

Stanley Cavell's Early Writing on Film, the Emergence of Academic Film Studies, and the
Interpretation of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

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ABSTRACT

Stanley Cavell, Film Studies, and *Vertigo*

Andrew Paul Djaballah

American philosopher Hillary Putnam has said that Stanley Cavell is the only philosopher to have made writing about movies a part of his philosophical project. Since 1971, with the publication of *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cavell has actively pursued questions concerning the physical medium of the movies – as well as its aesthetics, its history, and its criticism – as part of his reflections on our human experience of the world. This essay attempts to unearth some of the earliest of Cavell’s insights into the movies through a study of certain short passages on *Vertigo* by framing Cavell’s study with the examination of one of the most popular texts in Academic Film Studies, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” The conclusions of this analysis are offset by a survey of the recent psychoanalytic studies of *Vertigo* by Lacanian cultural critic Slavoj Žižek. The conjunction of these two excursions away from Cavell sets the stage for a discussion of his interpretation of the film, pieced together from sections of *The World Viewed* and *Pursuits of Happiness*. Themes of the screen creation of women, of the transformative powers of the camera, and of the role of the movie director, together forecast the most admired contribution this American philosopher has offered to Academic Film Studies: the definition of the related genres of the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage and the Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman.

Film is a moving image of skepticism: not only is there a reasonable possibility, it is a fact that here our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not exist – even, alarmingly, *because* it does not exist, because viewing it is all it takes.

Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film (Enlarged Edition)* 188-9

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Introduction

James Conant, now at the University of Chicago and widely considered an authority on Wittgenstein, was a student of Stanley Cavell at Harvard in the 1980s. The first collection of essays gathered around the work of Stanley Cavell was a special dedicated edition of the *Bucknell Review*, published in 1989, entitled *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*.¹ In Conant's offering to the collection, he sets up a distinction of voices in his text by *killing* one of them and having another other speak its obituary. The primary setup his essay poses is of a young James Conant, still under candidature at Harvard, under pressure to contribute to this particular collection of essays. Now, whatever was at stake for him, then, found its way into his essay as a way of contributing this form of writing as a perspicuous way of reading Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. The obituary mode offers the voice of the original, well-intentioned, reproachable, and hence unwritten essay, resurrected as an afterthought. The obituary reader, the narrator of his (written) essay, follows the thrust of the early essay, section by section, describing its arguments, where it comes in as valuable, as well as where it falls short or meets a dead-end. The position this reader takes is above the absent voice, able to gauge where things worked and where things did not. Conant's performance of this positioning is unique in its genre: taking his own efforts as fodder for philosophical afterthought, he postures with these as the performance of problems found in Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein.

¹ Richard Fleming and Michael Payne, eds. *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* [Fairfield, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1989]. This title is an adaptation of the title of Cavell's book on Thoreau's *Walden*, *The Senses of Walden*, and though the word "senses" does not immediately suggest the paradox of its dual use. The common use of the term is in its denotation of human capacities to be impressed by the external world, e.g. the capacity of sight, or touch; another common use is in its indicating a capacity for thought, e.g. you've lost your senses. The contradiction in these uses, mixing the sensorial dimension of the limits of knowledge with what comes up against these limits, can only be absorbed on review of such limits. Call this mode afterthought.

Overwhelmed and seized with dissatisfaction with the words he can gather, the first writing balks and withholds its writing, and the obituary reader comes in to show what the first cannot say. This amounts, as well, to the performance of such an obituary as a form of showing what could not, or cannot, be said; hence the title of the essay, “Must we show what we cannot say?”

Cavell’s first book on film was an exercise of a similar stripe – the animus of *The World Viewed* was to resist the voices of his interlocutors, who offer the easy words for understanding film that children grow up with, and to push himself, the narrator, to find more suitable, more appropriate, more accurate words which he could stand by. Conant’s text makes plain the other side of this early project in film studies: while resisting the common expressions, he would find himself struggling to show how his words *did* fit, despite the often awkward wordplays, despite the requirement for him to explain at length his correctives. Through this struggle to articulate concepts relating to our experience of movies, rather than through a dogmatic declaration of film’s ontology, we are invited to identify with the absent voice he is resisting, and then to follow his ways out of this voice, out of these words.

There is a shift in this work on film from Cavell’s first book: *Must We Mean What We Say?* is a collection of essays which can be taken, loosely, as asking (or showing) what counts as institutional Philosophy through essays on what will become recognized as his areas of expertise, on Wittgenstein, on skepticism, on literature as philosophy, and on aesthetics. He speaks of avoiding or repressing thoughts on film during the writing of some of the essays, namely “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*,” to which we also may want intuitively to include “Music Discomposed” and “A Matter of

Meaning It.” In his second book, Cavell is no longer openly discussing what counts as philosophy – though it is clear that this project fits under what the previous book advances as philosophy. The question driving this book, coming from the philosophical position demanding the investigation of our experience, is about our experience of the movies, of conversations about movies, and about the memory of both of these – “What is film?”²

The performance of both voices, of both sides of a dialogue, is as old as philosophy itself. It typically functions with one figure standing in for the author, and the other standing in for the reader, where latter begins with a position from which he will be led, through steps of arguments, to the position of the former. But the twist of resisting the identification of the author with one of these voices, as well as the identification (as a reader) with one of these voices, creates another plane on which these writers and readers in the text can be gauged from without. It becomes a mode of philosophical improvisation, provisionally staging a dialogue of points and counter-points, only to emerge in the end, perfectly willing to “do away with the ladder” as Wittgenstein famously ends his *Tractatus*. So it is not a teacher leading a pupil from A to B, but an author *showing* the teacher lead the pupil, or the author playing out voices that shape to a whole.

In Conant’s description of Wittgenstein’s “specific contribution” to Cavell’s writing on skepticism, he uses the same posturing as the one mentioned above with the voices. Conant poses the struggle between the skeptic and the antiskeptic as “stamped by a shared set of preoccupations, each bearing the mark of the other, locked together in a

² Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979], 15.

dialectic of insistence and counterinsistence.” The position taken by Cavell is at a remove from this, not “taking sides in the struggle” but seeking out its conditions, what “sets it off.” Cavell’s early work on film, digested through the project on skepticism together with his preoccupation with the form of philosophical writing and its relation to what motivates philosophy, takes the form of seeking out and probing the conditions of his interest in his experience of cinema.

*

This study is an exploration of Cavell’s early writing on film. The first chapter examines his study of the medium of film from the early chapters of *The World Viewed*, taking cues from key passages from *Must We Mean What we Say?* that couch the text in a more explicit philosophical context. Cavell’s insistence on the fact of what he calls film’s “projection of reality,” as compared with and opposed to modes of representation of other media, is brought out against his particular reflections on the origins of film, both ontological and metaphysical. His unique undertaking of relying on his own experience of movie-going to draw general claims about cinema are sketched briefly as a conclusion to chapter one.

Chapter two is meant to function as a bridge between theoretical questions of film and the interpretive practices associated with such theories. The focus of this chapter moves away from Cavell and falls on two studies of Hitchcock’s celebrated masterpiece *Vertigo*: first by feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey, then by Lacanian cultural critic Slavoj Žižek. Mulvey’s interpretation of the Hitchcock film is found in her very short paper entitled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Our text largely follows film scholar Marian Keane, a once student of Stanley Cavell’s, and her criticism of Mulvey’s

text in “A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock, and *Vertigo*.” To balance Mulvey’s extreme mode of interpretation, our study shifts to Žižek’s various remarks on Hitchcock and *Vertigo* from his studies of Lacan and of Deleuze through popular culture. Far closer in many respects to Cavell than Mulvey, Žižek’s methods and analysis of *Vertigo* nonetheless contrasts strongly to Cavell’s genre of film study.

The third chapter returns to Cavell and to *The World Viewed* to examine his reading of *Vertigo* in light of his ontological remarks about the camera laid out in the first chapter. Our examination begins however with a passage from his 1981 *Pursuits of Happiness* to ease through what his earlier text only hints at concerning the theme of the cinematic creation of woman: a theme at the heart of his famous definitions of the remarriage comedy and melodrama of the unknown woman genres. There seemed no other choice than *Vertigo* to best situate Cavell’s early work on film in relation to both his own later work and the larger field of film study.

Chapter 1

The method that Cavell appropriates from Wittgenstein is not something that he has learned from him but that he has found him to model most clearly – the concept of moral Perfectionism that Cavell locates in Emerson years later models the same procedures. A quick sketch of the procedures governing one’s appeals to ordinary language involves two movements. The first movement happens, if and when one lets it happen, when one finds oneself lost (like Dante’s traveler), or jailed (in the woods like the author of *Walden*), or chained and in a dark cave (like the prisoners of Plato’s allegory are compelled to realize). Wittgenstein will say that a “philosophical problem has the form: “I don’t know my way about.”³ *Finding* oneself in this situation is the first step, is the taking upon oneself, of a philosophical problem. The Oracle said that Socrates was wise because he knew he did not know – Cavell takes this to mean that “about the questions which were causing him wonder and hope and confusion and pain, he knew that he did not know what no man can know” and hence, found himself in the position of taking on philosophy. Yet he was found wise because he also knew that “any man could learn what he wanted to learn. No man is in any better position for knowing it than any other man – unless *wanting* to know is a special position.”⁴ Thus, Socrates embodies the posture of philosophy at its origin, hence Wittgenstein’s describing a late stage of philosophy as bringing “words back from their metaphysical use to their everyday use.”⁵ This return to the ordinary implies that the first movement has brought us off somewhere

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe trans., [New York: The MacMillan Company, 1953] §123, 49.

⁴ Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Collection of Essays*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976] xxviii.

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §116, 48.

away from the ordinary, that we have sought authority in some alterity – he says that “the confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling”⁶; or that “a philosophical problem arises when language goes on a holiday.”⁷ Therefore, when the engine is revved, when the holiday is over, and the ordinary routine and language-game are returned to, then philosophical problems should end; one should have found their way home again. Wittgenstein says that “the clarity we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.”⁸ Philosophy this way seems far less like a tradition of formal arguments and bitter rancorous retorts than an open-ended way of problem solving.

In the same passage where he asks if this amounts to a world-view, Wittgenstein explicitly likens his methods to therapies. Cavell pursues this connection and suggests psychoanalytic therapies as modeling the way solutions are to be arrived at with problems of aesthetics:

...the more one learns, so to speak, the hang of oneself, and mounts one’s problems, the less one is able to *say* what one has learned; not because you have *forgotten* what it was, but because nothing you said would seem like an answer or a solution: there is no longer any question or problem which your words would match.⁹

He calls this a process of “naturalizing ourselves to a new form of life, to a new world.”¹⁰

Reading Cavell’s application of these methods to problems of aesthetics into the very title

⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 132, 51.

⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §38, 19.

⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §133, 51.

⁹ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 85-6.

¹⁰ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 84.

of the book on film is simply tracking the progression of his thoughts in this period. What it opens up is a way of reading Cavell's film project as an attempt to use film as a means of prying into our shared consciousness, so to speak, our shared fears, joys, pains and prospects.

To begin with, the point Cavell's title makes in drawing near to the senses of a *weltanschauung* and to Heidegger's thought is first that this is itself a practice that is part of a particular form of life, of a particular context of conventions with rules and precedents and ways to go about performing these and of avoiding them. The title is not meant to wear anything on its sleeve, that is, it is not meant not to be obscure – one must track down the original language-games, so to speak, where these terms and concepts are at home. That the names of Heidegger and Wittgenstein come to the fore, suggests a certain context of philosophical games. However, from the very first words of the preface, when he is invoking the memories of movies of a period of his lifetime that began in childhood, he describes the effort to account for these condition as “the philosophical motivation” of his book. The autobiographical element of his writing, which has dominated his latest efforts at writing, is present here in a raw form: the experiences of films are emblematic of shared human experiences and hence provide the grounds and the authority to speak on such things.

On its face, the title plays with what modern philosophy has considered the problem of the external world. Descartes famously rehearses the proof of his own existence, and hence his assurance under a benevolent God of the existence of the world and of others, by saying to himself, *in his mind*, “I am.” This first and fatal step is of course prepared for by the inward turns of the Reformation, whose assurance of the world

(and of heaven) is governed by a horizon of understanding where the existence of God is unquestioned. The gap that inserts itself here between what one says in one's mind and what occurs out there in the world has grown, since no longer assured by God. Kant proposes that the human categories of understanding necessarily reveal what can be known of the world. For Kant this was once and for all, and yet the gap still grows, and subjectivity still harbors the threat of metaphysical isolation. The world *viewed*, Cavell says, is one where views are taken from or of it. Heidegger says that this is an age where our understanding of the world is as view. In our familiar practice of going to the movies and in our saucy and careless attendance to them (not *of* them), our distance from the world could not more aptly be epitomized.

Cavell asks, relating to the passage quoted earlier, whether “solving” philosophical problems count as a change in world-view, and in the extension of the title, implies the question of the emergence of film together with a cultural shift, as part of a *weltanschauung*. I would now add, with a slight inflection – is it metaphysics, or does it share the conditions of metaphysics? If one would claim that one's views in the cinema are *like* the “views” of the metaphysical world, then they are insisting on a literal sense of viewing as perceiving that is opposed to (and connected with) one of viewing as conceiving; because in action and in thought, a film audience is taking in views of the world. But are these merely sights of the world? A preliminary question to this is asked in a related passage from chapter 2 of *The World Viewed*: Cavell provocatively proposes that “a photograph does not present us with “likenesses” of things; it presents us, we want to say, with the things themselves.”¹¹ While on the surface, he seems to be undertaking a

¹¹ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 17.

discussion around Panofsky and Bazin's use of terminology – Bazin offers that cinema “is in its essence a dramaturgy of Nature”, Panofsky “reality as such”. But the allusion to Kant is unmissable, (and no less clearly in Panofsky). The discussion revolves rather around the distinction between “things themselves” and things-in-themselves. In Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation*, for instance, he says that sensible thoughts are representations of things as they appear, while intellectual thoughts are representations of things as they are. In the first *Critique*, he will contrast phenomena of the sensible world with noumena of the intelligible world. Of course, Cavell is not postulating that the images of film compose some type of tangible shape of the intelligible world, a world of forms or ideas from which possibilities of the sensible world can thus be derived. The world of film is the world of phenomena, of appearances. Yet he views we take of this world offered by the camera are from a world that “is holding the rest of the world away.”¹² Very like Heidegger's sense of the world as view, as limited to what is “held at bay”.

The title's question, taken in its many forms, opens an investigation into the practice of movie going and into the art of the movies that begins with Cavell's book on film and continues throughout his celebrated career. Before continuing with the joint idea of things themselves and appearances in the section to follow, permit a line from a recent lecture delivered at Mt.Holyoke late last century to capture in its way what only maturity can see retrospectively:

In Classical philosophy, impressions are understood as predictable effects of objects upon my senses. I am interested in the concept of an impression as an experience that a portion of the world unpredictably makes upon me,

¹² Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.

gives me, in which it captures my interest, matters to me, or fails to; a product of significance, not of causation.

Alas, the world viewed as impressions made upon me capitulates his earlier allusion to Kant as his shift from epistemology to aesthetics and moral philosophy.

The idea of the world of film as one of appearances may at first seem obvious or trivial. For even without acknowledging that the world on screen is our world on screen, one must accept that there is an appearance of something – even if it is only light. In his 1935 lecture course, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger devotes a section to the distinction between “Being and Appearance” – he draws here three modes to which the term “appearance” fits: 1) as glow and luster; 2) as the manifestation of something; 3) as mere seeming. He then remarks that second mode suits the first and the third as the basis of the possibility of this appearance – that the essence of appearance lies in this mode of manifestation *of something*: Cavell insists on this very point about what is on screen – “It is an incontestable fact that in a motion picture no live human being is up there. But a human *something* is.”¹³ Both Heidegger and Cavell follow with the concept and term of presentness as a key to this idea of appearance.

When Cavell says that thoughts of movies had been repressed during the last stages of *MWM*, he was referring to his essay on Lear entitled “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*”. In his essay on Beckett, the reading of “Endgame”, he makes analogies with movies in a casual way. In his essay “A Matter of Meaning It”, an essay discussing issues of intention and meaning in art and assumptions about their relation to each other, he closes with an extended illustration of his point with an example from

¹³ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 26.

Fellini and his film *La Strada* (1954). These essays do not pick up the films as having something *themselves* to say about the issues at hand but only offer illustrations to points that could well have been illustrated otherwise. Cavell's claim of repressing thoughts about movies in the writing of "The Avoidance of Love" is precisely the repression of what movies would have to say about such concepts as audience and performance, world and reality, as differently and uniquely as only film could. His book on film comes out of *MWM* like a flood of water from an opened dam.

The first discussion of the concept of presentness at any length comes about around the way we treat the existence of characters in the play. To this end, he states that characters in a play are not nor can they become aware of their audience – the obvious implication follows that characters and actors have different existences, since the actors cannot not *at any time* be aware of their audience. He will say about this that we, the audience, "are not in their presence."¹⁴ Hence the turnaround – they – the characters, *are* in our presence. This turnaround carries with it not simply that we see them before us, "but that we are acknowledging them (or specifically failing to)." The question of how to make oneself present to the character, of acknowledgment as a reversal of Heidegger's second mode of appearance, takes up the remaining twenty or so pages of *Must We Mean What we Say?*. In the line immediately following the phrase about characters, he mentions that this is like acknowledging or failing to acknowledge "the presence of the world." *This* mode of acknowledgment has to do with placing ourselves in the presence of the world, hence, or revealing ourselves to the world. Cavell's idea of presentness captures precisely the second mode of Heidegger's triptych modes of appearance, as well

¹⁴ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 332.

as a response in the form of a reversal, in the very terms in which he will return in *TWV*. The task or charge of making oneself present to the world of film, to its mythological existence, is at work throughout *TWV*. The discussion around presentness mentioned above is teased out in the following section with respect to the conditions of the theater to prepare for a fuller staging of Cavell's examination of film.

