

Doing philosophy as opening parentheses: quantifying the use of parentheses in Stanley Cavell's style.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to say something significant about Stanley Cavell's style. To accomplish this task, we adopt a distant reading approach, quantifying what seems to be an idiosyncratic use of parentheses. After outlining our methodological approach and the choices of texts from Cavell's corpus, we will present the results of our quantitative analysis. Two kinds of results will be presented and interpreted: the result of a comparison between Cavell and other authors (i.e. why Cavell's use of parentheses is exceptional) and the result of a quantitative analysis of Cavell's texts (i.e. how Cavell uses parentheses throughout his books). For both results, we will provide our own interpretation. In the conclusion, we will draw the moral of this parenthetical story, hoping to open future parentheses.

Keywords: Stanley Cavell; Distant Reading; Style; Metaphilosophy

In this and any context, Cavell stood out as a voice of reason. The Claim of Reason (1979) was based on his dissertation, The Claim to Rationality: Knowledge and the Basis of Morality (1961).

I remember reading the dissertation—a copy was on deposit at Widener Library—and coming upon a penciled comment in the margin pointing to an open parenthesis and saying there was no close. But Cavell was no Charles Olson (who used unclosed parentheses in his work)—someone else had marked, on the next page—here it is. I love the compound complexity of Cavell's sentences, and how a paragraph would not just say but think, where thinking is a process not a result of a deduction. This is the difference between the rationality of Quine and the reason of Cavell. Cavell's work is a series of long parentheticals, extenuations, revisions, recognitions, second and third thoughts.

Charles Bernstein

(Thinking does not start from scratch; it, as it were, sides against and with the self there is, and so constitutes it. The question is, What must that be in order to be sided, to be capable of asides, to require parentheses?)

Stanley Cavell

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1 Introduction

We decide to begin with a platitude: whatever philosophy is, it is *also* some kind of literature, and one can legitimately study some literary aspects of the philosophers’ style — like their use of lexicon or syntax, footnotes or parentheses. In the field of literary studies, it is a common practice to use quantitative methods in order to study the stylistic aspects of the authors under examination. And in both fields — philosophy and literature — what is initially considered a misplaced effort can become illuminating thanks to the results achieved and to their interpretations. This paper will provide two major sections of results, together with our own interpretation of them; going through these sections, one could see for oneself if our efforts were rewarding or misplaced. What is more, the upshot of a quantitative approach (which, under the influence of Franco Moretti, we label as *distant reading*¹) is that a great part of the effort is sustained by the calculations performed by computers. However, this fact does not assure that the results will ultimately be interesting, because an interpretative effort must always be done to let the data speak interestingly.

At this point, someone might still ask us: why study Cavell’s style? Why use a distant reading approach? We answer these two questions in the following way. First, we choose Cavell because he is one of the philosophers who are aware of their own style (and thereby tried to forge an idiosyncratic style, which is easier and more significant to recognize and to study). Cavell talks about style often and in different places. Just to give a few examples: in *Must We Mean What We Say?* he writes that a stylistic habit of his are “dots of suspension ... dashes before the sentences ... and parentheses” — and the use of parentheses, according to Cavell, is due to the “visual clarity” they possess; in the opening page of *The Claim of Reason* he writes that “Wittgenstein’s style is internal to what it teaches” — letting the reader guess how much that judgment is true of Cavell himself; in *Little Did I Know*, his autobiography, he admits to himself that “I have found that there is no more choice over the way one writes than over what makes one happy” — and, as the story of one’s life can testify, one does not find immediately what makes one happy; one has therefore to search for it, reflecting on what could be best and trying out different experiments (accommodating many compromises, both avoidable and unavoidable).

Second, we choose a distant reading approach because it is able to measure the most evident stylistic recurrences of a certain corpus. In Cavell, the use of parentheses is immediately striking, but it can be even more striking if one interrogates his text quantitatively, measuring exactly how many parentheses are used, and how. Thus distant reading seems like an adequate candidate for

¹Of course, we have in mind the approach outlined by Franco Moretti in *Distant Reading* (2013), which is an approach that can also be adopted without the help of the computer. Moretti was our primary source of inspiration, therefore we will use the label “distant reading”. Nevertheless, we have in mind various types of similar approaches that fall within the wider label of “digital humanities” and, generally speaking, quantitative methods in humanities. Here you find a list of people who have already done such works in the history of philosophy and in the history of ideas: Betti and van den Berg (2014), Betti and van den Berg (2016), Betti, van den Berg, et al. (2019), Bolla et al. (2020), Bonino and Tripodi (2019), Bonino, Maffezoli, and Tripodi (2020), Malaterre, Chartier, and Pulizzotto (2019), Petrovich (2018), and Petrovich and Buonomo (2018). In this context, it is worth reminding that both stylistics and digital humanities have long histories. For instance, in 1940s, Josephine Miles was counting adjectives in Romantic poets, and people like Robert Cluett were already computing sentence lengths and punctuation marks in Hemingway and other modern writers in the 1980s and 1990s. A key early text is also Burrows’s *Computation into criticism* (1987). Stylistics is also known as ‘authorship attribution’ in some contexts; this also has a long history overlapping with corpus and forensic linguistics. In the 1990s and 2000s stylistics was famously critiqued by authors like Stanley Fish. We hope that our interpretations and data allow the present paper to disprove Fish’s and others scepticism about these methods. We thank an anonymous reviewer for making us more aware of the richness of this history and of its various critics.

making sense, not just contextually, but globally, of an author’s use of certain stylistic devices. We speak of a more global or comprehensive view because distant reading — as is well known among those who practice it — is very often able to make up for a job that would be very difficult to do *manually* (e.g. counting thoroughly the number of words in every parenthesis of every single text in a corpus), and which is often conducted *intuitively* (“I see that there are many words in parentheses in these pages; parentheses *must* occur quite often in the whole corpus”). What is more, thanks to distant reading we are able to transform into space what — with just a close reading — we would experience in terms of time. (A methodological feature that shows not only the potential but also the limitations of this approach.) In *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cavell writes that “what makes a statement or a question profound is not its placing, but its timing”. By not taking into account the lived and temporal aspect of reading, and focusing only on its quantification and spatialization, distant reading is unable to aim at the kind of depth that Cavell has in mind. However, we believe that it can still offer us comprehensiveness and visual clarity — through the help of graphs, charts and tables.

But let us go back from speculations to impressions. An impression one gets when reading Cavell, even at a very first reading, is that there are a lot of parentheses. What happens when one tries to verify this fact? Is Cavell’s use really so great? Or is it just an impression? These were our guiding questions. And certainly we would not have gone very far (always in terms of *visual clarity*, mind you: there are excellent speculations on Cavell’s use of parentheses, among others Mahon (2014) and Jackson (2015)²) without a methodology like the distant reading.

2 Materials and methods

To highlight the exceptionality of Cavell’s use of parentheses, we chose a comparative approach: we defined some measures (Section 2.3) to describe the quantity (length, number) and the quality (semantics) of the content of the parentheses; then we applied these measures on Cavell’s books and on the books of other authors from the twentieth century analytic philosophy (a tradition Cavell wanted *to provoke* but never *to leave*; he rather wanted to make analytic philosophers hear his dissident voice) (Section 2.1).

