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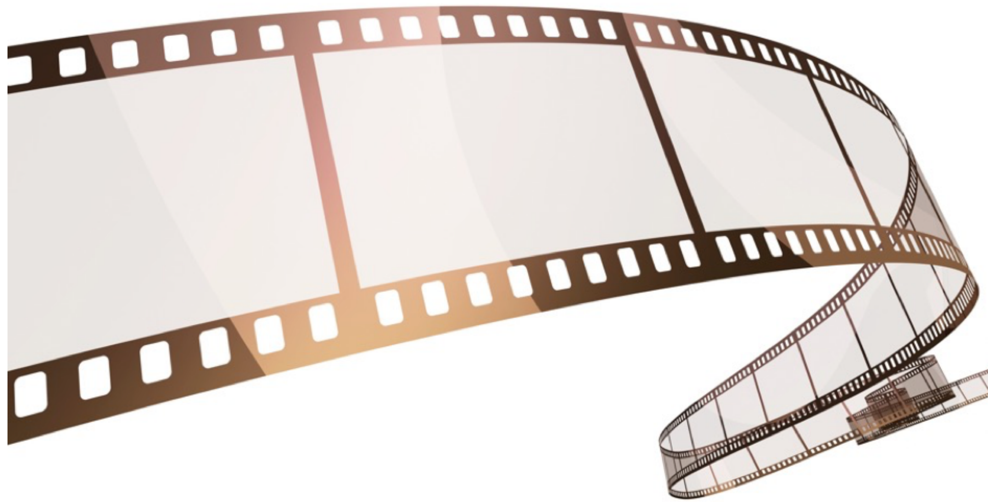

Mourning the Loss of the Ordinary. A Cavellian Reading of Ozu's *Late Spring*

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Abstract: This paper offers a reading of Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring* (*Banshun,* 1949) focusing on its examination of the ordinary: its conditions, its structure, its dynamics, and its fragility. This reading is articulated by juxtaposing some of Stanley Cavell's main insights concerning modern skepticism and its threat to the ordinary and their corresponding expressions in a series of representative sequences from Ozu's film. In both cases the notion of mourning plays a central role. I close by establishing one additional parallel between Cavell's and *Late Spring*'s interpretations of the ordinary, focusing on the absence of a wedding ceremony at the end of Ozu's film.

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The everyday is what we cannot but aspire to, since it appears to us as lost to us.
Stanley Cavell

I.

In the introduction to *Pursuits of Happiness*, Stanley Cavell portrays philosophy as a search to 'disquiet the foundations of our lives . . . on the basis of no expert knowledge, of nothing closed to the ordinary human being'.[1] Cavell further characterises this approach, which he associates principally with (later) Wittgenstein, Emerson and Thoreau, as a commitment to 'being guided by one's experience', to 'let the object or the work of your interest teach you how to consider it', and to 'educate your experience sufficiently so that it is worthy of trust'.[2] By Cavell's own admission, this understanding of philosophy may as well be thought of as 'an overcoming of philosophical theory'.[3]

Given these commitments, it is perhaps unsurprising that Cavell, a confessed cinephile, should become a pioneer among his peers in defending the importance of including films in the philosophical canon. One central reason for that is precisely film's promise to enrich and educate our experience, enhancing our response to human behaviour – on film 'every human posture and gesture, however glancing, has its poetry'[4] – and extending 'our first fascination with objects, with their inner and fixed lives'.[5] In other words, the very aesthetic potentialities of film make it a well-suited candidate to enable the kind of concentrated reflection upon ordinary experience that Cavell's methodology prescribes, but which he thinks philosophy 'has cause sometimes to turn from prematurely, particularly in its forms since its professionalisation, or academisation'.[6] Thus the radical claim that film shows philosophy to be 'the often invisible accompaniment' of ordinary lives.[7]

In what follows I make a case for considering Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949) as an exemplar of film capable of displaying structural features of ordinary experience that are otherwise easy to dismiss, and indeed have been largely dismissed by professional philosophers, at least in the analytical tradition – aspects having to do with the role of human intimacy, social expectations, habitual practices and repetition in creating and sustaining a world. Additionally, I argue that the film reveals the inherent fragility of that achievement, especially when facing the challenges posed by (what Cavell calls) modern skepticism.[8] Finally, I suggest that Ozu's film epitomises the work of mourning that is called for once our dwelling is disrupted. *Late Spring* explores these issues by focusing on the complex transition from a traditional (call it 'Japanese') to a modern (call it 'Westernised') way of relating to the ordinary, emblematised as the domestic and the familiar – or rather the famili*al*, since at its center is a world-defining relationship between a father and a daughter. As it happens with many of Ozu's films, *Late Spring*

employs a number of cinematic techniques in order to familiarise us with the rhythms and the geography of the protagonists' domestic world, as well as with the specific way they 'animate' it – only to make us painfully aware of its collapse when the daughter decides to leave the house.[9] The collapse of that domestic world reverberates through and is amplified by other aspects of its narrative, such as its depiction of the gradual replacement of traditional practices, technologies, and rituals in favour of more 'modern' counterparts. At an even more general level, as its title attests, *Late Spring* is also a meditation on the cyclical character of life, alternatingly framing the protagonists' plight in personal and in cosmic perspectives, thus reminding the viewer of the permanent human task of finding a balance between those stances.

