

“HOW OLD IS MAE WEST?”: MNEMOTECHNICS, FEMALE
FEMALE IMPERSONATION, AND THE EUNARCHY IN
HITCHCOCK

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“Have you time for me now?”
Grace Kelly to Cary Grant, *To Catch a Thief*

Well, when they talk about black and white,
you remember that black and white itself is
unreal basically. After all, we see color
everywhere. The camera will photograph
whatever you give it. If you want to give it a
black and white set – a woman in a black dress
and a white blouse, there’ll only be one thing
in color; that’ll be her face.
Hitchcock

Abstract

The article addresses the issue of female impersonation in Hitchcock’s work, stressing the director’s focus on the performative nature of gender and his view that gender positions are fabricated.

Keywords: Hitchcock – film criticism – gender positions

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Resumo

O artigo discute a questão da personificação feminina na obra de Hitchcock, enfatizando o enfoque do diretor na natureza performativa do gênero e na visão de que as posições de gênero são fabricadas.

I.

This question is put to Mr. Memory in the Music Hall scene of *The 39 Steps*. It will go unanswered (“I never tell a lady’s age,” says the discrete Memory, a human machine of memorized facts, “millions and millions,” we hear) but it has resonance beyond itself. We must recognize not only the word “West” here but the most notorious female impersonator of her time (precedent, say, for Madonna). We might translate: how long has the “female” been in the West a performative which, contrapuntally, allows to be generated a “male” position where there had been none? Since if this entangled logic is exposed, then what we call the patriarchy would too be exposed as a mytheme for what is, more appropriately perhaps, a eunarchy from which gender positions are fabricated. Pursuing this question suggests:

1) That what we call “Hitchcock” involves a project beyond the parameters of film studies, a textual intervention that challenges an entire signifying order or political state, in which all matter of marking or associations address issues of memory and how identity and violence is inscribed;

2) That the hyperbolic serial violence in Hitchcock directed at “woman” – who is caught in machines of serial murder repeatedly: the blonde woman whose open mouthed mute face opens *The Lodger*, the “merry widows” of *Shadow of a Doubt*, Marion in the shower of *Psycho*, the necktie murders of *Frenzy* – is positioned in at least a double way.

On the one hand, “she” receives in the figure of the cool Western blonde the iconic violence through which the system writes itself, a violation that links the consumption of women (serially) to the act of inscription (or film making). *She* is a figure simultaneously of metaphysics and the transformation of its program – that of woman as

source, as other, as "mother," as the undoing of each – into *other* terms. So I will say, here, that something in Hitchcock's work sets up a field of translations that are incomplete: one of these is from a field marked with traditional gender icons that is viewed as wholly "performative" and another in which those positions are cast against a neutral third position, no longer "human" and hence the makings of a future model. Now we know, in Hitchcock, that there will be a problem with "mother" – with who or what she or it is – and we know that the defacement of woman, their serial murder, is not simple. It is a violation elsewhere in Hitchcock linked rather to *theft*, such as that by "the cat" of the cold-cream faced middle-aged woman tourist who shrieks for her missing jewels opening *To Catch a Thief* – a "comic" version which tells us, too, that this repeat defacement is linked to something else as well, something other than the "male gaze" as classically conceived.

So these two thoughts. Again first: that Hitchcock's writing machine which traverses all his films even as his famous cameo does, and in each and includes sounds, marks, puns, references to language and writing, letteral chains, endless active citations, and the signature-effects launched by Hitchcock's cameos and surrogates – that all of these replicate the priority of memory systems over the "eye" in these works. They have to be read. Second, that since a certain notion of the "eye," of visibility and mimesis, is connected to violence to women, Hitchcock's hyperbolic use and undoing of that model involves a double movement: on the one hand, he exacerbates it, locates that violation at the prosthetic heart of the system he is circulating within – already in *The Lodger's* Daisy but coming back, with its ultimate commentary, in *Marnie* decades later. On the other hand, it is moved beyond, viewed from an almost desexed zone, a post-human position in which gender will have to be performed as "desire" and in which the male position is not a given or dominant but a fiction.

But all of this presupposes that Hitchcock is in fact practicing "cinema" in the manner theorized by Walter Benjamin: that is, as a machine that not only simulates where artificial memory forms imprints and inscriptions out of which the world is projected (along a model of

repetition at that, like consciousness), but one that would intervene in it, break the programs of history by reinscribing the senses differently, in effect presenting an alternative model of reading.