To perform machine-driven analysis on the books, we needed to digitalize, process (OCR-based text acquisition) and review the chosen books (Section 2.2).

²We can provide here a minimal bibliography of the studies that address, more or less directly, the question of style in the philosophy of Stanley Cavell. One of the them is certainly that of Timothy Gould: *Hearing things : voice and method in the writing of Stanley Cavell* (1998). Gould prefers to refer to the concepts of “voice” and “method”, but he is well aware that “style” represents a central question in Cavellian philosophy. And Peter De Bolla is well aware of that fact too when he decides to dedicate a study to a concept related to “style”, namely “tone”. See his “The Tone of Praise” (2020). One of the more direct studies of the style in Cavell is then to be found in Aine Mahon. Indeed, in her book *The ironist and the romantic : reading Richard Rorty and Stanley Cavell* (2015), Mahon devotes an entire chapter to a description of their philosophical styles (and the chapter is aptly titled *Stylists of the Philosophical*). Furthermore, it remains of interest the list provided by Michael Fischer in *Stanley Cavell and literary skepticism* (1989) of Cavell’s detractors - who, criticizing his style, nevertheless underlined its centrality for a critical analysis of Cavellian philosophy. Many of the authors cited by Fischer refer to parentheses as one of the weapons of the much-criticized Cavellian “self-indulgence”. For a detailed answer to these criticisms of Cavell’s style as “self-indulgent” see Stephen Mulhall “On Refusing to Begin” (2005). More recently, we can also refer to a forthcoming paper by one of the authors: “Lingering: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and the Problem of Style” (forthcoming).

2.1 The construction of the corpus

Out of the 18 books published by Cavell, we chose to include only 15 in our paper. The three remaining books (*Disowning Knowledge*, *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes*, *Cavell on Film*) were excluded because the majority of each text is comprised of works already published in the other books. Then, we included only three chapters of *Philosophical Passages*, those written by Cavell (and not the ones written by other authors or the interviews with Cavell). For three books (*The World Viewed*, *The Senses of Walden*, *The Claim of Reason*) we considered both the whole book at once and the parts of the books published in different editions. For *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden*, the publication of the second edition of both books brought with it new appendices, which we took into account also separately from the original books. For *The Claim of Reason* there are accounts made by Cavell himself in his autobiography that the fourth part (occupying the 45 percent of the whole book) was written after the years 1975-1976; therefore, we considered this part separately from the first three parts (which were written between 1955 and 1971). The list of books is to be found in Table 2.1. We chose to consider only the books written by Cavell and not his short essays because the majority of them were included, and even revised, in his books. In a further work, it would be possible to compare, with the very same measures defined here, the style of the essays as published in journals and as chapters in books.

	Title	First and enlarged editions	Used edition
	<i>Must We Mean What We Say?</i>	1969	1976
	<i>The World Viewed</i>	1971, 1979	1979
	<i>The Claim of Reason</i>	1979	1999
	<i>The Senses of Walden</i>	1972, 1981	1992
	<i>Pursuits of Happiness</i>	1981	1981
	<i>Themes out of School</i>	1984	1988
	<i>In Quest of the Ordinary</i>	1988	1988
	<i>This New Yet Unapproachable America</i>	1989	2013
	<i>Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome</i>	1990	1990
	<i>A Pitch of Philosophy</i>	1994	1994
	<i>Philosophical Passages</i>	1995	1995
	<i>Contesting Tears</i>	1996	1997
	<i>Cities of Words</i>	2004	2005
	<i>Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow</i>	2005	2005
	<i>Little Did I Know</i>	2010	2010

Table 2.1: List of Cavell’s books considered in our analysis.

Then, we defined three control groups to compare to Cavell: two authors which were important in his formation (which we can label as ‘masters’), nine authors who can be considered, alongside Cavell, as anti-theoretical moral philosophers and 12 other analytical authors from the second half of the twentieth century.

For the first group, we selected Wittgenstein and Austin, who, in the Foreword to *The Claim of Reason* are presented as philosophers “who opened a path” that Cavell himself is trying to follow. For the second group, we selected Anscombe, Baier, Diamond, Foot, MacIntyre, McDowell, Murdoch, Williams and Winch. These are the philosophers Cavell cites in the Foreword to *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, because he thinks they share with him an anti-theoretical spirit in

moral philosophy; therefore, they are thought of by Cavell as being in line with the perfectionist route for philosophical writing that he sketches in that book. Finally, the third group is composed by 12 analytical authors who happen to be the most cited in five representative philosophy journals (The Philosophical Review, Noûs, The Journal of Philosophy, Mind and Philosophy and Phenomenological Research) in the period from 1985 to 2015 (Petrovich and Buonomo 2018).

Then, for each of the three groups of authors, we selected the most cited book (or paper if there are not any books available) on Google Scholar³. These texts are listed in Table 2.2⁴.

Author	Title	Category
Cavell	<i>The Claim of Reason</i>	Cavell
Austin	<i>How to do things with words</i>	Master
Wittgenstein	<i>Philosophical Investigations</i>	Master
Burge	<i>Origins of objectivity</i>	Most cited
Davidson	<i>Essays on Actions and Events</i>	Most cited
Dummett	<i>Frege</i>	Most cited
Fodor	<i>The Modularity of Mind</i>	Most cited
Frege	“Sense and Reference”	Most cited
Kripke	<i>Naming and necessity</i>	Most cited
Lewis	<i>Convention</i>	Most cited
Putnam	<i>Reason, Truth and History</i>	Most cited
Quine	<i>Word and Object</i>	Most cited
Russell	<i>A History of Western Philosophy</i>	Most cited
Williamson	<i>Knowledge and Its Limits</i>	Most cited
Wright	<i>Truth and objectivity</i>	Most cited
Anscombe	<i>Intention</i>	Anti-teoretical
Baier	<i>A progress of sentiments : reflections on Hume’s Treatise</i>	Anti-teoretical
Diamond	<i>The Realistic Spirit</i>	Anti-teoretical
Foot	<i>Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy</i>	Anti-teoretical
MacIntyre	<i>After Virtue</i>	Anti-teoretical
McDowell	<i>Mind and World</i>	Anti-teoretical
Murdoch	<i>The Sovereignty of Good</i>	Anti-teoretical
Williams	<i>Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy</i>	Anti-teoretical
Winch	<i>The idea of a social science and its relation to philosophy</i>	Anti-teoretical

Table 2.2: List of benchmark books considered in our analysis.

³This choice can appear restrictive, leaving out of consideration some works from these authors which can be important from a stylistic point of view. Nevertheless, we are confident of our choice for two reasons. First, this is a paper on Cavell’s work and that has to remain the focus of our exploration. The other authors are considered only to highlight the exceptionality of Cavell’s style and not to discuss their own style. Second, the most cited opera of every author is probably the one that closely resembles the common idea of their style, simply because it is the more read and studied. To keep the comparison fair, we also consider only *The Claim of Reason* when comparing Cavell with the other authors.