I support these claims in what follows by connecting some fundamental Cavellian (hence, as we will see, Thoreauvian and Wittgensteinian) insights concerning modern skepticism and its threat to the ordinary with Ozu's exploration of the difficulties involving human relatedness and domesticity in *Late Spring.* Accordingly, I start by delineating Cavell's diagnosis of our modern predicament (section II), then I look for expressions of that predicament in representative sequences of Ozu's film (section III). In both cases the notion of mourning plays a central role. I close by establishing one additional parallel between Cavell's and *Late Spring*'s interpretations of the ordinary, focusing on the absence of a wedding ceremony at the end of Ozu's film (section IV).

II.

As intimated above, a central goal of Cavell's work has been to elucidate the dynamics of the relationship between our ordinary, pre-reflexive absorption in the world and its disruption, caused by (what he will call) skepticism. That relationship has presented itself in different guises throughout the history of the West, but Cavell is especially interested in the forms it has taken since modernity – say since the time of Galileo and Descartes – when our pre-reflexive absorption came to look like (at best) a naïve or ungrounded epistemic stance that should be subjected to the Tribunal of Reason, so that the reliability of our inherited opinions and beliefs could be systematically assessed with the aim of achieving *certainty.* It is precisely this obsession with certainty that, according to Cavell, eventually led to the feeling of isolation and loss of contact with external reality that he identifies as characteristic of modernity. The following passage presents that diagnosis concisely:

> In the unbroken tradition of epistemology since Descartes and Locke . . . , the concept of knowledge (of the world) disengages from its connections with matters of information and skill and learning, and becomes fixed to the concept of certainty alone, and in particular to a certainty provided by the (by my) senses. At some early point in epistemological investigations, the world normally present to us (the world in whose existence, as it is

> typically put, we 'believe') is brought into question and vanishes, whereupon all connection with a world is found to hang upon what can be said to be 'present to the senses'; and that turns out, shockingly, not to be the world. It is at this point that the doubter finds himself cast into skepticism, turning the existence of the external world into a problem.[10]

Crucially, for Cavell, the skeptical move leading to the 'problem of the external world' is not to be construed as a kind of intellectual game designed to satisfy purely theoretical demands;[11] rather, it should be seen as a serious (if ultimately misguided) response to real difficulties connected with the loss of 'the world normally present to us.'[12]

The history of how the world's 'presentness' to us became threatened with modernity is, of course, a long and complex one. Were it to be spelled out, it should emphasise a series of interconnected and mutually reinforcing factors such as (but in no way limited to) the following: (a) the Protestant Reformation, and with it (b) the decline in centralised religious authority, which in turn was instrumental for (c) (what Nietzsche called) 'the death of God', as well as for (d) the destitution of the absolute political power of (theocratic) monarchies; concurrently (e) the rise of the new science, and with it (f) mechanistic models of explanation that, when applied to perception, led to (g) the positing of a gap between 'primary' (objective) and 'secondary' (subjective) qualities of the world which, when radicalised, came to look like (h) an abyss separating 'inner' and 'outer'. Top this out with (i) the radical criticism of (West-European) beliefs, practices, and institutions fomented by the Enlightenment and, simultaneously, with (h) 'the age of global exploration,' enabling contact with new cultures, mores, and worldviews, and you are off to a good start. Suffice it to say that changes like these gradually undermined our reliance on any kind of absolute or transcendent values, creating an existential vacuum that we are still striving to fill in one way or another; as Cavell dramatically summarises it, the central issue suggested by this kind of skepticism is 'how to live at all in a groundless world'.[13]

It is precisely this existential motivation of modern skepticism that, according to Cavell, makes it so hard to overcome – notwithstanding the countless attempts at refuting the *arguments* employed by skeptics, starting already with Descartes's. Moreover, blindness to this dimension ends up driving philosophical criticism to inadvertently assume the terms of the problematic view it wants to avoid, ceding the very conception of human experience that grounds the skeptic's self-interpretation. Finally, and more importantly, by disregarding the real concerns underlying skepticism one fails to learn what it has to teach about our finitude – what Cavell sometimes calls the 'fundamental insight', the 'moral' or even the 'truth' of skepticism.[14] Hence the peculiar difficulty faced by someone simultaneously interested in being faithful to skepticism's deep lessons while avoiding its own misguided self-understanding.

This difficulty is vividly brought to the fore in the following passage, in which Cavell tackles Wittgenstein's and Austin's exemplary responses to skepticism:

> ... Wittgenstein's and Austin's return to ordinary or everyday language is, before anything else, a formidable attack on skepticism, epitomised by the difficult thought that it is not quite right to say that we believe the world exists (though certainly we should not conclude that we do not believe this, that we fail to believe its existence), and wrong even to say we know it exists (while of course it is equally wrong to say we fail to know this). And if one convinces oneself of the truth of such observations, it is then at issue, and much harder, to determine *what* it is right to say here, what truly expresses our convictions in our relation to the world. The idea is less to defend our ordinary beliefs than to wean us from expressing our thoughts in ways that do not genuinely satisfy us, to stop forcing ourselves to say things that we cannot fully mean. What the ordinary language philosopher is sensing – but I mean to speak just for myself here – is that our natural relation to the world's existence is – as I sometimes wish to express it – closer, or more intimate, than the ideas of believing and knowing are made to convey.[15]

The central question I want to address in the remainder of this section is precisely how to express our convictions in our ordinary relation to the world while taking to heart the valuable skeptical lessons about our finitude, yet without assuming skeptically infused notions of 'belief', 'knowledge', 'certainty', '(external) world', and so forth.