This other model of reading – which Benjamin will term at one late point “materialistic historiography” – gambles on bringing matters to a certain opening, a certain rupture, where the past can be reinscribed and alternative futures projected from this: it is best demonstrated by the cameo of Hitchcock when he is interrupted reading in a train in *Blackmail* (that is, interrupted reading in and by cinema). This intervention in the course of history is often the aim of the political assassins and saboteurs of Hitchcock’s early British thrillers – like Abbott in the first *Man Who Knew Too Much*, an assassin who uses a false Temple of Sun Worshippers as a front for his subversion, even taking collections from the parishioners (that is, money from the tourist film goers seeking a false “light” in the flickers of the screen). In *Sabotage*, a movie house named the Bijou is the front for Verloc’s sabotaging missions – the first of which is the putting out of the lights, emptying the movie house in advance of its film. In *The 39 Steps*, we, the audience, are mimed as if at the opening of consciousness itself: a hand buys a ticket from under the bars, giant neon letters (letters taken as light) start to spell Music Hall. From bars to letteration to the dark backs of heads facing the vaudeville stage where Mr. Memory is introduced. He is called a “remarkable” man, one who commits to memory, like a camera, millions of facts – pretends that is to a mimetic or documentary role as a recorder of things as they are – and the game is to ask Memory facts. If he gets them right, the questioner who already knows the answer to the question put affirms it, and the circle is closed – if not, the circle is open. This occurs at the films end when Memory is trying to take the memorized formula for a silent warplane from the country and is shot when asked to repeat what he knew of the spy-ring, “the thirty-nine steps.” He cannot not speak, if asked: all is *external* in a memory which operates by way of material marks. He recites the formula – all letters and numbers – and though Hannay, the hero, does

not know this and never heard it before, he affirms that it is right to give the dying Memory peace.

But what does Memory dying mean, if not the possible alteration in an entire system of memory, archive, identity, legacy, value, gender positioning? One problem is that the audience – likened to film-goers – treats the vaudeville Memory as Hesiod did Mnemosyne, echoed in the letters opening the film M-U-S as if for muse. Consciousness emerges as the effects of inscription, of memorized facts, unembellished, repeated, more, remarked (Mr. Memory is, again, called a “remarkable” man). Now, this issue, that of remarking, would not be remarkable, except for one fact: that the word or pre-word Mar- turns up all over Hitchcock in a network of proper names: Markham, Margaret, Martin, Marvin, Marlow, Margot, Mark, Marion, Mary, Marnie, not to mention variations such as Morton or Murchisson, and so on. Indeed, one is reminded of the effect on Hitchcock’s screen, a kind of marking that one critic, William Rothman, calls Hitchcock’s “signature.” A certain movement of a series of bar, or slashes – impossible to see or not see: / / / /, in fact, like the ticket booth bars opening *The 39 Steps*. We will only say, for the moment, that these are the strongest and yet most elusive tools, barely phenomenalized, which Hitchcock has in his semiotic arsenal – and they return, we know, as a knocking sound. Both are absolutely irreducible, without semantic content or even legible form (letters, musical notation). In the case of what Rothman calls the “bar series,” it is bewildering: a non-figure that implies endless cuts, like the slashes of “mother” in the show-room, it at once precedes, interrupts, evacuates and is the precondition of the visible. No play of shadow, of alternating, of spacing, of marking, and no seeing: in fact, given the neon letters, it might seem the eye begins in reading rather than in pure vision of any sort. It loops through, questions, compares with or is projected by memory – like the projected spools of film, the handcuffs on Hannay later in the film. *Spellbound* is the text where this “signature” of parallel lines, bars, or tracks (as in the snow) is openly presented as what precedes even inscription, what haunts all archives of mnemonic trauma.

But there is a problem, even before we return to the issue of Mae West, and where this leads to the possible positions, today, of “woman” in this signature-system we call “Hitchcock” or Hitchcock’s films. If Memory begins by reciting facts, and nothing more, marking them, the *repetition* of these answers produces a different effect – for then the fact is remarked, repeated as a word or image, becomes a hive of citational possibilities, and the camera’s pretense to documentation or mimetic reproduction is shot: it is now, like it or not, an allegory. This entire impasse of representation – that a repetition alters a marked object to being a *remarked* term held in a web of associated figures, a citation, is that of the impossibility of the “documentary” (this is explored in the non-passage between the silent opening of *Blackmail* and its introduction of “dialogue” for the first time – dialogue, which Hitchcock insisted to Truffaut was primarily “sound”). Relational meanings attend this remarking, undoing the pretense of mimesis or even a circle in which Memory is not altered – or made, like a new type of cinema or memoration, to carry within its inscription a silent warplane formula, a war machine against the hermeneutic state. Memory purveys facts but also a legacy, the legacy of cultural traces as inscriptions (legs, steps). The death of Memory could appear like the translation of that legacy, the memory of the West, into Hitchcock’s cinematic war machines – which open with an interruption, an erasure, and a potential for recasting. If the bar-series is previsible, spawns visibility, it also cuts the notion of the eye as organ – much as is done, with scissors, in the Dali dream sequence in *Spellbound*. But it is also etched in proper names (Judy Barton, Barlow Creek) or visual relays (cross bars, pub bars). This would denote a secret about the entire venture of the cinema that is being produced, viewed or consumed, since the very text that solicits the eye also precedes and entrances it. If we were to pursue this complex further, and why the bar-series translates aurally into this minimal form of knocking – like that under a table of a séance – we might better see why Hitchcock’s final trope for his cinema occurs in *Family Plot*. That is, his cinema as a seance in which a (fake) communion with the dead, accessing their memory (as is said), is deployed to recast the future –

and redispense of a proper legacy. The seance is not just theater, it regambles with time, the dead, the "past" itself, in the name of a prospective or future event.

