounds in order to express her wish and de-

mand that others take pleasure where she has taken it. Proceeding on the assumption that the object of criticism "has yet to have its due effect, that something there, fully open to the senses, has despite that been missed," the critic aspires to find the idea of that object "to which one may pay tribute" and to which others may be moved to pay tribute.[18]

Cavell begins his criticism of the first routine by purporting to describe it "uncontroversially." He notes that a man—Astaire, playing "a song-and-dance man whose star has faded in Hollywood and who is returning nervously to New York to try a comeback on Broadway"[19]—walks along a train platform singing; that throughout his singing the camera leads him with one continuous shot; and that when he stops, the camera stops and watches him leave through the gate. Cavell adds that we then cut to a view within the station, see the man continue his walk toward us, humming the same tune, and that the man then pauses and shifts nervously, looking around, as if expecting someone. The song Astaire has been singing is "By Myself." Cavell remarks that Astaire begins to sing this song with a self-conscious laugh that may be taken as his self-reflective response to the fact that his thinking, manifest in the film as melancholy, is about to become singing.

Cavell's criticism of the first routine considers three of its features. One is the sense of "hovering" that the routine conveys. Cavell attributes this sense to the facts that Astaire's song never reaches to dance and that its opening chord progression, which echoes the opening chord progression of *Tristan and Isolde*, figures Astaire's emotional state as suspended animation. The second feature is that the camera frames Astaire's walk along the train platform—a walk Cavell describes as a "proto-dancing" that is not quite dancing—so that his feet never appear. Cavell relates the second feature to the first when he observes that the camera's screening of Astaire's walk registers "that this man, with those feet, never arrives at unequivocal dancing in this routine." The third feature is Astaire's invisibility—his missability.[20] As he enters the train station, his musical syllabification DA: DA, DA, DA; DA, DA, DA alerts us, Cavell writes,

> to the fact, or the convention according to which, the opening delivery of the singing was inaudible and the opening proto-dancing was unnotable, invisible, within its fictional world. Had that crowd of passers-by on the platform been aware of a man doing in their presence what Astaire, or his particular shadow is

> doing in ours, they would have felt, let us say, a reportable indecorousness . . . I take the unremarkableness . . . together with the remarkableness . . . of Astaire's musical syllabification, and of the routine that renders it so, to emblematize a way of manifesting the ordinary.[21]

By noting three features of the first routine, Cavell presents Astaire as a figure for the skepticism of which "our ordinary lives partake."[22] Unable to transmute his singing into a dancing that finds and feels the ground, Astaire seems a soul in suspension above the earth, a man uncertain and doubtful that he exists (or could *again* exist) as a man with feet—to wit, *as a dancer* (and if this man, this Hollywood "individuality,"[23] cannot exist as a dancer, how can he exist at all?). Embodying and living his skepticism, he personifies a loss of intimacy with existence,[24] an everyday condition that Cavell here, echoing Emerson, calls melancholy. Unnoticed and unheard by passers-by, Astaire's skepticism—in Thoreau's language, his "quiet desperation"—expresses a "sense of invisibility" that Cavell elsewhere ties to the modern experience of privacy.[25] Hovering above the earth, the missable Astaire "haunts" the earth like the ghost that is Cavell's Hamlet. Where the tragedy of Hamlet works out "a scene of skepticism," the comedy of Astaire's comeback will work out a "festive abatement of skepticism"—an event that Cavell will locate in the *second* routine.[26] But before Astaire performs that routine—hence, before he is relieved of his skepticism—he is "by himself," a figure for the lonely, modern subject who ordinarily and invisibly "partakes of tragedy in partaking of skepticism."[27]

Here is Cavell's summary of his criticism and aesthetic judgment of Astaire's first routine:

> Now the utterance or delivery of Astaire's song and proto-dance has singled me out for a response of pleasure which I propose to read in terms of the concepts of psychic hovering, of dissociation from the body, within a state of ordinary invisibility . . . In my wish to share this pleasure I judge the scene of walking and of melodic syllabification as appropriate expressions of the ordinary as the missable.[28]

In Part 3 of this paper, I reject Cavell's judgment and offer an alternative aesthetic appraisal of the first routine. Here, however, I wish to amend his description of that routine, and so to lay the grounds for my alternative appraisal. Specifically, I discuss the two pairings of Astaire and Ava Gardner that precede the first routine, as well as the camera's correlation of Astaire's

proto-dancing with the mostly black passers-by who appear on the train platform. My aim is to show that and how the first routine *racializes* the ordinary as the missable.

Cavell notes the second, physical pairing of Gardner and Astaire when he mentions her cameo appearance. But he misses, or declines to mention, the first, conversational pairing of the two actors. This first pairing transpires before Astaire leaves the train during the scene in which he first appears. Sitting in the corner of a diner coach, and holding what seems to be a menu to his face, we find Astaire facing the camera (but hiding behind his menu) and flanked on his right and left by two white men engaged in a conversation about Hollywood stars. Precisely as the scene begins, a black waiter appears and begins to attend to the tables of the two men, a white woman sitting at the edge of the scene, and Astaire. While the waiter remains visible, his activity blocks the camera's view of Astaire, leaving the audience to attend to the conversation between the two men, who remain fully in sight. In the course of their exchange, one man expresses his desire to meet Ava Gardner, only to be told by the other that he is too late and that Gardner is married.[29] Just after the waiter leaves the scene, the conversation turns to an actor named Tony Hunter, the song-and-dance man played by Astaire, whose comeback story is in fact modeled on Astaire's career (for Astaire had recently made a comeback from a voluntary retirement).[30] One of the men remarks that Astaire, or Astaire/Hunter (henceforth, I mostly write "Astaire"), was good twelve or fifteen years ago, but that the Hollywood columnists now say that he is through. The scene ends with Astaire revealing himself and exiting the coach, just after the two men recognize him from his picture in a magazine.

I draw attention to the setting of this scene, for it uses racial blackness to establish a difference between Gardner and Astaire. While the black waiter occupies the set and obstructs our view of Astaire, the conversation concentrates on Gardner. But just as soon as the waiter departs, the conversation turns to Astaire—as if to suggest that talk about Gardner requires an apparent reference to black folk, where talk about Astaire will not tolerate it. The dining coach scene figures Hollywood success with the advent of a black waiter and Hollywood failure with his disappearance. By coordinating the scene's dialogue with the quiet movement of the waiter, Minnelli's direction proposes that the important and perhaps critical difference

between Gardner's success and Astaire's failure is specifically and essentially a racial difference.

Before turning to the second pairing of Gardner and Astaire, we should recall that just two years before her cameo in *The Band Wagon* (1953), Gardner's appearance in *Showboat* (1951) had transformed her into MGM's number-one female star.[31] Because Gardner played a mulatto in *Showboat*, a character named Julie LaVerne, it can come as no surprise that the dining coach scene attributes her recent success to blackness. Gardner succeeded, we are asked to believe, because she was able to appropriate blackness and to make it her own, at least on screen. This point may seem forced, but the second pairing serves subtly to reinforce it. As Astaire exits the train, he takes the awaiting reporters and photographers to have come to interview him. He quickly discovers, however, that they are awaiting Ava Gardner. As Gardner appears in the door of the next car, the newshounds rush to her. Statuesque in a jet black dress, she poses for a moment until she sees Astaire and comes over to chat with him. Seen close up, it is clear that Gardner has been dressed in detail to produce an array of chiaroscuro contrasts: not only jet black dress against white skin, but whitish, silvery earrings against jet black hair and a white coat streaked with fuzzy lines of black. As she speaks to Astaire, Gardner's black-white color coding prominently stands out against the background of motley clothing worn by the white men behind her and forms a sharp contrast to the sky-blue suit worn by Astaire. Although she has left the role of Julie LaVerne behind her, Gardner remains visually a mulatto, and so visually stained with the blackness that *The Band Wagon* argues has been the key to her cinematic stardom.

A final point relating to the second pairing: before Gardner appears, the film shows us an image of Astaire's former possessions, a top hat and a cane—both of them as black as Gardner's dress—and a pair of white gloves, all of which attend the film's opening credits. As we quickly learn in the scene following the credits, the hat, cane, and gloves were used by Astaire/Hunter during his heyday in Hollywood. Specifically, an auctioneer attempting to sell these effects lets on that Astaire used them in *Swinging Down to Panama*, a fictional film the title of which cleverly plays on the titles of two of his earlier movies: *Flying Down to Rio* (1933), his first film with Ginger Rogers, and *Swingtime* (1936), a movie that includes a black-

face "homage" to Bill "Bojangles" Robinson (as we shall see, reference to Robinson recurs in *The Band Wagon*). When Gardner arrives, we are recalled to Astaire/Hunter's former effects—therefore, to his past—for her black dress has the shading of his hat and cane, while her black-white body echoes the image of his hat and gloves. In her cameo appearance, Gardner adorns her body with the blackness that prompted her mulatto, chiaroscuro, success, a blackness that Astaire has lost but must regain to make a comeback.

It is obvious, no doubt, that my reading of the dining coach scene, of Gardner's appearance, and of the image of the hat, cane, and gloves depends for its plausibility on the assumption that Minnelli, as a director, gave careful consideration to scenic composition, to costuming, and to color contrasts. As it turns out, this assumption is true, for in the words of film scholar James Naremore, Minnelli "used set decorations in an almost Brechtian way, to 'narrate' and explicitly comment on the action"; was "unusually attentive to women's dresses, hairstyles, or accessories"; and repeatedly exploited the opportunity to "create patterns of light and color."[32] Due, arguably, to his background as a store-window designer for Marshall Field, Vincent Minnelli brought to his films a "display art" sensibility that lavished attention on visual detail.[33] It is also significant that, even before he directed *The Band Wagon*, Minnelli's work as a director and a set designer had demonstrated a strong and developed interest in specifically black and Africanist racial motifs[34]—still a further reason to suppose that his display of black-white color coding in *The Band Wagon*'s opening scenes was deliberate.

I turn now to the camera's correlation of Astaire's proto-dancing with the mostly black passers-by appearing on the train platform.[35] If the two pairings of Astaire and Gardner establish Astaire's want of blackness, the first routine further articulates that want as the want of a melancholy skeptic for intimacy with existence. Strolling down the train platform, Astaire, as his song lyric testifies, is "all alone in a crowd." With the exception of a couple of white men, the men we see walking along the platform with him are black (we see no women). We *expect* to see mainly blacks now, for as the train pulled into the station we noticed through the window four or five porters—all of them black—mingling on the platform. After the departure of the reporters and paparazzi come to meet Gardner, the plat-

form becomes again what it is *ordinarily*—a place where black men routinely work. As the camera leads Astaire down the platform, mostly black men pass him by (I count six blacks and two whites), one in front and two in back, while those walking in the opposite direction fade away into the ever-widening distance between them and Astaire, whose feet we never see. If Astaire, in this fictional world, is invisible to these men, then they too remain invisible to him. Yet there is an important difference, for what they miss is not what he misses. The missable ordinary that Astaire misses and for which he wants is the intimacy with existence that the largely black passers-by—none of whom sings with suspended animation and a few of whose grounded feet the camera takes care to show us—seem to possess. What the black passers-by miss is precisely *not* this intimacy, but the privately felt melancholy of a skeptic, doubtful of his existence and dissociated from his body "within a state of ordinary invisibility." The blacks miss the skeptic and the skeptic misses the blacks' intimacy with existence. An important corollary to this depiction is that the skeptic *cannot be black*, for then he would not want for the blackness that supplies intimacy and enables comebacks. In the perspective of Astaire's platform routine, which builds on the explanation of the decline of his movie career that the comparisons to Ava Gardner elaborate (again, that he failed—that he ceased to be a success—because he lost the blackness he once possessed), the trials and tribulations of skeptical, modern subjectivity belong exclusively to whites. Produced just a year before the Supreme Court's famous *Brown* decision, Astaire's first routine projects a Jim Crow version of the human capacity for skepticism.

