



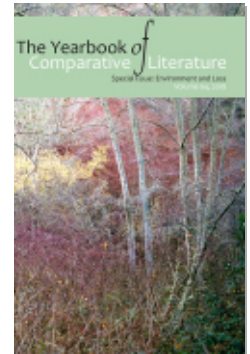
PROJECT MUSE®

Cinematic Genre and Viewer Engagement in Hitchcock's
Psycho

James Conant

The Yearbook of Comparative Literature, Volume 64, 2018, pp. 228-322
(Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/861491>

Cinematic Genre and Viewer Engagement in Hitchcock's *Psycho*

James Conant

Abstract: Alfred Hitchcock's admirers are fond of praising his work for being cinematically innovative. This article seeks to determine wherein his achievement in this regard lies. It begins by reflecting on the ways in which his movies harbor a form of "false bottom"—one that characterizes the new form of cinematic genre that Hitchcock pioneers. It then examines some of the particular ways in which this allows for novel kinds of viewer engagement. It does so, in particular, by attending to the forms of cinematic invisibility and disclosure enabled by the shower scene in *Psycho*. That this scene is somehow remarkable is hardly news. Yet in priding ourselves on being struck by its cinematic virtuosity, we are apt to fail to appreciate how that impression deflects our attention from the scene's real achievement—namely, the extent to which it enables the following five maneuvers all to be performed simultaneously in a manner permitting none of them to strike us on a first viewing: (1) the mediation of a transition from one organizing center of narrative subjectivity to another; (2) the dilation of the temporality of the scene in a manner that facilitates a registration of its significance; (3) a mode of aestheticization of the horror of the scene that opens up space for a very different form of experience of cinematic shock; (4) the artful concealment of the murderer's identity requisite to the unfolding of its plot; and (5) the consolidation of a "false bottom" in the movie's generic structure found throughout Hitchcock's masterworks.

Keywords: aesthetic medium, aesthetics, genre, Hitchcock, film noir, film theory

Prelude: The Aesthetic Category of a Hollywood Film Genre

When Hitchcock arrived from England and saw the technicians standing in line with their lunch boxes, under the clock, at the door of Warner Brothers, he anxiously asked himself if, amidst all this hubbub, film could possibly still be concerned with creating a form of fine art. (Bazin, "Hitchcock" 161)

It is worth remembering that there was a time—in the 1950s and 1960s—when the claims made by Alfred Hitchcock's most ardent admirers were simply laughed at.¹ Their claims seemed to their critics to ascribe forms of aesthetic ambition to works of popular entertainment that could not possibly harbor such ambitions—works that self-evidently aimed to do no more than to entertain or amuse us.² The admirers claimed that Hitchcock's best movies represented exemplary instances of cinematic fine art, while the critics held that such a claim rests on a category mistake. This particular battle for aesthetic prestige has long since been won. But, before we attempt to articulate wherein the greatness of a Hitchcock movie lies, it is worth reflecting for a moment on the sources of this initial reflex reaction to the very idea of such an attempt—not because Hitchcock's work is still widely dismissed but, rather, because we now too easily take it for granted that it should not be dismissed. This allows the assumptions undergirding those early dismissals to continue to exert influence, shaping and distorting our understanding of wherein Hitchcock's now widely acknowledged accomplishment may be presumed to lie. This can cause us to overlook something significant about the form of that work—namely, the manner in which his movies are designed to leave themselves vulnerable to precisely such forms of dismissal: how the character of their achievement is internally related to their mode of self-presentation as dismissible in just these ways.

Three interrelated sets of grounds are adduced in these early dismissals: (1) Hitchcock is making popular films; therefore, he cannot be making great art;³ (2) the kind of pleasure his films afford is that of entertainment; hence, they are not serious;⁴ and (3) they are genre films, whereas serious art films are cinematically innovative, necessitating an eschewal of all preexisting genre conventions.⁵ Each such imputation of something akin to a category mistake rests on an implicit invocation of a supposedly mutually exclusive category distinction—popular versus great, entertaining versus serious, genre film versus cinematic art. The early Hitchcock skeptics charged his early admirers

with eliding or transgressing one or more of these distinctions. The viability of such charges turn on the cogency of the following assumptions: (1) it is impossible to make a movie that outwardly embodies the features of popular cinema required for widespread commercial success while inwardly harboring the sort of ambition that animates great art;⁶ (2) a work of art cannot at one and the same time thoroughly entertain its beholder and engage her with the seriousness of purpose characteristic of fine art;⁷ and (3) the very structure of a genre film precludes the forms of creativity and innovation that are the hallmarks of great art.⁸ These assumptions present obstacles to understanding not only the relatively narrow aesthetic category of the Hitchcock movie but also the very broad aesthetic category of the Hollywood movie.

Let us subject these assumptions to brief scrutiny, focusing especially on the third one. The early Hitchcock skeptics were by no means alone in holding that an insurmountable obstacle to regarding even the greatest of Hollywood movies as examples of fine art was their supposed subservience to certain “fixed” forms or conventions, such as in the case of Westerns, for example, the “familiar setting” (the western town replete with saloon, brothel, jail, and so on), the “stereotypical character” (the sheriff, the gunslinger, the whore with a golden heart, and so on), the “happy ending,” and so forth. On the understanding of the matter under scrutiny, a movie’s obedience to such conventions hampers its capacity for aesthetically significant expression. Attempts to spell out such a claim tend to bring in the other two assumptions mentioned above and, hence, implicit presuppositions about what popular art cannot do and what fine art must be like. The latter sort of presupposition (about the nature of fine art) has its source in a genuine truth about how for many of the other arts concurrent with the advent of the age of cinema the modernist predicament had become inescapable. It had come to seem to be the mark of seriousness in a work of art that it split its audience into insiders and outsiders—that the very manner in which it partook of the artistic tradition it sought to inherit outwardly appeared to challenge and overturn that very tradition. This genuine truth about the condition that came to characterize many of the arts becomes a questionable dogma once it is converted into a requirement that must hold equally of any art form and, hence, of the cinema.

Thus, with the advent of the modernist era, the very idea of a form of art that aspires to high aesthetic achievement and yet acquiesces in the

established aesthetic conventions of a preexisting popular medium comes to seem a contradiction in terms.⁹ There is often a further presupposition at work here about the nature of popular art under the conditions of capitalism. It finds its source in truths about how the principles governing the construction of the least interesting of Hollywood's products are functions of their effort to capitalize on our appetites for what J.S. Mill has called "lower pleasures."¹⁰ A no less questionable dogma is erected, and dubious requirements on aesthetic theorizing are insinuated, however, when such putatively inexorable commercial considerations are converted into the aesthetic dictum that the very fact that a movie participates in a preexisting Hollywood genre suffices to show that its manner of construction must be wholly subordinated to the telos of achieving popular appeal and, hence, it must be designed to enthrall rather than to enlighten.

On the ensuing picture of things, the entire construction of a Hollywood genre film is to be analyzed in terms of the ways in which it seeks to ingratiate itself with its audience. This idea is often combined with the further idea that the manner in which such works seek to pander to their audiences itself serves to reinforce dominant preexisting societal, economic, or ideological structures. The modes of audience solicitation that a critic enamored of this form of theory ends up discovering in the objects of her attention invariably "turn out" to conform to the requirements on a Hollywood movie antecedently laid down by her theory. The results of such exercises in critical attention, in turn, are adduced as evidence offering apparent empirical confirmation of the theory. When the focus of the investigation shifts from ideological critique back to aesthetic reflection, it has already been predetermined that the object of attention that comes into view through such an investigation—the Hollywood movie—must, almost by definition, be classified as something necessarily devoid of the sorts of innovation and aesthetic ambition required of an exemplary instance of fine art.

This way of thinking about the products of Hollywood has three immediate consequences worth making explicit. First, it issues in an *a priori* license to regard an entire body of cinematic work as reducible to a single system of intelligibility—that of the so-called "Hollywood system." The characteristic marks of such films, a certain sort of sophisticated theorist will tell us, are symptoms of the more general principles governing the culture industry. If we are in the thrall of this way of thinking, then we will assume that any

American movie possessing the outward aspect of a Hollywood genre film must for that very reason be a mere plaything of forces that serve larger social and economic interests. Any commodity produced by such an industry is understood to be subject to laws that, due to their very nature, lie beyond the scope of anything the movie itself can possibly possess the resources to critically engage. Once such an attitude is firmly in place, the idea will not so much as occur that such a movie might itself be concerned with the thematization and critique of the very forms of appetite and interest that the so-called critic, in his knowingness, takes such a movie to be designed merely to satisfy. And, of course, what it does not occur to one to look for, one does not even try to look for and that which one thinks one cannot look for, one generally fails to notice.