While this problem may seem to be one of aesthetics more broadly, of (a)modernism and lingering problems of reading, even formalisms, I would like to raise a question I think is related still to *justice* in a broader sense.¹ That is, that something in Hitchcock remains of import to understanding cinema in its formal practice as an attempted intervention within perceptual programs and memory systems. Moreover, that the way in which these matters are theorized and practiced participates in – that is, records and produces itself as other in the process – the way the world is lived and interpreted. For "cinema" to turn against itself in Hitchcock could be of distant value to a report on gender violence in a different cultural setting. And the more so, today, when the discourse of social justice must be thought, and reconfigured, through and against a massive media and "global" telecommunicative transformation, in which the retention of "facts" for display or their effect is constantly repositioned and politically altered. So, if I was going to try to explain my hope here, it would be this: that the most canonical texts, when they are dismantling the conditions of power that their system derived from, retain a powerful claim to our attention, since they provoke the reconfiguration of representational programs we may well remain in the spell of. Moreover, that what comes of this interrogation into the terms of vision and the performative of woman relates exactly to questions emerging today – that is, what will come after identity politics, whose work is clearly not yet done (by far) but whose rhetoric has been, more than casually, assimilated to neo-conservative discourses.

For this "Hitchcock," one among others, there is a question about all of this which forbids returning to any definition of "home," be it a single language, a political faction, an auteurist model, the figure of "the gaze," or just a motel for the night. The "home" is predisinhabited by an alterity which, in turn, produces a new sort of hospitality to the Other: including summoning a post-human position beyond or outside

of what is performed as “male” and “female,” homosexualist or heterosexualist as categories. Moreover, rather than say even that a gender declension is being performed from “a” position, one could speak of a heterosexual pulsion or retreat being committed to or performed from a klepto-bi-homo-inflected position, itself being mapped in – or, by deception or design, against – the expectant gaze of another, real or non-existent logic. That is, there would be no unitary “positionality” *as such*, so that even supposed clear “homosexual” figures, female and male (but predominantly the latter), such as Brandon and Phillip or Bruno, require to be mapped *otherwise*.

II.

Questions are put to Memory, yet he defers answering that on Mae West. He will not say how long woman has been a premiere female impersonator, in particular “she” beneath the blonde hair. “Mae West” appears as a cartoon, half-bird, in *Sabotage*, the cartoon in which Cock Robin is shot with an arrow in song and the chorus “Who killed Cock Robin?” inscribes Hitchcock in Verloc’s death. That is, here the figure who moves between gender positions in a politically disruptive performance of “woman” as man as “woman” is placed between human and animal, animation and cinema – moving across all frontiers as an icon of sheer performativity. In *Frenzy*, the serial strangler Rusk notes that his mother used to say, “Beulah, peel me a grape” (a Mae West line identifying her as Rusk’s mother). Mae West, here, stands for an alternate space to woman-as-murdered, a token of the prosthetic and performative status of gender and desire. “She/he/it” locates a perspective outside of the seeming patriarchal state – a position of transvestisism and queer subject positions in every sense (and in this sense, too, not possible to code through a homosexualist poetics). She operates like a spirit or virus elsewhere throughout Hitchcock, however, assuring that Grace Kelly will not be found attractive by men, that Cary Grant will be homoerotically marked and James Stewart exposed as a desexed and lesser or unknowing Uncle Charlie within his iconic

everyman American. That is, the "Mae West" factor causes sexual power and positioning to enter a vertigo-like space of exchange and exposure even as the usual roles are remarked. (A kind of double-click.) The second consequence is what I call the exposure not of the patriarchy – indeed, in Hitchcock, the seeming father's position in the family is generally abdicated or vacant – but of a kind of *eunarchy* that is disguised as "patriarchy." That is, where male impersonation is performed, in turn, as the suppression of its own exposure as being without authority or authorship. In the process, a third space is opened.

But if Hitchcock seems to bracket the gender positioning in order to expose its sheer performativity he cannot get to the third model that this posits – a position outside of binarized genders. A site from which a certain *justice* in the future thinking of gender's legal status may need to emerge – and that in a post-humanist order.

I want to look at a couple of examples of this dislocation if I may – different ways that "woman" is placed as a reinvention and performance. The first is light, too light, you might say, the seduction scene in *To Catch a Thief*; the second is, in a sense, darker, even if it is the most classic final take on the ice-blonde to be marked or violated: the opening sequences of *Marnie*. I will only preface each of these with one observation, that part of the issue in Hitchcock of where "woman" is positioned, has to do with her relation to marking itself, to what receives inscription yet stands apart, too, from the archive she generates and haunts. Hence the association of whiteness – Alice White, Mme. Blanche, various blondes and "golden curls" – with woman as what receives a mark or marks. Hence, when we return in a moment to *Marnie*, whose male entrapper is named Mark, I will ask you to see in her a convergence of contradictory itineraries in Hitchcock. First, *Marnie* is the final reflexive and analytic meta-version of the cold blonde, refusing touch, operative in a marginal zone as sheer performance, theft of safes, numerous names, compulsive fiction-making. She is here the hyperbolic resistance, in effect, to a closed system of "male" properties. This is where a criminal metaphysics and its radical dismantling are jointly positioned in the Western female icon of the northern white