Let me hasten to emphasize here that I attribute a Jim Crow version of the capacity for skepticism to *The Band Wagon*'s screening of the first Astaire routine, *not to Cavell*. We need only look to Cavell's reading of *Othello* to see that he does not deny the experience of skepticism to blacks and that he brilliantly finds Shakespeare intimating that modern black subjects will be tragically prompted to skepticism as a defense against racializing white desire.[36] More generally, Cavell suggests in a number of his writings that skepticism is "an argument internal to the individual, or separate, human creature, as it were an argument of the self with itself (over its finitude)."[37] In short, he proposes that conflicting tendencies—both the affirmation of criteria and the skeptical repudiation of criteria—inhabit the human condition *in general*.[38] There is nothing in Cavell's writing to suggest that lives which partake of skepticism are exclusively white and that blackness is the key to recovering from skepticism. This, however, is precisely the message of the opening scenes of *The Band Wagon*, culminating with the first Astaire routine. According to Cavell, the unwitting "truth" or "moral" of skepticism is that our relation to the existence of the world is not that of knowing, but "one in which it is accepted, that is to say, received."[39] The abatement of skepticism is in part a matter of appreciating this moral—thus of aspiring to receive and acknowledge existence rather than to know it. As depicted by the opening scenes of *The Band Wagon*, the skepticism that Astaire personifies will be abated when he recovers his power to receive and acknowledge his earth-bound, bodily existence. He will recover that power—that is, he will regain his intimacy with that existence—when he repossesses the blackness he has lost. In racializing the skepticism that inhabits the ordinary as white, *The Band Wagon* reductively figures blackness as the supplement that whites require to recover from skepticism—as if the argument of the ordinary were not an argument of the self with itself but an interracial argument, an argument between white and black.

Like Nietzsche, Cavell revises Kant by connecting the concept of receptivity to the turn away from an epistemological orientation that makes the existence of the world a problem of knowledge—an orientation that Nietzsche links to the modern will to truth (which holds that the world exists to the extent that we have knowledge of it) and Cavell to skepticism.[40] As we have seen, Nietzsche figures this turn as from a beautiful to a sublime mode of bearing the body's power of receptivity. Although Cavell seems similarly to figure it in one of his recent books (in terms of the distinction between the unhandsome and the handsome[41]), his reading of the second Astaire routine, echoing his early writing on Thoreau, rather differently casts the recovery of receptivity as an ecstatic release from melancholy.[42] I turn now to that routine.

In his Spinoza lectures, Cavell's presents a different and more complicated account of his aesthetic judgment of the second routine than he presents in his APA address. In the latter, Cavell articulates the grounds of the pleasure he takes in the second routine with the judgment that Astaire's taking a photo of his shod foot is a skepticism-abating "ecstatic attesta-

tion of existence."[43] In the Spinoza lectures, he complicates this judgment by relating his criticism of the second routine to Michael Rogin's remarks about it in *Blackface, White Noise.* As Cavell interprets Rogin's book, its "burden . . . is the establishment of America's national identity and culture through the appropriation of black culture . . . a process . . . that has from the beginning to end been accomplished at the price of excluding African Americans from the mix." Rogin dismisses the second routine's "homage to black tap" as a form of domination.[44] Cavell in turn takes Rogin to task for his errors in recounting the second routine and for a view of film that leaves no room for treating it as one of the great arts. Cavell's chief concern, however, is that Rogin's dismissal of Astaire's homage does not permit him to see that Astaire's dance of praise is self-referentially about "[the] painful and potentially deadly irony of the white praise of a black culture whose very terms of praise it has appropriated."[45] In the Spinoza lectures, Cavell aesthetically judges the second routine, offering a reading of its self-referentiality that presents his pleasure and praise as other than vain. More exactly, he presents criticism of the second routine that declares a ground for finding pleasure in it and praising it *notwithstanding* the conditions of injustice (of white America's unjust appropriation of black culture) it depicts. That judgment and ground, he tells us, is that Astaire's dance of praise, because it affords a "glimpse of Utopia" that contests the unjust conditions it depicts, is itself not vain.

Cavell divides the second routine into three sections and an epilogue. Rather than summarize his description of the entire routine before amending it—as I did in the case of the first routine—I shall amend his description as I proceed from section to section. As before, I aim to lay the basis for an aesthetic judgment of the second routine that differs from Cavell's.

The first section begins with Astaire entering a penny Arcade, taking a hot dog from a man behind a counter, passing an exhibit entitled "The Gorillas Bride," and handing the hot dog to a young boy. As Cavell describes this section, Astaire goes on to discover a machine decorated by a question mark; receives two fortune tickets from a mechanical gypsy; plays pin-ball poker that he wins by cheating; is declared to be gorgeous by a machine that measures love appeal; and sees himself in a distorting mirror. Then, says Cavell, "something serious happens. He trips over the outstretched legs of a meditative shoeshine man."[46] According to Cavell,

Astaire's encounters with machines, which seem ever ready to tell him who he is, and which remind him, perhaps, that he has been displaced by the mechanism of film but may be redeemed by it, suggest that his ensuing dance with the shoeshine man (section 2) will be a dance of identity, as if the Arcade were an allegorical version of a movie theater, or a sound stage, in which he is to seek out "new origins."[47]

Before turning to section 2, three amendments to Cavell's description of section 1 are in order. First, that when Astaire enters the Arcade and wanders past "The Gorillas Bride," we see near him a notably tall white woman and the young white boy who will get his hot dog. Second, that "The Gorillas Bride," which shows a gorilla in a cage with two white women (one in his grip and one prostrate), seems an obvious allusion to RKO's *King Kong* (1933). The allusion to *King Kong* is significant, for that movie tells the tale of a monstrous, black gorilla worshiped by a tribe of Hollywood "jungle blacks" said to live somewhere "west of Sumatra"—thus, a gorilla that the movie imagines as embodying, writ-large, the jungle animality that it attributes to blacks in general. After hunters capture Kong and take him to America, he escapes and abducts a white woman. He is killed, of course, in order to save America and the woman from the bestial blackness he epitomizes.[48] My final amendment relates to the second: as Astaire turns from "The Gorillas Bride" and the camera shows him approaching a trash can, we see the shoeshine man for the first time, shining shoes on back of the machine that is decorated with a question mark. Leading Astaire away from the myth that blackness is a monstrous threat to American civilization, Minnelli's direction brings into focus the protagonist of what we shall see is an alternative myth.[49]

In section 2 this protagonist, a shoeshine man played by Leroy Daniels (Daniels shined shoes in downtown Los Angeles and was recruited specifically for the second routine[50]), shines Astaire's shoes after Astaire stumbles over him and begins to sing to him. When Astaire's song turns to the idea of getting a shoeshine, Daniels welcomes Astaire onto his stand and, in Cavell's words, "provides the song a habitation and a new beat with his brushes." With Astaire on the stand, his feet seeming to dance on air, Daniels shines Astaire's shoes, giving him a "fantastic or fantasmatic" shoeshine, as if his object, Cavell writes, were "not alone to transform shoes but to transfigure the creature on earth who wears the shoes."[51]

In describing the second section, Cavell notes that "A Shine on Your Shoes," Astaire's song, puns on the word *shine*, a "derogatory name for a black man." Cavell adds that

You can either understand Astaire . . . to be using the word conformably accepting its derogatory association, or you can understand Astaire to be mentioning this word as part of risking the full sense of what it means for him to be singing this song to this man. It *is* essential that the shoeshine man be black, specifically African-American, for the routine to be the one I have been reading, call it Astaire's comeback song.[52]

Perhaps we should hear Astaire as wishing to revalue the word *shine*, just as Minnelli, I have suggested, wishes to revalue blackness. As we have seen, *The Band Wagon*'s pairings of Astaire and Ava Gardner figure Astaire as lacking the blackness he required to make a comeback. The second section of the second routine shows him acquiring that blackness through the agency of a "shine" who, by shining his shoes, works a sorcery that disseminates his blackness, as if a priapic Daniels had discharged a second, miniature "shine," a sort of black homunculus, onto the surface of Astaire's footwear. If Minnelli has repudiated the myth that blackness is a potency threatening to American civilization, he now gestures in the direction of a different myth—that it is a potency needful to that civilization as an adorning supplement.[53]

Where the second routine's second section shows Astaire absorbing the magic of Daniels's shoeshine, section 3 shows him in the grip of it. Incessantly repeating the words "Shoe shine; shine on my shoes," Astaire is, according to Cavell,

taking in, trying to make out, what has happened to him, how it happens that he has found his feet again, come into his body again, asking what his words mean when he cannot just now know what they mean. He is reacquiring language, reconsidering all his words, pivoting around "shine." It is the moment of comeback. That the discovery of intact existence expresses itself here as ecstasy is linked in my mind to Thoreau's once expressing his recognition of his double existence . . . as a condition of being beside himself—by himself—roughly the dictionary definition of ecstasy . . . [54]

Possessed by blackness and his skepticism abated, Astaire has now retrieved his power to receive and acknowledge his earth-bound, bodily existence.

Like Zarathustra, after he has discarded his will to truth, Astaire has rediscovered his body, which is to say that he is now *available* to be stirred and moved by his body, and so can find himself just beside himself, ecstatically transported. Simply put, the blackening of Astaire's shoes has relieved him of the melancholic hovering he personifies in the first routine (in Cavell's phrasing, "hovering has found its landing, melancholy has found its ecstasy"[55]). As we have seen, a sublime Zarathustra beautifully returns himself to the possibility of revaluing his body's passions by reclaiming his feminine power to be sensibly affected by them. Similarly, a melancholic and hovering Astaire comes back to, ecstatically returns himself to, the intimacy with existence that he missed in the first routine—specifically, to an intimacy with his feet that is indispensable to dancing—by regaining an essentially black power to be gripped and carried away by his body. For Zarathustra and Astaire alike, some acknowledgment of the power to sense and accept the claims of the body is essential to self-renewal.