The second consequence of this way of thinking about genre films is that an extraordinary degree of aesthetic indiscriminateness ensues—a degree of indiscriminateness that would be immediately experienced as comical if it arose in the criticism of any (other) serious art form. So, for example, John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* and a Tom Mix "horse opera" will come to be treated as participants of equal standing in the delineation of the genre of the Western: as equally full-blooded instances of the kind. This means that each of these two films—one great and one silly—come to be regarded as harboring resources of equivalent status for articulating why the genre, over the course of its realization, obeys the logic it does. The form of indiscriminateness at issue here governs not only the initial moment of classification of instances but also the subsequent moment of theoretical reflection upon the works thus classified—for, in aesthetic reflection, these two moments cannot be independent of another. This leads to a preoccupation with generic features as shamelessly undifferentiated as, say, "the principle of the femme fatale" adducible by a certain kind of theorist as "partially constitutive" of "the genre of film noir" as such.¹¹ The femme fatale principle will be enunciated by the indiscriminate critic not only as equally operative but also as equally uncritically operative in the greatest of the classical film noirs and in the most meretricious of recent neo-noirs. Moreover, the operation of the principle in the films thus grouped together will largely be reduced to an understanding of the operation of forces at work in the enviroing society that produces these films—a society that we already know is, say, patriarchal, voyeuristic, in the grip of a castration anxiety, or so on.

So the role of the film becomes simply that of an object of cultural expression that obeys a requirement that has been theorized independently, prior to our engagement with the object of aesthetic investigation itself. The role of a Hollywood film, on this conception, again remains limited to one of illustrating the truth of a theory to which we are antecedently committed. On this conception of the theoretical place of the concept of Hollywood film genre in aesthetic theorizing, the crucial matters into which we need to achieve insight (in order to take the measure of the movies categorized via the concept) turn out to be matters that we can fully come to understand apart from watching these films. This yields the conclusion on which the aforementioned form of indiscriminateness is really based: that Hollywood genre films can have nothing fundamental to teach us beyond what they can reveal simply by reflecting the societal order that produces them. No sense is to be made of the idea that such a film might embody forms of understanding adequate to the task of emancipating us from our attachment to such theories.

This immediately brings us to the third consequence of this way of thinking: a flattening out of the concept of a Hollywood genre. To say that the concept of a Hollywood genre comes to be “flattened out” means, first, negatively, that it is not treated as a properly aesthetic concept—that is to say, one whose internal logic can be articulated only in the light of reflection upon a viewer’s own aesthetic experience of the objects to be brought under that concept, such as his or her experience of the very entity (one that is, after all, essentially made in order to be experienced) that the form of inquiry purports to classify. When properly conducted and directed at such an entity, aesthetic inquiry calls for a certain form of theoretical activity—one that seeks to bring to reflective self-consciousness the conditions of the possibility of that form of experience and wherein its significance lies. This is a form of reflection that demands an order of discrimination in the exercise of our power of aesthetic judgment achievable only through sustained acts of criticism—through attentive critical engagement with individual works. If we are dealing with a genuinely aesthetic cinematic concept (say, a genre concept such as the Western or the Film Noir), then only in the light of full readings of individual movies can that which we seek to understand through the deployment of such a concept properly reveal itself.

The result of (what I have called above) a flattening out of the concept of a film genre is that it comes to look as if what makes a particular movie

the member of such and such a genre is literally nothing more than its merely “possessing” such and such outward features, regardless of how it takes them up, what it seeks to make of them, or what forms of aesthetic attention and engagement it thereby comes to be able to invite and sustain. Thus, for example, on the flattened out conception, for a movie to be a Western, it need do no more than simply “instantiate” a great many of, say, the following features: it takes place in the West, where there are guns, horses, stagecoaches, a saloon, a sheriff, a good guy, a bad guy, and so on. This is a hopeless way to go about articulating an aesthetically illuminating concept of genre. No such set of features could ever be sufficient.¹² And no such set could be necessary.¹³ Does it render a movie no longer a Western if the sheriff collects all the guns so that the form a showdown takes is that of a knife fight; or if the location of the environment that represents “the West” is that of the Australian outback; or if railroad tracks are laid far enough into the frontier that “the West” is no longer beyond the reach of legal and economic forces operative in (what a traditional Western calls) “the East”? Indeed, often what confers on a member of a genre its aesthetic interest has to do with how it forgoes or challenges an antecedently established generic convention. The inner dynamic of such a member is a function of the ways in which it goes about mischievously messing with, or apparently dispensing with, some hitherto omnipresent surface feature of a genre, thereby permitting the exploration of the consequences of its attenuation or abrogation. It is only through attention to such genuinely innovative instances—to how each one enables participation in the genre in a new way, transposing articulation of its so-called “features” into new registers—that we arrive at a genuinely illuminating understanding of the terms in which one ought to specify the genre itself, thereby better coming to understand its logic as a whole, hence which other candidates qualify as significant instances of the aesthetic category thereby delimited.

The foregoing remarks have sought to indicate a certain direction of answer to the following question: what would it mean to arrive at an adequately demanding (that is, a non-flattened out) concept of a particular Hollywood genre serviceable for the purposes of aesthetic inquiry? Here is one rudimentary sort of difference between the sorts of films one must be able to get into view in order to single out the most fruitful starting points for an investigation into such a category: the difference between a film that

comparatively unimaginatively participates in a preexisting genre and one that inherits it by exemplifying the possibilities internal to it in unprecedented ways, cinematically reflecting upon latent dimensions of its inner logic. An appreciation of this point, in turn, requires no longer thinking of “the” features of a genre as anything like necessary or sufficient conditions for membership. Indeed, the very way in which a movie fails to exemplify a conventionally anticipated feature can itself constitute its mode of innovative inheritance and, hence, wholehearted embrace of the genre.¹⁴ So that something that from one perspective looks like the mere absence of a feature—from the vantage of a more illuminating account—can (through attention to the manner in which its absence is compensated for) be revealed to be that feature’s mode of presence, thereby further acknowledging the depth of the significance of the feature in question—the impossibility of merely subtracting it without consequence for the inner logic that animates every other aspect of the genre. Such a discovery, in turn, will require rethinking what that feature really is. This will necessitate a formulation of the thematic field of the genre at a higher level of abstraction, one at which comparatively material marks of the genre (such as guns, outlaws, sheriffs, and so on) increasingly give way to comparatively formal ones (modes of interrelation of violence, law, the emergence of civil society, and so on), permitting a less shallow comprehension of what the real meaning of “the” feature in question is.¹⁵ This, in turn, requires no longer settling for a comprehension of the genre that rests on a mere enumeration of material marks—hence, the emergence of a demand to comprehend how the generic themata intertwine. A deeper comprehension will aspire to exhibit how an appropriately circumscribed conception of the genre may bring to reflective consciousness (as variously operative in each of its instances) a formal aesthetic category—that is, a distinctively revelatory cinematic form in its own right—with the aim of illuminating why the form in question non-accidentally attracts the specific varieties of content that it does.

As the critic comes to be able to account for why our generic expectations are simultaneously frustrated (through the apparent omission of a putatively canonical feature) and satisfied (through its compensation)—hence, as her aesthetic comprehension of what makes a given movie, say, a Western comes to turn less and less on considerations as shallow as the mere presence of guns or a sheriff or a westward location—the very form of her reflective elaboration of the features that pervade the genre as a whole will increasingly

take on the aspect of philosophy. It begins to assume the form of (what the German masters of this branch of philosophical aesthetics—Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Walter Benjamin, or Peter Szondi—call) *Gattungstheorie*. The form of account of the genre will operate at a plane of reflection that permits an ever more penetrating characterization of the features that at the outset were provisionally identified merely through its most evident and superficial outward marks. An activity that begins with mere low-level observation (noting, for example, that guns are often omnipresent, outlaws tend to tangle with sheriffs, and the West is wild) gives way to one of reflective aesthetic comprehension (of, for example, the thematic significance within the formal structure of the Western of the immediacy of recourse to firearms, the improvisatory character of law when embodied in a single individual, or the fragility of justice in the absence of an administrative state).