blonde – as thief, shape-shifter, compulsory liar, desexed, defacing, shrill. Secondly, her *name* installs her in a marking system that precedes the orders of the visible, but also suggests the negation of the Mar(k). I draw your attention, then, to this irony: that the very figure of gender idealization is intertwined, inextricably, with concerns of a graphematic sort. They cannot be separated out, which is why this trajectory in Hitchcock goes “beyond” gender binarization or an analytic of the serially murdered blonde in Western representation.

Before we proceed I want to differ, in the pursuit of justice, from some classic feminist uses of Hitchcock. While not current, the trope of the male “gaze” was famously mapped by Laura Mulvey against *Vertigo*, and Tania Modleski’s strong readings of Hitchcock as threatened *pater* relies on a reversal of the “auteur” model – Hitchcock as directing god, positive or negative – using the matricide of *Psycho* as one exemplary case.² Taking these two approaches as themselves exemplary, we will in a moment note that the “eye” in the first names film seems positioned not with the male gaze, if that exists, but quite otherwise (indeed, with “Judy”), and that in the case of “mother,” it is not at all clear that the role “she” occupies is even gendered or possible to possible to personify – thought pursuing such labyrinthine logics would involve more space that we have here. In any event, what is to be noted is that these classically feminist approaches rely on two ideologies that virtually repeat the structure they would, in essence, put in question: ocularcentrism and auteurism. These must be reconfigured if we address “Hitchcock” as an expanding marking-system or signature-system.

First to the example, itself extraordinary, of *Grace Kelly* – who seemed to almost knowingly participate in the double zone Hitchcock created for her with a sort of intuitive mirth, become another female female impersonator, with other implications. Grace Kelly, in this rostrum, bears a philosophically explosive import. Suffice it to say Hitchcock does something to her that operates like scare quotes around her – he cites her as a “woman,” emptying out her powers to evoke response, exposing a liminal order of ventriloquization to her. She then

has to re-invent it, simultaneously, but over a fault line that bars reassembly. I will note only that already in *Rear Window* and *Dial 'M' for Murder* Hitchcock denies Kelly the sexual attraction of James Stewart or Ray Milland – marking each with gender ambiguities of the first order in turn. She is a screen goddess exposed as a neuter performing what she expects to mark her space as desirable – only the fault line protrudes. *Rear Window* witnesses the “too perfect” Lisa having to create a narrative in which sexual interest could be fictionalized and then performed. In *To Catch a Thief* she is caught in a text about sheer simulation – of copy-cat thefts and the (non) difference between fakes and originals (diamonds, actors, history). And the result is her full scale assault on the invention of desire by barter against the “resistant” Cary Grant – who has been marked by homosexualist puns throughout the text, but in any case has had no attraction at all to Francie. Every word of dialogue becomes the re-citation of a script within a script.

Before I transcribe the dialogue, let me situate the scene: it is the fire-works or pyrotechnic scene at Nice following the famous picnic scene – throughout which “sex” presented itself as the subtext for what seemed incessant double-entendres. That is, if one could say with assurance that “sex” were the secret referent. Here the double text might also be using a fairly banal signified like sex as a non-secret decoy for some still other cipher or “secret.” *To Catch a Thief* is after all a *light* film, we repeatedly hear, too light or trifling, but it seems to know, and thereby alter this surmise, when it uses the word light so frequently – as in pointing out the maidservant Germaine’s “light touch.” Yet the phrase is explained otherwise: “She strangled a German general once, without a sound.” To which the reply: “A remarkable woman.” This “remarkable woman,” already associated with memory, could be heard as cutting off generation itself (Germaine, German, general), much as Mrs. Stevens (“mother”) will be witnessed in a shot putting out a cigarette in a sunnyside-up egg, what at once finds a “mother” canceling generation in advance, eggs, much as the rocky landscape will be shorn of trees, burned arid, and at the same time putting out both the eye and the sun, the “origin” of light. Whatever “mother” knows or signifies

she cancels in advance this trace-chain model of generation, power and knowledge. So too will the text appear trifling, or *light* in the other sense of being without gravity (*Ce n'est pas bien grave*, says a woman at the roulette table to Grant). Everything rises to rooftops, or cliffs, or goes "up- up- up" (as Hugheson says in referring to a "funicular railway") – so much so as to seem vacated by the circular logics of memory. There is no real "sight" if we tourists only see a light trifle before us, an escape to the Riviera and glamour (the point of the Travel Service window in the credit sequence when soliciting tourist viewers), what the *travel folders* program us to expect, unless a rupture is insisted upon – such as the black "cat" provides the robbed female tourists going into the film.

But what do we see then? And why is the eye itself indicted, or how?