⁴The specific version considered for every book, including the chosen translation, is reported in the bibliography.

2.2 Acquisition and preprocessing

We collected each book or paper as an ebook, where available, or as a scanned file. Successively, we performed an image-to-text (OCR) elaboration of the scanned files and we converted the ebooks to plain text with ASCII encoding, which includes only numbers, the twenty-six letters of the alphabet (without accents or other modifications) and punctuation. Then each file was processed to extract the sentences inside the parentheses (and particularly inside the parentheses after a mark) using a regular expression (*regex*)⁵ search.

During this phase, we checked the files for errors both automatically⁶ and manually to correctly extract as much of the parentheses as possible; we didn't manually check all the typos in the text, which would have required a consistent amount of time without significantly improving, we think, the quality of the analysis. In fact, our measures compare the frequency of each word inside and outside the parentheses, and we had noted that if an OCR error occurs, it changes the word consistently in the text (i.e. the word is always (or at least often) wrong in the same way), preserving the comparison with itself.

It is not guaranteed that we have caught all the parentheses in the original text, as some may be lost due to poor OCR processing. However, the number of lost parentheses are so small that they do not pose a challenge to the overall strength of our findings. Vice versa, we had manually checked that each recognized parentheses appears in the text. For this reason, our data must be considered as an underestimation of parentheses (in terms of count and content) rather than an overestimation. At the same time, we automatically discarded some meaningless parentheses, particularly those which contain only a single alphabetical character different from **a** and **i**, non-alphabetic characters or Roman numbers. Finally, we tokenized (i.e. transformed in a list of word and punctuation marks, each of them individually referred to as a token) the lowercased ASCII text and the content of the parentheses, discarding all non-alphabetic characters except for **.**, **,**, **;**, **?**, **!** and all tokens composed of a single alphabetical character other than **a** and **i**.⁷

2.3 Measurements

Since our aim is to investigate the use of parentheses in Cavell's books both quantitatively and qualitatively, we defined some measures for each task.

The quantitative investigation aims to assess if Cavell used more parentheses than a typical contemporary author, and therefore we tried to measure the length and the frequency of the parentheses. We chose not to focus on the raw number of parentheses because the books in our sample are heterogeneous in their length, and so it is not meaningful comparing the raw number of parentheses in two books, if one is twice as long as the other. Moreover, also the length of each parenthesis varies a lot among the authors, and we needed to distinguish an author who uses many very short (two or three words) parentheses from an author like Cavell, who uses many very long (even over one hundred words) parentheses.

The qualitative investigation aims to describe the role of parentheses in Cavell's style, and so

⁵The pattern used for the regex is, in python dialect, for the sentences inside the parentheses `r'\([^()]*(?:\([^()]*\)[^()]*)*\)|\[[^\[\]]*(?:\[[^\[\]]*\][^\[\]]*)*\]'` and `r'\. \, ; ! \s*\([^()]*(?:\([^()]*\)[^()]*)*\)|\[[^\[\]]*(?:\[[^\[\]]*\][^\[\]]*)*\]'` for those after a mark.

⁶See the source files available at <https://github.com/TnTo/CavellParentheses> (particularly the functions `clean` and `extract_brackets` in the `libcavell.py` file) for a comprehensive list of the automated text-processing performed.

⁷See the function `tokenize` in the `libcavell.py` source file

we tried to measure if and how the text inside the parentheses differs from the text outside the parentheses.

To assess the quantitative use of parentheses, we defined some measures:

1. $text_length$ = total number of tokens in the book
2. $parentheses_ratio = \frac{\text{number of tokens inside parentheses}}{text_length}$
3. $dot_parentheses_ratio = \frac{\text{number of tokens inside a parentheses which begins immediately after a mark (.?!)}}{text_length}$

The $dot_parentheses_ratio$ measure was suggested by a close-read of Cavell's books, and it was identified in the early stages of the research as a possible marker of Cavell's exceptional use of parentheses⁸.

The $parentheses_ratio$ is computed using the number of tokens inside the parentheses (i.e. the sum of the lengths of the parentheses) rather than the absolute number: this allows us to highlight another distinctive trait of Cavell's style, immediately evident in a close reading. The absolute number of parentheses in *The Claim of Reason*, divided by the length of the book measured in tokens, is the second highest (0.0095) among the considered authors (the first one is Putnam's *Reason, Truth and History* (0.0105)). But at the same time, *The Claim of Reason* is the only book containing parentheses longer than 300 tokens (there are three parentheses longer than 400 tokens).

$parentheses_ratio$ and $dot_parentheses_ratio$ were used to quantify how much greater the use of parentheses by Cavell is to the use by other authors.

To assess the qualitative (semantic) use of parentheses, we defined two other measures, one which looks at each text all at once and one which looks at each single word in the text at the time:

1. The first measure is the Pearson's correlation coefficient r^2 between the frequency of each given word inside the parentheses (i.e. the fraction of the words which are the given one or equivalently the probability that a word randomly chosen is the given one) and in the whole text: it measures how much the content of parentheses represents (i.e. is semantically similar to) the whole text (1 means that the frequency of each word is identical inside the parentheses and in the whole text, while 0 means that the frequency of each word inside the parentheses is useless to predict the frequency of that word in the whole text).
2. The second measure is the result, as p-value, of a one-tailed binomial test on the frequency of each word inside the parentheses (in terms of number of occurrences of the chosen word and total number of tokens inside the parentheses), assuming as true frequency the frequency of the word in the whole text: this measure represents the complement to the probability that a word is significantly more (or less) frequent inside the parentheses than in the whole text (i.e. the lower the value, the more likely it is that the frequencies inside and outside the parentheses are different)⁹.

⁸We want to highlight that this measure is substantially equivalent to measuring the number of tokens inside the parentheses that are a sentence on their own. But some corner cases in either direction make these two measures different, for example a parenthesis after an *etc.* or a dot at the end of a sentence lost during the digitalization. We opted for the measure simpler to be measured.

⁹This statistical test tries to measure the likelihood of the extraction of k white ball in a sample of n balls from an urn in which only a fraction p is white. In our case, we want to measure how likely it is that a word occurs a given number of times in a sample (the words inside the parentheses) given the frequency

The Pearson’s coefficient helped us to recognize where the parentheses are an integral part of the text and so where the same words and themes appear inside and outside the parentheses, and where they are an addition to the text (like citations or mathematical formulas) with different words and themes.

Instead, the binomial test looks closely at the text and discovers for us (who remain distant) which words characterize the lexicon inside the parentheses.

It can appear as contradictory to try to highlight both similarities and differences between the parentheses and the rest of the text, but is not. Just as two twins appears very similar to one another (and this peculiarity allows us to distinguish a couple of twins from a generic couple of siblings), if we step closer and look carefully at them, we will start to see some details which make each of them different. In the same way, we want to find when the parentheses are similar to the text (with the r^2 coefficient) but also, since they cannot be identical, how they differ (with the binomial test).