Besides looking for inspiration in Austin and Wittgenstein to develop such a 'difficult thought', Cavell identifies a congenial response to skepticism in Thoreau's writings, particularly in the idea of 'mourning', understood as 'the path of accepting the loss of the world', accepting it 'as something which exists for us only in its loss'.[16] This means accepting the fact, so crucial to our modern sensibility, that the world's existence is indeed *separate* from our own while avoiding to construe this as an epistemic 'problem' in need of a theoretical 'solution' (a bridge over this gap). Once we realise that every impulse to philosophy has the power to break our original absorption in the world, there is no return to a kind of prelapsarian state; rather, the only way to reconnect with the world will be precisely by accepting that it is always already receding, which implies a willingness for a constant acknowledging of separation, of loss – something that, as Cavell remarks, 'may be the achievement of a lifetime.'[17]

This is indeed a difficult thought, which is also crucial to understand Cavell's engagement with skepticism, so it bears elucidation. As I learned from Tammy Clewell, a useful way to go forward in this connection is to distinguish the Thoreauvian notion of mourning from its Freudian construal,

as presented, e.g., in the essay 'Mourning and Melancholia'.[18] In that work, Freud defines mourning as a painful process of reinvestment of libido going from the original lost object – a loved one, say – to some kind of consoling substitute – a person, a thing, an activity, and so on. As Clewell clarifies, Thoreauvian mourning differs from this Freudian process in that it 'neither seeks to recover what has been lost nor attempts to install a substitute in place of the absence'.[19] By thus avoiding or bypassing the process of libido reinvestment, and confronting the full reality of her loss, the Thoreauvian mourner will engage in a (potentially *endless*) activity of seeking a renewed self-identity that is constantly informed by the *irrecoverable and irreplaceable loss* of the loved object.[20]

An additional step towards understanding the role of mourning in Cavell's assessment of skepticism is to project it onto the social or collective circumstances laid bare by modernity – the 'existential vacuum' I was alluding to earlier, created by the loss of absolute foundations for meaning and value. In Clewell's words, what we have lost is 'a sense of immediacy or necessity governing our social forms of life', showing that 'nothing preordained or essential determines the structures of our society'; she continues:

> In Cavell's account, this knowledge of social contingency cannot be grasped without an experience of self-division and laceration. We must be thrown out, so to speak, of our habitual dwelling places – our selves, traditions, beliefs, and languages – so that they appear not as transcendentally sanctioned and unalterable social forms, but ones of human creation for which we are responsible.[21]

This passage perspicuously conveys what in Cavell's view is skepticism's fundamental contribution towards a better-informed understanding of our condition, namely the discovery of our ultimate ungroundedness, our always imminent *Unheimlichkeit*. Only through that realisation will we be able to acknowledge our own responsibility in enabling and sustaining (not only linguistic but also personal and social) meaning, in making ourselves at home in the world.

However – and here we are back to the 'difficult thought' alluded to above – granted that modern skepticism was largely responsible for laying bare that aspect of our condition, the problem is that the skeptic herself is not fully prepared to take that existential revelation to heart, reacting instead by interpreting 'a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack', that is, transforming it into a 'riddle' in search of a (theoretical) solution.[22] The skeptic thus falls short of acknowledging the loss of the world, and this, as Wittgenstein would put, is more a problem of the *will* than a problem of the *intellect*:[23] what makes it so hard to accept this separateness is not (as the skeptic tends to think) its *epistemic* costs, but rather the *existential* costs of thwarting our deep-seated desire 'to know the world as we imagine God knows it', which is ultimately a desire for absolute *control* over it – 'a yearning at once

unappeasable and unsatisfiable, as for an impossible exclusiveness or completeness'.[24] As Daniele Rugo clarifies, it is precisely this fantasy of 'total penetration' that opposes a (Thoreauvian, Wittgensteinian and Cavellian) acknowledgment of our constant responsibility in establishing meaning.[25] On this view, the skeptical doubt is a displacement of our discovery of separateness, and it is grounded upon a fantasy that is self-defeating, since without (separate) *relata* there would be no *relation* to begin with.[26]

With this idea of doubt as a displacement of the discovery of separateness, my reconstruction of Cavell's diagnosis of modern skepticism is almost finished. For ease of presentation, I summarise its main outcomes as follows: (i) modern skepticism is born not simply from intellectual overzealousness regarding the conditions for attaining knowledge, but from the desire to recover our lost absorption in the world; (ii) but this desire and the fantasy of absolute intimacy that accompanies it are self-defeating, in that there is no (real) relationship without separateness – any (real) relation requires at least two relata; (iii) skeptical disappointment with the world's separateness is, therefore, disappointment with a *real aspect of our condition*; however, (iv) the skeptic tends to 'cover up' that realisation, intellectualising it, transforming it into an epistemic problem (a quest for *certainty*); (v) mourning the loss of that (fantasised) intimacy is, therefore, a necessary step towards a more mature, undisplaced acknowledgment of our finitude, which, in turn, would hopefully lead us to (vi) take fuller responsibility for building and nurturing real relationships, realising that no tradition, no set of social norms, nor any other 'transcendent' factor can enable and sustain meaning and significance as it were *impersonally*, without exposing us to the risks of trying to make ourselves at home in the world.[27]