What femininity does for Zarathustra, blackness does for Astaire: it qualifies his masculinity, thus rendering him susceptible to his body's promptings (where Ariadne is the answer to Zarathustra's night song, blackness is the answer to Astaire's Wagnerian musical syllabification). That the Arcade routine imagines the acquisition of blackness as the acquisition of a homunculus-harboring substance disseminated by a black man is not my only reason for asserting that it presents the blackness Astaire gets as qualifying, by augmenting, his masculinity. More pertinent, I think, is that "a comically withdrawn and awkwardly tall woman screams in terror" as Astaire, having left the shoeshine stand, moves toward her.[56] As it turns out, this woman is the white woman we saw with Astaire and a young white boy in the vicinity of "The Gorillas Bride." When the woman later sees Astaire coming toward her, manic and deranged by the blackness that has possessed him, she shrieks and runs away. Because her reaction strikes us as silly and comical, it serves further to distance *The Band Wagon*'s myth of blackness from *King Kong*'s. As we have seen, *King Kong*, like *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) before it, portrays the threat of blackness to civilization as, among other things, a sexual threat that black men, the putative likes of Kong, pose to white women. By mocking a white woman's terror of a white man suddenly become a "White Negro" (Norman Mailer's notorious phrase), the Arcade routine discredits that fear. It attributes a black-

ened masculinity to Astaire but denies that a blackened masculinity endangers white women.

The Arcade routine is also marked by the recurrent appearance of the young white boy. Attracted to Astaire as he turns away from "The Gorillas Bride," the boy takes Astaire's hot dog just after Daniels comes into view behind the question-mark machine. While Astaire gets his shoes shined, we barely notice that the boy has moved to the back of the Arcade, but when the white women Astaire scares runs away, we see the boy again, in the corner, closely watching the train of events. Continuing to haunt Astaire, the boy yet again shows up, a few moments later, trying to shake Astaire's hand, or maybe just to touch him, after Astaire turns the question-mark machine into a flurry of "whistles, flags, and flashing lights."[57] Our last sight of the boy shows him watching Astaire exit the Arcade after he has finished his dance with Daniels. Think of Astaire, then, as the boy's unwitting exemplar: as a wise elder to whom the boy repeatedly attaches himself and whose unwitting vocation is to prompt the boy to attain a better self than he is otherwise likely to attain.[58] In the perspective of the Arcade routine—read now as a scene of instruction—that self will be a black masculine self that is a boon to white men but never a threat to white women. According to Minnelli's alternative myth, blackness can be an adorning supplement to American civilization because blackness can be an adorning supplement to white American manhood.[59] He suggests, in effect, that while the racial myths of *King Kong* belong to America's past, the promise of its future, as personified by the boy, is the promise of a white manhood redeemed through the appropriation of black masculinity, a promise that is as dated as America's antebellum traditions of blackface minstrelsy. As Eric Lott reminds us, "to wear or enjoy blackface was literally, for a time, to become black, to inherit the cool, virility, abandon or *gaité de Coeur* that were the prime components of white ideologies of black manhood."[60]

We may now turn to the second routine's epilogue, which Cavell describes as "an Apollo Theater finale . . . a perfectly recognizable and perfectly executed walk off."[61] Cavell's interpretation of this finale is critical to his claim that his praise of Astaire is not vain, for it explicitly declares a ground for accepting pleasure in and praising the second routine *notwithstanding* the conditions of injustice it depicts.

> In declaring my acceptance of [pleasure] I go back to the men's re-encounter of one another for their walk-off and recall that as they reach the entrance, or now the exit, of the Arcade, the marquee from a neighboring theater is visible above their heads that announces THE "PROUD LAND." I take the placement above the center of the entrance/exit to suggest that the Arcade itself is a portrait or allegory of the proud land, call it America, containing not only amusements and occupations and false promises for those with nothing better to do, but a territory of magic or exemption in which such things as the walk-off can form itself. I have called it perfect in recognition and execution. I mean that it demonstrates that these two can dance together—for a while—on an equal basis, equally choreographed, equally standing, equally kneeling, equally happy with the knowledge of their achievement in their joint work, a momentary achievement of the Kingdom of Ends, a traumatic glimpse of Utopia. But it demonstrates at the same time that they cannot leave the scene of entertainment together, and cannot for no good reason. This is against reason, against the scene of mutuality (of mutual legislation you might say) that we have witnessed.[62]

Certainly Cavell is right to insist that the walk-off shows that the two men can dance together on an equal basis, equally choreographed, equally happy, et cetera. Less convincing, however, is his claim that it shows "a momentary achievement of the Kingdom of Ends, a traumatic glimpse of Utopia." What reason is there to attribute this achievement to the walk-off? To be sure, Daniels and Astaire exhibit an image of equality, but it is an equality to which a white man has risen by taking possession of the black masculinity that has possessed him—thus, by learning to express himself, to dance, through the medium of that masculinity. If Astaire and Daniels now appear as equals, it is, according to the Arcade's myths and ideologies of blackness and black manhood, because Astaire's new-found, blackened masculinity has let him find his feet and dance as Daniels, the bootblack, dances, equally standing, equally kneeling, and so on. With his shoes shined, Astaire mirrors Daniels just as Daniels mirrors Astaire, each equally manifesting the black masculinity that joins them, each legislating, let us suppose, *not* as Cavell imagines, for the republic of all rational beings—Kant's Kingdom of Ends—but for a republic of all the white men who crave black manhood.

Cavell is also right to claim that the Arcade is an allegory that sees America as "containing not only amusements and occupations and false promises . . . but a territory of magic or exemption in which such things

as that walk-off can form itself." For Cavell, the magic of the walk-off is its glimpse of a Kantian utopia and its implied call for social change. *Pace* Cavell, I have been urging that the walk-off affords us no such glimpse, and that whatever utopia it envisions it envisions in the perspective of white mythologies and ideologies of black manhood. The epilogue to the second routine will seem a genuine utopia—as though its beauty really were a symbol of the moral good—only if we ignore those mythologies and ideologies.[63]

In his Spinoza lectures, Cavell distinguishes between false praise and vain praise. As we have seen, he takes the Astaire routines, especially the second, as raising the question of vain praise. Henry James's story "The Birthplace," he takes as raising the question of false praise, "a traditional concept of . . . [which] is idolatry, freezing allegiance into superstition."[64] One way to summarize my amendments to Cavell's reading of the second routine is to say that it too raises the question of false praise. In *Swing Time*, Astaire pays homage to the tradition and genius of black dance by blackening his face and performing "Bojangles of Harlem." If, in *The Band Wagon*, he gets his shoes rather than his face "blacked up," the substance of the performance remains the same: homage that cannot separate itself from the legacy of blackface minstrelsy's myths and fantasies about black masculinity.[65] *The Band Wagon*'s reiteration of these myths and fantasies—specifically its suggestion that blackness and especially black masculinity is a magical force that can bring alienated, melancholic white men to earth[66]—suffuses and saturates its gestures toward homage, thus compromising, fatally, our ability to see in Astaire's "dance of praise" anything more than a form of idolatry that superstitiously mistakes a myth about black manhood for the rich artistic tradition to which Astaire owes his existence as a dancer.[67]

There is no doubt that *The Band Wagon* aspires to acknowledge the roots of the Hollywood musical, and of Astaire's dancing, in black dance.[68] In the scene that follows the second routine, Astaire asks Jeff Cordova (Jack Buchanan), the director who has been solicited to direct his comeback, and whom Astaire has just seen play the role of Oedipus in a sequence from *Oedipus Rex*, whether he really wants to make a musical. Cordova retorts that he is sick of artificial distinctions between the musical and the drama, emphatically insisting that there is "no difference between the magic rhythms of Bill Shakespeare's verse and the magic rhythms of Bill Robinson's feet."[69] Here, then, through a short dialogue, *The Band Wagon* verbally acknowledges what Astaire has performatively acknowledged in the second routine: the musical's roots, thus Astaire's roots, in the tradition of black dance. But because the second routine has failed to distinguish its preoccupations from those of a minstrel show, this later acknowledgment rings hollow. The problem is a difficult one: how, within American culture, pervaded as it is with white counterfeits and caricatures of black cultural productivity, can "white praise of a black culture whose very terms of praise it has appropriated"—Cavell's words—persuade that it is not false praise?[70] Or, to borrow one of Cavell's key critical concepts, how can white praise of a black culture whose terms of praise it has appropriated defeat its perhaps inevitable tendency to a sort of *theatricality* that is pitched to white fantasies and ideologies about blacks?[71]

Part 3. Invisible Femininity, Invisible Blackness

I begin the final part of this paper with a discussion of Kelly Oliver's reading of Luce Irigaray's *Marine Lover of Nietzsche*. Oliver's reading of Irigaray speaks to my purposes, for it raises questions pertaining to Nietzsche's appropriation of femininity that apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to *The Band Wagon*'s appropriation of blackness. In extrapolating those questions to a discussion of *The Band Wagon*, I will explain my rejection of Cavell's appraisals of the two Astaire routines, drawing on my analysis of those routines in part 2 of this paper. I conclude by suggesting that an important implication of the general line of argument I bring against Cavell's aesthetic judgments is a reconsideration of his interpretation of philosophy in American life that perhaps parallels Oliver's Irigaray-inspired aspiration to open philosophy to a dialogue with its feminine and other others.[72]

On Oliver's account, Irigaray's *Marine Lover* is Ariadne's plaint against the appropriation of "the feminine" within the "masculine imaginary." More specifically, it is a plaint against "the desire by a man to be a woman . . . If man becomes woman, then there is no woman/other, there is only man and the woman/other is a mask worn by the selfsame." Irigaray's argument bears directly on Part 2 of *Zarathustra*, for there, we have seen, Nietzsche presents the feminine Ariadne as a dimension, or qualification,

of Zarathustra's masculinity. For Oliver's Irigaray, this presentation of the feminine demonstrates a general tendency in Nietzsche's thought to "speak for, and as, the feminine," thus "to represent woman as the mirror whose non reflective surfaces . . . cannot be seen." Miming women, it seems, is "just another strategy to ensure that those surfaces that do not reflect the masculine will not be seen." In fine, it is a recuperation of the other "into the economy of the same."[73]

It is essential to see, I think, that this economy is at once instrumental and reductive. It is instrumental, for it makes femininity an instrument of masculinity. More precisely, it assigns femininity a significance that is dictated by male interests, desires, and fantasies. In *Zarathustra*, for example, the economy of the same attributes to femininity the power of receptivity craved by the male singer of the night song. This economy is reductive, because it reduces the figure of woman to a horizon of possibilities that serve male concerns, thus leaving invisible the innumerable alternative possibilities that Oliver describes as women's "nonreflective surfaces."

The first Astaire routine's recuperation of blackness into an economy of the same lies at the heart of my rejection of Cavell's judgment of that routine. That judgment, again, took "the scene of walking and of melodic syllabification as appropriate expressions of the ordinary as the missable." I demur at Cavell's judgment for two reasons. First, because the first routine, along with the preceding pairings of Astaire and Ava Gardner, presents blackness as the power of receptivity whites require to recover from skepticism. In fine, it presents blackness as an instrument for redeeming melancholic, white subjectivity. My second reason is that the first routine, by making blackness into an instrument for redeeming white subjectivity, contributes to the film's more general tendency to reduce the manifold human possibilities available to blacks to the services they provide whites (Astaire takes money from his pocket thrice in *The Band Wagon*'s opening twenty or so minutes: first to pay the black waiter who has been serving him on the train; second, to tip a black porter in advance for taking his luggage; and third, to pay Daniels for the shine on his shoes—that is, for his newly acquired black masculinity. And, of course, the only blacks we see in these scenes are the waiter, porters, and Daniels).[74] As I suggested in the second part of this paper, one aspect of this reductionist tendency is the odd implication that skepticism's loss of the world is not available to

blacks. At once instrumental and reductive in its treatment of blacks, the first routine presents a Jim Crow version of skepticism and racially divides the ordinary. Because it thus distorts the ordinary, I repudiate the judgment that it presents *appropriate* expressions of the ordinary as the missable. Rather than find pleasure in the first routine's portrait of the ordinary, I am dismayed by it. In articulating the grounds of that dismay—that is, in articulating a negative aesthetic judgment—I declare my wish, my demand, that the first Astaire routine prompt dismay in others.