We analysed only the words with a p-value lower than 0.01 and at least 10 occurrences inside the parentheses (or parentheses after mark) to lower the possibility of false positives and errors caused by typos in OCR scans¹⁰.

3 Results

3.1 Comparing Cavell with other authors

At first glance, we can identify an escape in the upper right-hand corner of all three graphs reported in Figure 1: it is, as expected, Stanley Cavell. The total use of parentheses (i.e. the *parentheses_ratio* as defined in Section 2.3) amounts to 12%, while the use of parentheses after a mark (*dot_parentheses_ratio*) amounts to 7%. In the same way, although only slightly, the r^2 for Cavell’s book is also the highest: the content of parentheses is in agreement with the content of the body of the text. This similarity between text and parentheses is by no means obvious or expected. Before raising some possible explanatory hypotheses for this phenomenon, let us comment on the results of the benchmark authors.

Wittgenstein and Austin (the ‘masters’) stand more or less in the middle of the table in terms of total use of parentheses. Although in fact the overall use of parentheses is slightly higher in Wittgenstein, further investigation of the quantitative side reveals something surprising: the use of parentheses after a mark, in fact, shows us a Wittgenstein is much closer to Cavell than any of the benchmark authors, with a value of 4%. Let us therefore leave Austin behind and focus only on Wittgenstein. For a reader of Wittgenstein, this result will perhaps not be too surprising: in the wilderness that is the *Philosophical Investigations*, one finds interruptions, backward marches, second thoughts, exclamations, retractions, different voices and tones, in dialogue with each other but also fighting each other, in a constant tension¹¹. Now, one may ask: how to graphically represent these pauses and movements? What better typographic sign than a parenthesis? However, a

in the population (the text). This is a paradigmatic situation in which the binomial test, which is defined between a sample and the population, is better suited than a non-parametric test between two populations (like the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test).

¹⁰A longer list of word (p-value < 0.1) is available with source code.

¹¹In his “Wittgenstein’s Texts and Style” (2016), David Stern makes a list of the devices typical of the later Wittgenstein: multiple voices, thought experiments, provocative examples, striking similes, rhetorical questions, irony, parody. Among them, Stern writes, the use of multiple voices is the most important aspect of Wittgenstein’s style.

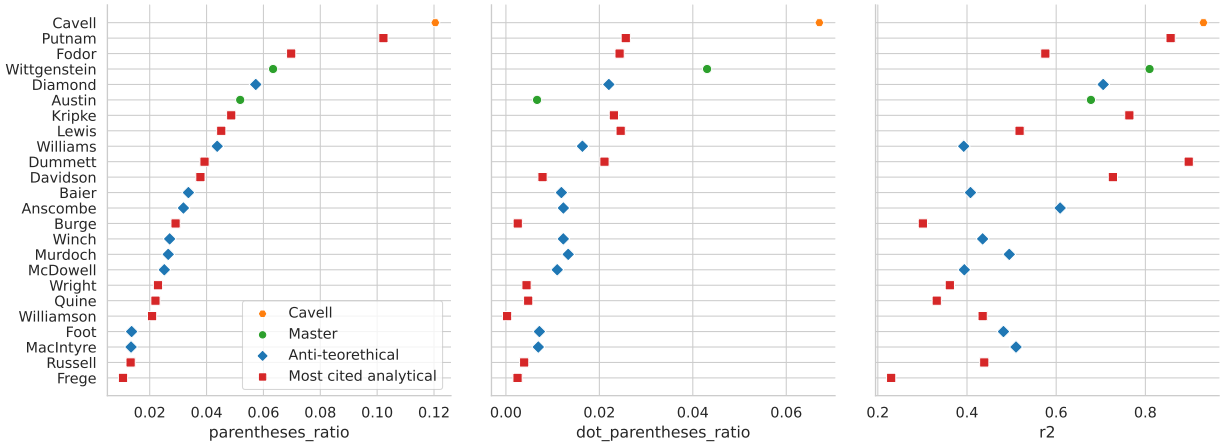


Figure 1: These three graphs represent the results of quantitative and qualitative measurements of the use of parentheses in Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason* and the benchmark authors. The quantitative measurements have been divided into two parts: in the first graph on the left we find the calculation of total parentheses; while in the second graph, in the middle, we find the calculation of parentheses after a mark; finally in the third graph on the right we find the calculation made according to the r^2 , which indicates the similarity between the text outside the parentheses and the text inside the parentheses.

sceptical Wittgensteinian voice could occupy the centre of the scene for a moment and exclaim: “—What better typographic sign than the parenthesis? But we have the em-dash to represent these movements!” And this voice would certainly be right, as the em-dash, at first glance, seems to outnumber even the parentheses (a future distant reading work might dissolve, or at least give greater *visual clarity* to, this enigma in plain sight).

As the use of this last parenthesis shows, the parenthetical voice often stands out to announce, foretell, to the side, apart from, in counterpoint to the supporting themes of the body of the text. The high number of parentheses after a mark in Wittgenstein, as well as in Cavell, thus seems aimed at not wanting to give up these kinds of voices: *meditative voices*, often, *off-screen voices*, just as often, or simply voices *aside*. Let us consider a single, quite significant example: starting from paragraph 6 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, in fact, we see Wittgenstein inserting three sentences within parentheses after a dot:

An important part of the training will consist in the teacher’s pointing to the objects, directing the child’s attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word; for instance, the word “slab” as he displays that shape. (I do not want to call this “ostensive explanation” or “definition”, because the child cannot as yet ask what the name is. I’ll call it “ostensive teaching of words”. — I say that it will form an important part of the training, because it is so with human beings; not because it could not be imagined otherwise.) This ostensive teaching of words can be said to establish an associative connection between word and thing. But what does this mean? Well, it may mean various things; but one very likely thinks first of all that a picture of the object comes before the child’s mind when it hears the word. But now, if this does happen, is it the purpose of the word? a Yes, it may be the purpose. a I can imagine such a use of words (of sequences of sounds). (Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.) But in the language of §2 it is not the purpose of the words to evoke

images. (It may, of course, be discovered that it helps to attain the actual purpose.)

The theme of this paragraph is language learning in the master-pupil relationship. The parentheses after the period are used by Wittgenstein to insert specifications and insights, useful for a greater understanding of the intent of his research. In fact, the first parenthesis after the period opens with “I do not want to call this ...” and then continues with “I’ll call it ...”. This distinction is made by Wittgenstein in the parenthesis, a place in which to express temptations and desires, or even just thoughts that are more intimate and difficult, or perhaps difficult to justify, even if intuitively understandable. In fact, let us think about the use of the second sentence in parentheses after the period: “Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination”. This simile helps Wittgenstein’s thought, it makes it go forward even in its backwardness. In fact, the pause of the parenthesis does not totally divert from the topic under examination, it deepens it on the side, with an illuminating (or obscure — depending on the reader) simile, which enriches the prose of the *Philosophical Investigations* with a mosaic of voices. Finally, the last parenthesis after the period gives voice to an obvious possibility, one that had not been considered in the previous sentence but nevertheless deserves to be uttered, in that context, after what has just been stated. (Recall how Cavell wrote that not only the placing, but the timing contributes to the depth of an utterance: an unspoken obviousness, not taken into account at certain points in the work, may be missed by certain types of discerning readers).