I want to add one final Cavellian insight to this list before transitioning to *Late Spring*. Consonant with the view just summarised, Cavell has argued on many occasions that modern skepticism is a philosophical interpretation of something that is also known by the arts, and that is exemplarily examined in the forms of comedy, melodrama, and tragedy. For example, in the following passage Cavell defines 'the thing known in melodrama and in tragedy' as, 'roughly':

> the dependence of the human self on society for its definition, but at the same time its transcendence of that definition, its infinite insecurity in maintaining its existence. Which seems to mean, on this description, in determining and maintaining what 'belongs' to it.[28]

In the same vein, but referring specifically to Hollywood comedies and melodramas of the 1930's and 40's, Cavell puts this point by claiming that the best of them are 'working out the problematic of self-reliance and conformity, of hope and despair'.[29] In these instances relations between individual

human beings – particularly between the couples at the center of their narratives – are exemplary of the *possibilities of society*: comedies are concerned with the *acceptance of separateness* that is required to achieve equality between human beings in the form of (re)marriage, while melodramas present us the flip side of this, namely the *failure* (on the man's part, as it happens) *to accept separateness,* thus leading one (a woman, as it happens) to look for an alternative way of expressing individuality and self-reliance, without conforming to society's present expectations. In both cases, Cavell argues, the challenges involved in the institution of marriage serve as emblems of the challenges involving *human relatedness as such* – both to others and to the world. And:

> [if] some image of human intimacy, call it marriage or domestication, is the fictional equivalent of what the philosophers of ordinary language understand as the ordinary[...], then it stands to reason that the threat to the ordinary that philosophy names skepticism should show up in fiction's favorite threats to forms of marriage, namely in forms of melodrama and of tragedy.[30]

With this last Cavellian insight in place – call it (vii) the fictional equivalence between the ordinary and the domestic, on the one hand, and between skepticism and the threat to domesticity, on the other – I hopefully have all the elements I need to put forward a reading of *Late Spring* as a study in mourning the loss of the ordinary in the face of skepticism.

III.

Cavell once claimed that 'any relationship of absorbing importance will form a world'.[31] The flipside is that profound *changes* in any relationship of absorbing importance will destroy a world. Referring to Ozu's filmography, Tyler Parks notes 'the importance of the observation and evocation of change in the director's work':

> Change [in Ozu's work] may be understood in this regard as personal, social, or cosmic: as a transformation that characters and their relationships undergo, as the giving way of traditional norms and adoption of new modes of living, or as an ephemerality that characterises all existence, human or otherwise.[32]

As with many of Ozu's films, *Late Spring* is obsessed with human relationships and domesticity – hence, in Cavell's sense, with the ordinary. As with the comedies and melodramas that Cavell singles out for analysis in his work, *Late Spring* examines the ordinary by focusing on one concrete, emblematic human relationship, exploring the trials and changes it has to face in order to allow the individuals involved in it to continue in their pursuit

of happiness.[33] The change that is most ostensible in *Late Spring* affects the domestic world created by the 'relationship of absorbing importance' between a widowed father, Shukichi Somiya (Chishu Ryu), and his single, 27-year-old daughter Noriko (Setsuko Hara). For Noriko in particular, this change is experienced as a somewhat belated transition from the world of childhood to the world of adulthood, symbolised by marriage; for Somiya, the change is from a shared, familial world of mutual dependence to one of separateness and solitude at his old age. At a more general level, however (and in syntony with Parks' suggestion above), the film is also preoccupied with the destruction of a whole 'mode of living' that, for lack of a better shorthand, I will keep calling 'Japanese' (in contrast to 'Westernised').

I support these claims below by describing a series of representative sequences from *Late Spring* in which the connections between the protagonist's personal plight and the broader changes occurring in their world are especially tangible. Space limitations require selectivity and conciseness, yet I hope the cumulative effect of these descriptions will suffice to lay bare the film's underlying concern with a multi-layered destruction of modes of living, and with the work of mourning that is called for by the losses it effects.[34]

