

## ***Vertigo* and the Spectator of Film Analysis**

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Both *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) and *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) are famous examples of films where the spectator is aligned, or orientated, around the viewing that takes place *within* the film (mostly by the central character, in both cases played by actor James Stewart). Their skill in managing this orientation, and other aspects of viewpoint, is thought to be one source of their power over a spectator. These films have become central in discussions concerning the role of the film spectator primarily because, for many spectators, they naturally and effectively bring forward questions of involvement and identification. For this very reason, they are staples of film courses throughout the world, in schools and universities, and many students will encounter *Vertigo* for the first time within the curriculum under the heading of Film Spectatorship. Indeed, for these students it is difficult to view the film, or conceive of it, outside this paradigm.

For most of these students, the film will be accompanied by Laura Mulvey's seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', perhaps the most studied and cited in the history of film scholarship. For Mulvey, our viewing of *Vertigo* is channelled through Scottie's (James Stewart) 'gazing' at Madeleine (Kim Novak) and the essay cemented the importance, within a psychoanalytical framework, of the relationship between the viewing that takes place *within* the film and the viewing *of* the film. The idea that the viewing of this film, and indeed film viewing in general, is orientated around the 'the look' and in particular 'the male gaze' became a significant one. This idea is currently less prevalent but its vocabulary has filtered into casual critical parlance and the word 'gaze' is still used to describe a variety of forms of looking in films. Since Mulvey's essay, there have been many conceptions, more or less complexly elaborated, of the film spectator.<sup>2</sup> Explicitly or implicitly, they often use Mulvey's ideas as a starting point and then nuance or reject.<sup>3</sup>

These conceptions, even the more sophisticated, flexible and illuminating ones, tend to be abstractly constructed. Therefore, I thought it would be

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<sup>2</sup> The word 'spectator' carries its own connotations – from sport for example – and the substitution of 'audience' or 'viewer' may open up different implications.

<sup>3</sup> I want to acknowledge that the history of Mulvey's essay is more complicated and involved than my brief account has indicated, especially with regard to its importance to feminist theory and in turn feminist theory's importance to Film Studies. Indeed, the influence of the essay is pervasive: accepted, adjusted, adapted, absorbed or rejected (sometimes by those who have not even read it). Merely the thought of it, and I feel assailed by surrounding voices.

worthwhile to take a different route and examine how individual pieces of film analysis – each an individuated instance of how *Vertigo* is viewed – conjure or reveal, either explicitly or not, different types of spectator.<sup>4</sup> In most cases, I work through segments of the prose because this allows me to track the moment-by-moment development of a writer's viewpoint.<sup>5</sup> One reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein's work is that philosophical problems might be usefully tackled by linguistic clarification rather than by theoretical, scientific or empirical investigation. The philosopher's goal is to produce a 'perspicacious representation' of the use of our words in specific contexts (Turvey, 2011, p. 472-3; quoting point 122 of the *Philosophical Investigations*). Malcolm Turvey has argued that 'film scholars...have typically opted for constructing theories of film and our responses to it, instead of investigating the language people use...in their response to film' (2011, p. 474-5). The writing on *Vertigo* is particularly helpful in aiding our understanding of spectatorship. Given that the film potently addresses, confronts even, many spectators as a spectator, attending closely to the writing on *Vertigo* is a way of understanding how, and appreciating the methods by which, the writers manage to *articulate* the experience of being a spectator of it.<sup>6</sup>

Analysing the work on *Vertigo* shows that far from producing or revealing one type of spectator, the film encourages a variety. Given the reasonably tight associations that *Vertigo* establishes between the viewpoints within the film and the viewing of the film one might expect a definite or circumscribed way of watching it. Instead, it inspires or provokes different responses, perhaps because it cleverly compels us to grapple with its proposed identifications, and these may be instructive in opening our eyes to

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<sup>4</sup> This (slightly adjusted) essay also appears in the volume *Vertigo: Philosophers on Film* edited by Katalin Makkai (Routledge 2013; © Andrew Klevan 2013), and appears with the publisher's permission. There were some factual errors regarding the essay in Makkai's introduction to that volume, and I have used this version as an opportunity to correct them in the footnotes.

<sup>5</sup> I acknowledge this is not necessarily the viewpoint that represents the actual moment of spectating. It is also worth remarking that although, quite often, the writer presumptuously equates 'the spectator' with their own view of the film, 'the spectator' sometimes behaves unlike the writer, and this can be disorientating. If a reader thinks that Mulvey's spectator is not Mulvey the spectator, he or she may feel an irritating dislocation and even some condescension (especially if the spectator is being characterised as limited in capacity). The reader might find comfort in the thought, when required, that the spectator referred to is somebody else.

<sup>6</sup> We can also observe how this most visually and aurally vivid of films exists, and extends its existence, in a medium without image and sound. Indeed, this essay completes a small project exploring the language of film analysis and criticism, and it aims to illuminate writing as well as spectatorship. It is a companion piece to my essay 'Description' in *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (Klevan 2011a), and to the jointly authored introduction to that book entitled 'The Language and Style of Film Criticism' (Clayton and Klevan 2011). It is not, despite some overlap, mostly in the section entitled 'The Experiential Spectator', identical to either of those pieces – neither of which were concerned with the writing on *Vertigo* – despite the information to the contrary in the introduction to the *Vertigo* collection which identifies it as a reprint (Makkai 2013, 15).

alternative modes of viewing, and understanding. The film skilfully continues to stimulate different views of it – hence the volume of writing – different ways of viewing it, different ways of being a viewer of it (even if these views overlap or are complementary). One purpose of the piece is to provide a little caution to those students coming to study *Vertigo*, and Spectatorship, for the first time: not to presume that the film, and by association any film, has one type of spectator. It is through examining various responses to it – rather than presenting one view of it – that we can see perspicaciously that *Vertigo* has a special capacity for teaching us about the complexity of film spectatorship. This is possibly because *Vertigo* is so concerned to make the act of viewing an active part of viewing it.

### *The Fixated Spectator*

Like most people who have gone before me, I will start with Mulvey's essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. In it, Mulvey famously gives an account of Hollywood cinema as structured around 'looks' with the spectator identifying with the male 'look':

The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator...This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (Mulvey 1985, 310)

An important consequence of this is that the spectator is 'prevent[ed]...from achieving any distance from the image in front of him' (Mulvey, 314). Disconcertingly, however, when Mulvey comes to discuss her Hollywood case study, *Vertigo*, she seems to imply that the spectator is not quite so fixated. Far from locking the spectator into the limitations of the male 'look', *Vertigo* does allow for 'distance', and knowingly '*focuses on the implications* of the active/looking, passive/looked-at split in terms of sexual difference and the power of the male symbolic encapsulated in the hero' [my emphasis] (313, and all further references are from this page). One wonders then whether *Vertigo* is an exception to the rule, and if so, why it receives the most attention in the essay (the essay briefly mentions *Only Angels have Wings* (Howard Hawks, US, 1939) and *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks, US, 1944) to support the main argument, but does not discuss them).<sup>7</sup> As Tania Modleski writes:

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<sup>7</sup> The essay also devotes a paragraph to the Joseph von Sternberg/Marlene Dietrich films but once again appears to see them as *analysing* the processes of looking and 'visual pleasure' rather than lazily succumbing to them.

