

It's Not Just About Birds: The Other Negative Space in Alfred Hitchcock –
Cinematic Dream Vernacular and the Phenomenology of Fear

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated with deep gratitude to my late Grandma Evans, whose generosity of spirit and love of Hitchcock stay with me for always.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	I
Acknowledgements.....	III
Introduction	
It's Not Just About Birds	1
Chapter 1	
There Is Always Someone Watching: Voyeurism and Otherness in <i>Rear Window</i>	13
Chapter 2	
Hearing-Seeing: Cinematic Dream Vernacular in <i>The Birds</i>	34
Chapter 3	
The Phantasmagoria Phenomenon: Doubling Dark Shapes and Negative Space in <i>Strangers on a Train</i>	58
Conclusion	
Strangers Within: Location and Liberation of Our Fear Through Hitchcock	97
Works Cited	100
Works Consulted.....	104

Abstract

Foundational to almost any Hitchcock film is the idea of the voyeur: the (un)natural inclination to *want* to look upon the private, obscene, and potentially grizzly instances in other peoples' lives. Such inclinations are typically satiated in *secret* and subsequently *denied* as something we desire. The voyeuristic act may be connected to narcissism in that we are seduced by our own fears and inner hells projected onto the watched 'other.' This kind of projection not only perpetuates our sense of denial of what are our *own* inclinations, but it also precipitates the potential for de-humanization and feelings of emptiness in that we detach from *ourselves*. The phenomenological paradox to such detachment is that the more we insist we are safe and self-enclosed *here* while the 'other' remains at bay *there*, the more we are convinced that we know ourselves and are connected to ourselves, when arguably, we couldn't be more detached from ourselves and our humanity. And by not really knowing ourselves as well as we thought – as we might infer from a kind of 'doppelganger' or 'doubles' reading of *Strangers on a Train*, for example – is how fear is born, both in a Hitchcock film and in life generally. How then, might we come to truly know or face our fear if estrangement would seem an inherent quality to our very experience of it?

Like any voyeur, the character of Jeffries in *Rear Window*, for instance, could be read as a kind of 'intruder' merely by his gaze. Throughout the film, Hitchcock presents him in a variety of ways as the cliché "peeping Tom," that is, until his window gazing leads him to believe he has witnessed his apartment block neighbour, Thorwald, kill his wife. The character of Thorwald, as the main subject of voyeuristic gaze in the film, eventually returns his watcher's gaze, much to Jeffries' horror. Further, it is this juxtaposition of the watcher with the watched that allows both parties to enter each other's worlds by the film's conclusion. Analogously, such entry could also be inferred from Hitchcock himself, as he figuratively climbs out of our television/movie screens and into our living rooms/theatres via his cameos, that is, via our (sought out) recognition for the Director who – like the murderous Thorwald – knows we are watching. Moreover, the reciprocating gaze by Hitchcock to his voyeur audience – via his cameos – paradoxically reminds us that, much as his recognizable gaze invites us into the film, we are still in our theatre/living room seats – behind the fourth wall. The apartment block murder in *Rear Window* thus becomes the focus in auteur readings for viewer surrogacy. That is to say, Jeffries, and by surrogate extension, the audience, denies that the murder is something we ever *wanted* to see, though it seems we have nevertheless willed it into existence – in 'parts' – in our minds. Furthermore, such willing into existence or 'summoning' of something terrible from within is engendered by Hitchcock's voyeuristic use of the camera, from the point of view of a present-absent "I," and this can poignantly be inferred in *Strangers on a Train* in a way that "doubles" one's darkest, subconscious, desires, now exposed by our great Dark Director. Once more, Hitchcock's use of the camera in this way would also seem to underscore Thorwald's intriguing question for our voyeur audience by *Rear Window*'s end: "What do you want from me?"

Indeed, what *does* the watcher want from the watched? What does Hitchcock want from his audience and vice versa? The answer that we *don't* get from *The Birds*, paradoxically, invites a further look at the Romantic unconscious of the likes of Thomas De Quincey, whose dreamed Dark Interpreter could be understood as the agent of his dream in much the same way as our Director could be understood as the agent of his film: as a present-absence. The potential difference is: In dreams, we don't always know/recognize the Dark Interpreter who returns our gaze, nor can we really explain the dream meaning – much like the birds in Hitchcock's film, meaning remains largely inexplicable. Alternatively, and still in the ambit of finding something akin to "meaning" in both a dream and in a film like *The Birds*, we might only explain the memory of *being* in the dream at the same time the dream is forgotten. That is, we can only remember the dream in context to a fragmented point – it is the unknown or "negative space" – of what came in between – that shapes it for us. The latter "shape" is what Hitchcock brings to light in darkness, by way of a kind of cinematic dream vernacular – at once igniting an audience *becoming* their own worst nightmare.

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There are a number of peers, friends, family members, professors, teachers, and guiding lights (in spirit and incarnate) to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for all of their support and encouragement during my time as a graduate student. By now my sincere wish is that you all know who you are, and what your individual input has meant to me.

A girl, interrupted, and barely half way through her program, you all witnessed the thesis component morph into a kind of albatross. I won't soon forget your patience with me as I tried to work it all out and grow up a lot more – I needed to grow up (and need to, still – such humility is infrequently found confined in an armchair). One of my many (latent) realizations is that the thesis was being written all along. I just needed to live out what I knew to be true for *Me* first: That what may have inspired me in the beginning was not about to inspire my end. In fact, it was perhaps a mistake to assume there was ever an end in sight, for we all never really grow up, and yet must grow all the same. If I am to regret anything in this regard, let it be that I became a stranger to myself, and by extension, to each of you, by refusing to grow in some significant ways. Nevertheless, each of you were *there* for me at points throughout, when I didn't yet know how to be there for myself. For this, I could never thank you enough...

I am now becoming the person I didn't know I was yet. Until she cast an ominous shadow over me one summer afternoon – and in the black winged form of my childhood Hitchcock – I wondered how I would ever find her (again). Though there had been glimpses and slow transformations through many moons of sadness and doubt, I still needed to *see* through the darkness and *hear* the hum of silence – from *within*. I can write this with conviction now, though never quite well enough to do it full justice.

My attempt will be this: Long overdue but yet right on time, I needed to sit across from my Fear, blinking cursor on screen, and talk for a while. And a Constant throughout *that* uncertainty was of course, George, whose unending patience, kindness, understanding, and belief in Me two-fold, is how and why I'm able to write this at all. I had a strange dream in ink, and George continuously challenged me and never stopped encouraging me to *BE* it on paper, and the best way possible. No one could have asked for a better advisor and teacher. George, from the bottom of my heart, *thank-you* in italics!

And since I'm never quite finished, I want to give the last best honourable mention in these acknowledgments to my newfound "double" – he is most certainly a *B.* of a different kind, and yet very much the same. *B.* – you inspire a goodness again, a better version of myself, and infinite possibilities for "[] like *this*" that go on and on... It doesn't matter where the road might lead us – we might still go sideways yet. And that's okay. The more exquisite hope *now* – I think – is knowing my heart can break again.

"Thus freedom now so seldom wakes,

The only throb she gives,

Is when some heart indignant breaks,

To show that still she lives." ~*The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls*, Thomas Moore

Introduction

It's Not Just About Birds

*“Give them pleasure – the same pleasure they have
when they wake up from a nightmare”*

~Alfred Hitchcock, “On Audiences”¹

This is a true story. And an odd beginning to a Master's thesis, but the relevance to Hitchcock will become clear.

It was mid-summer, prairie Manitoba. I was feeling finished for the afternoon with my Hitchcock research and had decided to go for a long bike ride. Unbeknownst to me at the time, however, was that Hitchcock seemingly wasn't quite finished with *me* for the day. I should have stayed home.

Picture this: blue skies for miles, treetops, power lines, bright July humidity. Squint hot sun, beating the pavement hard, I cruised up rough rural highway. Yellow, dashing indefinitely through thick fields of canola, parted each way, and through the sweet buzzing scents, heavy and lightly breezing, all of my sensibilities were ignited. This. Was. Bliss.

As I made my way just south of the Perimeter on a quiet highway toward St. Agathe, my IPOD blasted “The Veldt” on repeat (I swear that name was an unconscious choice, complete with its prelude of chipper bird song, which becomes important later).

I was about 35 km in on this wonderful workout. I passed a family also on bicycles, exchanging smiles with the parents and child as we went. Then the RCMP

¹ Asbury Park NJ Press (Aug 13 1974)

passed me on their loop, exchanging friendly nods as well. I peddled onwards. Lost in delightful, seemingly ordinary, summer afternoon.

Eventually I noticed my water supply getting low and my pale wintered skin turning red with sun. I decided it was probably time to head back. I crossed over to the other side of the highway, noticing there wasn't a soul around. Serenity became me. Though this was all about to change.

My heart still singing, and my veldt, chipper bird tune still adding an artificial Apple-beat to the whole scene, I suddenly noticed the shadow of a bird – black – on the highway beneath me. Naturally, it was flying high overhead somewhere. I vaguely recollected noticing medium-sized black birds with orange on their wings at about 15 km from the start. Thought dismissed then, I continued on, now aware that I was getting thirsty.

Just as the veldt chirped in my ears once more, I happened to look up and notice the bird shadow again. Looming closer this time, the dark shape seemed to be following my path. Again, I paid it only mild attention and stayed in my 'happy place' a bit longer before looking back a third time.

And that's when time stood still.

The shadow was about to make contact with my helmet.

In what seemed like slow motion, I whirled around on my bike seat and was confronted with a gaping open beak and determined black and orange wings, thumping out an aggression which all too easily muted the happy Apple-tune now chirping ironically in my ears.

I tried to keep my balance at my 28 km per hour speed. I never saw my attacker's eyes, which were seemingly obstructed by its gaping beak and a beating blur I'd have to be a poet to describe. Too shocked to scream, I waved my arm frantically at the open mouth before turning back around to begin pedaling as hard as I could. The angry bird continued to close in. No swooping or diving. This was a direct and deliberate pursuit.

Since I had to keep watch where I was going, I could only observe my attacker's shadow as it continued to chase me for a few more (long) seconds. Finally, it flew away. I pedaled a bit farther, to be sure. Then I stopped to gather myself. Pounding heart, I breathed in deeply and gulped at my depleting water supply. My mind was frantic. What the hell *was* that?

Shaking, I looked behind me. I couldn't see the culprit anymore. My thoughts became white noise at the same time my IPOD blasted veldt-happy. My head swam in loud silence.... I turned around and looked forward again.

And that's when true terror struck through me.

On every second hydro-line, along the lonely highway leading back, for as far as the eye could see, I suddenly became aware of perched blackened orange; of sharply figured, hunched in waiting, feathered guardians of each of their respective mating territories.

All the way back.

Perched.

Waiting.

Like a hallway of mirrors that suddenly became elongated.

And just what were these feathery watchers waiting for? At that moment, my most intelligent answer was that they were all hunched in waiting for *me*. As a child, my mother had, quite innocently, made the judgment-call of allowing me to watch *The Birds* on television (“oh it’s just about birds!” is all I remember her saying in her thick Irish accent). And so now, on this hot July afternoon, I was brought to the childish conclusion that all of the hydro-line birds before me were going to go for my *head* if I dared pass them. My first assailant had already done so, after all, and despite the fact I was wearing a t-shirt and bike shorts – that exposed skin being a much easier area to target than my helmet covered head and sunglass shielded eyes, or so one would think.

Could targeting my head mean the birds have an agenda?

As the thoughts and possibilities sank in, I no longer felt the heat of the day, nor smelled the sweet scents of the afternoon, nor basked in the yellow glow of my freedom to enjoy such a picturesque afternoon. I was absolutely and unequivocally terrified.

I was on the highway to Hell.

“Hitchcock was a genius,” was all I could muster out loud to the Gods, and as if that were brand new information. I was trying to make a deal with the deities now – I needed desperately to get back to my car, now parked forever-far-away at the Perimeter.

Telling myself not to veer out onto the highway (getting pecked to death was far preferable to getting hit by any oncoming traffic), I proceeded onwards. As for my IPOD, I decided to keep my artificial veldt playing on, that musical denial being the only thing that would keep me pedaling, I decided.

I pedaled faster and faster – adrenalized but equally more tired than I’d felt in a long time. I tried not to make eye contact with the birds as I passed (somehow it felt like

my sunglasses made little difference in this regard). Fearing the worst, I watched for shadows again. This time I didn't see one. Didn't see it coming at all. The black-feathered rage sought to broadside me this time. Again, it happened in slow motion. And I did veer out in traffic. But thankfully the motorcyclist who suddenly appeared out of nowhere barely missed me, and also scared the bird off. I got away again.

Much to my relief, there were no further incidents. I had little choice but to make my way down the *other* side of the highway after the second attack. I rode against traffic, all the way back to my car, and only suffered occasional embarrassment from drivers clearly wondering what I was doing as they passed me, head on. My mind was turned to more important matters. All the way back, I watched those birds and they watched me. I crunched my neck and shoulders up to my ears to make sure I didn't lose sight of them. I'm sure in some strange way I began to look as hunched in anticipation as they did.

Today, and perhaps foolishly, I still shudder when I notice those birds on my bike rides. The "rare attacks on humans" research that I subsequently found in connection with the black and orange birds of that July afternoon still haunts my memory. Needless to say, it became crystal clear to me that I must know where Hitchcockian fear comes from. Contrary to my mother's innocent summation, something tells me it's not just about birds.

Through his camera lens, the photographer character of Jeffries in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* lends us the opportunity to become voyeurs. In various cuts, we, the audience – along with Jeffries – are granted piecemeal insight into a gruesome murder that has taken place in another suite across the courtyard of Jeffries' apartment

block. Like the wheelchair-bound Jeffries, we too, are pinned to our seats throughout the ‘changing of channels’ that becomes the context for the film’s eerie plot in this setting. That is, we, through Jeffries, are watching each apartment window across the courtyard as we would little television screens, focusing in, eventually, on the ‘Thorwald murder channel,’ if you will.

Unlike Jeffries, however, we are eventually absolved, potentially, of our voyeuristic “sin” when our protagonist is thrown over the fourth wall at the film’s conclusion, leaving us to gape at what ultimately could have been our spot on the pavement too, along with our further injured protagonist. Moreover, it is in these final scenes, I would argue, that the voyeuristic gaze falls open – as Jeffries hits the ground – and Hitchcock, as the invisible agent through whose presence we once became Jeffries, emerges as auteur to release us from Jeffries’ perspective, and by extension, from Jeffries’ fate. In addition, I would suggest that at the same time our subconscious might become aware of Hitchcock in this way, the fourth wall revelation in the final scene of *Rear Window* also forces the audience outwards and at a distance once again, while we try to face what has happened. That is, we might try to face what has happened as though relieved to be disconnected and/or able to deny any connection or complicity in the film’s action and conclusion at all. But in releasing us from Jeffries’ first-person perspective, does Hitchcock really let his audience off the hook for having – or not having – committed any so-called “sin” at all?

While notions of “sin” in connection with voyeurism (either confined to the movie theatre or otherwise acted out) should not be presupposed or taken for granted, it is perhaps at least conceivable that, we, the audience during the final scene of *Rear*

Window, might on some level ratify any possible voyeuristic “sin” committed with the “punishment” Jeffries ultimately receives for his intrusive gaze (that being his confrontation by the murderer – the object of his gaze – and his subsequently being thrown over the fourth wall to meet further injury of a second broken leg, or what Freudians might infer as double castration). Indeed, it would seem that Hitchcock allows us to escape such jarring punishment, if he does not simply substitute it for another one. In looking at possible inferences of “sin” in this latter regard then, I wish to pose the question: what do we *take* from the people we watch, and what motivates our continuation of the looking versus cutting it off? Some consideration for Hitchcock’s views on “sin” in this regard may prove beneficial in delineating a relevant “reader-response” approach to his craft. However, in order not to take for granted any perceived or current generalities that may come with such a critical framework, I will be employing elements of Iser’s reception theory in substantiating my particular readings of Hitchcock in this light.

My approach to the moral edifications at issue for voyeurism in a Hitchcock film will begin with *Rear Window*’s climax, wherein our murderer steps out of his little television screen, from across Jeffries’ apartment courtyard, and right into Jeffries’ living room, asking repeatedly into the darkness, “What do you want from me?” Here, I would question whether there is at least a fragment of our sympathies momentarily directed more towards Thorvald than Jeffries. Suddenly it is our voyeur – Jeffries – sitting eerily in the dark, silent and unanswering of our ever-watched and now frustrated murderer, who has just become aware of his observer and is trying to be proactive about his own fate. And wouldn’t *we*, and shouldn’t *we*, all have such a say in our own ending,

especially if it is seemingly right there for the taking? Certainly if I am going to be watched to my ultimate death or downfall, then it would seem pointed to ask the question of my watcher, if the opportunity is there, “what do you want from me?” and expect an answer. Thus, I would argue there is an appeal to the humanistic – quite ironically – from the point of view of the murderous Thorvald at the film’s end. This is especially poignant because of the fleeting near role reversal with our protagonist, Jeffries, whom we might quickly realize has not yet come close to falling victim to our murderer by this point; our murderer who, by contrast, is now realized in this scene to be helpless under Jeffries’ watchful eye. In this way then, I would suggest the viewer becomes frustrated – if not fleetingly – by character identification in this scene, and thus, it is the viewer who becomes as susceptible to the frustration as Thorvald by the repeated and unanswered question, of “What do you want from me?”. Indeed, what *do* we want from Thorvald? We have several camera flashes from Jeffries, accompanied by silence, to think about this question now – seemingly in slow motion, almost dreamlike. Still with no answer for Thorvald, Hitchcock subsequently severs our embodiment of Jeffries’ point-of-view all together at the fourth wall – that is, if said point of view was not already coming apart at Thorvald’s repeated question. Consequently, the revelation of the fourth wall and subsequent fall from it, would seem to beg the additional question of the auteur himself: in getting us there and then letting us go at the last possible moment, what does Hitchcock want from *us*?

For my M.A. thesis, I wish to suggest there is a unique way in which only Hitchcock can invite a reader/viewer to play the role of his/herself; a way that goes a step beyond such existing notions as ‘putting the audience through it’ and then ‘absolving

them’ of any desire for sin.² As well, like *Rear Window*’s Thorwald, many of us, at one time or another in everyday life contexts, may find ourselves inwardly shouting “what do you want from me?!” in the face of life’s various complexities – and then we might feel we don’t get an answer. Doubtless, the madness that life – and Hitchcock – can still inspire will perpetuate this question for always. But for my purposes here, and as one potential answer to this question, I am proposing a thesis that looks closely at the notion of fear, of a helplessness that can perhaps more productively turn into a form of humility in its potential resolution, *if* one can realize inner-self-recognition projected outward – *there* – in the form of unfamiliar object, in a paradoxical self-recognition-as-other. Such self-recognition, furthermore, is perhaps what Hitchcock would say is the biggest fear realized: the (denied) recognition of one’s seemingly unknowable or worst self.

Moreover, I wish to look at what Hitchcock might say are one’s choices leading up to said inner/outer self-recognition, or whether he would say there is even a choice as to what *is* when it comes to what comprises oneself? That is to say, is this proposed reading of Hitchcock – this proposed form of self-recognition – revealed in a kind of dream language, where temporality and spatiality are suspended and we exist in a world of simply *being* as opposed to *meaning*? In that light, can we then accept a form of predetermined randomness to our (narrative) existence, one that Hitchcock might say is knowable only in the sense of its location/unconsciously felt presence of what is unreliable or unfettered? That is, does a Hitchcock film convey an art of not knowing? If so, I would argue that we might begin to think of the unreliable or only partially

² As previously alluded to, my use of the word “sin” throughout this thesis will be mostly limited to general and humanistic conceptualizations of it in context, though this particular word choice is still intended as thought-provoking towards other relevant contexts and is not limited to the Hitchcock film or Hitchcock’s views on it himself.

accessible narrator or agent in a dream as analogous to watching a film.

More precisely, I wish to argue there is a ‘phenomenology of fear’ that is highlighted for us by Hitchcock that hedges on the liminal or dream state. Such phenomenology might best begin in the confessional spirit of William Hazlitt’s writing in *Liber Amoris*, a work which author Philip Rieff, for instance, in his book, Freud: The Mind of the Moralist, contextualizes in terms of objectifying the chaos of emotion, as capacity of art to master (346). Moreover, in Peter B. Ford’s “Writing the Love Letter from the Lack: The Economy of Absence in Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris*” he describes Hazlitt’s separation of subject and object as follows:

As....the break from libido development is further perpetuated, Hazlitt’s discussion noticeably deteriorates....What this signifies, and here Freud again allows us to establish the link with self-denigration, is the move of the ego towards tendencies of cruelty and sadism. These tendencies, which he calls “self-tormenting melancholia” (Freud 251) arise when the self becomes embedded in a sadistic project to abuse and debase the project at hand. *By projecting outward upon the object, which at the same time is in the process of being drawn within, the subject carries out this torture and suffering on his own self...* This move, which becomes all too evident in Hazlitt’s self-loathing and lack of self regard, signals the break between subject and object that has already subterraneously occurred {Emphasis mine}.