(i) Noriko's introduction

After a couple of opening shots establishing the setting for most of the film – a sign in the train station identifies the city of Kamakura, in Japan – we are introduced to the first of our two protagonists, Noriko, as she joins a group of older women inside a house.[35] The entire mise-en-scène of this sequence, starting with the room's layout and decoration, provides plenty of visual hints intimating that the women are preparing for a traditional Japanese tea ceremony: their gestures are, for the most part, studied, ritualised and solemn; they are all dressed in kimonos, sitting on tatami mats in the mandatory *seiza* position, around what I assume is a *Furo*.[36] But a couple of small details seem out of place. The first is the purse that Noriko brings as she enters the room; soon after greeting the women she becomes self-conscious, as if sensing that such a modern item does not fit the traditional setting. Interestingly, however, no one else seems to care, or even to register the fact. Furthermore, as Noriko sits next to her aunt Misa (Haruko Sugimura) they immediately engage in lively conversation, thus defeating our initial impression of the occasion's solemnity. These, as we will see, are only the first of many subtle indications in this film of *a world in transition*, in which traditions and practices are being gradually undermined, becoming more nostalgic or evocative than fully alive.[37] Additionally, the sequence also starts establishing Noriko's character itself as ambiguous or transitional, something that will be reinforced throughout the movie (at one point, for example, her aunt will describe her as 'old fashioned for someone her age'), thus allowing her to emblematise the growing split between the old Japanese customs and the new, westernised ones.

Noriko's introduction 1

Noriko's introduction 2

Noriko's introduction 3

(ii) Somiya's introduction

The next sequence continues on this note. In it, we are introduced to our second protagonist, Noriko's father, Professor Somiya. We see him at home, sitting next to his assistant Hattori (Jun Usami), as both are working on some kind of scholarly paper. Again, what is striking about this sequence are the small incongruences: both characters are sitting on a tatami, inside a traditional Japanese house, surrounded by Japanese furniture (in particular, the *chabudai,* or short-legged table they use to work), but while Somiya is wearing a kimono Hattori wears a (Western-style) suit. Furthermore, the topic of their research comes clearly from a Western academic context – they are writing about the German-American economist Friedrich List, about whom Somya seems to know a great deal (for example, that he should not be confused with Franz Liszt, the Hungarian composer). This short sequence, therefore, not only gives us a clear indication of Somiya's familiarity with Western culture but also contributes to sediment the impression of its entrenchment in Japanese society.[38]

Somiya's introduction

(iii) Aya's introduction

Another important character, in addition to the two protagonists, is Noriko's friend Aya (Yumeji Tsukioka). More than anyone else in the film, Aya embodies the nascent, westernised way of life. This is directly displayed by her way of dressing and behaving, and especially by her status as a young divorcee (a very recent possibility in Japan, introduced by the new Constitution of 1948).[39] The first time we see her is when she visits Noriko at the Somiya house. Ozu here is again magistral in providing all sort of visual clues underscoring the differences between Aya's 'modernity' and Somiya's 'Japaneseness', with Noriko characteristically falling somewhere in between the two. As Aya arrives she learns from Somiya that Noriko will be home soon; Somiya then invites her to sit down with him (on tatami mats, as it happens); upon Noriko's return, having spent no more than a couple of minutes sitting on the tatami, Aya gets up complaining that her legs 'fell asleep' – a first, not so subtle indication of her unfamiliarity with 'old' Japanese customs. The two women then move to a room upstairs which we will soon learn to identify as Noriko's favourite refuge. Contrasting with the lower, 'Japanese' floor, the furniture upstairs is more modern and westernised. They sit on chairs around a coffee table to have tea. As if to reinforce the message conveyed by this moment, it is Somiya (the representative of traditional Japan in this context) who brings them tea, but he forgets the sugar and the teaspoons, causing the two to giggle, implicitly making fun of his 'backwardness'. Moreover, their

Aya's introduction 1

Aya's introduction 2

Aya's introduction 3

Aya's introduction 4

ensuing conversation (the main topic of which is marriage and divorce) employs many metaphors coming from Baseball, a Westernised sport that was becoming increasingly popular in Japan at that time. (This message is again reinforced by the sequence that immediately follows their conversation, in which we see children – the new Japan – playing Baseball.)

(iv) Noriko and Somiya's domestic world

Throughout the first half of the film, we follow Noriko and Somiya in several daily routines and intimate family moments, especially inside their house. These moments gradually settle our impression of Noriko's resourcefulness, her joy in feeling helpful, as well as Somiya's dependence on her – Noriko is in charge of preparing and serving dinner, making tea, organising the house, and so on. Andrew Klevan offers a sharp description of the dynamics of these interactions:

> Noriko's movements around the house show the freedom she creates for herself while living with her father. Although she appears to be trapped in a form of servitude – tidying up after him, hanging up his clothes making the dinner – she is also 'running rings' around him.[40]

Getting acquainted with these family routines makes us realise the full extent to which this 'relationship of absorbing importance' (to go back to Cavell's phrase) has been successful in establishing a shared domestic world. This realisation, in turn, will be crucial for helping us understand the full extent of the *changes* affecting this arrangement during the second half of the film.