1.2

In a way, Cavell suggests, the so-called mirror-held-up-to-nature in the theater more fully satisfies our "wish for the world" than the camera does. Here, the people and things that the audience sees are present. Both sides of the camera are here in one shared space. Nonetheless, there is a divide between the audience and the characters. Here, there are no mechanisms that separate them; it is all up to conventions. Cavell speaks of the characters as unaware of their audience and expresses this by saying "We are not in their presence." Using the same terminology, he follows this by stating that the characters *are* in the presence of the audience. What is the stage that it can contain such conventions of presence and absence?¹⁵

In the second part of his reading of *King Lear*, written immediately before his book on film, Cavell reflects on the phenomenology of theater. The focus is on the experience of the audience: "the first task of the dramatist is to gather us and then to silence us and immobilize us." He quickly defers the gathering to the advertizing poster,

¹⁵ In speaking of the presence and absence of characters rather than of actors, the authenticity of the mirror held to nature may seem duplicitous. This might lead one to suggest that it is the actors who are present to the audience, and the actors who resist reacting to the presence of the audience. The presence of the actors on the stage however is not what typically draws the audience, and is certainly not what immobilize and silence them. The theater is about the play, and the play is about the character and his words.

and the silencing to the dimming house-lights, leaving the job of immobilization, of “rewarding this disruption”, to the dramatist. So what does an audience expect in going to a theater show? Why gather and sit quietly in the dark before a stage of sets and performers?¹⁶

Cavell recounts a joke about a Southern yokel in attendance at a performance of *Othello*. The joke has the yokel spring onto the stage during Desdemona’s strangulation to save her from the dark brute. What is so funny? That southern chivalry at times is too strong for some to keep in check? The yokel’s ignorance of proper behavior in a theater offers us a little chuckle, but what type of ignorance is this? Cavell asks what mistake the yokel has made, and makes the analogy with “drinking from the finger bowl.” It is the mistake of the outsider fumbling with customs that are not his.

Cavell’s tactic in appealing to the yokel joke is to first show that the observance of theater customs are givens; then, when we are smirking at the backwardness of the outsider, he asks how we would correct his mistake. The stick in insisting on how he is to be corrected is that the answers that come readily to mind are simply unsatisfactory and ineffectual. For instance, it is different than correcting a child who makes the same mistake. Following Cavell’s example, to tell the child screaming at Red Riding Hood to calm down and sit quietly amounts to teaching the child how to control his outbursts; he needs to learn to behave. It is also different than scolding a man for smoking in church: he needs to be reminded that *this* type of behavior is inappropriate, that he is behaving badly. To correct the yokel, one would need to teach him *how* to behave – not just how to sit calmly and quietly, but why and how this particular behavior can be rewarding.

¹⁶ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 326-7.

The yokel thinks there is someone on stage strangling a woman, so he bursts onto the scene. What then? We tell him this is inappropriate. But it is more than this: the play would stop, at least until the yokel could be dragged off the stage. His behavior with respect to the play is not merely inappropriate, it is incoherent. The customs he ignores are the very ones that hold the people gathered there together. The dramatist can hardly be held responsible for his education. The inverse is closer to the truth – like the child who is carried away, the yokel is so caught up that he needs to be told that it’s a play, *only* a play. But telling him that it’s not real is what one would say to a child. It is not “an instructive remark, but an emergency measure.” Then what *would* count as instructing the yokel?¹⁷

The explanation that the man strangling the woman is pretending falls into the same emergency register. What is it from behind the convention (that absorbs the fact that they are play-acting) that stops any of the members of the audience from going up there? Part of the structure of the theater that makes room for our immobilization is the requirement of our acceptance of the stage as a world. It is only upon this acceptance that Othello and Desdemona can be present at all. The trouble the yokel has with accepting this world is that it implies accepting his absence from it. His efforts to make himself present to that world are precisely what cause it to vanish. As soon as he sets foot on stage, the world evaporates.

How is the particular mirror of the theater more satisfying than the camera’s? The plain fact that there are people up there, in flesh and in blood, makes it so. But it also complicates things. Cavell’s words about the characters of that world, since after all, the

¹⁷ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 329.

theater is all about characters and their words, lead towards his answer for the yokel. We accept the world and we *acknowledge* its characters. He begins with the analogue of our absence from their world by saying that a “character is not, and cannot become, aware of us”, hence, “We are not in their presence.” This of course stands to reason, as does the flip side: “They are in our presence.” What this pair of relations conceals is that we are in fact in the presence of the actors on stage. Their task is to ingest this presence while they perform and *become* the character, don not merely its clothes but its very soul as well. What then is up to us, sitting there unseen, immobile?

The philosophical problem of other minds has been put in various ways in recent centuries but always with the same sense that human beings are alone in the experience of their subjectivity and cannot break past this subjectivity and reach into another. Cavell studies *King Lear* in the first part of this essay as an examination of this very problem through Lear’s affliction of blindness to his daughters (framed by the previous essay “Knowing and Acknowledging,” that sketches a move from skepticism to recognition and back again to a now truncated-skepticism). The acknowledgement of the stage’s characters is a form of owning the knowledge of them, something one has to bring oneself to. Cavell proposes that this is a form of confrontation. This seems paradoxical, for we just saw that we cannot interact with the characters and any effort to do so would kill the performance. We could also say that the characters are confronting us, and we can either rise to the occasion or fail to. His term for this is the acknowledgement of the characters. But in what way do the characters, who cannot acknowledge us, confront us?

The idea of acknowledgment is brought into play in an earlier essay from *Must We Mean what We Say?*, “Knowing and Acknowledging”, where Cavell reads and walks

through a key step in Wittgenstein's infamous private language argument: whether it is proper to say that one's pain is the same as another's or that there are two pains. The idea is that what is referred to in certain circles as "the problem of other minds," whether we can know, can be certain of, the existence of others, is not a matter of certainty. In other words, certainty does not provide the grounds on which to recognize the other – this type of recognition requires an openness, an acceptance, a leap. It needs to be acknowledged. That person, his or her pain, only exists when the confrontation is met. Cavell puts this as the "claim" your suffering makes on me, assuming the recognition that he or she (his or her pain) exists. What's more of this recognition is that it comes from our understanding of human expression as expressive of human beings. The acknowledgment of the existence of other minds takes the form of a response to the claims the mind's body expresses.¹⁸

The notion of acknowledgment in the theater then becomes problematic, or rather more complex. Within the span of a few dozen pages, Cavell has used the same term for both cases in a more or less technical way to describe two seemingly contradictory positions. In life, the acknowledgment of another human means recognizing the humanity in the expression of a human body, and acting upon this recognition. In the theater, we are not present to the characters; hence our confrontation cannot take the form of expressing our recognition.

Acknowledgment in the theater is the acknowledgment of its characters. The impossibility of confronting them, say of meeting them in confrontation, says something about the kind of confrontation Cavell is talking about. His description of the conditions

¹⁸Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 256-66.

of theater as a certain presence and absence, his insistence on the importance of the physical presence of the actors, and his specific location of the abyss between audience and character, all set up his question about the existence of characters on stage. The acknowledgment of the existence of the minds of characters does not need to account for our passiveness; that is just what the theater is. The point where it begins to feel as if something is missing, that something is falling short with this type of knowledge, is where Cavell reverses the problem. We feel this type of knowledge is incomplete against an understanding of how it works in actuality:

When we do not [reveal ourselves], when we keep ourselves in the dark, the consequence is that we convert the other into a character and make the world a stage for him. There is fictional existence with a vengeance... The conditions of theater literalize the conditions we exact from outside – hiddenness, silence, isolation – hence make that existence plain.¹⁹

In comparing tragedy in the theater and tragedy in actuality, he says that in both cases “people in pain are in my presence.” If acknowledgment amounts to “revealing ourselves, allowing ourselves to be seen,” such that we may be confronted, then the failure to do so makes of the actual world a theater.²⁰

What then is the acknowledgement of characters in a theater? The yokel learns that it is incoherent to go up to the actors to confront the characters – another way Cavell puts this is that the characters and audience “do not occupy the same space.” This much is clear. In a turnaround moment, he opens a new direction for his reflection that provides a setting for an answer to initial question of acknowledgment: “We do, however, occupy

¹⁹ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 333-4.

²⁰ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 331-3.

the same time. And the time is always now... measured solely by what is now happening to [the characters], for what they are doing now is all that is happening." While the audience is not in the presence of the characters (who are in the presence of the audience), Cavell says that the audience is, or can be, "in their *present*." In other words, recognizing that what is happening to the characters is in fact happening to these characters *now*, and that I am sitting, facing them, doing nothing.²¹

In the first section of his reading of *Lear*, the idea of self-recognition is pulled out as a central theme of the play. Cavell examines how the imagery of sight, including eyes and seeing and glances and avoided glances and of blinding, etc., suggests the necessity of self-recognition as a condition of recognition. In each case where a character recognizes another, there is a moment of self-awareness, self-possession, or self-consciousness that precedes it. Lear's climactic recognition of Cordelia comes at the same time as his recognition of himself as her father. Cavell points out that, phenomenologically, self-recognition is a form of *insight*.²²

Accepting the world of theater as something presently happening, which involves making ourselves present to the characters, requires such self-recognition. It is not enough though to simply recognize our part in the character, "identifying with him" so to speak. Cavell sets our identification with the characters against a backdrop of immediacy: they are up there *now*, and "that I am I, and here." Recognizing our separateness from them, our identification with them becomes an acknowledgement of their separateness from us. "I make them *other*, and face them."²³

²¹ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 334.

²² Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 272-4.

²³ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 337-8.

The respite from action that we enjoy in the theater during the performance ends when the house lights turn on. We are however no less in a present than during the show. “Because the actors have stopped, we are freed to act again; but also compelled to. Our hiddenness, our silence, and our placement are now our choices.” Carrying through our acknowledgement of characters means the inverse of identifying with them (if that means putting oneself in their shoes): it means recognizing that they are different from us, that their cares, their capacities, their knowledge and thoughts are not ours. The difficulty and sometimes pain of acknowledgement are in discovering what these are.²⁴

The awe inspiring nature of theater is what makes it a world. Unlike the novel, there can be no omniscient narrator that recounts what is happening to the audience. A character can describe events, can lay a setting, can even speak on the inner feelings and thoughts of other characters; but they are in no better a position to do this than someone in the actual world is. The acceptance of the theater as a world and the acknowledgement of its characters as other are responses of awe to this mirror put up to nature. In the face of this mirror, we are shown ourselves by making ourselves present at what is happening.

1.3

The World Viewed project came from this same connectedness of thought, so why did Cavell need a separate book and a separate method to tackle the subject of film? The method at work in much of *Must We Mean What we Say?* simulates the sense of anticipating the reader's words, and does in fact anticipate the currents of reading that leaves the reader imagining to have wanted to say them first. Different than Conant's

²⁴ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 343.

method of dialoguing with a lost voice, the capacity to anticipate the reader's words is a matter of its engaging in a voice that already exists in the text, of luring the reader into identifying with a voice of the text. When a reader is caught, it feels as if the text were *stealing* their words. Reminders about the impersonality of our words, or of our soul, often come as a shock.

When Cavell reflects on his methodology in the addendum “More of *The World Viewed*” he states that this method, used in his previous philosophical writing, was reversed when he set to writing about film: “... I felt called upon to voice my responses with their privacy, their argumentativeness, even their intellectual perverseness, on their face;” as opposed to attempting to find the voice of the reader. In fact, resisting this voice, avoiding the thoughts and words that have easy formulas that are “ready to take over thinking for us” – he takes as a starting point an effort to purify the concept, pressing himself for words about the conditions of film, of its historical manifestation as well as its artistic discoveries.²⁵

The first chapter of *The World Viewed* brings the question “What is film?” to a head, in both an autobiographical sense, Cavell being brought up as a boy on the movies, and in a historical sense as having lived through an American phenomena. His thinking about the medium of film, his inquiries into the essential conditions of what film is, are not enumerations of the properties of film but a general investigation of its origins through our shared language (forced to adapt to the newness of movies and slow about it), through our shared movies, and through our shared existence that grows ever more isolated. In the first paragraph of the second chapter, Cavell begins his book-long answer

²⁵ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 162-3.

by registering Panofsky and Bazin's sense that "the basis of the medium of movies is photographic, and that a photograph is *of* reality or nature." The key in this early register is to push the absurdity of the closeness of photograph and photographed well past that imagined in the made-up stories of early viewers' genuine fear of being hit by trains from motion pictures. The closeness Cavell insists on is the permanency of the relation between the photograph and reality; hence, of the publicness of reality photographed. A photograph *precisely* is not a picture, since depiction involves a passing through an individual artist's interpretation (of the world) and application (of artistic conventions). The *connection* between reality and painting is merely conventional, absolutely contingent, whereas the connection between reality and photographs is not conventional but mechanical. The conventions surrounding this medium, established by the maverick artisans and artists' explorations of photography's connection to the world, are still flourishing and defining further possibilities of the mechanism of the camera.²⁶

But Cavell ultimately is interested in reaching to the desire that existed before photography, located for instance in his appreciation for Baudelaire's descriptions of moving carriages and postured gaits, setting the scene of the final state of anticipation in the West before the greatest satisfaction of its wish for a mirror held to the world.

Studying the conditions that made possible the discovery of the camera is the privilege of

²⁶ Rothman and Keane spin the difference in the ways painting and photography differently attempted to satisfy the wish for the world recreated, the wish as Hamlet puts it for a mirror held up to nature, as a difference between realism and reality. Their interest in denying that film has satisfied "once and for all, and in its very essence, our obsession with realism" is to shift the plane of discussion from artistic conventions to the mechanism of the camera. "Reality is real, not realistic," they state, and turn to Cavell's statement about fantasy as that which reality can be mistaken for. They find this blurring of lines between fantasy and reality echoed in Cavell's statement about film as "a moving image of skepticism," quoted in our epigraph. The mechanical reproduction of the world, mirroring our experience of it, declares and places before our eyes our absolute uncertainty about our experience of reality itself. William Rothman and Marian Keane, *Reading Cavell's The World Viewed: A Philosophical Perspective* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000], 66-8.

Cavell's vantage point. Examining how the movies differed from what existed before them by rehearsing common over-extensions of language in our shared way of talking about them, Cavell's study serves as a type of film criticism therapy. He is not interested in enumerating the various possibilities of the camera and creating some kind of systematic "ontology". Cavell is interested in how we talk about such things:

Obviously a photograph of an earthquake, or of Garbo, is not an earthquake happening (fortunately), or Garbo in the flesh (unfortunately). But this is not very informative. And, moreover, it is no less paradoxical or false to hold up a photograph of Garbo and say, "That is not Garbo," if all you mean is that the object you are holding up is not a human creature. Such trouble in notating so obvious a fact suggests that we do not know what a photograph is; we do not know how to place it ontologically. We might say that we don't know how to think of the *connection* between a photograph and what it is a photograph of. The image is not a likeness; it is not exactly a replica, or a relic, or a shadow, or an apparition either, though all of these natural candidates share a striking feature with photographs – an aura or history of magic surrounding them.²⁷

Cavell's insistence on the mysteriousness of the camera by recounting all different types of things that do not describe its specific power, leaving the invention of words like "photogenesis" to his later writings, precisely functions in the reverse way than the method used in his first book of essays described earlier: where the latter aims to anticipate the flow of words such that the reader finds himself bound to the logical (not

²⁷ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 17-8.

merely implied) meaning of his words, the former works to tear down what words seem natural and ordinary. The aims of the two writings are not different: to redress what we say to what its saying means, either by leading us to discover what it is we say by saying it along with us, or by insisting that certain things we say do not always mean what we want them to mean. When one cannot say what it is one must say, one can always show what one cannot say.

Movies are not dreams – but there are nonetheless some shared features. The analogy Cavell suggests does not draw the media of movies and dreams together but rather between the ways we remember and talk about them. The publicness of movies, and yet their presence in the deepest crevasses of our memories, is the first feature Cavell touches on and is perhaps the most fundamental common touchstone of his writings about film and about language. Where dreams are remembered from sleep, putting words to movies is more public - “It is as if you had to remember what happened *before* you slept.” Dreams are the site of a pivotal point of contact with Cavell’s interest in movies and with Freud and psychoanalysis. In this text, dreams are touched on so briefly that the weight of Cavell’s reflections is often overlooked. Later, in his contribution to *Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, and in texts like his Perfectionism lectures on film *Cities of Words*, the relation between film criticism and the analysis of dreams becomes more explicit. Already though, in *The World Viewed*, Cavell makes an important comment on our connection to the movies as being different than dreams in that “other people can help you remember.”²⁸

²⁸ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 16-7.

In searching for words for our memories of movies, as with dreams, we often find that terms from other art media offer themselves as sensible analogues. But in our description of the medium of movies, failing to account for the camera and its transformative powers fails to reach the first condition of what a movie is. For instance, a painting can be said to be a portrait, or the landscape of a certain river, or the King of England in his birthday suit but the connection between the painting and the person is in a different register than the between photograph and photographic model. As Cavell's described scene above with Garbo and her photograph, we have no notation specific to this particular connection. Thinking about abstract painting makes this relation explicit; the painter gathers her technique from conventions and traditions and filters her imagination through these. Her imagination is the only necessary connection a given work has with reality. The technique that makes photographs has nothing to do with imagination - it's all mechanisms. So the difference with a photograph is not between the photographer's camera and the painter's brush, but between the way the camera depicts the world and the way the painter herself does. Cavell calls this mechanical takeover of the artist's imagination the camera's automatism.