It will be recalled that Cavell judges the second routine to warrant praise on the grounds that its dance of praise contests the very conditions it depicts. Again, I demur at Cavell's judgment, this time for three reasons. One is that the second routine is founded on the first routine's racializing distortion of the ordinary (the second routine shows the racial redemption that the first routine shows the melancholic white subject to require). A second is that I find no glimpse (not even a traumatic one) of Kant's Kingdom of Ends in the second routine's epilogue—Cavell's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding—but simply the jazzy, big-band–accompanied climax of Minnelli's celebration of the minstrel tradition. My third reason is that the second routine invites the suspicion of false praise, for it seems to pertain less to "the transcendent accomplishment of black dancing" than to black idols in the minds of whites.[75] Dismayed by the second routine, as well as by the first, I present these reasons as the grounds of my dismay.

My third reason for rejecting Cavell's judgment returns us to the idea of an economy of the same. Here, the issue is not simply that the two Astaire routines present blackness as an instrument for redeeming melancholic, white subjectivity, but that the presentation of blackness in this fashion is pitched to white fantasies and expectations of black serviceability. For Irigaray and Oliver, of course there is a parallel and general tendency in the West to pitch presentations of femininity to male fantasies and expectations of women's serviceability. Responding to that tendency, Oliver urges that we begin to envision philosophy "as a dialogue of human experiences." Specifically, she invites philosophy to "engage in a dialogue with its feminine other." Feminist philosophy, Oliver argues, "can listen to and speak the excluded feminine(s)."[76] Oliver's point, I take it, is that philosophy should include sensibilities, perspectives, and self-understand-

ings that reflect the unreflective surfaces of the feminine and that have not been sanctioned as serving the demands of a masculinist agenda. I offer a coda to the present paper by briefly pressing a similar point in connection to Cavell's conception of Emerson's finding and founding of philosophy for America.

Consider, then, Cavell's "Emerson's Constitutional Amending: Reading 'Fate.'" In this extended discussion of "Fate," Cavell's central concern is that Emerson's essay, written in 1850 and just a few months after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, makes no mention of that law. It is well known that Emerson was "unforgettingly, unforgivingly"[77] horrified by Daniel Webster's support of the "Fugitive Slave Law." Why, then, asks Cavell,

> throughout the distressed, difficult, dense stretches of metaphysical speculation of this essay does Emerson seem mostly, even essentially, to keep silent about the subject of slavery, make nothing special of it? It is a silence that must still encourage his critics, as not long ago his admirer Harold Bloom and his detractor John Updike, to imagine that Emerson gave up hope of democracy. But since I am continuing to follow out the consequences of finding in Emerson the founding of American thinking—the consequence, for example, that his thought is repressed in the culture he founded—the irony of discovering that this repressed thinking has given up on the hope and demand for a nation of the self-governing, would be, so I fear, harder than I could digest.[78]

Cavell answers the question relating to Emerson's silence by insisting that "Fate" was not intended as polemic, but meant by Emerson as an effort "to preserve philosophy in the face of conditions that negate philosophy."[79] More interesting to me than this answer, however, is the role that references to enslaved African Americans play in the unfolding of Cavell's argument. Although Emerson (on Cavell's reading) is mindful of slavery but omits to mention it, Cavell mentions it explicitly, ultimately with an eye to defending Emerson against the likes of Harold Bloom and John Updike. Specifically, Cavell refers to slavery so that he can vindicate Emerson against the charge that he gave up on democracy. Notice, here, the similarity between "Emerson's Constitutional Amending" and Cavell's Spinoza lectures. If, in the former essay, Cavell is intent on vindicating Emerson, in the latter essay he is intent on vindicating Astaire against Michael Rogin's complaints. In both cases Cavell alludes to America's history of racial injustice, mainly in order to acquit the white protagonist of his essay—Astaire in the one case, Emerson in the other—of false charges. Put differently, he invokes that history as an instrument—as something like a legal instrument—for preparing extended briefs on behalf of Astaire and Emerson. Here, then, we have two further cases in which blackness, or the presence of blacks—here, specifically, the fact of blacks' subjection to racial injustice—has proved serviceable for a purpose relating to whites, that purpose being absolution. One question these cases raise, I think, is whether Cavell's effort "to follow out the consequences of finding in Emerson the founding of American thinking" can dispense with narrative economies of the same that, to borrow Toni Morrison's words, speak "of" the African in America, but decline to hearken to a "response from the Africanist persona."[80] As we have seen, Oliver hopes to expand the horizon of philosophy to include feminine voices that have not been constructed, as, for example, Nietzsche constructs them, to serve a masculinist philosophical agenda. What would it mean similarly to expand the horizon of consequences that Cavell follows out to include a hearkening to African American voices in tracing out the significance of Emerson's philosophical legacy?

Although I cannot begin here even to outline an answer to this question, three books—three points of departure—come to mind: Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903); and Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). I mention these books, for each of them may be read as, in part, an African American engagement with Emerson's founding of American thought. In *Bondage*, for example, Douglass presents himself as an Emersonian representative man, as an aversive thinker ("I paced the seven miles . . . thinking much by the solitary way—averse to my condition; but *thinking* was all I could do"[81]), and, I believe, as revising Emerson's thesis that self-reliance is the aversion of conformity. In *Souls*, one likewise hears revisionary echoes of Emerson, not only in Du Bois's much-commented-on analysis of the idea of double consciousness—an idea that Emerson invokes in "Fate" and that Cavell discusses at length—but, and perhaps more significantly, in the final paragraph of "Of the Training of Black Men," where Du Bois, like Emerson near the end of "The American Scholar," finds "company" among "the shades of all the good and great." "I walk with Shakespeare," Du Bois writes, "and he winces not."[82] In *Invisible Man*, finally, Ellison's attempt to think with and

against Emerson's founding of thinking is as overt as could be imagined. One obvious example of this effort is the white "trustee" (Norton) who after repeatedly mentioning his "pleasant fate" asks the invisible man whether he has studied Emerson. Learning that he has not, the trustee returns to the theme of fate and advises the invisible man to read him, "for he was important to your people. He had a hand in your destiny."[83]

Cavell remarks that Emerson's thought is repressed in the culture he founded. How do we take the measure of that repression? Could it be that part of the task is to listen to a tradition of philosophical thought—of, precisely, African American philosophical thought—that has intermittently heard and responded to Emerson's call to think, speaking back critically but not deafly? And could it be that this tradition has been less embarrassed to receive Emerson, and so less inclined to repress him, than other American philosophical traditions? It is obvious, I suppose, that these questions raise a host of issues that would better mark the beginning than the end of a proper paper presentation. I conclude, then, by conjecturing that something like the reverse of what the trustee says is true: that Douglass, Du Bois, Ellison, and other African American thinkers have had a hand in Emerson's destiny, and that they have handsomely turned that destiny to the hope of democracy.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Incessance and the Absence of the Political

Stanley Cavell

I suppose it was as some gesture in the effort to keep my responsibility in taking up so rich an array of texts under some illusion of control that I have ordered my responses to the foregoing essays according to the order in which Andrew Norris listed and mailed them to me, with the exception that, on an impulse to juxtapose the two interventions dealing with film, I reversed the order of the last two.

Sandra Laugier's contribution (Chapter 2) sets an admirable tone for beginning to read the collection through. Not only is she at home, among other matters, in the entire history of analytical philosophy (from the time of her doctoral dissertation on Quine two decades ago, she has published work on essentially every major figure in that tradition from Frege and Carnap to Austin and the later Wittgenstein), but she has the touch of getting to and staying with a depth of the concepts involved, none trickier than that of the ordinary, that many, even clearly gifted, philosophers despair of successfully conveying. We all know, I believe—I mean those who have tried to express their sense of the power and richness of the writings of Wittgenstein and of Austin—the frustration in trying to convey this sense and at the same time show the knowledge that the trivial details of words and experiences that our lives at any time turn upon, and are the question-

represents civil society. Butler, in contrast, says, "My view is that there is no uncontaminated voice with which Antigone speaks." (p. 88n1). I think this view is consistent with the central claims that Cavell wishes to make concerning ordinary language.

26. Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 4.

27. Frank Kermode, Introduction to *King Lear,* in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* p. 1249.

28. For helpful references on this field of critical contention, I thank David Sofield.

29. This is partly the point of Hardt and Negri's *Empire,* but it is not clear that we can hear them.

30. Simon Critchley, *Very Little, Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 127.

31. Ibid., p. 137.

32. Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 393–413.

33. Ibid., p. 407.

34. Ibid., p. 413.

CHAPTER 12

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's, 1965), pp. 92–93.

2. For references to *Zarathustra* in English translation, I rely on *The Portable Nietzsche,* ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954) (hereafter cited as *Z*). For references to *Zarathustra* in German, I use the *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studien Ausgabe in 15 Bänden,* ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazino Montinari (Berlin and Munich: de Gruyter and Deutscher Tauschenbuch Verlag, 1980), hereafter cited as *KSA,* followed by volume and page numbers.

3. For the APA address, see Cavell, "Something Out of the Ordinary," *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* 71, no. 2 (hereafter cited as SO). My discussion of the Spinoza lectures is based on a typescript that Stanley Cavell has generously made available to me. It is entitled "Praise as Identification: At Moments of Henry James and Fred Astaire" (hereafter cited as PI).

4. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* p. 66.

5. Here, of course, it should not be forgotten (as I have been reminded by Gary Banham) that Kant, in order to emphasize his concern with *pure* aesthetic judgments, describes the project of the third *Critique* as a "transcendental aesthetic of judgment." But *this* transcendental aesthetic is not to be identified with the first *Critique*'s doctrine of a priori sensibility. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 130.

6. Peter Fenves has argued that Walter Benjamin "develops the concept of spirit in his *Farbenlehre* by radicalizing the 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment' of the third *Critique* to the point where it revises the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' of the first." Nietzsche, I am arguing, moves in roughly the opposite direction, transforming the transcendental aesthetic to the point where it revises "The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment." See Peter Fenves, *Arresting Language: From Leibniz to Benjamin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 183–84.

7. Much of the discussion of *Zarathustra* that follows here is an abbreviated version of an argument I make at length in chapter 4 of Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

8. *Z,* pp. 231–38; *KSA,* 4:153–62.

9. For the quotations in this paragraph from "On the Child with the Mirror," see *Z,* pp. 196–97; *KSA,* 4:107. For the quotations in this paragraph deriving from "On Those Who Are Sublime," see *Z,* pp. 228–31; *KSA,* 4:150–52.