When atop Robie's villa, the insurance agent H. H. Hugheson calls the latter a "travel folder heaven." While the Travel Service of the credit sequence marked the solicitation of tourists to this work, or inscription in it, "fold" is used elsewhere: when Robie/Grant is explaining how he got into jewel thieving/film acting after his traveling circus "folded." This folding as collapsing is also annotated by the first car chase along folds in the road (the picnic is staged within one), where Germaine is stopped by crossing sheep – a figure that, citing the stone bridge scene from *The 39 Steps*, recalls Mr. Memory. Inspector le Pic, giving chase, turns back, then again misses Robie who passes on a bus (with Hitchcock seated beyond a cage with a bird). *Travel folding*, here, is a doubling back of memory over itself, a turning back. The eye is pre-inhabited by this mnemonic system, like the graphic design that we see in the woman's eye in the credit sequence of *Vertigo*, which compels not only a blindness but a form at once of circularity and closure. Travel folder heaven is, as the name says, already an *afterlife* – and it is this that will be meant when Francie, who has caught Robie back at his villa at the end of the film, says: "Oh, mother will love it up here!" It is "mother" that will be there in fact, and what she will love is this cognitive trap or machine ("travel folder heaven"), this mnemonic implosion of

model and copy or mimesis generally that says the image you have implanted – like that of an advertisement – is what you will see. Like the aerial flight following the car-chase, the longest in Hitchcock and the only sustained panorama of “nature,” as if for once abandoning the camera to do its work unmolested. But nothing is further than the case, since what is demonstrated – a fact to which the viewer will or must be blind – is the evisceration of the earth by the camera (in the place, now, of aerial, mobile sun). Here is the problem – and this will lead back to the performance of “woman” – what we have been told to enjoy in the aerial track (and which won Hitchcock his only Oscar, for cinematography), promised by the Travel Service window as a “beautiful” Riviera landscape is, if we look, dry, treeless, and barren, a moonscape rather, except for what look like human dwellings etched almost in the cliffs. “We” do not see what we see, what we are looking at – and this burning away of trees by some kind of sun is underscored by Grant’s second pseudonym (Conrad Burns), a *logger* from “Portland, Oregon” (as if to say, origin).

The aerial shot is from a plane that, reappearing in *North by Northwest*’s cropduster scene, is already a sort of mechanical and attacking sun, displaced from any natural grid. It is a machine that positions our prosthetic “eye” in the place, too, of a sun. This seeing that is blinded or not seeing also partakes of the deforestation of the earthscape it pretends to be celebrating, as if scorching it not with fire or lightness alone but representational violence – an analogy of earth to woman’s corpse that returns in the opening of *Frenzy*. If the eye that views the screen is already both blind to it and partaking in its evisceration of natural images (trees) in a post-historical setting (the post-war Riviera), it would have, like Cyclops’, to be put out by the screen image as well – and this occurs, literally, in the fire-works scene, when a cold artificed light burns out the screen image altogether, to accompany the mock-Joycean analog of fireworks and a supposed orgasm, a possible *jouissance*.

There is a line of banter during a scene I will not fully explore which refers to “fighting fire with fire.” That is what we are given in the fire-works scene, which has the double effect, at its end, of blinding the tourist viewer’s (already blind) eye – a double negation that suggests, in its way, the opening of another scene to view. I will not dwell on the *technicity* of light and (cold) fire, neither will I address *seduction* – which is all that is being performed, or staged on every level. Several things gather here: the inability to touch, the substitute of the jewel (itself imitation) for sex in luring Grant in a parody of seduction – for here, again, the sexes stand at an acme of distance and proximity, in the exposure of a fictionalization and analytic of artifice of desire. The dialogue runs (with my italics):

“Doesn’t it make you nervous to be in a room with thousands of dollars of diamonds and *unable to touch them?*”

“No.”

“Like an alcoholic outside of a *bar* on election day.”

“Wouldn’t know the feeling.”

“Alright. You’ve studied the layout, drawn your plan, worked out your timetable, put on your dark clothes with your crepe-sole shoes, and your *rope*, maybe your face blackened. And you’re over the roof in the darkness, down the side wall, to the right apartment – and the window’s locked. All that elation turned to frustration. What would you do?”

“I’d go home and get a good night’s sleep.”

“Oh, what would you do, the thrill is right there in front of you, but you can’t quite get it. And the gems glistening on *the other side of the window*. And someone’s asleep – breathing heavily.”

“I’d go home and get a good night’s sleep.”

“Wouldn’t you use a glass cutter, a brick, your fist, anything to get what you wanted –when it was just there waiting for you. . . Drinking dulls your *senses*.”

“Yeah, and if I’m lucky *some of my hearing*.”

"Blue-white. With just hairline touches of platinum."

"You know, I have about the same interest in jewelry as I do in politics, horse-racing, *modern poetry*, and women who need weird excitement – none."

"What do you say?"

"My only comment would be *highly censorable*."