In trading imagination for automatism, the photographer gains the world. A painting of the world is a representation, filtering the world through the artist's imagination and technique, presenting a depiction of something in the artist that, through likeness or abstraction, we may recognize and perceive. A photograph projects a view of the world itself. It does not reproduce objects in the world, but reproduces our way of seeing the world – that is, the world remains out of the artist's hands. This automatic reproduction therefore leaves to the artist a different task than those of previous

generations. The photographer's art consists in holding the rest of the world at bay, to confine our view of it and limit its exposure. Cavell puns on this fact: "the camera is a kind of room," where people and things are gathered, "not a kind of womb", since nothing is created or incubated.²⁹

Before continuing with this important feature of the camera, a third comparison after dreams and paintings will take us nearer to Cavell's sense of what is important about the camera. Film recordings are like sound recordings - of course, they are *like* them as a mode of preservation, or conservation, or perfect multiplication, and here only like them. The recording device that replicates sound is different than that of a camera in ways that are blurred now since the advent of sound films in the early half of the twentieth century, and it is sometimes an effort to think of them as acting separately.

Cavell pushes the analogy such that it offers something that doesn't seem to fit: he suggests that:

...the record reproduces its sound, but we cannot say that a photograph reproduces a sight (or a look, or an appearance). It can seem that language is missing a word at this place. Well, you can always invent a word. But one doesn't know what to pin the word *on* here.³⁰

In his revision in the enlarged edition, Cavell returns to this point with two clarifying aspects of his analogy. The first is that to call something a recording requires an original "to which one can be present directly"; and second, that the virtue of a recording is its fidelity to this original. Hence, if there is no original that can be copied more or less faithfully, then nothing is being recorded. Yet, if someone were to look through the

²⁹ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 185.

³⁰ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 183.

viewfinder of a camera (through, say, the lens and pinhole), the original to which they are present is perfectly clear, and the fidelity of the photograph to *this* original will simply depend on the quality of the recording material. Digital video makes this patently evident since the view from the camera during the recording *is* the original to which others are more or less faithful. I would like to say that a photograph is the record of the camera's sight.

In this same register, when Cavell says that “what is heard comes *from* someplace, whereas what you can see you can look at,” he is underlining this very fact. Sound reaches us where we are, whereas we reach out to see. And this is where the shift occurs: sound moves through space, from someplace *to* various places; our perception of objects moves as we move, moves *with* us. The trouble is not that “objects are too close to their sights”, as if there was some difficulty in imagining objects emitting their visual signal. The trouble is where Cavell wants the trouble to be: out in the world as opposed to with the camera or the viewer.³¹

In the early chapter, Cavell spins the matter from the side of the object:

What is missing is not a word, but, so to speak, something in nature – the fact that objects don't *make* sights, or *have* sights. I feel like saying: Objects are too *close* to their sights to give them up for reproducing: in order to reproduce the sights they (as it were) make, you have to reproduce *them*...³²

³¹ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 20. When Cavell discusses the way *movies* are not recordings, he relies on the same distinction between object and subject.

³² Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 20.

His insistence on focusing on the object as the point of origin, as opposed to looking through the camera, has to do with his emphasis on reality. Recording the camera's sight, as I suggested above, is precisely the reproduction of objects. Of course they don't make sights, but it does not follow, as Cavell offers, that a photograph is not the reproduction of a sight. The recording simply comes from the other side. The recording of a sound has to do with reception – the visual equivalent is not a type of reception, coming in from somewhere as Cavell says, but a type of perception, looking out. Perceived objects are the subjects of a perception. Whether we want to talk about the visibility of such subjects or the camera's capacity of perception, what is being recorded is exactly this visibility, the subjects of this perception. It may not be the sight given up by the object, but a sight is precisely being recorded. Cavell's turning around this point presses the automatic capacity of the camera to replace the artist in reproducing the world.

The final comparison Cavell makes in this chapter invokes Bazin's idea of the photograph as a visual mold or impression. Cavell's objection to this is that molds typically have "procedures for getting *rid* of their originals," thus leaving just the mold behind. The obvious conclusion is that a photograph is not a mold since the original is "still as present as it ever was." He effects the same turnaround here as with sound recordings. The idea here though is that a print or a press is not a reproduction of something natural but of something that is cast and set. Not only are there ways of getting rid of the original, as he puts it, there are also ways of reproducing further copies. Again, if we imagine the camera as perceptive, then what it sees *and prints* is a mold of the light and shades that pass through its lens – gone forever as soon as they are printed. But

Cavell is here not satisfied with any account of the medium that conceals the mysteriousness of its presentation of reality.³³

In keeping with the difficulty Cavell insists on in grasping the connection between the world and a photograph, his refusal to accept the idea of recording or a mold is not that he has not thought of the camera-eye metaphor before. The problem is with the camera's anthropomorphosis. A photograph gives us the object, not the subject – the subjection of the objects is up to the viewer. By adding that the original still present is not “present as it once was to the camera”, since the camera is merely the “mold-machine”, he implies that the camera is our surrogate: present *for us* at a moment that we cannot be present at, yet nonetheless offering its present to us. Hence, objects in a photograph *are* present. It is therefore clear that the way the original is present to us in a photograph is different than the way an object is present to us physically. The difference is a difference of core arguments. Present *in a photograph* means that the viewer is not present to the objects, to the scene, in the photograph. It means the viewer can present him or herself to these objects inasmuch as they are the subjects of a photograph.

What is the connection between a photograph and reality? In distinguishing them, we see that what physically exists in front of the camera can become its subject, while what appears on a photograph is “*this* fixing of the subject.” This isolation of the way the camera sees and records the world could be thought of as the phenomenology of the camera, only this would imply that the camera is an entity which had conscious experiences. The way Cavell speaks of the camera, and what causes his dissatisfaction with other traditional ways of describing the connection between an object and its idea, is

³³ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 20.

as the description of an object of *our* experience, which has allowed for the possibilities or conditions of our experience of the world. Not that the camera changed the way we see the world – “the mirror was in various hands held up to nature” – our isolation from and yearning for the presence of the world had already discovered this compromise. The world in a photograph is the world that exists to me though I may not exist or be present to it. Hence my experience of this will differ from my experience of another art form in that what first strikes me and the level at which I first interact with a photograph is as it is in reality; this experience will differ from that of reality in that my present is not the present of the photograph: I am present at a scene from the past and therefore free and constricted in ways unique to this experience.³⁴

These reflections are from the second chapter of *The World Viewed*, entitled "Sights and Sounds," where the way we talk about and remember dreams sets the scene for a series of reflections that end just before returning to the analogy with dreams. After drawing the analogies with painting and the visual arts, with sound and molds and prints, Cavell finds himself wanting to talk about movies as if they existed in the same condition as dreams. He ends the chapter with this sentence:

The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it:
and a world I know and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present
(through no fault of my subjectivity), is a world past.³⁵

This sentence could also describe the world of dreams, indeed, a world past which is different from that of the movies in that others cannot help remember my dreams. The development of film criticism as based on simple descriptions, from memory, of a scene

³⁴ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 39, 185.

³⁵ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 23.

or moment in a film is closely related to the psychoanalytic practice of dream therapy. Cavell's interest in the description of film, though related to psychoanalysis, comes directly from the practice of ordinary language philosophy and hence more concerned with how to put words to the world than to dreams.

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Luther's problem was to combat a foreign institution motivated politically and economically, but Kierkegaard's problem is that the mind itself has become political and economic; Luther's success was to break the hold of an external authority and put it back into the individual soul, but what happens when *that* authority is broken? Luther's problem was to combat false definitions of religious categories, but Kierkegaard has to provide definitions of them from the beginning.³⁶

From the first pages of Cavell's first book, the topic of grammatical investigations begins to take shape with the question entitled by the book and first essay, "Must we mean what we say?" The question is unpacked slowly and starts by situating the title as a generalized assertion of philosophers of ordinary language: are we morally bound to the *implications* that our language carries in the various contexts in which it is spoken – i.e., must we mean what the-things-we-say *mean*? Before answering whether we indeed must, Cavell inquires of the type of necessity this is: are the implications of language logical, and if this is the case, is the necessity bound up in the language or in the specific contextual use? Very early, twelve pages in, he clearly answers affirmatively deducing that as speakers of a language we are "exactly as responsible for the specific implications

³⁶ Cavell, "Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*," *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 169.

of our utterances as we are for their explicit factual claims.” Only, since they are not formally logical (that is, not built into the rules of syntax), the necessity these implications carry cannot be derived in the same systematic way. In what register, then, *must* I mean what I imply? Speaking of language-games is Wittgenstein’s way of marking the distinction of the various contexts where language is used and learned. Language-games are governed by grammar – therefore, investigations of the grammar of a language game say something about both the language and the context of use. Must we mean what we say? Well, we must in the sense that we do, that’s just what meaning *is* – when someone says something, the words come together to mean something that is comprehensible (or not) to those around, and this meaning is tied to the voice of the speaker. The “must” is not an obligation on the person to mean what they say; it is a statement of a law, like gravity. Remarks about the words used in a given context that specify how the word is to be used and what rules govern its use are frequently referred to as grammatical investigations, and could be described as the first major theme of *Must We Mean What We Say?*.

In the third chapter of this book, Cavell brings about the turn that made him famous: to draw together a vision of grammatical statements, those commenting on the implications of ordinary speech, with aesthetic claims. He returns to this idea of calling *logic* the non-formal implications used in the act of speech by suggesting an understanding of the term with heavy overtones of aesthetic judgment, naming “patterns” and “agreement” as two “distinct features of the notion of logic.” It is this form of

agreement that interests Cavell and will remain an aspiration of his writing in aesthetics and film criticism but, broadly, across the board as a philosopher.³⁷

The way Cavell's work all comes together has barely even been gestured at, and what helpful remarks about how to see Cavell's writings as a body of work come from Cavell himself, reflecting back on his life as a writer. In the recent essay "Something out of the ordinary" which began as the 1996 Presidential address of the eastern APA division, he looks back to his early essay drawing together Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations and Kant's claim of aesthetic judgment and pushes the centrality of this connection:

I was not able when I wrote that essay to press this intuitive connection very far, for example to surmise why there should be this connection between the arrogation of the right to speak for others about the language we share *and* about works of art we cannot bear not to share... but what I could not get at, I think now, was the feature of the aesthetic claim, as suggested by Kant's description, as a kind of compulsion to share a pleasure, hence as tinged with an anxiety that the claim stands to be rebuked. It is a condition of, or threat to, that relation of things called aesthetic, that something I know and cannot make intelligible stands to be lost to me.³⁸

³⁷ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 94.

³⁸ Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* [Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2005], 9.

Chapter 2

Cavell's writing on film from the earliest stands as a measure of how far a critic or theorist can go in letting the work of art speak for itself, how far a writer can be willing to let a film have a say in their experience of the film. Laura Mulvey, lauded pioneer of feminist psychoanalytic film theory, stands as the measure of the opposite trend – her project, from the beginning, has been to “use psychoanalysis” as a means of building a theory of film; and there is no effort to conceal the fact that her film analyses are nothing but illustrations of her theory. Another writer working in the cross-section of psychoanalysis and film is Slavoj Žižek, writing from a specialization in Lacan, and while he also uses films to illustrate the concepts he lays out, the rigor of his work and the respect he holds for films make for a very different read than Mulvey. Where she lays out a concept and brings in a film as evidence for her description, he pushes the reading of both the Lacanian concept and of the film and is then surprised at the coincidence. Of course this is generated by a mode of writing that unveils discoveries methodologically, not empirically, but Žižek is nonetheless open to the possibilities of film, receptive of what film has to say about itself. This chapter is split between the presentation and critique of Mulvey's famous essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” mostly following Marian Keane, and between a study of two short sections from Žižek where he focuses on *Vertigo*.³⁹

³⁹ The juxtaposition of Žižek with Mulvey was intended to waylay the blind-sighted animosity that is sometime present in texts like Keane's “A Closer Look at Scopophilia,” given that Žižek is in accord with certain things Mulvey advances simply on the basis of his Lacanian leanings. The repetitions, especially in his interpretations of *Vertigo*, allow for Mulvey's claims more than she makes for herself, and in this way gives a better hint into how a text like this one can have the impact it had.

2.1 Mulvey

Published in 1975 in the Oxford based journal *Screen*, the essay stands alone as the most important and, until recently, as the most popular essay in the history of this emerging institution of Film Studies.⁴⁰ It has been taken up by countless chapters and essays, assigned in countless college and university courses, and has inspired an important following. But even a cursory glance at the essay and the literature that follows it is enough to see that the strength of the essay is neither in its psychoanalytic posturing, its film analyses, nor its theoretical speculations, but in its emphasis on, its critical discovery of, visual pleasure in the traditional practice of watching movies. The “ironic” feminist current that runs through the essay and supports her revolutionary cries to destroy pleasure have not fully registered in the shared imaginary of Film Studies.⁴¹ For we see in the succeeding literature the discovery of the gaze systematically associated to her paper, often within the context of her reading of *Vertigo*, while we find her specific postulates concerning the domination and power of subjugation of “the male gaze” more or less glossed over. Her work has served Film Studies professionals as more of a starting point than a reference text for their reflections on “the look” in its various states, on feminist film theory and classical cinema, and on Hitchcock’s authorship. Mulvey’s essay is the prime example of a text that has been well accepted by Film Studies, addressed, referenced, dismissed – in short, it has been acknowledged. It stands at the opposite pole,

⁴⁰ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” *Screen* 16.3 Autumn 1975, 6-18.

⁴¹ Laura Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by *Duel in the Sun*” *Framework* 15/16/17, 1981, 12-5. Mulvey re-approaches the subject, without rejecting the claims from her earlier paper, deflects the disparagement of some critics, like Marian Keane, by stating that *they* misunderstood the ironic undertones of her position, calling for instance for her isolation of the “male third person” perspective. Keane’s objections to Mulvey’s poor film analysis, her contorting interpretations of Freud and a general misunderstanding of the apparatus of cinema are however only waved at by the excuse of a use of irony.

in the literature on film available to film students, to Cavell's contemporary 1971 study of film, *The World Viewed*, which remains more of a film studies curio than a foundational piece of a standard college curriculum.

Her paper begins by proposing to use psychoanalysis as a "political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" (833). The demonstration consists of a theory/application combination, where she first describes the psychoanalytic concepts she wishes to put into play, then offers descriptions of certain film moments to illustrate "more simply" how these concepts play out. The manifesto-like introduction is matched by an equally provocative summary where she calls for the destruction of pleasure in narrative cinema by means of critical distancing, both from the filmmaker's "screen illusions" and from the act of viewing itself. All in, the essay describes representative moments from Hollywood films and explains how these scenes, from Josef von Sternberg and Alfred Hitchcock, "reinforce" in a conservative mode the political relations and power structures under the dominant phallogocentric order.⁴²

⁴² Psychoanalysis, as is well known, is the method of therapy introduced into medicine by Freud and Breuer, winning immediate popular acclaim at the turn of the twentieth century and over the course of the century, gaining academic notoriety. When Mulvey opens her paper with the claim that she will "use psychoanalysis to discover" so on and so forth, we should understand her to be *appealing* to this long-standing tradition, the general facts of which are established elsewhere, in her effort to discover how spectatorship of classical cinema "reinforces" the oppressive patriarchal subjugation and objectification of women. The tone of the entire essay, set in these opening paragraphs, is not a straightforward use of psychoanalytic concepts for feminist ends – it is one of avant-garde feminism, decrying the still reigning order of patriarchal society. The air of stirring impatience bubbles out with slogans: "The fascination of film reinforces the fascination inscribed by the patriarchal order"; "Forgo satisfaction, Destroy pleasure, Upset privilege." We can therefore understand her appeal to the traditions and discoveries of psychoanalysis *as a weapon* as an abstraction from psychoanalytic therapy in the form of a critical attack on the reigning symbolic order which has pervasively inscribed itself onto the social order of the West. What I am calling slogans here, setting the tone of her essay, are more or less read into her lines of the first and last paragraph: "This paper intends to use psychoanalysis to discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have molded him," and "The first blow against monolithic accumulation of

Moreover, by unmasking with the weapon of psychoanalysis the unconscious motives of Hollywood filmmaking institutions as well as uncovering the fundamental drives that motor the narrative of these classical films, it becomes possible to “challenge the basic assumptions of mainstream film ... Not in favor of a reconstructed new pleasure, ..., but to make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film” (834-835). Psychoanalysis is thus allied with a particularly destructive film criticism though not in the interpretation or depreciation of individual films. Mulvey’s appeal to psychoanalysis (in the names of Freud and Lacan) is the appeal to an authority from which she draws generalizations about Western culture and aims at the Hollywood institutions from the period a decade or so before and after the second war. The concepts she thus amasses provide her with the foundations for her subsequent descriptions and explications of films which she extracts into a theory of cinema.

This theory is primarily structured around her own idea of “the male gaze,” presumably derived from her cinema studies, and abstracted from a standard three part division of artist-art-audience with her notion of gaze governing the union. Her cinematic triad runs as follows: the gaze of the camera, in a fairly straight-forward one-dimensional association with the artist; the gaze of the spectator, exhausting the relationship between viewer and screen; and the gazes of the characters in the story, gazing at each other in that beyond away from both spectator and camera. In the summary, we learn that her use

traditional film conventions (...) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the ‘invisible guest’...” Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, 6, 18.

The slogan is a very specific and very dangerous medium: one does not teach grammar in slogans, one teaches the rules of grammar. It is a political medium, capable of gathering and swaying large, uproarious crowds, and it is crucial to read Mulvey’s essay as driven by slogans and in the name of solidarity. In her follow-up essay “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by *Duel in the Sun*”, she names this drive towards solidarity “irony” that many of her readers, she explains, did not understand.

of psychoanalysis as a weapon is intended to circumvent *the denial* of two of these three types of “looks”: the “pro-filmic event” of shooting the film, incorporated under the division of the camera’s gaze, and the audience watching the film, gazing at the screen. Mulvey asserts that both the gazes of the camera and of the audience are repressed, and that these exhibitionistic and the scopophilic aspects of, respectively, filmmaking and film viewing, disproportionately absorbed by classical narratives, need to be confronted. Ultimately, she poses the interest of applying psychoanalytic structures to the interpretation of the film medium, formed by a culture of phallogentric patriarchy, as taking steps to “advance our understanding of the status quo, of the patriarchal order in which we are caught.” Her three levels of cinema’s-looking correspond approximately to an everyman’s theory of film, but for her heavy inflection on seeing. The significance of this shift, that is, adding the contraction from reading to watching, is the landmark of her essay. This focus shift in the study of narrative, from reading books to watching film, is captured with her now infamous insistence upon the gaze.