10. Zarathustra rejects Cartesian dualism. He also rejects two theses associated with Kant: (1) that there exist noumenal subjects and (2) that the subject does not belong to—is not a piece of—the world, what Quassim Cassam has called "the exclusion thesis" (see Quassim Cassam, *Self and World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 9–21). Zarathustra seems to be claiming, however, that self-estrangement in the domain of bodies and appearances can produce appearances that give the (false) impression of being appearances *of* otherworldly, suprasensible subjects.

11. For the quoted material in this paragraph, see *Z,* 228–31; *KSA,* 4:15–52.

12. Nietzsche's portrait of the sublime hero as someone who stands aloof from the world of appearances may owe something to Wagner's depiction of Beethoven's sublime genius in Wagner's *Beethoven* (a book to which Nietzsche alludes in *The Birth of Tragedy*'s "Preface to Richard Wagner"). See Richard Wagner, *Beethoven,* trans. Edward Dannreuther (London: Wm. Reeves, 1903), pp. 20, 54, 56, 102–3. I thank John Sallis for pointing out the relevance of Wagner's book to my interpretation of "On Those Who Are Sublime."

13. *Z,* 231; *KSA,* 4:152.

14. Cf. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism,* pp. 180–82.

15. See the discussion of "The Night Song" in the *Zarathustra* section of *Ecce Homo.*

16. Cf. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism,* pp. 180–82 and 264–67, where I defend and develop the thesis that Ariadne is a figure for the body's power of receptivity.

17. SO, p. 25. Cavell's reading of Kant suggests that aesthetic judgment is a response to and an attempt to justify aesthetic pleasure through the articulation of concepts. Although this is not the place to pursue in any detail the niceties of Kant

interpretation, it should be noted that Kant may plausibly be taken to have argued otherwise: that aesthetic pleasure *results* from the articulation and application of concepts in the testing of interpretations (for a convincing reading of Kant along these lines, see Samuel Fleischaker, *A Third Concept of Liberty: Judgment and Freedom in Kant and Adam Smith* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999], chap. 2). As I read Cavell, his view has substantial affinities to that of his former student Paul Guyer, who attributes to Kant a distinction between the pleasure-producing estimation of an object and the judging of a pleasure (see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2d ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], pp. 97–106). For the purposes of the present paper, I do not take issue with Cavell's and Guyer's reading of Kant.

18. SO, p. 25; PI, p. 10.

19. SO, pp. 33.

20. In PI, Cavell speaks specifically of three features; see pp. 13–16. Cf. SO, pp. 34–36.

21. SO, p. 34.

22. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 9.

23. Cavell uses the concept of an individuality to refer to the "inflections of disposition and demeanor" that project particular ways of inhabiting a social role. See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 33, 35.

24. On the theme of "intimacy" with existence, see Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, pp. 3–9.

25. See Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 40–41.

26. SO, pp. 36–37. The discussion of *Hamlet* in these pages echoes the more detailed analysis Cavell presents in Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 179–91.

27. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, p. 9.

28. SO, p. 36.

29. In 1953, the year *The Band Wagon* appeared, Gardner was in fact married to Frank Sinatra.

30. On this point, see John Mueller, *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 351. See also Hugh Fordin, *The World of Entertainment! Hollywood's Greatest Musicals* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 400.

31. For the impact of *Showboat* on Gardner's career, see Roland Flamini, *Ava* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1983), p. 153; and Karin J. Fowler, *Ava Gardner: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 11.

32. See James Naremore, *The Films of Vincent Minnelli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 34–35.

33. Ibid., p. 33.

34. See below, n. 49.

35. My thinking about the significance of the ways American films correlate images of blacks and whites "in a larger schema of semiotic valuation" has been inspired by James Snead's writing on Hollywood film. See James Snead, *White Screen/Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 4–5.

36. See Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare*, pp. 136–37.

37. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, p. 5.

38. Here, my formulation owes a debt to Richard Eldridge. See Eldridge's introduction to his *Stanley Cavell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 5. See too Eldridge's "Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice," in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, ed. Cressida J. Heyes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 124–25.

39. Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, expanded ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 133. See also Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 241–42. For useful clarification of Cavell's view that it is a mistake to think of the concept of knowing as applying to the existence of the world as a whole, or as such, see James Conant, "On Bruns, On Cavell," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Spring 1991): 627. See also, on this point, Stephan Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 77–85.

40. Cf. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, p. 46, Conant, "On Bruns, On Cavell," p. 621.

41. See Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 38–39, 92. In the first of these passages, Cavell links the handsome to receptivity (specifically, to a conception of thinking as receptivity that is evident in Emerson and Heidegger, and that Cavell presents as a revision of Kant) and the unhandsome to "the sublimized violence" of Western conceptualizing. In the second, he links sublimity to the skeptic's "disappointment with criteria."

42. See Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, pp. 55–56, 104ff.

43. SO, p. 36.

44. Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 204.

45. PI, p. 17.

46. Ibid., p. 22.

47. Ibid., pp. 22–23.

48. My summary discussion of *King Kong* owes much to James Snead's reading. See Snead, *White Screens/Black Images*, pp. 1–27. For another useful discussion of the film, see Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism* (Westview Press: Boulder, Colo., 1999), pp. 9–18.

49. Vincent Minnelli's direction (which Cavell, focusing on Astaire, ignores) is crucial, I think, to making sense of the semiotics of race in *The Band Wagon.* As I have suggested, this is no less true of the Astaire-Gardner pairings and the first routine than it is of the second routine. Minnelli was the director of the all-black *Cabin in the Sky* (1943), and in 1939 was already producing set designs that both figured blacks as primitive and promoted an urbane, sophisticated idea of primitivism, an idea according to which primitivism was not a threat to, but could be reconciled with, civilization (see James Naremore, *The Films of Vincent Minnelli,* chap. 2). As will become evident, I believe that the treatment of blacks and blackness in *The Band Wagon* follows along similar lines.

50. For a brief account of the effort to recruit Daniels, and of his performance, leavened with some interesting personal reflections, see Stuart Klawans, "Shined Shoes," in *O.K. You Mugs: Writers on Movie Actors,* ed. Luc Sante and Melissa Holbrook Pierson (New York: Vintage, 2000), pp. 117–30.

51. PI, pp. 23–24.

52. Ibid.

53. As Robin James pointed out in her brilliant response to this paper at a conference at DePaul University, "While Astaire sings throughout the whole number, the only musical contribution the shoeshine man makes is *rhythmic*: he's basically a multifunction percussive instrument, using his shinecloth, buffers, hands and feet to beat out patterns to accompany and educate Astaire." Building on James's insight, I am inclined to add that in essence Daniels the shoeshine man teaches Astaire to "swing." For the relationship between rhythm, the distribution of rhythmic values, and the jazz-critical notion of swing, see Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 6–26.

54. PI, p. 25.

55. Ibid., p. 27.

56. Ibid., p. 26.

57. Ibid., p. 24.

58. For Cavell on the Nietzschean/Emersonian notion of the exemplar, see Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome,* pp. 6ff, 50ff. For further analysis of this notion, which draws inspiration from Cavell, see James Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of Schopenhauer as Educator" in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism,* ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 191–96.

59. For my discussion of some related themes in connection to the figure of the black cupid, see Robert Gooding-Williams, "Black Cupids, White Desires: Reading the Representation of Racial Difference in 'Ghost' and 'Casablanca,'" in *Philosophy and Film,* ed. Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas A. Wartenberg (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 143–60.

60. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 52.

61. PI, p. 26.

62. Ibid., p. 29. With respect to the marquee announcement of "The 'Proud Land,'" there is perhaps more to say than Cavell acknowledges. It is significant, for example, that the title recurs in "The Girl Hunt" episode of *The Band Wagon,* and that it is also the name of the film that ruins Jonathan Shields's career in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (the film Minnelli made just before he made *The Band Wagon*). I owe these insights to Arturo Silva's unpublished paper on the "Girl Hunt" episode of *Band Wagon,* and to Stephen Harvey's book, *Directed by Vincente Minnelli* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), on which Silva relies.

63. For Kant's idea that beauty is a symbol of the moral good, see his *Critique of Judgment,* §59.

64. PI, p. 10.

65. In an e-mail correspondence, Arturo Silva has suggested to me that one of the most astonishing things about the second routine is that it shows Astaire dancing a duet with a man who is black, thus "that there is a biracial gay subtext here." While I am wholly sympathetic to this suggestion, I also believe that it raises as many questions as it answers: for if we have not assumed in advance, and without reference to context, the significance of a depiction of a biracial, gay transaction (that is, if we have not assumed that there is a significance that attaches *essentially* to the depiction of biracial gay transactions), then we must ask, *what work is the depiction of such a transaction doing in this particular filmic context?* My answer to this question—or, at least, the beginning of my answer—is that here a biracial gay transaction serves as the medium for a white man's appropriation of a black male sexuality. But I am reluctant to assert that the sexuality thus appropriated is exclusively "gay," as, arguably, it becomes functional, subsequently, in Astaire's heterosexual involvement with Gabrielle Girard (played in the movie by Cyd Charisse).

66. Cf. Gooding-Williams, "Black Cupids, White Desires: Reading the Representation of Racial Difference in 'Ghost' and 'Casablanca,'" pp. 155–56.

67. Interestingly, Cavell himself touches on the theme of the minstrel show in connection to the first section of the second routine: "Astaire hands the hot dog to a young boy, as if to separate himself from childish things, even from things associated with the wrong kind of entertainment, e.g., food concessions in the lobby of movie theaters (or, for all I know, of minstrel shows" (see PI, p. 21). My view, of course, is that the hot dog hand-off is the beginning of the boy's apprenticeship to Astaire, and that what Astaire has to teach him is precisely the benefits available to white manhood through minstrelsy.

68. In the early 1950s, the Freed unit of Hollywood musicals production seems to have been more than a little preoccupied with the musical's roots in black dance. It is significant, for example, that the theme is also evident in *Singin' in the*

Rain (1951). See, on this point, Carol Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Summer 1995): 722–47.

69. Here, I suspect that there is a connection between the incest theme in *Oedipus Rex* and Cordova's remarks relating Bill Robinson and Bill Shakespeare. The key point is that denying putatively "artificial" distinctions, e.g., the distinction between a man's mother and his wife that Oedipus overrides, is the very essence of the impurity that incest courts. Thus *The Band Wagon* may be read as an extended critique of Cordova's denial of the putatively artificial distinction between musicals and dramas: when he pretentiously attempts to marry the two forms, by producing a musical version of Faust, he badly fails. Astaire, of course, saves the day, by taking control of the show and leading the cast in the production of a musical revue. I should like to thank Stanley Cavell for drawing my attention (in an e-mail communication) to *The Band Wagon*'s incest motif, and thus for prompting me to think seriously about it.

70. PI, p. 17. For a discussion of minstrelsy as counterfeit, see Lott, *Love and Theft*, pp. 100–105.

71. For Cavell on theatricality, see, e.g., Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 332–34, and especially 333n16. For a related discussion, see also Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 108–18. For Michael Fried's development of the notion of theatricality, which is relevantly similar to Cavell's—as Cavell acknowledges in the above-mentioned footnote—see Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in his *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148–72; and Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), passim.

