

Unlikely Candidates for Paradigmatic Cases of Intercultural Communication, reply to Van Brakel

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After my first reading of Jaap van Brakel's 'De-Essentialising Across the Board' I wondered less about what 'de-essentialising' could mean, than about the implications of Van Brakel's subtitle. According to this subtitle there is 'No Need to Speak to Same Language,' but I could not immediately tell to what this claim applies.¹ Our conference section was called 'The Possibility of Intercultural Communication,' so I felt urged to ponder the idea that Van Brakel believes that speaking the same language is not a precondition for intercultural communication. Yet, the argumentation concerns communication in general, that is, both inter- and intracultural communication. Subsequently, Van Brakel's appeal to a principle of mutual attunement suggests that he at least also considers the possibility of cultural exchange founding a community, which would generate political and/or moral consequences for the claim that there is no need to speak the same language. If we concur that such a community can come into existence without the need to speak the same language, we should, again, observe that the main argument is not exclusively intercultural. Moreover, Van Brakel's paradigm case, the First Contact between peoples, is mainly historical and anthropological, and less representative of contemporary culture clashes that have triggered speculation about, for example, the impossibility of intercultural law. These First Contact illustrations almost seem to deflect any over-eager attempt to make philosophical work 'useful' or at least 'fashionable' in contemporary cross-cultural, political debates. From a media studies perspective I might add that film scholars as well have found themselves hard pressed for interpretations

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1 J. van Brakel, 'De-essentialising Across the Board. No Need to Speak the Same Language', in this issue.

of global trends in cinema, the quality of which is not seldom measured by the firm confirmation or denial of the possibility of a cinematic version of intercultural dialogue. In my response to Van Brakel I have tried to follow up on what appears to be Van Brakel's implicit suggestion that in spite of the often heart-felt urge to do some kind of short-term philosophical right thing, we should pause and take at least one step back to reconsider the presuppositions of many proponents of the installment of intercultural dialogue. I have to admit, then, that I am quite sympathetic to the idea that de-essentialising across the board would imply, if I may paraphrase in another idiom, that the essence of interculturality is nothing intercultural. Correspondingly, for media studies, the relevance of film for contemporary discourses of interculturality may be found less in the politically engaged, thematically intercultural recent-year film festivals of Rotterdam, Berlin or Cannes, than in least-likely candidates such as a Hollywood screwball comedy or a woman's weepy of the 1930s and 40s. To be sure, Van Brakel's claim that we do not need to speak the same language is not exactly new, as I want to show by means of anecdotal, 25 year old 'evidence,' but it is exactly not irrelevant either, when and if we are addressing interculturality in our own time.

In 1981 Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida explored the possibility of an intercultural language that would bring together the philosophical tribes of hermeneutics and post-structuralism. They were not very successful. In the end, there was little rapport between *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.² Some would say that Gadamer and Derrida never came round to speaking the same language, which, by the way, many did not deplore. This was twenty-five years ago, and there was quite a lot of 'de-essentialising' going on, not just by deconstructionists alone: the beneficence expressed by the political correctness of multiculturalism in the 1980s, was criticized as veiled ideology by commentators 'across the board.' Our own time and place hardly expresses the same political correctness, given current attempts to (re-)essentialise culture. Professor Van Brakel's call to de-essentialise across the board, implying that there is no need to speak the same language, then, may sound familiar but also quite different given contemporaneous, politically resounding efforts to establish who and what exactly belongs to us, in the Netherlands ranging from the authorization of the cultural canon, to definitive citizenship tests, and even parliamentary passport information control. There is a remarkable new ring, therefore, to the old adage that we do not need to speak the same language as long as we respect each other's values, beliefs, identities.