While I will not be examining Hazlitt’s work in great detail, it is helpful to employ some relevant interpretations of his work, as above, as insight into what I mean by this ‘phenomenology of fear.’ That is to say, it begins with a projection of consciously unexpected emotion (i.e. fear) that fragments the self, and/or realizes the self as inherently fragmented, and/or realizes the self as a proliferation of a myriad of different selves at a given time. The self is thus realized in any of these ways when confronted with the potential for loss or helplessness and it only *becomes* recognizable – felt – as one (fleeting) being when the projected self outward – there – into the form of the

consciously unfamiliar object, is simultaneously internalized inwards – here – and the self-as-other is recognized, and fearfully so, due to the initial seemingly ‘unknowable’ element of the unfamiliar.

In sum, I think Hitchcock might exploit our phenomenological presence by drawing us (unconsciously) out of ourselves in our voyeuristic tendencies (complicated by our narcissism and alter-ego, which I will discuss), and then confronts us with a sense of helplessness we realize we *wanted* all along but then didn’t wish to internalize as ours/ourselves in that act of desire. Thus, in this perpetual denial of the self as object/out-there/other, we perpetuate the fear of the unknown, at the same time we might come to recognize ourselves in that fear (i.e. becoming within it, as we project and simultaneously internalize it), which deepens the fear, before, if ever, it can be resolvable.

Finally, I wish to propose that a partial strategy Hitchcock employs in achieving his phenomenological exploits is a kind of cinematic-dream-language. That is, Hitchcock shows us his awareness of the unconscious workings of the mind to the point that we fade out at the end of his films as if waking up from a dream, as though something happened all at once. Hitchcock’s agency in this regard is immediately comparable to what we might question could be *felt* agency in our dreams, such as the Romantic notion of a Dark Interpreter, or what I will propose as a kind of ‘doppelganger’ or ‘double’ figure in our waking lives. In this light, I wish to explore the potential that such ‘becoming’ on the part of the Dark Interpreter might yield, as well as suggest what Hitchcock might give us glimpses of as a result: the realization, perhaps, that our biggest fear is never fully knowing ourselves throughout our lives. Could there be, phenomenologically as well as psychologically, a stranger dwelling within all of us? Like an everyday life kind of

‘Bruno’ we might meet on *Strangers On A Train*; a stranger who seemingly becomes a manifestation of our own clues, our own unconscious doppelganger desires – darkened – in a life we would otherwise never imagine ourselves choosing to lead? Furthermore, though we might yet spend a lifetime trying to know – or not know – our stranger, might the closest we ever come possibly be as in a dream – by way of a kind of dream vernacular that Hitchcock brings to cinema by breaking through all of our own individual, sky-lit, everyday scenes – our subjectivity – with *The Birds*?

The films and concepts I wish to work with in delineating a phenomenology of fear in connection with a kind of ‘self-recognition-as-other’ possible way into answering the question of “what do you want from me?” will include the following in a three chapter thesis: 1) a query of Hitchcock’s narcissistic voyeurism as depicted through the everyday mundane of apartment-block-living in *Rear Window*; 2) an in-depth consideration of a Romantic conceptualization of dreaming – the Dark Interpreter – in support of what I will argue is Hitchcock’s ‘cinematic dream vernacular;’ a vernacular that he ultimately achieves by disturbing the everyday ‘blending in’ of birds as they complicate our subjectivity in *The Birds*; and 3) an analysis of Hitchcock’s doubling through the seemingly harmless, everyday encounters of strangers in *Strangers On A Train*; strangers whose psychology is complicated by a kind of ‘negative space’ engendered through ‘cinematic dream vernacular’ as a way of reading Hitchcock’s films.

Chapter 1

There Is Always Someone Watching: Voyeurism and Otherness in *Rear Window*

In the moments following L.B. Jeffries' fall from his apartment window in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, we are presented with a shot of nurse Stella whispering to Lt. Doyle. We can assume Stella's whispers concern the late Mrs. Thorwald, whose body part(s) is believed to be buried in the courtyard garden. Upon learning that the body part(s) was in fact moved to a hatbox in Mr. Thorwald's apartment, and upon being asked by Lt. Doyle if she wants to take a look at "it" Stella exclaims, "I don't want any *part* of *it*!" [emphasis mine]. Stella then immediately looks away from Lt. Doyle/the camera after this exclamation, but, she just as quickly turns and looks *back* again, the whites of her eyes widening into the horrified expression of the person who *cannot help* but *want* to look – at "it." The shot then fades and the spectator is left chuckling at Stella's characteristic outburst as well as the possible pun on "part" in her line. Subconsciously perhaps, the spectator is also left attempting to fill in the blanks of just what the ambiguous pronoun, "it," referred to in that scene.

Although cloaked in humour, this scene with Stella is perhaps the quintessence of the voyeur Hitchcock makes of his characters and even his audience in *Rear Window*: the idea that within all of us is a seemingly (un)natural inclination to *want to look* (or even, to want to look *back*) upon the private, obscene and potentially horrifying instances in other peoples' lives; that any such inclinations must be satiated *in secret* and subsequently *denied*. Thus, of *course* Stella "won't have any part of it" when she is invited to view

the contents of the hatbox. Of *course* she wouldn't want to look upon the chopped up body part(s) of a victim of murder, even though her profession as a nurse would have her deal with bloody human body parts at least on occasion. Once more, of *course* Stella wouldn't want to look "at any part of it," because if she were to so much as *hint* at wanting anything to the contrary in this murderous context, we might doubt her morals, or perhaps worse, her psychological state of mind. Voyeurism therefore becomes a question Hitchcock poses to the human psyche in *Rear Window*: it is the question of *wanting* to look and *how* we look in particular (moral) contexts; it is the potential connectedness of "watcher" and "the watched," most especially through the lens of a camera, or even through the thin white screen of a movie theatre, and it is the potential transposition of narrative and reality through this same "watching" act that becomes problematic within an ever-increasing popular culture of voyeurism. Before we can begin to answer Hitchcock in his rich and complicated delineation of voyeurism in *Rear Window*, however, we must first reach some clarity as to his basic premise: what do we mean when we define something as "voyeuristic" generally?

In "Voyeur Nation? Changing Definitions of Voyeurism, 1950-2004," Jonathan M. Metz, addresses the shifting characteristics of what constitutes "normal" versus "pathological" definitions of "voyeurism" in popular culture. He specifically cites *Rear Window* and suggests that, although certainly alluded to in the film, the term "voyeurism" wasn't apparent in popular descriptions of film and literature until the late 1970's (Metz, 129). In considering Hitchcock as perhaps one of the first major film makers to foreground "voyeurism" on the big screen then, we might start by asking how we regard Jeff, as the protagonist voyeur, in *Rear Window*. Immobilized by his broken leg and

incapacitated by his boredom, does Jeff's incessant watching of his neighbours through their apartment windows seem "creepy," or alternatively, "natural" under the circumstances? How is Hitchcock orchestrating Jeff's, and by extension, the audience's subjectivity such that the voyeuristic experience is either "pathological" or "normal"/naturalized in the film? Does Hitchcock appropriate "peeping-tomism" for us in *Rear Window*, for instance, or does he condemn it?

Metzl refers to the psychoanalytical model respecting one's entrance into adulthood and notes that voyeurism is an attempt at "reassurance against castration anxiety" (P. Friedman qtd. in Metzl, 128). Specifically, Metzl means that "voyeurs peeped at others in order to distract attention from their own fear of castration" (Metzl, 128). Moreover, Metzl explains that "looking at the actions of others....became a means of deflecting awareness of the emptiness in the self; the voyeur was thus defined both by what he looked *at* and, much more importantly, by what he unconsciously chose to overlook" (Metzl, 128). Given Metzl's line of argument, I would suggest that in Jeff's case, if we are in fact made uncomfortable by his character as an obvious "creepy" voyeur, then his voyeurism is perhaps more easily forgivable because it is only as a result of his *temporary* "emptiness." His leg cast will be off in a mere week, and when he is mobile again and thus 'back to his old self,' he will not actually *be* the empty, insatiable voyeur who regularly seeks to define himself via invasive and uncomfortable acts of "looking" (at Miss Torso as a sex object, for instance, her name also being an overlaid description of his view of Mrs. Thorwald as hacked to *pieces*) and also of "overlooking"

(for example, Jeff toasting his wine glass to Miss Lonelyhearts instead of to Lisa, whom he “overlooks” as a potential companion until she appears in Thorwald’s window).³

The issue of castration in Metz’s reference to the psychoanalytical model as a framework for understanding voyeurism, and more precisely, for understanding our shared subjectivity with Jeff as voyeur, invites consideration of feminist theorizations on audience subjectivity as well. For the purposes of this chapter, I will consider some of the generally known issues pertaining to the female audience, and later return to them in greater theoretical context of this thesis, from a phenomenological point of view.

One of the most notable feminist critics of Hitchcock’s work is Tania Modleski, who foregrounds much of her criticism with the notion that Hitchcock turns his women characters into objects or “others” so as to avoid fears of castration, of emasculating his usual male protagonists and surrogate male viewing audience in their “loss of self involved *in* identification, especially identification with a woman” (“Women and the Labyrinth,” 53). Modleski more precisely delineates fears of castration and Hitchcock’s alleviation of those fears as follows:

Typically, a shot of a woman is followed by a shot of a man – a surrogate for the male spectator – looking at her. This editing alleviates castration anxiety in two ways: first, the threat posed by the woman is allayed because the man seems to possess her; secondly, the “gaze within the fiction” conceals “the controlling gaze outside the fiction” – that of the castrating Other who lurks beyond the field of vision (Kaja Silverman qtd. in Modleski, “Women and the Labyrinth,” 50).

Modleski’s second point might convincingly highlight the significance of the camera (i.e. “the gaze within the fiction” – the edited shots of which control the “gaze outside the fiction”) as that which subverts the gaze of the “castrating Other,” who is the implicit, but unacknowledged female spectator “beyond the field” of the camera’s vision. However,

³ I note that the relationship status between Jeff and Lisa throughout the entire film is largely debatable and is not a major subject of analysis in this chapter.

Modleski's former point with respect to "possession" is not so convincing. Why would a mere "shot of a man" amount to his "possessing" the female character in the shot immediately preceding? How does "looking" suddenly become equal to "possessing?"

Interestingly, in her reading of *Rebecca*, specifically her reading of the scene at the top of the staircase on the night of the masquerade ball, Modleski invites closer attention to the issue of "possession" as follows:

[The camera] continually cuts back to her smiling face, radiant with anticipation of her husband's approval. When he turns to face her, becomes angry, and orders her to take off the costume, the interchange is filmed with progressively tighter close-ups suggesting the claustrophobia experienced by the heroine, who seems unable to escape possession by Rebecca ("Women and the Labyrinth," 47).

While Modleski's discussion delves deeper into the complicated aspects of the "mother" relationship in *Rebecca*, as well as related substitutions of the heroine's "body" for that of the late Mrs. De Winter, I take the position that the above reading is enough for my purposes here in suggesting what might serve to satisfy as a general understanding of the connection between "looking" and "possession" in a Hitchcock film. First, our nameless heroine in *Rebecca* had of course, unwittingly managed to dress up like the late Mrs. De Winter on the night of the masquerade ball, and Rebecca's *absence* is felt throughout the film very much as a *presence* with whom our heroine has to compete and/or with whom our heroine has to embody as the *new* Mrs. De Winter. While I do not disagree with Modleski's suggestion of "possession" of our heroine by Rebecca, I am not convinced that either a formulated 'competition,' or an embodiment of the former Mrs. De Winter, fully presents itself on the staircase scene down to the masquerade ball. Instead, when Maxim "turns to face her, becomes angry, and orders her to take off the costume," indeed in a kind of reverse-Cinderella moment that Modleski points out ("Women and the

Labyrinth,” 43), what Maxim’s look engenders, along with our “cringing embarrassment” (“Women and the Labyrinth,” 43) for our heroine, is a cutting *rejection* of her – a *dispossession* of *who she never was to begin with*. In this way, I would argue Maxim’s “look” trumps the absent “look” of Rebecca in this scene, and it is thus, *Maxim* who begins to “possess” and subsequently “dispossess” our heroine for *her* absence – *not* Rebecca’s. Once more, I am in agreement with Modleski’s concluding point that “the *spectator* [in this scene] is forced to undergo an experience analogous to that of the heroine: both she and we are made to experience a kind of annihilation of the self, of individual identity, through our merger with another woman [our *Rebecca* heroine who *herself* is also *absent*]” (“Women and the Labyrinth,” 47). Such a merger, moreover, would certainly seem to have us arriving under the “controlling look” of Maxim, who orders our heroine/us back up the stairs immediately. And, “cringing with embarrassment,” we couldn’t get out of that scene fast enough. Does this necessarily mean, however, that a male viewing audience, having merged with our heroine here, is necessarily “castrated” in this surrogacy of self-annihilation? To put it another way, if there is a kind of “emptiness” at the bottom of a character who is stripped of their layers of surrogacy in a Hitchcock film (such as our heroine in *Rebecca*), stripped or perhaps even denied surrogacy altogether with the depiction of that character as “other” or “object”, why do we automatically reject these notions, respectively, as something undesirable, even terrible, or as something that must at least be controlled or “possessed” so as to avoid the undesirable and terrible? Does “possessing emptiness” if you will, *have* to equal castration, self-annihilation or death? Is the gender argument even at the heart of the matter, or does Hitchcock potentially push it further with voyeurism? With

respect to *Rear Window*, even Modleski concedes that this film “increasingly stresses a *dual* point of view, with the reverse shots finding *both* Jeff and Lisa intently staring out the window at the neighbours across the way” (“The Master’s Dollhouse,” 76). How then, as a male or female spectator, might we begin to negotiate voyeurism in *Rear Window* as beginning in an “emptiness” we might possess or dispossess?

We might start by returning to the issue of whether Jeff’s “emptiness” is at all “temporary,” and thus, that readily forgivable as something that potentially drives him to be the creepy ‘peeping Tom.’ That is to say, once Jeff is “back to his old self,” he will resume earning his living as an avid photographer. Interestingly though, Jeff’s job as a photographer is the reason behind how he became immobilized with a broken leg in the first place – he got too close to his photographed object (the race car). Perhaps then, we are reminded that Jeff is by nature quite dominated by his voyeuristic tendencies, in spite of physical danger. His confinement to his apartment in *Rear Window* merely exacerbates his predominantly voyeuristic character, marking it far from a mere “temporary” state. By the film’s end, for example, Jeff once again gets “too close” to the object in his camera lens, Lars Thorwald, and the result is another broken leg, which feminist critics like Modleski would argue could be read as double castration.

Despite this latter line of argument, however, *if* we still choose *not* to see Jeff as a “creep,” or as someone regularly overcome by his voyeuristic tendencies, I would argue that Hitchcock has, in the very least, made voyeurs out of his male and female audience – that is, out of *us*. This is because 1) we chose to see “the ordinary man”⁴ that James Stewart made out of Jeff’s character, 2) like the “ordinary” and immobilized James

⁴ To a 1950’s audience at least, Jimmy Stewart was recognized to represent “the ordinary man” (qtd. in “Rear Window Ethics: An Original Documentary”).

Stewart we see before us up on screen, we too, are an “ordinary” audience, immobilized in our spectatorship, and 3) with the exception of a few omnipotent moments, we too, see whatever the “ordinary” and immobile James Stewart sees. As to the *character* James Stewart *plays*, however, we chose to “overlook” the fact that, as a photographer with a habit of getting too close to his photographed objects, the *character*, *L.B. Jeffries*, is very likely motivated and dominated – immobilized or not – by his voyeuristic tendencies on a regular basis. Once more, we might also say that we are definable as “voyeurs” in *Rear Window* by what we choose to “overlook” thanks to James Stewart’s presence: that Jeff, in fact, *does* have a problem that might border on the pathological, and thus, he may in fact *be* that “creep” that we’d rather deny knowing – or dispossess – via our vicarious experience of him. As Metzl points out, the result of ever-expanding popular definitions of “voyeurism” has forced psychiatric definitions to become narrower. Thus, voyeurism “caus[ing] clinically important distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning” (Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders qtd. in Metzl, 130) is a major consideration when distinguishing “pathological” from “normal” behaviour. I would therefore propose that Jeff’s character in *Rear Window* could be argued as that of a “pathological” voyeur because of the “distress” and “impairment” he experienced in his “social” and “occupational” functioning, with the result that his “pathology” instantly became the central plotline of the film. Here again, Hitchcock has, at the very least, got the audience on the hook for “overlooking” a potentially pathological *Jeff* for their “ordinary man,” *James Stewart*, both of whom become the “hero” in the outcome of the plot because Lars Thorwald admits to murdering his wife. If Lars Thorwald had *not* been guilty, however, it would be Jeff/James who would be

guilty of peeping-tomism. We might posit, therefore, that it is Lars Thorwald's guilt that ultimately has us "overlooking" any potential signs that might lead to the reduction of Jeff's/Jimmy's character by the end of the film.

Before departing from Metzl in this analysis of the term "voyeurism," I think it's important to note his reference to the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders in further defining "voyeurism" for us:

To be sure, DSM-IV (1994) defines voyeurism as the practice of looking specifically at "unsuspecting individuals, usually strangers, who are naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity" (qtd. in Metzl, 127).

As previously noted, a major distinguishing factor in determining "pathological" voyeuristic behaviour versus "normal" (or culturally appropriated) voyeuristic behaviour is whether or not the behaviour causes "distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning." I have argued in support of the possibility that Jeff was impaired socially and occupationally such that he might be considered the "pathological" voyeur upon whose pathology the central plot of *Rear Window* and the audience's subjectivity rested. While there are certainly instances in the film where Jeff is watching Miss Torso undress, I would argue that by and large, Hitchcockian voyeurism does not seem to emphasize nudity or the sexual act itself. Rather, I would suggest that there is the quality of secrecy, or, the desire to remain hidden and unexposed while "watching" that is transposed from Metzl's cited psychiatric definition to what Hitchcock does on the big screen. In this way, we might see Hitchcock's work as the beginning of the "popular" definitions Metzl alludes to in that not all "voyeurism" is limited as such by the overtly sexual. This expanding definition might begin to explain Metzl's premise that it is

“difficult to distinguish hard-core paraphiliacs who require psychiatric interventions from the many amateurs who simply watch VTV [voyeurism television] programs” (127).

Finally, one aspect Metzl refers back to is the “social impairment” method of distinguishing, which he notes *avoids* “defining psychopathology on ethical grounds” (Karl Hanson and Andrew Harris qtd. in Metzl). Certainly, it would seem Hitchcockian voyeurism begins and ends, if nowhere else, on the morality issue.

In “The Rise of the Voyeur,” Ziauddin Sardar condemns the rise of voyeurism, particularly in the form of reality television. He writes:

[T]he success of sleaze talk [has] whetted our appetite for a more overt form of voyeurism. It [has] arrived in the form of reality television....People have always been interested in people. But voyeurism is a close cousin of narcissism. When we turn our lurid gaze towards dysfunctional others, leer into their private moments, or watch them engaging in banal acts, we are actually looking at ourselves. Voyeurism seduces us by projecting our own inner hell on to other people. And what this breeds, feeds, and spawns is a dehumanizing process that actually lessens our regard for other people....We are not there to understand [people], to feel for them, to care about them. Voyeuristic television makes people the ultimate commodity. We consume them to fill a boring evening (25-26).