72. In this paper, I do not pursue a reading of *The Band Wagon* beyond the film's first fifteen or twenty minutes (the part of the film on which Cavell concentrates). But I am happy to have been encouraged by two readers of earlier drafts of this essay to believe that a fruitful reading of the remainder of the film could be pursued in the terms I establish through my engagement with Cavell's interpretation. E.g., both Steven Shaviro and Robin James have suggested that the racial motifs established in the film's opening sequences might be usefully brought to bear in an interpretation of the movie's "Girl Hunt" film noir parody.

73. All the material quoted in this paragraph derives from Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy's Relation to the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 83–91.

74. James Snead makes a similar point in connection to the Shirley Temple vehicles *The Littlest Rebel* and *The Little Colonel*: "we never see black families or significant relationships between black men and women. Blacks are not here for themselves, clearly, but mainly for others, and more precisely, *for whites*." See Snead, *White Screen/Black Images*, p. 58.

75. PI, p. 30.

76. All material quoted in this paragraph derives from Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche*, p. 200.

77. Stanley Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 15.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., p. 39.

80. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 50.

81. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. and intro. William L. Andrews (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 128. For Cavell's interpretation of Emerson as an aversive thinker see Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, chap. 1.

82. Cavell neither mentions nor uses the expression "double consciousness," but he devotes much of his essay on Emerson's constitutional amending to an analysis of the distinction (between riding on the horse of one's private nature and riding on that of one's public nature) to which Emerson alludes with that expression. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 351. In the same volume, see "The American Scholar," pp. 79–80. For Du Bois's remarks near the end of "Of the Training of Black Men," see W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. and intro. David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams (Boston: Beford Books, 1997), p. 102. For an insightful discussion of Emerson and Du Bois in connection to the theme of grief for the loss of a child, see Thomas Dumm, "Political Theory for Losers," in *Vocations of Political Theory*, ed. Jason A. Frank and John Tambornino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 145–65.

83. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 41.

CHAPTER 13

1. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1974), 515.

will not know what compensations will or will not be required until it is tried and pondered and screened in various economies. The question is at issue in a different form not infrequently pressed upon me: Are remarriage comedies still made? And if not, why not?

There are various answers here, among them that there are many good films with a remarriage "feel" to them, as well as an overall structure in which a pair get together again after a breakup. But it is clear enough that these films do not occupy the cultural role of the classical remarriage comedies, which I have claimed are among the principal and enduring successes of what is called Hollywood's Golden Age in its sound period. Neither does American film continue to occupy its former role (nor, for that matter, does marriage), but at the same time, the *history* of film (present on videos, etc.) is a fact of cultural consciousness as never before. But as long as marriage continues to be problematized in movies, what I specified as the model or set of conditions of marriage as specified in remarriage comedy may be expected to persist, in forms that may be unheard of. For example, the degree and intersection of intimacy and psychic freedom or zaniness featured in classical remarriage comedy may now be found in a recent group of interesting films exploring the limits and desire for what may be understood as an improvised family, which includes the *philia* of friendship and of marriage within it (an improvisation of relationship rendering its principals hard to understand from outside—except by us). Examples here (confined by my increasingly impoverished knowledge of recent movies) are *About a Boy* (with Hugh Grant), *My First Mister* (with Albert Brooks, Leelee Sobieski, and John Goodman), *Flawless* (with Robert de Niro and Philip Seymour Hoffman), and *Daddy and Them* (written, directed by, and starring Billy Bob Thornton). A clear source of embedding a marriage within a family that is itself eccentric in the degree of its toleration of difference and eccentricity is *You Can't Take It with You*, from the stage play by Kaufman and Hart (winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1937), which early in the play (I have not checked the play) cites Ralph Waldo Emerson as the guide to the pursuit of happiness.

The conjunction of the medium of film with Plato's *Protagoras*, which invokes the difficulty of praise as a topic waiting to upset conversation, brings me to Robert Gooding-Williams's response to my reading of the opening Astaire routines from the film *The Band Wagon* (Chapter 12).

Gooding-Williams's absolute rejection of my wish to find the praiseworthiness, philosophical and political, of the routines opens with a discussion of Kant and Nietzsche that is clearly part of a larger project whose richness I would not touch without more knowledge of it and thought about it than are feasible here. The discussion closes with a proposal that what I call the repression of Emerson's legacy in the culture Emerson helped, or wished, to found should be measured by "[listening] to African American philosophical thought," a "tradition [that] has been less embarrassed to receive Emerson, and so less inclined to repress him" (p. 262). That is a gloriously pertinent suggestion, which I hope to have the years to participate in following. I have no defense against my having not tried to listen and to respond to it before now, other than (to take the case of gender that Gooding-Williams links with that of race), as with feminism, I seem to have needed an invitation to feel entitled to take it up—to go beyond autobiographical responses to isolated events.

About Gooding-Williams's discussions of my reading of the two routines, I say at once and in general that I do not feel well perceived in them. But I do not want to defend to him the specific words, or the ways I have used them, in which I have so far said things in the essay of mine he takes up. His rejection of them seems so complete that at least for the moment I regard them as out of order between us. I shall accordingly try now to arrive again at a fresh articulation of my response to my sense (and memory) of the routines. Gooding-Williams exempts me from the charge of sharing the idea, which he sees in Vincente Minnelli's film, of "a Jim Crow version of the capacity for skepticism" (p. 248). But it is still bad enough if I have failed to perceive it there.

My reflections about the treacherous difficulties of false and of hollow praise, of blasphemy and idolatry, were to set the stage for a discussion of a dance (I take the second routine initially), or rather say a quasi-dance (I explicitly say it is not a tap dance, and most of this dancing is not any obvious other kind either), something like a chain of proto-dance movements of twirling and weaving, unlike any other routine of Astaire's I remember, like his proto-words "Da: *da*, da da; da, da *da*." I call attention here to Astaire's uttering to himself at the end of the first routine, as analogous in their self-absorption to the seventy-plus repetitions of the phrase, or fragments of the phrase, "I've got a shoe shine" in the second routine, a

(quasi-)dance which is precisely one that questions his right to dance. It is a dance of open frenzy, of madness, of the threat of the loss of language, of incomprehension and incomprehensibility. If he cannot dance this dance, he cannot dance at all, since what he does would not exist without the relation this routine declares to the heritage of black dancing; and since to dance as he does is his life, if he cannot dance such a dance he cannot exist. Then because I find I want him to exist, want him to want to exist, to claim his existence, and find that the America with him dancing in it was better than it would have been without him, the question arises for me how he asserts, or may assert, the right to exist.

I say in my original essay that in Astaire's claiming an inheritance, his way, from black dancing, "nobody does what Astaire does better than Astaire," I suppose taking encouragement from remembering, from the same period of the 1950s, Miles Davis's taking to himself songs from *Porgy and Bess*, as if he were prepared to hear: Nobody does what George Gershwin does better than Gershwin. But hear it when? After the 1950s comes the 1960s. And hear it from whom? In claiming the right, or standing, of Astaire to praise here, I am claiming my right, or standing, to praise Astaire on this ground. I recognize no established convention as grounding me; the utterance is not performative but passionate, its act irreducibly perlocutionary. Its acceptability is exposed to the other. And here I am not in a position to single out the other to whom I address myself. Why take so stacked a risk? I suppose because I have already taken it, I have in my life taken Astaire to heart as part of my education by film and by music. It is understandable that another may claim the standing to contest it.

Astaire's mad incorporation of the entranced dervish is brought to an end by his making explicit the answer to the question mark of America—the mysterious box that is present early in the routine when it resists his probing but is reencountered later and bursts open for him, precipitating the routine's close as he recoils from its mechanical, flag-waving ballyhoo as an answer of belonging, of overcoming loneliness. As he reels away from this declaration, luck intervenes and he and the black man reencounter each other and for the first time satisfy the conditions for dancing together equally on level ground. But what they dance is only and precisely the conclusion of a dance, of a dance of equality that they have not danced, that does not (yet?) exist; all they can dance is farewell, since what they have

realized cannot be taken outside, beyond the America of the Arcade. I call this a glimpse of Utopia and I want to see the glimpse expressed in Astaire's final gesture, reciprocally holding his arms out to the black man as he himself is drawn away by the crowd in which, as his first routine explicitly declares—the song without exactly a dance—he is all alone, going his way by himself. It is the concluding gesture of a tragic dance, an expression of pain and non-existence. (I am thinking of my speaking of Emerson's "Fate"—the paradoxical title of an essay about Freedom, a continuous expression, on my reading, of the pain in recognizing that one cannot solve a state of radical injustice alone—as a tragic essay.) In the film we cut from that final gesture of Astaire's incompletion and longing to a rehearsal of a Greek tragedy. It is up to us what we miss, or choose to miss, or deplore as vulgar or as cute, in this conjunction; perhaps it is not a tip to consider the tragedy in what we have just seen, but it is rather or only meant to encourage the suggestion that film is the latest discoverer of some register of homogeneous entertainment in which the history of human theatricality in all its forms takes part.

But Gooding-Williams will not have it. He says:

> If, in *The Band Wagon*, he gets his shoes rather than his face "blacked up," the substance of the performance remains the same: homage that cannot separate itself from the legacy of blackface minstrelsy's myth and fantasies about black masculinity. *The Band Wagon*'s reiteration of these myths and fantasies—specifically its suggestion that blackness and especially black masculinity is a magical force that can bring alienated, melancholic white men to earth—suffuses and saturates its gestures toward homage, thus compromising, fatally, our ability to see in Astaire's "dance of praise" anything more than a form of idolatry that superstitiously mistakes a myth about black manhood for the rich artistic tradition to which Astaire owes his existence as a dancer. (p. 256)

(Gooding-Williams had spelled out the mythical force as a fantasy a few pages earlier: "[Astaire is shown] acquiring that blackness through the agency of a 'shine' who, by shining his shoes, works a sorcery that dis-seminates his blackness, as if a priapic Daniels had discharged a second, miniature 'shine,' a sort of black homunculus, onto the surface of Astaire's footwear" [p. 252].) This is strong material, and if it must be accepted then I can see that "the substance of the performance remains the same: homage that cannot separate itself from the legacy of blackface minstrelsy's myth

and fantasies about black masculinity." The claim that it must be accepted is evidently the same necessity as claimed in "homage that cannot separate itself from the legacy of blackface. . . . " Then the question is: Why *must* it be accepted? Why *cannot* the homage separate itself from insupportable legacies?

What we actually are shown is a "shoeshine" in which the polishing cloth never (maybe once) touches the shoes, and in which it is waved over Astaire's hands as well as feet, equating the power of "polishing" his nails with polishing his shoes. Astaire's ecstatic cry "Wonderful!" on the shoe stand only makes explicit what can hardly in any case be missed, that this is no ordinary shoeshine; something of breakthrough magic is in evidence. But I am suggesting that what we are invited to attribute the magic to is left open. Gooding-Williams finds that an older myth and accompanying fantasies are in force. I am proposing an alternative interpretation, or perception. ("Interpretation" may already be prejudicial. I understand the concept virtually to imply that an alternative is possible. I am prepared, if that is thought prejudicial, to stay with the idea of perception.)