Noriko and Somiya's domestic world 1

Noriko and Somiya's domestic world 2

Noriko and Somiya's domestic world 3

(v) The Noh play

Said changes begin to emerge more clearly during a pivotal sequence in which Somiya and Noriko attend a traditional Noh play. The play itself is characterised by very precise, ritualised movements that are used by the actors to express deep emotions with minimal expressive behaviour (a description that, incidentally, is also apt for the performances in *Late Spring*).[41] Given the traditional setting, our expectation is that the protagonists will assume a respectful attitude, directing their full attention to the play. Although that expectation is initially met, we soon detect some disturbances (similarly to what happened in sequences [i] and [ii]). In this case, they are triggered by the presence of another character, the widowed Mrs. Miwa (Kuniko Miyake), about whom Noriko knows at this point that she is a suitor to (re)marry Somiya.[42] Again, the interactions among these three characters are minimal in terms of overt expression, but they are able to convey intense (if deeply buried) emotion. Case in point, a subtle lowering of the head by Noriko upon acknowledging Mrs. Miwa's presence is sufficient to convey profound sadness and dissatisfaction at the prospect of her father's remarriage. (We were also prepared for this by a previous comment made by Noriko to Professor Onodera [Masao Mishima], her father's friend, to the effect that she found his remarriage to be 'distasteful,' 'indecent' and even 'filthy'.) This is a pivotal moment because it marks the beginning of Noriko's realisation of her father's separateness and with it the fact that he may have desires of his own, im-

The Noh play 1

plying that his pursuit of happiness may not be essentially attached to hers. Moreover, by the end of this sequence, Ozu has once again managed to simultaneously incite and undercut or destabilise our conventional expectations concerning the behaviour of the main characters in this traditional setting. This reinforces the message that some traditional practices are slowly being emptied of their original force and purpose, at the verge of becoming *mere* ritualised repetitions – or perhaps forms of *mourning* a world already felt as lost.

The Noh play 2

The Noh play 3

The Noh play 4

The Noh play 5

(vi) The collapse of Noriko and Somiya's domestic world

The changes in Noriko's behaviour evolve quickly after the last sequence: her initial playfulness around the house recedes and is replaced by a degree of stiffness; in the same vein, the general ease and fluidity of her interactions with Somiya now subside, and a more distanced relationship takes place. These changes, I would argue, mark the transition from Noriko's belated childhood or adolescence to adulthood and independence, which calls for a work of mourning her lost self, as well as the domestic world previously shared with her father. As a result, the prospect of her own marriage, which was repeatedly encouraged by Somiya and more or less dismissed by Noriko up to now, finally becomes a serious possibility in her mind. (This will be made explicit later, when she visits Aya and shares some information about her suitor, Satake, implying that she does not find him unattractive.) Concurrently with Noriko's change, Ozu starts framing Somiya alone in the family house and providing lingering shots of empty rooms and corridors, thus inviting the viewer to share the father's emerging feeling of emptiness now that the prospect of Noriko leaving the house becomes a real possibility.

(vii) The trip to Kyoto

The work of mourning already in course gradually leads Noriko to admit the possibility of pursuing a renewed, more mature identity. This change in her outlook is perhaps the reason why Noriko and Somiya decide to go together on a trip to Kyoto, where they will be able to enjoy their familial intimacy one last time in a sort of farewell celebration – an important additional step towards mourning their separation and the loss of their shared world. The location chosen for this sequence is significant: as the former capital of Japan, Kyoto – with its old temples, monuments, and rock gardens – stands for a traditional Japanese way of life that is also being lost, as Ozu kept reminding us throughout the film; therefore the whole sequence can be interpreted as a farewell to that world, thus sedimenting the cinematic work of mourning intimated in previous sequences. Noriko's maturation is here underscored by, among other factors, her avowed change of mind regarding Professor Onodera's remarriage: her regret in having previously expressed disgust towards it shows that she is finally open to accepting human separateness, as well as the fact that, for adult human beings, the pursuit of happiness is an ongoing process that may take a lifetime, and that will inevitably involve coping with loss. This point is also stressed in one important exchange between the two protagonists, at the end of their last day together. Prompted by Somiya's remark that it was a pleasurable day but that from now it would be her new husband, Satake, who would be responsible to 'go places' with her, Noriko momentarily relapses into her earlier, more childish self, and replies:

> I . . . want us to stay as we are. I don't want to go anywhere. Being with you is enough for me. I'm happy as I am. Even marriage

The trip to Kyoto 1

The trip to Kyoto 2

The trip to Kyoto 3

> couldn't make me happier. . . . You marry if you want to Father. I just want to be by your side. I'm so fond of you. Being with you like this is my greatest happiness. Please Father, why can't we stay just as we are? I know marriage won't make me any happier.

To which Somiya retorts:

> That's not true. You'll see. I'm 56 years old. My life is nearing its end. But your life as a couple is just beginning. You're starting a new life, one that you and Satake must build together. One in which I play no part. That's the order of human life and history. Marriage may not mean happiness from the start. To expect such immediate happiness is a mistake. Happiness isn't something you wait around for. It's something you create yourself.[...] Happiness lies in the forging of a new life shared together. It may take a year or two. Maybe even five or ten. Happiness comes only through effort.

Moved by her father's speech Noriko apologises 'for being so selfish', thus triggering a crucial development in her path towards adulthood, which culminates in her finally acquiescing – this time wholeheartedly – to marry Satake.

(viii) Noriko's departure

The farewell will be carried out to its conclusion in the next short sequence, which takes place back at the family home in Kamakura, just before the wedding ceremony. We see Noriko in her room (now cleared of furniture), beautifully dressed in a traditional Japanese wedding kimono, and holding an ambiguous smile that seems to convey genuine contentment while also trying to hide some (understandable) sadness at the prospect of leaving her old home for good. Before heading to the wedding Noriko bows to her father and expresses her gratitude for his 'loving care these many years'. Somiya smiles and urges her to 'be happy and be a good wife.' This is the last time we see them together.