Here, I would suggest that Sardar alludes to a seemingly different kind of sexual quality or seduction with respect to voyeurism: that of narcissism. What Sardar might mean when he connects the voyeuristic act to narcissism is that in “turning our lurid gaze towards dysfunctional others” we are in fact seduced by our own “inner hell” – by *ourselves*. The power of this *self-seducing gaze*, if you will, derives from our denial of recognition for the “other” or object as an actual projection of our own desires.⁵ We therefore *keep watching* because we fail to realize it is our subconscious *identification*

⁵In “Voyeurism and the Postwar Crisis of Masculinity in *Rear Window*,” Elise Lemire reiterates the psychoanalytic position that “cinematic spectatorship is akin to the dream state, the state in which, according to Sigmund Freud, we symbolically fulfill our unconscious wishes” (57).

with our projection, and not our *assumed detachment from* it, that holds our interest in the spectacle as “other”/object. To explain what I mean here, I will begin by arguing that in watching the likes of “reality” television, we define ourselves as the subject who is *here* and not *there*; as the self-possessed *me* who is not *that* up there on screen. The “sleaze talk” of *Jerry Springer*, for instance, assures us that *we* are not *them*; that *I* am not the *hopeless spectacle* – the “other” – who is Springer’s guest on the show; the guest who comes on stage, seemingly undeterred by the certainty of the show’s ultimate theme: supreme humiliation. Interestingly, it is *our* humiliation *projected* onto these *Jerry Springer* guests that is used to construct our sense of self-possession as the watching subject. It is our “inner hell,” in other words, that we “cringe with embarrassment” at the sight of, but which we *need to know exists* and that we therefore *want to see* on screen in order to gain the assurance, in our perceived detachment from it, that we have *not become* our worst fears. Moreover, this *desire* to watch and to project is thus fuelled by the need to assure ourselves that our “hell” is not *here* but remains at bay, *there*. As I will show in subsequent readings of Hitchcock, however, the phenomenology behind the fear he delineates is not so easily located or ‘boxed in’ *there*. For now, we might begin to think of this idea in terms of Lars Thorwald, who effectively climbs out of the little television screen amongst many on the brick lined wall across from Jeff’s apartment, and right into Jeff’s living room. In this way, Sardar might not only be right to point out that we *are* in fact looking at ourselves when we watch “reality” television, but also that reality television is simply a reflection of, or at most, a reaction to, the (immoral) reality it maintains. In other words, we are looking at the hell we *want to see*, and this is, sadly, a reflection of our ability to value ourselves. Once more, the hell that we want to see is

also what the reality TV producers and directors *know* we want to see, and even what they *tell us* we want to see, and so we become consumers of our own self-assurance, self-esteem, and self-possession. With respect to being told what we want to see, Sardar points out that there is nothing “ordinary” about the people in “reality” television shows: “they have been carefully selected, selectively edited, and expertly packaged” (26). And here arises the problem of “reality” television to the narcissistic voyeur: that in projecting our “inner hells” onto the screen, in having those “inner hells” re-packaged and commodified for us by the powers that be in television production, and in *wanting* that hell to remain artificially *there* and not *here*, we ultimately lose all sense of *empathy* for the experience of the “other,” whether that experience be “real” or manufactured. Moreover, as a consequence of such further denial of this “other” – this reflection/repackaging of *ourselves* – as being in any way connected to us, I would argue that we, by extension, begin to disconnect from ourselves *as well*. And so begins the filling of our minds with ‘empty’ images for which we refuse most forms of accountability. In this way it would seem that yes, in the context of voyeurism at least, “possessing empty” is indeed undesirable. We lose ourselves as well as ‘others.’ As Sardar seems to suggest, it is the narcissism behind the voyeuristic act that begins the dehumanization process, which, again, includes the loss of empathy for the “other” – and it is *this disconnect*, that I am suggesting invokes the emptiness we *also* try to project as some undesirable problem of ‘the other’ when it is really our own. Hence the loss of accountability arises as well.

While there is much more to be understood and grafted from Sardar’s argument and psychoanalytical models of narcissism and voyeurism, what remains at issue here is

how Hitchcock's work in *Rear Window* may or may not contribute to any such future avenues of inquiry. With respect to the "inner hell" Sardar proposes, I am reminded of one of the opening scenes in *Rear Window* in which Jeff is talking on the phone and threatening to "do something drastic, like get married." At the time of this utterance, we are presented with a shot of Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald across the courtyard, apparently bickering with one another in their apartment. This overlaid scene is suggestive of Jeff's "inner hell" at this stage of the plot; the "hell" which is his aversion to marrying Lisa. Jeff projects his justification for not wanting to get married onto Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald in this scene – their argument being the symbolic quintessence of what Jeff feels marriage is all about. And certainly many critics have noted the juxtaposition of the four characters – Jeff, Lisa, Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald – to the effect that Mrs. Thorwald's murder, as it unfolds on the tiny "movie screen" across the courtyard, is an enactment of Jeff's desire to be rid of Lisa. With respect to the "expertly packaged" "reality" television Sardar implies is in fact not "reality" at all, I am reminded of the "different direction"⁶ that Hitchcock is said to have given to the couple sleeping on the balcony in the scene in *Rear Window* wherein it began to rain. The different direction given by Hitchcock to each of these actors via earpiece, without either actor knowing they were each receiving different instructions, culminated in an argument and a fall through the window that gave the appearance of the authentic. Perhaps by contrast, Hitchcock is said to have refused choreography to the actress who played Miss Torso, insisting that if she made up her rehearsals herself, they would look more "natural"⁷ on screen. Here I would ask: how might we accept the "inner hell" and "natural" shots inferred in Hitchcock's

⁶ qtd. in "*Rear Window* Ethics: An Original Documentary"

⁷ qtd. in "*Rear Window* Ethics: An Original Documentary"

films as being *fundamentally* different from those inferred in the “reality” television shows of the present popular culture? What might be gained from an understanding of any such fundamental difference?

While critic Seth M. Blazer does not disagree with Sardar’s position respecting the “expertly packaged” aspect of “reality” television, he does disagree with Sardar’s position respecting the narcissistic quality of “reality” television. The basis of this disagreement is perhaps worth noting in thinking about how Hitchcock’s voyeurism in *Rear Window* may be fundamentally different from the voyeurism of “reality” television in present popular culture. In “Rear Window Ethics: Domestic Privacy versus Public Responsibility in the Evolution of Voyeurism,” Blazer writes: “What Sardar may chalk up as narcissism, others may consider self-actualization by utilizing others for the study of the self and how we fit into a community” (386). Blazer goes on to argue that “our eyes are naturally drawn to living things. We cannot help but be interested in the lives around us, whether those lives are fictional, real, or somewhere in between” (388). In the case of *Rear Window*, Blazer suggests it “not only explores the taboo of voyeurism, but it also questions a neighbourly responsibility” (389). To support his argument, Blazer makes example of the Thorwald television “channel” across the *Rear Window* courtyard as that which “closely reflects a program such as *America’s Most Wanted*,” which depicts re-enacted crimes (390). Of this example, Blazer suggests, “if it’s within our power to make a bad situation better, then do we not have a responsibility to those around us?” (390). Although our knee-jerk reaction, particularly in contemporary times of terrorism, technology, and surveillance, might be to dismiss Blazer’s “self-actualization” position as naive or misguidedly sociological at best, his latter question regarding “neighbourly

responsibility” is reminiscent of a scene in *Rear Window* with Miss Lonelyhearts. In this scene, Lisa and Jeff watch Miss Lonelyhearts through her apartment window as she is assaulted by a young man whom she invited inside. Throughout this scene, Hitchcock cuts back to Jeff, who is cringing uncomfortably as Lisa looks on. We might remark here that there is something to be said for the human emotion of *shame* and its contiguous threshold between what is internalized and what is acted out.⁸ Another more immanent question this scene raises, however, is the question of when privacy should take precedence over witnessing domestic violence.

At the end of this scene with Miss Lonelyhearts, Jeff recalls Lt. Doyle’s advice to him that what goes on in other peoples’ homes is really private and “could not be explained in public.” Certainly, Jeff and Lisa know next to nothing about Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald’s marriage, and yet, they are convinced Mr. Thorwald had reason to murder his wife. This calls into question the boundary issues to consider when witnessing a neighbour’s abuse and deciding whether or not to take action. For instance, the abused spouse may not wish to press charges against her abuser, or there may be a risk of having children removed by social workers if the police are called to the scene. The possibilities are endless, but the point I believe Hitchcock makes with *Rear Window* is that *no one really knows* what goes on in the private lives of others, and making the decision to involve yourself or the authorities can prove to be far more consequential and intrusive than one might think possible by simply “doing the right thing.” As Lisa says to Jeff by the end of the scene, aren’t we “a couple of ghouls,” for being upset that our neighbour’s wife was not murdered. This is a poignant reminder for us that most of the time, it’s erroneous and potentially self-incriminating to think the worst and assume the right to

⁸ Refer to *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, and Performativity* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

intervene. That *right*, in any case, does not exist, and I think in leveraging Jeff from his subjectivity by *Rear Window*'s end, Hitchcock reminds us of this fact too. That is, Jeff is both punished *and* elevated to hero status for his voyeurism, but the contradiction of having both outcomes indirectly emphasizes the finer point that what goes on in private *cannot* be made coherent in public.

The inability to reconcile the private activities of people in their homes within the public sphere relates to my final point regarding the connection between “watcher” and “watched” in *Rear Window*, or perhaps even analogously, the connection between “possessor” and “possessed,” that is, *if* after discussion of some of the psychological, psycho-social, and moral ramifications at issue in voyeurism have made Modleski's arguments all the more poignant.

In the climaxing scene of *Rear Window*, wherein Thorwald enters Jeff's apartment, we broach the overarching epistemological issue of how we infer “real” versus “fiction.” I will be touching on Wolfgang Iser's reception theory in the next chapter, but for my purposes here, I believe his explanation of the reading process proves quite analogous to the process of reading film, and thus, to the further delineation of what is “real” as a “fiction” versus what is “real” as a “reality.” In “Do I Write for an Audience,” Iser explains:

While reading, we are transposed to a realm outside our bodily existence, having the illusion of leading another life. We are with and simultaneously outside of ourselves, and we obviously enjoy such a doubling (312-313).

I take the position that Iser's arguments in this regard further our phenomenological readings of Hitchcock in the sense that our transposition “to a realm outside our bodily existence” nevertheless creates a sensation of *here*, and thus “real,” however “fictional”

his film narrative is. For instance, in the case of reading *Rear Window*, we note a shot of Thorwald while Stella and Jeff were trying to gather funds for Lisa's bail – that is, *we* see Thorwald leave his apartment in a brief cut through Jeff's window. Neither Jeff nor Stella are looking at this point. Again, with neither character looking, *we* see Thorwald look up towards Jeff's apartment, or perhaps even at *us*, as he is leaving his. Here, the audience has the 'privilege' of knowing, before Jeff, that Thorwald has departed, which would seem to separate us from Jeff's subjective perspective in similar fashion to an earlier scene in the film wherein Jeff falls asleep and *we* see Thorwald leaving his apartment with another woman. Indeed, it would seem a lot of the trouble starts in this film when Jeff falls asleep, and *we* are privileged to be *outside* of Jeff, gleaning a different reality from the same work of fiction, only in different *pieces* or fragments – but dreaming is another matter I will get to in the next chapter.

For now, in light of Iser's arguments, it is interesting to think about the final scenes of the film, with Thorwald crossing over from the watched world into his watcher's, and Jeff, sitting back down in his wheelchair in a panic, is vulnerably visible in the light now shining through his window; light that Hitchcock would seem to be operating to the effect that what was once 'out there' is now coming 'in here.' We then see the hallway light go out under Jeff's door, and he grabs his camera flash and backs up towards the still shadowed part of his window, his leg cast being left exposed as his biggest vulnerability in the light. Of course, critics like Modleski might be quick to point out the castration anxieties at play, but I would argue the issues go further than this. First, when Thorwald walks through the door, we are struck by how illuminated his eyes are in this shot, even though he is not looking into the camera/at the audience, as he was

earlier in the film. The delineation of his eyes here is striking because we see his eyes by the light shining *in* from *out* – “out” being the location of Thorwald’s vantage point *if* he were looking “out” from his window and across the courtyard at Jeff, instead of Jeff looking out and across the courtyard at him. Not only is this lighting suggestive of the two characters trading places in this scene, but I would argue it’s almost as if, regardless of his physical presence, Thorwald, or any voyeur, could be read as a kind of intruder merely by his gaze. Once more, I would posit that this illumination of Thorwald’s eyes, combined with the lighted window frame reflected in his glasses, emphasizes the reversal of subject and object – watcher and watched – in this scene such that Jeff is now the object. Next Thorwald asks, “What do you want from me?” along with a small series of questions punctuated again with “Tell me what you want.” All of these questions and demands are met by stillness and an eerie silence on the part of Jeff, which might beg the question of whether we start to sympathize more with Thorwald’s character in this scene, substantiating his new position as subject. Moreover, Thorwald’s apparent exasperation, confusion, and sense of helplessness as a result of realizing he was being watched – and without knowing why – gives rise to a sense of feeling controlled or perhaps even “possessed” somehow – not demonically of course, but as if something of his person was being possessed *from him*, or rather, temporarily *taken* from him. I will develop this idea further in the coming chapters, but as a starting point, I note Jeff’s reliance on the flash of his camera to hold Thorwald at bay. Here, critics like Robin Wood⁹ read Jeff’s ‘photographic defences’ as connecting to the way in which we all construct identities for ourselves that serve to protect us. And we know, Jeff’s identity as a photographer – his camera being his instrument of voyeurism – is now his protection against the intruder

⁹ qtd. in “*Rear Window Ethics: An Original Documentary.*”

who will no doubt *take* something from him in the coming moments. In that regard, Wood also likens the apartments in *Rear Window* to “little prisons” within which the characters are all isolated. Thus upon throwing Jeff out of *his* “little prison” we might ask whether Jeff is being liberated from his voyeuristic self somehow or if he is being punished for it. Critics like Modleski would likely see the double castration – the two broken legs – as a kind of punishment, but again I ask how Hitchcock might be pushing things beyond the gender question. That is to say, although in “The Master’s Dollhouse,” Modleski argues that Jeff only becomes “erotically attracted to [Lisa]” when she begins to “corroborate his interpretation” of reality (i.e. that Mrs. Thorwald has been murdered) and is otherwise unable to care for her except insofar as she “affirms and mirrors him” (79), critics like Lawrence Howe take a refreshingly different position. In “Through the Looking Glass: Reflexivity, Reciprocity, and Defenestration in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*,” Howe argues that in the concluding scenes, with Jeff having been “leveraged out of his subjective protection,” he is now able and willing to enter a relationship on reciprocal terms, giving a literal twist to the metaphorical phrase, “falling in love” (31). Here, I believe Howe’s argument lends something to the juxtaposition of subject and object – of Jeff and Thorwald, of Jeff and Mrs. Thorwald, of Jeff and Lisa – in the concluding moments of the film: that juxtaposition is somehow necessary for the voyeur to break free from his isolation and be capable of “reaching out,” which is also something Robin Wood notes to be an implicit theme within this film. Once more, I would offer Iser as an expansion of such a thematic point: “Fictionalizing begins where knowledge leaves off, and this dividing line turns out to be the fountainhead of fictions by means of which we *extend ourselves beyond ourselves*” [emphasis mine] (313). While my next

chapters will delve into the phenomenological connotations of that statement, I will note the “fountainhead of fictions” for my purposes here, as another means by which one might “cross the line” with too much “neighbourly responsibility” in mind and erroneously cause more harm than good. As R. Barton Palmer in, “The Metafictional Hitchcock: The Experience of Viewing and the Viewing of Experience in *Rear Window* and *Psycho*,” explains: “It is not accurate to argue that Jeff’s predicament embodies a warning about the effects of voyeurism. Instead, it spells out the consequences of violating the contract between narrative text and consumer, underlines the difficulties which might arise from taking a story too seriously” (7). Again, I note the contradictory outcome of Jeff’s predicament by the film’s end and suggest that *Rear Window* is about the right one does *not* have to make sense out of another’s private affairs, even if doing so turns out to be “the right thing to do” in the spirit of neighbourly responsibility. Taking a story or occurrence too literally and too far has consequences, and what constitutes “crossing the line” in this respect is easier said than done. As Palmer points out, the metafictional/reflexive perspective in *Rear Window* “disputes that, epistemologically, our experience of reality is any different from our experience of narrative” (6). It is thus, one’s experience of “reality” and “narrative;” of potentially “taking a story too far” that Hitchcock also plays with in *Rear Window* and which complicates this film as more than just a commentary on the rise of voyeurism. Howe, moreover, draws our attention to the scene in the film in which we spot Hitchcock himself winding the musician’s clock and looking directly out at the camera/audience through the musician’s studio window. Of this scene, Howe writes: “we are given a clear look at the one individual in the film who knows we are watching” (33). I would take this a step further and argue that we, the

“watcher” of the film, have in this scene acquired the knowledge that we are in fact being “watched.” And *this* overt juxtaposition of the *audience* with “the watched” object in *Rear Window*, grants us the opportunity to enter the film. Such an idea would certainly run contrary to Palmer’s position that the audience of *Rear Window* remains “safe because he or she cannot enter the world of the film [and] discovers in Jeff both a mirror image and an object lesson” (7). Hitchcock’s “lesson,” I would suggest in the alternative, in both Jeff’s subject juxtaposition with Thorwald, and our subject juxtaposition with the Director (via his cameo), is that voyeurism as passive obsession *can* become (re)active participation in scenarios we hadn’t necessarily bargained for. Hitchcock’s point with *Rear Window*, I believe, is that when you least expect it, any act of “looking,” no matter how passive or banal, may just be reciprocated, even from someone you don’t *know*.

Chapter 2

Hearing-Seeing: Cinematic Dream Vernacular in *The Birds*

“The dream is not a secret as much as it is our common language, the way we think, the way we are. Why then, do they seem so mysterious?”

*“Dream is a book that is ignited by the gaze...
Before we can tell a dream, it’s gone.”*

~Lynda Sexton, “Tinkering the Universe: The Art of the Dream”

Although many critics regard Alfred Hitchcock as an artist, I am most struck by the way in which film critic, Stefan Sharff, regards him. In Alfred Hitchcock’s High Vernacular, Sharff states, “while an artist of considerable purity, [Hitchcock] was not an extremist and was able to attain enormous popular appeal. This fact alone may be the beginning of proof that an elegant cinema “language” can reach and gratify a mass audience” (7). Sharff’s aim in asserting this idea of “cinema language” is not for a “precise linguistic analogy” (3), but rather, for a conceptualization of a language that is “looking in a specific way, penetrating the space around in search of meaning” (4). As a student of English Literature, I find Sharff’s notion of another *kind* of language – of a “cinema language” – to be fascinating. Specifically, I am interested in how this language compares to the screenplay narrative – the literature – on which the film is based. Hitchcock’s primary use of separation techniques, for instance, elucidates just how “cinema language” invites the audience to actively participate *within* the film, as opposed to passively absorbing it. In this way, we could regard Hitchcock’s films in much the

same fashion as Wolfgang Iser regards literature: “as a form of interaction.”¹⁰

Furthermore, I would ask how such an interaction in film might extend to the human experience generally, so as to undoubtedly seal Hitchcock’s legacy, his “enormous popular appeal,” in our minds as not only a Master of Suspense, but also, as a cinematic ‘Master of Arts.’

Through an analysis of a selection of scenes in *The Birds*, and through a consideration of possible connections with my previous conceptualization of voyeurism in *Rear Window*, I wish to demonstrate my understanding of Sharff’s theory, his “cinema language,” as a *dream language*; as a kind of fragmented reception¹¹ that is at once rhythmic and unifying to the spectator. In contrast to Sharff, however, I will suggest that such a language is perhaps not to be equated with understanding *meaning* in Hitchcock’s films, per se, but rather, as an experience of *being* in his films; as something we are *put through* and not necessarily meant to comprehend by a translation/reduction to any former linguistic, narrative or literary base. I am thus proposing that Hitchcock explodes any popular (or amateur) assumptions that all film can or should be reducible to narrative or literature. *How* Hitchcock utilizes narrative structures is as a contextual platform from which to step beyond film as merely a kind of *text* for images and sounds to be meaningfully grasped together in sequence, as in a *story*. *The Birds*, for instance, is perhaps only half a story and half something else entirely, the latter of which is difficult to explain or justify, and that is precisely the point.

¹⁰ Wolfgang Iser. “Do I Write for an Audience?” 312.

¹¹ I will be employing Wolfgang Iser’s reception/reader-response theory, as well as some Romantic references to the realm of the unconscious.

I feel my approach as an English Literature student begins best with a loose conceptualization of linear narrative and “art¹²” as separate ideas, but only insofar as to understand how the former foregrounds what I will later formulate is the latter’s cinematic ‘dream vernacular’ in Hitchcock’s films. In considering these notions of narrative and art in Hitchcock’s films, I am reminded of the climactic confrontation between Jeff and Thorwald in the final scenes of *Rear Window*. There is also a worthwhile comparison of same with a climactic scene in *The Birds*. Such a comparison will emphasize common audience *expectations* regarding film’s overall *narrative structure*; of the typical introduction-rising action-climax-conclusion of *storytelling* with which we are all too familiar, and which Hitchcock, for me, explodes.

The first question Thorwald asks Jeff when he figuratively walks off of Jeff’s ‘movie screen’ and literally *into* Jeff’s apartment in *Rear Window* is: “What do you want from me?” All of Thorwald’s exasperated questions that follow in this scene are met with an eerie silence *except* when Thorwald asks Jeff, “Can you get me that ring back?” This question seems to be much simpler. It addresses an object or major component of the *plot* for which Jeff *can* provide an easy answer. By contrast, ‘easy answers¹³’ are not entirely the case in the climactic scene of *The Birds*. I note that if there *is* a scene we

¹² To be clear, I am not attempting to define “art” generally or universally, but specifically in terms of Hitchcock and his filmmaking.