I take up the idea that presides over my reading, or perception, of the closing moments of the routine—namely the absent, longed-for, dance of equality, of reciprocity, on the level ground, what I called a glimpse of Utopia, of the Kingdom of Ends, from which Astaire (alone, unequally) tears himself away. Here is where I see the sense of compromise entering. Not in an inability to achieve the ecstatic reciprocity of the dance, but—precisely because that has been momentarily achieved—in an inability to sustain the dance outside the Arcade, out in what a marquee announces as "The Proud Land," which is, accordingly, ironically designated to be shameful. Justice cannot be attained privately, neither in vengeance nor in magnanimity; how much injustice we are willing to absorb, or judge ourselves as having to absorb, is up to each of us to know.

So here is my alternative understanding of the source of magic. I do not take Astaire to attribute his offcenteredness, ungroundedness, to a lack of infusion. He still has his rare talent (his initial walk, in the first routine, down the platform proves that, no other [white] man walks like that); but he has lost the sense of a place for it, the point of it, his right to his possession of it. In his song, alone in a crowd, he says further that he is under a cloud, facing the unknown, needing to build a home of his own. None of the entertainments for sale in the arcade seriously attract him, no fortune-telling machines nor cardboard myths of black men as marauding apes, nor distorting mirrors. What stops his roaming is stumbling over the outstretched legs of the black shoeshine man. What starts his song is the effort to cheer him (the black man, the other), not to be cheered by him. The song could be seen as intrusive, motivated by a mere assumption of the black man's melancholy. But that man shows interest in the interest being offered him; perhaps it is not all he wants, or needs, but it evidently goes beyond anything he expects to come along in an ordinary hour in this place.

From the time of this initial encounter, Astaire (I should by now use, anyway mention, the name of the character he plays in this film, Tony Hunter, one who shares certain biographical details with Astaire, but level is everything here) is no longer alone in a crowd or walking under a cloud. His old friends, who met him at the train station but from whom he has managed to take a break, had not broken into his isolation. In the Arcade he has begun recovering the home he vows to build of his own, using what he has made so far of his everyday. No one can predict (any more than it was at once predictable when God found that it is not good that the first man be alone) who or what will be apt for him, end his being alone. It is anything but accidental to Astaire that his isolation is ended by this man's being black. But it is not that fact that produces the magic, as if magic is a transportable object. It is critical that Astaire take this fact of beginning recovery as ordinary, as a return home, a reminder of the self to which he aspires, which he has misplaced, not a self to be appropriated (anyway, no more than any self is a matter of appropriation), but one to be inspired to attain, or regain, from within his attained self. This black man cannot teach him how to inherit and modify black dancing, any more than Astaire can teach the black man how to inherit and modify the remainder of white American culture. But their futures depend upon the learning that they have done, and perhaps that they will still do.

The song and shine we are now given to see—like the song Astaire sang on the train platform—are, I am bound to assume, not what is seen in that depicted world. There what is visible is a white man climbing on a stand and getting a somewhat exaggerated shoe shine from a black man, with extra waves of the rag and clicks of the brushes. Nothing has happened

to that ordinary to draw a crowd. The fantastic events on and around the shoe shine stand, revealed to us privileged viewers, open to the judgment of our judgment, are the responses of these two men to the ordinary fact that they have reciprocated each other's interest and acknowledgment, itself of no more than passing interest, alas, as yet, to those beyond in their world. One bio-ethnological form of life has reciprocally interpenetrated another, producing an everyday miracle, namely one human being's recognition of and by another, a defeat of self-absorption, the creation of a small "we." They would still need, if occasion arose, to find how to acknowledge each other outside, beyond the enclosure and privacy of the Arcade, in which the black man will visibly do more than accompany and encourage Astaire's mood with his brushes. As for the black man's consciousness of the event, the man played, we are told, by a real bootblack named Leroy Daniels, I picture it as somewhat amused, not unhappy about the diversion provided on a dull day by this rather over-excited, not badly dressed visitor, who talked a lot and moved pretty well, seemingly well-intentioned, though maybe trying too hard to prove something, but not as left with the sense that anything superbly good, or bad, has happened to him, or been asked of him, nothing much given to him nor taken from him, just possibly an encounter worth a remark to friends or family.

I should emphasize that evidence against this reading would not, from my point of view, come from adducing expectations based on anything that Vincente Minnelli and his colleagues have achieved elsewhere, nor from trying to unify the opening routines with the rest of the film. My sense is that this is breakthrough material, that work is being here produced (I don't know about elsewhere, each case needs its own attention) that may well be beyond the intention and grasp of those then and there at work. I have recurrently emphasized this fact about serious writing, that one writes (with luck, call it) beyond oneself, better than oneself. Emerson puts the matter by saying "Character teaches above our wills." Otherwise criticism is fated to be a limited, monitoring thing.

Of course I can understand that what I have been saying is variously controversial. But I have to say that I still do not see that my reading of the first, companion routine is fairly thought of as controversial, as far as it goes. That Astaire misses something in others other than they miss in him is surely right, and important, and that there may be a Jim Crow version

of skepticism (pp. 248, 259), in which one race excludes another from the complexities of skepticism, seems to me a startling and fascinating idea. (The closest I have come to it, I believe, is my recording the thought, in *The World Viewed*, that Scarlett O'Hara's rage and abuse of her personal slave [played in the film of *Gone With the Wind* by Butterfly McQueen] is produced by Scarlett's "natural" assumption that, being black, this inexperienced young woman *must* be familiar with the intimate business of the earth, such as giving birth.) There are bound to be, if this is right, many examples of it (it is perhaps endemic in colonialist contexts, and it occurs to me that Iago may not think of Othello as capable of skepticism, but only of superstition, which ironically does the trick, for Othello's own reasons), but I do not see it in the present Astaire case. Gooding-Williams's counting "mostly black men" on the train platform, four among a total of six men, does not establish an opposed world. And the thing that the members of that depicted world miss is not what we ordinarily miss every day—call this the mortality of the others passing to their oblivion—but specifically they miss what it is *we*, the viewers of that world, are shown: those passers-by see an unremarkable man silently walking down a platform (or quietly da-da-da-ing), walking as they are walking; whereas we are shown the state of mind of this walking man, whose manifestation of this way of walking and singing reveals him to be cheering himself up with an effort of swaying, even swaggering good humor, and whose absence of feet goes to explain his sense of psychic suspension. That no one I have spoken with about the film had noticed that Astaire's feet were excluded from the framing of that routine throughout the walk, that it had to dawn on us as things proceed that this fact is telling, is something I am counting on to get us to see the standing possibility of film to reveal our blindness to the ordinary, and to bring to consciousness the fact that these Astaire routines are both of them about what is ordinarily visible and invisible, and how this is challenged (e.g., in Plato, in Wittgenstein). (I have not been able to check the initial invisibility of Astaire's feet on a 35-mm print. If the video reproduction has caused this then the initial cinematography missed a bet here.)

When I praise I do not ask others to praise, to imitate me, but to see or hear. When I condemn, or shun, I do, it seems, ask them to condemn; I provide an example for others to follow. The stakes have changed. Perhaps they should. I do not think Kant helps when the question is a matter

of what Proust calls "aesthetic sacrilege" (in the preface to his translation of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens*). But spelling things out this way, while it has increased my conviction in my views, has at the same time shown me more clearly their fundamental vulnerability. Just as I feel that my discussion of the material begins after Gooding-Williams's considerations have been advanced—that Astaire's dancing already explicitly incorporates, and enacts, such doubts—so I see more starkly that he may feel comparably that his views begin after mine have been considered. He would be in effect claiming that the film's incorporation of blindness masks its blindness to itself. I cannot deny the possibility. For the moment that is where I would hope to leave things, namely with a possibility, or say with a grave risk.

Thomas Dumm's (Chapter 11) understanding and expansions of ways I have followed into *King Lear* may be taken as translating, however else, into arguably its expressively most extreme case, a theme that has been developing in various of my responses over the course of the essays of this volume. In that theme, what I have called the two directions, or axes (whatever others may be posited), of the life form called the human, the vertical and the horizontal, or the biological and the ethnological (a duplicity unshared with life forms lacking, or to the extent that they lack, language) are put in motion and internalized, as pictured, for example, in my elaboration of the distinction between performative and passionate utterance (or better between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary implications and conspiracies of speech), so that in any utterance a struggle between, let's call them, nature and convention, or natural law and common law, may come into play. These struggles are no longer well thought, as classically in Kant and Mill, to occur between homogeneous and separate realms, say between that of inclination or desire and that of reason or order, but as forces perpetually incorporating and calling each other to account, within each breast, constituting our present, our ordinary. Emerson called the forces intuition and tuition, or power and form, Nietzsche followed with the figures of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. (I invoke Nietzsche's too-famous distinction to suggest that from my point of view the judgment of a political present, as with the case of judgment in general, is in part—or has in part become—irreducibly aesthetic, marking a point at which the sensible and the intellectual must cross. This point recurs in principle with every utterance, every human expression. An underlying thought here is

Freud's discussion of negation in his essay "Negation," as the condition of possibility of judgment in general, in which, among the most primitive of human instincts, the oral, there is the choice between expressing yes and expressing no, between incorporation and rejection, swallowing and spitting out. Here is a reason that I hope not to ignore Dumm's calling upon the concept of disgust, a perturbation in our taste for human existence.)

We have in effect witnessed this economy of forces in Mill's picture of the withered or crippled mass of humanity forgetting their right to their individual eccentricities; of the Third Estate claiming to speak for the General Assembly; of a prisoner in Plato's cave violently resisting the thrust, or say his and her own sense, of the real, the present, of the beyond projected by every ordinary; of Astaire's frenzy or madness in recognizing the comparative impotence of his isolated talent to rectify the horror in the suppression of those who have invented the medium of expression of that talent; of the opposition between sovereignty and bare life. And now we have Cordelia, isolated and exposed in her love and pity for her father, by her father's making his absolute power meaningless, commanding speech and silence simultaneously, hence making her feelings inexpressible. (To say "Nothing," her first public word, is precisely to speak by saying nothing. It may be taken as an allegory of a particular political state of affairs.) I add that the perpetual interaction of the horizontal and the vertical, or the performative and the passionate, is essential to Wittgenstein's idea that we are, in thinking, led to speak "outside language games," hence to the idea of a longing for the transcendent (cf. *Culture and Value*, p. 15). I think of the interaction as essential to the concept of expression, of its distortion and its suppression, of the difficulty of saying what we mean, of incessantly saying more and saying less than we mean. The *Investigations* seems to sketch a vision of the human being, following Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and Freud, as what I sometimes call a perpetual expression machine, unappeasably desirous (even if all that is left to desire is, as in Nietzsche, nothing). It seems to picture us as born with one foot in hell.