Interestingly...Mulvey's essay, which uses Hitchcock films as the main evidence in her case against Hollywood cinema, actually ends up claiming that *Vertigo* is critical of the kinds of visual pleasure typically offered by mainstream cinema, a visual pleasure that is rooted in the scopic regime of the male psychic economy. In her reading of the film, Mulvey thus unwittingly undercuts her own indictment of narrative cinema. (Modleski 2005, 13)

Indeed, for Mulvey, *Vertigo* is aware of the perils of 'visual pleasure' so that 'the spectator...finds himself exposed as complicit, caught in the moral ambiguity of looking'. Now 'the spectator...sees through his look', where 'sees through' is primarily meant to express, given the essay's current line of argument, that Scottie is 'exposed' by the spectator who is no longer 'complicit' with him. The sense roughly is 'previously deceived, I now *see through* you', but it also permits another meaning: 'he guides me, I *see though* his eyes', and preserves the trace of Mulvey's earlier and overarching claim that the male protagonist in Hollywood cinema is the spectator's 'screen surrogate'.

There might be a third meaning if one drops the presumption that 'his' refers to Scottie. The full sentence reads, 'Hence the spectator, lulled into a false sense of security by the apparent legality of his surrogate, sees through his look and finds himself exposed as complicit, caught in the moral ambiguity of looking', and 'his' could refer to the spectator – 'sees through his [own] look' – rather than the 'surrogate' (i.e. Scottie). A similar inconclusiveness occurs elsewhere. After explicating the behaviour of the characters, the essay states, 'In *Vertigo*, erotic involvement with the look is disorienting: the spectator's fascination is turned against *him* as the narrative carries *him* through and entwines *him* with the processes that *he* is *himself* exercising' [my emphasis]. Are 'him' (three times) and 'he' and 'himself' referring to Scottie, who has been the subject of the previous sentences, *or* the spectator, because 'him' is the customary way Mulvey characterises this entity, *or* one then the other as the sentence progresses? When Mulvey writes, 'the spectator's fascination is turned against him', has the 'spectator's fascination' turned against Scottie or turned back upon 'himself'? The repetition of 'him' compounds and emphasises the referential ambiguity, and the possibilities for substitution conflate the identities of Scottie and the spectator. For some readers, these may be troublesome confusions with regard to *Vertigo*, film and grammar but they do peculiarly enact, within the syntax of the sentence, Mulvey's general thesis about the merging of spectator and protagonist (and psychoanalytic concerns about the instability of subject and object). The sentence, like the audience's 'erotic involvement', is 'disorientating'. Not unlike the film, as one tries to get a grip on the (sentence's) meaning, one ends up going round and round, somewhat queasily. It is vertiginous.

Mulvey's essay sets out to provide a categorical thesis on the viewing experience of Hollywood cinema that is complicated by the effort to put in writing the specific viewing experience of *Vertigo*. Perhaps the essay is deconstructing itself, betraying its contradictions, and the strength of the film's complexity ruptures and insidiously manipulates the writing. The polemic of the thesis is 'exposed' by the prose to reveal the more suggestive and less definite aspects of it. The analysis releases the spectator, and the writer, formerly fixated by the theory, into a fluctuating drama of attachment *and* detachment. Indeed, the film sometimes sets up the 'gaze' only for the camera to depart from it, as it does when Scottie turns to spy Madeleine in Ernie's Restaurant and the camera goes wandering off at a tangent to the direction of his 'gaze', stalls to mark a quite different viewpoint, and *then* approaches her. Mulvey's sentence, 'The audience follows the growth of his erotic obsession and subsequent despair precisely from his point of view' is once again deceptive and slippery. On the one hand, if we were 'precisely' in his 'point of view', it would be as if we had become him, and it would make it hard, impossible even, to follow him, which is to come after him. 'Follows the growth of [Scottie's] obsession' suggests a more clinical position – 'I've been following his progress carefully' – that is 'precisely' not his 'point of view'. On the other hand, the sentence conveys the experience of Mulvey's 'audience' (is this the same as a 'spectator'?) vacillating with regard to Scottie's point of view, or simultaneously sharing, or coming very close to, his point of view *and* following it. After all, *Vertigo*'s story is concerned with following and becoming (another).

#### *The Medium-Conscious Spectator*

Like Mulvey, both David Thomson and Stanley Cavell give reasonably brief accounts of *Vertigo* in their respective books *Movie Man* (1967) and *The World Viewed* (1979). In these books, they generalise about a wide range of films, about genre, about directorial oeuvre, and about the medium in general, and they are alert to how they inform each other.<sup>8</sup> One puzzling aspect of Mulvey's essay is that her brief account of the sophisticated mechanisms of *Vertigo* does not provide the example for her over-arching understanding of Hollywood cinema. Thomson and Cavell proceed in a different direction in that their feelings about *Vertigo* feed into their conceptualisation of (Hollywood) cinema. For Cavell, the good film will discover and explore the possibilities of the medium and the spectator will not realise them in advance of their realisation in the film.

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<sup>8</sup> As Dudley Andrew says in his discerning survey piece, 'The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory', '[W]e should consider much of Cavell's *The World Viewed* in light of [the] effort to describe the experience...of the very phenomenon of cinema in its totality. David Thomson's little remembered *Movie Man* is likewise a descriptive foray into the experience of the movie complex.' (Andrew 1985, 628)

Thomson writes, 'Essential to every Hitchcock film is this awareness the director has of his spectator. It conceives of the spectator as an economic generalisation and there is an element of sadism in the devices inflicted' (Thomson 1967, 150). The films of this specific director, especially *Vertigo*, conceive of a particular sort of spectator, 'an economic generalisation', and inflict 'sadism' on them (partly by encouraging them to view sadistically). Yet, the use of 'conceives' means that the spectator is not necessarily 'an economic generalisation' but rather that this is how they are imagined by Hitchcock's films. The spectator may be amenable to this conception and to other conceptions: agreeably chameleonic from director to director and from film to film. Further, if Hitchcock's 'awareness' is an 'essential' aspect of his films, then Thomson, as a spectator, is aware of Hitchcock's 'awareness' and the 'devices'. The spectator is susceptible and conscious of their susceptibility. 'In watching Hitchcock films', Thomson writes, 'one becomes conscious of issues of freedom, not only to the extent that the characters in the film enjoy it but in how far the spectator in the cinema is deprived of it' (149). For Thomson, like Mulvey, the spectator of Hitchcock's films may get trapped in the male character's 'look' and 'find...himself exposed as complicit' but this spectator also 'become[s] conscious' of the very 'issues of freedom', and more importantly *conscious of the way these 'issues' manifest in films and the viewing of them*.