¹³ I refer here to George Toles’ discussion of “quests in narratives” (330) to explain more precisely the connection I am making between “linear narrative” and our expectation for “answers” within them. In *A House Made of Light*, Toles says, “the assumption seems to be that *clarity* is the basic requirement of both the quester’s game plan and *effective narrative closure*. Purposeful story movement on-screen begins, screenwriting handbooks tell us, at that point where the quester knows where she is going and *why*” [emphasis mine] (330). As I previously argued in my *Rear Window* essay, in the climactic scene with Jeff our sympathies, and by extension, our vicarious experience, momentarily switch to Thorwald in his desperate and unanswered questions of “What do you want from me?” As the momentary “quester” in this scene, and also in the attic scene with Melanie, I am suggesting that the vicarious viewer’s request for clarity in the narrative goes unanswered by Hitchcock and that these ‘non-answers’ are what foregrounds his abilities as a cinematic artist.

might consider climactic in *The Birds*, it is the scene in which Melanie (our protagonist¹⁴) is most viciously attacked by the birds in the attic of the Brenner home. This confrontation, like that between our protagonist and Thorwald, is what we had more or less expected as forming part of the linear narrative structure; the structure that is typically centered on conflict for which the protagonist seeks resolve. In Melanie's attic confrontation scene, we witness a feathered fury of violence that keeps coming and *coming* at her/the camera, pinning her against the wall/our seats. There is a bloody, panting struggle – of arms flailing, clawing against beating bodied wings – as Melanie unwittingly traps herself in the room, eventually slumping down the wall and to the floor in a muffled moan of “oh....Mitch” as the assault persists. There is no scream. The encounter here is seemingly *sexual*¹⁵ inasmuch as it is violent. The sexual component of the encounter appears to hold no *rational*¹⁶ explanation that is in keeping with the logic of linear narrative progression. That said, however, I would have to argue that this sexual component is nevertheless *felt* by the viewer, perhaps most distinctly in the substitution of a horrified scream with a muffled, slumping, moan. Similarly then, in the climactic confrontation in *Rear Window*, wherein Thorwald finally lunges violently at Jeff, there ensues a grunting gasping struggle as the two men clutch one another. We see Jeff

¹⁴ I am adopting Raymond Durnat's position that “the spiritual eye is more often Melanie's than anyone else's” in the film, despite perspective switching amongst the other characters (*The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock*, 349).

¹⁵ I acknowledge the argument that the sexual component in this scene could function as a symbolic *rape*, and therefore, a mere *extension* of the violence. I am taking the position, however, that Melanie's moan implies orgasm, and thus, not rape. I am commenting on the (aesthetic) co-existence of the sexual desire and deathly violence in this scene, neither of which appears to subvert the other.

¹⁶ And for clarity's sake, I mean the sexual component of this scene is not *rational* in the sense that one does not typically have sexual intercourse with birds. And more importantly, if the birds are some kind of sexual metaphor in this scene, we *were already* denied the sexual encounter between Melanie and Mitch earlier, when we followed Lydia to the Fawcett farmhouse. The *second* kitchen kiss that Mitch gives to Melanie on the back of her head while she stands at the sink (after the Fawcett scene) is reconciled by the audience having to assume a (denied) sexual encounter/climax between the two characters while our gaze was turned elsewhere. Linearly therefore, the sexual encounter should not occur (instead) for the audience by the later point of the attic scene in the film.

thrown down onto the bed, Thorwald pouncing on top of him, before Jeff is finally leveraged out of his window. As Jeff falls, however, we *do* hear a scream; the kind of scream that would seem to epitomize *fear*, although we're never sure from whose lips it escapes (perhaps it is intended to merely blend in with the screams of the audience). I would argue this scream, coupled with the interrupting cuts to the neighbours running to see what is wrong, downplays, if not effaces, any sexual suggestiveness about the moments leading up to Jeff's fall. The climax of *fear* in this violent encounter is therefore in keeping with the narrative progression towards a confrontation and capture by our protagonist of the murderous Thorwald. Again, in contrast, the climactic attic scene with Melanie makes for a violent and *also* sexual encounter, the climax of which is implicitly orgasmic. There are no cuts to other characters/spaces in this scene. And not only does Melanie moan Mitch's name as she slumps to the floor, but this moan would seem to replace the sound of the fearful scream that we *did* get in *Rear Window* when our protagonist *fell*. Why is it that this moan is seemingly inferred out of context?

In his article, "Do I Write for an Audience," Wolfgang Iser stipulates:

[R]eception theory, as I have tried to formulate it, conceives of literature as a form of interaction. This conception goes against the aura surrounding autonomous art, as well as against the notion of literature as a representation of life; instead, by intervening in contextual realities, literature refracts life's multifariousness (312).

To employ a slightly modified version of Iser's argument, I would suggest that the sexual connotation of Melanie's moan in the attic scene is Hitchcock's 'intervention in the contextual reality' of the linear narrative "representation." I note that while auteur criticism seeks to "give to the director the same legitimacy as that given to the author of a novel, and to the film the same legitimacy as that given to literature itself" (Konigsberg, "Film Theory and Criticism," 344), this is *not* the way in which I am employing Iser's

theory for an understanding of Hitchcock here. Rather, I am broaching the notion of *agency* with respect to Hitchcock's direction in the film, and this is comparable to Iser's *text* (not the author) which still "signals, guides, directs, and manipulates" the reader's perceptual experience towards reinterpretations and "the experience of a coherent living whole" (Goldstein, "Reader Response Theory and Criticism," 794). With respect to reinterpretations, there is quite suggestively in this attic scene with Melanie a 'refraction' of more than one singular experience located within "life's multifariousness." I would propose, however, that such multifarious refraction within this scene is not necessarily as a result of 'reinterpretations' in the sense that reader-response theory might frame it. When presented with a film reality, with a flow of imagery and sounds, the act of reader/viewer reception becomes more complicated. Why does this seem to be the case, and more importantly, *how*? What is to be grafted from a *simultaneous* delineation of violence and (latent) gratification of the victim's sexual desire? Is it, perhaps, only in *dreams* that we have such multifaceted capacity for this kind of simultaneous reception; a kind of reception where one idea does not necessarily subvert the other in the same given moment? A kind of reception, the experience of which, can only ever be *recalled* (and simultaneously *forgotten*)¹⁷ as flashes and fragments of imagery, sound, and sensations, understood not necessarily in sequence or in context, but rather, *all at once*, in a paradoxically unifying experience of *being* in the moment?

To begin answering these questions, I refer to the "Dark Interpreter" of Thomas De Quincey's, "Apparition of the Brocken," whose concept is articulated in the following lines:

¹⁷ In A Long Hard Look at *Psycho*, Raymond Durgnat says, "a film is a time-based experience, not a concise summary in retrospect" (31).

The apparition is but a reflex of yourself; and, in uttering your secret feelings to him, you make this phantom the dark symbolic mirror for reflecting to the daylight what else must be hidden forever. Such a relation does the Dark Interpreter, whom immediately the reader will know as an intruder into my dreams, bear to my own mind. He is originally a mere reflex of my inner nature (De Quincey qtd. in “Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream,” 626).

Here, I am reminded of my previous chapter on *Rear Window*, wherein I noted Hitchcock’s agency relationship to his audience. Specifically, I cited Lawrence Howe, who argued, “the director’s agency [is] his role as the one who returns our gaze¹⁸” (33). If, in the spirit of Iser, we accept Hitchcock as the ‘intervening agent in the contextual reality’ of the film’s narrative, and if we shortly wish to consider the way of the *dream* as the “language” or “form of interaction” (Iser, 312) of film, a form which I will argue differs slightly from Sharff’s “cinema language,” then it follows that we should first have some concept of agency in our dreams that is potentially analogous to Hitchcock’s agency in film. And so this raises the question: who is the agent in our dreams who returns our gaze? The passage from De Quincey would seem to connect a kind of “Dark Interpreter” with the unconscious¹⁹ in that this “phantom” figure is an “intruder” into our unconscious, namely, our dreams. This “phantom” is similar, perhaps, to the director as an intervener or agent in film. With the exception of his cameos, Hitchcock is very much a “phantom” presence to his audience, whose gaze he invisibly directs, vicariously through his characters, or omnipotently. Further, this “intruder,” according to De Quincey, acts as a “reflex” of ourselves who, in “uttering [our] secret feelings to him,” becomes the “dark symbolic mirror for reflecting to the daylight what else must be

¹⁸ I will shortly be elaborating on a moment in *The Birds* wherein Hitchcock returns our gaze via Melanie, in a scene which occurs subsequent to the attic attack.

¹⁹ I am using this term in the general sense that Psychoanalysis ascribes to it for explaining the discontinuity of consciousness, such as dreams, and in the general sense that Freudian literary theorists regard it as a foundation for aesthetic production (“Sigmund Freud,” The Johns Hopkins Guide To Literary Theory and Criticism, 2nd ed.).

hidden forever.” Such reflection “to the daylight what else must be hidden forever” is reminiscent of my previous *Rear Window* argument on voyeurism wherein I formulated the voyeuristic gaze as a *self-seducing gaze*, deriving from our denial of recognition for the “other” or watched object as an actual *projection* of our own desires,²⁰ of our own *inner hell* (what “must be hidden forever”). Such *hell*, I argued, is the hell *we want to see*, and is reassuringly externalized up *there* on screen (“reflecting to the daylight”); remaining at bay *there* and never *here*. Hence, the true *narcissistic* act of voyeurism rears its ugly head. Interestingly, however, De Quincey says something else about his Dark Interpreter that has me hesitating to conclude that this figure is simply or only a kind of narcissistic-voyeuristic presence in our dreams who invisibly directs our gaze/experience. What De Quincey says is this phantom figure was “*originally a mere reflex of my inner nature* [emphasis mine].” This would seem to suggest the Dark Interpreter as a changed or changing figure who is, or is perpetually becoming, *more* than a *mere* reflex of our “inner nature.” What then, does this say about his (or her²¹) agency in our dreams and about voyeurism as a narcissistic act that is reflexively repeated in our dreams via this agent? My reading of De Quincey in these lines is that our Dark Interpreter, “originally” a reflection of our “inner nature,” is made into a “dark[ening] symbolic mirror” by the “secret feelings”/inner hells that are perpetually revealed to him via our narcissistic-voyeuristic acts in waking life. He has thus become a figure of our unconscious who remains connected to us in our narcissism, our “inner nature,” which is

²⁰In “Voyeurism and the Postwar Crisis of Masculinity in *Rear Window*,” Elise Lemire reiterates the psychoanalytic position that “cinematic spectatorship is akin to the dream state, the state in which, according to Sigmund Freud, we symbolically fulfill our unconscious wishes” (57).

²¹It is not my intent to implicate the issues of voyeurism or agency as restricted to the male gaze. The issue of the female gaze is an additional complication that I am choosing not to address in the context of this essay, but which I submit requires further inquiry, particularly with respect to the unconscious act of dreaming.

intrinsic to the dream, but who also, in the darkness that feeds him in our nightly fragmentations of conscious life, has become a darker and *unrecognizable* reflection, *even* as a denied voyeuristic projection, of *ourselves*. Why might this be so?

I refer briefly to Richard Allen's discussion of "the figure of the double as an externalized, objective projection of unacknowledged human desires" (Allen, 180). Allen argues that the conception of "the double or the shadow world as the objectification of a split-off aspect of the self" (i.e. an objectification which allows for the "psychological explanation of expressionism" to still "domesticate what is alien or other by making it relative to human psychology"), is complicated by the (romantic) idea of nature as a "blind force" (180). Specifically, Allen argues the "affinity of the figure of the double with blind nature in expressionism shows the fundamentally antipsychological nature of the double: it demonstrates the core of irrationality or blind instinct that is lodged within the human" (180-181). Such "blind instinct," Allen suggests, is what romantic philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer refers to as "The Will" (qtd. in Allen, 181), as what is "fundamentally blind and found in forces of nature which are without consciousness at all."²² What I take from Allen's argument is the possibility that the Dark Interpreter of our unconscious is perhaps more than just a "domesticated" psychoanalytical figure who directs our dreams. I take from Allen that it's possible to actually be influenced in dreams, spiritually or otherwise, by an "other," perhaps akin to Schopenhauer's "Will," who began and still *becomes* as a manifestation of our various selves (for instance, of the *hellish* selves we project and discard in our waking lives), but whom we may not recognize as originally forming part of ourselves. This

²² Christopher Janaway. "Schopenhauer." Oxford University Press, 1994. This is a website reference given by Richard Allen. http://www.labyrinth.net.au/~muffin/schopenhauer_c.html.

unrecognizable quality of our Dark Interpreter is *not* as a result of the reflexive act of voyeurism occurring in dreams, an act which we deny is our narcissistic act, but rather, as a result of our Dark Interpreter's phenomenological *location* at the threshold of the unknowable, the unsayable, the unconscious. Such a location could perhaps only be described as what is *natural*, or naturally *felt*, as *there*. Thus, the particular influence of this Dark Interpreter in our unconscious – in our dreams – can only ever be his *agency* that is *there* for experiencing that which cannot be readily explained (of the unconscious, of ourselves) in waking life. How then, does this figure stand to *interpret* our dreams for us? What do we see in him that we also see in Hitchcock? *What does he want from us?*

Pinned against my seat as the birds fire at the camera in the Brenner's attic, I recall Hitchcock's overt intentions, perhaps in his role as interpreting agent, to play his audience like an organ.²³ Have I missed the beat with Melanie in the attic scene? The fear and confrontation with the *birds* in the attic, I can rationalize within the linear narrative structure; the seeming sexual encounter with Mitch, I cannot.

Like Thorwald then, I am asking Hitchcock, I am imploring my Dark Interpreter, "what do you want from me?" in this scene. There is no 'easy answer' to this question, and this is quite possibly Hitchcock's point in that he is constructing a kind of *experience* for us, as in a dream, as opposed to simply telling a *story* that is (narcissistically) *recognized* on screen and thus, easily grasped. I pause to note that my readings of the two memorable scenes in *Rear Window* and *The Birds* could only amount to a *partial* reading of either. My purpose in my particular interpretation of them is that comparatively, the climax scene in the latter film engenders an experience of at least *two*

²³ In Sidney Gottlieb's *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, Hitchcock says, "I'm using their natural instincts to help them enjoy fear....I know those people can all be scared. I play them like an organ" (151).

types of encounters, one of which is inexplicable in that it would not seem to add much, at least *linearly*, to the narrative progression. Thus, a question that remains for me is how the *story* and the *experience* Hitchcock is giving us up on screen *connect*? Unlike in *Rear Window*, for instance, *why* does it seem there are no ‘easy answers’ in *The Birds*?

Consider Robin Wood’s take on the lack of *explanations* in *The Birds*:

The film’s central (and most explicit, most thesis-like) scene in the Tides restaurant, leading to the mass attack on the town, extends Hitchcock’s theme from the particular to the general. The point of the debate is, precisely, the inadequacy of explanations: it exposes the failures of the major protective coverings which humanity has elaborated in its attempts to explain or justify the still inexplicable: notably scientific rationalism...and religion... (“Looking at *The Birds* and *Marnie* through *Rear Window*,” 80-85).

Here, I would agree with Wood that with *The Birds*, Hitchcock seems to be commenting on the “inexplicability” of things which humanity’s “protective coverings” cannot hold.

I would push Wood’s argument a bit further, however, and ask, if the “protective coverings” of our/the characters’ *identities* equally cannot hold the “inexplicability” of what lies beneath them. What I am suggesting is that Hitchcock is also commenting on the “inexplicability” of *humanity*, what our Dark Interpreter cannot *meaningfully* interpret for us. For instance, the attic attack on Melanie (and, analogously, the attack on Jeff in *Rear Window*) moves “from the particular to the general” (via my slightly modified version of Wood’s argument) in at least two ways: 1) Melanie’s look²⁴ provokes an attack/confrontation (as Jeff’s looking does on Thorwald) which becomes a harsh lesson (as it also does for Jeff) of “the failures of the major protective coverings,” that are the “false facades²⁵” or “constructed identities for ourselves which [we think] serve to protect us” (Wood qtd. in “*Rear Window* Ethics: An Original Documentary”). In the case of

²⁴ Here, I am referring to “the look” Wood says has been connected, by many critics, to the provocation of bird attacks throughout the film (“Looking at *The Birds* and *Marnie* through *Rear Window*,” 80-85).

²⁵ Robin Wood. “Looking at *The Birds* and *Marnie* through *Rear Window*,” 80-85.

Melanie's identity, her sharp, chic, self-assured demeanour could not protect her from the birds. Suddenly *she* is as chipped away as her nail polish after the attic attack, an attack which rendered her near catatonic and thus, quite vulnerable by the film's end. Similarly, in the case of Jeff's identity as a photographer (and Peeping Tom), we see his camera flashes fail to stop Thorwald's assault, which renders him *in* the courtyard at the film's end, suddenly very vulnerable to his neighbours, whom he had until now only been watching from afar. In both cases, the characters' particular "protective coverings," which allowed them to remain *at a distance*, are stripped away and pushed to the past tense, allowing the more general and *inexplicable* sensation of "who are they *now*?" to surface. The sensation behind this question is perhaps most poignantly felt in the catatonic look of Melanie after the attic attack; behind her eyes resonates a sudden sense of emptiness. Who are *any* of us *now*, when our various masks are wrenched away? Moreover, who are any of us in our *dreams*, when there are no defences against the "blind force" of the imagination²⁶? 2) This movement from the particular to the general via the characters identities connects to the narrative *structure* of the film as well, which, as I've stated, is my primary point of interest. As demonstrated through a reading of the violent *and* sexual connotations in the attic scene with Melanie, our narrative *expectation* by this point of confrontation in the film becomes more than we bargained for; it adds an additional (sexual) dynamic to the viewing experience that is *inexplicable* in the sense that the linear narrative is not continued in any way by it. It would seem here, that Hitchcock moves away from the particular narrative in front of us into the broader realm of our multifaceted capacity for reception, which is perhaps most easily grasped as a kind

²⁶ Here, I am elaborating Iser's discussion of Freud, wherein he states: "for consciousness has no barrier – as Freud remarked – against the perceptible and no defence against the imaginable" (313).

of *dream* reception in which Hitchcock is the directing agent akin to our Dark Interpreter. This branching off from the (narcissistic) safety of *expected* linear narrative progression, coupled with our protagonist's loss of her mask, her "protective covering," suggests a reading of *The Birds* as a question posed to ourselves, and perhaps by extension, to our Dark Interpreter: do our *stories* always have to *mean something* so that *we* can mean something?

To summarize thus far, through a comparative reading of the climactic scenes in *Rear Window* and *The Birds*, I have demonstrated that 1) the linear narrative structure, as just one dimension of Hitchcock's work, has perhaps drawn the (popular/amateur) audience so deeply into their own (narcissistic) expectations, that when Hitchcock strategically decides to play a different/additional tune in *The Birds*, we become the jaded-sounding Thorwald who asks, "what do you want from me?" of the phantom figure behind the camera; the director and Dark Interpreter whom we *thought* were framing *us*, *playing* us, in our own, perhaps previously subconscious expectations, but who have nevertheless stopped showing us what we *want to see* now. This predicament is an extension of my previous chapter on *Rear Window*, wherein I argued for the power of the *self-seducing gaze*; the gaze which derives from our denial of recognition for the "other" or watched object as an actual *projection* of our own desires. Interestingly then, it would appear that a reading of *The Birds* further complicates our own (narcissistic) desires as the film audience; 2) there are no 'easy answers' in *The Birds*. Our defeated expectation in this way is precisely what is necessary for Hitchcock to make the point that not all things, including what lies beneath the "protective coverings" of the individual or humanity, *must* mean and *must* be explainable. This leaves us shouting "what do you

want from me?” as into the “darkening mirror” of our unconscious, the eerie, unanswering reflection of which is *inexplicable* in its inability to *mean* anything to us in response. Moreover, our reflection is inexplicable/unrecognizable because we, as an audience of *The Birds*, cannot really see ourselves through our own “protective coverings;” *covers* which would enfold a “good” *story* the way *we* want it and in the way *we* can receive it: as subconscious, narcissistic projections of ourselves. Finally, our reflection is unrecognizable because it is (terrifyingly) realized in *The Birds* as perhaps not *really* ourselves; our *desires* may actually derive from the *facades* of the “protective coverings” that the birds reveal for us as meaning *nothing*. Hence, the question Hitchcock brings to us with *The Birds* which might black out our mirror altogether: what is more terrifying – the realization that our masks cannot explain us, or that what lies beneath them cannot be explained? 3) the unanswered question of “what do you want from me?” moves us from the particular, linear, one-dimensional narrative that is *meaningful*, to a broader, multi-dimensional field of reception that is *felt*, is *experienced*, as in a dream. The agency of the dream is complicated by what shapes our narcissistic-voyeuristic expectations, and perhaps further still, by the “blind force” of its nature, which we may infer as an “other” who cannot be “domesticated” by psychoanalytical explanation. How then, do we find ourselves in our dreams now? How do we find ourselves in *The Birds* now? The answer, I would suggest, begins with the notion of *hearing rhythm* in Hitchcock’s *images*, as an experience of *being* in the film, as opposed to finding what *means* within it.

In Alfred Hitchcock's High Vernacular, Stefan Sharff suggests that Hitchcock's separations are "his primary element of structure" (238). Sharff defines the "separation" element of cinema as follows:

[F]ragmentation of a scene into single images, seen in alternation, A,B,A,B,A,B, etc....the scene usually, but not always, starts with a full exposition, wherein all participants are seen in one frame, together; the ensuing single images should not be of the same size (but more or less constant), in order to create the sense of perspective; participants in the single images are in visible eye contact with each other; and at the end of the scene there usually is a resolution consisting, again, of a fully populated frame as in the introduction (4).