Noriko's departure 1

Noriko's departure 2

(ix) An epilogue: Somiya's solitude, and the cycles of life

After the wedding (which, true to Ozu's propensity for ellipses, happens off-screen) we meet Somiya and Aya having drinks and chatting at a bar. Visibly concerned, Aya asks whether Somiya will be well living alone. 'I'll soon get used to it,' he replies. Prompted by Aya's remark to the effect that Noriko was upset about his remarriage, Somiya confesses that he had never really intended to remarry and that he had said so just to persuade Noriko to leave. Aya, moved by Somiya's sacrifice, promises to visit him often. Ozu then cuts to Somiya's entering his house and sitting on a chair that used to be upstairs, and which we associate with Noriko. As Klevan has remarked, this simple act of using one of Noriko's chairs 'both recalls her absence and conveys an unfamiliar position for [Somiya]', thus emphasising the challenge of learning how to make himself at home anew, without Noriko's help.[43] The hardness of this challenge is underscored by what has to be one of the most extraordinary uses of an ordinary scene in the history of film: Ozu gives us a series of close-ups of Somiya as he carefully peels an apple, trying – but ultimately failing – to keep the peel in one piece; then, echoing Noriko's subtle yet expressive lowering of the head at the Noh play (sequence v), Somiya lowers his own head in what reads and feels like a moment of realisation, followed by profound sadness and resignation. Again, Klevan offers a fine analysis of this moment, claiming that 'the film does not cut to the peel falling onto the floor because it wishes to maintain the integrity of something lost from the frame

An epilogue 1

An epilogue 2

An epilogue 3

An epilogue 4

and now unrecoverable'.[44] We then cut to the final shot of the film, in which we see the ocean waves crashing on the beach, suggesting a sort of cosmic indifference towards the human plight as well as reminding us of the cyclic character of life. The message is clear: as waves in the ocean, separation, and loss will keep recurring as long as there is human life, and so will the need for mourning and starting anew.

IV.

I hope the preceding analysis was sufficient to indicate *Late Spring*'s pervasive concern with the conditions and difficulties involved in the task of making oneself at home in the world, especially when faced with the ascendancy of a modern outlook. The film conveys that concern through a series of nested cinematic disclosures whose cumulative effect is, as I suggested, congenial to Cavell's understanding of our condition under the threat of (modern) skepticism. As he puts in the passage used as the epigraph to this essay, '[t]he everyday is what we cannot but aspire to, since it appears to us as lost to us'.[45] In other words, for finite human beings, the everyday is always an *ideal*, something towards which we must strive *continuously*, while continuously *mourning its loss*. As I also suggested, *Late Spring* takes up these issues in a way that is reminiscent of Cavell's favourite Hollywood comedies and melodramas, namely by focusing on the challenges affecting one emblematic human relationship. As I bring this essay to a close I would like to present one further outcome of this parallel, having to do with Ozu's choice not to show Noriko's wedding ceremony.

At the end of the following passage, which contrasts film's reinstatement of the myth of marriage with classical comedy, Cavell introduces an intriguing speculation which I think will be helpful in this connection:

> In classical comedy the stage at the end is littered with marriages, tangled pairs have at last been sorted out, age accepts its place, youth takes its own, and families are present to celebrate the continuance of their order. *At some point, perhaps when the world went to war, society stopped believing in its ability to provide that continuity.*[46]

As indicated above, *Late Spring* takes place during the immediate aftermath of World War II, and this ambivalence towards society's ability to provide continuity seems to be precisely the feeling permeating the film.[47] This, I would argue, is also what motivates the film's ambivalence towards the changes it is documenting, particularly (but in no way exclusively) changes affecting the institution of marriage. This point was made with characteristic acuity by Klevan:

> Refusing to polarise situations and characters, the film's point of view in relation to marriage is not orientated to one perspective

> or balanced between competing opinions, but rather suspended. The film's view-point rarely hardens into an adamant position: it's understanding of marriage gently vacillates, not because the film itself is confused, but rather because it is clear about the confusions and apprehensions which accompany life's changes.[48]

In later writings, Cavell went on to explore the speculation I presented above in much more detail. He did that in part by defining the genre of 'remarriage comedies' in contrast to (and as an inheritor of the preoccupations of) Shakespearean romantic comedy. One specific feature of that contrast is particularly relevant in this connection: while Shakespearean comedy shows a young pair 'overcoming individual and social obstacles to their happiness', and concludes with a wedding ceremony, the main drive of the plot of remarriage comedies 'is not to get the central pair together, but to get them *back* together, together *again*';[49] as Cavell later puts it:

> I have accounted for this compromise or subversion by saying variously that this comedy expects the pair to find happiness alone, unsponsored, in one another, out of their capacities for improvising a world, beyond ceremony. Now I add that this is not to be understood exactly or merely as something true of modem society but as something true about the conversation of marriage that modem society comes to lay bare. The courage, the powers, required for happiness are not something a festival can reward, or perhaps so much as recognise, any longer. Or rather, whatever festival and ceremony can do has already been done. And wasn't this always true?[50]