"Give up John. Admit who you are. Even in this light I can tell where you're eyes are looking. Look, John, hold *them* – diamonds, the only thing in the world you can't resist. *Then tell me you don't know what I'm talking about.* (*Kisses his fingertips, then places necklace on his hand.*) Ever had a better *offer* in you're whole life – one with *everything*."

(*Fire-works going off with increasing light bursts.*)

"I never had a *crazier* one."

"Just as long as you're satisfied."

"You know as well as I do this necklace is *imitation*."

"We'll I'm not."

(*Kiss, cut to exploding fire-works that expand to burn and proceed to consume and white-out all visuals in the frame.*)

A simulated woman, impersonated, before a neutered male. The motivation for seduction – using (fake) diamonds as bait, by "Francie" and by the screen – is other. Barred touching, seduction by supplantation (sex for the place of the original, the jewel, itself imitation), a certain double-entendre. Now, what does this dialogue – the height of pointless artifice and role playing, at the epitome of Western triviality – have to do with women and social justice? Well, obviously nothing – or everything: it is, after all, an "offer" with "everything," we hear, one we can't refuse, no strings or barter, just substitution of sex for jewels, supposed reals for supposed "imitations" (which Francie certainly is too, triply so in the film). But with all this double talk two things: first, the exploding fireworks is also cold, a technical or fake "sun," hence not a token of *jouissance* but the cold citation of the association of *jouissance*, detaching the metaphor from a site obliterating visual traces

momentarily – the dismissal, also, of Joyce’s play with this trope in *Ulysses* as amateurish or novelistic. When Francie says “*tell me you don’t know what I’m talking about,*” the text admits it cannot say, since the “secret” referent of the nearly obscene double-entendre has lost its referent between the imitation diamonds and the imitation Francie-Kelly. Indeed, Kelly gets inscribed in the text, not only with references to getting “out of this gracefully,” or in the lobby scene in the hotel where tourists are gaping at Grace Kelly, but in life, in fact, ever after (that is, she will stay in Monaco, become the fairy-tale princess of the Riviera she fakes in the film, and die, eventually, in a car crash no less, at the spot of the picnic in the film: just another victim of Hitchcock’s consuming machine). The loss of “reference” as a moment that burns through, as it were, to another reading model is inscribed in *Marnie* as well. We might say that is where the latter film begins or opens, with *Marnie* said by Strutt to be without “references.”

The pyrotechnic scene exposes a certain degenderization before the artificial “sun” of the post-historical Riviera – a Mediterranean *logos* in which gods wander like ghosts (Hephaestus, Prometheus), itself without a map (“The Mediterranean” – that is, middle-earth – “used to be this way,” quips Kelly), where the *logos* itself is shattered (the broken “*parole*” the text speaks of). “Sex” is inflected in this referential interstice of censorship, yet it is not the ultimate reference or secret since it seems, if anything, more generated by the implications of there being an obscene secret here (which must be “sex”), than designated as such. Indeed, a rift opens as reference pours out of the very possibility of the whited-out screen, the cold non-sun which cannot, after all, fully signify orgasm either (while there is allusion to sex, it is oblique – as when “mother” asks Francie what Robie stole from her – and both Grant and Kelly appear fully clothed, unwrinkled, and apart, in the subsequent scene). Hence – and this, again, is under the gaze of Mae West, we might say – “sex” seems itself a stand in, perhaps, for another secret, that of a deeper transformation within the text which a passing definition of the censored or obscene (“would be highly *ensorable*”) cannot fully contain or define.

But now I want to swing forward to *Marnie*, where the idea of the blonde "model" has contracted to a fine distillation – one presented in the opening scene, when Marnie runs through her series of aliases as a thief by going through social security cards with numerous Mar-names on them (among them Marion and Mary) as potentially absorbing all the names of the blonde thieves and criminals, performers and liars at the prominent edge of Hitchcock's texts. (This system of blondes could be read as finally mocked by the pair, Mme. Blanche and Fran (with blonde wig), in *Family Plot*.) I invite you to note several things in these opening vignettes. We view Marnie from the back walking on a train station with double-tracks, site of cinema (as if, say, where Uncle Charlie falls to the tracks of the oncoming cars – although here the station is deserted), later with numerous names beginning with the Mar-signature already noted. And what we hear from the interview with Strutt, who is the latest victim of theft, the crude figure of male power who Marnie sets up and despoils, caught not only in an erotic fantasy. As he tries to account for her to the attendant detectives, we hear: that she is identified with legs (the feet or material traces and legacies that run through Hitchcock, preceding *The 39 Steps*); that she is spoken of as *without* "references," that is, a signifier void of past traces (other than disguised ones); and that she is called something resonant by James Bond (Sean Connery). Specifically, Connery observes that she is "resourceful," the *repetition* of a "source" which, as repetition, is not a source or is its negation, a mark that is not a mark. She refuses, in this sense, the names and references that are imposed on her.