Sharff further stipulates:

The element of separation draws the viewer into a more active participation in the film by forcing him to unify the fragmented parts, to occasionally act for the A when the B is on the screen and to anticipate reactions of those who in turn (the A or the B) are about to come on screen (5).

My interest in the separation element of film, as Sharff frames it, is threefold: 1) the way in which it connects with Sharff's assertion that a viewer's reception of film "resembles the human, innate faculty for language" (4), and by extension, our faculty for (Iser's) literature, would seem to be that it "looks for something" in a way that is "always story bound" (Sharff, 4). In other words, if we're acting for A in one shot, we are *looking for* B and we *expect to see B* because B is part of the narrative structure; 2) the way in which it connects to Iser's theory of reception would seem to be that it, much like the act of reading a *text*, forces the viewer to "unify the fragmented parts," resulting in a "more active participation in the film;" and 3) the way in which it connects to our sense of complete/contextualized perspective within a scene would seem to be that it allows us a "resolution" by means of a symmetrical repetition of the scene's "fully populated" introduction. I would suggest that what further complicates the separation element is 1)

the “rhythmic pulsation” that Sharff theorizes results from the fragmentation aspect, and 2) the “fourth wall resolution” available to cinema which, Sharff says, “renders a nonproscenium way of looking” (The Art of Looking in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, 182). For instance, in The Art of Looking in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, Sharff offers a reading of the climactic confrontation scene between Jeff and Thorwald, beginning with Thorwald’s entry into Jeff’s apartment, and he summarizes for us as follows:

The basic elements employed here by Hitchcock are: multiangularity, frequent changes in framing (yet, interestingly enough, with several repetitions) and, most important, a minute yet precise *fragmentation* that controls the *rhythm* of the scene....There are several half-second intercuts to the principal members of the courtyard community looking on from across – they become onlookers now...the camera pans ...up to a long shot of Jefferies dangling down but still hanging on to his second-floor window, his back to the camera. This is the most crucial reverse shot in the film [because] for the first time we see the geographically correct other side of the “across,” the *fourth wall* of the film...the original onlooker becomes the *target of view*, another kind of symmetry, perspicaciously spelled out in cinema language[emphasis mine] (90-91).

I note that while Sharff also offers a rigorous reading of the time length of each shot in this scene to demonstrate the building and slowing of the “rhythm” he suggests is occurring within it, he does not list “separation” as one of the “basic elements” Hitchcock uses to ‘spell’ any of this out in “cinema language.” This is puzzling considering Sharff talks about “precise fragmentation” as the controller of “rhythm” in this scene, and fragmentation is what he says is necessary in separation to “unify” the parts of the scene, engendering “more active participation” within it, such as in the complex juxtapositions of ‘watcher’ and ‘watched’ occurring here between Thorwald, Jeff, and the audience. Of the separation element, Sharff also says we “act for the A when the B is on screen.” This most certainly occurs in Thorwald’s slow approach towards Jeff, wherein the camera alternates shots between the characters as they speak/(re)act. Once more, Sharff holds

that separation is Hitchcock's "primary element" of structure. It would therefore not seem likely that the separation element would be entirely left out of such a crucial scene in *Rear Window*. It is perhaps here where we see some potential problems arising in Sharff's theorization of cinema language: 1) Sharff's "'practice' does nothing to confirm his 'theory'²⁷" in that he may be unable to demonstrate his theory with any reasoned *consistency*; and 2) Sharff's instructive approach "reminds one that there is more to the complex art of film than Sharff's eight structural elements, and that the rhetorical flourish with which a film is constructed does not by itself determine a film's artistic power."²⁸ I would suggest that while the latter point seems to be a valid criticism of Sharff, it also gives him the benefit of the doubt. That is, while his theorization of "cinema language" does not "by *itself*" determine the film's "artistic power" of rhythmical imagery, I would venture to guess that there is perhaps *nothing* which would "by *itself*" determine a film's "artistic power." In the absence of any *one structure* that could determine a film's "artistic power" then, why not at least *begin* with a basic analogy common to all of us: language.

What I have been building towards in this chapter is the proposition that Sharff's "cinema language" is perhaps better understood as a kind of "dream vernacular." As I've shown, Sharff seems to base his theory in elemental structures, such as separation, that are comparable, though not *precisely* so, to established linguistic/narrative structures; structures that invite the viewer to actively receive and participate within the text/film, to *look for the story*, as Iser does in reading literature. This latter point would seem to

²⁷ Leland Poague Rev. of *Alfred Hitchcock's High Vernacular: Theory and Practice*, by Stefan Sharff. *Film Quarterly* 45.4 (1992): 24-25.

²⁸ D.B. Jones Rev. of *Alfred Hitchcock's High Vernacular: Theory and Practice*, by Stefan Sharff. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 11.3 (1991): 298-299.

answer my earlier question of what connects the *experience* Hitchcock gives us with the *narrative* structure of the film: the linear narrative is there as a *context*, but can never be interpreted as a completely straightforward “representation of life” (Iser, 312) because there is agency – what still “signals, guides, directs, and manipulates” the reader’s/[viewer’s] perceptual experience” (Goldstein, “Reader Response Theory and Criticism,” 794) – enticing the reader/viewer to *look for the story*. As a modified alternative to Sharff then, what I have proposed next in theorizing a kind of *imprecise* ‘cinematic dream vernacular’ is the analogy of *agency* of a romanticized Dark Interpreter to that of a film director. Such agency in both cases is as a “phantom” presence, intrinsically narcissistic in that he shows us the “inner hell” we want to see. At the same time, however, this agent is an unrecognizable synthesis of our voyeuristic projection and “inner nature.” His presence is only *felt* as the natural “blind force,” who is *there*, *unknowable* and *inexplicable* to us because there are some intricacies of *humanity* which cannot be explained, even by psychoanalytical “domestication.” This would also gesture towards our dream/film agent as someone who does not communicate *meaning* to us, as in our usual conceptualization of “language” function, but who rather, *acts upon us* to pluralize our gaze in a rhythm of images, forcing us to unify our perceptions and self-projections, and thus simply *be* in that experience. *The Birds* would therefore seem to highlight for us the potential terror of not being able to *explain* what such an experience derives from, namely, the culling of our Dark Interpreter, who himself is afflicted with the false manifestations of our “protective coverings” in daily life, and who simultaneously acts to reveal these to us (if we can allow ourselves to see them). As we all eventually have to wake up from a dream, however, I wish to argue next that the

“fourth wall,” as Sharff frames it, is what allows the film viewer to return from the *be* state of the film/dream. Although we get this return from *Rear Window*, I will argue we do not get this from *The Birds*.

Although it is not my intention to imply that in *Rear Window* there are ‘easy answers’ available for our every pressing question, I am in agreement with Sharff’s quip that by the revelation of the fourth wall in *Rear Window*, “the dream is definitely over” (The Art of Looking in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, 95). That is, in this “rare occasion of seeing the holy grail of an illusion fulfilled” (The Art of Looking in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, 181), the jig is suddenly up, and our vicarious voyeurism through Jeff, from his *inside* look *out*, is finished. This, in itself, is an answer that *we want*. It is perhaps in the moment before hitting the ground when falling (from the fourth wall) in a dream that the dreamer suddenly wakes up, leaving the illusion of that reality, that reality within which one is not actually in *physical* danger, behind. As Sharff suggests, the audience reaction to the fourth wall in *Rear Window* is *visceral* (The Art of Looking in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, 182), and this *instinctual* reaction as opposed to a conscious one is what the “blind force” of our Dark Interpreter, and analogously, our film director, engender within us, when we startle awake. *This* experience is what is ‘spelled out’ for us in cinematic dream vernacular. Moreover, perhaps in his most terrifying move yet, I would argue that Hitchcock does *not* give us the fourth wall experience in the concluding scene of *The Birds*, as my following reading will demonstrate.

First, it would seem from Melanie’s alarmed reaction when she awakens on the couch following her attic bird attack that she is reacting to the *camera* and by extension, to the *audience’s* gaze. We can deduce this because Mitch is turned away from Melanie

in this shot and Cathy's position next to the couch is not located at the same angle as the camera, which could only mean that it is *our* gaze, directly *over* Melanie, which provokes her frantic clawing of the air. As I've hinted at previously, this is a moment in the film in which Hitchcock vicariously returns our gaze via Melanie, with Melanie as perhaps "the A" and we as perhaps "the B" in that we are forced to "unify" the fragmented/interrupted perspective and consequently, act for *the birds*. Clearly, Melanie's panic in this shot is depicted in much the same fashion as when only moments ago, she was attacked in the attic by the birds. Therefore, it would seem not only that our gaze is *reciprocated* by the watched object in this shot, namely, by the terrified Melanie, but also, that our gaze is reciprocated *as though we had assumed the gaze of the birds*, rendering us an active participant within the film, in the spirit of both Sharff and Iser. Furthermore, as Mitch, Melanie, and Lydia exit the house, we are presented with a view of them from the *outside in*, that is, from where the birds are massed *outside*. We do not watch, for instance, from the vantage point of Cathy, who is still located *behind* the three adults as they exit the home ahead of her. Interestingly, it would appear that *our* backing out of the house first, as the *outside onlooker* looking *in* or *back* on the three adults, furthers *our* transformation into the *bird's eye view*. This is because 1) with the exception of two cuts to the waiting car amidst the sea of birds (approximately 2 – 2.2 seconds in the first shot and 1 second in the second shot), which is perhaps a gesture towards Sharff's separation element of giving us "the fully populated frame" introduction, as the three characters slowly exit the house, our view of them from the front gradually emphasizes more and more the vertical gaze upwards (i.e. towards the characters' faces and the background ceiling of the house and upper doorframe), in a medium shot, and 2) the slow moving angle of this shot is

suggestive of a viewpoint of a bird that is perched midway up the driveway or porch, although its exact location/angle in relation to the characters is unclear. This medium shot is then broken up sequentially, after the second cut to the waiting car, as follows: 1) there is a cut to a close-up of Melanie (approximately 1 – 1.2 seconds); 2) there is a cut to a close-up of Lydia (approximately 1 – 1.2 seconds); 3) there is a cut to a close-up of a clump of crows perched on one side of the porch (2 – 2.2 seconds); 4) there is a cut back to a close-up of Mitch (1 – 1.2 seconds); 5) there is a cut back again to a close-up of crows perched on the other side of the porch (2 – 2.2 seconds), and then we cut straight from the perched crows into a moving crane shot of the women as Mitch helps them in the car (more than 10 seconds).²⁹ Film critic Raymond Durgnat, who speaks admirably of Sharff in A Long Hard Look at *Psycho*, might explain the rhythmic alternations (between 2 – 2.2 seconds and 1 – 1.2 seconds) in this scene as follows: the birds' shot is twice as long so as to depict a "nervous flow" that "engrosses" us, whereas the characters' faces "come at us" (Durgnat, 60). The alternating close-ups between the birds and the characters might add a "special intimacy of connection" between them; each having their own space, we "sense each in turn more exclusively, more strongly, than in two-shots shared with [the] adversary. This fuller awareness (not necessarily *identification*) then *collides* with the other...Thus, separating faces, formally, *collides* them psychologically" (Durgnat, 61). Although such a reading is highly suggestive of the characters' psyches blurring together and then again with that of the birds,' I would argue that there is perhaps something much more complicated taking place in this scene. This complexity hinges on the implicit alternation of our acting for the characters, "the

²⁹ These time durations were recorded via a 'half-speed' timer feature on a home DVD system and are thus, not technically precise.

A,” when the birds are on screen in longer “engrossing” shots, and then our acting for the birds, “the B,” when the characters are on screen. While these participatory juxtapositions are taking place, the three characters pass through an imaginary or invisible door,³⁰ which would suggest that the audience, albeit vicariously, is also passing through an imaginary door, a kind of threshold; a threshold which furthers our transformation to the *bird’s eye*. What seemingly finalizes our transformation here is 1) the last (now repetitious) cut to the crows perched on the porch railing as Mitch starts to drive away, with no further cuts back to any of the characters again, and 2) the final cut *back* to that imaginary door which we notice is never *closed* by any of the characters. We simply never see it. The front door is seemingly left open, as if some presence were to remain standing in the doorway to watch the characters’ departure. And from this very last shot, it is indeed *us* looking out over the porch, *as if we had become a part of the mass of birds*, poised to recede back into the opened doorway, in opposition to the way we had first ‘receded’ out. What both Sharff and Durnat might say has occurred here is that the “camera-position has ‘jumped’ to the *other* side of the *entire* scene and of ‘the action line’” (A Long Hard Look at *Psycho*, 61). Have we now become the villain, the villain who has won the day, as the ‘losers’ never quite make it around the bend in the distance? Is the house now ours for the taking? Is this what *we wanted* as spectators? Another possibility presents itself which is reminiscent of Lars Thorwald stepping off of Jeff’s ‘movie screen’ and straight into his living room, his “little prison.”³¹ Unlike Jeff, who is launched from his subjectivity and *out over* the “fourth wall” of his apartment complex, a scene which functioned to “viscerally” end the illusion for the audience as

³⁰ “Opening a door when there is no door – this is film; this is the illusion of movie-making” (Rod Taylor qtd. in *All About the Birds*).

³¹ Robin Wood qtd. in “*Rear Window* Ethics: An Original Documentary.”

well, the imaginary door in *The Birds* is never closed and never seen. One could infer that the imaginary door is the “fourth wall” illusion that is never resolved. We are not granted that visceral disconnect from the reality of *The Birds*. The result is that *the characters drive off and leave us on screen*. It is us who must remain in our subjective gaze, our “little prison;” that one long note of “the fully populated frame” of birds, baiting us with a “nervous flow” of daunting possibility for what (never) happens next. *The Birds* thus becomes a film that is more than the ‘dream vernacular’ we have come to know it in; it has become the dream from which we are not allowed to wake up. And for some, this is the nightmare that never ends.

Being left to linger in the doorway of *The Birds*, and paradoxically perhaps, as captives to our own subjective “little prisons” that look out into a dream from which we cannot wake up, I would ask if, in addition to watching the characters drive off screen into the distance, we also don’t feel or sense our Director, our Dark Interpreter, receding off screen as well. Having previously acted upon us to engender a kind of multifaceted reception, in a way perhaps, of *hearing-seeing*, I would now suggest that here begins – in this final scene of *The Birds* – our Dark Interpreter’s ultimate abandonment of the dream, and thus, of acting upon us within it. That is, there is no further movement between, and opening of the “I” in this scene via any kind of felt agency. Thus, not only are we denied an explanation for the birds in a linear story that *we want*, but it would also seem that our *Dark Director*, if you will, has fled the scene, the “I” of the shifting camera, and left us to our own [] devices.

To begin substantiating this line of argument, I would posit that we still get a sense of our phenomenological location of *here* on the front porch of *The Birds*, thanks to

the hearing-seeing methods our Dark Director employed to get us this far. At the same time, however, we realize that rhythmical ‘hum’ is fading while the scene both does and does not end. The ‘hum’ is no longer there to bridge the gaps between the massing birdcalls, which at this juncture are becoming noticeably overwhelming. Consequently, we start to feel the blankness – the inexplicable – deriving from *within* as well as *without*, engulfing and imploding the senses. We are everywhere and nowhere in this space. As we *become* in this dreamy amorphous state of multiple bird spaces, of the nothingness that I am now proposing disassociates us even from our own agent/agency, it is perhaps at this juncture that the nightmare truly begins: if we’re not going to wake up from this dream, *then who is?* What is going to emerge from this bird experience if not our sense of (our own) selves? And who then, will wake (us) up from this anxiety-ridden and frustrated desire to *mean?* That is to say, who will continue our conscious, linear awareness of the story that *we still want*, and perpetually from our phenomenological vantage point of the ever-self-possessed *here?*

Chapter 3

The Phantasmagoria Phenomenon: Doubling Dark Shapes and Negative Space in *Strangers on a Train*

While urban myths and the like pertaining to the idea of the “doppelganger” are not what I wish to explore in this examination of Hitchcock’s methods, I would pose this scenario in the spirit of our Dark Director: Suppose one were to come across his/her doppelganger, or more precisely, his/her *double*. Suppose this kind of double, while it does not embody all of this person’s physical features, nevertheless seems to exude strikingly similar thoughts, behaviours, and characteristics that might at first go unrecognized and unacknowledged, though they may have been realized almost immediately if identical physical features *were* present. Let’s say too, that this double can seemingly read the mind of their figurative, or pseudo twin, anticipating almost every move/word, and relate emotionally on a multitude of similar levels, all with an unfamiliar glint in their eye. To put it another way: come face to face with a kind of *You* one day – long after you thought you had identified this double as entirely someone *else* – and what might ensue? Do you think, for instance, that you’ve found your soul mate³²? Interestingly, it would seem the appearance of this double in your life is conveniently timed, though not quite ‘fated’ to be. That is, there is something about this person and their timing that seems amiss as well, so you aren’t willing to commit to ‘soul mate’

³² My use of this concept is not limited to notions of romantic love, nor is it intended to become a working definition for the purposes of this thesis. I mean the concept in the general sense that one might expect ideological or utopian notions of a ‘perfect match’ to follow from it. And I don’t believe the identification issues at stake for Hitchcock are rooted in idealisms of perfection or the like, as should become evident in my following arguments.

notions just yet. How then, might the situation be broached? How does one react to possibly '*meeting their match*' so to speak? There is perhaps amazement, curiosity, and quite possibly some creepy-humour in the situation too, but I would suggest it's safe to assume some shock, bewilderment, and fear are at least three initial reactions to an occurrence this profound. But for this double not sharing your physical appearance, the person is *almost* a twin – a doppelganger – but perhaps with *some* uncomfortable psychological differences amidst so many similar ones. These differences, moreover, engender fear, or a certain way of processing fear, that I wish to propose Hitchcock quite brilliantly taps into as part of his Dark Director and "*doubleganger effect*" methods, if I may also coin the latter phrase. I will demonstrate that such methods serve to further characterize Hitchcock's cinematic dream vernacular as perhaps being uniquely his own.

In returning to the final scene of *The Birds* then, I am proposing that our Dark Director has entrapped us on the front porch, leaving us seemingly unable to wake up from that inexplicable, dreamed subjectivity. What effectively 'wakes up' from that dream then is our unconscious dream experience remembered and revealed to us at the same time said experience is forgotten as well. It is the dream we remember at the same time we forget it. *Phenomenologically* speaking, however, what we've brought into – unleashed – into the waking world (and perhaps perpetually unleash) is our unconscious *double*. For Hitchcock, such doubling goes beyond the general (and psychological) assumption that what we can't consciously know, understand, resolve or complete for ourselves in reality is usually subject to that which we desire and/or fear most as it dwells in the unconscious, waiting for (self) fulfillment (most often in the form of projection). If, however, such generalities of wish-fulfillment or self-fulfilling prophecy may be

understood (and will be exemplified in my readings following) to expose that fine line/link between what we fear and what we desire, then, following from said understanding, I would suggest that with his “doubleganger effect” Hitchcock complicates psychological readings of mere projections or wish fulfillments and illuminates the following for us: if we can’t make *meaning* out of our own [], then we *become* within it, even unwittingly. Once more, the terrifying paradox I believe Hitchcock invokes with his “doubleganger effect” is the sensibility or sensation of being truly able to recognize oneself as an actual ‘other;’ that is, we feel estranged from this ‘other’ self and yet guilty for this estrangement at the same time. We might first see Guy Haines’ estranged recognition in this way when Bruno Anthony shows up at his residence after Miriam’s murder and calls out to Guy from across the street, behind a barred gate. Before the end of the scene, Guy has also stepped behind the bars with Bruno to escape the line of sight of the police, all the while protesting to Bruno, “you’ve got me acting guilty now too!”

I will include multiple readings in this chapter to further exemplify my position that Hitchcock complicates his narcissistic voyeur who projects, and in turn, highlights an estrangement from ourselves, as in a dream that is *crossed over* into waking life, and our Dark Interpreter or *double* is unleashed in the light of day (the dream turned waking nightmare). Such an unleashing for Hitchcock is more than a mere projection of unconscious fears and desires (i.e. from ‘here’ to ‘there’), however; it is the culling out of such fears and desires in the form of someone or something we *become*.

As an extension of the lines of argument in my first two chapters then, I am now suggesting that what happens when our Dark Interpreter fades into the background and he, as well as the reality of our dream, leaves us and confounds us, is that his *shape* or “negative space³³” is what remains. This shape *cannot* go without acknowledgment in waking life; it has to be resolved or else our figure’s absence, phenomenologically, couldn’t be / could never have been, when intuitively we know this *not* to be the case (i.e. we know it dwells within, as argued above).