Of course, an even closer examination of the use of parentheses after a mark in Wittgenstein would be interesting. Just as it would be interesting to compare the use of parentheses after a mark in Wittgenstein and in Cavell. However, here we merely note the affinity in the purely quantitative use of this stylistic device. (The time spent commenting on the very first parentheses after a mark in the *Philosophical Investigations* was not spent in vain: it will come in handy when we take a closer look at this use in Cavell’s work). It was commonplace to say that Wittgenstein and Cavell use so many parentheses, and so many parentheses after a mark; now we can say how many.

We now turn to commenting on the results for the other benchmark authors (anti-theoretical and analytical). The results obtained do not help to differentiate the group of anti-theoretical authors much from the group of the most cited analytical authors. And that in itself is a significant result.

The group of anti-theorists reveals no major surprises. For all of them, the parentheses’ ratios hover between 2% and 4%. Only Foot and MacIntyre fall below 2%; while Williams and Diamond exceed 4% (Williams by a little, Diamond by a lot, reaching almost 6%). Both, however, hover around 2% with regard to the use of parentheses after a mark, much the same as all other anti-theorists. In the r^2 measurement, however, the anti-theorists never drop much below 0.4, while the analytic group counts for 4 members below 0.4, ranging from 0.2 to 0.4 (Frege, Wright, Quine, and Burge). This may be due to the use of less discursive parentheses, as in the case of Quine and Frege where the parenthesis is often used to introduce mathematical formulas.

In the analytic group, Putnam and Fodor stand out in terms of the total use of parentheses. This is an interesting result, which raises an obvious question: why? Are there particular reasons (analogous to those shared by Wittgenstein and Cavell) that increase the overall use of parentheses in Putnam and Fodor? Let us take a closer look. Before we get into their parentheses, however, it may be useful to go close in the sense of beside, that is, to turn to the second graph. In this graph, in fact, the two philosophers suffer a major recoil. Their use of parentheses after a mark moves to the left significantly for both. This result can help us in part to comment on their overall use of parentheses. If we browse through Putnam’s and Fodor’s texts, parentheses are often used to introduce citations in the body of the text (author-work citations: e.g. (Fodor 1983) — see Table 3.1) or to insert lists within the text ((i), (ii), (iii), etc.). The use of parentheses after a mark

amounts for both of them around 2% — almost half compared to Wittgenstein and almost a third compared to Cavell. We can therefore hypothesize that it is a less pronounced use of parentheses after the mark that keeps Fodor’s r^2 low: since most of the parentheses are used to do something else (quoting, making lists, ...) and not to take up a theme addressed in the text, it is understandable that the similarity remains low. More interesting, however, is the case of Putnam: despite having a ratio of parentheses after a mark similar to Fodor, Putnam has a higher text/parenthesis similarity than Wittgenstein. How can this fact be explained?

Table 3.1: List of significant words in parentheses for Fodor. More (frequent) refer to the frequencies inside the parentheses compared to the whole text.

Fodor			
	word	count	pvalue
More	see	73	1.54e-39
More	,	493	3.82e-21
More	ed	16	5.04e-13
More	fodor	16	1.83e-09

It can perhaps be explained by hypothesizing that a classical, traditional use of parentheses (as an addition, or specification of the point under consideration — see Table 3.2) raises the similarity index.

Table 3.2: List of significant words in parentheses for Putnam. More (frequent) refer to the frequencies inside the parentheses compared to the whole text.

Putnam			
	word	count	pvalue
More	or	183	7.85e-26
More	i.e	30	1.77e-12
More	e.g	26	8.45e-12

The last interesting case is Dummett. His number of parentheses (both total and after a mark) is relatively average, but his similarity index is almost tacked on to Cavell’s. Looking at the list of words more frequently used in parentheses, as defined in Section 2.3 and reported in Table 3.3, it appears to be composed of many meaningful words from the semantic field of mathematics: *fn* (as abbreviation for function), *bound*, *relations*, *number*, *term*, *functions*, *singular*, *variable*, *category*, *operator*. Taking something written in the body of the text, and expanding on it and specifying it within the parentheses is how discursive parentheses work, when they are not used to introduce symbols or quotations or lists. One puts something in parentheses immediately after a consideration of one’s own, to assign it a role of deepening and specifying, like a formal definition.

Table 3.3: List of chosen significant words in parentheses for Dummett. More (frequent) refer to the frequencies inside the parentheses compared to the whole text.

Dummett			
	word	count	pvalue
More	fn	17	7.12e-13
More	bound	14	2.00e-04
More	relations	12	3.76e-04
More	number	24	5.20e-04
More	term	27	7.27e-04
More	functions	15	1.64e-03
More	singular	15	2.09e-03
More	variable	12	2.48e-03
More	category	10	4.39e-03
More	operator	15	7.05e-03

Now, one can certainly insert considerations *to the side* (for whatever reason) without necessarily using parentheses after a mark. In our opinion, it is the result of the parentheses after a mark that is interesting. During the reading, in fact, the parentheses after a mark can have a greater poetic effect (as in the example commented on above from *Philosophical Investigations*). As the second graph has well shown, this expedient of the parenthesis after a mark has been exploited more by Wittgenstein and Cavell.

In general, however, it is worth remarking once again how Cavell departs from the benchmark authors in all three graphs with his use of parentheses. This detachment really signals his exceptionality and encourages an interest in a deeper study of his work. Let us therefore delve further into Cavell's work to try to see more closely some aspects of his use of parentheses.

3.2 Looking into Cavell

Let us start with the first graph in Figure 2. *Must We Mean What We Say?* by Cavell records a very high use of parentheses right away: 10% of the entire book. The two books that immediately followed, on the other hand, recorded a gradual decline in the use of parentheses: from 8% in *The World Viewed* to 6% in *The Senses of Walden*. Yet, as early as the publication of the expanded version of *The World Viewed*, which contains an appendix (*More of The World Viewed*, 1979) about half the length of the book published in 1971, the percentage returns to 10% — a percentage that is confirmed (with a very slight decrease) in the writing of the two appendices added by Cavell to *The Senses of Walden* in the 1981 expanded edition (and written in 1979 and 1980, respectively).

After that, the use of parentheses in Cavell would never again drop below 9% percent and would even reach (almost) 15%. To what is the stabilization of this stylistic device due? Why is it that works like *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden* deviate from this normality of Cavell's style?