Marian Keane is to be counted among those who have attempted to quell the overwhelming popularity of Mulvey’s essay by bringing up certain important correctives. Unlike many of those after “Visual Pleasure...” who offer minor correctives and continue, more or less, with the train of Mulvey’s interpretation (Williams, Doane, and Modeleski, to name a few), Keane wishes to dismiss the entire essay. The correctives she picks out are at each of the three levels of Mulvey’s argument, starting with the descriptions of the films themselves, then adding the descriptions of the psychoanalytic concepts she puts into play, and the theoretical postulations about cinema that are based

on these concepts and film illustrations. In upturning the famous argument as she does, she pinpoints the film camera as the central oversight in Mulvey's text. Her attempt to direct the reader towards the specific powers of the camera, in order to reorient Mulvey's "discovery" of the gaze, brings her to the clearing (the open expanse, the unbroken horizon) of Stanley Cavell's film studies, which begin as we have seen in the previous chapter with the *question* of "what is film?" and whose answer turns immediately to an investigation of the camera.

Keane abstracts the introductory charge against "Visual Pleasure..." to three points:

My disagreement rests with [Mulvey's] understanding of the films she calls on as evidence... with her reading of texts by Freud... and perhaps most importantly, I find inadequate Mulvey's concept of the camera, its powers, and the nature of its gaze.

What follows this, in what Keane calls a "corollary or consequence of this inadequacy," is her first mention of Cavell, whose referenced texts thereafter dominates the theoretical side of her response to Mulvey. Starting with her description, or counter-description, of certain "powers of the camera," and continuing into her analysis of Mulvey's film criticism, where *Vertigo* is singled out as the reference text, the specific way the camera presents James Stewart is at the center of her theoretical realignment. The particular power she calls on and remains more or less fixed to is a mode of transformation coined as photogenesis.

Cavell describes photogenesis as the particular way something *becomes* something – "as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, or a prisoner becomes a count, or as an

emotion becomes conscious, or after a long night it becomes light.”⁴³ In these examples of his, together with the obviousness of the breadth expressed in the variety of transformations he associates with the transformation of the camera, is the sense of an ascendancy. The caterpillar/butterfly culminates its existence in the form of a butterfly and the emotion becomes recognizable only as it accedes into consciousness. The photogenetic transformations of the camera, especially of human beings, produce an ethereal existence that is nonetheless permanently fixed to a moment of our everyday physical reality: the world of the screen is indeed our world, yet not here and not now. This fact, unmatched by any of the other arts, involves speaking in an accent about such things as screen figures and human types. The importance of this accent in studying film can be observed in the difference between Mulvey’s easy-going gaze theory and Cavell’s reflections on the world viewed. Keane sets up this very dichotomy with Mulvey’s study of *Vertigo* and of Scottie’s male gaze with Keane’s reflections on James Stewart based on Cavell’s foundational writings on film.

What Stewart becomes on film is the question that drives Keane’s essay and, from Cavell’s reflections on *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and also on *Vertigo*, she derives the thought that Stewart’s figure, gait and demeanor carry feminine qualities, attributes, and characteristics. In view of the centrality of the Stewart/Scottie figure for Mulvey’s entire claim, and of the fact that she reads Stewart’s *Vertigo* cop-turn-detective Scottie as representative of the domineering patriarchal gaze, Keane’s essay rests on her associations of femininity with Stewart’s photogenesis. This then spills over into a focus

⁴³ Stanley Cavell, “What Becomes of Things on Film?”, *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984] 174.

on the photogenesis of Kim Novak, on the powers of Hitchcock's camera, and the varied and complex relationship that exist *on the screen* between the two actors, the director and the camera.

But before continuing with Keane, let us examine in more depth Mulvey's claim, first generally, then through the few examples she uses other than *Vertigo*: from *Marnie* and *Rear Window*, from Josef von Sternberg's *Morocco* and *Dishonored*, and from Howard Hawks' *Only Angels have Wings* and *To Have and Have Not*. Each of these seven films is called upon as an illustration of both Mulvey's two contrasting modes of depicting relations of power. Naturally these are both tied to the gaze at every level. "Scopophilia" and "Identification" are the two impulses she centers on in the descriptive psychoanalytic part, entitled "Pleasure in Looking/ Fascination with the Human Form." After describing them with references to Freud and Lacan, she brings them together in what she considers the contradictory, paradoxical space of cinema:

...in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like... Both pursue aims in indifference to the world that forms the perception of the subject and makes a mockery of empirical objectivity.

Here is where the gender polemic is raised: the woman, she claims, represented on screen *and pervasively present in society*, is the woman who defines herself according to her lack, and this lack provides not merely her sexual drive but her entire psychological drive. It is a role in the "symbolic order" which is essential to the male role in its sustenance of the

male fantasy, the power of possession of that which woman lacks. As a screen “representation”, “ultimately”, the meaning of the female figure is sexual difference.

In short, Mulvey’s charge against narrative cinema as it came out of Hollywood is in the form of an analysis of masculinity as it is projected onto viewing audiences and as it is presented in movie stories. The perspective she adopts to lay her charge is the analyst’s, uncovering the grimy underbelly of a lifetime of cinema, the subject of which revolves about the male-pleasure induced by the woman on display. The exhibition of this woman does not simply stir up pleasure which it in turn satisfies; Mulvey reads into film’s presentation of the image of woman the corresponding anxiety brought out at the very sight of her – an anxiety related to a primal fear of castration.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Though she may wish to resound with Freud, the words she chooses in her descriptions of conditions of the “phallogentric” world draw her far closer to a position often attributed to Nietzsche, though very likely attributable to his sister and the posthumous editions of *The Will to Power*, where “the feminist” is described as “the castrated woman” who *imitates* the will to truth. In other words, the woman who defines femininity as lack and thus, to gain any power and strength, is forced to imitate masculinity. Of course, Freud too speaks of castration but in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he uses the expression “castration complex” to describe the root of (what are primarily masculine) perversions. In a note from the section entitled “Touching and Looking”, he explains: “The compulsion to exhibit, for instance, is also closely dependent on the castration complex: it is a means of constantly insisting upon the integrity of one’s own (male) genitals and it reiterates his infantile satisfaction at the absence of a penis in those of women.”(23 n.2). Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* edited by James Strachey [New York: Basic Books, 2000].

Moreover, her insistence on speaking literally of genitals in her discussion of scopophilia/exhibitionism and sadism/masochism, in part 2 “Pleasure in Looking/Fascination with the Human Form,” seems at odds with Freud’s own self-corrective between the editions of *Three Essays*. This corrective is the substitution of the term ‘genital’ from the former ‘sexual’, where Freud notes that “the instincts of scopophilia, exhibitionism and cruelty ... do not enter into intimate relation with genital life until later, but are already to be observed in childhood as independent impulses, distinct in the first instance from erotogenic sexual activity,” 58. On one level, certainly, he means here simply that the instinct acts independently of the genitals, as Mulvey recognizes. At another though, Freud maintains the use of the term ‘children’ generally without specification to their gender until the ‘Castration complex penis envy’ subsection, which hence could suggest that scopophilic, exhibitionistic and sadistic/masochistic impulses are not gendered.

To further the matter, we can look to Marian Keane’s relevant notes from her essay:

[Freud’s] crucial discovery that these instincts always appear in pairs or, as he puts it specifically ‘[a] sadist is always at the same time a masochist’ and ‘exhibitionists ... exhibit their own genitals in order to obtain a reciprocal view of the genitals of the other person’ Freud’s discovery that scopophilia-exhibitionism and sadism-masochism are sexual instincts that occur in ambivalent forms constitutes a deep insight into the nature

Here is where the role Mulvey plays of psychoanalyst makes its most definitive move: “The male unconscious” she explains, “has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety.” The first involves an immediate return to what she calls the “original trauma,” a return to the scene where the male infant first witnesses the anatomical difference of gender difference. Her using words like “investigating” and “demystifying” suggests an active cooperation that female counterpart (infant or otherwise) must play. In reaction to this, the investigation/demystification takes the form of “devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object” – the object simply that is designed to suffer is naturally “guilty.” The type of look associated with this first avenue is voyeurism – and in view of the reasons mentioned, is associated with sadism. The second avenue is to avoid “dangerous” behavior and to “[completely disavow] castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure into a fetish.” The look associated with this type of reaction to the representation of the female form Mulvey calls “fetishistic scopophilia...[which] builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming into something satisfying by itself.”

The two Hawks films only appear in a single short parenthesis as examples of films that contain a particular shift from this last mode of scopophilia as fetish that is then eclipsed by the voyeur-based narrative. That she should pick two Hawks films as illustrations of films that fully contain both scopophilic and voyeuristic modes of erotic representation, without mentioning neither Hawks nor any of the other modes of sexual

of human sexuality. Marian Keane, “A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock and *Vertigo*” in *A Hitchcock Reader*, Marshall Deutelbaum, Leland Poague, eds. [Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1986] 238.

Mulvey’s insistence on gendering her concept of the gaze is essential to her thesis – but apparently, and this appearance has been confirmed by Keane and others, this does not come from Freud or Lacan.

and erotic representation that he is *more* interested in, is enough to call out as a fault. Mulvey claims that these films contain a tension between the two spectatorial modes that she speaks of: “direct scopophilic contact with the female form” and a kind of fascinated-identification with the character and “through him [gain] control and possession of the woman within the diegesis.” Her choice does well to illustrate her point but neither does she go anywhere with the fact of the shift (i.e., so what, there is a modal shift onto one that obscures the other), nor does she follow the films to explore why the scopophilic gives way to the voyeuristic.

While Mulvey claims that both modes are indivisibly present in classical narrative, she brings in von Sternberg as representative of the first mode and Hitchcock that of the second. In the first, von Sternberg gave primacy to “the pictorial space enclosed in the frame,” presenting the scopophilic as fetishistic, indifferent to the narrative, the pleasures of character identification, and camera point of views. Hence in his films, the visual pleasure is displaced from the narrative context and “the ultimate fetish” directly confronts the gaze of the film’s audience with its full “erotic impact.” The examples she uses concern the unmet gaze of Marlene Dietrich – von Sternberg’s leading woman for his six primary films – where the audience is privy to all sorts of close-ups, glamour shots, filters, and flattering lighting of his star while the male hero is typically not present to return the gaze or even to witness the spectacle.

She mentions the character La Bessière from Morocco as playing the director’s surrogate, then follows with two illustrations of what she meant by the absence of the male hero at the climactic “high points of emotional drama.” The mention of La Bessière as surrogate is contrasted to the audience identification that Mulvey claims is next to non-

existent for von Sternberg. Conversely, the gaze of the crowds and onlookers in the films, which typically represent the audience, “is one with, not standing for, the audience.” She ends the portion on von Sternberg by emphasizing that in the hero’s absence, it is his lack of sight that is most important – the fact of his not seeing. At the end of *Morocco*, Dietrich as Amy Jolly follows the French Legion troupe with the other women hangers-on with Coop marching on ahead unknowing. For her second example, a single line suffices her purpose: “at the end of *Dishonored*, Kranau is indifferent to the fate of Magda.” With this single interpretative line, Mulvey is ready to conclude that the “erotic impact” of scopophilic pleasure is offered, unmediated through narrative, as a “spectacle for the audience.”

For the three final films, Mulvey brings together some generalizing statements about Hitchcock, referring sporadically to the mentioned films, before concerning herself solely in the paper’s final film analysis with *Vertigo*. Her preface of this final analysis, the cornerstone of her paper, is prepared by a three step process: the fictional story is concerned with the gaze, the director is setting up traditional social dichotomies then undermining them from within, and the audience is drawn to the object of fascination through identification with the male protagonist. For *Marnie*, she does not specify how the story is *about* looking, and unlike *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*, the theme of looking (across a courtyard at a murder/cover-up; at a young beautiful woman who is perhaps possessed) is not so easily identifiable. Where the illustration works best (to illustrate *her* concepts) is in the remarks on the relation between Mark and Marnie, beginning with her description of Mark as “a dominant male possessing money and power [exemplary of the

symbolic order and law].”⁴⁵ She further specifies that the power Mark has “is backed by a certainty of legal right and the established guilt of the woman (evoking castration, psychoanalytically speaking).” And while these are but glosses, the descriptions generally fit the film and her abstraction fits her theory. Mark’s perversion is disguised (all too thinly) under a sheen of wealth and propriety which engulfs most of the male characters in the film – for instance, in the way Hitchcock plays with the sensual descriptions of “the brunette with the legs” and the variety of onscreen reactions to these.

Nonetheless, for a film like this one, psychoanalytically inclined with the male protagonist virtually playing psychotherapist to the female lead, as it was with the Hawks films, there are more important, more central, more obvious things to be stopped by. Her final remarks on the film also end the section of film description – they run as follows:

Marnie, too, performs for Mark Rutland's gaze and masquerades as the perfect to-be-looked-at image. He, too, is on the side of the law until, drawn in by obsession with her guilt, her secret, he longs to see her in the act of committing a crime, make her confess and thus save her. So he, too, becomes complicit as he acts out the implications of his power. He controls money and words, he can have his cake and eat it.⁴⁶

To be sure, there is no description of the film at all, no reminders or place holders to tie to her extractions, like Marnie’s masquerading or Mark’s longing. Mulvey links this masquerade to Madeleine’s in *Vertigo* but the similarity is, again, not that obvious – Marnie is not, say, the accomplice of a sly wife-killer posing for the dupe of a witness

⁴⁵ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 16. The passage also mentions Scottie from *Vertigo* as so exemplary.

⁴⁶ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 17. All three uses of “too” refer to the longer description of *Vertigo* where she references Madeleine and Scottie.

and *thus* masquerading. She is her own Gavin, plotting her robberies and disguising her identity by changing her hair color, her name, and her social security number to maintain her freedom. The masquerade she pulls with Mark, at the level of plot, is equivalent to the entire setup orchestrated by Gavin to rid himself of his wife. In some way, the transformation of Judy to Madeleine does not need to happen for Marnie, for she has absorbed both sides. Where Judy became Madeleine to lure Scottie, Marnie already knew how to be “Madeleine” and how to use this identity. Rather than speak of Madeleine and Marnie together, one would have to speak of them as before and after.⁴⁷

This is all to say, simply, that if Mulvey wishes to use *Marnie* in support of her claims, she would do well to pursue the connections she proposes. For much like Stewart’s photogenesis projects feminine attributes, so too does Tippi Hedren’s project aspects of masculinity. In *Marnie*, it is more than her sometimes masculine clothes, more than the rigidity of her features erstwhile birdlike; the subject of the film, is not “the fascination with an image through scopophilic eroticism” as Mulvey suggests, but the repression of (desire for) masculinity through some psychological compensation and gender-duality, such as is at work in Perkins’ Norman Bates. “The look” *is* central to the narrative, as Mulvey claims, but the complexity of its abstracted levels, from Marnie’s visual intrusion into her mother’s world to Mark’s verbal intrusion into Marnie’s world, are far from providing support to her claims.

⁴⁷ Clifford T. Manlove, “Visual ‘Drive’ and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey,” *Cinema Journal* - 46, Number 3, Spring 2007, 83-108 (100-3). Among the several commentators who take the good of Mulvey’s gaze theory and leave the bad, Manlove is the only one to explicitly call out the inappropriateness of *Marnie* to explain this theory. He proposes a Lacanian distinction between objective and subjective “ways of seeing.” This is not dissimilar to what Žižek will propose using Lacan with *Vertigo* and several other films, first in *Looking Awry*, and scattered across several later essays and books.

In her use of *Rear Window*, Mulvey appeals to Jean Douchet's famous article from the *Cahier du Cinema* as if to confirm her claims, but she leaves out as much from his essay as she does in her use of the films. She begins by claiming, correctly, that for this author from the height of French criticism, Jeffries stands for the audience – overlooking that Douchet quite clearly goes on to reposition Jeffries' surrogacy and postulates that he also stands in *for the projector*. His sense that *Rear Window* is Hitchcock's concept of cinema at work, much like Wood and others have spoken of *Vertigo*, is based on this dual role played by Jeffries, both projector and spectator, "*qui fait son propre cinema*."⁴⁸ One could overlook this difference, by say associating projector and audience under the rubric of screening, but the difference is crucial with respect to claims such as Mulvey's. As projector-surrogate with his camera, his lenses, and his binoculars, Jeffries is rarely seen gazing at anything specific – instead, Hitchcock gives us shots of Jeffries looking, then cuts to the windows of his neighbors where his gaze resides. And yet, as Mulvey and many contend, he is stuck to his chair, able only to look. Following Douchet, as a combination of the two, Jeffries personifies the voyeur – marking out the subjects to watch and watching them (even to the extent of naming the subjects of his projections: Ms. Torso, Ms. Lonelyheart, etc.).

The issue of Lisa's exhibitionism, paired to Scottie's voyeurism, just does not fit, and for reasons Mulvey herself states: Jeffries is simply unenthusiastic in his interest in his girlfriend until she becomes part of the game. Conversations between the two from the moment we meet Lisa have been about their difference and incompatibility; but when

⁴⁸ Translated as "who makes his own cinema." Jean Douchet, "Hitch et son Publique," *Cahier du Cinema* 19.3, 1960, 7-15. Douchet then follows with the question, "But isn't this precisely the definition of voyeurism, the essence of morose gratification?"