If the above line of argument prompts intervention from rationalists, then I would suggest consideration for the point that we cannot rule out the possibility of our Dark Interpreter’s existence any more than we could prove it absolutely. Hence, what I am proposing is simply the shape or memory of our Dark Interpreter that *crosses over* with us from the dream and practically demands to be defined (again) by what surrounds him in waking life, which is the dream remembered at the same time forgotten; the unconscious undertow of fears and desires now (un)opening for interpretation. Moreover, what I would suggest is behind Hitchcock’s genius in this way, is his ability to bring our Dark *Shape*, if you will, to the forefront, as a kind of “doubling” of our unconscious (i.e. our Dark Interpreter), of the “inner hells” that Hitchcock, as our Dark Director, makes sure we *do* recognize as “me” and “other” simultaneously in waking life / on screen. Such recognition, I will theorize, occurs in a context of “negative space;” our [] within which, we *become*.

In this chapter I will substantiate not only that phenomenological doubling of self is at the heart of Hitchcock’s genius, but that his methods in particular (i.e. “negative

³³ I will be developing an informed definition of “negative space” in this context later in this chapter. For my purposes at this juncture, I am staging my argument for it as being what is remembered and simultaneously forgotten about the dream, as the foreground for the Dark Interpreter’s shape that remains.

space”) explode ‘here-there’ / ‘self-other’ binaries employed in phenomenology and move toward a profound cinematic art form of [] as it engenders a Romantic Will³⁴; of hearing our visceral silence and *making it through* to-gether, *with our double*, in the sense that we are not alone in our fears because we are always with ourselves and capable of a lot more than we think. In this way, Hitchcock rightly delineates for us that what we should fear most is not just the unknown, but more importantly, the unknown about *ourselves*; about what we’re capable of in our repression. Thus, we might begin to appreciate the significance of prioritizing a relationship with the self in order to circumscribe or cultivate our capabilities, if and whenever possible. In my readings of *Strangers*, furthermore, I wish to employ a phenomenological framework to illustrate how Hitchcock smartly culls our fear out of us by re-creating this particular psychology – this psychology of not knowing that we are, in many respects, strangers to ourselves every day we wake up.

So to begin this ‘crossing over’ of our Dark Interpreter to our waking life as our remembered Dark *Shape*, couched in what I will theorize as a kind of “negative space” in *Strangers on a Train*, I’ll return briefly to Thomas De Quincey’s, “Apparition of the Brocken” as it goes on to explain his Dark Interpreter:

The Interpreter is anchored and stationary in my dreams; but great storms and driving mists cause him to fluctuate uncertainly, or even to retire all together....and to assume new features or strange features, as in dreams always there is a power not contented with reproduction, but which absolutely creates or transforms. This dark being the reader will see again in a further stage....and I warn him that he will not always be found sitting inside my dreams, but at times, outside, and in open daylight” (*Suspiria De Profundis*, Part 1).

³⁴ “blind instinct,” as discussed in my previous chapter, is what romantic philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer refers to as “The Will” (qtd. in Allen, 181), and as what is “fundamentally blind and found in forces of nature which are without consciousness at all.”

Here, De Quincey elaborates on the contradictory nature of his Dark Interpreter; contradictions that could be inferred as becoming perceptible in moments of fear or of the need to protect himself. That is, “great storms and driving mists” will cause the Dark Interpreter to “fluctuate uncertainly” or to “retire all together” from his role as agent, *despite* his location as *also* “anchored” and “stationary.” Thus, we begin to see there is nothing absolute about the location of this “dark being.” Further, in order to avoid “reproduction” in such moments of (the dreamer’s) uncertainty, the Dark Interpreter will assume “new” or “strange” features for the creation or transformation of his/the dreamer’s reality. Such a transformation, De Quincey implies, is to the point of his warning us that the Dark Interpreter “will not always be found sitting inside my dreams, but at times, *outside, and in open daylight*” [emphasis mine]. And so here might raise the question: at what “times” in “open daylight” might De Quincey mean?

In Derrida and Disinterest, Sean Gaston writes:

In a further fragment of the *Suspiria de Profundis* published in 1854, De Quincey illustrates the origins of the Dark Interpreter by referring to the phantasmagoria. ‘Perhaps you are aware’ he writes ‘of that power in the eye of many children by which in darkness they project a vast theatre of phantasmagorical figures moving forwards or backwards between their bed-curtains and the chamber walls.’ As Alina Clej remarks, the image of the phantasmagoria ‘whether projected by an optical apparatus or constructed in symbolic terms, introduces a distance and uncertainty between subject and object or between the *subject and itself*.’ By the 1850’s the ‘power in the eye’ is no longer with the poet who decides what is ‘most interesting’ and calls upon the imagination to discriminate between the inside and the outside, the public and the private [emphasis mine] (53).

As a figure of the imagination that is so called upon, Gaston goes on to describe “[t]he spectre as the *imaginary* dark interpreter and violator of the private...” [emphasis mine] (53). While I would agree with Clej’s and subsequently Gaston’s general assertion that

1) whether the projected image is aided by the material or the figurative, there is a

distance and uncertainty introduced between subject and object or the subject and itself; and 2) that the “power in the eye” is thus, no longer up to the *creator* but rather, is created by the implicit reader’s/viewer’s imagination in navigating the uncertain (narrative) distance *in between*, I am not in agreement that the Dark Interpreter can be so readily defined as the strictly “imaginary” or implicitly ‘childish’ figure who negotiates imaginative (*in between*) space and also “violates” the “private” or subjective points of view. Gaston’s discussion does include, after all, the *phantasmagoria*, which I am positing means for De Quincey that what is created *is as real as* what is created by the imagination; there *are* dark figures moving along the chamber walls, and it is precisely the *shape* of this movement that mirrors that of our Dark Interpreter, a phantom now whirling about our glowing chamber walls – in “open daylight” – soon to be an “intruder into [our] dreams” (De Quincey); dreams being a considerably “private” realm, but we nevertheless *feel* our Dark Interpreter’s presence there (his phenomenological location).

Once more, Gaston writes:

De Quincey’s narrator invites the reader to ‘ascend’ the Brocken and ‘*to test the nature*’ of the ‘mysterious’ Brocken Spectre. These tests are prompted by a ‘*fear*’ that the spectre is *corrupt and unreliable*. The ‘decisive’ proof that the Brocken Spectre is a ‘reflex’ of the subject only transforms the spectre into a Dark Interpreter. ‘By ‘uttering your secret feelings to *him*’ De Quincey writes, ‘you make this phantom the dark symbolic mirror for reflecting to the daylight what else must be hidden forever’ [emphasis mine] (53).

Here again, we are reminded, as argued in my previous chapters, of the Dark Interpreter’s “mirror” characteristic of being able to “reflect to the daylight what else must be hidden forever.” This “original” reflex of our “inner nature,” moreover, may be read to imply the Dark Interpreter as a changed or changing figure, a figure whom De Quincey later elaborates upon as “not always...sitting inside [his] dreams, but at times outside, and in

open daylight.” De Quincey’s image of the phantasmagoria exemplifies his theorizations in this regard beautifully. What I would like to propose, however, is that Hitchcock, as our Dark Director, takes things a step further. That is, if we consider De Quincey’s Brocken Spectre as a kind of double of his Dark Interpreter, as a Dark Shape that is found at times “in open daylight” – at such times perhaps, when fear that this shape is “corrupt and unreliable” prompts a ‘testing’ of its “mysterious” nature – then Hitchcock as the Dark Director who outlines our shape in chamber-lit walls, playing with the lighting so as to engender such testing, is a compelling thought. With his doubling in *Strangers on a Train* then, perhaps too, we might begin to see our Dark Director simultaneously ‘crossing-over’ between “inside and outside, public and private” (Gaston 53), exploding phenomenological notions of being *only* “at times” *here* and “at times” *there*.

From the opening scenes of *Strangers on a Train*, I take the position that Guy’s “chance encounter” with Bruno was no accident, nor were many of the intricacies of the plot following from it. First, we have the shot of the glowing archway to the train station, with all of the film credits to appear through, then the eventual “Diamond Cab” pulling up to the curb where fancy black and white shoes and pin striped suit climb out. We are encouraged forward with the booming brass instrumental score as the next “Diamond Cab” pulls up and plainer black shoes and no striped suit emerge. Strings and flutes bring determined strides across diamond-tiled flooring-turned-lines, straight through another archway out to the platform, and we see both shoes and suits pass through here. Cut to the parallel train tracks and climaxing full-orchestra score as the tracks crisscross and blur out through the bottom of the screen so that we can move with them – we are clearly going for a ride too! Flutes soften the fade-out to inside the train car, where we

see fancy shoes and striped suit saunter to a seat, legs crossed. What are we waiting for in this frame? We are already in motion toward a destination. But there is something else, and right then we get it: plain shoes stride over and sit down *right* in front of fancy shoes. And how could anyone miss *those* shoes? But Guy Haines, plain-shoes wearer and pro-tennis player accustomed to keeping his eye on a clear path to the ball, *does* miss those fancy shoes. Here, Guy (what a plain name too!) “accidentally” kicks Bruno Anthony’s fancy shoes as he sits down to cross his legs next. I will argue that the conversation that ensues adds to the proposition that this meeting was *not* by chance. Rather, this meeting was at best, a series of ‘pre-determined’ accidents; the kind where we can feel that bird swooping at our heads without *knowing* it yet.

The issue of determinism versus accident is discussed at length by George Toles in his article, “Occasions of Sin: The Forgotten Cigarette Lighter and Other Moral Accidents in Hitchcock.”³⁵ To foreground his reading of *Strangers*, for instance, Toles asserts the following:

We tend to think of Hitchcock’s control of his narratives as so rigorous that our moral experience of them will have a similarly determined character. Hitchcock knows, we have often been told, what moral decisions and dilemmas will confront his characters and how his imagined viewers are likely to relate to them. My insistence on the accidental or contingent nature of our moral participation in a Hitchcock film builds on my assumption that the telling moral moments purposely lack the clarity of the director’s plot points....Hitchcock arranges his obscure testing places as mundane, initially reassuring sites that are somehow misted over. He intends that we stumble our way into them. We didn’t mean to arrive at this moment in this fashion; our mind was elsewhere, half-wandering (535).

The deterministic quality to Hitchcock’s work, I believe Toles rightly points out, is his foreknowledge of “what moral decisions and dilemmas will confront his characters and how his imagined viewers are likely to relate.” Moreover, it would seem our Guy half-

³⁵ A Companion To Alfred Hitchcock. Eds. Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague. 529-552.

stumbled – indeed, half-kicked – his ‘accidental’ way into crossing paths with Bruno, though our minds in this opening scene are likely far from “half-wandering” due to the elaborate crisscross themed prelude leading – quite linearly – up to it from the crossing train tracks. The meeting between the two characters was inevitable, though couched very much as a non-accident by Hitchcock’s deliberate imagery. That said, I am still in favour of Toles’ subsequent line of questioning in this regard: “Once Hitchcock inserts the idea of accident into the midst of his rigorous formal arrangements, what opportunity is there for contingency to interrupt the flow of determinism and make its own presence felt?” (537). Again, at the strangers’ first meeting, I would propose the crisscross themed opener to the film as being Hitchcock’s “rigorous formal arrangement,” with the insertion of the “accident” being that of Guy’s plain shoe kicking Bruno’s fancy patent shoe. I note, however, that Bruno’s bright patent shoes are hard to miss. Toles, furthermore, handles the contingency issue by implying that Guy’s foot could take cues from Hitchcock’s opening visual pattern to “induce us to believe that [it] instinctively knows what it is doing,” (537). Toles’ point of course, is that this is an absurd idea – a foot can’t “know” anything. And while there is a “veiled declaration of sympathy with and tacit encouragement of a psychological double” (Toles, 537) in Guy leaving his lighter behind in Bruno’s train compartment, that yes, opens the door for contingency, I believe Toles asks a much more interesting question in this context (however tongue-in-cheek it may or may not be) that is relevant for my purposes here: “Is Guy’s body ahead of his mind in signaling a readiness for Bruno’s enamored attention and his subsequent malevolent offer?” (537). As a potential answer to this question, Toles does note an “unvoiced, subterranean level” (537) on the part of Guy in causing

these major “accidents” in the film, though with respect to the shoe incident at the film’s opening, I am not clear from Toles’ argument so far how that incident would be considered a “telling *moral* moment” [emphasis mine] that would require “testing” in a setting of the “mundane, initially reassuring sites,” like that of a passenger train car (Toles, 535). Surely the mundane overpowers any potential for a moral problem in the film’s opening sequence. The only issue at stake would seem either to make contact with, or not make contact with, another passenger’s fancy shoe. That said, and in light of Toles’ above-cited question pertaining to Guy’s body being ahead of his mind, I am nevertheless compelled to see the opening shoe incident as a “telling moral moment” as well. This is due in part to another compelling point Toles subsequently brings up:

In the inverted logic characteristic of the best tales of doubling, the more cautious, socially adept and respectable figure – wound tight with the strain of denial and the lack of self-knowledge – sets the terms for the double’s conduct. Guy is the knot Bruno is summoned to untie [emphasis mine] (543).

Here I would suggest that on a subconscious or “subterranean level” our Dark Shape is at work, mentally summoning the Bruno necessary to complete the task of unwinding whatever “tight strains of denial” keep us so “socially adept” that we can hardly turn inward to face – to know – our own selves anymore. What complicates the issue is that the tighter the strain, the more ‘boxed in’ the self-knowledge that needs to get out, unleashed in the form of our Dark Shape, at a time (like divorce) when the dams are about to burst. That is, Guy may have *thought* he knew himself as a husband to Miriam, but does he know who he is now as a cuckolded husband – as someone whose reality is not what he thought? Further, does the now cuckolded husband open the door to further self-knowledge – for Guy – of what is reality versus the possibilities of truths and untruths within that reality? For instance, what, if any “protective coverings” is Guy

prepared to dis-cover, versus what must his Dark Shape entertain for him, as ‘tests’ for Guy’s self dis-covering? I would suggest that Guy’s Dark Shape has arrived in the form of Bruno, whose interiority now seems a pressing issue to ‘figure out’ as part of said ‘testing.’ That said however, Bruno’s interiority might be comprised of more knowledge about Guy than we think. When Guy exclaims once again “you’re *quite* a reader Mr. Anthony,” Bruno responds with, “Ask me anything, I know the answer!” which would seem to imply not only that Bruno could be quite book smart, but also, that Bruno thinks he knows as much, if not more, about Guy/Guy’s life, than Guy does himself. One would think this possibility should produce a chilling effect on Guy, but it seemingly does not. Again, is this meeting really an accident? Is Guy, or the audience, being ‘tested?’ How do we recognize or locate our own Dark Shape in this film, as a figure Hitchcock, our directing agent, simultaneously attempts to cull out?

With respect to the imagery we’re given in the train car scene, this initial crossing of paths of two strangers, the shoes once again form the center of the shot, though this time they are obscuring, we *want* to see around them. Cut to the close-up shot of Bruno exclaiming “My father!” in answer to Guy’s question of who called him a bum, and we get the perspective of a child, looking up at his parents’ dinner table. At the center of this shot, we get the “A to G lighter” sitting just beyond our reach, our reach perhaps as the child who *wants* to swipe that lighter off the table but who doesn’t yet know *why*. Here, I would suggest that this is the body that knows before the mind what it wants. The child-like context can also be inferred from the dialogue in this ‘looking up’ shot. And is there not still a child in all of us? Here again, Bruno preambles a teenage diatribe about his ‘strict unreasonable parent’ with a childish tone of “he *hates* me,” as if it were some

naïve notion just meant to be accepted at face value. This is reinforced again when Bruno asks Guy, “Now what do you think about that?” and then doesn’t allow Guy to form an answer. The “hate” is not really a question. What follows are outlandish stories from Bruno to the tune of “driving a car blind-folded at 150 mph,” and “almost blowing the sawdust out of my head.” Again, we infer a childlike imagination that is tempered only by the subsequent suggestion of “swapping murders,” which is seemingly far more *possible* a story by comparison. “What are you trying to prove?” Guy asks this man full of “sawdust” and the answer Bruno provides is “Well I’m not like you, Guy. You’re lucky, you’re smart. Marrying the boss’s daughter, that makes a nice short-cut to a career doesn’t it?” To this, we have Guy on the defensive: “Can’t a fellow look beyond a tennis net without being out for something?” What does Guy mean by this question? As Bruno smoothes things again with protestations of friendship, we might wonder just what Guy is “out” for, in his defensiveness about it. And just as he has smoothed things and Guy starts to get up for his train stop, we have Bruno “testing” – planting questions – again: “What did you say your wife’s name was?” Our inkling here might be that Guy never actually told Bruno the name, though we were cut out of the beginning of the train car lunch. Still, why would Bruno *also* know Miriam’s middle name? He simply seems to know *too much* for his purposes as a mere stranger on a train, even planting facts about Miriam’s adultery in the conversation in order to have them confirmed and angrily *out in the open* on the part of Guy, seemingly for Bruno’s segue into the crisscross of murders he proposes. “Let’s just say” is what he repeats in order to silence Guy’s rebuttals of unlawfulness and “morbid thoughts.” Seemingly tongue-in-cheek, Bruno proceeds to theorize the “swapping of murders” he used to “put himself to sleep with at night” just

“figuring it out.” Here perhaps, the phantasmagoria figures begin to flash rapidly along the wall, spinning out a narrative of missing “motives” in order to make ‘getting away with murder’ possible. And since Guy has been made a “chump” by the adulterous Miriam, we begin to see those missing motives quite clearly. The smooth, almost sarcastic way in which Guy entertains Bruno’s proposition – “Sure Bruno, sure!” – “We talk the same language” – right out of the train car – is the mask for the not-so-hidden glimmer of desire to indeed be ‘rid’ of the “*total stranger*,” the stranger whom Bruno says would be *Miriam*. And isn’t this who she ultimately became for Guy – a stranger – in her philandering? Once more, would it be a fair question to consider Bruno, as the seemingly sincere truth-teller, as the more familiar and less estranged character from Guy now, as compared to Miriam? In other words, how close are we to trusting Bruno? Do we *want* to trust him?

As Bruno invites himself over to sit *right* next to Guy, we note his introduction includes his mentioning of his name pinned to his tie as a brooch, almost as if we required ‘proof’ of his identity this way. Seemingly, it isn’t us, the viewers, but rather, Anne Morton, later on in the film, who needs this ‘proof’ before confronting Guy about the murder of his then soon-to-be-ex-wife, Miriam. So then, why does Bruno, and by extension, Hitchcock, give us this name proof *now*, when we seem to want to dismiss the brooch as a mere oddity or quirk in someone’s introduction of themselves and nothing more consequential? Perhaps in this way – and coupled with the window blinds that cast parallel shadow lines over Bruno’s face in this shot – we are still meant to question Bruno’s credibility. We must regard him as ‘suspect,’ and in this way I would argue we

begin to take on Guy's perspective as the character with whom we sympathize throughout the rest of the film. But, as we'll see, this is precisely Hitchcock's trick.

We may notice much of the imagery depicting Bruno's character thus far is 'lined' in some way. The blinds that shadow-line just below his eyes, for instance, are particularly hard not to notice as his conversation with Guy gains momentum. The lines continue: "I don't talk much, you go ahead and read" is the first line/lie Bruno tells us. Next comes his immediate interruption, with his darting eyes highlighted in shadow bars, and with a tone almost childlike, Bruno again gushes seemingly sincere appeals to Guy's ego: "It must be pretty exciting to be so important." Here, we immediately get Guy clarifying his role as "tennis player" in response, and Bruno bringing it back to the generalized "well people who do things are important.....I never seem to do anything." Again, his commentary hardly seems that glib – it comes off as genuine, yet cast in shadow from the window blinds. If it were a question before, we certainly have it confirmed for us now that Bruno doesn't feel he does *anything* important – or does he? Perhaps in this oddity of phrasing and imagery we're still meant to question Bruno's credibility in this scene, and in spite of the sincere tone. Certainly Guy doesn't seem to be asking Bruno any questions, so we might only assume he is still weighing Bruno up as someone he may or may not want to get to know. I would suggest that Hitchcock is highlighting for us a certain, natural *discomfort* in getting to know a stranger. The uncertain vacillation between the known and unknown and possibilities of truths and untruths, creates a distance we're not sure we want to close yet, even though the person is sitting *right* next to us in this train car.