Like Mulvey, Thomson conjoins character, director and spectator but in Thomson's case this leads to a spectator sensible to the mechanisms of the art form. The spectator follows the 'facts' *and* the 'cuts'; and is involved in the 'story' *and* 'story form'. Stewart's 'assignment' becomes an equivalent of 'cinematic method', and 'factual gathering' in the film is 'related to the ideal of pure cinema'. Thomson refers to performers *not* characters – Helmore, Stewart and Novak rather than Elster, Scottie and Madeleine. For Mulvey, 'erotic involvement with the look is disorientating' but for Thomson 'the real source of disorientation' results from 'the *insinuation* of the film's form with the natural processes of watching a movie' [my emphasis] (all quotations from 152-154). The spectator attends to the 'visual material', the handling of the material, and the materiality of the medium, and all three merge.

### *The Philosophical Spectator*

Rather than moving us through a specific example, Thomson's writing generalises and distills. Stanley Cavell's book *The World Viewed* is even more sharply condensed as one profound exclamation follows another. On *Vertigo* and fantasy:

I speak of 'establishing a world of private fantasy'...More specifically, [it] is *about* the power of fantasy, and in particular about its power to survive every inroad of science and civility intact, and to

direct the destiny of its subject with, finally, his active cooperation... *Vertigo* seems at first to be about a man's impotence in the face of, or faced with the task of sustaining, his desire; perhaps, on second thought, about the precariousness of human verticality altogether. But it turns out to be about the specific power of a man's fantasy to cause him not merely to forgo reality – that consequence is as widespread as the sea – but to gear every instant of his energy toward a private alteration of reality. (Cavell 1979, 85)

There is a prevalence in film discourse (in all its various guises) to assume to know too quickly and straightforwardly what a film is 'about' and how it works. Critics who trust to close reading may be concerned that Cavell does not sufficiently analyse instances to validate and substantiate his points with detailed evidence.<sup>9</sup> However, although close reading may authorise, it will not ensure the reader's engagement. I practice and advocate close reading, but one danger of the close reading approach is a list, more or less sophisticated, which straightens out the film, exhaustive perhaps (for the time being), but also exhausting. Even deft and delicate analysis cannot avoid, indeed it more insistently lay bare, the fact that someone else has done the work. Highly accomplished pieces of exact close reading may apparently seal up the film or lay it to rest: they overwhelm and over impress, they leave us with little room for our own engagements or they satisfy us that we know everything there is to know. Let us take the clause that understands the film to be 'about the precariousness of human verticality'. Cavell's clause suspends a thought and indicates further potential for viewing: it prompts the reader to think through the instances of 'verticality' in the film, to elaborate for herself. The proposition does not require (a) proof but invites conversation.<sup>10</sup> How much can the writer safely leave unsaid? He trusts in his reader – his fellow spectator – and the film, and there are no assurances (but trust is itself an encouragement). Cavell's writing here, like 'human verticality', is precarious, perhaps thrillingly so.<sup>11</sup>

Cavell's spectator is stimulated to contemplate a range of ideas and concepts while viewing the film: 'fantasy', 'science', 'civility', 'destiny', 'impotence', 'desire', and 'reality'. For Cavell, a good film like *Vertigo* stretches the mind and inevitably encourages the spectator to challenge their presumptions about the meaning of ideas or concepts. He continues:

It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with. It is through fantasy that our conviction

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<sup>9</sup> Makkai (2013) writes in her summary of this essay (in the introduction to the *Vertigo* volume) that '[Klevan] notes Cavell's use of close reading' where in fact I explicitly note the absence of it.

<sup>10</sup> Conversation in film and philosophy – and philosophy conceived as conversation – is central in Cavell's work.

<sup>11</sup> Although Cavell's writing in *The World Viewed* tends toward the epigrammatic and impressionistic, across the body of his work he adopts various modes.

of the worth of reality is established; to forgo our fantasies would be to forgo our touch with the world. (Cavell 1979, 85)

‘Fantasy’, for Cavell, is not only inseparable from ‘reality’ or ‘confused’ with it. The inseparability and the confusion are integral to its conception. Furthermore, the medium of film is especially suited to showing the reality of fantasy, especially if it juxtaposes reality and fantasy without necessarily marking the boundary between them as it might, say, by explicitly indicating a change in the status of the image.<sup>12</sup> We have here not simply a moral ambiguity or an inescapable human tension but, for good or ill, something essential to our experience of the world, perhaps to our ability to experience it at all: fantasy establishes ‘the worth of reality’, and without it, we would ‘forgo our touch with the world’.<sup>13</sup> It is unsurprising to read interpretations that consider *Vertigo* a critique of sexual or romantic fantasy or alternatively a perverse, Romantic celebration of fantasy’s destructive intensity,<sup>14</sup> but *Vertigo* prompts Cavell to focus on the fundamental standing of the concept because the film dramatises the depth of fantasy’s effect upon our grasp of the world.

Cavell is concerned not simply with announcing what the film means but with the approach to meaning, and the journey through meanings. Returning to the initial quotation, Cavell seems initially to announce what the film is about – ‘the power of fantasy’ – but then he refines the idea to be about ‘a man’s impotence in the face of...his desire’ or slightly differently, ‘a man’s impotence...faced with the task of sustaining...his desire’. In turn, this leads to a ‘second thought’ that the film might be about ‘the precariousness of human verticality altogether’. The move to this point of general importance is stimulated by, and simultaneously allows, a tactful elaboration on the problems of impotence – ‘precarious...verticality’. Just after his ‘second thought’ the film ‘turns out’ to be about something else: ‘the specific power of a man’s fantasy...to gear every instant of his energy toward a private alteration of reality’. Cavell is not simply providing alternatives, he is, with ‘perhaps, on second thought’ and ‘But it turns out’, explicitly marking the stages of alteration and adjustment. He is expressing how ideas come to us as we view, one prompting another in the mind, the train of thought. Even if we consider the prose to be a literary contrivance, there is nevertheless an attempt to recreate or evoke the viewing experience as a series of

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<sup>12</sup> Cavell discusses this point more fully in ‘What Becomes of Things on Film?’ when he compares *Vertigo* with *It’s a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, US, 1947). *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1966) and *Belle de Jour* (Luis Buñuel, France, 1967) are also important touchstones in the discussion (Cavell 2005, 1-9).

<sup>13</sup> See my Cavellian discussion of *Vertigo* as a tragedy of scepticism (Klevan 2000, 13-17).

<sup>14</sup> James Harvey says, ‘It may be, in some sense, the most romantic film of all. It’s the defiance of its romanticism that makes it finally so powerful and lingering – and maybe even unique. In prototypical romantic texts like *Wuthering Heights* and *Peter Ibbetson*, both book and movie versions, the romantic passion survives death. In *Vertigo* it survives disbelief’ (Harvey 2001, 42)



developing impressions. It conveys film spectatorship as a *thoughtful* process.