What such an activity of reflective comprehension seeks to do is to think out the genre. Before we turn to Hitchcock, it will be useful to have before our mind's eye a schematic illustration of what it means to do this in connection with a specific case of a genre. Let us continue with our present example of the Western.¹⁶ As the theorist of the Western ascends to this higher reflective plane in the comprehension of the genre, the exemplary Western can be discovered to be concerned not only to ask, but also to explore and test answers to questions such as the following: why does the concept of America demand a genre that is a cinematic successor to literary genres such as the epic and the saga; why do the events depicted on the screen partake of both a mythic and an elegiac dimension; why must they be located at the frontier—on the outskirts of civilization—requiring a new founding of civil society? Even if civil society requires tolerable forms and degrees of violence, justifiable from within the reality of a social order (in which the law is generally stronger than the gun), to what extent does its initial actualization require a form of justice outside the law and, hence, require forms of contest not only between sheriff and outlaw but also between virtuous and vicious outlaw?¹⁷ Does the possibility of the transition to this new form of “Western” social reality require a new form of hero? Why can such a hero have no place in the eventual post-heroic bourgeois order whose inception his capacity for improvised justice makes possible? Is such a world (without heroes but with law) better or worse than the one it replaces? Should we rejoice at or regret

the fact that the hero must ride off into the sunset (or somehow otherwise literally or symbolically be ushered offstage at the end of the movie)? May one regret what one understands to be necessary to the realization of the innermost ends of one's society (and, therefore, in a sense, one's own ends)? How should we reckon the cost of the triumph of law over lawlessness? At what point does justified violence in the service of the good shade into the mere violence of evil? Can one effect the transition to a genuinely legal order without first overshooting the mark where one wants to draw that line? Does willingness to enter into a state of civil society necessarily involve such a moment of practical contradiction? Can such a contradiction (not only between the hero and society but also between violence and law) itself be resolved? Does its resolution call for a new form of social reality—one that is capable of sublating the aporia of the improvised code of the hero and the non-negotiable claims of the law?¹⁸

Am I seriously wanting to claim that a great Hollywood Western is the kind of object that embodies reflection on such topics? Am I suggesting that a genre as unapologetically American and commercially popular as the Western harbors such philosophical ambitions? Yes, I am happy to make this claim.¹⁹ But its justification would require more than an article.²⁰ The topic of this article until now has been far more modest. It has simply been to highlight the importance of questions such as the following: What theoretical background assumptions must be firmly in place for these sorts of claims to sound as patently absurd as they generally do to a certain sort of theorist? What is the logical shape of an aesthetically demanding category of Hollywood film genre? How might the articulation of such categories bring to light forms of constriction in our thinking that hamper not only our efforts to think about movies but also the dimensions of our lives upon which they invite us to reflect? Such questions indicate how a critical understanding of genre films may serve as an especially illuminating case of the problem of understanding the achievement of Hollywood cinema more generally.²¹ For what we really want to understand here is this: how is it that our sympathetic forms of participation in lives that unfold within the world of a movie have the recurring power to enable us to discover what it is that we really think in our lives outside the movies, enabling us to distinguish it from what we merely think we think?²²

The joy of coming to fathom the depths of a great Hollywood genre film involves discovering how much can be dared in the creation of a new

form, how much can be transformed from within through the continuation of an existing form, and how much can still be productively ventured in the complication or destruction of a nearly exhausted form. The historically unfolding thematic field of a cinematic genre therefore demands a complex relation between the compulsions of the past, the freedoms of the present, and the uncertainties of inheritance that attend the future. The hallmark of the great genre film therefore resides not so much in its dazzling flashes of inspiration, attention-grabbing flourishes, or overt declarations of seriousness of purpose, as they do in its deep and often outwardly invisible forms of exploration of cinematic craft.

Through a constant interplay between the contours of the prior history of a genre and those of its present instance, genre films are able to achieve forms of aesthetic complexity unachievable outside of participation in a genre, while doing so through the employment of means undetectable to the inattentive and unreflective observer. Precisely through its elicitation of the viewer's generic expectations—about how this sort of movie plot “is supposed to” work, what this sort of stereotypical character “must” do, what such a stock line of dialogue ought and ought not to mean—the genre film may step beyond the present moment of its medium and turn the tables on its own aesthetic history. It can do this in countless ways that most of the high arts of the twentieth century no longer can, precisely because the latter are so often radically intent upon recalibrating their entire relation to the past in a single fell swoop, seeking to create themselves totally anew in a manner that overtly exhibits their ambition to qualify as great works of art by declaring their independence from their predecessors.

Nowadays—as opposed to the 1950s and 1960s when Hitchcock's early admirers were equally derided on both sides of the Atlantic—it comes more naturally to the European than to the American intellectual to want to continue to insist upon a sharp distinction between high art and the lower arts—or, as the Germans would put it, between *hohe Kunst* and *Unterhaltungskunst*. Such a distinction is supposed to exclude the possibility of a work of art being both. Many a great movie Hollywood movie is, by its very nature, a kind of work of art that not only challenges such a distinction but also subverts it by pretending first to respect its terms. That is to say, such a movie must have some sort of false bottom. On a first viewing, you can believe that you are consuming a piece of mere *Unterhaltungskunst*. But

in order to better to understand that same movie on a more careful viewing, you must come to see that the movie has exploited your willingness to underestimate it to its own ends.

A New Form of Hollywood Cinema

Andrew Sarris: You expect quite a lot from your audience.

Alfred Hitchcock: For those who want it. I don't think films should be looked at *once*. (Sarris, *Interviews* 248)

Hitchcock's Hollywood body of work includes a notable number of movies that not only harbor the aforementioned sort of false bottom but also do so in a very particular and remarkable way. On a second viewing of such a movie, we begin to become unable to miss much that we found it easy to miss on a first viewing: we see things we overlooked, discover further layers of meaning in the dialogue, and come to notice how we attached significance only to what we originally had thought ought to matter, blinding us to what was right before our eyes. We thereby come to appreciate the almost endless degree to which the expectations we bring to the movie shape our initial experiences of it. That is to say, a person can really claim to have "seen" a Hitchcock movie only if she has watched it at least twice. This also means that to discuss—or even just minimally to describe—such a movie, one must take care to distinguish what a viewer sees on a first viewing from what she sees on a subsequent viewing as well as to distinguish between what is merely apt to remain invisible to her on a first viewing from what must remain invisible—hence between that which a certain sort of knowingness merely obscures from view and that which only can become visible in the light of further knowledge.

Psycho contains many moments that, if we are able to look out for them and to trust them, can serve to warn us that this movie is not what we may at first be inclined to think it is. On a second and a third viewing, these moments will acquire a significance that we are either unlikely or unable to ascribe to them on our first journey through the movie. So, on a first viewing of such a movie, we will—and, to some extent, we must—work with an understanding of the movie's genre, its dialogue, and even its opening credits that allows us to miss the significance of much of what is right before our eyes.

Yes, this begins already with the opening credits of the movie. If we are watching *Psycho* for the first time, then—once we get some way into the movie—it will seem clear to us that Janet Leigh’s character, Marion Crane, is the star of this film. As Robin Wood succinctly puts it, “[e]verything is done to encourage the spectator to identify with Marion” (*Hitchcock’s Films* 143). From the first moments of dramatic action in *Psycho*, it is her actions that appear to make for the plot of the movie, her gaze that determines the contents of the point-of-view shots we are afforded, her face that expresses reactions with which we are invited to identify. Having thus made our way into the movie—identifying with her reactions (for example, as Sam explains why he needs her to wait until he can provide “financial security” or as Cassidy boasts about how he can “buy off unhappiness” for someone like her), following her gaze (for example, toward the money, lying on her bed, as she ponders her next move), watching her facial expressions (say, as she drives through the pounding rain) while we overhear her thoughts (as she imagines what Sam, her boss, and Cassidy will each say when they first learn of her act of theft)—after all this—if we recall the opening credits, then they should begin to puzzle us. This is how they began: “Starring Anthony Perkins, John Gavin, and Vera Miles.” Then we see more names. Finally, at the very end of the cast list, the screen tells us: “And Janet Leigh as Marion Crane.” This would suggest that Leigh’s participation does not constitute the dramatic center of the movie and that Marion Crane is not the center of consciousness from which our avenues of attention and response to the movie’s world ought to emanate. Yet, at the outset, every reaction we are invited by the camera to share, every point-of-view shot through which we see, every unspoken thought we are permitted to hear—all this and much more—tells us that, contrary to what the credits suggest, we are in the midst of a Janet Leigh vehicle. If we are watching a Film Noir, then Marion Crane must be its protagonist through whose subjectivity our own engagement with the world of this movie is funneled and whose continued existence qua character we may presume to be secured by our dependence on her for our own sympathetic involvement with it.

Stanley Cavell in his writings on Hollywood comedy and melodrama and Robert Pippin in his writings on the Western and the Film Noir concern themselves relatively little with the overt intermingling of genres, let alone the painstaking engagement of generic expectations by a movie that has no

intention of confining itself to an exploration of the internal possibilities of the very genre in which it begins by appearing to participate.²³ Precisely, such an equivocal and internally subversive relation to existing film genres is, however, characteristic of that very particular genre that I will henceforth denominate “the Hitchcockian genre-busting movie” (or “the Hitchcockian movie” for short).²⁴ It is not uncommon to observe that Hitchcock was concerned to disclose new forms of possibility for cinematic art.²⁵ It is less often appreciated that he ushered in a new medium for Hollywood film and rarer still that a critical effort is made to offer anything approximating an account of the form of the resulting aesthetic entity. For not every way of bursting the seams of a genre through an invocation of its conventions is a case of the Hitchcockian way of doing so—one that exploits these conventions precisely in order to subvert them, eventually shedding them to reveal an aesthetic object that is governed by a different logic, one that sublates the oppositions upon which the logic of the original genre was founded.²⁶ There is a transition from the activity of watching a movie whose guiding preoccupations appear to be antecedently surveyable (defined in the case of *Psycho* by generic expectations concerning matters such as the longevity of Marian’s presence in the movie, the significance of the money she steals for the movie’s plot, the immediate determinability of her murderer’s identity, and so on) to the activity of watching an altogether different form of movie—one in which we are left with questions such as the following: Then with whom are we to identify? What matters to them? What would it be—for us, or even for them—to determine their identity? A transition of this sort—from the apparently surveyable to the vertiginously unsurveyable—marks the revelation of the first dimension of a Hitchcockian movie’s false bottom.