Lisa takes an interest in the murder story, Jeffries' enthusiasm sparks. Mulvey contends that when Jeffries sees Lisa "on the screen" across the courtyard, he is hooked as she becomes part of his voyeuristic fantasy. And yet it is clearly before this, if we are to assess his passion for this woman by his physical reaction (as we've assessed his lack of fervor previously) at the moment Lisa picks up the binoculars, that Jeffries' emotions turn. The film begins with Lisa and Jeffries at opposite poles of a voyeur/exhibitionist relationship, but it is one where neither party is satisfied. The pair come together not, as Mulvey insists, in this bi-lateral relation but in a mutual and active voyeurism.

These six examples, excluding *Vertigo* for the time being, make up the totality of films she discusses. She also includes the names of Busby Berkeley and Budd Boetticher to this list. By simply mentioning their names she therefore rides her claims about them solely on their reputations. Hence, Berkeley's magnificent stage choreographies are disparagingly evoked as (mis)treating women as geometric figures on a par with stage props; and Boetticher's lifelong study of the lone male figure of the American frontier is cast as a repression of women's role in the West. Each of Mulvey's descriptions of particular films fall short of providing a key into a deeper understanding of the films or the filmmakers. These descriptions, which are always vague and generalizing, are called upon to support claims that precede any interpretation of the film. She calls her use of film examples "illustrations" of the concepts she wishes to impose on them. Cavell draws attention to this very term at a conference held the same year as Mulvey's paper where he gives his first full reading of a film, Howard Hawk's *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). The paper was published a year later in 1976 in *The Georgia Review*, and thereafter made its way into his book *Pursuits of Happiness* as a chapter on *Bringing Up Baby*, entitled

“Leopards in Connecticut,” and an afterword entitled “Film in the University” where he discusses the emergence of film onto the academic scene. In the latter, he describes his distinctive mode of “reading film” *specifically* as opposed to the common way of using films as illustrations. In such uses as these and Mulvey’s, the films are called upon in support “of some prior set of preoccupations rather than constitute an effort to study the medium in and for itself.”⁴⁹

Returning to Keane’s argument, her first objection to Mulvey’s paper was her dissatisfaction with the way she used films as “evidence” – so not only is Keane dissatisfied with the fact that the films are merely being called upon to illustrate some preexisting set of concepts, she finds her use of these films to be inadequate even to Mulvey’s own modest claims. Keane does not pick up any of the films that are discussed above but focuses solely on *Vertigo* as the keystone of Mulvey’s claims.

The first point Keane picks up is the most important point in Mulvey’s description of *Vertigo*; the alliance of the camera with Stewart that renders his character Scottie’s point of view into the camera’s point of view. Mulvey calls this Hitchcock’s use of a subjective camera. Keane points to the scene, discussed in Truffaut’s famous interview with Hitchcock and made a big deal of in the criticism which followed, where Scottie leaves Judy at her hotel and the camera remains with her. And as it does, the camera leaps further away from Scottie’s subjectivity to reveal, in what Keane calls the “decisive turning point,” precisely what Scottie had failed to see during the first fateful church tower event. The “flashback” sequence, as both Mulvey and Keane call it, is much more than simply an authorial insertion of information to an audience: it is placed within the

⁴⁹ Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness* [Boston: Harvard University Press, 1981] 272.

heroine's act of *confession* to her would-be lover; which is then torn up and thrown away. But most importantly, as Keane notes and expands, is that the "flashback" is initiated by Novak's direct look into the camera. She describes this specific acknowledgement of the camera:

Her look into the camera registers what she knows, and the flashback that follows represents but a piece of that knowledge. She knows not only all that took place on the bell tower, but that Stewart/Scottie is right to believe he has found Madeleine Elster again. When she looks into Hitchcock's camera, she is acknowledging her identity as Madeleine...⁵⁰

Keane wants the image of Kim Novak, in her mauve sweater and green backlight, sitting at the hotel writing desk pen in hand and lifting her head from the paper onto which she is writing, to own up to the role she played at the behest of Gavin. But her acknowledgement here is not merely of the role she played with Gavin in the swindle, but the recognition of the love inside her brimming out beyond the planned scheme. As she looks into the camera, she *directs* the narrative into the flashback. . The active and passive forms of instincts Mulvey calls up to describe, respectively, the male gaze and female posturing, are brought together here by Keane into an instance of the female gaze. Of course, Keane is right to underline the relation that Novak forms with the camera in this scene. She is right to point out Mulvey's oversight. She is right to imply that Judy knows all that the flashback reveals – but she stops before continuing to examine the form this "piece of knowledge" comes in. The confessional is an ancient form of communicating remorse and regret, and specifically in a religious sense to be rid of or

⁵⁰ Keane, "A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock and *Vertigo*," 238.

cleansed of something. *This* is what she tears up – Judy may very well, as most commentators note, wish to have Scottie love her for herself rather than the Madeleine she can put on, but she forgoes confession and decides to move on with another plan. Keane stands by Judy’s decision to tear up her confession and go on lying to Scottie *in the name of love*.

Keane’s strange attachment to this idea of an importance of loving, inexplicably missing from feminist studies, ultimately carries her counter-reading of Mulvey’s paper. She calls out the theme of love as a major preoccupation of Freud’s, and therefore studies in Freudian psychoanalysis need to account for this aspect of human behavior. Notwithstanding all this, *Vertigo* does not seem to be the obvious choice to *illustrate* a general topic of love – if it were to illustrate anything, it would resemble something closer to the loss of love, or its failure. And though her text is a response to Mulvey’s paper and specially to her analysis of the film, there is something that Mulvey is saying that hits the spot with what is going on in the film that Keane does not respond to.

2.2 Žižek

Had the animus of this paper been to save *Vertigo* or Hitchcock or movies generally from the hands of misguided instructors, this essay would have begun with a tirade directed against Mulvey’s *use of Vertigo* in her backwards project, analogous in many regards with Keane. However, this writing is led by an interest in Cavell, and hence has instead been directed towards what has been missed and pushed aside in the throes of adolescent institutional growing pains. This writing follows a new interest in Cavell’s writing on film that has spread across North America, attested to by the small yet

burgeoning number of articles by film scholars recognizing the importance of these texts; these texts which have helped shape an understanding of our relationship to the screen image by examining the relation of the camera with the world, and by then turning the examination towards the experience of cinema, hinged on the importance of memory and of remembering to experience. In his book, *Organs Without Bodies*, Slavoj Žižek notes this particular feature of Cavell's film studies: his particular (and now idiosyncratic) emphasis on working with films from memory. Cavell is someone that Žižek will reference every now and again, and always in favorable tones, but since Žižek sees himself working on things that are adjacent but not immediately related, Cavell appears only sporadically. In this book, and with reference to *Vertigo*, this is the only mention of Cavell: he comes in to stand as the figure who values the experience of film in criticism.⁵¹

In our first chapter, we examined *The World Viewed* by placing it on a horizon of Cavell's effort of writing; the first part of this present chapter surveys the text behind the Mulvey phenomenon, with the help of Marian Keane, as a singular text independent of any larger project. Moving from Cavell to Mulvey was an attempt to gauge how far the early institution of Film Studies was from that of Philosophy; continuing with the example of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* with cultural scholar Slavoj Žižek is meant to show to that this distance has considerably shortened. The study of films and the subject of

⁵¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, [New York: Routledge, 2004] 149-176; Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992] 69-106.

It could have been a Jamesian value of experience that Žižek was seeking to reference, and James is someone Žižek would reference, but then he would lose the connection to film that Cavell brings so uniquely. This experience, for someone who has made a name for himself by making connections with Lacan, psychoanalysis and various cultural avenues, is what Žižek attempts to read in the films.

philosophy are presently crossing currents in today's institutions of Humanities and Arts. The third and final chapter returns to *The World Viewed* to unpack Cavell's reading of *Vertigo*, which somehow has remained unrecognized by current Hitchcock scholarship, as an example of serious early film criticism. This section functions as a bridge between Mulvey's and Cavell's readings of *Vertigo* whose similarity lies only in their brevity. Therefore the Lacanian and psychoanalytical structures of Žižek's analyses will be downplayed to focus on the reading of *Vertigo*, while at the same time recognizing that this is precisely the context in which his writing on *Vertigo* appears.

In Žižek's first study, the ideas of perception and point of view are not discussed in relation to the camera, though these will become major themes in the later text, but the gaze as a psychoanalytical concept nonetheless makes an appearance:

The gaze denotes at the same time power (it enables us to exert control over the situation, to occupy the position of master), and impotence (as bearer of a gaze, we are reduced to the role of passive witness to the adversary's action). The gaze, in short, is a perfect embodiment of the "impotent Master," one of the central figures of Hitchcockian universe.⁵²

The archetypal example of this quality of power and impotence associated with the gaze is found in Poe's famous short story "The Purloined Letter," where a letter is stolen from the Queen in broad view of everyone by a minister who knows something of its incriminating nature. The theft is seen by the Queen but she cannot react for fear that her husband the King should discover the contents of the letter; the key to this particular posturing is that the confrontation is not merely between the minister-thief and the Queen

⁵² Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 72.

but takes place on a public plane in the presence of a third agent “who personifies the innocent ignorance of the ‘big Other’.”⁵³ The “dialectic of the gaze” involves both seeing and being seen but more precisely invokes the third line of sight that sees things (not objectively but) from within a particular political order. This gaze is not disinterested; quite the contrary, but the interest of the gaze is located precisely at the heart of what the big Other is so innocently ignorant of, namely in what the purloined letter reveals about the Queen. Hence the advantage of the minister who plays the game on the King’s political field. The political realm is one where appearances constitute the fabric of the real.

In the preface to his book *Looking Awry*, where he stages his first run through with *Vertigo*, Žižek describes one of his “new approaches” to Hitchcock as “an articulation of the dialectic of deception at work in Hitchcock’s films, a dialectic in which those who really err are the non-duped” – the title of the section that culminates with *Vertigo* is “How the Non-duped Err,” and the concepts the “big Other,” of the gaze, and of sublimation come in from Lacan. In *Organs Without Bodies*, Žižek examines the topic of sublimation in art starting with *Vertigo*, again with Lacan and again through these same concepts, only here with a focus on the camera. The corollary concepts of the “Thing,” of the subject as gaze, and of the “third agency” of the camera, dig deeper into the Lacanian world of Žižek’s Hitchcock.

The first important text of Lacan relates to the infamous mirror phase, the stage where an infant learns to recognize herself as a whole body, separate from her parents and other individuals, separate from objects but not made up of separate parts. She is

⁵³ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 72.

whole *and therefore* she gains the grasp of her identity as that of the mirrored infant. Pointing to the mirror and saying “That is me” is the subject’s understanding of her Self. This subjectivity comes wholly from outside, and in this phase, the Self is first understood as Other.

Seeing as from a perspective outside the body involves a process of objectifying and unifying the human body as a body of humans, “decentralizing” the subjective core from the body onto the normative social plane. The infant who recognizes her bodily-self in the mirror can do so because she recognizes the bodily whole from other humans. The very notion of an embodied selfhood is one that is learned. And notwithstanding the presence of constant biological needs, human behavior is learned by observing the behavior of humans.

Lacan, like Freud, points to the mother as the child’s first model of desiring: learning from this desire and also attempting to satisfy it. The father’s interruption of the child’s designs to satisfy the mother is what Lacan calls “the Law of the Father” (against incest but also as a declaration of the family unity), which comes as the castration of the child’s phallus-for-her-mother. Post-castration is the field of the “big Other.” This is here familiar ground for anyone in Film Studies but Žižek takes a new approach to Lacanian film studies.

Rather than to explain from the doctor’s viewpoint what concepts are at work in various movie scenes, which would yield a straightforward illustration of the concepts in the play of human interaction on screen, Žižek takes the figure from below the threshold of castration, the pervert and the psychotic, to expound his illustrations of psychoanalytic concepts. From the perspectives of the unassimilated or only partially assimilated, Žižek

describes the “big Other” as an illusion upon which nonetheless hangs the balance of reality.

*

The “articulation of the dialectic of deception” that Žižek announces in his preface is primarily worked on with an interest in narrative, with no emphasis on specific shots, cuts or camera movements. He begins by ascribing the feeling where a story advances naturally and inevitably towards its conclusion to an illusion which, applied in retrospect, “confers the consistency of an organic whole on the preceding events.” (69) To fully depict the nature of such an illusion, Žižek flips the scenario and locates next to this feeling of natural narrative development the “anxious premonition” that still lurks behind when the end of a story is given before hand – knowing the outcome of events before they occur and nonetheless watching their dénouement, “render[s] palpable the radical contingency of events.” He is suggesting that the feeling that an ending *just fits* the set-up and development of a story is empty, that the *necessity* of this specific coherence is illusory, and that things very well could have gone otherwise. One has only to see how differently things could have gone without respect to this sense of a perfect and necessary conclusion. “The “big Other” does not exist”: the world is chaos, at least as far as we can see, systems of meaning, structuring narratives and human relations, are nothing but illusions.

However:

It would be wrong to conclude from the “nonexistence of the big Other,” i.e., from the fact that the big Other is just a retroactive illusion masking the radical contingency of the real, that we could just suspend these

illusions and see things as they really are.” The crucial point is that this “illusion” structures reality itself: its disintegration leads to a “loss of reality.”

One cannot help thinking about the old Cartesian problematic of doubting the sureness of one’s faculties, and starting afresh on the sure grounds of the assurance of one’s subjectivity - but am I still *I* when the big Other does not exist? Where Descartes’ faith in reality rested in Christianity, Žižek is more modern, after the death of god, the illusions (not merely of religion but of reality itself) have no guarantor: I simply am, and I must be, unless I am willing to renounce the enchantment of this reality. The subject’s relation to the big Other is where its relation to itself is found, and the psychotic is the figure for whom these illusions are unnecessary.⁵⁴

This dialectic of deception frames his study of *Vertigo*. The topic of the film that Žižek focuses on is the sublimation of the woman, where the construction of the perfect transcendent image of Madeleine (echoing Mulvey’s “perfect image of beauty”) is only too perfect, slipping away as Scottie comes nearest to possessing her – and this *twice*. One of Žižek’s well-worked, oft-turned to devices in reading films, is the what-if trick: which consists in hypothesizing about the film in given what-if scenarios that set up the discussion around the importance of how something *did* in fact go down. Here, with *Vertigo*, he examines the development of the film had it ended after Madeleine’s suicide, the first of the bell tower plunges:

⁵⁴ Žižek later refers to the psychotic as “precisely a subject who is not duped by the symbolic order.” And the dupe here is not someone literally fooled or conned into something but someone who simply acts from within the social order; the tag of “dupe” is from the perspective of the “non-duped” for whom everyone is in on the game.

We would have the passionate drama of a man who, while striving desperately to save a woman from the demons of her past, unwittingly pushed her towards her death by the very excessive nature of his love. We could even – why not? – give the story a Lacanian twist by interpreting it as a variation on the theme of the impossibility of the sexual relationship. The elevation of an ordinary, earthly woman to the sublime object always entails mortal danger for the miserable creature charged with embodying the Thing, since “Woman does not exist.”⁵⁵

Before going on with Žižek, let us tease out exactly how the narrative would tie up had it ended here. First, there is no Judy, and hence, no confession, no masquerade, etc.; and second, Gavin is on the level about his concern for his wife’s mental stability. The narrative which began with Scottie holding on to a rooftop watching his partner plummet to his death ends with yet another deathly plummet – the woman he is charged to watch becomes the woman he falls in love with, and in an effort to rationally break the spell of her dreams leads her to the real places of her nightmares, in essence driving her to the stage of her death. The sound of the charges read by the judge at the trial in the scene following this one (that makes Scottie writhe in his skin) is uncannily similar.

Reading the first part alone sustains the Lacanian reading similar to that of a typical romantic text; an ordinary woman becomes the object of sublime rapture, luring and ensnaring the man fantasy around her fascination with death. The loss of this sublime object is all part of the typical romance narrative where part of the lure of death is its

⁵⁵ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 84.

involvement with the sublimation of woman. Had the film ended this way, and it could have, it would have held together as a classical romantic drama of lost love.

But it did not, and famously so. Žižek prepares the turnaround moment by giving the first part a Lacanian reading since we know that this is not in fact the story of Scottie's failure to save the woman (from the "excesses of his love"), but of his failure to see through the scam (that there never was a Madeleine for Scottie, that "the Woman does not exist"). So Scottie sits in the courthouse on the very grounds of the site of the death of his beloved hearing the story being retold in its most accusatory tone, and then he becomes lost. The entire scene from the fall of Mrs. Elster to Judy's confession plays out as the lull that allows Scottie to take his bearings in the world again; but these bearings are all part of Madeleine's universe. It is through his fantasy of Madeleine that Scottie is brought back to the world, unawares of Gavin and Judy's ploy, and thus begins Judy's second life as Madeleine.⁵⁶

This comical identity of "resembling" and "being" announces, however, a lethal proximity: if the false Madeleine resembles herself, it is because she is in a way *already dead*. The hero loves her as Madeleine, that is to say, *insofar as she is dead* – the sublimation of her figure is equivalent to her mortification in the real.⁵⁷

Let us turn things around to Scottie's perspective: this redhead who lives at the Empire hotel really (and *amazingly*, considering) looks like Madeleine; I will do

⁵⁶ When Scottie leaves the hospital after his breakdown, he finds Judy. There are no Hitchcock cameos to announce the director's complicity with Judy in this second meeting, and rightly so for the relation between Gavin and the camera's authorship (call it Hitchcock) is different than this new complicity with Judy. When Judy stares into the camera during her confession, she forms a bond with the camera as a model with a photographer, pleading it to "make him love me again."