The aphoristic line, 'Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with', strikes us like an admonition, sternly conclusive: *surely, you realise that* 'Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with'. Yet, Cavell is not arrogantly rebuking his reader; he is reproducing the film's rebuke (to him), writing under the influence of its mood – still in shock. The force of *Vertigo* dragged me to this *point*; it compelled me to see that 'fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with'. Cavell's philosophical spectator is not a cool rationalist sitting back, aloof, carefully clarifying concepts. The drama of the film stimulates the drama of thought. For Cavell, the film is a philosophical melodrama, but so is viewing it – and writing about it.

### *The Camera-Conscious Spectator*

For Mulvey, the cinema spectator should not be conscious of the camera, but rather see the film world through the (male) character's eyes. She writes:

There are three different looks associated with the cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. (Mulvey 1985, 314)

For William Rothman, however, the spectator is ever so conscious of the camera; and some directors, like Hitchcock, far from denying the camera, are eager to make them conscious of it (hence the moment, in *Ernie's*, of the diverting camera that I remarked upon earlier). Rothman is a camera-aware spectator, and much of his experience of films is down to experiencing the camera, rather than seeing the screen as simply a window through which we view the fictional world. The camera does so much more than 'record...the pro-filmic event': it has a 'presence', like a character, and although it sometimes allies itself with a character, it has its own character. It is often a vehicle of authorial intervention and commentary (sometimes 'intrusive').

At first appearance, the following example from Rothman would be in keeping with Mulvey's understanding:

Judy [also played by Kim Novak]...turns to him for help with her necklace. 'How do you work this thing?' 'Can't you see?' Finally he *does* see, and we cut to his view, the camera moving in on the necklace reflected in the mirror. This provides an occasion for another of Hitchcock's virtuoso declarations of the camera. There is an 'invisible' cut to the portrait of Carlotta, the camera continuing its movement in, then pulling out until it frames Madeleine in the museum, spellbound in front of the painting. As the image slowly

dissolves back to the present, the painting frames Scottie's eyes, a perfect Hitchcockian declaration of the camera. (Rothman 2004, 231-2)

The spectators see the necklace from Scottie's point of view, and as the camera takes them deeper into his viewpoint, they will have a sense of it taking them there. For Rothman, the spectators do not simply see what he sees, they see that he sees – 'he *does* see' – and 'we', the spectators, 'cut to his view'. The cut to the portrait of Carlotta is disguised so as not to disrupt the alignment with Scottie's vision, but the "invisible" cut is visible, visibly invisible (and hence highlighted in speech marks). When the film dissolves from the museum and the 'painting frames [his] eyes', the spectators have been brought back full circle, tightly locked into Scottie's mind and thoughts. Yet they also see that his eyes are isolated from the rest of his face, his vision circumscribed, delimited and dominated by a vision of Carlotta/Madeleine. They see that what he sees is locked within a frame and that Hitchcock *frames* Scottie as surely as Elster.

The famous dizzying shots that express Scottie's vertigo are 'another invocation of the film frame...[an] intimation that he is condemned to the gaze of Hitchcock's camera' (233). Similarly, the final shot of the film:

The nun, pulling on the rope, rings down the final curtain, signifying the end of the performance. Yet Hitchcock's final virtuoso turn remains to be completed. The movement continues, now revealing the camera to be – all along to have been – outside the tower chamber, occupying a position inaccessible to any human being on Earth. The camera keeps pulling out until it frames Scottie, looking down, his hands at his sides in mute anguish and supplication, as the bell continues to toll. It is with this declaration of the camera that Hitchcock ends his film. (Rothman 2004, 236-237)

The movement is 'revealing' the camera 'all along to have been...outside the tower chamber' and as such is 'revealing' the camera. The spectators are aware of it 'pulling out' so that they *come to see* him from this 'position'. They not only see Scottie 'in mute anguish and supplication', but are conscious that they (are able to) see him from this peculiarly 'inaccessible' view.

George Toles writes that 'Hitchcock...invents a visible action whose highest purpose is to reveal the camera's nature – in effect, giving the camera reflexively back to itself as the 'power behind all things'' (Toles 2001, 175). While discussing Hitchcock's overt declarations of the camera at the beginning and ending of *Rear Window*, Toles writes about the 'arresting strangeness of the camera's way of positioning itself in relation to this environment, its manner of taking possession' (174). He is referring to when the 'camera actively asserts its independence from a character's point of view' as in the prologue. The camera passes through the window and

conducts a 'survey of the courtyard, the apartment dwellings opposite, and their tenants, returning twice in a kind of circling motion to James Stewart, the sleeping occupant of the room whose windows were the starting point for this guided tour' (173). For Toles, 'Finding the camera and questioning its purpose in declaring itself is equivalent to being briefly released from the spell of James Stewart's...presence' (178).

The camera can make explicit declarations but it may also provide an unobtrusive 'point of view' that does not compel us, and yet is revelatory. Toles writes of *Rear Window*:

The film presents us with a narrative structure that is serenely intact, yet at the same time authorizes endless rupture. The rupturing process begins when the spectator recognizes that the perfect order of the film's surface story is a 'blind' for another story in which the camera's point of view is at variance with that of the characters. The same images that make it seem reasonable to view *Rear Window* as a self-sufficient, 'naïve' genre film also invite us, without compelling us, to see *through* the devices that hold us captive to the story. A mystery whose solution has seemed to depend on the gathering of external data conceals, but also discloses (to those moved to attend to it) a more basic mystery of perception: how our window on the world 'out there' ceaselessly transforms into a mirror of our desires and perceptual habits. (Toles 2001, 172)

The 'narrative structure' is simultaneously 'serenely intact' and full of 'endless rupture' and this apparent paradox goes against the grain of a commonly held assumption that a film either remains 'intact' (mainstream, Hollywood) *or* generates 'rupture' (independent, experimental, avant-garde).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it is the 'serenely intact' 'narrative structure' that 'authorizes' 'rupture', and 'endless rupture'.

It is a technological matter of fact that the camera is always making itself known because it is producing the image, but the experience of the camera in fiction films is not easily known. The camera is always there *and yet* we (normally) never see it. We experience it moving about in the environment of the fiction *and yet* we (normally) do not see it in the fictional world. We depend upon the camera, frequently aware of the *direction* of the image (as Rothman is) *and yet* we are prone to forget that it is providing these views. We see that performers depend on the camera too and they cannot forget it, so they look to it but (normally) do not look at it. For Toles, Hitchcock's films show us that the camera is a 'window' *and* ('ceaselessly transforms into') a 'mirror', an instrument that opens out *and* reflects back, that 'discloses' and 'conceals', that clearly perceives *and* poses the 'mystery of perception'. The camera ensures that film is equivocal and unresolved at the

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this is one of the assumptions behind Mulvey's 'visual pleasure' critique.

core of its being, and it encourages a spectator that is fluctuating and indeterminate.