When I touched above on the theoretical task of bringing to reflective consciousness the generic features of that aesthetic medium known as the Hollywood Western, I elaborated a set of questions that the genre explores—questions whose formulation turned upon particular ways of yoking together concepts such as the following: gun, sheriff, law, outlaw, America, founding, myth, epic, elegy, legend, frontier, civil society, violence, hero, and justice. As the questions that animate the genre receive preliminary formulation, these concepts are apt to sort themselves into pairs of opposites such as the following: old world/new world, white man/Indian, America/Europe, legend/fact, myth/history, frontier community/civil society, violence/law,

sheriff/outlaw, villain/hero, justice within/justice without the law, and so on. As the animating questions achieve sharper focus, the interest and depth of the genre reveals itself to be non-accidentally related to the ways in which these apparent oppositions are called into question, challenging our provisional unreflective conceptions of what America, a founding myth, a civil society, true justice, an honest outlaw, and so on are.

A proper articulation of the genre of movie here under investigation—the one that Hitchcock brought into being—calls for a similar form of *gattungstheoretische Reflexion*: a movement of thought parallel to the sort coarsely adumbrated above for the Western, arriving at a reflective elaboration of the questions whose exploration delimit the horizons of the new genre. This, again, will require a specification of a counterpart set of concepts that, when appropriately yoked together, reveal themselves to be adequate to the task of enabling such an elaboration.²⁷ Let us therefore make a new start and try to provide a preliminary schematic answer to the question: what would it mean to think out *this* genre? If we were to attempt to collect some candidates for such a Hitchcockian series of counterpart concepts, and to begin sorting them into pairs of opposites, we might arrive at something like the following list: normal/abnormal, ordinary/extraordinary, hidden/open to plain view, watching/failing to notice, witting/unwitting, surface/depth, inner/outer, private/public, natural/theatrical, absorbed/detached, passivity/activity, freedom/entrapment, knowingness/unknowingness, self-knowledge/self-deception, acknowledgment/denial, buried/excavated, expressible/inexpressible, potency/impotence, reality/fantasy, and sanity/madness. And here, too, an exploration of how the members of the genre—each in its own way—take up its guiding questions will reveal these oppositions to be subject to pressure, realigning the concepts that figure in them in ways that challenge assumptions we bring to the movie: assumptions about what normality, ordinary life, knowledge of another mind (or one's own), fantasy, reality, madness, sanity, and so on each are—unreflective assumptions that the genre may appear even to condone, prior to arranging for the ground upon which they rest to drop out from under you.

The attempt to pin a label on the new genre that Hitchcock's contemporaries already sensed he was "inventing" resulted in coinages such as the "psychological thriller" or "psychological suspense mystery" or "psychological suspense thriller."²⁸ These labels are not so much wrong as they are aesthetically useless, for reasons that ought to become palpable if not as soon as one has

assembled such a list of concepts, then at least by the time one has begun to combine and juxtapose them in a manner that permits articulation of the genre's animating questions. When a genuinely new genre of movie comes into being, then—as with any new form of ambitious art—its claim to be so recognized must lie in its capacity to disclose some untapped possibility for the aesthetic medium that it seeks to inherit and revolutionize, revealing its form to be perfectly suited to its content and vice versa, such that neither is possible apart from the unity they jointly comprise.²⁹ Hence, the following cannot be three independent tasks: (1) understanding the concept of a genre (if it possesses any aesthetic depth); (2) understanding what its individual members are “about” (“diegetically” or “pictorially” or “cinematically” or in some other way); and (3) understanding why so classifying a work (if the classification is fully merited) is *ipso facto* to honor it as a form of genuine aesthetic achievement.³⁰ To classify some product of Hollywood—as *TV Guide* frequently does—as a “psychological suspense thriller” is not, as such, a way of honoring anything. In the pages of *TV Guide*, the tasks of descriptive classification and expression of appreciation are strictly separate and that of aesthetic elucidation has no place.³¹ In the work of the serious critic of art, these three tasks can never be strictly separate.³²

In the following remarks from one such critic, aimed at characterizing one salient instance of this new Hitchcockian form, Cavell points us in the right direction, indicating how to execute these three tasks at once through identifying the sorts of questions this genre seeks to pose and explore:

Vertigo seems at first to be about a man's impotence in the face of, or faced with the task of sustaining, his desire. . . . But it turns out to be about the specific power of a man's fantasy to cause him not merely to forgo reality . . . but to gear every instant of his energy toward a private alteration of reality. Each of these ways of handling fantasy has its psychotic leanings, but neither of them need tip over. 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 of the worth of reality is established; to forgo our fantasies would be to forgo our touch with the world. (*World Viewed* 85)

This characterization of what is at stake in *Vertigo*, prescinding as it does from almost every detail of plot, is pitched at a sufficiently high level

of abstraction to permit it to be valid for a number of Hitchcock's other movies, thereby providing us with a useful starting point. As one must do in the description of any member of this genre, Cavell distinguishes between what such a movie at first seems to be about and what it turns out to be about. It will emerge below that there are two intertwined aspects of the genre in play here: two interrelated dimensions of the sort of false bottom such a movie has. Such a distinction (between what the movie seems to be up to and what it turns out to be up to) must be drawn both at the level of the viewer's understanding of the narrative content of the movie and at the level of the understanding of the character of her own engagement with the movie. The viewer's original picture of what "the" story of the movie is undergoes a shift in *Gestalt* when (what I called above) the first dimension of the false bottom gives out: obliging her to revise her understanding of many initially apparently insignificant details in the presentation of the plot.³³ The very comprehension of what it means to watch such a movie, in turn, itself undergoes a comparable switch once the second dimension gives out, obliging her to revise her understanding not only of how much attention such a movie requires but also of the very kind of attention it demands, as it becomes increasingly inescapable that she attend not only to it but also to herself—to her very activity as viewer. It becomes not just the viewer who is reading the film but also the film that is reading the viewer.³⁴

A fully concrete characterization of how in a given Hitchcockian work its false bottom is first insinuated would need to occupy itself with a wealth of detail.³⁵ But this dimension of such a movie's outward surface also admits of characterization at a higher plane of reflection. What *Vertigo* seems to be about, Cavell says, is a protagonist's impotence in the face of the task of sustaining his or her desires. That perfectly accurate, if very abstract, description of its incipient thematic field could equally well figure in many an account of what an instance of a non-Hitchcockian Hollywood genre is really about. If the aim, however, of this initial characterization is limited to describing what a Hitchcockian movie first *appears* to be about, then the fact that it fails to distinguish Hitchcockian from non-Hitchcockian products of Hollywood is not a bug, but a feature—or more precisely: an outer aspect of an inner (generic) feature of such movies. This outer aspect of the genre is concerned to activate themes salient throughout the Hollywood melodrama, comedy, or noir, in order to engender a horizon of

expectations structured around the conventions of one of these genres—or one of their subgenres.³⁶

Once the first dimension of the false bottom is punched through, the aesthetic theorist is faced with the task of charting what really comprises the topology of the thematic field of this genre. The helpful level of abstraction in Cavell's description highlights one aspect of this: The transition from the more familiar Hollywood genre to the Hitchcockian one will turn on a difference in their treatments of the sorts of obstruction and deformation that will and desire undergo—a transition in which more quotidian forms of self-deception, fantasy, impulsiveness, and akrasia give way to far less circumscribable forms of psychic introjection, phantasmatic apprehension, pathological trauma, and agential impotence. In Cavell's attempt to summarize, in breathtakingly brief compass, what *Vertigo* turns out really to be about, he begins by saying it is about how the protagonist gears every instant of his energy toward a private alteration of reality. This is absolutely right about *Vertigo*, but something more cautious, nuanced, and intricate will need to be substituted for this formulation if it is to permit the inclusion of less drastic extremes (than in *Vertigo*) of psychic energy willfully geared toward saturating reality with fantasy—for example, the sort of merely wishful imbuing of reality with fantasy we find in *Shadow of a Doubt* or *Rear Window*, in which the respective heroine (Charlie) and hero (Jeff) manage, while falling prey to fantasy, to keep one limb more firmly planted in reality than Scottie does in *Vertigo*, allowing for a less drastic ending. The resulting demarcation of the genre will also need to be able to accommodate cases in which a condition of psychic entrapment, born of an episode of past trauma, is what drives a comparatively unwilling private alteration of the present (of the sort we encounter in the hero of *Spellbound* or the heroine of *Marnie*).