If we keep in mind the correlation between ordinary/marriage and skepticism/divorce established at the end of section II (item vii on that list), this passage will acquire a new valence: it suggests not only that remarriage comedies have laid bare something that has always been true about marriage – namely that nothing external to the pair's own powers can ensure its success and persistence – but also, and more importantly, that modern skepticism has laid bare something that has always been true about our condition – namely that nothing external to our own powers (poor things) can ensure the success and persistence of our connection with the world and others in it. This, it seems to me, is another way of expressing what Cavell thinks is 'the truth in skepticism'. And I want to suggest, in closing, that *Late Spring*'s ambivalence towards marriage, and particularly its choice not to show a wedding ceremony, can be understood as Ozu's own acknowledgment of this truth about human relatedness and about human dwelling.

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NOTES

[1]Cavell 1981, 9.

[2]Cavell 1981, 10, 12.

[3]Cavell 1981, 10.

[4]Cavell 1984, 14.

[5]Cavell 1971, 43.

[6]Cavell 2004, 6.

[7]Cavell 2004, 6.

[8]Heidegger, an implicit presence in what follows, would call this our 'modern understanding of being' – see especially the essays 'The question concerning technology' and 'The age of the world picture' in Heidegger 1997.

[9]Such as the signature low or 'tatami' shots, mostly stationary camera, sustained focus on interiors, slow pace and, crucially, repetition.

[10]Cavell 1987, 94.

[11]Although this is what skepticism has been reduced to, especially in the analytic epistemological tradition. I took up this issue in Techio 2016.

[12]See Cavell 1987, 94-95.

[13]Cavell 1987, 3.

[14]See, e.g., Cavell 1976, 258, and Cavell 1979, 241 and 448.

[15]Cavell 1984, 192-193.

[16]Cavell 1988, 172.

[17]Cavell 1988, 172.

[18]Clewell 2004, Freud 1917.

[19]Clewell 2004, 77.

[20]Lear 2017 presents a congenial account of the work of mourning. To my mind, one of the best cinematic expressions of this process is offered by *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959).

[21]Clewell 2004, 77.

[22]Cavell 1987, 11, 138.

[23]See, e.g., Wittgenstein 1984, 17.

[24]Cavell 1979, 236, 452.

[25]See Rugo 2016, 26.

[26]See Rugo 2016, 27-28.

[27]I explore this last topic in more detail in Techio 2020.

[28]Cavell 1988, 174.

[29]See Cavell 1996, 9.

[30]Cavell 1988, 176.

[31]Cavell 1976, 118.

[32]Parks 2016, 284.

[33]As William Rothman has argued in an essay to which I am much in debt, *Late Spring* shares with remarriage comedies an interest in the 'pursuit of happiness', particularly as it is shown to require 'embracing change, letting go of one's old self in order for a new self to be born'. Rothman 2006, 34.

[34]On this connection, compare again Jonathan Lear 2018, 1207 fn 1: 'For, we are creatures who do not simply move through a series of stages – infancy, youth, adolescence, and adulthood. At each stage, what it is to move on consists in *bidding adieu* to earlier modes of relating to parents and loved ones, and we maintain these earlier forms, perhaps somewhat transformed, in memories, emotions, *and styles of being*.' My emphasis.

[35]I wish I could say more about what Burch 1979 famously called Ozu's 'pillow-shots', namely shots of still lives, landscapes, and empty spaces commonly used by him to mark a transition between sequences. Suffice it to say that I concur with Parks evaluation that their role in *Late Spring* is 'to fill the film with a sense of the degree to which life exceeds the narrowly human horizons in which it appears to us in our everyday lives' (Parks 2016, 300-301). It is worth noting that *Late Spring* begins and ends with such shots (more on the closing pillow-shot below, sequence ix), which is another indication that the film wants us to consider the lives at its center both from a human and from

a cosmic perspective.

[36]A portable brazier used to heat the water kettle to make tea.

[37]It might be useful to recall that the film takes place in 1949, hence during US occupation and only one year after the promulgation of Japan's new Constitution, which introduces deep political and social changes.

[38]This impression is reinforced throughout the movie by, among other things, advertisement of American products, two prominent examples being a large 'Time-Life' sign seen in Tokyo and the 'Drink Coca-Cola' sign seen during Noriko and Hattori's bicycle ride.

[39]This initial impression will be reinforced by two later sequences in which we see the Westernised architecture and decoration of Aya's house – including a fireplace, sofas, upholstered chairs, Western paintings, magazines in English, and so on.

[40]Klevan 2000, 142.

[41]As Klevan has argued, *Late Spring*'s 'undramatic style [...] is ideal for rendering a reticent form of family interaction' in which deep emotions are, for the most part, left unexpressed, or at the very least *under*expressed (Klevan 2000, 135).

[42]This information was revealed by aunt Masa during an earlier exchange, leaving Noriko quite upset.

[43]Klevan 2000, 146.

[44]Klevan 2000, 159.

[45]Cavell 1988, 171.

[46]Cavell 1971, 79; my emphasis.

[47]See note 37.

[48]Klevan 2000, 136.

[49]Cavell 1981, 1, 2.

[50]Cavell 1981, 239.

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