Marnie, as name, not only *absorbs* all of the female Mar- names, indicated by the array of Social Security cards with names like Mary and Marion (Crane) that we see before we are allowed to identify 'Tippi' Hedren's face, moving behind each and turning against the forces of serial evisceration they may have encountered – turning upon, and despoiling, not only "male" desire but the capital, and semantics, of that marking system, even as she goes up against another Mark, Mark Rutledge, heir to a firm that publishes books. Yet the real scandal of Marnie is not her lying and thieving, her frigidity and ritually

unpersuasive groveling before the ex-prostitute “mother.” It is that she enters the film – and stands in for Hitchcock’s cinema here, and in general – as voided of the rituals of “sexuality” altogether, and she must be tamed, lured, blackmailed, and stupefyingly tutored to appear to assent to re-enter it, if that will keep her out of jail. In Hitchcock’s calculus, she is ground zero.

III.

Marnie represents a political subversion of a putative phallosemantic order, the virgin inversion of the space of prostitution her mother, Bernice Edgar, will be found to have occupied. Only this, too, as the *eunarchy* represented too by the book production business of Rutland Publishing. She occupies a *para*-site the way Mr. Memory does in *The 39 Steps*. As a recasting of the problematic of *Spellbound*, where the amnesiac Gregory Peck must discover why he is haunted by the bar-series pattern, Marnie seems to be led back to the discovery of the suppressed memory-trauma, the killing of the sailor or John visiting her mother from which, the film pretends, the red-motif stems.³ Yet that is also something of a screen memory or front, as Bernice Edgar, Marnie’s mother, drifts into reverie about Marnie’s origin, how she had her. That is: her first act of prostitution, she traded sex for Billy’s basketball sweatshirt. Nice enough – except that Billy will be echoed in the zombie children’s chant outside, in the word “ill” (“Mother, mother, I am ill, / Send for the Doctor on the hill”), as it is echoed in the sister-in-law’s name, Lil, putting out these letters as another bar-series signature (ill, / / /), Marnie’s progenitor as marker without source – *re*-sourceful. This precession of source is what, like that of the sun, introduces a *movement of justice* across Hitchcock’s work, resistant to any identificatory inscription that is not mobile in its positional politics. When Tania Modleski speaks of “women who knew too much” in the sense of women who threatened “Hitchcock” with a sexual knowledge, she drifts back into the patriarchal rhetoric involved in positing a patriarchal order of identities. Instead, we may speak of how “woman”

occupies a zone of counter-signatures referenced to marking or writing systems at work within the film texts – in which the representation of “woman” or male contracts of control are put, instantly, in question, and this from the position we ascribed earlier to “Mae West.”

The character Marnie brings the full saturation of the positioned blonde to a site of crossing – of being allowed to circulate endlessly as thief and subverter, or being transformed into some other logic following the impasse of those systems. Marnie is not human, already is a machinal figure, a place where the “mark” is exposed and withdrawn from any personification herself. *Referenceless*, without references, she is a point of passage and transformation for her thefts, her undoing of a patriarchist institution that is running, has been running, on empty, that persists over its own non-existence.⁴

The multiplicitous agencies and installed mnemonic transformations we call “Hitchcock” cannot be returned to an auteur-like archive, film-theory, or entirely a gendered itinerary. Marnie’s fiction making to account for herself in the car with Mark, an extraordinary vignette of sheer performativity and “lying,” seems paradigmatic. It is in transit. Between two systems. In the one, the murder of the blonde is accelerated, already serially caught in an infinity of repetitions with the inaugural text and pretext of *The Lodger*. In the second, the blonde is thief and criminal, all-names, a marring machine as detached from romance or sex as “mother” is from origination or source. Here the work persists as a performative intervention within a historial system. From *this* side of the frame or divide, the “patriarchist” institution is itself a performative covering a broader neuterism or eunarchy. Beyond that, an allohuman site or agency is posited before which the sexed or gendered subject would have to position, mime and perform itself along multiple planes.

One more fold.

Nothing in *Vertigo* compels us to view the narrative through “Scottie’s” eyes – on the contrary, the text could be generated in the first half through Judy’s knowing performance as Madeleine for “Scottie,” according to Elster’s script (a male to male assault behind the set-up).

He follows her to a flower shop and stares through a crack in a mirrored door, not aware she is aware of him looking, is posing, buying the set-up flowers like Carlotta, gazing off while seducing. Moreover, if "Scottie" has to fall for the haunted woman act – that is, all of popular cinema and literature, in petto – to be in love, and this in a mock Oedipal move no doubt anticipated by Elster, he also comes to the position he denied when Elster asked him if he believed that the dead can return and harm the living (the condition of cinema). Only here, the dead does not even exist, "Madeleine" was a non-existent ghost or figure, an implant – and the "past" is sucked up into the complex of a memory fold or knot. So one knows that when Judy, finally, puts on Carlotta's pendant and asks "Scottie" to fix it, it is not altogether an accident, a stupidity, but a gesture of victory and a defacement of "Scottie's" pretended authorship (which is not even his). Pure evisceration. Thus it is a mistake to speak of the "male gaze," and this altogether, if that must be fixed to some entity, consumer or camera, or even some gender position as such – since it is a wandering effect, a prop in turn. On the contrary, it is the woman's eye in the credits that we see, rather than just look at, and this eye is prosthetic, preinhabited by a graphic design or moebius strip in ceaseless transformation. Like the vertiginous logic that allows one to be inhabited by a "past" and a dead that never were – and the exposure of that driving, dispossessing mnemonic as a replaceable referent, as without references too. On the belltower at the end "Scottie" complains that Judy was a "very apt pupil," trained by Elster but also the only knowing position of the look, alone witness to and partaking in all roles of the performances, "wandering" within narrative folds.