The ensuing reformulation of what the genre as a whole is about will, nonetheless, not want to lose sight of this detail in Cavell's description of *Vertigo*: that the interrogated forms of desire and psychic activity are exquisitely private. They may be so radically ensnared in the tangle of the protagonist's inner life as to be unable to achieve genuinely intelligible outer manifestation, thereby verging on seemingly unutterable secrets. In a further twist (common to many members of the genre), the protagonist may find herself unable to express such thoughts or desires not only in ways in which another person can understand but also even in ways she herself is

able to make sense of—so that aspects of her own agency appear to emanate, even to the agent herself, from a source outside her will. This dialectic, too, admits of degrees in the implosion of agential self-knowledge. I am tempted to say that, whereas Scottie is a stranger to his own mind, Norman is a stranger in his own mind. With *Vertigo* as the target of his description, Cavell accurately characterizes the psychic activity that Scottie devotes to achieving a private alteration of reality as harboring a “psychotic leaning.” In a movie such as *Psycho*, things are pushed well beyond that point so that the potential for psychosis, which is everywhere latent in the genre’s dialectic, comes to be fully actualized.

To gauge the level at which such themes are broached in the genre, one needs to plumb the depth at which they launch their critique of our preconceptions regarding what agency, normality, fantasy, reality, madness, and sanity are. Cavell’s remarks about *Vertigo* are helpful on this point too. The conception of the relation that fantasy bears to the reality that the genre seeks to undo is one according to which she who actively fantasizes thereby recognizes the product of her fantasy as belonging to a world apart from reality: a world insofar as it can be recognized as partaking of fantasy therewith shows itself to be unreality. On this conception—one that each member of the genre targets in its own way—reality and fantasy are two distinct and self-contained realms, able to crowd out or eclipse one another but unable to interpenetrate.³⁷ Not only do the members of this genre seek to reveal that, on the contrary, fantasy is precisely that with which reality can be confused but also that our very capacity for accommodating ourselves to reality turns on our capacity to imagine a world radically different from the one we inhabit—thereby introducing the ever present temptation and threat of our mistaking the one for the other.

Through its manner of activating and interrogating such ways of mistaking one for the other, each such movie thematizes questions about what a Hollywood movie is: what we seek from it and what the relations are between the forms of fantasy activated in us when we become absorbed in this movie and those that inform our lives when we are otherwise engrossed. This brings us to the second dimension of the false bottom. Each of the questions that the genre engages (and that the concepts on the list above enable us to formulate) is explored not only in its application to the world of the movie (and, hence, to the characters caught up in it) but also in application to the beholder of

the movie (and, hence, to her mode of absorption in its world). Her very modes of engagement with the movie come to be implicated as themselves constituting a dimension along which the movie seeks to interrogate her—to lay bare and subject to scrutiny all of the following: the thoughts and desires it elicits from her, the moral character and psychic stability of those with whom she qua viewer identifies and sympathizes, the contours of her horizon of expectations and what they enable her to see—and, hence, what lies beyond that horizon and thereby eludes her notice. Through the manner in which the first dimension of its false bottom drops away, a Hitchcockian movie equips itself with resources to turn the lens back onto the viewer herself, affording her countless occasions (on a subsequent viewing) to discover her own unwitting proclivities to misdirect her attention and trust—to miss what is right before her eyes—in ways designed to allow for a self-revelation of what is attenuated or defective in her exercises of her own powers of attention, thought, and desire. The ontological chasm that canonically holds apart the (“fictional”) world of the Hollywood movie from the (“real”) world of the beholder turns out—as the second dimension of the false bottom gives out—to be bridgeable.

This genre thereby invites, in order to undo, the very conception of a Hollywood movie touched on at the outset of this article, according to which it is the product of a dream factory—a commodity rolled off the studio’s assembly line with the sole end of enabling its audience to escape reality by eliciting their fantasies. On this conception, in allowing yourself to be absorbed in the world of the movie, you are largely passive, consuming what is presented for your delectation—in no way active in having had just those fantasies activated in your imagination. You are here; the movie is there; and the direction of delivery of the imagined world is from the screen to your mind—a screen in which you understand yourself to be called upon to perceive a world apart from reality. On this conception of what a movie is, the forms of fantasy elicited by a movie and the portion of reality inhabited by you as its beholder belong to ontologically distinct and self-contained spheres, able to crowd out or eclipse one another, but never able (at least for those who remain minimally sane) to interpenetrate.³⁸

The foregoing conception of a movie is one that almost any interesting movie will in some way seek to interrogate: first by enforcing such an ontological divide (between the world of the movie and that of the beholder)

and then exploiting its power to compromise or complicate it (through various cinematic means of acknowledging, modulating, or collapsing its conditions of possibility) to its own aesthetic ends. What singles out a movie as a member of the Hitchcockian genre is that this is specifically accomplished through the manner in which the collapse of the first dimension of the movie's false bottom allows its second to emerge. Such a movie seeks to reveal not only that the particular fantasies elicited in you (corresponding to those of the characters whose points of view you transitorily share) are ones you, too, are prone to confuse with reality but also that your sanity (your very capacity to accommodate yourself to reality) turns on the powers of imagination that it discovers in you through your manner of participation in it, thereby revealing the fragility of the equipoise each of us strives to strike between fantasy and reality. The forms of absorption it elicits in you are calibrated to furnish you with a measure of your degree of similarity to (or distance from) a Judy or a Scottie, a Marion or a Norman—hence, with a measure of your own proclivity not only constructively to suffuse reality with fantasy but also perilously to conflate one with the other.

The First Dimension of *Psycho's* False Bottom

Good directors know how to mean everything they do. Great directors mean more—more completely, more subtly, more specifically—and they discover how to do everything they mean. (Cavell, *World Viewed* 188)

Psycho begins with an aerial view of an urban cityscape. As the camera edges to the right, the words “PHOENIX, ARIZONA” appear in white lettering, overlaid on the black-and-white screen's presentation of what we understand to be the skyline of this city. This mode of introduction to the world of a movie is familiar from crime dramas and police procedurals. It serves to impart a quasi-documentary impression not only that what is about to happen is real historical fact but also that it has been thoroughly sifted and documented by investigative authorities. The camera continues to move, pause, resume, and dissolve into a less aerial vantage, as the words “FRIDAY DECEMBER ELEVENTH” similarly appear on the screen. As the shot decreases in elevation, zooms in, and pans right to the wall of a building, the words “TWO FORTY-THREE” take their place. A bank of windows is sought out by the camera, and one, in particular, is then selected, whose

blinds afford no glimpse into the interior. As the camera moves toward, into, and through this window, darkness fills the frame, as we understand ourselves to be penetrating the privacy that these drawn blinds were meant to afford. Having come to occupy this viewpoint onto—but in no way attainable from within—the world of the movie, we are afforded a vantage on what lies on the other side of this window—a hotel room, a double bed, and a half-dressed couple—permitting us to witness the first dramatic scene of the movie.

In this scene, we find ourselves in a risqué situation for a 1960 Hollywood movie: in the moment of (what the Germans call) *die Zigarette danach* (the moment of lingering over a cigarette in bed after having just made love). The elicitation of this understanding is a way of intimating what we just missed seeing—what just happened in that bedroom. Such a direct evocation of extramarital sex, depicted in these unapologetically unromantic terms, pushed the limits of what was permissibly showable in 1960. No Hollywood movie had ever begun like this. But, still, there is much else that would have been cinematically familiar, suggesting to a contemporaneous viewer that she was watching a Film Noir³⁹: the character of the opening shot of the urban landscape, the documentary lettering recording place, date, and exact time of our events, the camera's progress to and through a deliberately selected, but outwardly characterless, window, from out of a sea of uncountably many windows looming over a faceless asphalt jungle and into a bleak, dingy hotel room with the loveless scene it encloses, as the alternation of frank camera angles onto this confined space imparts an unsentimental (in equal parts unromantic and unmelodramatic) treatment of the relation between the man and the woman.⁴⁰

It is not only through its visual mode of presentation that *Psycho* signals its aim to engage the conventions that define the Film Noir. So, too, does its dialogue. And here, too, the appearance of such a form of engagement initially serves to obscure from view a substructure of dialogue governed by a very different logic. On a first hearing of each line uttered by an actor in this movie, we look for no further layers in what is said beyond those required to understand each line of that dialogue to be something that one character in a Film Noir might say to another. If, however, the film we are watching is a genre-busting Hitchcock movie, then we will eventually be in a position to discover that there are further layers of meaning in almost every line of dialogue beyond those we are initially disposed to register.

We touched above on a first crucial sort of difference one must be able to appreciate in order to adequately articulate the concept of a film genre: the difference between a film that merely participates in a genre (by unreflectively drawing upon certain generic conventions) and one that reflects upon and explores the inner logic of the genre (by exemplifying the possibilities internal to it in an exemplary way). Now we come to a second crucial difference between kinds of movie: the difference between the latter two sorts just mentioned and one that engages the conventions of a genre to other ends—alien to that genre—in order to take the cinema to an entirely different place.⁴¹ This observation is meant to prepare us for the following question: what would it mean to claim that *Psycho* engages the conventions of the genre of the classical American Film Noir, not in order to remain within (and thus further explore the possibilities internal to) that genre but, rather, in order to take the cinema to some entirely different place?