⁵⁷ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 85.

everything I can to enhance whatever it is this girl Judy has to bring out the Madeleine in her (while quashing the Judy in her); wait a moment, this is working better than I could have hoped, she really does pull off this Madeleine thing; But, how can this be? She *is* Madeleine; but then, she can be Madeleine only because there never was a Madeleine. Recognizing the mental leap that Scottie needs to perform between the final appearance of Judy as Madeleine and the realization that Madeleine never existed are crucial to understanding this second part.

The obsessive reconstruction of the sublime image turns differently in this version of *Pygmalion* but not because of Scottie's failure; he does everything he can to recreate his lost Madeleine from this brute woman but his success, unlike that of Professor Higgins, is dependent on the fact that he was merely re-enacting the creation of another man – it would be as if Eliza were already a lady in a flower shop, and the professor finds out the game is rigged after tasting victory.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ As I mention Shaw's *Pygmalion*, I should note the proximity of Hebrew University lecturer Aner Preminger's essay from last summer's 2008 *Literature/Film Quarterly* "Francois Truffaut Rewrites Alfred Hitchcock: A Pygmalion Trilogy" to this particular aspect of the film. Preminger examines the type from its Greek origin, but seeing as the characters in *Vertigo* are merely modeling and modifying their respective types, I see no advantage Preminger's return to Ovid would have over simply remaining with Shaw, who models his characters straight from the types of the myth. In his reading of the film, influenced by the current of Mulvey's early paper, Preminger adds a corrective to Truffaut's recounting of it in the Hitchcock interview: he claims that what Truffaut misses is that "Judy plays Madeleine not after the model of the real Mrs. Elster, but after the model of Carlotta," which results in what he calls "the incarnation of an image of a historical figure." The importance of this shift produces for Preminger the resolution to the uncertainty surrounding the film by providing the key to understanding the final bell-tower scene.

In the *Pygmalion* story, "a sculptor... though he hated women, fell in love with his own ivory statue of Aphrodite. In answer to his prayer, the goddess gave life to the statue and he married her"; in the first part of the film, "Judy plays Madeleine whose ontological status is that of a total fiction" directed and produced by Gavin Elster using Carlotta, and specially her portrait and the story of her suicide, to craft his Madeleine; "In the second part we see a reconstruction/recreation/reflection of the first part, in which Scottie changes from an actor maneuvered by Elster into a director who maneuvers Judy..." Though he describes the film as divided into two part, he points to "two Turning Points", turning the significance of the film...: the first is at the foot of the bridge where Judy jumps into the water and Carlotta becomes flesh for Scottie; the second is where Scottie "spots Judy as resembling the dead Madeleine, and proceeds to transform her into Madeleine."

And here, Žižek takes the reading further than most:

The hero puts all his efforts into transforming Judy into a new “Madeleine,” into producing a sublime object, when, all of a sudden, he becomes aware that “Madeleine” herself was Judy, this common girl. The point of such a reversal is not that an earthly woman can never fully conform to the sublime ideal, on the contrary, it is the sublime object herself (“Madeleine”) that loses her power of fascination.⁵⁹

Recall the setting of Žižek’s what-if where he proposes the Lacanian reading of the impossibility of a sexual relationship as fitting to the first part of the film, Scottie’s loss of Madeleine functioned as the loss of the sublime image at precisely the moment where he would have possessed her – the lesson learned is that transcendent beauty has its price to pay. In the second part, his loss of Judy is of a different nature. Following the Pygmalion interpretive-key, where the first loss is inflicted upon Scottie, and in the second through the blindness he unwittingly inflicts upon himself; both losses are similar, they are both of a woman, of the same woman. For Žižek, this second loss is not the loss

These two storylines, first the doubling structure of the Pygmalion myth and second the Turning Points that suggest three phases, play on Judy’s pliancy in both the hands of Gavin and of Scottie, which itself opens up the scenario of creation – Gavin creates Madeleine for “power and freedom”; Scottie for love. But Scottie’s blindness to what he was creating, for he was indeed unwittingly recreating Gavin’s Madeleine, is what leads to the *inevitably* of the film’s ending. Preminger and Mulvey are not alone here in their sense that the ending of this film is prescribed somehow by the events of the narrative. If we accept the inevitability of the ending, there is something that is being missed.

For when Preminger claims after describing the two transformations of Judy, “From here on the film moves on to its inevitable resolution, where Judy is led to her death by falling from the tower and Scottie is liberated from his vertigo” as if there is no remainder to the equation, he is brushing off a whole leg of criticism with this offering as the solution. It ultimately suggests itself as the disenchantment of *Vertigo*. The point Preminger begins with, correcting Truffaut on the model of Gavin’s Madeleine from Gavin’s actual wife to Carlotta, is somehow lost in the brilliance of the inevitability of the plot. The fact of the nun’s immediate relation to Judy’s death in causing the fall is equally neglected. These last two points are at the center of both Žižek’s and Cavell’s reading of the film.

⁵⁹ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 85.

of the woman but of the sublime image: “by obtaining the object, we lose the fascinating dimension of loss as that which captivates our desires.”⁶⁰

As Judy asks Scottie to fix the clasp on her necklace, Madeleine’s necklace, *Carlotta’s* necklace, all at once, the hold that “Madeleine’s image” had on his fantasy breaks down. He calls this Madeleine’s “second death” with scare quotes because it is not literally the death of a physical woman but functions as the loss of loss, the breakdown of his fantasy. For Žižek, this second loss implies a cure for Scottie, who he points to on the bell-tower looking down without crumbling, as being cured from his vertigo as well. The duration between his affixing the clasp on the neck of this woman who has taken him for a ride, and the scene in the bell-tower when *she* is brought to see that he knows what she knows, that he knows more than she knows, is time that needs accounting for. Does Scottie gradually become unhinged and unintentionally drive Judy off the ledge? Or does everything come together the moment he sees the fateful necklace, and the drive to San Batista and the climb up the tower become part of his retributive designs?

Before answering these questions, or even weighing what answering them would mean, let us elaborate more precisely on this “second death,” the death of Scottie’s fantasy. For Žižek, subjectivity is on the outside; Scottie catches up with what the camera has been revealing since the first shot of Madeleine at Ernie’s. In his second take on *Vertigo* in *Organs Without Bodies*, Žižek begins by making an appeal to what he calls Cavell’s theory of misrepresentation in pointing out the way the first appearance of

⁶⁰ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 86.

Madeleine is systematically described by critics, “from Wood to Spoto,” as shot from Scottie’s point of view.⁶¹

A fluid tracking shot advances towards the black and red-glass doors of the restaurant and dissolves into Žižek’s first shot. The movement, though somewhat jolted by the dissolve, continues its fluid movement from outside as Scottie appears through the dissolve, framed from the waist: the shot begins with his head and eyes already turned towards something off-screen to his right, our left. As he leans back only slightly from the bar, tilting his head as he leans, the camera tracks back, then quickly pans left, leaving Scottie at the bar and throwing an eye over a crowded busy restaurant. The tracking that continues in this shot moves through the other guests and finds its way to Elster’s table where Elster and Madeleine are getting up from their chairs. The shot is not Scottie’s point-of-view, clearly; and yet, as Žižek claims, this and the following problem shot are included in the suture of the rest of the scene (the standard series of shots of a person viewing, coupled with the counter-shot of the viewed object). Žižek is among the few to single out that the audio track happens to play an important role in this sequence, starting with the bustling clamor of a busy restaurant that is drowned out by Hermann’s swelling

⁶¹ At the beginning of this section, I remarked Žižek’s use of Cavell as the figure of experience. This presence also marks a deeper recognition by Žižek concerning the very theme of the book from which he draws the reference: the importance of the camera in the study of film. Žižek’s idea of a “kino-eye” that marks the title of the first section on *Vertigo*, is the difference in his two main texts on *Vertigo* from 1991 and 2004. This emphasis on the camera complements his earlier reading but also complicates it in ways that Žižek does not explore. His deference to Cavell and his various commitments to Lacan and Deleuze create interesting tensions that will lead into and prepare for Cavell’s singularly brilliant reading in the following chapter.

The subject of this first section is framed by the invocation of Cavell as representative of a theory of misrepresentations, prizing the description of film from memory *especially* when the frames of the film don’t match up, calling attention to this as a special mode of perception. In calling up the scene from Ernie’s, two things are set into motion immediately: the first is the juxtaposition of the critic, who writes and misrepresents film as accented with his or her own “libidinal investments”, with Scottie, the subject of the transcription error of these critics; the second is the idea of “the gaze as object, free from the strings that attach it to a particular subject.” Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 154.

violin score “which accompanies the camera in its gradual approach of the *fascinum*,” the “naked back” of a black velvet dressed Kim Novak. The play on the soundtrack supports Žižek’s argument of “total subjectivity”, literally drowning out the diegetic sound of real life with the swell of an emotional\mental\spiritual affection echoed in the music.

Both Žižek and Mulvey associate the camera’s perspective with Scottie, but while Mulvey crudely links the audience to the camera and to Scottie in one careless brush, Žižek is more subtle. He suggests that the moments where the camera disengages from its literal alliance with Scottie are sometimes those moments where Scottie is most invested, with the single exception of Judy’s flashback – which will be discussed later. The first shot is one of these moments where the camera’s gaze, detached from any character, is nonetheless somehow allied with a given and, also, with the audience. Here is where Žižek’s appeal to Cavell’s so-called theory of misrepresentation comes in: it is not that the critics whom Žižek names have identified with Scottie, and therefore feel Scottie’s perspective as theirs, hence misidentifying the shot – these critics are given the eye of the camera, as the audience is, and are introduced to Madeleine through the same masquerade set-up as Scottie. The camera, Hitchcock’s major ally, is directing the gaze – primordial and essential.⁶²

⁶² Just thinking about Mulvey in the discussion of this scene shows exactly how obnoxious and harmful her text has been to students of cinema. Unlike most critics who mistakenly ascribe these shots to Scottie’s point of view, Mulvey is not discussing this scene specifically but *every* scene generally save that of the flashback. Whether or not her notion of point of view is literal or not, when the stakes of her interpretation rest on calling the camera subjective, the details of a scene like this one *which are not that complex* should be enough for any reader to discard a interpretation of the film that begins with these words:

In *Vertigo*, subjective camera predominates, apart from one flash-back from Judy’s point of view, the narrative is woven around what Scottie sees or fails to see. The audience follows the growth of his erotic obsession and subsequent despair precisely from his point of view.

Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 15.

While the first shot enacts the metaphor of casting an eye over something, whose literalness Žižek pushes far, the second shot has nothing to do with eye-casting unless we move to a metaphysical eye-casting, say the doubly metaphorical, where the camera's eye drifts from Scottie's visual point of view to his mental or emotional point of view. The single shot comes after a shot-counter shot sequence, repeated once to count four shots, where Scottie is shown at the bar, head turned, looking through the partition straight at the advancing Madeleine. As she approaches the bar, Scottie turns his glance slightly away from her. There is a close-up, from a higher angle than before of Scottie looking away towards the bar, then the cut to the fantasy Madeleine seen from no perspective but that of the kino-eye, then another cut to Scottie turned the other way to catch a glimpse of her leaving, and a final cut to the shot of Gavin catching up to her and the two leaving together. The fantasy shot does not fit with the shot-countershot sequence in which Scottie observes Madeleine followed by Gavin getting up from their table and leaving the restaurant. The camera is dislocated from the sutured scene of Scottie gazing at the couple and instead aligns itself for a single shot with what we want to call Scottie's fantasy. Žižek underscores the red from the background wallpaper swelling as "almost threatening to explode in red heat turning into a yellow blaze," in the same way as the effect of the music had combined with the wandering camera. Here, the effect of the color combines with the surreal detached subjectivized gaze to seal the scorching fantasy in Scottie's mind.

But in associating these two shots with Scottie, and suggesting that Hitchcock's camera identifies with Scottie, we must be careful with what we are calling point of view. How much depends on the identification of the camera's perception with the physical

location of its subjects? Calling a shot subjective outside of these conventions, as we suggested above with the “metaphysical” point of view, breaks down the convention by taking away the single defining necessity of the shot – i.e. that it mimic the perspective of one of its subjects. If we concede the possibility of a metaphysical point of view, then anything and everything could be considered some type of point of view, and the game would be to place the camera’s projection either onto physical bodies or onto mental states - thus effacing the existing conventions that generated such possibilities in the first place.

Žižek calls this out in another scene from *Vertigo* where the object-gaze manifests its detachment to the subjects in the narrative. The scene is in Scottie’s apartment where he has brought Madeleine after rescuing her from her plunge into the bay. The opening shot begins with a full shot of Scottie kneeling by the burning fire, throwing in a log, then the camera pans left in an arching motion displaying the array of the apartment, starting with the couch where Scottie turns from the fire to sit and sip his cup of tea. Midway through the pan, the camera faces Scottie’s open kitchen where Madeleine’s dress, stockings, and various garments are hung to dry. The pan continues and ends its 180 degree turn on the open door of Scottie’s bedroom, revealing Madeleine asleep in his bed. There should be no question of subjective point of view here, and there does not appear to be any allegiance between the camera and any of the characters. What Žižek picks up on is the dupe pulled by Hitchcock not to show Madeleine’s underwear on the clothesline but only her dress and a few unidentifiable cloths. But the pan is so quick, even though it is a slow pan, that an audience watching the film without pausing on these frames will automatically assume that the nondescript cloths hanging are her

undergarments. The censorship implied by this absence, concealing only the fact (and not the implication) that Scottie would have had to take her undergarments off to undress her, brings Žižek to ask who the shot is intended for, that is, who the censorship is for? His answer is “the ‘big Other’ itself, in the sense of the all-seeing, but stupid and innocent, observer.”⁶³

Žižek’s examples match three types of identification. In the first, where the camera wanders without a body through the aisles of the restaurant, Scottie’s point of view is discarded for a better look at Madeleine and we are effectively shown the room and Gavin and Madeleine’s table. Here we are invited to identify with the camera in the first person. In the second, the camera inserts a frame of the “totally subjectivized” image of Scottie’s fantasy. We are shown Scottie’s fantasy in a way that somehow belongs to him, different than his point of view shot. One might say this image is ascribed to him. The way the camera breaks into its subject can be thought of here as speaking for the second person – this is *your* fantasy Scottie – in a way that the dislocated camera meandering through the tables belongs to us rather than to Scottie. The third example plays with the juxtaposition of the real audience with this non-existent presumed audience: the real audience is shown the outer garments and non-descript white rags but sees underwear, while the presumed audience sees the rags that are inexplicably missing when Madeleine takes her clothes. This shot of the white rags on the line is not about Hollywood decency, say in the same register as the two beds that were required in a couple’s bedroom, but a declaration of the virtuosity of its creator. The eye that was

⁶³ Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 156.

released to wander the aisles of the restaurant, and to break into Scottie's subjective fantasy, is also capable of transcending the screen barrier and look out at its audience.

It is more difficult to see this third example as part of the triad that Žižek offers to explain the camera-eye in *Vertigo* – he lists a fourth in footnote and implies that there can be several more to be found, and that these merely stand out for him. The fourth example is the shot of the petals falling into the bay from Madeleine's bouquet at the foot of the bridge, framed in close up from no possible character perspective. This same camera placement sets-up another later shot of Madeleine in the bay, again from no specific subjective point of view. Suggesting Judy's perspective as having some kind of premonition brings us closest to Žižek's idea of the pre-subjective substance that embodies the organ-without-body of the camera-eye.

In the discussion of undergarments in the apartment scene, Žižek brings us to an example of a subject outside the film that somehow directs the gaze. But all his examples together point to more than this: Žižek is proposing a subject-less subjectivity, a void around the sublime object of the gaze that draws the subject towards the object. This model reverses the traditional notion of a subject gazing at, but never reaching, the sublime object – the gaze exists in itself and contains both subject and object. And is this not exactly what the cinema is: a gaze which contains both viewer and viewed?

The idea of sublimation in *Vertigo* is invoked by Žižek through Lacan in *Looking Awry* where the “object elevated to the dignity of the Thing” is illustrated in Madeleine's first embodiment of “sublime” inaccessible beauty, and again by Judy as the raw immaterial texture for Scottie to mold a new Madeleine. The first apparition vanishes as

he is about to come to possess it; and the second apparition loses its gloss, its spirit, what made it what it was, and reverses the fantasy. The gaze as object is the functioning organ in both cases where Kim Novak, “Madeleine” and Judy all bear the gaze.

Another tripling hauntingly echoes the camera’s study of this woman. The mask that Gavin and Judy create of Carlotta’s ghost becomes an illusion essential to understanding *Vertigo*, beyond the mere physics of corporeal bodies. Gavin stages a scene where “his wife,” played by Judy, is possessed by the ghost of Carlotta. Before Scottie’s retransformation of Judy, the relation of director-actress-audience is replayed piece by piece: adulterous spouse-killer with Hitchcock; trappy pickup girl with Novak; and the dupe of dupes for falling for the whole thing with the audience. When Scottie takes the reins in redressing a new Madeleine onto Judy, the mirroring is less perfect. Judy plays her role for Scottie as she had for Gavin, and in some way, Scottie does stand in for the director as he clearly controls the movement of the narrative at this point. The problem emerges when Scottie also becomes the audience for Madeleine. What Scottie sees from the other side of the mirror as he set to clasp the chain of the necklace is not merely *this* setup, nor even that of Gavin’s murderous scheme. Scottie sees through to Hitchcock, or whatever Hitchcock could stand for in this world. More importantly, Scottie’s seeing through to understanding *his* role in the larger scheme meant merging his narrative with hers.