The camera also accommodates multiple perspectives within its single vision. For example, the camera is able to show us simultaneously what it knows and what a character knows (feels or experiences). It may make available a crucial object, a glance, a gesture, which remains unacknowledged within the fiction. The camera-conscious spectator judiciously engages with the surveying camera and is the opposite of the spectator conceived by Mulvey. The survey takes on a more distinct character when it is felt that, as it is in Hitchcock's films, the camera's viewpoint strongly aligns with that of the director. Indeed, the camera-conscious spectator is often an authorial-conscious spectator. The director's eye refines the camera's in-built propensity for perspicacity. For Rothman, the camera is not merely a tool of the director, it is his main vehicle of authorial intervention. Hitchcock sees through the camera to speak through the camera: in Rothman's formulation, the 'eye' of the camera is the 'I' of the camera.

The worry for the camera-conscious spectator is that they may over-invest in what they take to be the all-seeing, all-knowing camera and become over-impressed with the ironies it provides. For Rothman, the camera intervenes, but to complicate rather than confirm. The camera's capacity to see the bigger picture does not mean it is the source of truth. Toles writes about the moment at the end of *Rear Window* when Thorwald (Raymond Burr) confronts Jefferies (James Stewart):

Thorwald and Jefferies confront each other in a mutual blindness, culminating in Jefferies dropping out of the window (the rigorously controlled frame of the film's world) and Thorwald disappearing into the darkness inside. Jefferies's fall, in allegorical terms, is the final severance of the idea of the privileged, justified spectator from the 'window'; the film decisively shows the window as something not belonging to him, something whose capacity to reveal is *not* predicated on his presence behind it. I would like to think that Hitchcock is also acknowledging here the drastic limits of the *camera's* power to image truth. Significantly, it is the camera that Jefferies instinctively seizes as the protective barrier between himself and Thorwald's 'reality.'...The camera...will proclaim itself part of the 'empty' fiction rather than attempt to *show* what is real. Hitchcock may be suggesting that the camera's truth *always* resides in what, at the last instant, eludes capture, never in what can be made literally visible. (Toles 2001, 179-180)

The camera captures the 'visible' but does not '*show* what is real'. The camera lets us see everything that is before it and simultaneously asks what it is that we see. *Searching* films recognise that this recording instrument is also a tool of inspection and perusal: it brings the spectator close to, and

entices them with, the meaning of surfaces. This is why any worthwhile image, and not just transparently beguiling or puzzling ones, invites interpretation. Stewart and Novak's very presence, their bodies, their faces, their clothes, their gestures, and their movements ask questions of us. Hitchcock is the 'Master of Suspense' and this most commonly refers to his handling of anticipation and expectation within the plot, but he also keeps us in suspense about people, their identities, and their behaviour.

Good films need not be insistently questioning, however: their simplicity or ordinariness is deceptive and significance passes without notice. Some films, like *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*, are insistent *and* deceptive. In almost every image, they compel us to interrogate the status of what we see and yet Toles is still correct when he writes that 'The extraordinary imaginative resonance of a Hitchcock film derives...from his matchless ability to hide things in plain sight – to create 'open' stories that are entirely taken up with subtle acts of concealment' (176). This line evokes point 89 in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, and a favourite touchstone of Stanley Cavell: '[I]t is...the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand' (Wittgenstein, trans. Anscombe, 2006 edition, 36). In its ability to make aspects available but not necessarily apparent, the camera seems peculiarly suited to this 'investigation'. It keeps the spectator on the case.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Experiential Spectator*

For an experiential spectator, absorbed in the moment-by-moment encounter with a film, the camera, although fundamental, is only one aspect of the whole experience. The experiential spectator responds to the intricacy of a film as it unfolds and wishes to articulate this intricacy. He or she evokes the experience most often by way of an involved and intimate description. In the following passage, James Harvey describes the period after Scottie has found Judy. The prose recreates the dramatic momentum of the scene and is disposed towards shifts in mood and tone:

They have their first 'date,' and he takes her (no surprise) to Ernie's, where she looks rather out of place. It's not a successful evening. Nonetheless, when he brings her back to the hotel and they are saying goodnight in the hallway, he asks her to quit her job, to let him 'take care of' her. She treats this disdainfully, as a conventional, if extreme, make-out move – though she knows better, of course. Like Midge, she knows very well – just as much as he does not – what's going on between them. She walks away from him into the darkened room and sits on the arm of a chair near the window. From outside it, the big 'Hotel Empire' electric sign gives off an eerie aqueous blue-green glow that floods her corner of the room. But she is in darkness, as she

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<sup>16</sup> See Klevan (2000) especially Chapter Seven, 'Unconcealing the Obvious'.

removes her glove – her face turned in profile, a black outline, like a silhouette cutout, against the green unearthly light. Scotty stands in the doorway, talking to her across the room, uncomfortably. His intentions are honourable, he tells her – he only wants to see more of her. ‘Why?’ comes her voice from the darkness. ‘Because I remind you of her?’ (pronouncing it ‘remind-juv’). At this, Scotty looks pained, the music rises, and the camera sweeps suddenly forward, right up to the black, unreadable profile, where it stops – the movement an almost visceral register of Scotty’s longing and frustration. The next shot, however, is Judy’s – inside the darkness: a frontal close-up, her face half in shadow, half in the sea-green light. She is gazing out the window into the light: one of those moments when Novak’s unmediated, cornered-animal quality seems most vivid and moving. The unearthly light makes the misery in her opaque dark eyes look almost luminous. She shifts her gaze from the window: maybe, she says, she could get the day off from work. (Harvey 2001, 35, 37)

The passage is colloquial and idiomatic, knowingly *in with* the sequence’s ironies. Laconic understatement captures the underhand (black humour) and the uncanny. Taking her to Ernie’s is the ominous beginning of Scottie’s obsessive re-creation but here appears simply as ‘(no surprise)’ with the parentheses standing in for raised eyebrows; and ‘It’s not a successful evening’ is deadpan as if this was any old, *blind* date unworthy of further particulars. Vernacular locutions express the attitudes of movie characters – real, moving characters – especially ones which are modern, twentieth-century, urban and American. Correct formalities of academic prose do not necessarily faithfully evoke their physical and emotional energies, and dynamics. The lack of an ‘and’, for example, between ‘quit her job,’ and ‘to let him ‘take care of’ her’ means the latter clause appears abruptly and conveys Scottie’s anxious pleading.

The sentence ‘She walks away from him into the darkened room and sits on the arm of a chair near the window’ does not start with a ‘Because’ or a ‘When’ or any other word that will lead to an interpretation or explanation of her movement. This risks boring the reader with what is plainly evident although we should take care because, as Toles writes, Hitchcock has the ‘matchless ability to hide things in plain sight’. Harvey is not afraid of telling us what happens because he is interested in drawing attention to telling; this sentence deliberately sets the scene and begins a sequence of descriptive moves. The vocabulary of the ‘eerie aqueous blue-green glow’ appears more *colourful* and describing what is in plain view now seems less straightforward. In the next sentence, the efforts to describe are further foregrounded with the explicit simile of ‘like a silhouette cutout’. Harvey’s writing shows that the experience of a film includes a consciousness of experiencing it, and the articulation of that consciousness. The writer will be especially aware of translating the images and sounds into written language,

but any spectator thinking about what they see and hear will be involved in an act of construal, forming descriptions in the mind, gathering the experience into words.

