

Lecture
Stanley Cavell: Philosophy, Literature, Film
Wed. 16.15 - 17.45
Prof. Elisabeth Bronfen

This lecture is conceived as an introduction to the writings of the American philosopher Stanley Cavell and the conversation between philosophy and literature he proposes. Given that he was one of the philosophers to propose Hollywood as a site for America's conversation with and about itself, we will look in detail at his discussion of both the comedy of remarriage as well as the melodrama of the unknown woman. Featured in an equally prominent manner will be his readings of Shakespeare in relation to Descartes' skepticism as this pertains to issues of self-knowledge and an acknowledgement of the separateness of the other. Finally, we will also engage with his claim that in the transcendentalist writings of Emerson and Thoreau, America found its unique philosophical voice.

(1./ 24 Feb) Introduction: Why Fred Astaire matters.

-- "Something out of the Ordinary"*

-- "Fred Astaire Asserts the Right to Praise"*

(2./ 2 Mar) Film Screening

(3./ 9 Mar) Shakespearean Tragedy and Skepticism: *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*

-- "Othello and the Stake of the Other"*

-- "*Coriolanus* and Interpretations of Politics"*

(4./ 16 Mar) Shakespearean Romance and Romantic Philosophy: *The Winter's Tale*

-- "Recounting Gains, Showing Losses: Reading *The Winter's Tale*"*

(5./ 23 Mar) American Transcendentalism: H.D. Thoreau and R.W. Emerson

-- *The Senses of Walden*

-- "Being Odd. Getting Even"*

-- "Emerson"* in *City of Words*

(6./ 6 Apr) Philosophy and the Gothic

-- "The Uncanniness of the Ordinary"*

-- "The Fantastic of Philosophy"*

(7./ 13 Apr) Comedy of Remarriage

-- "Introduction. Words for a Conversation"*

-- "Leopards in Connecticut. *Bringing up Baby*"*

(8./ 20 Apr) Hollywood's Shakespeare

-- "The Importance of Importance. *The Philadelphia Story*"*

-- "*The Philadelphia Story*"* in *City of Words*

(9./ 27 Apr) In a Darker Mode

-- "Counterfeiting Happiness. *His Girl Friday*"*

-- "*His Girl Friday*" in *City of Words**

(10./ 11 May) Melodrama and Working Woman

- "Introduction"* in *Contesting Tears*
- "Stella's Taste: Reading *Stella Dallas*"*

(11./ 18 May) Film Screening

(12./ 25 May) Melodrama and Feminine Transformation

- "Ugly Duckling, Funny Butterfly: Bette Davis and *Now, Voyager*"*
- "*Now Voyager*"* in City of Words

(13./ 1 June) Philosophy and Autobiography

- "Excerpts from Memory"*

Requirements: All students must prepare a one-page preliminary discussion for each class session. These are to be posted on Olat (course forum) by Tuesday, 9 am of the respective week. This can entail a thesis, a series of questions, comments or associations. This will count towards your class participation and also represents the *Leistungsnachweis* for the course (in lieu of an exam). Writing this preliminary discussion is, thus, compulsory for each session. **Neglecting to hand in (or upload) 10 thesis papers will result in a fail.**

Recommended for Purchase:

Elisabeth Bronfen. *Stanley Cavell zur Einführung*. Hamburg Junius Verlag, 2009
Stanley Cavell. *Cities of Words. Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004.
Stanley Cavell. *The Senses of Walden*. Chicago, London: U of Chicago P, 1981.

All * texts are available on OLAT

Bibliography of Texts by Stanley Cavell

1. *Philosophy The Day After Tomorrow*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard UP, 2005.
- 3./4. *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, updated edition. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
5. *The Senses of Walden*. An Expanded Version. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972.
 - *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
 - *Cities of Words. Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard UP, 2004.
6. *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- 7./ 8./ 9. *Pursuits of Happiness. The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard UP, 1981.
- 10./ 11. *Contesting Tears. The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.
12. "Excerpts from Memory." *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 32, Nr. 4 (Summer 2006); 767-811.