2 D.P. Michelfelder & R.E. Palmer (eds.), *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989).

John Caputo's return to the 'ill-fated non-exchange [between Gadamer and Derrida] in 1981' appears to be driven by a concern for what he in the eighties would not have dared to call a shared 'hope for a justice (...) to come'.³ In 2002, however, Caputo has come to reconsider his fin-de-siecle impressions of what he probably thought was a forever-lost possibility of humanistic dialogue; instead, Caputo now writes that Gadamer's 'demand for (...) the good will to try to understand one another' is actually close to Derrida's (later) call for friendship:

'For hermeneutics and deconstruction alike turn on a common faith, that as soon I open my mouth (or take pen in hand) I have promised myself and the other that I am speaking the truth. That is what Gadamer calls good will and Derrida calls friendship.'⁴

I would contend, then, that Van Brakel's diagnosis that Gadamer suffers from ideal language syndrome⁵ is not unlike *the guter Wille zur Macht* reproach made in the 1980s by Derrida; analogously, Van Brakel's subsequent adherence to some version of a charity principle resembles Derridean reconsiderations of friendship as not too dissimilar from what Gadamer was after in the first place. Indeed, if we would accept that what Caputo calls 'a common faith' denominates both good will and friendship, we are not too far from also covering the assumption that 'any speaker is consistent, a believer of truths, and a lover of the good in the majority of cases' also known as Donald Davidson's 'charity principle'.⁶ Of course, Caputo continues by emphasizing that even if there is closeness, Derrida and Gadamer do not agree and remain importantly different in several respects. Or in an extended analogy, even if the hermeneutic, the post-structuralist and the analytic philosopher have something in common concerning the possibility of mutual understanding, Van Brakel would say that there is no need to assume that they speak, or even ought to speak, the same language.

Van Brakel's preferred expression characterizing the assumption that an interpreter has to attribute at least some meaning to the utterances of a speaker is 'attunement'.⁷ As Van Brakel explains in his 1999 article 'We', we cannot find out what a speaker means unless we assume 'definite things about his beliefs'.⁸ Yet, the only access to the speaker's beliefs is through his words to which, as a consequence of our assumptions, we have always

3 J. Caputo, 'Good Will and the Hermeneutics of Friendship: Gadamer and Derrida', in: *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol 28 (2002), no 5, 512-522, at 522.

4 *Ibid.*, at 516.

5 In this issue at 266 and 274.

6 In this issue at 275.

7 In this issue at 275.

8 Jaap van Brakel, 'We', in: *Ethical Perspectives* 6 (1999), issue 3-4, 266-276, at 272.

already attributed meanings. Van Brakel concludes that the interpreter 'seems to be caught in a vicious circle'.⁹ In philosophical hermeneutics this is recognized as the existentialisation of the problems of textual interpretation, in which the meaning of a certain fragment of the text is informed by the meaning of the text as a whole, which in its turn depends on the attribution of meaning to the fragments. The circle not only describes the relation of textual parts to a whole, it also describes what we, as interpreting creatures, are. Significantly, though, the circle in which the interpreter seems to be caught, is not a *vicious* circle. In philosophical hermeneutics there is nothing worrying about never being able to make meanings definitive. In the same way, there is nothing worrying about not speaking the same language. As Van Brakel explains, those 'definite things' we assume about the other's beliefs will never be 'definitive things' functioning as the essential core that would make up the sameness of the language being spoken. The speaker and the interpreter, therefore, do not so much agree on what is essentially the same for each of them, they rather agree to fine-tune their mutual assumptions about each other's language to make their interaction work for that place in that moment. Mutual attunement is real in the German (*wirklich*) and Dutch (*werkelijk*) sense of the word: it makes communicative interaction work. Attunement in English has been used as the word to translate *Stimmung* in Kant and *Befindlichkeit* in Heidegger. Van Brakel seems to welcome the dispositional quality of attunement as *Befindlichkeit*, but he may be less pleased by the beautiful connotation of a shared *Stimmung* creating a *sensus communis*. Still, mutual attunement, for Van Brakel, does describe what we actually do to make a here and now community, a 'we'.