In considering credibility, sincerity, and comfort levels when first getting to know a stranger, particularly as these elements are depicted in *Strangers on a Train*, D.A. Miller's observations in his article, "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures," are a worthwhile place to start. When the strangers first meet (i.e. when the camera finally pans upward from the accidental grazing of plain and patent shoes) we have Bruno sitting across from Guy, gushing instant recognition for the pro-tennis-player and appeals to Guy's ego: "I certainly admire people who do things." While Guy delivers modest chuckling and smiles in response, we notice he is reading a book – a book D.A. Miller rightly identifies as Alfred Hitchcock's Fireside Book of Suspense. In my review of this scene, the once hidden book is suddenly in plain sight, and I can't help but notice that immediately after Bruno says, "I certainly admire people who do things," he glances downwards – almost imperceptible, but it's there – and we might consequently draw the inference that this glance is aimed at Hitchcock's book. I would add that such an inference is strengthened by Bruno's subsequent contradictory line, "I don't talk much, you go ahead and read," which he says after he moves from across the train car to sit *right* next to Guy. Then, outstretched hands of introduction temporarily touch and remove Guy's hands from the pages of the book, and Bruno proceeds from this point forward to carry on a conversation that ultimately *keeps Guy from reading Hitchcock's book* for the rest of the journey. It's as if Bruno decided – consciously or otherwise – that the book is either an obstacle, something he already knows about, and/or something he just doesn't care about, and so he really *doesn't* want Guy's attention on it. Such possibilities on the part of the man who claims to "read too much" might seem oddly contradictory of course. Though we do see Bruno look fleetingly over Guy's shoulder at the book's pages initially, we don't get

a feeling that there is much interest and/or that anything familiar has registered with him. That said, perhaps Bruno, like the audience, hasn't yet copped on as to the book's author, and so Bruno still finds the book's reader – Guy – to be of greater interest, that is, if Bruno really finds books and reading to be an interesting pastime at all. Once more, we seem to forget about Guy's (hidden) book and our Director's non-cameo until the train arrives at Metcalf and Guy is departing Bruno's private train car. The book pops up from the bottom of the frame again as Guy is smoothly saying "Sure Bruno, sure" in response to Bruno's search for reassurance that his murder theory (i.e. the proposed swapping of murders – "crisscross") is a good one. If someone told me Guy was a car salesman instead of a pro-tennis-player after this scene, I might believe it. He is certainly slick in placating Bruno here, and totally collected, with Hitchcock's book in hand, as he exits the frame. Who is seemingly in control of the crisscrossing narrative at this juncture? Or more precisely, who does Hitchcock want us to *think* is in control? Is it Bruno, who began as a quirky, inquisitive passenger, not using his own private train compartment, save for inviting strangers into it for lunch? Bruno, who has wavered and not wavered in his very informed and sincere appreciation for a pro-tennis Guy he supposedly didn't even realize was from Metcalf ("Metcalf? What would you want to stop in *Metcalf* for?")? Bruno who, highlighted in blinds, lines, cigarette smoke, and 'too much reading' (where is *his* book?), is now striding away from the doorway of the now departed Guy, with Guy's "A to G" lighter in creamy manicured hand as future key to a carnival murder? Or, is it Guy who controls the narrative at this point, as he smoothly carries the workings of our Dark Director in hand off of the train and away from the stranger who never permitted him to read any of it? Guy who, reader of our literary Hitchcock,

nevertheless fails to recognize him in the flesh as he passes him – in cameo – boarding the train at Metcalf with his bass instrument in hand, likely from the same music store our Guy is about to visit next?

With respect to the latter – that is, to Guy, who can only seem to appreciate Hitchcock in hand, while we, the audience, mainly look to appreciate him in the flesh, in cameo, D.A. Miller writes the following:

We'd thought we were patronizing Hitchcock when all along it was he who was patronizing us; in smugly discerning him, we were only being his dupes. He is not the person we imagined, or, rather, *that person is not the author we overlooked* [emphasis mine]. Naively, we were content to find Hitchcock in the flesh when we should have been looking for his image on *film*; in that "still" which is the author's photograph. And now that we can no longer take the same pride in recognizing *Hitchcock*, *we are no longer able to take the same pleasure in his film for recognizing us in our competence to read it right* [emphasis mine].

Given Miller's astute powers of observation regarding Hitchcock's first "still" cameo in *Strangers* as the author photograph on the back of Guy's book, I would argue that any inclination toward Hitchcock as being he who controls the narrative upon the strangers' first meeting, *either* via Bruno's character *or* possibly even Guy's character, is shaky, at best. This is because Miller delineates for us that the viewers' close involvement and/or proximity to the most sympathetic characters in a particular Hitchcock scene (i.e. our "smug discerning" for "reading it right") can simultaneously obscure our powers of observation such that major narrative points can become hidden in plain sight. Here, for instance, we look for our Director's cameo *movement* to appear in the film when his *stillness* in this regard can be just as significant, if not more so, if and when recognized.

Deriving from Miller's poignant observation, I would suggest that with this "still" or 'non-cameo' on the back of Guy's book, followed by the train-boarding cameo at Metcalf, Hitchcock has, in effect, played 'doubles' of himself in *Strangers*, making his

presence or even surrogacy with any one character difficult to pinpoint. With the first cameo being more accessible and poignantly recognizable by his character(s), and the second cameo being more poignantly recognizable by his audience, with a ‘crisscross’ of failures of recognition in between, it would indeed seem that Hitchcock has engaged in some “duping,” the double nature of which leaves us questioning who is really a step ahead of whom by the time the train reaches Metcalf. This is especially true of course, *if* the first “still” cameo is even noticed by Hitchcock’s audience as one of his tricks for hiding in plain sight. Perhaps the persistent interruption from Bruno, for instance, equally kept us from turning our attention to the book as it did Guy, hence our “smug discerning” of the two characters in this scene may have obscured our ability to really *see* the book. Contingent upon the viewers’ recognition for the book then, it would seem to follow that, in so recognizing the book, the audience is left with a kind of reception or way of thinking about the narrative as though continually ‘tested,’ with nothing to hold on to, or rather, with nothing that certainly “recognizes us in our competence to read it right” (Miller). Just where is Hitchcock, or even his sensed agency, if we – and his characters – don’t but do recognize him as hidden and also in plain sight? Moreover, with his ‘double cameo’ in this film, it’s almost as if Hitchcock has winked through the camera at his audience: “Ha! You saw me, but you didn’t see me!” And so the testing continues: Hitchcock is right in our faces at Metcalf boarding the train, but did we catch that wink of his *not* being there too? If we missed the first “still” cameo on Guy’s book, then we did miss that wink. So, we continue down the track of the second ‘in the flesh’ cameo only, and in the false certainty that *we*, over and above Hitchcock’s characters, are the successful participatory subjects of a ‘double recognition’ (i.e. Hitchcock’s implicit

recognition for an audience that also wants to recognize him), a double recognition that was contrived via Hitchcock's second cameo and which (here, falsely) "recognizes us in our competence to read [him] right" (Miller). In other words, in the likelihood that we only caught the second cameo, then not only do we *think* we're on track with the narrative at this point in the film, but we think we're a step ahead of the game as well. That is, we think we're on equal footing with Hitchcock – we have knowledge of, and double recognition for, our Dark Director that our Guy seems to lack, even though, yes, if there are Millers in the audience to notice, it is arguably *Guy* who is the character carrying the unread plot in the palm of his hands at this point, perhaps a step ahead of *us*.

Nevertheless, while we self-congratulate in our recognition of our Director at Metcalf – and as his main character strides obliviously on by – we also delight in the knowledge – and this is true for almost any Hitchcock film – that we're about to get duped. Of course, Miller would argue we already *have* been duped, given the average audience member likely would not have caught the first "still" cameo, however hidden in plain sight. Indeed, given the accuracy of Miller's observation in this regard, it would be difficult to disagree with him on that point. Even so, the second cameo is enough to consider, in its own right, that Hitchcock is both there and not there. We recognize him outside of the film, and even acknowledge his presence with delight, but within the film, and even when given the same opportunity, his characters do not. Thus, Hitchcock's audience is simultaneously obliged to recognize his absence. What we should still take from Miller, however, is the underscored notion of *expectations* in a Hitchcock film, and specifically, in *Strangers*. That is, while at least one of Hitchcock's prescribed forms is seemingly to give us what we *want* – expressly wanted or not – his 'doubling' of himself

with “still” and “in motion” cameos in *Strangers* is a compelling reminder *not* to let our expectations construct our reality to the point that we don’t recognize it when our reality starts to change, even when said reality merely presents the same material but in a different way. This might be how we get duped, for instance, into being cuckolded, into talking to strangers, into murder plots, and into eventual carnivalesque spinning out of control to the point of nausea and wondering what the hell happened that we would arrive at this moment in time. In this regard then, our Dark Director should be realized as a presence *and* an absence, and as presented in many forms besides ‘in the flesh’ or ‘in motion.’ Hitchcock’s “stillness” for instance, might cause something or someone *else* to move instead, such movement being very much anticipated as part of his “plot points.” These narrative points, moreover, are what Toles argues Hitchcock intends for us to “stumble our way into” even though we “didn’t mean to arrive at this moment in this fashion” and with our minds “elsewhere, half-wandering” (535). This idea of movement – perhaps in the form of stumbling – as a consequence of Hitchcock’s “stillness” or ‘present-absence’ as a film director, might lead us to question his self-doubling in *Strangers* a bit further. For instance, how does his doubling continue to test our expectations such that we’re duped or not duped, and perhaps even by the Dark Shape of our own making? To ‘test’ Toles’ foregoing arguments in this regard, I would suggest Guy’s/Hitchcock’s (hidden) book as a worthwhile starting point.

If we were able to notice and appreciate the book in Guy’s hands in the opening scenes of *Strangers* as being Hitchcock’s book, with Hitchcock’s photograph, we might be tempted to read Guy as a kind of empty vessel of authorship for our Dark Director, from the get-go. That is, we might see Guy as the plain, not-too-emotional character (for

someone who has just been cuckolded), non-reader of Hitchcock's book of suspense, as a somewhat 'open form' through which our Dark Director invites participation from the audience to play the role, or even, "stumble into" it. Paradoxically, this 'open form' might be inferred or arrived at due to Guy being tightly wound or 'closed' somewhat as a character. Unlike Bruno, for instance, who seems to tell us everything (though he apparently *does* nothing), we don't glimpse much of Guy's interiority (even as a person who "does things"), save for his outbursts of anger toward Miriam in the music shop, outbursts which seem far more packed with emotion than any gesture we see between Guy and his fiancé, Anne Morton. Furthermore, with the denied recognition for what we *want*, as discussed in Chapter 1, I am suggesting that what has crossed over to take on this vessel or role – of ourselves, *as* Guy – is our Dark Shape, our own double who must vicariously, as Guy, enter into the already begun relationship of doubling with Bruno (i.e. via Hitchcock's opening imagery). Bruno, moreover, might be read as a kind of Hitchcock surrogate, even though our director's self-doubling in "still" has arguably destabilized our sense of locating his agency just yet (i.e. Hitchcock's expected *movement* is arguably suspended over the book that neither character is engaged in reading). Thus, herein lies my argument that Hitchcock, as our Dark Director, is outlining our Dark Shape on proverbial chamber-lit walls – a phantasmagoria of sorts. We might almost feel him here simply as the suspended absence – hovering above the train car while the two strangers talk – playing with the lighting, lining Bruno's face in shadow as our Guy is drawn in – or just interrupted. Here, our Dark Shape's "mysterious" nature and propensity to be, perhaps, "corrupt and unreliable" is being tested as Bruno enthusiastically takes our Guy's hands off of the pages of Hitchcock's book. To go back

to Miller's arguments for just a moment that our "pleasure" is somehow "lost" in an unconfirmed ability to "read [Hitchcock] right" in a scene like this, a scene wherein we've put the book aside and are searching for Hitchcock beyond his pages, I would argue instead that certainly there is much "pleasure" to be had in this way of reception, regardless of any former "competencies" that were likely rooted too deeply in narcissistic outcomes anyway. In a refreshing alternative with *Strangers* then, Hitchcock is perhaps coaxing us along an interpretative plane that denies the location of any one agent, more sympathetic vessel, or double of self. That is to say, there are multiple selves, both everywhere and nowhere – to be considered in the perceptual spectrum of the crisscrossing narrative. Even as the story progresses beyond the journey to Metcalf, just when there might seem a *knowable* answer, we do a 'double-take' if you will, a re-check of the narrative facts, and another question needs to be asked. For instance, when Guy screams into the phone at Anne Morton that he'd like to break Miriam's "foul" and "useless" neck, we might first think of it as fitting punctuation to the angry confrontation at the music store, and thus, an authentic look at Guy's interiority. However, because the outburst stipulated "I could strangle her!" we *have* to look back and consider whether this outburst is a reflection of Guy's truer feelings, or if perhaps, it is the result of a seed planted by Bruno. How might this line of inquiry affect our being sympathetic to Guy's cause, or even, our being accountable for *wanting* Miriam dead (too)? I believe this idea of taking another look, or even a 'double-take' could be an important point Hitchcock would want us to take from *Strangers* – how can we really *know* anything – about characters, about our Dark Director, about ourselves – if we stop asking questions? People are multi-dimensional and complicated, not to be 'boxed in' under any one

heading or audience expectation of ‘murderer’ and ‘victim,’ ‘protagonist’ and ‘antagonist.’ I see at least two dark shapes gliding, chasing, and overlapping on chamber walls as I am considering Hitchcock’s method in this regard. As Miller continues,

Strangers, in spite or because of the obviousness of the platform appearance, seems especially rich in what might be called Hitchcock appearances without Hitchcock, and the structural similarities between the phony Hitchcocks and the real one ensure that, no matter how many times we see the film, it will always be affirming that Hitchcock is one man and many men; that he appears but once and is on the verge of appearing all the time; that we will certainly find him and may just miss him.

I would suggest that Miller’s discussion in this light – about the present-absent Hitchcocks and non-Hitchcocks; the idea of uncertain vacillation between the known and unknown, and possibilities of truths and untruths, is also the idea behind what creates the distance we’re not sure we want to close yet when we meet a stranger, even though all the possibilities are sitting *right* next to us in a train car, or *right* there up on screen. Here again, I would suggest Hitchcock doubles the nature of his existent/non-existent narrative agency with a kind of *present distance* when in the company of a stranger/strangers. Such a phenomenon might account, for instance, for Guy’s non-recognition of Hitchcock at the Metcalf train station even though he is carrying his book of suspense, as well as our (potential) non-recognition of Hitchcock’s “still” cameo hidden in plain sight. How might we be at a *present distance* from *ourselves* as well?

In light of the multiplicity of Hitchcocks Miller suggests, I would like to consider Manny Farber’s conceptualization of “negative space” in his book, Negative Space:

Manny Farber on the Movies:

Negative space, the command of experience which an artist can set resonating within a film, is a sense of terrain created partly by the audience’s imagination and partly by camera-actors-director....Negative space assumes the director testing himself as an intelligence against what appears on screen, so that there is a

murmur of poetic action enlarging the terrain of the film, giving the scene an extra-objective breadth. It has to do with flux, movement, and air; always the sense of an artist knowing where he's at...(9-10)

If we accept Farber's position that negative space encompasses "a sense of terrain created partly by the audience's imagination and partly by camera-actors-director" (and I have previously demonstrated various such moments in my readings of both *Rear Window* and *The Birds*), and if we regard Hitchcock's two cameos in *Strangers* as his "testing himself as an intelligence against what appears on screen" to the degree that we feel a "murmur of poetic action enlarging the terrain of the film" – this being in the form of Hitchcock doubling himself, and by extension, our Dark Shape *crossed over* from the realm of the dreaming unconscious (such crisscrossing is indeed "elegant") – then I would agree with Farber insofar as "extra-objective breadth" is achievable and is achieved by Hitchcock in *Strangers on a Train*. That said, Farber's suggestion of "flux, movement, and air" is something I would argue is more appropriately conceptualized as organic; as something our Dark Director *wouldn't always* have a sense of "knowing where he's at" once within it so as to 'test himself,' and by extension, our own Dark Shape, because it would necessitate pinpointing a sensibility that is inherently in flux, or 'on the verge.' Thus, I am proposing "negative space" in this context as more of a *way of thinking* than a specific static moment. The very nature of negative space, I would suggest, is that it cannot be pinpointed or necessarily predicted given its organic qualities, though paradoxically, the organic unpredictability will happen along predetermined (shadow) lines of (dark) direction (much like a plant will grow in the direction of sunlight, for example).

So where does this discussion of negative space leave us in terms of negotiating 'present distance' in *Strangers* for the purposes of getting to know our stranger, Bruno, as

well as our other stranger, Guy, with whom we might already be slightly more sympathetic, in the very least, as the passive receiver/viewer of Bruno's questions? Once more, where does this discussion of negative space leave us in terms of De Quincey's potential present distance from his Dark Interpreter, and by extension, of our present distance from our Dark Shape? With our Dark Director understood now as a kind of 'double-agent,' that is, Hitchcock is both multiplied and vanished at once, how do we navigate this film? It would seem we've entered into a game of 'doubles' through which we will have to further develop our familiarity with negative space and be 'tested' in our 'present distance' from these strangers.

Another proposed 'double-take' or 'look again' episode within *Strangers*, which is arguably more subtle than the first one previously mentioned, but nevertheless seems to invite a 'double-take' kind of re-thinking, might be inferred in the train car scene between Guy and Professor Collins. Here, we seem to get a kind of ratified affirmation on the part of our Guy indeed "speaking the same language" as Bruno, or at least, this possibility becomes even more plausible. This is something we may have initially not questioned at the time of Guy and Bruno's first meeting, when it appeared Guy was sarcastically placating Bruno in order to end their lunch and get off the train. First, Hitchcock's fade-out of the 9:30 p.m. time on the face of Bruno's watch after he murders Miriam, followed by his fade-in to the scene with Guy slouched on a train with drunken professor Collins, implies that both Guy and Bruno are connected in time, and by extension, in having just committed the offence. Next, we see Professor Collins stop his singing (about a goat) to introduce himself and recount the speech he just gave in New York on "integration." He provides a complicated calculus formula and asks Guy if he understands. Quite flatly and

convincingly Guy responds, “Yes I understand,” and aghast, the Professor retorts with an incredulous, “You *do*?” Since we know Guy to be a pro-tennis player and not a mathematician, I would suggest here that, as a part of Guy’s identity – his “protective covering” – he holds himself too tightly in his dry sarcasm, and, given the Professor’s sincerely stunned – but believing – reaction to it, we might therefore catch a backward glimpse of sincerity on the part of Bruno as well. That is, at the strangers’ first meeting, Bruno may have truly believed that Guy *did* understand and *does* want to proceed with the murder, meaning, there was perhaps no trickery intended on the part of Bruno in garnering any friendship with Guy. Contrary to Guy, Bruno’s intentions, at least, were always clearly laid out in the open. Ironically then, we might be inclined to attribute more ‘innocence’ to Bruno in this film for his honesty, and more ‘guilt’ to Guy in this film for his self-involvement and lack of concern for how he comes off to other people, including strangers. Once more, we might infer grave consequences to carelessness when it comes to our interactions with strangers in that if you remain *too closed*, and not *empathetic* to how you might be treating other people, negative outcomes can result. Of course, the extreme of murder is the outcome Hitchcock delivers with *Strangers*, and so we’re poised to absolve Guy – in having not committed the physical act, and in having maintained a *distance* from Bruno (in analogous and similar fashion to Jeffries and Mr. Thorwald) – of any responsibility for the murder and instead look to Bruno as the character to take the blame.