Pippin, in his book *Fatalism in American Film Noir*, presents a comprehensive and compelling account of the genre of Film Noir. His account of the central thematic features of the genre helps to lay bare the extent to which *Psycho*, at the outset of the movie, goes to considerable trouble to leave its viewer firmly under the impression that the action of *Psycho* initially unfolds in accordance with the logic of the Film Noir. To adduce just a few relevant details from his account of the characteristic marks of that genre, we find Pippin saying things like this:

[N]oirs were almost always about crime. ... Even more surprisingly, the larger social context for such deeds, the historical American world in which they take place, was itself just as bleak, amoral, and ugly as the individual deeds and characters themselves. ... The so-called American Dream was treated with bitter irony because in reality, we see over and over, wealth and power were all that mattered. The noir representation of bourgeois domestic life ... portrayed it as so stultifying and banal that even crime began to look attractive to those trapped in it. The most powerful and effective human passions seemed to be greed, revenge, lust, and craven fear. ... Characters who had been righteous, stable, and paragons of responsibility all their adult lives were seamlessly and quite believably transformed in a few seconds into reckless, dangerous, and even murderous types, all suggesting that anyone, in the right (or wrong) circumstances, was capable

of almost anything and that one's own sincere avowals of one's own basic principles could be ludicrously self-deceived. (*Fatalism* 6)

At its outset, *Psycho* appears to present us with an instance of the genre that Pippin here delineates. It appears to exhibit each of the enumerated earmarks. Early into a first viewing of the movie, the crime, around which the action in *Psycho* seems destined to revolve, is Marion Crane's theft of the money from one of her boss's clients. As each twist in the plot cascades into the next, the plot seems to pivot around the ever-ramifying consequences of this one act. The larger social context of her crime—the historical American world in which the action takes place—appears to be at least as bleak and amoral as her deed itself. Her impulsive crime notwithstanding, she continues to strike us, within that world, as by far the most attractive character anywhere in sight. Indeed, no small part of the reason why her initial theft of a considerable sum of money is so laughably easy for her to perpetrate is because she is regarded by her fellows as a paragon of decency, stability, and responsibility. Yet, in a matter of a few moments, through a single reckless act, she is transformed, right before our eyes, from a reliable and affable office worker into a jumpy criminal on the run, terrified by the mere sight of a policeman. In taking ourselves to understand all this, we take ourselves to know which genre of film we find ourselves in. We thereby quickly fall into assuming that we know more or less what awaits us—we take ourselves to understand the rough shape of the horizon of possibilities for what can happen—in this movie. It is not easy to count the sheer number of misapprehensions we thereby fall under all at once in making this single assumption.

The creating and defeating of generic expectations is just one of the ways in which Hollywood movies invite us to underestimate them. A far more local, but equally characteristic, device is a mode of Janus-faced dialogue of a sort to be found in any good Hollywood classic—be it a Western, a Film Noir, or a romantic comedy. Hitchcock is particularly relentless in his deployment of double-edged moments of apparently innocent conversational banter. A line is delivered that, on a first viewing of the movie, we take ourselves to understand. On a subsequent viewing of the movie, we suddenly hear the undertow of irony in the line—a hidden meaning that can become audible to us only once we appreciate how far below its apparent surface the actual depth of the movie lies. Usually Hollywood dialogical irony—in, say, a

Romantic Comedy or a Film Noir—lies in the way in which a line that we first construe in a very literal way admits of a more interesting or disturbing form of figurative or hyperbolic reading. In Hitchcock films, more often than not, it works the other way around: an all too familiar turn of speech, one whose usual use contains something akin to a dead metaphor, suddenly admits of a hilarious or horrifying super-literal understanding, reanimating what we had taken to be dead in that mode of speech and revealing the possibility of a construal that, upon its discovery, stops us in our tracks. Indeed, the task of discerning the first dimension of the false bottom in a line of dialogue in a Hitchcock film is often a matter of inflecting an idiom of speech or turn of phrase in a fashion far more literal than one previously had imagined possible—as if one were coming to understand what this particular set of words really means for the first time. When we first hear Norman say: “My mother is not quite herself today,” we think we know what he means. When Norman comes to the topic of private traps and says: “And none us can ever get out. We scratch and claw. But only at the air, only at each other. And for all of it, we never budge an inch,” we think he is expressing himself hyperbolically. It is only upon a second or a third viewing of the film that we may be suddenly struck, in a manner apt to cause us to laugh or gasp out loud, that each of these things he says is literally true—on a super-literal construal of what those words can mean. Numerous lines of dialogue may (though no sooner than on a second viewing) acquire such super-literal significance. Mother turns out to be (in a previously unintelligible sense) really and truly not quite herself today. Such a line, as Érich Rohmer nicely puts it, “gets tinged with a second and more exact truth” (“Le soupçon” 63). There is a structure of hidden linguistic literality here: on a first viewing, we fail to register the possibility of a form of linguistically strict construal of what we hear said; on subsequent hearings, as our familiarity with the structure of the discourse of the movie is refined, it becomes ever more impossible for us to fail to hear what was previously outside the audible range in these very same words.⁴²

When we attend more closely to this stretch of dialogue between Norman and Marion, I will display in quotation marks only those lines that harbor such a subsequently discernible super-literal significance. My claim will be that every line of dialogue thus displayed is one that admits of a double reading: (1) a reading that comes naturally to us on a first viewing

of the movie as we participate in Marion's conception of her world and (2) a super-literal construal, betokening a significance audible to us only once a certain conception of the world of the movie has been exploded. What therefore at first appears to be perfectly casual dialogue turns out to require that just these lines need to be phrased using just these words ("not herself," "empty," "trap," "born," "bury," "mad") in just this way if this dimension of the work's false bottom is to function properly: remaining linguistically latent on a first hearing prior to becoming ever more audibly patent upon subsequent ones. This sort of claim—regarding a necessity in the manner in which the elements in the work are linguistically configured—is one that it is comparatively easy to test out on oneself upon subsequent exposure to the dialogue. This is because we are all already fluent and active speakers of language—that is, to some degree, experienced practitioners of the art of assessing the merits of choosing one linguistic construction (with its attendant syntax, juxtaposition of words, degree or lack of verbal ambiguity, and so on) over another. This allows us to gauge with some precision the brilliance of the linguistic choices that have gone into the precise wording of each such line of dialogue. Most of us, however, are not active speakers of the language of cinema—we are not experienced in the art of choosing one cinematic construction (camera angle, depth of shot, splicing or pacing of montage, lighting or shadowing of scene, and so on) over another. Most of us are, at best, more or less well versed in a comparatively passive form of exercise of this capacity for making meaning—we practice the cinematic counterpart to listening to a spoken language that we ourselves never actively speak. The capacity that we more or less fluently exercise is that of watching a movie. This renders it comparatively more difficult for us to discern the achievement of a parallel degree of perfection in the manner in which the non-verbal aspects of a movie are cinematically configured.

In the next section of this article, the reader will be afforded an opportunity to try out on herself some comparatively easily tested claims about what is latent in the structure of what we hear in the dialogue: to gauge for herself the depth and intricacy of intention laced into the sequences of words spoken by the characters. In the section of the article thereafter on the shower scene, we will turn to a counterpart set of claims (about what is latent in the structure of what we see) that are comparatively difficult to assess. It helps that the shower scene itself involves no dialogue, so our attention will be directed

solely where it needs to be, if the aim is to reveal that the same depth of intention and rigor in design—the same degree of necessity governing the placement of each detail in this register of the movie’s construction—can govern every aspect of what and how we see. Claims of this sort require striving to discern a necessarily initially indeterminable degree of depth of aesthetic rigor in a work. The accomplished critic of non-cinematic art—of, say, a Shakespeare sonnet, a Caravaggio painting, or a Henry James novel—understands it to be part of her task to sound the depths of the work as measured by such a standard. The average working critic of Hollywood films generally does not even imagine that the assumption of such a critical burden could form part of her mandate in offering a “reading” of a movie.⁴³ To assume this burden in relation to a movie requires reflection upon how its particular manner of determining every aspect of our mode of visual access to its world shapes our overall aesthetic experience of it as viewers.

To make out such a claim in application to the shower scene in *Psycho* requires revealing how far we are from doing it justice if we take its unusual visual character to stem from the director’s desire to sprinkle the movie with dazzling ornamental flourishes—pirouettes that he performs for the delectation of a viewer who delights in exercises in cinematic gymnastics. On this conception, the means employed could have been dispensed with in favor of some cinematically less unprecedented way of rendering what we see without undermining the movie’s capacity to “tell” (what gets called) its “story.” One thing that is wrong with such an understanding of the relation of, say, the use of montage in, say, the shower scene is that there is no single or simple relation between (what, in the idiom of classical film theory, gets called) “the technique of montage” and (what gets called) “the diegetic content” of “the” scene. Indeed, what diegetic content the shower scene is taken to impart already comes to differ radically for an attentive viewer on a first and second viewing. Hence, one essential aspect of its burden is to enfold within itself multiple levels of diegetic register while retaining the outward visual aspect of being a single scene. It does this in a manner that only the cinema can achieve. So the first thing we need to come to terms with is how the scene’s manner of visual construction is essential to its encoding such internally nested narrative strata. “The” story it tells is not only not “a story” for reasons already familiar from the other arts (because there is no single story), but it is also not “a (mere) *story*” if this is taken to mean that its

content may be pried loose from its form—as if it were a story here told by cinematic means but which another aesthetic medium (say, the novel) could just as well “tell” employing the alternative means available to it.