There is a range of alternative phrases addressing a practically oriented movement by different cultures towards each other, similar to the notion of mutual attunement. Paul Willemen, for example, has commented on the surge of interest among European and American film scholars for the film cultures of non-Western countries in general and for the discourse of so-called Third Cinema in particular.¹⁰ Willemen is as critical about the tendency to presuppose a universal film language as the condition for intercultural interpretations, as he is about the obverse immersion in the other's culture as a precondition for intercultural understanding. Both the 'projective appropriation' of presuming one and the same film language, unavoidably compromised by the

9 Ibid.

10 P. Willemen, 'The Third Cinema Question' and 'The National', in: *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*, at 175-205 and 206-219 (BFI, London, 1994). Willemen warns that Third Cinema should not be mistaken for Third World Cinema. Third Cinema is a mode of cinematic discourse, third relative to Hollywood cinema (first) and European arthouse cinema (second). The notion Third Cinema, first used in Latin America in the 1960s, implies a 'programme for the political practice of cinema' (178), and criticizes the relative lack of political awareness in both entertainment (First Cinema, Hollywood) and self-satisfied artworks (Second Cinema, European Artfilm).

dominant industries of cinema, and the 'ventriloquist identification' of the benevolent interpreter who would want to become the mouthpiece for other voices, are versions of the same mistaken belief that we need to speak the same language before we can make intercultural interaction work.¹¹ An example of projective appropriation would be the idea that classical Hollywood narration could be the *lingua franca* of all filmmakers around the world, sometimes suggesting the neutrality of aesthetic and narrative criteria which in actuality have evolved along the lines of tightly interwoven American entertainment industry interests and politically endorsed economic and moral priorities. An example of ventriloquist identification would be the idea that to understand the film aesthetics of Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963), famous for his knee-high camera positions and 'circular' editing, one should first master Japanese rituals of politeness and religious ceremonies. For the ventriloquist, or should we say the dummy of the ventriloquist, out to voice Ozu's authentic 'Japaneseness', it would be difficult to acknowledge that Ozu, like many others in Japan, admired the comedies of Hollywood silent-film hero Harold Lloyd, to the extent even that in one of Ozu's earliest films, the silent comedy *Wakaki Hi/Days of Youth* (1929), Ozu pays homage to Lloyd by directing a Lloyd look-alike in a physical comedy scene on skis.

Next, like Van Brakel with 'mutual attunement' taken as that which makes an actual 'we,' Willemen also suggests an alternative to the presupposition of the need for the same language. Willemen uses 'creative understanding', a notion borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin. Willemen writes:

[Creative understanding] is not simply a matter of engaging in a dialogue with some other culture's products, but of using one's understanding of another cultural practice to re-perceive and rethink one's own cultural constellation at the same time.¹²

What mutual attunement is for the need to speak the same language, creative understanding is for appropriation and ventriloquism: a practical return to the dynamics of cultural exchange. In another reference to Bakhtin, Willemen's media-studies colleagues Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, when writing about multiculturalism and the media, do not use 'creative

11 'Projective appropriation' and 'ventriloquist identification' are Willemen's terms. *Ibid.*, at 212-3.

12 *Ibid.*, at 214. Note that both Willemen and Van Brakel avoid 'intercultural dialogue': Van Brakel because he is suspicious about the idea of a shared language, again a same language ([section No need to speak (...), alinea 1 regel 1, draft p.51]), Willemen because he underlines that Bakhtin's 'fashionably inflated' dialogism is inherent in all communication, even in projective appropriation, and therefore not an adequate means to distinguish appropriation and ventriloquism from forms of understanding in which alterity actually (not seemingly) is respected (*supra* n. 10, at 213).

13 E. Shohat & R. Stam, 'The Mutual Illumination of Cultures', in: *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, at 241-245 (Routledge, London/New York, 1994).

understanding' or 'mutual attunement': they favour 'mutual illumination'.¹³ To give an example of mutual illumination, Shohat and Stam interrelate the depiction of Native Americans in revisionist Westerns like *The Last of the Mohicans* (Michael Mann, 1992) based on Fenimore Cooper's 1826 novel on the one hand, and 'progressive' Brazilian cinema towards indigenous peoples on the other. They conclude that Hollywood and Brazilian cinema respectively differ in their fear and celebration of miscegenation, but correspond in the way that a 'compliment' to the Indians was a means to avoid the vexed question of Blacks and slavery.¹⁴ The media studies authors all emphasize that in understanding the other's culture, one's own culture is at stake; Van Brakel appears to agree, even in the case of evidently asymmetrical exchanges of many, if not all, First Contacts.