All of that said, however, I would pose the question of whether we would still hold Bruno as accountable if say, something went wrong and Miriam survived Bruno’s attack. Would we somehow look to Guy – in his being too closed off – as having been

careless, as having cared *less*, for the wife who has cuckolded him, and to the point of her assault by a total stranger? That is to say, wouldn't it 'all come out in the wash,' after all, that Guy had indeed *met* and even *had lunch* with Bruno prior to the assault, and wouldn't our sympathies then shift to Miriam, whom we had up until that point regarded as a lecherous adulterer? Would we thus be more open to having Guy share responsibility for Miriam getting hurt in that scenario? Or would his getting angry and physical with Miriam in the music shop still garner enough of our sympathy such that our focus would still be on Bruno? The point of this line of inquiry is to illustrate that although Hitchcock might point us towards significant consideration of relationships, connectedness, and accountability for the two, what we have to concede is that we can't always *know* what (moral) choices we might make available to ourselves unless and until we are *in the situation ourselves* first. Aligning sympathies won't necessarily cut it, however close surrogacy might bring us, and however *in your face* the reality seems to be put, because connections can be relative, transient, and thus, fickle. Even in "doubling" each other, the fact that Bruno and Guy are *strangers* in this film necessitates that in their connectedness they are also unknown to each other.³⁶ And, as previously demonstrated, such unknowing or estrangement can also be read into Guy's relationship with his wife as well. In this regard, I believe Hitchcock is very much aware of the interplay of connections – the crisscrossing of relationships – that occurs when our (denied) narcissistic desires and (surrogate) fears are tested. As Roberta Rubenstein, in her article, "I Meant Nothing by the Lighthouse: Virginia Woolf's Poetics of Negation," explains, "For Woolf, the emotional distance between people who, for the most part, cannot know

³⁶ In "Not So Strangers: Patricia Highsmith according to Alfred Hitchcock, author Jorge Peralta describes the "double meaning" in the book's title as making reference "to both people who are unfamiliar or unknown to each other" (154).

one another constitutes the negative space occupied by *nothing*” (41). Indeed, by calling *how* we connect into question, that is, by overlaying and crisscrossing the connections we take for granted to be *there*, Hitchcock equally highlights for us what isn’t *here*, that is, our ability to *know* what is inherently *unknowable*: the train car stranger right next to us, the on-screen stranger in front of us, or even the cuckolding stranger we may have married – all of whom seem close and yet not entirely “possess-able.” In this way, I believe Hitchcock turns the issue inward with *Strangers*. Specifically with his thematic ‘doubling,’ Hitchcock plays with the tension of ‘present distance’ or “the negative space occupied by nothing” in our connectedness with ‘the other,’ and shows us that at the root of all of our relationships is our relationship with ourselves – that relationship being achieved *not* by such notions as ‘self-actualization’ or anecdotal (fore)knowledge, per se, but rather, by *becoming* in the tension that estrangement from ‘the other’ creates. Such becoming is indeed facilitated by narcissistic or surrogate forms of projection, but phenomenologically it invites emptiness as *possibility* of ‘being’ as opposed to *possession* of ‘being.’ That is, one remains ‘open,’ continuously willing to “dispossess” what is present and known about oneself in order to close the distance to what is not (yet) known about the ‘other,’ and simultaneously, to what is not (yet) known about oneself. In this way, the process becomes an organic paradox of predictably unpredictable. We might think of it emotionally as “letting someone in” at the same time we “let ourselves out.” Moreover, in inevitably projecting our desires, the process may be perpetuated, but since we continue to deny recognition of ourselves within that process, we remain disconnected to ourselves and thus, to ‘others.’ We are thus, our own stranger. What I believe Hitchcock taps into in a phenomenological way, however, is the discomfort in

having to get to know ourselves *through* ‘the other’ and not necessarily *by* ‘the other,’ that is, ‘the other’ we project onto, or possess. Once more, I believe Hitchcock sees our ability to know ourselves as a kind of apprehension of being as opposed to (linear) thought of it. This kind of self-understanding might begin as a question, but in “letting ourselves out” to ask it, we get something else entirely. As Rubenstein continues her reading of Virginia Woolf:

Blocked by Mr. Ramsay’s overbearing presence and lack of inspiration, Lily wonders why she even attempts to put brush to canvas again. As she regards the empty drawing-room steps, the negative space once occupied by Mrs. Ramsay, she pauses to ruminate on the “vast general question” that “darkened over her:” “What is the meaning of life? That was all – a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there are little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark....*In the midst of chaos there was a shape.....*” [emphasis mine] (45).

Here, I would ask the following of Hitchcock: In the very asking of “what do you want from me?” am I giving *it* to you? That is, “any part of it” that I (don’t) want to look back on in horror? Does the question take on the *shape* of the answer, in other words, flashing “unexpectedly in the dark,” perhaps as a dream I didn’t know I had yet? Flashing for instance, as Thorwald questioned too, and “amidst the chaos” of his *crossing over* the fourth wall and into the watcher’s – my – reality? Do you simply want me to dispossess – to lose myself – *in any part* in order that I can find *it* again – on the verge – and flash it’s gone once more, as in a dream? Must we always be *on edge*?

My favourite image in *Strangers on a Train* is that of Bruno shoveling popcorn into his face as he drives his boat through the Tunnel of Love with a sinister grin. Here, I don’t see Bruno anymore, but rather, Hitchcock, our Dark Director himself getting

ready to dish up what *we want*. And, in similar quality to De Quincey's whirling dark shapes of the phantasmagoria, Hitchcock *does*.

Cast as shadows along the Tunnel of Love wall, we see Bruno, in the form of a dark *shape*, rowing closer and closer to Miriam's boat. Immediately prior to this, we have Bruno entering the lantern lit archway to the "magic isle," popcorn in hand, his eyes on the back of Miriam as she climbs in her boat and pushes off, with one final longing glance backward at her future assailant. This is perhaps approaching the climax to the sexual tension that has been building to this point between the two characters: first, with Miriam's notice of being noticed – her double recognition – when she is eating her ice cream; second, with the flirty glances and double-raised eyebrows of Bruno upon his show of hands (literally) and subsequent show of strength in ringing the bell and winning the doll to impress Miriam; and third, still with no words exchanged between the two, but with a definite "chase" beginning on the merry-go-round, there commences the important musical score which we'll hear during the murder (i.e. their 'embrace'), as well as during Bruno's 'projected murder' (i.e. of Barbara) later on in the film.

Into the Tunnel of Love we follow Bruno, lit lanterns lining the way in order to cast his aforementioned shadow along the tunnel walls. As he progresses toward the other shadows (i.e. of Miriam and her friends), we see the shadow movement conjuring a phantasmagoria of sorts. We can sense our Dark Director's agency here – can almost picture his grin behind the shadows – as well as read his surrogacy of Bruno, about to delight his audience with the murder we all know we *want* to see, though the tunnel shots – mainly of shadow lit walls – do not depict this surrogacy, this anticipation, from the first person. Where do we locate ourselves in this scene then? Cut to the tunnel exit and

we perhaps jump from our seats at the sound of Miriam's scream; a scream we realize, not to be of her death, as it is immediately followed by her laughter with her friends.

Nevertheless, we are jolted from our phantasmagoria lull, and I turn to Toles' reading of Altieri in trying to understand this moment:

“[I]dentification is not a process of comparing states [from an outside vantage point] to see which ones actually belong to me. It is more like a process of extending the self by deciding that this mode of activity engages me to take responsibility for it because of who I become during the time I am engaged in it.” We can be taken by surprise, and then, as we fitfully regain presence of mind, find “how [our feelings are] modified by the occasion, no matter what our [prior] vision of character [or proper conduct]” (139). Altieri seems to hope for an “expansive turbulence” as we connect with images. How else are we likely to lose ourselves? [parentheses by Toles] (Altieri qtd. in “Occasions of Sin,” 532).

As previously discussed, I am in agreement that “identification is not a process of comparing states,” as in, say, a kind of ‘self-actualization’ process. Rather, the process is indeed a kind of “extension of the self by deciding that this mode of activity engages me to take responsibility for it because of who I become during [that] time.” In this way, yes, we *can* “be taken by surprise,” – but – in the instance of the Tunnel of Love scene, lost in our phantasmagoria lull and building anticipation as the shadows row on, *who* have we become such that this (misplaced) scream surprises us back to our seats? And “how are our feelings modified by the occasion?” Once more, in his remark that Altieri might expect a kind of “expansive turbulence” as we “connect with images” in this context, is Toles implying that we become images beyond those of the characters in film? In similar fashion perhaps, to the ‘bird’s I’ perspective I argued took place in the concluding scenes of *The Birds*? Certainly we have “lost ourselves” in this Tunnel of Love scene to be subsequently jolted out of it. And the relief we might feel upon hearing the scream – the climax – is immediately frustrated when we realize the murder hasn’t

happened yet. But again, and perhaps unlike in my reading of *The Birds*, I am having trouble locating the first person in the Tunnel of Love chase. All of the shadows' owners would seem to be accounted for already in this scene, so where am 'I' at the crux of this anticipation?

His popcorn finished now, we see Bruno dock his boat shortly after Miriam's, in dark pursuit – there are no lanterns here. We see the carnival from across the water now, glimmering, with Miriam's laughter suddenly *right* next to us in our seat. Are we jolted again here, or did Miriam – in her screaming – already *take* our scared reaction from us? Do we locate fear merely as a measure of our relief from it? Or, much like (sexual) desire/anticipation, does fear *build*? Here, Miriam runs on camera and seemingly bumps into an invisible force, looking slightly away from it, however, and over to her left where Bruno is understood to be standing. Has our "I" of the camera become Bruno's "I" in this scene? Having been jolted at least once (i.e. by Miriam's scream) we certainly know our "I" isn't "lost," so *where are we*?

What ensues is an outstretched hand and the lighter flicking on to illuminate Miriam's delighted face. In *this* light at the end of the tunnel – finally – the pursuer and the pursued finally speak: "Is your name Miriam?" is all our assailant need ask. He is not interested in any named brooches as the 'proof' he himself had offered to Guy on the train. Upon hearing Miriam's purred and seductive-sounding "Why, Yes," – but before she can finish her question of "how did you know?" – we get Bruno's gloved hands choking out her voice from around her neck. The gloves are presumably to cover fingerprints, but noticeable nonetheless in this shot as a cover-up of the beautifully manicured hands we had just seen moments ago, when Bruno showed them off to Miriam

as the hands that would ring the carnival bell, an ominous bell-tolling for what was to come.

Through Miriam's gasps for air, we have a medium to close-up shot of the back of Bruno's head, obscuring the shot of Miriam's face now, save for a brief shot of her one closed eye as her glasses fall to the ground, her face a grimace of pain. Why are we *behind* Bruno here? And why doesn't Hitchcock give us clear shots of either Bruno's or Miriam's face? It's almost as if we want to stand up and peer around Bruno's neck in order to see Miriam's get choked. Immediately after the shot of Miriam's closed eye, we see where the glasses fall – the left lens breaking – next to the lighter on the grass, which might cause us to almost miss the dark outline of Bruno's shoe, no longer a fancy black and white, located at the bottom left corner of the frame. Cut to the next shot and we are looking through – and at – the reflection on the *inside* of the right lens of Miriam's glasses. Is our attention drawn to the black shape of the glasses frame here, or the glowing outlined shapes within it? In this regard, I would argue that it takes a few seconds before we really begin paying attention to the murder. That is, I think Hitchcock wants us to see the shape of the glasses frames first, which will focus our attention more poignantly toward the reflected and thus *projected* murder taking place at the centre of the right lens – again, on the *inside*.

As the strangling continues, I note the two figures appear embraced almost as if in a dreamed dance – that is, with no linear kind of explanation for the image – and we may start to become more aware, through this dream vernacular, of the carnival music score that is still playing eerily in the background. What we might start to notice during this process is the nausea – the paradoxical silence – that is brought to the forefront at the

same time it recedes into the background of the still playing carnival musical score, and specifically that of the merry-go-round. To try to discern this moment, I shall turn to Ming-Qian Ma's article, "The Sound Shape of the Visual: Toward A Phenomenology of Interface," which discusses how ratios of vision and sound can be played with such that a kind of "phenomenological seeing that "sees something" emerges (John McCumber qtd. in Ma, 263). Ma begins his argument and reading of post-phenomenologist, Don Ihde, by explaining that "vision" is essentially a "double reduction" since the image itself is "a reduction *to* vision," that is, the physical act of seeing, as well as "a reduction *of* vision," that is, the meaningful act of seeing (Ihde qtd. in Ma, 252). Once more, one might think of a "double reduction" in this way as a separation of "sense from significance" (Ihde qtd. in Ma, 252) or "focus from fringe" (Ihde qtd. in Ma, 262). It is the "visualist tradition," Ma goes on to argue, that typically relegates silence to "visual noise" thereby denying the full phenomenological experience of the image or thing. To counteract this, Ma explains there has to be a "deliberate change of emphasis from the visual to the auditory dimension," a change which offers the *potential* for "a recovery of the richness of primary experience which is now forgotten or covered over in the too tightly interpreted visualist traditions" (Ihde qtd. in Ma, 253). In this way, I would suggest we start to see what Hitchcock does with score during Miriam's murder in *Strangers*. That is, by bringing to the forefront the auditory we typically subvert for the visual (i.e. the "visual noise" or silence) – this being the ironic carnival music playing while a killing is taking place before us – Hitchcock is, paradoxically, giving us *parts* of the experience as though inherently *separated*, when in fact, these parts noticed *together* are arguably much closer to the *whole* of the experience that we *would* get if we weren't so ruled by our "visualist

traditions.” In other words, Hitchcock is showing us our phenomenological experience in terms of turning up the volume on our “visual noise” or “silence” that we typically deny is there, that we typically deny we *want* to see. This would explain our sense of disorientation or nausea during the strangulation scene, an experience I will show we draw into us as if our “body is ahead of our mind” (Toles) because the image would seem to “contain [in it] all things and puts eternal essences into play of Becoming” (John McCumber qtd. in Ma, 263). Finally, “the sound shape of the visual” we get in the moment of Miriam’s murder, I would argue, is the “shape of space in the visual becoming acoustically temporal; it is the shape of time in sound becoming visually spatial” (Ma, 269). That is to say, since we apprehend sound in the form of time and the visual in the form of space, Hitchcock is – by manipulating each of their respective ratios of experience into paradoxical *parts* closer to a whole we would otherwise deny in this scene – creating a “phenomenological interface of becoming in a participatory process of fully experiencing the world” (Ma, 269). And inherent in the notion of “becoming,” I would posit, is that it cannot be left in the movie theatre when the film is over – we take the experience with(in) us and in this way, the disorientation fear engenders doesn’t build inasmuch as it *remains*.

I shall now offer a reading of *becoming* during the murder scene of *Strangers* that draws our Dark Shape out in an unrecognizable form that nevertheless forces a reconciliation of it as being *ours*. Not only do we have to “take responsibility” for it in this kind of engagement, moreover, but we realize that we purposefully seek it out to the point that *it* becomes *us*.

Similar to wanting to peer around Bruno's neck, we find ourselves wanting to peer through Miriam's glasses frames into the lens, bringing ourselves closer to the point that we might, on some "subterranean level" – and again, similar to our inclination to want to get up from our seats and peer around Bruno's neck – feel our "body ahead of our mind" in assuming a viewpoint of *wearing* the un-wearable fallen glasses, thereby drawing the – projected, *inside* image – *up* from the outer edges of the glasses frames – and right *into* our eyes, that is, into *us*. The glasses frames in this regard, are what Ma and other phenomenologists would consider to be the "horizon" or *edge* that engenders a "field state" in which "phenomenologically" [one is] attending to nothing-in-particular" (Ma, 263), or, to what Virginia Woolf might deem "the space occupied by *nothing*," the "negative space." This would seem in keeping with our "I" vantage point in this strangulation scene, of being from the point of *nowhere*, leaving us with the *potential* for further perceptual opening. Such an experience or potential for experience, moreover, would seem contrary to both Altieri's and Toles' arguments for an "expansive turbulence" of "losing ourselves" in that here, the image is drawn into us as opposed to us out into it. Thus, alternatively, and in this particular instance of *Strangers*, I would argue for a kind of frustrated rapture (precipitated by the premature scream, which I will get to) that has us drink the image in, turning our gaze inward, almost as if the murder happened in our *mind*, because we were tasked with watching Bruno watch Miriam, peering around Bruno's neck and then in and through the reflecting lens of the fallen glasses, as opposed to being able to watch the strangulation (that we *want* to see) ourselves. In this way, I would argue that Hitchcock *doesn't give us* a murder in *Strangers on a Train* – we only ever get two projected murders: the carnival murder and the surrogate/Barbara murder – a

“double” murder of the same killing, with that “double vision” seemingly brought together in a single image (i.e. of Miriam’s death) in our *mind*, through a dream vernacular that turns the temporal and spatial aspects of the occurrence into itself. Moreover, what we might say we get in *Strangers*, and in contrast to our being left trapped in our “little prison” of subjectivity on the front porch in *The Birds*, as having *become* the bird’s ‘I’ view in that film, is a single image that has *become* in us. That is to say, there is no “I” or even third person perspective to become *outward*, as Toles and Altieri would seem to hold. Rather, surprised into our seats with a premature scream, we are kicked out of ‘perspective spectatorship’ of having “lost ourselves” and we become something else entirely through these projected dark shapes – our own Dark Shape, the glasses frames, being that which our Dark Director has doubled in order to get us “out” such that we drink the Shape back “in;” back in as our (denied) dark desires that we want to *see*. We are then forced to reconcile *within ourselves*, this Dark Shape as being *part* of ourselves, a *changing* entity – culled out by Hitchcock’s moving and multiplied agency – and in whom we might recognize as having just facilitated a murder in our own mind, with our complete complicity.

How else, beyond a Hitchcock film, might we find ourselves unwittingly, as though a pre-determined accident, seeking out our Dark Shape or subterranean “doubleganger” to confront us with recognition for what we deny? How might this serve to reconcile a present distance from ourselves such that we are less estranged from what we didn’t know we were capable of yet? How might these realized capabilities strike fear through our hearts from the point of nowhere? A point from which we can find ourselves on the verge, reaching to connect with the ‘other’ – the stranger, that spirit we

seek to find amidst life's "chaos" – [*there*] perhaps hovering over our heads, keeping close watch all along.

Conclusion

Strangers Within: Location and Liberation of Our Fear Through Hitchcock

In light of this reading of the murder scene in *Strangers*, Hitchcock has exploded my initial sense of phenomenology. His ability as a Director to incite his audience to bring *there* simultaneously *here* in a kind of *there-ness* experience is not limited to rich readings of multidimensional characters in their images, projections, surrogates, perspectives, and subjectivities within the narrative, but also includes the ‘empty images.’ These empty images, or dark shapes, in their apparent lack, or denial of an “I,” nevertheless demand interpretation as ‘*other-ness*’ if you will, in their “double” or “doubleganger” presentation of (narcissistic) contingency and complicity within the narrative – of inwardly outward within it and vice versa, and always on edge, on the verge of becoming something else. In this way, “the space occupied by nothing” or “negative space” need not be equated with self-annihilation or death. It is the *Strangers* audience, after all, that is privileged or privy to the murder of Miriam *not* by a seeing “I” inasmuch as by the choreography of two dark shapes reflected back upon the spectator from the point of view of nowhere. Miriam herself, by contrast, closes her eye, breaks her glasses, and doesn’t get to see her own murder, the murder we arguably facilitate in our own minds and which invites our gaze inwards towards a reconciliation of estrangement from ourselves in our (denied) dark desires. From the point of view of nowhere, then, as *no one*, we nevertheless *become* in our absence. As a comparable moment, we might think back to the moment of Melanie’s moan in *The Birds*, but

distinguish our seeing “I” in that scene from the closed “I” of Miriam, the latter inviting us to ‘see through closed eyes.’ In this way, Hitchcock might be said to highlight for us “The Will” as what is “fundamentally blind and found in forces of nature which are without consciousness at all.” Moreover, I would propose that Hitchcock not only invites identification within his films, but also without them, as a kind of drawing *up* of the image and drinking it in (visually) such that it becomes *us*. Such a ‘crossing over’ of sorts is also gleaned in *Rear Window* wherein we have the murderer stepping out of the television and into the watcher’s – *our* – livingroom. Here, critics like Tanya Modleski draw our attention to gender ramifications pertaining to this kind of movement, as well as to other moments within the film in connection with the issue of voyeurism and by extension, with narcissism (i.e. the “inner hells” that we project and realize we *want* to see). What we might take from Modleski in this latter regard, and in addition to the moral questions at stake in the film that are perhaps best answered by Hitchcock in his ‘voyeur making’ of all of us, is the idea of ‘emptiness’ or ‘present absence’ in the woman spectator or woman ‘other,’ that can be ‘entered into’ (i.e. surrogacy / identification with a character) as a form of castration. In questioning whether the idea of self-annihilation necessitates undesirable outcomes at every turn, however, I looked closer at our phenomenological experience of fear – of our experience of the inexplicable ‘other’ – through the lens of cinematic dream vernacular in *Strangers on a Train*. In so doing, I employed Ming-Qian Ma’s delineation of “the sound shape of the visual” to determine Hitchcock’s particular use of “negative space” to engender the potential of an image to become the viewer, and from the point of view of nowhere. This location of emptiness, however, would seem to facilitate a kind of present-absent becoming as opposed to self-

annihilation in that it invites a recognition of, and reconciliation within, our previously unimagined or unknown capabilities. With respect to the latter, I would suggest Ma's citation of Merleau-Ponty, whose philosophy locates subjectivity within the body, might be taken to answer the idea of "body before the mind" theorizations in my discussion of *Strangers*. Specifically, critics like Iris Young in "Throwing Like A Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality," argue that women are oppressed in their self-identification of the body in *parts*. My reading of 'dancing' during the murder scene in *Strangers*, however, which is highlighted by the carnival music score, might suggest, in similar fashion to the rhythmic "hearing-seeing" dream vernacular I argued Hitchcock employs in *The Birds*, a kind of 'body memory' that recognizes the dance – remembers the choreography – before the mind has thought it, thus, engendering a kind of organicism amongst *parts* that previously weren't sensed, apprehended, or realized. In this rhythmic, multifaceted way of reception then, we might see Miss Torso liberate herself from the empty, voyeuristic gaze of Jeffries, and instead "summon" a potential present-absent gaze of her own Dark Interpreter; a "reciprocated look" in a kind of estranged relationship from herself through an 'other.' There is something or someone *there* that keeps us on edge – and Hitchcock knows it – of *being* before the thought of being.³⁷ It is the former 'being' of course, whom Hitchcock taps into as our Dark Director, and consequently, (inner) hell is unleashed for the latter – the fear that remains nowhere, and the shape of that dance.

³⁷ I am grateful for Robert Creeley and his poem, "The Edge" for inspiring my articulation of the phenomenological complexities and corresponding subjectivities of 'being' between dreaming and waking life, all of which I am attempting to argue Hitchcock plays with as contiguities of the unconscious. In short, there are multiple "here" and "there" "I's" seeing and occurring at once such that one *becomes* in their fear, and consequently, (un)recognizable.

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