So a second thing we need to come to terms with is the cinematic counterpart of the following literary truism: a novel cannot convey what a poem does or vice versa—their difference lies far deeper than merely in how they convey the putatively separable something that they each convey. To take a poem to harbor a primary kernel of impartible content impervious to its form is precisely to fail to comprehend what serious poetry is. Hitchcock aspires to satisfy the analogue of this demand in cinema.⁴⁴ The point here is not just that a poem communicates what only poetry can and no novel could. It turns on the further thought that a fully successful poem achieves a structure of significance not achievable even in another poem, including one that might at first blush appear only negligibly to differ in meter, rhythm, or wording from it. To vindicate the critical claim that the shower scene measures up to this standard, one must do more than just show that what it conveys could be conveyed only by cinematic means. One must show that the scene requires precisely the means it deploys: that what it renders accessible to a viewer's experience and how it renders it depend upon one another to an exquisite degree.

This branch of aesthetic criticism is still in its relative infancy (in comparison, for example, to the counterpart branch of literary criticism)—hence, comparatively bereft of exemplars of what it would even mean to make out such a claim in application to the cinema. This renders such criticism, insofar as it seeks to bring to reflective consciousness the exemplariness of the forms of artistic excellence hitherto achieved in the history of cinema, still in search of aesthetically fruitful canons of criticism. It renders it difficult even to have a clear idea of how to go about vindicating cinematic counterparts to landmark claims in truly ambitious literary or art historical criticism—such as a claim, for example, to the effect that there simply is no alternative way of visually presenting that scene in that movie that would allow them each (the movie and the scene) to retain the full cinematic significance they presently possess in the work as we know it. On this conception of the critical task, the critic must make out that the choices that go into the construction of the scene are dictated by an aesthetic ideal no less stringent than that which governs the sonnet form—so that no other set of alternatives could achieve

the same ends: no alternative selection of camera angle from which to show what we see, no change in the character and duration of transitions between shots, nothing in the pacing and rhythm of montage, and so on may suffer alteration without mutilating the whole.

I will attempt to make out such a claim, but I will not do so directly and laboriously by drawing attention to each distinguishable element in the montage sequence comprising the shower scene and showing how these elements form the whole of the scene in the ways in which they do.⁴⁵ Rather, I shall do so in a comparatively tractable—hence, also necessarily more indirect—way by reflecting on the purposes the scene must fulfill within the whole of the movie in order for each—the part and the whole—to depend upon the other in the ways in which they do. One mark of a great work of art is how it can seem to unfold within itself an infinite degree of intention—far more than anyone, it seems, could have possibly managed to place into an artifact crafted by mere human hands—so that every aspect of the work appears to contribute in an essential way to its overall unity of meaning. If we are talking about a great poem, this means the resulting whole requires just these words spoken in just this order: each occurring precisely where and how it does, with just these possibilities of alluding to what remains unsaid, with just these assonances and dissonances, with just this rhythm and meter, with just this length of line, duration of rhyme or lyricism or pathos, degree of indulgence, or restraint, in relation to any or all of the above. If we are talking about a certain kind of great movie, this means that every murmur or scream we are able or unable to hear, every violin stroke of the soundtrack, every camera angle and movement, everything that is shown or withheld from view, the brevity or length of the duration of every shot or pan, not only the number of cuts in a montage sequence but also every dimension of its rhythm and pacing—everything in the work—carries aesthetic significance and contributes essentially to the unity and power of the whole. If the soundtrack were to allow the viewer to hear a bit more or a bit less or to allow it to be heard differently—if the canvas of the screen were to allow us to see a bit more or a bit less or to visually present what we see in a slightly varied different manner—one would, through the alteration of this one seemingly tiny aspect of the film, likely mangle the whole no less drastically than were one to alter a word in a single line of a Shakespeare sonnet.

This classic conception of the unity of a great work of art is certainly not one to which every Hollywood director aspires. But it is one to which Hitchcock aspires. There are perhaps not many moments in the work of any director, even a Hitchcock, that fully measure up to this standard of aesthetic rigor, but there are some. If such perfection is achieved within the construction of a sonnet, then it will be comparatively evident to us that we cannot tinker with any part without ruining the whole. If such thoroughgoing unity in the relation of the parts to the whole is achieved within the construction of a Hollywood film, then the exquisite exactitude and beauty of such an achievement is apt to remain underappreciated. This holds true even if the moment in question is as famous as any in the history of Hollywood cinema.⁴⁶

The Preamble to the Shower Scene

There is no world just the other side of this one, opened onto through mirrors. . . . There is only this world, unenchanted, unsponsored, but more fantastic than we can tell. The unbelievable, the plain truth which you cannot tell, that others will think you mad when you try to tell, is one of Hitchcock's patented themes. (Cavell, "Ending" 131)

Before we attend to the shower scene, let us, as promised, attend briefly first to those that precede it—those in which Norman and Marion gingerly befriend one another—with special attention to the construction of the literary register of the dialogue. From the start, Marion senses that something is not quite right about Norman. But she takes this not to be a sign of anything ominous about him but, rather, to be something she experiences as cute, perhaps even loveable, and in any case disarming—affording her some release from the pressure of the impending consequences that haunt her and propel her to flee. James Harvey deftly encapsulates the way in which we are permitted both to experience that there is Something Wrong with Norman and yet made to feel that there is nothing about him Marion cannot handle:

[T]his is a boy (a young man, really) who can't say the word "bathroom" in her presence when he's showing her her room. It's in the background of the shot, the door open and the light on, glowing like a spaceship in its whiteness: "And that's the, uh—" he says. "The bathroom", says Marion

helpfully. He concedes it is. So it is clear to Marion that there's Something Wrong with him—to say the least. She smiles at him: certainly nothing she can't handle. For the first time since she's left Phoenix, we can say that she's regained her aplomb. More than that: Norman is the first person we have seen her with who hasn't impinged on her in some threatening personal way, who isn't somehow involved in her dilemma. He is someone she can be *disinterestedly* nice to—and she is. Their unexpected encounter frees her to be generous and friendly, impulses that seem natural to her but that we haven't seen much of up to now. (95–96; emphasis in original)

On a second viewing, we are apt to be struck (in a way we were not on a first viewing) by how Norman hesitates for a fateful moment before deciding which room key—from the bank of keys behind the reception desk of this completely vacant motel—to hand over to Marion. Knowing what we later come to know about the fate of young women who stay in that motel room, if we achieve a modicum of sympathetic identification with Norman's predicament, then in his situation (in possession of his reasons for believing how and why this might be Marion's last stop in life) we, too, in his shoes, having chosen to hand over to her that key, might find difficulty in uttering the word "bathroom" as we point out to her where it is. On a first viewing, however, our attitude toward him mirrors hers: our understanding of why he has difficulty completing the sentence that begins "And that's the, uh, ..." accords with hers. More generally, we find it easy to accept the movie's invitation to share in her solicitous impulses toward what she interprets as Norman's various moments of awkwardness. As she sits in the parlor of the Bates Motel, surrounded by stuffed birds, and nibbles at the sandwich that Norman has prepared for her, indications that hint at his possible derangement continue to be assuaged or deflected through the spirit of generosity and friendliness that she extends to him and in which we are invited to partake. The way the dialogue builds even inclines us to suppose that perhaps we find ourselves in the midst of a tale of emotional liberation—one in which Norman and Marion might each enable the other to free himself or herself from traps of their own making.

Yet, at the same time, we are afforded ever more evidence that Norman might be discombobulated in ways that the advent of a beautiful friendship would be powerless to repair. All of this notwithstanding, on a first viewing, we are likely to discount the signs that what afflicts Norman might exceed

the bounds of Marion's understanding of the world she inhabits. We follow her in construing the oscillations in Norman's psychic state—as he swings, over the course of the conversation, from friendly and solicitous to chilly and even furious—to be signs of nothing more alarming than that he is (are you not sometimes?) afflicted by sudden alterations of mood. Though we may fleetingly apprehend the presence of a perhaps darker undercurrent, we permit our intimation of what is off-key in his modes of expression to be shunted aside, eclipsed by our predilection to follow her lead. We are thereby drawn into sympathetic participation in a human encounter in which two lonely protagonists each permit themselves a certain vulnerability in the presence of the other. (This is precisely what unleashes the mother's fury.) And this, in turn, permits us to realize how little friendship there has been until now in this Noirish world.