Van Brakel's paradigmatic cases, in which communicative interaction works in spite of not speaking the same language, are the well-documented, empirical facts of First Contact between different peoples. Unlike thought experiments, ideal speech situations, shared horizons etc., which are in danger of succumbing to the virus of the ideal, same language syndrome, First Contacts, according to Van Brakel, 'can serve as life heuristics' less vulnerable to 'chauvinistic', 'transcendental certainties' expressed as cores, essences, or indubitable universals.¹⁵ Paradoxically, then, Van Brakel does need a primordial version of intercultural communication to warrant his claim that there is no need to speak the same language, apparently because nothing else better serves the purpose of being a prime example. To wit, post-colonial bias and distortions in dominant historiographies are acknowledged by Van Brakel; yet, they are not serious enough to make him reconsider his paradigm in the way he has deemed Davidson's 'charity principle' an 'unfortunate label in a postcolonial context'.¹⁶ Although it is not clear from Van Brakel's text why exactly 'charity' is unfortunate from a postcolonial perspective, it is clear that the postcolonial context all too often makes us gregariously want to discuss the grounds of intercultural communication, even if that implies neglecting intracultural communication. Professor Van Brakel's lone reminder vis-à-vis such enthusiasm, is worth quoting: the principle of mutual attunement

'applies as much to interpreting the familiar (Other) as the foreign (Other). There is no principled difference between the process of mutual attunement in intra- and intercultural communication'.¹⁷

And if there is no principled difference, we might add, would there be any need

14 Ibid., at 243.

15 In this issue at 274.

16 In this issue at 275.

17 In this issue at 275.

to speak the same language whether in inter- or intracultural interactions? Indeed, shouldn't we also consider our *own* communities as not being warranted by definitive meanings, that is, as not being warranted by core agreements independent of particular speech situations? For, in these deliberations about cultural exchange, our own culture at least is always also at stake. And if there is no reason to presuppose that we speak the same language, not even within our own culture, then, shouldn't we also conclude that there is no need to presuppose First Contacts as paradigmatic for the dynamics of attunement within cultural interactions? On the other hand, searching for a paradigmatic case in point is quite relevant, considering that the argument for the principle of attunement runs the risk of remaining an empty exercise if there is no concretisation of attunement in actuality. What do we minimally need, then, if only to avoid relativism, for the embodiment of the concept of mutual attunement? Van Brakel's answer is clear enough: 'meaning requires no more than fluency and effectiveness of dialogue,' that is, 'smooth conversation'.¹⁸ Note, however, that for Van Brakel the concretisation of attunement in conversation does not amount to a dialogue naturally moving towards a horizon of settled agreements, generalized meanings, or untouchable universals. It is the local outcome of conversation that counts. This does not imply, Van Brakel insists, 'that the word 'universal' becomes meaningless'. Such a notion is 'always tied to a particularized situation which is described in a variety of (...) momentaneous idiolects'. At this point, Van Brakel refers to Stanley Cavell to emphasize 'that any local concept of universality can always be contested again'.¹⁹

Cavell has elaborated on the importance of conversation in several places, and often in relation to film. In his latest book on philosophy and film, *Cities of Words* (2004), conversation again is a prominent theme. Cavell understands 'conversation' as 'my speaking for others and my being spoken for by others, not alone speaking to and being spoken to by others'.²⁰ Conversation, for Cavell, then, is more than just the exchange of words, it conveys an intimacy strong enough to found the polis, the city of words. Hence, Cavell's philosophy of language is at least always also a political philosophy. Yet, remarkably, when interrelating philosophy and film, Cavell does not focus on films with an explicitly political theme. His prime examples are from,

18 In this issue at 269.

19 In this issue at 278. Van Brakel adds: 'any local concept of universality can be contested by those who did not participate in the formation of that local concept of universality' (zelfde alinea, slotzin). Even stronger is the idea that the contestation should always also be the domain of former participants as well: 'there are no secure attunements with epistemological or metaphysical priority – attunements being fleeting and contested, with revision in the air' (supra n. 8, at 273).