No one, not even Žižek who comes so close here, points to the presence of the *three* women in this embodiment of the loss of fantasy: as the necklace goes on, the three women (Carlotta, “Madeleine,” and Judy) become one, but why do the following actions happen the way that they do? What inevitability can be attributed, even in retrospect, to

Scottie's actions in the face of the necklace? He is neither the level-headed Ferguson we had met earlier in the film at Midge's (who we may expect to bring the woman into the station house), nor is he the dazed amorous Scottie blind to his whim (who may swoon and find himself again in the hospital). Can we explain how he seems to understand everything instantly and mete out justice by leading her to jump from the tower?

All along the drive Scottie is piecing things together but it is only as he climbs the bell tower that things are revealed. As they ascend the tower, Scottie undergoes two more bouts of vertigo, signified by the tracking-zooming "vertigo" effect felt before on his previous failed ascension. He is not cured from the moment he sees the necklace. Once past the place where he had stopped, he turns to Judy and calls her Madeleine: "This was as far as I could get," and he turns his head towards a cowering Judy, "but you went on." "Remember?" He continues to stare at her and she whips around, finally confronted directly and verbally as Madeleine. "The necklace Madeleine, that was the slip. I remembered the necklace." The past comes out through Scottie's enraged inquiries, pulling her, by her waist, by her neck and shoulders, squeezing the facts from the squealing answers Judy lets escape from her throat. But what was the slip of the necklace? Scottie says she should not have been so "sentimental."

The shot of the necklace that precedes the flashback tracks toward Judy's neckline too close to be Scottie's view – the pendent on the necklace grows so large and red that it seems to scorch the white skin beneath. We are gain in the realm of the presubjective. The follow-up shot, cutting away from the close up of Judy's neck to that of Carlotta's, tracks back to frame the entire portrait as far as to include Judy (posing as Madeleine in her grey suit) sitting before the painting at the Palace of the Legion of Honor. All in one

shot, Hitchcock gives Scottie the juxtaposition wherein everything is made clear: *Carlotta's* necklace. Judy had never worn the necklace as Madeleine, it was explicitly something of *Carlotta's*, hence of Madeleine's. All at once, "the whole fantasy structure that gave consistency to his falls apart."⁶⁴

One is very tempted to attribute the conceptual death of Madeleine at the sight of the necklace to Scottie, but we must concede that Judy somehow sees it as well. Judy chooses to put the necklace on with the black dress that Scottie describes in detail to the storekeeper "with a square neck," the one replicating the dress from the first scene at Ernie's. Scottie says she should not have been "so sentimental" in keeping a souvenir of a murder. But was it not precisely her sentimentality that brought her to put on the necklace? She wanted to offer something to Scottie by way of adding this symbolic coordinate to the universe of his fantasy; as a gift over and above what she had already done.

The disconnect came at precisely the moment Judy offered something of herself to Scottie's Madeleine, paradoxically at the moment when she was most fully willing to suffer reconstruction. It is upon this physical body that the film weds the myth of *Carlotta* to the murder of Mrs. Elster. Madeleine's spectral presence precedes even her first incarnation at the hands of Gavin Elster. When Judy puts on the necklace, wittingly or not, she seals her fate with that of her predecessors. *Carlotta* gives birth to a child, is thrown away, goes crazy and commits suicide; Mrs. Elster marries a man who kills her for her money. However this is described, *this* story is the most complex of any of *Vertigo's* internal stories. Žižek's conclusion differs from Mulvey's reading of the film's

⁶⁴ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 86.

dominating “masculine perspective.” For Žižek, “*Vertigo* tells us more about the impasse of the woman’s being a symptom of man than most ‘women’s films’.”⁶⁵

In a suggestive line that, I believe, is intended to go along as an experiment in criticism, Žižek imagines the scenario wherein Gavin Elster “does not exist,” in the way that the “big Other” does not exist. With all the mechanism and machinations he embodies, Gavin is a contingent explanation of an otherwise explainable situation: Scottie’s libidinal investment in the figure of Judy creates the story of a concerned husband, a wife possessed of a ghost from the past, bordering on suicide, his friend Midge’s reservations about the whole thing, his own affectation of love and concern for this woman, her ultimate suicide, and the dejection and loss felt by her husband. Žižek is proposing that we examine the story as told from Scottie’s perspective, from the depth of his perversion, from his otherness from the social system. The sexual forces that drew him towards Judy are “explained away” in this fiction directed at the viewer just as Scottie tried to explain away Madeleine’s madness; each figure is a coordinate for some impasse or failure in Scottie’s elaborate fantasy. Of course, the film continues after Scottie emerges from his pathological devastation and we are immediately given Judy’s explanation that contradicts this reading. But what if Judy’s confession was precisely the explanation that emerges from Scottie’s psychotic imagination? Judy *is not and never was* Madeleine, and Scottie is perversely imposing himself on this needy and suggestible woman Judy. Only once the necklace breaks the trance does this reading fail. Here lies Žižek’s brilliance: in playing out the experiment until this point, the viewer is confronted

⁶⁵ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 86.

with an extreme view of Scottie's psychosis. The revelation the necklace brings him is not simply that it was all a sham, but that the sham was all real. And this is precisely what he was trying to escape.

Žižek ends his discussion of *Vertigo* by bringing in two scenes that support his claim, or at least *importantly* do not contradict it: the phone call from Elster to Scottie's apartment where he has brought Madeleine after her jump into the bay, and the presence of the nun atop the bell-tower at the end of the film. The phone call interrupts what Žižek, and Charles Barr whom he cites (and Rothman in *The "I" of the Camera*, and many others), consider the moment of tenderness that tugs the first strings of romance of Scottie and Madeleine's hands touching as she warms herself by the fire wrapped in nothing but his bed blanket. The interruption gives Madeleine enough time to leave the apartment, with her clothes, and hang the moment in an interruption or delay of sexual contact. Of course, the delay enhances the appeal of what escaped, building an intimate romantic, even sexual relationship on the already laid foundations of her ghostly possession. (On this note, few critics have weighed in on what is to be made of Scottie's willingness, eagerness, to pursue a relation with a married woman.) The non-existence of Elster in Žižek's postulation is his intimate linking with the authorial figure of Hitchcock.

Every critic notes the association Hitchcock makes with the Gavin Elster character by walking across the shipping lot on our first introduction to this shipping mogul. Never however, does the fact that he is carrying a tool box have any effect on the type of relationship that is described – Hitchcock presenting himself as a tool man (wearing a suit, no less) on Gavin's lot. The way that Gavin does not exist is in a way that Hitchcock's camera does: Gavin is the master-figure behind all the narrative movements

that lead up to Judy's death, whereas Hitchcock's camera is there not leading but anticipating the development.

Žižek leaves this suggestion of Elster's non-existence as an endnote to a fruitful discussion of the forces at work in the film, and as a microcosm of Hitchcock's larger oeuvre. More powerful than a mere lingering and untied ending, this closing suggestion opens up from his discussion of a film that represents for an entire generation of cinema the question of levels or compartments of authorship. The camera is not simply allied to the author, nor is the director or writer as is often footnoted in discussion of cinematic authorship. What Žižek proposes here is to examine the way the film thinks about its own authorship – a refreshing take that is reminiscent of Cavell.

Žižek remains with Charles Barr for the description of his second and final point, the nun appearing “the very moment Scottie and Judy embrace in reconciliation.” This very description, that Scottie was willing to “accept the reality of Judy,” or Barr's description of the moment as “the first time they are being completely open and honest with each other,” does not prevail in Žižek's interpretation. Scottie's repeating Judy's earlier “no, no, it's too late” all but confirms the contrary. She may want to go on, though constrained by forces larger than their relationship; but Scottie is utterly repulsed and wants nothing to do with her. In Žižek's proposal of Gavin Elster as a creation of Scottie's sick mind, the presence of the nun is explained as the libidinal incarnation of Scottie's fantasy – a fantasy that is no longer about possessing a woman, but about destroying and punishing her. Interestingly, Hitchcock's insertion of this religious figure in the scene where Scottie wrenches the confession from Judy, the very confession she was considering at one time giving herself *but nonetheless withheld*, twists this

retributive fantasy into Hitchcock's career-long obsession with religion and religious symbolism. In the following chapter, we will examine Cavell's related but strikingly different take on Hitchcock and religion, including his study of the figure of Judy as, figuratively and literally, "the fallen nun."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 87.

Chapter 3

Cavell's reading of *Vertigo* is confined to but a few pages from *The World Viewed* and to scattered references in *Pursuits of Happiness* and some later lectures. His interpretation of the Hitchcock film nonetheless holds an important place as *the* film about the creation of a woman adjacent to those of his studied genres, as an empty placeholder waiting to be replaced by a fuller study. For brevity and clarity's sake, we will study a short passage from *Pursuits of Happiness*, then examine the passage on *Vertigo* from *The World Viewed* in light of Cavell's claims in *Pursuits of Happiness*. Rather than sketch Cavell's most significant contribution to film history in the form of a survey of his work on the sister genres of comedies of remarriage and the melodrama of the unknown woman, the idea here is to point to the source of fascination at the heart of his film studies. The first passage in question is a quick aside from Cavell's main text on George Cukor's *Adam's Rib*, where his earlier film *A Woman's Face* is read as a parable of film directing. In this short text he comes to state as explicitly as anywhere the interest fueling the study of such comedies, which turns out also to be the pivot point to his later study of melodramas. The site is of what Cavell calls the camera's original violence and his interest is in "the film director's original responsibility."

The remarks on *Vertigo* from *The World Viewed*, returned to after absorbing his later texts, anchor the more famous studies of genre with his earlier "ontological reflections" around the origins of film. Hitchcock's near obsession with religious symbolism (churches and nuns in this film) is the primary region Cavell examines in this text, "a zone" he describes "in which superstition, expectancy, explanation, and obsession cross one another." The religious icons that Hitchcock plays with throughout his career

connect with the original source of movies, or should I say the original source of the desire for movies, of the desire to see the world unseen. The expression Cavell uses for this particular transcendental aspect does not come from above or beyond the world but as emerges from “below the world.” Connections to this realm are made more explicit with touch points from Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby*. By replacing Polanski’s film with Cukor’s, this study of Cavell on *Vertigo* bridges his concept of horror as “the perception of the instability of the fact of human existence, its neighboring of the inhuman, of the monstrous,” with his more popular and expansive study of the creation of woman.⁶⁷

In Cukor’s parable of film directing, two figures are pitted against each other as vying for the love of a single woman. However, their amorous vying is not depicted as a competition of one man against another but as part of the woman’s decision of which world she will inhabit. This decision, located entirely within the woman and expressed as her conferral of love, hinges on the two men’s creation of her. By focusing on the woman’s choice, her decisions relating to who she will permit to guide and lead her, to direct and control her, rather than on the overtures or flirtations of her would-be suitors, Cukor makes this a film about self-creation as well as direction – or rather, portrays direction as a process that involves both actor and director. The first man, openly depicted as villainous, seduces the woman (who is not used to seduction because of her facial disfigurement) and entrances her with his European wiles and sophistication. The good surgeon is played by a serious and solemn Melvin Douglas, made all the more solemn when thought of in proximity to his more common lighter roles, is nonetheless

⁶⁷ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 86-7; Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 218, 222-3.

presented as married and an unlikely candidate for romance. The surgery he performs to remove the scar from her face, together with his coaching and therapy regarding the dangers of a beautiful face, is opposed to the villainous man's seduction.

The villain, played by Conrad Veidt, seduces her, attracts her, and then asks things of her. He leads her as an underling in his criminal undertakings. Seduced, the woman not only complies but does so willingly, happy in the nest her disfigurement has found a home in. But when her exterior is transformed, she is challenged to live up to her external beauty and become the beautiful, kind woman she never could be behind the veil of ugliness. The place where the actress becomes a star is principally in front of her audience; behind the camera *directing* every play of the game is the director. Even after the surgery, the director's coaching and encouragement are only seen as love when she understands the difference between the roles of Conrad Veidt and Melvin Douglas. The seduction and control of the villainous man is affected like one would play a Mariquette – the soulless doll can jump around and play out a story but is empty inside, *must* be empty inside. The contrast with Douglas's calling out the ugliness within, calling her out from beneath the edge of his blade that has made her outer being beautiful, is contained in his calling her "my little Galatea," – the statue which comes to life. Once sculpted, Douglas entreats her to come bring her outer beauty to life, he entreats her to continue and culminate his creation – this is his direction.⁶⁸

In contrast to the comedies of remarriage that Cavell studies in *Pursuits of Happiness*, Joan Crawford's choice between a plainly villainous and a plainly good man

⁶⁸ I note here that Cavell does not speak of director surrogacy but of the film as being "a parable of directing." *Pursuits of Happiness*, 182. The difference is that the relation of surrogacy supplants the initial context of director-actor to an unnatural one of director-character. The parable functions at the wider narrative level and aligns two contexts where the relationship is more than simply analogical.

is made easier than for women in typical comedies. But, in fact, the choice is not easy, although it is clearly obvious. Cavell describes Crawford's decision of which man to follow, her discovery of which man she loves, "a piece of cinematic code for a type of love between which it is by no means easy to choose." Speaking of the type of love, as opposed to the type of man loved, is the slight inflection that gives to this parable the weight Cavell is looking for:

The evil of the villainous procedure is that while it promises the woman release it leaves her unchanged, above all sealed in the isolation of her moral disfigurement... The good of the heroic procedure is that the point of the excruciating physical pain is to leave the matter of spiritual change up to her; the doctor repeated asks her whether he has create a monster or a woman, appealing to the realm of her better angel. This is why direction is therapeutic.⁶⁹

The creation of a woman culminating with a remarriage is the theme of the comedies Cavell studies; his aside about this Cukor film, together with references to touchstones of his directing career from *The Women* to *My Fair Lady*, lead him to hold up remarriage comedies as one possible treatment of the creation of women and, quite generally, *Vertigo* as *the* film about the creation of a woman through other means. The connection with these two films are not so far off, though in *Vertigo*, the woman's choice is not so easily described as the locus of the film's theme.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 219.

⁷⁰ In Cavell's melodramas, the creation of the woman is left up to herself, and this "solitude or unknownness" is seen as better than "a marriage of irritation, silent condescension, and questionlessness." Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996] 11.

To begin with a contrast, in *Vertigo* there are no good directors, though quite clearly there are two men involved in directing. In the first, the woman Judy has fallen in love with a married man, Gavin Elster master planner and villain extraordinaire, began an affair with him, and colluded with him to commit murder – a relationship not unlike that one formed between Veidt and Crawford. Where *A Woman's Face* concludes happily with the little boy in peril being saved and the villain's demise, the first part of *Vertigo* ends precisely opposite: Elster's murderous plot to kill his wife comes off, the woman is murdered and dumped from atop the church bell-tower. When "Madeleine Elster" arrives to tell Scottie about her nightmare in the scene before the first fateful drive to San Batista, she has already witnessed the murder. The mock terror she splays out for Scottie leads him to his psychoanalytic reading of her dream, which leads out to the tower in San Batista. This is importantly not real terror (the real terror of having witnessed the death of a woman wrung by the hands of her current lover) but precise acting.⁷¹ The "perfect pliability" of Kim Novak's body, a characteristic that Cavell praises Hitchcock for discovering, is on display here. In the hands of Gavin Elster is not only his wife's neck but also the strings to his Carlotta-Madeleine Frankenstein.⁷²

⁷¹ The text William Rothman devotes to *Vertigo* also situates the scene where Madeleine bursts in to tell Scottie her dream as carrying the importance of Scottie's "embracing of the mystery." He goes on to situate the mystery that begins simply as the fabricated Madeleine-Carlotta tale spun by Gavin Elster and Judy, to one that ensnares all levels of interpretation with a figure like Carlotta-Madeleine-Barton-Novak. This scene is the only scene, in its extended length from the knock at the door rousing Scottie from his sleep until the fall from the tower, where the figure Carlotta-Madeleine-Barton-Novak exists on the screen at all, and all at once. Rothman is the only commentator of the film to note the importance of this particular scene in Scottie's apartment. William Rothman, *The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004] 222-6.

⁷² In *A Woman's Face*, after the surgery, Melvin Douglas asks whether or not he has created a Frankenstein. The idea of Galatea becoming a Frankenstein melds the history of man's attempts to create man, to displace God in the creation of life, with marriage and the *Genesis* creation story of woman from the rib of man. Cavell examines the latter side of this broad concept in his study of *Adam's Rib* in *Contesting Tears*, 27-9.

And Frankenstein she is. This scene, from her emergence into Scottie's apartment with her terrible nightmare until the toss off the tower, is Elster's directorial finale and stands as the model of this type of directing. The second part of the film, which begins with Scottie's search for another Madeleine on this new director's casting stage, is the image of inept direction – of empty direction, worse than villainous. Scottie's re-creation of Judy as Madeleine not merely leaves the woman empty and unfulfilled, but is himself renouncing his own voice in this new creation. His failure to meet the first Madeleine on the psychoanalytic plane marks the point of his resignation. The popular expression credited to George Santayana about repeating history is aimed at those who do not learn from it. And Scottie did not learn from Gavin's direction.

Hitchcock trades on an idea that even Freud could not stomach – that the fantasy of a transcendent God is not, is perhaps the central experience which is not, original in childhood, but is the product of adults, creatures whose knowledge is of childhood past... To understand his effect, one needs to know the source of the rightness in his setting, not merely their irony and wittiness: Kim Novak's final fall from the tower being tripped off by the sudden fluttering of a nun, Stewart's world snapping at the high point of a church...⁷³

This "fantasy of a transcendent God" that Cavell mentions above is not meant to encompass religion in its entirety; it is the fantastic notion that a human being can create itself a conception of God. And what Hitchcock "trades on" is not merely that this fantasy is a construction often concealing ulterior designs, but that it nonetheless intersects a

⁷³ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 86-7.

genuine transcendental realm beyond the control of any fixed fantasy. So there is the fantasy that conceals both the realm of human designs as well as genuine transcendental experience. Beyond his blindness to Gavin's construction of Madeleine, beyond his blindness to the woman Judy beneath Madeleine, he is blind to the fire he is playing with in resurrecting Carlotta: the calamity of Scottie's second failure lies here.