Harvey plays out the drama again but this time in words, and each sentence re-builds the scene. The method is quite the opposite of encapsulation and generalisation employed by Thomson and Cavell. For Harvey, it is perhaps a way of *coming to terms* with the scene, a therapeutic process, where even if it is immediately in front of him, *recalling* it, or learning to call it (something), becomes revelatory. For the reader, it is perhaps a way of understanding how Harvey comes to see (how one thing leads to another) because of the opportunity to experience it through his eyes. Rather than simply giving *a* view of what happened, the writing conveys the drama of viewing as it happens and the reader, rather than checking (off) discrete observations, follows the progression. The writing recognises the unfolding of meaning in time, instead of conflating it, after the fact, into a brief summation that reduces instance to example.<sup>17</sup>

Sentences replicate cinematic movement. Scottie ‘looks pained’, the ‘music rises’ and ‘the camera sweeps suddenly forward’, like the sentence, right until ‘it stops – ’ with a dash. On the other side of the dash lies the interpretation of the movement but the dash does not so much separate as bridge, or more accurately it drives and directs us, with the momentum previously achieved, into the interpretive clause ‘– the movement an almost visceral register of Scotty’s longing and frustration’. Harvey’s writing is not merely emoting about story and character because technique and meaning equally affect. The experience of the fiction is inseparable from the experience that this is a fiction. The vibrant and poetic close to the paragraph – ‘The unearthly light makes the misery in her opaque eyes look almost luminous’ – is inspired not simply by Judy, the fictional character, but by Novak at her ‘most vivid’. Judy’s submission is an appropriate climax to the paragraph as Scottie may now begin to create his fantasy. The crescendo into the ‘unearthly’ and the ‘luminous’ make possible a sudden drop back down to earth – ‘maybe, she says, she could get the day off from work’. The bathos created by the syntactical arrangement generates, and incorporates, the interpretation – about the ordinary’s capacity suddenly to subsume intensity – without needing to state it. Rather than transferring to an alternative discourse, the interpretation is expressed *within* the language that describes the film.

It is rare enough for commentaries to point out accent or pronunciation, but rarer still to impersonate a voice in order to provide an *impression*. For Harvey, what Judy sounds like (‘remind-juv’) is as important as what she

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<sup>17</sup> I also make these points with regard to a different passage of Harvey’s in my essay ‘Description’ (Klevan 2011a).

says: 'Because I remind you of her?' In just that 'remind-juv', he distils the character and suggests class and upbringing (and performances of class and upbringing by character and performer) without elaboration – as Kim Novak does. Later in his chapter on *Vertigo*, Harvey draws attention to Scottie's final dialogue:

'Carlotta's necklace,' says Scotty. 'There's where you made your mistake, Judy. You shouldn't keep souvenirs of a killing,' he says – and the anguish in Stewart's face and voice is nearly as terrifying to us as it is to her. Then he adds, 'You shouldn't've been – ' and stops, choking up at the bitterness of what he's saying. He starts over: 'You shouldn't've been – that sentimental' – both swallowing that last crucial word and coming down on it at the same time...Judy...who has just connived at a killing for money...is capable of appropriating even a murder...It's the pain of this recognition that Stewart – remarkably – gets into this word 'sentimental' when he says it, with all his bitterness and grief. And his next words, different as they are, are even more searing. 'I loved you so, Madeleine,' he says, in tears, raising his head. No longer looking *through* the insufficient Judy, but upward and away. But, of course, there never was a Madeleine...Madeleine is a phenomenon both impossibly specific and finally transcendent, so that Scotty's cry of love for her in the bell tower feels not only moving but oddly heartless – like this movie itself. (Harvey 2001, 40-41)

Stewart's 'terrifying' intensity ruptures *Vertigo*'s 'heartless' surface, and so the film gives his outburst a sense of bursting. It is 'terrifying', and confusing, for the spectator not least because 'there never was a Madeleine': how did fakery elicit this raw sincerity? Scottie's moments of suffering, like the moment in the bell-tower, are vital for many spectators ('terrifying to us'), but difficult to handle within the conventions of academic analysis without seeming aloof and dispassionate, and neutralising their force. It is greatly to Harvey's credit that he confronts them on their own terms and dwells upon them. Acknowledging Scottie's behaviour will take more than understanding (his character). It will require adequately experiencing his *being*. This entails an encounter with the urgency of the performance: the spectator experiences not only Scottie's emotions but also Stewart's expression of them. It may be 'Scotty's cry of love', but it is the 'anguish in Stewart's face' and 'the pain of this recognition that Stewart – remarkably – gets into the word 'sentimental'' [my emphasis]. For Harvey, the 'audience' is as emotional, empathetic, and sympathetic about a performer as they are about a character.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The spectator with whom I recently watched the film was reasonably concerned with Scottie's plight but was particularly disturbed that the film could play such a cruel trick on James Stewart.



*The Context-Conscious Spectator*

The nakedness of Stewart's outburst in the bell tower is similar to his distressed tirade at the children in *It's a Wonderful Life* and his frantic cries as the filibuster collapses in *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra, 1939), and his glowing tribute to Tracy's magnificence in *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940). Indeed, for Cavell, Stewart's performance in *Vertigo* joins hands with his other films:

I think it cannot be an accident that the actor in both films is James Stewart, that both Capra and Hitchcock see in Stewart's temperament (which, of course, is to say, see in what becomes of that temperament on film, its photogenesis) the capacity to stake identity upon the power of wishing, upon the capacity and purity of one's imagination and desire – not on one's work, or position, or accomplishments, or looks, or intelligence. Call the quality Stewart projects a willingness for suffering – his quality Capra records in *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*, and that John Ford used in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. (Cavell 2005, 6-7)

Cavell is alert here to Stewart's relationship to his other films and his relationship to the medium and asks what becomes of his 'temperament on film'. This allows him to see *Vertigo* as another chapter in Stewart's explorations 'on film' of 'wishing', 'suffering', 'imagination' and 'desire'. Indeed, performer and director are involved in exploring these concepts, or seeing different aspects of them, from film to film. Cavell sees *Vertigo* in these terms and as V.F. Perkins writes:

The star performers influence what the audience expects and therefore how it reacts. The familiar styles and personalities...necessarily contribute to the total style of any film in which they appear...Hitchcock is able to absorb the strong personalities of [Cary] Grant and Stewart into the textures and meanings of his movies. (Perkins 1972, 182)

Anything in a film may trigger an association to something outside it that then affects the view of it. Raymond Durnat is responsive to the elements in films that rhyme with other films and other aspects of the cultural terrain:

Hitchcock must take the credit...for prefiguring the '60s sextet of blonde heroines whose smoothly perfidious responses to their victimisation or confusion catch a more generalised mood of disjuncted psyche: Tippi Hedren in *Marnie*, Catherine Deneuve in *Repulsion*, *Belle de Jour* and *Tristana*, and the two heroines of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*. *Vertigo*, like *L'Avventura*, is built round winding journeyings after a missing person. (Durnat 1982, 296-297)