20 S. Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* at 51 (Belknap, Cambridge/London, 2004).

what Cavell calls, the *comedy of remarriage* and the *melodrama of the unknown woman*, Hollywood films made in the 1930s and 1940s. These old comedies and melodramas appear to divert our interest away from what at first sight may seem evidently relevant, present-day filmic portrayals of the 'front-page moral dilemmas'²¹ which clearly ask of us, by way of cinematically induced processes of character identification: 'what would you do in the same situation?' or 'where do you draw the line?'.²²

We may suppose that Cavell will never write extensively about the dilemmas of intercultural law, because he is more interested in the average everydayness of not speaking the same language, than in the moral attunement that characteristically transcends the real-life problems marked by cultural abysses. More accurately, it is not that Cavell does not care about dilemmas and subsequent uprightness demonstrated in moral crises; rather, Cavell seems to want to step back from film's high-impact character identification and agenda-setting propensities, and (re)consider the moral attunement inherent in derogatorily qualified *screwball comedies* and *weepies* 'merely' made for entertainment. In spite of the acknowledgement that his favourite films were indeed made to make you laugh and cry and feel good at the end, Cavell claims that these comedies and melodramas, after all, are about 'what is the public's business',²³ albeit not in a *cultural studies* way of investing anti-hegemonic meanings into popular film. The comic and melodramatic conflicts in contested conversations in marriage and remarriage, then, are not read as analogies for political upheaval. For Cavell, the privacy of marriage does not *stand for*, but actually *is* the place from which to judge society at large.²⁴

In George Cukor's film *Adam's Rib* (1949), starring Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, we come to understand that a marriage crisis, as in all comedies of remarriage, is not so much resolved but, in a way, postponed. *Adam's Rib* smartly makes a couple's crisis public by bringing it to court, not directly but by making the protagonists each other's opponents in the public arena of the courtroom over a shooting incident involving adultery. Amanda (Hepburn),

21 For the phrase 'front-page moral dilemmas' as indicative of what Cavell steers away from, in order to come closer to the moral significance of film, see for example: *ibid.*, at 11, and also 'The Good of Film,' in: W. Rothman (ed.), *Cavell on Film*, 333-348, at 334, (SUNY Press, Albany, 2005).

22 This latter 'begged question' is the tagline of Gavin Hood's *A Reasonable Man* (1999), about the front-page moral entanglement of a city lawyer and a young herdsman in South-Africa. Hood's film was screened at The Possibility of Intercultural Law Conference in June 2006, of which the presentation of this paper was also a part.

23 *Supra* n. 20, at 11. Here Cavell is commenting on the remarkable fact that quite a few of his favourite films are set in the newspaper world, and that, yet, the question of how we 'come to our knowledge of what bears on the common good of our lives' (*ibid.*) precisely is answered not by the front-page news of papers.

24 *Ibid.* In general, Cavell pairs film to philosophy because he believes film can 'be thought of as differently configuring intellectual and emotional avenues that philosophy is already in exploration of, but which, perhaps, it has cause sometimes to turn from prematurely' (*Ibid.*, at 6).

the defence lawyer, and Adam (Tracy), the prosecutor, are engaged in the attempt to outwit each other publicly, mainly by disputing the equality of the sexes before the law. Because we, as viewers are also present in the privacy of their home, we know that the court-room battles are reruns, as it were, of private, marital arguments, and we also know that the private arguments are particularized versions of societal concern, here equality of the sexes. What makes the marriage work again, and again, and again, is that the couple comes to understand that they should not want to avoid but rather learn to embrace this reiteration of the private made public made private etc.²⁵ The pursuit of the couple's happiness – Cavell's book on remarriage comedies is titled *Pursuits of Happiness* – is both a private and a public affair, necessarily so:

‘You must test [marriage] in the open or else mutual independence is threatened, the capacity to notice one another, to remember beginning, to remember that you are strangers; but it is only worth subjecting to this examination if the case is one of intimacy, which you might describe as the threat of mutual independence.’²⁶

In Van Brakel's terms, the couple needs to abandon the idea that what they share is the felt intimacy of speaking the same language; instead, what binds the couple together is the continuous contestation of what they are.