My reading of *King Lear* was criticized quite fervently, in a recent round table on the essay, along the following lines (I include I think most of the words used): "How can you claim to know so much about what Cordelia means since we know nothing about her, nothing about her childhood, her relation with her mother and sisters, let alone her life with

Robert Gooding-Williams
August 24, 2006

For the APSA, August 31, 2006:
"The Cavell-Gooding-Williams Exchange"

I frame my contribution to our conversation here, this morning, with two autobiographical declarations. The first is that I delighted in Stanley Cavell's 1996 Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association, entitled "Something Out of the Ordinary." The second is that I remember that my father, in his day a graceful and elegant dancer, when asked how he learned to dance so well, at least once answered: "By watching Fred Astaire."

I delighted in Cavell's Presidential Address, and found it inspiring, because I heard in it an encouraging invitation to continue with the some of the work I had then recently undertaken, work geared to making sense—I hoped philosophical sense—of the significance of depictions of racial differences, and specifically, black racial identities, in American film. Cavell helped me here in at least three ways of which I am currently aware. First, by recalling what he described as "a difference in… [his] approach to aesthetic matters from that of most…work in aesthetics in the Anglo-American ways of philosophy," by which he had in mind his characteristic emphasis on individual works of art, "on letting a work of art have a voice in what philosophy says about it." Second, by his discussion of the second of two Astaire routines, which discussion very briefly touched on a black shoeshine man's "transfigurative shine" of Fred Astaire's shoes, and so explicitly introduced the question of race into his extended, ongoing reflections on the ordinary, on skepticism, and on acknowledgement and avoidance. And third, and perhaps

most pertinent, by welcoming my excited response to his talk when, as we rode the elevator to the post-Presidential Address reception, he expressed a generous receptivity to the intuitions I expressed about the issues his talk had raised.

That elevator exchange, almost ten years ago now, was the beginning of my off and on conversation with Stanley Cavell about Fred Astaire. It took me almost that long to clarify to myself my own intuitions about the Astaire routines, and thanks to Tom Dumm and Andrew Norris I have had an invitation to write down my thoughts, and so to continue my exchange with Cavell in writing. Today's event is prompted in part by Cavell's rejoinder to that writing, and affords us yet another opportunity, in the company of mutual friends, to think seriously about praise. In what follows, my own remarks offer, I fear, an all-too-meager attempt, not further to defend my reading of the Astaire routines, or to contest Cavell's reading, but to reflect on the significance of the exchange itself, and, more generally, on the democratic good of disagreement.

In another place, in the preface to a collection of essays entitled Look, A Negro!, I ask "whether [in post-segregation America]…it is possible to establish the terms of a discourse about race that is consonant both with the demands of a democratic political culture and with the acknowledgement of the specific history and legacies of white supremacy in the United States." That question, I think, raises a further question that bears directly on my exchange with Stanley Cavell and on our session to today: namely, whether it is possible to acknowledge the specific history and legacies of white supremacy without extending that history or perpetuating those legacies. I am optimistic enough to propose that the answer to this question need not be "no." But I am pessimistic enough to be chagrined—as, I am sure, Cavell, in the spirit of Emerson is chagrined--that

often, all-too-often, our American, all-too-American efforts to acknowledge our history of racial injustice amount to little more than repetitions of the same that further entrench the legacies of that history.

In my first response to Cavell's writing on the Astaire routines, I let the pessimist in me have its say. Cavell, I think, accurately captures the disagreement between us when he proposes that just as he feels that his discussion of the Astaire material begins after my considerations have been advanced, so too he sees more starkly that I may feel comparably that my views begin after his have been considered—that, in effect, The Band Wagon's "incorporation of blindness masks its blindness to itself." In a discussion of Shirley Temple's dance routines with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, the late James Snead, wrote that "What we might suggest about the Temple/Robinson films is simply that in many cases, their racist intent falls short of the mark, at moments of shimmering reversal, the actors shatter through the film's intended ideology." As I understand him, Cavell wishes to make a similar point when, responding to my argument that Minnelli's direction saturates the Astaire/Daniels dance sequence with racial ideology pitched to white fantasies about black sexuality, he writes "that this is breakthrough material, that work is being here produced…that may well be beyond the intention and grasp of those then and there at work." Or, again, "that something of breakthrough magic is in evidence." In Cavell and Snead, I hear aesthetic judgments that echo—or, more exactly, that displace and revise—key elements of Kant's analysis of the dynamical sublime. Thus, where Kant describes the soul that glories in the discovery of its ability to resist nature's seeming omnipotence, Cavell and Snead invite us to perceive souls, or dancing feet, that glory in their discovery of the power of their collaboration to resist and surpass

white supremacy's seeming omnipotence, achieving for a moment what Cavell calls "a traumatic glimpse of utopia." My response to Snead and Cavell is divided, for where I do indeed have a sense of "breakthrough magic" in what I recall of the Temple/Bojangles routines, I can't quite see it in the Astaire/Daniels routine—although I cannot deny that I have felt seduced, and so much so that I have sensed that I am on the verge of seeing it--a point to which I shall return in a moment.

Ever wary of the temptation of false reconciliation, Theodor Adorno held that in today's totally administered world "every 'image of man'" must be fractured, and that every anticipation of a "more human existence" must be damaged rather than harmonious. That judgment is too strong, I believe, as would be the similarly damning judgment that in today's American society, still animated by the ideological legacies of white supremacy, every image that would break with those legacies is bound to repeat them, and thus bound to fail in its efforts to glimpse utopia. But neither will it do to follow the defensively affirmative example of literary critic, Lawrence Rhu, who is a tad too eager to adjudicate and resolve the issues raised by "The Cavell-Gooding-Williams Exchange," declaring that "if you have eyes to see" the breakthrough that Cavell sees in the Astaire/Daniels routine, then, indeed, "it [the breakthrough] does happen [there]," if only briefly.

Rhu's remarks notwithstanding, I still believe that I have eyes to see, and I suppose that I am as open as anyone to seeing what Cavell sees. But I don't see what he sees even after, as he puts it, his views have been considered. What, then, do I make of our disagreement, or, perhaps I should say, of our blindness to each other's perception? Is it an occasion for chagrin? I think not, for we can hope, I hope, that my pessimism can

serve the cause of his optimism. That, in other words, a disagreement such as ours can, if taken to heart, strengthen our efforts to find and fashion terms adequate to acknowledging the legacies of white supremacy without repeating them. (Here, of course, the devil, the hope, is in the details, which is one reason I continue to draw inspiration from Cavell's engagement with <u>individual</u> artworks). Like Nietzsche, we must think against ourselves, and despair in the face of our best hopes, not in order to squelch them, but in order to refine, amend, and better revisit them. As Cavell well knows and writes, our conversation, like Zarathustra's in the market, is perlocution unsupported by convention, hence the site of self-exposure and risk, not only for that reason, but also because our democracy, American democracy, inherits a history riven with violence. And that history, not the transcendental form of human understanding in general, is the uncertain, ambiguous, but common ground—the <u>sensus communis</u>, so to speak--of our conflicting aesthetic judgments. "The Cavell-Gooding-Williams Exchange"--our disagreement--can be turned to the hope of democracy, I should like to believe, for sustaining that hope requires that we see as clearly as we can its fundamental vulnerability to the history that awaits it.

A few words, finally, about my father. As I have remarked, he claimed to have learned to dance by watching Fred Astaire. And as I should now like to add, he shined shoes to earn money during his teenage years in Cleveland, Ohio—or, to echo Astaire—he earned money putting shines on men's shoes roughly during the same years that, I have recently learned, Stanley Cavell was growing up in Atlanta and Sacremento (Cavell was born in 1926, my father in 1927). I do not recollect my father saying much about the experience of putting shines on other men's shoes—some of whom were black, and some

of whom were white, I assume. But I do recall his shoeshine box, with its compartments for polish, brushes and rags, kept in a closet of the home in which I grew up before we left Cleveland. The box was made of dark, cracked, and worn wood, I remember, with a place on top for shod feet to be set, one at a time, and there to be polished, brushed, and buffed by the boy kneeling beside the box. And I remember that when I was a boy, learning then to shine my own shoes, I set my foot, still not large enough to fill the space, on top of my father's shoeshine box, and tried hard, but often unsuccessfully I think, to follow his very specific, craftsman's instructions as to how to apply the polish, as to the steps I must follow to see to it that I brushed every inch of a shoe, and as to how exactly to hold a rag when buffing a shoe. Another vivid recollection is that of my dad stylishly snapping his rag as he buffed his shoes.

I share these memories, because I have wondered off and on, as I prepared these remarks, how my father, the Astaire fan and former shoeshine boy, would have judged the Astaire/Daniels routine (or, perhaps, did judge it, if, indeed he had occasion in his life to see it).

One thought, of course, is that he would have judged it as I have judged it—a thought prompted less by the memories I have thus far recounted than by my father's remarks in the aftermath of a viewing of The Silver Streak, starring Gene Wilder, Richard Pryor, and Jill Clayburgh. Specifically, I remember the sharpness of my father's response to what he took to be Pryor's marginalization relative to the over all plot of the film, his despair that, yet again, Hollywood had found it necessary to leave to the side, aimlessly headed nowhere in a red convertible, the smiling but serviceable black sidekick played by Pryor—perhaps a black Cupid, like the character of Sam in Casablanca—while

the central, romantically connected white couple, Wilder and Clayburgh, go on to a happy ending. My father's reaction to the Astaire/Daniels routine, I have imagined, would have echoed his response to the Wilder/Pryor movie, and led him intuitively to sympathize with my take of that routine.

But another thought, my second thought, is that my first thought is dead wrong—that my father, having mastered both the art of dance and the art of the shoeshine would have been able to discern in the Astaire/Daniels routine more than I have been able to discern there. To be more precise, that my father's response would not have been that of his philosophically trained, hyper-critical son, but that of an artist appreciating the art of one man in whom he might have seen an image of his younger self, and that of another to whose genius he had deliberately apprenticed himself—although it is hard to say here whether that apprenticeship was "across the racial divide," given Astaire's debt to the tradition of black dance (in this connection, we might also ponder the figure of the black Elvis). With my second thought, then, I have imagined that my father, judging the Astaire/Daniels routine as an artist rather than as a critic, would easily have perceived the "breakthrough magic" that Cavell perceives there, knowing and sensing from his own work and pleasure the power of art to break through and, as James Snead writes, shatter the forces of racial ideology. Indeed, I wonder if he could have had something like that in mind when, as my mother still reports, he responded to the awe of the mostly white colleagues fortunate enough to see him and her dance with a deadpan: "You know, don't you, that they call us the black Fred and Ginger?!"

Sometimes, when I see Astaire and Daniels dance, I find myself irresistibly tapping my foot and ready to dance myself—the moment of seduction to which I earlier

alluded. What do I make of that foot tapping? Is it my father's artistry faintly reborn in me—for my father taught me how to dance as well as how to shine my shoes—and so a joy I should cultivate in order better to perceive what Cavell perceives and what my father may have perceived? Or is it a temptation, the beginning of an immoral pleasure, that I should resist—the sort of temptation and pleasure that distresses me, when, e.g., I find myself, despite myself, excited by D.W. Griffith's combined use of montage and Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyrie" to depict the Ku Klux Klan riding to save a white woman from a black man. Although I don't know the correct answers to these questions, and even doubt that they have correct answers, I hope that our conversation here, this morning, will help us better to think about them.