Durgnat is a context-conscious spectator and he has an unrestricted range of reference that liberates a variety of meaning.<sup>19</sup> He lets the vividness of imagery and his descriptions of it – ‘smoothly perfidious’, ‘mood of disjuncted psyche’, ‘winding journeyings’ – lead him to other films and the wider culture. He makes several contextual connections in one paragraph each one condensed into individual words and phrases. He writes:

The mixture of archaic and contemporary elements makes the beauty of this necrophiliac tale which, with its sugar-coating of glamour, remains a poignant lyric about what David Reisman in *The Lonely Crowd* called ‘false personalization’ and the alienations of modern life – including that deodorisation, depilation and depersonalisation of womanhood, the secret meaning of whose apparently optimistic perfectionism is a terror of the vulnerabilities which distinguish a woman from a pin-up or a high heeled machine. No doubt the film’s own surface expresses an acquiescence in it. (Durgnat 1982, 296)

Durgnat’s cultural references wind around each other and the film: coiled, tense, sparking to other points of contact. His descriptions simultaneously evoke the film and the wider culture. The rhyming of ‘deodorisation, depilation and depersonalisation’ and the alliteration of ‘d’s is more than a stylistic flourish. The words fold into each other, losing their individual identities, and starting with the same letter, they all have the same face. These words are ‘smoothly perfidious’ so they speak to *Vertigo*’s style and content and, at the same time, they are a sinister little mockery of an advertisement catchphrase where all the ‘ation’s reveal the clinical science buried under the ‘glamour’.<sup>20</sup>

Durgnat doesn’t simply write that *Vertigo* is a film about necrophilia; rather, it is a ‘necrophiliac tale’ where ‘tale’ evokes the ‘archaic’, and specifically brings out the film’s meta-narrative aspects (‘I have a tale to tell’), its deceptions (‘telling tales’) and its capacity to provide a lesson like a parable or fable (‘it tells a tale’). The film is also ‘lyric’, a short poem of songlike quality, with its patterns of circularity, literally musical or otherwise. ‘Lyric’ and ‘tale’ link the film to prior artistic forms, and establish a spectator – an antidote to the perpetually affected and implicated one customarily

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<sup>19</sup> Not ‘the evaluating spectator’ as Makkai mistakenly labels the ‘spectator who is aware...of various aspects of the film’s ‘context’ (Makkai 2013, 17) in her summary of this essay. The evaluating spectator is a different entity and is discussed in the following section.

<sup>20</sup> Durgnat’s use of the repetition of a consonant to aid compression is expertly exhibited earlier in his chapter: ‘Scottie’s house lies on a slope, lending certain scenes, in the context of laterality, a half-ominous, half-elegiac quality of decline’ (Durgnat 1982, 293). The repeated use of ‘l’s allows the aspects to slide into each other with the constant ‘l’ sound conveying the quality of slipping away. At the same time, an ‘l’ is also upright which gives the appearance of verticality (which plays against the ‘laterality’). If this form of writing expressed a demonstrative moment of slipping or sliding, it would be more obviously appropriate. To apply it to a few unimposing establishing shots of Scottie’s house discloses the implications – only ‘half-ominous’ – in the apparently ordinary (and stable).

conceived – who dispassionately, perhaps admiringly, looks upon its form and sees it as an art object situated within a distinguished tradition.

### *The Evaluating Spectator*

One spectator may feel *Vertigo* to be penetrating, another may find it silly, and these aspects may colour their whole experience. Yet, these reactions are often regarded as less important than their other identifications and involvements. The fact that spectators may disagree over the qualities of the presentation does not alter the fact that they may be an integral part of the viewing experience. A spectator feels a work to be deft, tender, or delicate or perhaps condescending, smug, or arch as much as they feel for a character or their situations (indeed, whether the fiction affects them will depend on these qualities of expression). This is the evaluating spectator, perhaps the most prevalent and yet the one least acknowledged in academic treatments of film viewing.

The spectator's attachment to a performer, for example, will be crucial to their engagement, but it need not be sentimental. When Harvey describes Stewart 'both swallowing that last crucial word and coming down on it at the same time', he indicates how the actor's delivery achieves the emotion, and how the delivery might earn the spectator's involvement. It is not only Scottie's plight that is at stake for the spectator but Stewart's handling of it. The spectator senses the risks for the actor – exaggeration, embarrassment, earnestness – in pushing the fervency. The tension between *Vertigo*'s aspiration or potential and its actual achievement is as palpable as that generated by plot or narrative. The spectator monitors the success with which the film handles its elements; and this is not of supplementary interest, but of pressing importance every step of the way. It affects the moment-by-moment viewing of the film.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, for the evaluating spectator, aspects of aesthetic value are properties of the work, and not simply subjective projection.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, these aspects seem not to be materially present in the way that Midge's apartment *is*, or the way that the small stepladder *is*, or the way Scottie's walking stick *is*. However, the apartment, steps and stick are not

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<sup>21</sup> See Clayton and Klevan (2011) and Klevan (2011b) for a reiteration of these points in different contexts.

<sup>22</sup> Alan H. Goldman supplies a pithy classification in his book *Aesthetic Value*: 'Artworks are rarely conceived or described as mere physical objects or processes. Critics and laypersons alike ascribe properties to them beyond those described in physical terms. They use a large variety of terms in ascribing these properties. First, there are broadly evaluative terms: beautiful, ugly, sublime, dreary; second, formal terms: balanced, graceful, concise, loosely woven; third, emotion terms: sad, angry, joyful, serene; fourth, evocative terms: powerful, stirring, amusing, hilarious, boring; fifth, behavioural terms: sluggish, bouncy, jaunty; sixth, representational terms: realistic, distorted, true to life, erroneous; seventh, second-order perceptual terms: vivid, dull, muted, steely, mellow (ascribed to colors or tones); eighth, historical terms: derivative, original, daring, bold, conservative' (Goldman 1998, 17).

simply present, they have a presence *and* they are *presented*, to us, in a particular way.<sup>23</sup>

Different elements of a film sometimes may be of varying quality, and a spectator may be alive to the imbalance or incoherence: for *Vertigo*, she might feel a powerful performance is carrying an otherwise crude drama, an intrusive score is overstating significance or a hitherto shrewdly arranged plot is let down by a wilful dénouement. The evaluating spectator entertains hypotheses about these matters as she views and she verifies or adjusts them as the film progresses. She may change her mind on a second viewing, or after learning of an alternative justification. Some spectators may believe, for example, that on an initial viewing *Vertigo* is less than convincing or credible, but they might eventually see that the film is testing the limits of such notions, perhaps after reading Harvey who argues that the film is about a ‘romantic passion [that] survives disbelief’ (42).