By way of conclusion, let me introduce you to another example from Cavellian cinema, paradigmatic for mutual attunement. This example confirms the importance for the possibility of intercultural communication of the ‘unspoken attunement of moral perception that conditions, and calls upon, our ability to make ourselves intelligible to each other’.²⁷ It is an example that works in a negative fashion: it shows what happens when attunement is lost. The tragic result of halting the reiteration of consent in marriage has become the subject matter of a genre entirely different from the comedy of remarriage, although also intimately related to it: Cavell's melodrama of the unknown woman.²⁸ The woman in these melodramas literally remains unknown if she is not allowed a public opportunity to (con)test her marriage.²⁹ The relation between the remarriage comedies and these melo-

25 See Cavell's chapter on Adam's Rib in *ibid.* (at 70-81) paired to a discussion of the meaning of reiterated, explicit consent in the ‘Politick Society’ of John Locke (*ibid.*, at 49-69).

26 S. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, at 216 (Harvard UP, Cambridge, MA/London, 1981).

27 *Supra* n. 20, at 381.

28 Cavell's genre indication is a reference to Max Ophüls's 1948 melodrama *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

29 Cavell's book on melodrama is titled: *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996).

dramas concerns the effect of doubting what it is that the couples share: in remarriage comedies doubting is constitutive, in the melodramas it is devastating. In the comedies of remarriage there is nothing petrifying in the scepticism that always accompanies the mutual attunement within the couple's society, a continuous doubt about the certainty of marriage that will not be resolved, but forever admitted as itself the gesture of continuation-in-time towards repeated consent. If, however, scepticism is not expressed time and again, the continuation of consent will come to a halt. In the melodramas of the unknown woman, of which *Gaslight* (Cukor, 1944) is an eminent example, scepticism has an annihilating effect on the woman protagonist: she will not be publicly acknowledged and instead become imprisoned in the intimacy of her marriage.

Paula (Ingrid Bergman) is married to Gregory (Charles Boyer) whose only interest is the jewelry of Paula deceased aunt, still hidden in the aunt's London house. It is through Paula that Gregory gains access to the house. But as soon as he is in, Paula becomes an obstacle for Gregory, which is why he carefully plans to get rid of Paula by driving her insane. Gregory finds ways to make Paula unsure of herself. He makes her believe she is forgetful, that she has illusions, that her behaviour is so erratic that her appearance in public spaces has become dangerous. In the final scenes, Paula takes bitter-sweet revenge. When Gregory is captured by the police and tied to a chair, he, for the last time, tries to influence Paula's behaviour and make her cut him loose with a knife hidden in a cabinet drawer. Instead, she acts out what Gregory wanted her to become, a mad woman incapable of being a real subject, a subject who would know for sure that there is a knife in the drawer. With her act of madness, doubting the existence of the knife in the drawer, she regains control of her own existence, but not, alas, by re-affirming her bond with her husband. There is individual existence, but no community. In the melodrama of the unknown woman, our heroine is alone.³⁰

Let me, then, recapitulate: as Van Brakel insists, there is no need to speak the same language, not even within our own culture. And our own culture is at stake here, as the 'unspoken attunement [that] calls upon our ability to make ourselves intelligible to each other' (Cavell, as quoted), underlies all communicative interaction, not just intercultural communication. Nevertheless, attunement is no guarantee for community: there is a perpetual risk of tragically, melodramatically ending up alone. With Cavell we can observe how comedies of remarriage and melodramas of the unknown woman articulate attunement and show the effects of this attunement kept alive or lost. A film

30 Cavell writes: 'In linking the position of a woman's voice (hence her individual existence) with the constitution of consent (hence the existence of the social order), [the melodrama of the unknown woman] offers a sort of explanation about why we remain studiously unclear about both' (*Ibid.*, at 147).

studies alternative to First Contacts as paradigmatic for cultural communication could therefore be formulated as follows: protagonists, in the comedies and melodramas referred to, do not speak the same language; their community 'works' or not because they cope successfully (in the comedies) or not (in the melodramas) with what Van Brakel calls potentially de-essentialising crises. Specifically, the comedies of remarriage do not resolve but reiterate scepticism about who 'we' are, effectively interrelating the public to the private and vice versa. The melodramas of the unknown woman, on the other hand, cannot avoid being paralysed by scepticism, imprisoning female protagonists in the intimacy of their marriage. Cavell's heroines are Barbara Stanwyck, Ingrid Bergman and Bette Davis. They star in what have become, I hope, likely candidates for paradigmatic cases of inter- and intracultural communication.