We will answer one question at a time, but before doing that, let us turn to the second graphic. The arrangements of the dots in the graph do not undergo any major shifts. *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden* are confirmed as the texts with the lowest percentages, even in the case of parentheses after a mark. A dozen texts, on the other hand, remain more or less stable between 5% (or slightly less, such as *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*) and 7%; the only ones to reserve some surprises are the remaining three texts that exceed 7%: *Pursuits of Happiness*

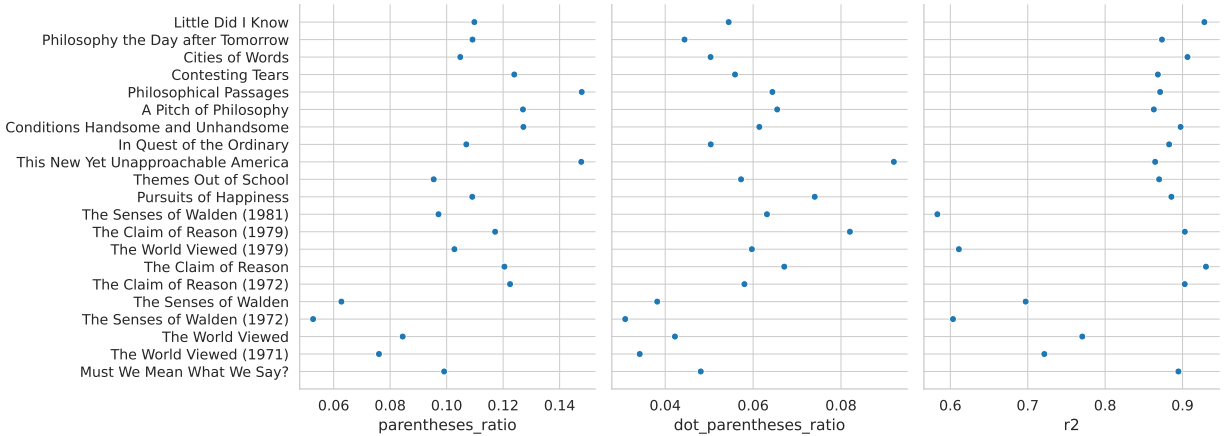


Figure 2: In these three graphs we can observe the time progression (from top to bottom we find the last to the first book) of Stanley Cavell’s writing regarding the use of parentheses. Books with a publication date are the subsection of the books split as described in section 2.1.

slightly exceeds 7%, the fourth part of *The Claim of Reason* slightly exceeds 8%, while *This New Yet Unapproachable America* exceeds 9%. Inevitably, these new results generate new questions (which we again postpone answering).

We thus come to the third graph. The stabilization of Cavell’s style could not be more evident. Aside from *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden* (including the second editions), which nonetheless register a fairly high degree of similarity between about 0.5 and 0.7, all the other texts rank extremely far to the right on the graph, with values between 0.8 (or slightly less, as in the case of *In Quest of the Ordinary*) and 0.9 (or slightly more, as in *Little Did I Know*).

These are the data. From now on we find ourselves on the interpretative ground. So, let us return to the first question that had arisen from the commentary on the first graph: why do *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden* differ from the rest of the books in the number of parentheses?

First, let us start by looking at some facts. These are two short books: one on film, and the other on Thoreau. Does this information tell us anything? Doesn’t a short book need parentheses? When does a book need parentheses? We have said, quite obviously, that parentheses insert considerations on the side. How can this phenomenon be explained? Perhaps Cavell added fewer parentheses in these two books — which are also his first two books ever, after the essay collection *Must We Mean What We Say?* — because he has more sharply limited the boundary of his attention to the objects studied without digressing too much, as he had allowed himself in the essays in *Must We Mean What We Say?* Possibly. Since both are very short books (the first editions of both run around 150 pages), it can be argued that Cavell preferred concision to digression. Perhaps, the commentary on Thoreau’s prophetic and concise style in *The Senses of Walden* led Cavell to absorb his writing style as well (for instance, this is what Mark Greif claims in “Cavell as Educator” (2011)); while in *The World Viewed*, having to focus on the world of cinema and having to examine many films, Cavell did not have time to dwell much on any particular film, but moved quickly (through very short chapters, the shortest ever in his production) to explore the rivulets of this world still (at the time) unknown to philosophical writing.

Take, for example, the back cover of *The World Viewed*. There, you will find a critic’s opinion that Cavell, in this book, “never lingers”. Here, anyone who has ever read Cavell’s other books

will be surprised by this judgment and will instead be more inclined to agree with Larry Jackson’s judgment that: “[In Cavell’s books] there are distractions and afterthoughts, abrupt endings and slow, lingering pleasures — and of course, plenty of verbal sparring, too.” (Jackson 2015)

In the books following *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden*, developing a way of proceeding already present in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cavell will allow himself many of these “lingering pleasures”, which are functional to the motivations of his philosophical prose (Jackson in fact quotes a long parenthesis of an essay in *Must We Mean What We Say?* “Ending the Waiting Game”, as an example of the indirect and lingering style of Cavellian prose): motivations such as how to best describe in detail the objects examined, along with his own experience (as he claims in the *Introduction of Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*).

On closer inspection, however, these judgments made about *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden* are limited. The total use of parentheses (always as *parentheses_ratio*, defined in Section 2.3) in the two texts is still quite high — between 5% and 7%, though not as high as the 10% on the other books. In a second sense, and more specifically, the judgments made just now about Cavell’s first two books find themselves limited by the publication of their respective appendices in the late 1970s. These parts suffer from the stylistic turn (or return of modules already widely present in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, and only slightly set aside in *The World Viewed* and *The Senses of Walden*) represented by the writing of the fourth part of *The Claim of Reason*: a turn that will leave its traces until Cavell’s last publication, the autobiography *Little Did I Know*.

A distant and quantitative reading was crucial to arrive at this conclusion. In the introduction and in the appendix to the new introduction of *The World Viewed*, in fact, we observed how the pronoun ‘you’ is repeated 20 times in the new parentheses (while it was used 15 times in the parentheses of the 1971 text, which we recall was about twice as long as the new parts).¹² Let us take as an example the very first parentheses of the introduction to the 1979 edition:

The question of what constitutes, in the various arts, “remembering a work,” especially in light of the matter of variable quotability, naturally raises the question of what constitutes, or expresses, “knowing a work” (is recognizing it enough? is being able to whistle a few bars necessary? does it matter which bars?). These questions in turn lead to the question of what I have called “the necessity to return to a work, in fact or in memory,” an experience I try hitting off by speaking of “having to remember” (“The Avoidance of Love” in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, p. 314). (If you express this wish by whistling, you will have, unlike the former case in which you are expressing knowledge, to mean the whistling, which is not something everyone who can whistle can do.)

The first parenthesis, inserted at the end of the sentence, is used by Cavell to raise three different questions; while the second parenthesis, inserted after the dot, picks up the theme raised by the last two questions in the previous parenthesis. Now, it is not so important that in this paragraph Cavell reflects on ‘whistling’ only in parentheses (not least because the activity of whistling is just a pretext — a pretext to talk about the emphasis we can put on performing many other more meaningful activities). What is important is that a subplot of the text is first hinted at in a parenthesis, only

¹²A more comprehensive list is reported in online appendix at <https://github.com/TnTo/CavellParentheses/tree/main/paper/appendix.pdf>. In *The Senses of Walden* the tokens highlighted as more frequent inside the parentheses are *god*, *he*, *man* and *i* (which, looking to the unprocessed data, appears to be the roman number 1 and not the pronoun I). In *The World Viewed* nothing of interest stands out: in particular for the second part the only words listed are *you* (discussed in the text above) and *marquis*, a character from the film *The Rules of the Game*.

to be picked up again in a latter parenthesis: it is as if Cavell is trying to insert a text within the text, a subterranean plot that is entirely run through the parenthetical space.