Cavell calls out a type of Hitchcockian heroine as the "defrocked nun"; in every Hitchcock film, the incestuous *Shadow of a Doubt* and the perverse *Under Capricorn* proving the rule, the heroine is a slightly younger than middle-aged woman, unmarried and romantically eligible.⁷⁴ In referring to this type as a former nun, Cavell aligns the relevance of the woman's side of the religious context with Hitchcock who, biographically as well as artistically, can be said to exist in a post-Christian realm. The icons of a religion past remain as signposts of a deep abyss left by the death of God. The second birth of the heroine at the hands of the hero protagonist is antithetical to the religious notion of salvation as rebirth, coming from above. Judy's birth as Madeleine at Gavin's hand was designed to murder a woman, and at Scottie's hand, unwittingly so – and this is the force of such creation from below the world. The stand-in for the good director in *A Woman's Face* fears that he has created a monster. In the first part of *Vertigo* we are shown just what these types of monsters can do; in the second, we are shown just what they can bring others to do, we are shown the power contained beneath the delicate sheen of a fabricated womanhood. The danger of such power is that if it is not controlled, it remains active.

⁷⁴ There must be something about Joseph Cotton that calls out this perversity. Other films that do not fit are the two *The Man Who Knew Too Much* films, that both have their explanations. *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* is a film that plays on this characterization.

If Cukor's film is a parable of directing, *Vertigo* is a parable of the cinematic creation of woman, and specifically of the transformative powers of "the camera's original violence." Judy's death is necessary for this emblem to fit, for the creations of this woman are not happy creations, and are not the creations of human beings. Gavin's work on Judy made her into the star with whom Scottie fell in love without having spoken. Gavin wrote the part for her, coached her, molded her, and she played the part perfectly (Scottie says that she played the part "very well"). From his first sighting of her at Ernie's, Scottie sees Madeleine from an invisible state, following her choreographed gestures from the distance of a private detective; as with Joan Crawford and Conrad Veidt, her play for Gavin is reminiscent of theatrical play. Returning to Cavell's writing on *King Lear* examined in the first chapter, he describes the theater as the space wherein the audience is not present to the characters but the characters are present to the audience. Scottie's invisibility is more a matter of practice than of convention, but the claim here is not that this is actual theater. The idea is that in this parable of cinematic transformation is the very foundation which Cavell locates at the heart of the distinction between theater and film: the photographic process.

When Scottie trades in his supposed invisibility, he does so *not* like the yokel who jumps onto the stage and interrupts the proceedings – Scottie's emergence into the water is planned scene. Madeleine leaps into the bay, and Scottie jumps in after her and brings her back to his apartment: and the woman becomes flesh. Naked and covered in only drapery, the scene begins with the declaration of her nudity and leads towards Scottie's hopes of an amorous relationship. From their hands grazing as Scottie and Madeleine curl up to each other in the fire lit room, to the ocean side embrace they share after the walk in

the oversized sequoia woods, up to their embrace in the stables at San Batista and Scottie's failure of grabbing hold of the woman's body as she made her way up the tower stairs – Scottie's relation to this woman is to her body; and this woman's body is not the body of the woman she claims. Judy is donning the Madeleine costume as a theatrical robe.

In Scottie's aimless wandering after the hearing and after the institutional stay, he goes back to wandering Madeleine's old haunts in search for the next Madeleine. From his first meeting with Judy and up until the moment where she ceases to be Judy, that is before her dress, make-up and hair fully replicate Madeleine, Scottie is unhappy, he is gruff, he is pushy, and he is manipulative. Once his fantasy is enlivened, he himself is transplanted to the world of San Batista. His photogenic memory of the place and of the woman is the catalysts for this new amorous liaison. Her transformation *for him* is a symbol for the transforming powers of the camera.

But there is more to the story than the contrast between the two directors handling of the woman: there is the necklace. This tell-tale necklace that betrays Judy's secret, was part of Madeleine's world that Scottie was trying to overcome – first, in his therapeutic efforts with Madeleine (“If I could just find the key...”), and second in his complete reconstruction of Judy as Madeleine omitting every trace of psychology and of Madeleine's inner life and troubles. Contrast here the reconstruction of Joan Crawford's face in Cukor's *A Woman's Face* and the woman's role in this creation: after the surgery is performed, Melvin Douglas leaves the rest of the transformation, the so-called inner transformation, up to her. Here, Judy's very first initiative to participate in this construction, beyond her pathetic pleas for Scottie to love her for herself, ends in

catastrophe. Wanting to please her director, she tries to complete the picture and in this participation reveals her inner self – not the self that pleaded for a return of her love for him, but the self that was in on the original con. For Judy, the necklace was an enhancement, a final touch to cap off his creation, but it not only broke down the image of Madeleine he had just constructed, it collapsed the two women into one; and these women are not Judy and Madeleine, but Judy and Carlotta – and this for the second time, where this time, there is no surrogate body to offer in her stead.

The notion of one woman playing two different women who nonetheless look identical to movie audiences and the characters of the movie abounds in classical Hollywood more than anywhere. Two films come to mind in relevance to *Vertigo* in this light: Preston Sturges's *Lady Eve* with Barbara Stanwyck, and Cukor's *Two Faced Woman* with Greta Garbo, both comedies of remarriage. In the first, Stanwyck is in love with a man (Fonda) who breaks off the relationship when he discovers she is a card shark who has taken him for a ride. Stanwyck then pretends to be an English woman, by changing nothing but her voice, in order to “teach him a lesson” about deception and love. In the second film, Garbo pretends to be her own twin sister to teach her husband (Melvin Douglas) a lesson about moderation, restraint and sobriety by acting without. In both films, the man returns to the original version of the woman and this is made to be understood as a return to virtue.

The play of one woman acting as another to fool her husband, lover, or would-be suitor and teach him a lesson is turned around in *Vertigo*, and the relation to the remarriage comedy is implicit. This film plays out the doubling game in a reverse manner: it begins with a woman playing an artificial role to fool the man who will

become her lover. Though here, the designs do not originate with the woman teaching the man a lesson. If lessons attempted, they come from the man: “You shouldn’t keep souvenirs from a killing!” is the first but it is tied to the second that is far more relevant. In the escalation of the tower steps, a tortured Scottie explains to a frightened Judy that he knows everything and after he cautions her about the souvenir, he adds that she “shouldn’t have been so sentimental.”⁷⁵

On the surface, this may not appear to be a trenchant critique of Judy – it seems on the contrary to be beside the point, for her sentimental slip was what led him to piece together the murder and cover-up. He is therefore not calling out her complicity in the killing but her failure to keep it secret. Of course, one may read this as a bit of sarcastic sentimentality itself, coming from an emotionally distraught Scottie. If one were to think of sentimentality as the cocooning interest in one’s own feelings, Scottie’s issue with the necklace is that it doesn’t belong in his fantasy. As it happens, this reproach reflects an important shift in the nature of the Hitchcockian leading lady.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ We find here yet another moment that parallels the comedies of remarriage: the man’s responsibility, or his impression of a responsibility, to educate the woman. In *It Happened One Night*, Clack Gable is nicknamed “Professor,” in *Bringing Up Baby* and *The Philadelphia Story*, Cary Grant is given to nagging reproaches and to long moralizing lectures. And in *Adam’s Rib*, Spencer Tracy brings himself to false tears to teach his wife something about cheap sentimentality. In the comedies, this education is welcome and a requirement for the endings they earn.

⁷⁶ This shift occurs across Hollywood films where, according to Cavell, “conviction in the movies originating myths and geniuses ... has been lost, or baffled.” The title of this section is appropriately entitled “The End of Myths,” and here Cavell responds to the list of character types that he has compiled in the earlier chapters with a new list, beginning each set of groupings with the formula “We no longer grant, or take it for granted, that...” One such grouping refers to the reception of intelligence in women – the time where “stylish dumb women are as interesting as stylish intelligent ones” is presumably over, that is, no longer are intelligent women thought of as beautiful, at least in the way that dumb ones could be. In other words, in claiming that “dumb women” like Hedy Lamarr, or Madeleine Carroll, *are like* the so-called intelligent ones, like Katherine Hepburn or Carole Lombard, Cavell is suggesting something about a difference in the bodies of new screen women. For instance, an intelligence such as carried by Carole Lombard, and seen most clearly in the roles where she forcibly represses the appearance of this intelligence, has to do with her mastery of her body. Norma Shearer is perhaps the model for this mold. Such women did not need to be told where to confer their amorous favors (nor have to give explanations for them). The intelligence of a Katherine Hepburn, far more intimidating and forceful, is displayed by an

Cavell speaks of the Hitchcock heroine as once promising an intimate passion from the coldness of her exterior – Alida Valli from *The Paradine Case* is perhaps the finest example of this. The late Hitchcock heroines – Grace Kelly, Kim Novak, Tippi Hedren – animate this coldness with a denseness that contains a further promise of vulgarity, “thus heightening the perverseness of the lust they invite.” He outlines the shift by contrasting Hedren’s role in *The Birds* with Bergman’s role in *Notorious*:

Time changes. During the Second World War, at the end of *Notorious*, a Hitchcock hero rescues another sickened lady from a dangerous house, supporting her dazed body on the long walk to his car. But that lady will stand again on her own two feet, facing her lover... The new lady will not be recovered: she has flown into her own imagination...⁷⁷

When Ingrid Bergman refuses to tell Cary Grant that she loves him, and refuses to allow this to be assumed, she turns the conclusion of the film into a stage for Grant’s sentimentality to win over everything. When Hedren does this to Rod Taylor, he is in no position to so indulge. The passion concealed by her cold exterior is not a normal sexual intimacy but a perverse “rut of virginity... now claimed by nature.” In the final attack on

awareness and control not merely of her own body but also of the world surrounding it. She is nonetheless a prize worth winning equal to any other leading lady. The difference from figures like Janet Gaynor or Alice Faye, who are both as beautiful and capable as the others, is that intelligence shifts the place of dominance – these women are not won but themselves pick their prize. Cavell adds Garbo and Dietrich to this line and describes them as often “suppressing a running giggle at their lover’s ignorance of this fact.” *The World Viewed*, 63-4. Cavell introduces in the earlier chapter, “The Military Man and the Woman,” the myth of community that is supported by the image of men uniform, of “men doing the work of the world, in consort,” and hence asserting the harmony and productivity of society. Women, in this light, stand as threats to this community by luring the men either to inside of the familial home and away from the work of the world, or outside the community and openly opposing its conventions. The dandy is also considered anti-community, though by no lure from others. He withholds himself from community. The complication of the myth of women is that this is rarely so simple. His first example, showing the woman refusing marriage in support of the community is *Now, Voyager*, one of the four films Cavell will use years later in the definition of the melodrama of the unknown woman. *The World Viewed*, 47-51.

⁷⁷ Cavell *The World Viewed*, 66.

the Brenner house, Cavell points to our introduction to Hedren: “She is framed alone; we enter the picture of her at those gripping knees.” Nature has replaced man for this woman, and instinct has taken her over just as it has the birds. Once the household is asleep, Hedren is “aroused” by the bird noises in the attic and “responds to its call... to be ruttled by all the bird of heaven.” If Bergman’s coldness invites the sentimentality of her lover, Hedren’s is a concealment of her inability to be sentimental.

The issue here of sentimentality, from its expression in weepiness or tenderness or torrid passion, is what the woman’s body has to do with predictions of such expression. When Grace Kelly excites Cary Grant’s passion for jewels in *To Catch a Thief*, Hitchcock shows her response of excitement by lifting the camera from the couch where she and Grant have begun to embrace to outside where the fireworks display pops out explosions of fire and light. Cavell cautions against treating this shot as a banal (and “cliché”) substitution for graphic sexuality:

[Hitchcock] has converted this conventional movie dodge into a specific display of this girl’s imagination... here the conventional symbol exposes a conventional imagination of the deed... She does not want to incorporate her man but to be absorbed into his fantasy.

Further evidence of this shift can be seen upon a cursory glance to *Rear Window*, where only after some initial resistance is she indeed “absorbed into his fantasy.” As far as *Vertigo* goes, the matter of her absorption into his fantasy is obvious, but here her sentimentality gets in the way of the fantasy. If the last vestiges of Judy’s individuality (and hence, of her sentimentality) died when Madeleine was fully reformed, her recovery

of *some* inner life, even as this was Madeleine's inner life, was too much for the pathological perversity of Scottie's fantasy.

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In the added essay of the enlarged edition of *The World Viewed*, Cavell returns to the distinction between screen and stage. About the stage actor, who is present to the audience in the guise of the character, he says that a human being is up there, present and live in performance. About the screen actor the issue is not as simple. Obviously, there is no human being on the screen and settling the issue about what *is* on the screen will either conclude in emptiness (finding there is nothing but some projected light and shadow) or in a further mystery (finding that there is a "human something" up there). The discussion in our first chapter surrounding the role of reality in film underscores this mystery. Cavell follows up on the mystery by suggesting that the idea of a recording, seemingly aptly borrowed from the idea of a musical recording, cannot fit the description of screen acting. Newsreels roughly match the sound recording analogy when they record events which occur independently of the camera (though this is a naïve way of thinking about newsreels, even early single-reelers). Movies however are never even candidates for being records of events because such events have never happened – at least, not in the way that they appear on screen. The "projection of reality," as opposed to a live performance, revolves about the mystery of the camera.⁷⁸

The mythological point about the camera's revelations is twofold: first, that the camera has no choice either over what is revealed to it nor over

⁷⁸ The examination of this passage in Chapter One, approaches the idea of recording from a slightly different angle. One might say that the earlier study was more concerned with the ontological status of the photographic whereas here the focus is the mythological.

what it reveals; and second, that what is revealed to and by it can only be known by what appears upon the print or screen.⁷⁹

Cavell's two fold point about the camera's specific power adds a slight but critical inflection to the idea of its being a (relatively) simple mechanism that can ingest the world and project it anew: the first relating to its lack of choice in what is filmed, and the second in the detachment of what is revealed to the camera with what the camera reveals. Regarding the camera's lack of choice, Cavell calls the camera not honest but dumb, mute and ignorant about what is being filmed – and this stands to reason for we are talking about a machine. The choice of what is revealed to the camera is entirely up to the cameraman (in the largest aspect of the entity controlling the camera). And here lies the crux of the analysis – that, notwithstanding both the camera's dumb intransigence and the cameraman's liberty to do it will with the camera, “you cannot know what you've made the camera do, what is revealed to it, unless its results have appeared.”

...the mysteriousness of a photograph lies not in the machinery which produces it, but in the unfathomable abyss between what it captures (its subject) and what is captured for us (*this* fixing of the subject), the metaphysical wait between exposure and exhibition, the absolute authority or finality of the fixed image... The photographic mystery is that you can

⁷⁹ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 184-5. The essay added to the enlarged edition was written during the same period as Cavell was writing Part Four of *The Claim of Reason* were a particular idea of mythological is taken on in relation to the space between the body and the soul, to the “metaphysical hiddenness” of the soul of the other, to the “fantasy of privacy” that sees the body as a veil for the soul. The same idea of the mythological is at work in the passage on the camera. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979] 365-70.

know both the appearance and the reality, but that nevertheless the one is unpredictable from the other.⁸⁰

Moving from the ontological difference between the stage actor and the screen actor to the mythological distance between body and soul is precisely the move that Hitchcock analogically performs in *Vertigo*. As noted above, the first part of the film is reminiscent of the theater, with its focus on the physicality of its female star, on the all-importance of the body, which ends, almost magically, with the dead drop of Madeleine's body. I suggest an air of magic because the superposition of Madeleine Elster's body to the conclusion of this part of the narrative gives to the end of the film a ghostly undertone. Once Judy becomes Madeleine (again, as it were), the matter of who's soul is controlling or inhabiting her body becomes the main issue of the film. Scottie's transformation of Judy, recalling the cinematic process, involved luring her into his private fantasy. But this lure also involved the breaking down of Judy's resistance, each transformation requiring Scottie to insist and impose his will. Only after the final resistance is broken down, once she lifts her hair from off her shoulders and fixes it up in a bun, can the couple enclose themselves away from the world, and into the realm of fantasy. Hitchcock shoots their embrace after Judy's full reconstruction into Madeleine in a 360° circular pan that Cavell relates to a cocoon enfolding the couple in Scottie's fantasy. The scene that the couple is transplanted to is from the climax of the first part of the film where Scottie believes he has found the key to solving Madeleine's dream enigma, and has cured her from her obsession with the past. His return to this space in this newly enacted reality is a declaration of his victory over her, of her complete

⁸⁰ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 187.

submission. And more than this, it is a show of the camera's specific power to transform and create:

The succession of the man's images are neither really seen nor merely imagined nor simply remembered by him. They are projections and successions of the reality he enacts. They invoke the status of film images. But they simultaneously violate this status.⁸¹

The violation that Cavell mentions here concerns the position from which these images are produced: personal, fragmented, and unshareable. Scottie's reconstruction of Madeleine is a reconstruction of his private fantasy, unknowable to anyone who has not undergone the same affectation as he, including Judy (despite her knowledge of the events). The violence of his transformation of Judy matches the camera's original violence, but his pathological indulgence imprecates his fantasy and dooms his love.

If one thinks of the Romance, say of *The Winter's Tale*, as the satisfaction of impossible yet unappeasable human wishes, and hence as defining a presiding wish of movies generally, one might think of *Vertigo* as a declaration of the end of Romance.⁸²

Vertigo is a film about Scottie's "impossible yet unappeasable" human wish to possess a woman, *this* woman. His initial enchantment and his first loss enshrine his desire; his reconstruction bespeaks the unappeasable in this desire. In a world of such desiring men and of such empty women, Romance, as it was once known in Hollywood, is over.

⁸¹ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 202-3.

⁸² Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 203.

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