But even this "eye" is not hers, in so far as "she" is already a citational performance – like the *face* she says she just put on, warning "Scottie" that it is not to be mussed. Thus, in *To Catch a Thief*, "mother" puts the cigarette out into the egg as eye, as sun, as generation, the eye becomes a trope for a matrilineal operation. Before this location of a "mother" who is not one, not that is a *she*, not a gendered binary or origin, an *it* perhaps, but something like a marking system more generally – the non-place where inscriptions bring forth world and

program memory – the eye loses its priority in a model supposing a transparency and hegemony of vision. When, in *Frenzy*, references are made to “Dick-O” Blaney, as if two genital markers were interfaced, mirrored in the fetish necktie with its circle-collar and dangling tie, or in *Family Plot* when Lumley promises Blanche in bed a “standing ovation” – where an erection is interfaced with an “O” figure marked as female (ovarian) – tropes are put in play which retire the binary war of genital markers, the phallic above all.⁵

The gaze or non-gaze of Mae West, so to speak, is not that of a given position on a binary map of gender violence and performance. It has no aura. It also splits with the tourist apparatus of classical film or cinema, with a turn toward “mother,” toward the graphematics of the mark, which seems through its very *referencelessness* (its refusal of identification or the “gaze”) to exceed and deface the props and performances of viewing Hitchcock as “film” alone. Something else is happening here, something like a re-inscription. What we are calling the gaze of Mae West positions Hitchcock’s cinema as a vehicle toward a post-human recalibration of gender positioning and performance – having steeped this production in the full-blown logics of violence and specular destruction of woman and, simultaneously, accelerated that to mark its inversion, as with *Marnie*. No men, no women: figures that “act” both in a general spectrology and mnemotechnic. This is also to say, however, that a figure like “justice” circulates in these writing systems as a sort of translational project and agency. It positions us, as Benjamin proposes, at a site where the “past” can be intervened in and re-inscribed, outside of personification. Within the autocritique of Western prosthetics, “Hitchcock” is one name for a transformation of mnemonic inscription that includes a defacement of binarized gender differencing as a cultural performance. But this can only happen within a vaster rewriting of vision, of light itself (the *pyrotechnic*), of any memory that is structured and preceded by the bar-series in its vagrant forms of inscription, of agency, of the event. A formal event, perhaps remote in many ways from the issues of “social justice” that preoccupy us here, today. Or perhaps not. A matter of machines, and how we see,

of reading models and the break-down of sacrificial orders – “woman” by and in this machine. Nonetheless, within the discourse we call “cinema,” it operates like the seance opening *Family Plot* – where Mme. Blanche’s medium, the ghost-medium who relays the memories of the dead to the living, to give the latter direction, so to speak, is named Henry, an “H” names stand-in – and in which various futures appear to be recast. It is this, anyway, which I put before you as a problem to consider.

Notes

- 1 A version of this paper was first presented as a keynote address at an International Conference on “Gender and Equity Issues: Humanistic Considerations for the 21st Century,” at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand, January 6, 2000.
- 2 See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 30-36 and Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, “Introduction.”
- 3 Lee Edelman, in a path-breaking essay, “*Rear Window’s* Glasshole,” references the red-light of the flash bulbs used by Jeff to momentarily arrest the advance of Thorwald to a logic of the cut: “a graphic inscription of a hole: a red hole that thoroughly saturates and eclipses the image of Jefferies himself, radiating outward from his body until it bleeds across the whole screen. . . . a purely rhythmic repetition” (86). He accelerates this figure to exceed binarized psychoanalytic or gendered poetics, positioning a semio-anality – under the guise of homopoetics – that exceeds, as referee, any genital mapping (phallic or otherwise). To close one’s eyes to the object-refusing insistence of that hole, to focus, instead, with some versions of feminism, on a visual logic imagined as wholly and unproblematically phallic, or to search, like Ernest Jones, for a feminist alternative to the phallus in a genital game for which the phallus continues to function, however invisibly, as referee, must leave a gaping hole in the discourses of cinema, sexuality, and vision: the hole of an originary cut that the cut of castration, despite its repeated efforts to cut it from the picture, must, perversely, by means of that very cutting, always – if blindly – preserve.” (92)
- 4 In the archive of “modernist” moments, Marnie’s evisceration of “female” expectations – an absolute female nihilism that exposes the “female” performative or would – distantly echoes that of Addie Bundren in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*.

- 5 This sort of punning goes back to *Murder!* when Sir John is woken in his bed by an innkeeper's children and a running cat, with the little girl reaching under Sir John's bedcover looking for her "pussy."

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