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Abstract Title:
Stanley Cavell's Modernism: Is "Us" Me?

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I explore the "us" problem of aesthetics via J. M. Bernstein's (2006) extraordinarily lucid critique of Cavell's account of modernism. There are three aspects of Cavell's modernism to which Bernstein objects:

1) its emphasis on "presentness;" 2) its "virtual identity" of philosophy and art, and 3) its autobiographical discursiveness. These three objections come together in Bernstein's distrust of the literariness of Cavell's writing. My claim is that the relation of Cavell's "truth of skepticism" to his aesthetics will remain misunderstood until the necessity of Cavell's literariness is seen. What is missing from Bernstein's interpretation of Cavell's modernism is a recognition of the necessity of what Wittgenstein called "perspicuous presentation [Darstellung]." Perspicuous presentation is the "truth of skepticism" put to work.

I conclude with an instance of perspicuous presentation in Cavell's writing of the early 80s. In criticizing Paul De Man's reading of the 70s sit-com *All in the Family*, Cavell depends on his reader's recognizing the same literary quality in Cavell's prose that Cavell earlier recognized in Beckett's: its hidden literality. To see Cavell's literalization of the meaning of De Man's and Archie Bunker's rhetorical question is to see Cavell's meaning as the reader's own. Either readers discover this "us" on-going, already embodied in their own reading practice, or like Bernstein, they experience the literariness of Cavell's writing as fraudulent.