Moreover, this plot is traversed from the point of view of ‘you’. The fact that Cavell uses just the second person singular — and not the first person plural, as is often the case — and that he uses it in parentheses may mean something like: you, reader, pause here, and ask yourself what are the different ways of returning to a work of art. In the second parenthesis, Cavell points to two ways: returning to a work, such as a poem, by *means of knowledge* (“What is that poem by Montale called?” “Ah, yes, *Ex voto*”) and by *means of remembering*: remembering here understood as a re-bringing to mind, understanding anew what is at stake in that poem, rereading the poem and remembering, repeating what it may mean that “it happens/that affinities of soul do not come to gestures but remain effused like a magnetism.” (This is the sense in which it is not enough to whistle a few stanzas to remember a melody, to remember what it means *to me* — you need to mean the whistling for such a thing to happen).

Be that as it may, it is interesting to note how the passage in *Must We Mean What We Say?* devoted to remembering, to which Cavell refers in the little piece of the introduction to *The World Viewed*, is also found in a parenthesis. The plot thickens, and one discovers whole thematic rivulets that run through Cavell’s work, traces of which are found mainly in the parentheses.

For example, the parentheses of Cavell’s corpus are abound with names of philosophers. This fact can be explained by assuming that there are considerations, raised by each of the philosophers, to which Cavell often returns in parentheses; further, it can be assumed that he uses this device to include, within his text, the voices of other authors who may not be central to the topic at hand, but that may be laterally interesting. A significant example is the article Cavell wrote about *Mr and Mrs Smith*, a 2005 film starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, in which Wittgenstein makes an appearance in the parentheses; following our line of reasoning, one can imagine that bringing up Wittgenstein helps Cavell to think, to develop his commentary on the film under consideration, but not to the point of making him occupy the foreground of the scene (Wittgenstein’s role, in the economy of the article, is to stay in the background — or to make only a cameo).

In Cavell’s corpus, one can count the occurrences of the following philosophers in the parentheses: Heidegger 101, Thoreau 111, Nietzsche 112, Austin 178, Emerson 271, Wittgenstein 277 (see Table 3.4).

However, from such a distance, it is difficult to observe the most recurrent themes in the Cavellian parentheses. In fact, we got the impression that it is much easier to capture a certain style, a certain tone, rather than the repetition of a certain type of theme. We spoke earlier about Cavell’s use of an informal, engaging, and imaginative tone in the 1979 introduction to *The World Viewed*. This tone was facilitated by the opening of parentheses in which Cavell referred directly to a ‘you’. Also, we noted how Cavell, in this period (around 1979, and after that), returns to using more parentheses in his texts. A book like *The Claim of Reason* (1979), then, is a good litmus test for whether this change (or rediscovery) of style is measurable within the text, particularly between the first three parts, written between 1955 and 1971, and the fourth part, which is instead the one written in the time closest to the 1979 publication.

The pronoun ‘you’ is repeated 150 times in the parentheses of the first three parts, while it is repeated 350 times in the parentheses of the fourth part.¹³ Without going to see more closely how ‘you’ is used these 350 times, we note that the fourth part is shorter than the first three, but is denser both in the total use of parentheses, of parentheses after the mark, and of an expedient (the use of ‘you’) that we have seen to be typical of a certain parenthetical style. This fact confirms to

¹³See tables in online appendix at <https://github.com/TnTo/CavellParentheses/tree/main/paper/appendix.pdf>.

Table 3.4: Count and significance p-value for philosophers’ names significantly more frequent in parentheses for Cavell’s corpus

	word	count	pvalue
More	thoreau	111	1.54e-08
More	hegel	35	1.20e-07
More	heidegger	101	6.72e-07
More	nietzsche	112	2.29e-06
More	wittgenstein	277	6.38e-05
More	descartes	55	7.04e-05
More	kant	123	7.68e-05
More	emerson	271	8.82e-05
More	kripke	29	1.98e-04
More	moore	21	2.39e-04
More	hume	33	3.96e-04
More	austin	178	4.16e-04
More	luther	13	8.24e-04
More	dewey	21	1.08e-03
More	lacan	20	1.09e-03
More	lewis	12	1.33e-03

us that Cavell is back — and that subplot we have been talking about continues to thicken from the mid-1970s onward, and will hold steady throughout his work.

Another stylistic aspect we have seen Cavell using in the 1979 introduction to *The World Viewed* is the question mark, repeated three times in the first parenthesis of the citation quoted above. With the stabilization of an informal and engaging, imaginative and reflective style, is there also a stabilization in the use of the question mark?

Let us look at the data again. Table 3.5 reports the list of the words recurring more in the parentheses than in the whole text (ordered by the significance of the comparison measured with the p-value as defined in Section 2.3), where we kept only prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions and punctuation¹⁴. We see that the question mark is part of this list, along with terms like ‘or’, ‘though’, ‘perhaps’, ‘except’, ‘unless’ and ‘not’.

Before discussing the use of the question mark, a few words regarding the other terms. The use of dubitative and concessive expressions, such as *perhaps* and *though*, are very significant for the change of tone sought by Cavell. They are able to dilute the point of examination and open up other perspectives (to which space is conceded, in fact). Moreover, the use of these expressions serves as an aid, as a crutch, for more adventurous and exploratory attempts: “perhaps one might think so, but it is not certain”; “though the point under examination is controversial, we can nevertheless ...”. A large part of the pleasures of a Cavellian lingering comes from the parenthetical road opened up by these expressions.

With regard to the use of ‘except’, ‘unless’ or ‘not’ a somewhat similar argument can be made. The use of these expressions in parentheses can have the function of specification (“not in this sense, but in that sense ...”), but it can also have the function of introducing a road not taken in

¹⁴The complete list is reported in online appendix at <https://github.com/TnTo/CavellParentheses/tree/main/paper/appendix.pdf>.

Table 3.5: Count and significance p-value for conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs and punctuation significantly more frequent in parentheses for Cavell’s corpus

	word	count	pvalue
More	or	2531	8.09e-48
More	though	192	4.32e-25
More	perhaps	383	9.44e-25
More	?	1173	8.18e-21
More	as	2849	1.91e-16
More	except	72	5.09e-15
More	hence	189	3.99e-13
More	,	13260	1.21e-09
More	in	4562	4.22e-09
More	like	314	1.51e-07
More	unless	55	8.87e-07
More	later	111	9.92e-07
More	explicitly	64	3.89e-06
More	anyway	64	4.29e-06
More	here	313	4.54e-06
More	notably	23	6.31e-06
More	not	2031	8.00e-06
More	especially	63	1.07e-05
More	doubtless	27	1.16e-05
More	grammatically	17	1.33e-05

the course of the text and that will be followed — more or less briefly — in the parenthesis.