This critical spectator constantly questions the film’s way of doing things often against the background of alternative options and possibilities. Robin Wood discusses Judy’s flashback when the film reveals to the spectator the extent of Elster’s trickery and that Madeleine was a fraud:

Two big questions are now raised: why did Hitchcock choose to break the first law of the mystery thriller and divulge the ‘surprise’ solution two-thirds of the way through the film? And what difference does the revelation make, in retrospect, to the significance of what has preceded it?...Our immediate reaction to the revelation, I think, is extreme disappointment. This can exist on a purely superficial level: we have come to see a mystery story and now we know it all, so what is the use of the film’s continuing? Why should we have to watch the detective laboriously discovering things we know already? Much popular discontent with the film can be traced to this premature revelation, and in terms of audience reaction it was certainly a daring move on Hitchcock’s part. (Wood 1991, 120-121)

Wood uses his essay to articulate explicitly the questions that he considers crucial to understanding the film and to judging its success. They are important to him as a spectator, and to other spectators too for whom the ‘premature revelation’ caused ‘discontent’. The spectator may put any aspect under scrutiny, questioning its place and purpose, but Wood insists that in this case the film deliberately raises the questions. For Wood, divulging ‘the ‘surprise’ solution two-thirds of the way through’ is a choice that invites questioning. Whether discontented or not, a spectator may simply view the moment as a significant turning point in the plot, and yet the moment holds out hope for a more critical spectator, who recognises it – as it ‘break[s] the first law of the mystery thriller’ – *as a choice*. The

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<sup>23</sup> The attitude embodied in presentation is crucial but we are prone to disregard it in our formal analyses of film.

spectator conceives of it not simply as an important moment, but as a creative decision (as Wood does).

Indeed, *Vertigo* is 'daring' because it challenges its spectator to make judgements about its credibility and quality as a film, and risks disapproval. Aspects of narrative continuity, such as the one Wood chose to discuss, and aspects of stylistic exaggeration may or may not be deliberate provocations, but it would be difficult to appreciate *Vertigo* without arriving at a justification for their appearance. Robin Wood and Tania Modleski give explanations of the dream sequence:

This begins with an image of disintegration from earlier in the film – the posy which Madeleine plucked to pieces, dropped in the water and watched floating away immediately before her first suicide attempt. Again the posy (suggestive of a tight, unnatural order) disintegrates, only in the dream Hitchcock uses cartoon – crude cartoon at that – to show it: the image of the real flowers turned to paper flowers suggests that the possibility that the whole Madeleine ideal is a fraud is already nightmarishly present in Scottie's subconscious. (Wood 1991, 117)

What is most extraordinary about this dream is that Scottie actually *lives out Madeleine's hallucination*, that very hallucination of which he had tried so desperately to cure her, and he *dies Madeleine's death*. His attempts at a cure having failed, he himself is plunged into the 'feminine' world of psychic disintegration, madness and death. Even the form of the dream, which is off-putting to many viewers because it is so 'phoney,' suggest the failure of the 'real' that we have seen to be the stake of Scottie's confrontation with Woman. (Modleski 2005, 96-97)

For Wood, the dream not only uses cartoon but a 'crude cartoon', for Modleski, many viewers find it 'phoney' but both critics see it as deliberately artificial. For Wood, it reflects the fraudulence of the Madeleine ideal that is already in Scottie's subconscious. For Modleski, it represents a fundamental 'failure of the 'real'' and expresses not only his problem with this woman but with Woman. The defence of the moment rests on establishing its consistency, despite its apparent incongruence, with other aspects, or more precisely their understanding of other aspects, of the film. This is not necessarily because they a priori assume coherence as an aesthetic criterion of value but because they want to demonstrate how the film has effectively *directed* them to (understand or experience) the moment. Indeed, for most of the spectators analysed in this essay, their viewing is guided by what they think the film means, and in this sense, their spectatorship is interpretive (or hermeneutical).

Rather than attempting to justify value, some critics *show their appreciation* through description and distinction. Harvey moves through a scene or sequence, susceptible to its progression, so when he finally reaches the moment where Novak 'is gazing out of the window into the light' he

appreciates that it is *at this point* that her ‘unmediated, cornered-animal quality seems most vivid and moving’ (37). Murray Pomerance describes Madeleine’s voice as ‘articulate without being pompous, gentle and urging yet never hungry’ (Pomerance 2004, 257). The intensity of Pomerance’s appreciation of colour takes him far beyond the red/green duality (with a splash of yellow) that satisfies so many sober commentaries:

The delicate depth – constructed entirely of the play of colors – of the bouquet Madeleine purchases at Podesta’s, miniature pink roses and blue forget-me-nots...The autumnal explosion and earthy richness of the architecture, pond, leaves, and lovers as Scottie and Judy amble beside the Musée des Beaux Arts...The stunning silver of Madeleine’s silk suit. The Neptunian provocation of the turquoise in her gown at Ernie’s and the inflammation produced by the flaring and dipping of illumination upon those scarlet flocked walls. Scottie’s ethereal teal cashmere sweater, and his sincere chocolate suit. Elster’s seductive, ruby office upholstery. The tedious blue of Scottie’s sweater in the sanatorium or the sensuous dusty rose of Judy Barton’s hotel room walls against the vexatious green of the EMPIRE HOTEL sign outside her window. The clear terrifying blue of that final sky.

And what a choir are the many yellows in this film! (Pomerance 2004, 251-252)

*Vertigo*’s extraordinary visual design invites the critic to become an enraptured spectator as Pomerance shows himself to be with regard to the symbolic and expressive virtuosity of colour.

#### *The Analysis-Conscious Spectator*

An involvement with the writer’s involvement (with the film) is crucial to my final type of spectator. The analyses influence the way in which he moves through the film, his disposition and expectations. A piece of writing may persuade him to entertain, or identify with, a way of seeing – flexibly yielding without surrendering. Simply a word or phrase may open up a perspective. In one mood, or at one time in his life, he may see *Vertigo* like James Harvey; in another mood, at another time, like Tania Modleski. His viewing may allow one perspective to dominate, it may entertain a few simultaneously, or it may proceed by way of an agile negotiation. This is testament to the multi-dimensional quality of the film, but also to a critically cultivated spectatorship. This spectator may sound a touch rarefied, or academic, but reading film analysis is to experience a formal, considered, extended version of something a companion might say to us in a conversation that will unavoidably colour our viewing. This spectator enjoys interacting with others: he is interdependent, and responsive.

Mulvey’s essay has only a paragraph devoted to *Vertigo*, and the account is sketchy, but it presents a possible way of picturing the film, a way of seeing, following, and comprehending its entire structure. Through its vocabulary –

‘voyeurism’, ‘sadistic’, ‘erotic drive’, ‘obsessive’, ‘fetish’, ‘masochism’, ‘the look’, ‘symbolic order’, ‘patriarchal superego’ and ‘surrogate’ – it constructs a world of meaning.<sup>24</sup> The essay reconstitutes the film through a thorough renaming. The spectator enters into a unique creation – Mulvey’s *Vertigo*. The spectator’s ‘surrogate’ is now not only Scottie, or the camera, or the director, or the conventions of Hollywood film, patriarchal or otherwise, but Mulvey’s essay.

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<sup>24</sup> This point should not be lost simply because psychoanalytic vocabulary now customarily appears in film analysis.

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