Instead, the use of ‘or’ ultimately has to do with the multiplication of possible paths: “does this mean this? (or does it not? Or could it mean something else?).”.

However, ‘not’ and ‘or’ are very common words, inside and outside the parentheses. Therefore one could question their relevance in setting the *parenthetical tone*. But, it remains reasonable to assume that many of the occurrences of ‘not’ and ‘or’ are central to the economy of the parentheses: as, for example, when they open the parentheses, or close them. Upon a closer look at the files with the lists of parentheses, we encounter many uses of ‘not’ and ‘or’ at the beginning or at the end of the parentheses.

Let us take three examples at random from *Little Did I Know*:

1. (The possibility that nothing can be done **was not voiced**.);
2. (Evidently **I am not** quite beyond the defensiveness of authorizing my gratitude for Emerson’s achievement by appealing to the grandeur of earlier readers of his who have sensed something of the sort.);
3. (**Or** is it the other way around — that I am using the mortal threat of the procedure, and of what it may reveal, to justify my right to tell my story, in the way in which I wish to tell it? What could this mean — my story is surely mine to tell or not to tell according to my desire? But of course the story is not mine alone but eventually includes the lives of all who have been incorporated into mine.)

Table 3.6: Count and significance p-value for expressions which introduce an example significantly more frequent in parentheses for Cavell’s corpus

	word	count	pvalue
More	e.g.	161	1.10e-65
More	i.e.	94	1.73e-23
More	example	244	2.53e-17
More	as	2849	1.91e-16
More	like	314	1.51e-07

In her article on Stanley Cavell’s writing, “‘This is said on tiptoe’: Stanley Cavell and the Writing of Philosophy” (2014), Áine Mahon talked about three uses of the parenthesis: additional, clarificatory and demonstrative. Our analysis led us to emphasize the first and the second use (‘perhaps’ and ‘though,’ ‘not’ and ‘or’ — all four perform additional and clarifying functions). On the other hand, we haven’t talked about the third use, the demonstrative one, since it seemed to us to be the most standard use of the parenthesis, and therefore a little less interesting. We can, however, point out that even this more standard use is present in Cavell’s parentheses: we find ‘e.g.’, ‘i.e.’, ‘example’, ‘as’ and ‘like’ in the list of the most significantly more frequent words in Cavell’s corpus (see Table 3.6).

Then, we can finally discuss another very characteristic element of the Cavellian parentheses: the question mark. In the four books which use more parentheses (*This New Yet Unapproachable America*; *Philosophical Passages*; *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*; *A Pitch of Philosophy*), the question mark appears in the list of the most significantly more frequent words¹⁵. In these texts, the readers have the opportunity to stop in the parenthetical space and listen to the question being asked in a different tone than a question they would encounter in the body of the text. *Sottovoce*.

We are therefore reminded of Peter Szondi’s interpretation of Celan’s poem *Engführung*, in which the literary critic comments on Celan’s reprise of an almost identical passage of the incipit within the concluding parenthesis; the poem in fact begins with *Displaced into/ the terrain/ with the unmistakable track: Grass, written asunder. [...]* and ends with (almost) the same words repeated in the final parenthesis: *Displaced into/ the terrain/ with the unmistakable track: Grass/Grass/ written asunder*. We can observe how the displacement of the text in the parenthesis mirrors the displacement which opens the poem: the final parenthesis contributes to stress the unmistakable track which the poem follows, and which is now, at the end of it, *reclaimed* (and revised: the Grass in fact doubles itself, perhaps mirroring its condition of being written *asunder*). There are many examples of parenthetical uses in poetry, and it is not at all useful to lump them all together. Szondi’s considerations serve us only insofar as they show that, in poetry, parentheses make it possible to insert many voices into the text. They provide changes of tone. So it is in poetry, but also in philosophy with poetic ambition, as seen in Wittgenstein and Cavell.

Then we can ask ourselves: in a Cavell’s texts, what are the effects of inserting many voices (for instance, through the insertion of question marks within the parenthetical space)? Are these effects aimed at stressing and emphasizing the various things — which can form “an unmistakable track” — to which the text alludes? Or are they aimed at appealing to the sensibilities of different possible readers? Or maybe their aim is to awaken — or reclaim — different parts, or voices, or tones of voices, of Cavell himself (which he might be tempted to keep quiet, for instance out of

¹⁵See online appendix at <https://github.com/TnTo/CavellParentheses/tree/main/paper/appendix.pdf>.

repression or shame)? Be it as it may, inserting many voices allows Cavell to appeal to different *selves* (of the text, of the readers, of the writer).

An attention to the plurality of the self, and to the circles of which it is composed, and of which it ceaselessly composes itself, is known to be a characteristic of the vision that Cavell, taking it from Emerson's philosophy and writing, calls *perfectionist*. By "perfectionist", in fact, Cavell means a view of the self as constantly in motion, travelling from a condition of darkness to one of greater clarity, from a present self to a future self. A journey that is as old as that of Plato's allegory of the cave and that is still alive today, and that is revived every time our current self undergoes a conversion and sets itself in motion to form a further, broader, freer self — and for whom many figures could come to the rescue, such as that of the friend, the teacher, and our own no longer repressed self. The parenthesis therefore represents a constant dialogue and counterpoint of one self with another, in a movement that never stops; or rather, that stops at each point, to start again after the next point (or after the next mark — it could start after the next period or the next question mark).

4 Discussion

In this article, we measured, observed and commented on some signs of the birth and growth of Cavell's *stylistic perfectionism*: the massive presence of parentheses after a mark (which open to another self of the text, in counterpoint to the main body); the use, within normal parentheses and parentheses after a mark, of pronouns such as 'you' or punctuation marks such as '?'. Moreover, we also briefly observed how the lingering movement of the parenthesis is expressed by dubitative and concessive formulas such as 'perhaps' or 'though'; or by the negation ('not') of alternative ways (which are excluded but at the same time remembered in parentheses); or by the massive use of 'or', which contributes to increase the ambiguity and multiplicity of dimensions to which Cavell's writing refers (as pointed out, among others, by Mahon (2014)).

It was not news to Cavell's readers that he had sought a tone for philosophy, as the title of one of his last texts, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, reminds us. An interesting result of our research was to see more clearly how this tone was formed and stabilized by the use of parentheses. A use that, through Cavell's comparison with some of his contemporary philosophers, turned out to be exceptional: an exceptionality addressed both to the use of parentheses after a mark (an expedient shared in large part by Wittgenstein) and to the use of expressions (such as the second-person singular, or the question mark, or the dubitative and concessive expressions...) able to form an idiosyncratic style, endowed with many souls and many voices, deeply perfectionist in spirit.

Finally, we showed how a distant reading approach, which benefits from relatively simple statistical tools, can provide new suggestions (or put old ones under a new light) on how to interpret and explain the style (or more generally some semantic traits) of a literary work, like the one of a philosopher.

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