The dialogue in this scene, to fulfill its purpose, must be constructed so as to allow for the following succession of experiences upon a first and a later hearing: on a first hearing, the conversation in the parlor between Marion and Norman must allow for the forms of sympathetic identification that permit us to imagine that we are watching a Hollywood movie of a sort we already understand; on a second, the ground upon which that identification rests must give way to an apprehension of a world very different from the one that we had mistaken for that of the movie. On a first viewing, we feel we are witness to a conversation between Marion and Norman that could hold the key to Marion's salvation. This reinforces our sense that Marion is the heroine of this film—that she might be on the verge of regaining control of her fate rather than just fleeing the consequences of her impulsive act of theft. Our attention is focused on the considerations and on the ways in which Marion's own attention is configured. On a second viewing, this bubble is irremediably burst. We are now in a position to begin to gauge the ramifying ways in which Marion's (and, on a first viewing, our own) attention was misdirected. We can begin to register all that we blithely misconstrued, grossly minimized, or blankly overlooked. The varieties of misdirection in attention and mistaking of significance we thereby fall into pertain to every aspect of our experience of the movie on a first viewing. But we want first to investigate how this happens merely at the level of the dialogue with regard to the layers of latent significance and ironic undertow that we necessarily fail to fathom on our initial schematization of it.

After Norman admits that he likes to stuff things (restoring them to a state in which they appear lifelike), Marion says: “A man *should* have a hobby.” Norman: “It’s more than a hobby.” He continues: “A hobby is supposed to pass the time—not fill it.” (On a second viewing, we come to appreciate that what Marion imagines to be his hobby—reanimating the dead—is quite literally more than just a hobby for him: it *is* his life.⁴⁷) To which she responds: “Is your time so empty?” Not really, he says: there is the motel to take care of and the errands I do for my mother: “The ones she allows I might be capable of doing.” One takes Norman to mean the sort of thing any son might have occasion to say about his mother and what she allows he might be capable of doing. (On a second viewing, the scope of what Norman’s mother will allow and of what Norman is capable of doing become increasingly difficult to hold apart; the movie’s conclusion marks their point of total collapse, so that his allotment of psychic space in the body they share becomes literally null.) Marion then asks him about his friends. In response to this, a new note of oddness in affect, blankness of expression, and tautness of mien come over him as he blurts out something not even the conversationally adroit Marion knows how to parry: “Well, a . . . a boy’s best friend is his mother.”⁴⁸ At this point, even on a first viewing, we detect in Norman a sense that there is a limit to which Marion can sympathetically enter into in an appreciation of his plight. He tries to help her see this, flashing his most disarming grin as he says: “You’ve never had an empty moment in your entire life, have you?”⁴⁹ Marion directs her gaze down toward her plate and answers gently: “Only my share.” But then Norman reveals a degree of penetration she had not anticipated, suddenly reversing their roles in the conversation as he puts to her the question about where she is going and what she is running away from. This takes her by surprise: “Why do you ask *that*?” This is when Norman breaks out into his little speech about private traps: “And none us can ever get out. We scratch and claw. But only at the air, only at each other. And for all of it, we never budge an inch.”⁵⁰ Marion, true to her character, finds a way to interpret even this disturbing little discourse so that it bears on an understanding of her own situation—thereby, in effect, modeling for us what we, too, on a first viewing, are invited to do in making sense of this scene. She is struck by a truth she finds in his words. She attempts to formulate it as an observation that might equally well apply to each of them: “Sometimes we deliberately step into those traps.”⁵¹ We know how she

means this in application to her own case; on a first viewing, we only think we know why Norman takes it not to apply to his. He responds by saying he was “born in his trap” (only much later can we appreciate that this is literally true) and that he does not “really mind anymore” (where this, too, later admits of literal construal: for the possibility of his really minding depends on his having a mind to himself). Our sympathies swing back toward her, when she protests by responding: “Oh, but you *should* . . . you *should* mind it!” (*We* certainly do, once we begin to fathom what *he* means.)

Our next glimmer into the gradually darkening undercurrent has been prepared by an earlier scene in which Marion overhears what she takes to be Norman's mother dressing down her son. She follows up her remark about how Norman “*should* mind” with the following observation: “You know if anyone ever spoke to me the way I heard—the way she spoke to you . . . I don't think I could ever laugh again.”⁵² Marion breaks off the remark as she notices that these words have wiped every semblance of a smile off of his face. He eventually responds that, well, of course, he would “like to go away and leave his mother,” but he “*can't*.”⁵³ The simple reason he gives for why he cannot, perfectly intelligible on a first viewing, is because she is ill. Marion responds: “She *sounded* strong.” Norman: “No, I mean *ill*.”⁵⁴ He then recounts the horrific tale of how she loses her husband, concluding it with these words: “Anyway, it was too much of a loss for my mother . . . she had nothing left.”⁵⁵ “Except you,” Marion observes,⁵⁶ to which Norman offers a reply that even on a first viewing may appear to portend more than one level of meaning: “A son is a poor substitute for a lover.”⁵⁷ Marion asks: “Why don't you go away,” to which Norman responds with a particularly striking set of examples of utterances that admit of a second, fully literal construal (but only once we have completed a first viewing of the movie): “It's too late for me. And besides . . . who'd look after her? She'd be alone up there, the fire would go out . . . damp and cold, like a grave. When you love someone, you don't do that to them, even if you hate them.” Marion, intimating that perhaps the presence of this mother crowds out all space for a life for her son, wonders aloud: “Wouldn't it be better if you put her in . . . someplace.”⁵⁸ Norman asks: “You mean an institution?” And follows it up with: “A *Madhouse*?” His reaction is summed up in these five double-layered utterances: “I couldn't do that.” “It would be like burying her.” “I don't hate her.” “I hate what she has become.” “I hate her illness.”⁵⁹

Every one of the lines of dialogue displayed in quotation marks above, upon a later hearing, admits of a more literal reading than any we, on a first hearing, deem possible. To touch on five further dimensions of this present in our most recent exhibits: (1) in the conventional sense of the idiom, Norman is, as he says, literally unable “to put his mother someplace”; (2) there is the closest approximation to doing this still open to Norman, which would not just be, as he suggests, *like* burying her, for it would involve literally *burying* her (re-burying her corpse—remedying the fact that, as we later learn, the grave bearing her name in the local cemetery is empty); (3) this opens out onto a larger play of senses—at work throughout the second half of the movie—of putting someone into the ground, a fruit cellar, the bottom of a lake, and so on), along with correlatively literal converse notions of exhuming, uncovering, dredging up, and so on; as opposed to (4) the mode of burying that calls for psychological excavation, threatening a return of the repressed (hence, a backlash of an internalized superego); and, finally, (5) there is the level at which this field of expressions serves to literalize the structure of the movie’s own permeable underlayer and to thematize the dynamics of the viewer’s engagement with it.

Marion tries to steer the conversation back to a calmer place, explaining that she did not mean her question (“Wouldn’t it be better if you put her in ... someplace”) to sound uncaring. Norman’s coldness gives way to fury, as we hear a new tone in his voice: “What do you mean about caring?” He then, in the underlayer of the dialogue, delivers (what we, only upon a second viewing, may appreciate are) three bull’s-eye predictions about what we will come to see: “Have you ever seen one of those places? Inside? Laughing and tears and cruel eyes studying you ... and my mother there?⁶⁰ Why? Has she harmed you?⁶¹ She is as harmless as ... one of these stuffed birds.”⁶² Marion responds gently: “I am sorry. I only felt ... it seemed she was harming you.”⁶³ ... I meant.” Norman, his fury building, completes her sentence for her: “*Well?* You meant well? People always mean well, they cluck their thick tongues and shake their heads and suggest so very delicately that....”⁶⁴ Then he breaks off and, after a considerable silence, continues almost pleadingly: “But I hate to even think such a thing. She *needs* me.”⁶⁵ He continues: “It isn’t as if she were a maniac, a raving thing ... it’s just that ... sometimes she goes a little mad.” And then comes the kicker: “We all go a little mad sometimes. *Haven’t you?*”

On a first viewing, here too, we are prone to reign in our conception of just how mad you need to go in order to count as going a little mad. If we can keep our conception of madness sufficiently reigned in, then Norman's deployment of this *bon mot* will seem simply to echo a few of Robert Pippin's fundamental theses about Film Noir, starting with the point that the action of such a drama is triggered by a single act of succumbing to a desperate impulse to free oneself from one's circumstances—such as when Marion yields to her sudden urge to make off with the money. Just as Pippin's propositions about the prototypical Noir protagonist may reveal themselves (through the extent of your capacity over the course of a compelling Noir to identify with its heroine) to express a disturbing truth about you.⁶⁶ You, too, have sometimes felt (haven't you?) an impulse to make a mad break for freedom. So, too, upon a first hearing, Norman's remark ("We all go a little mad sometimes, haven't you?") may appear to express a truth about each one of us: given a certain exigency of circumstance, each of us has the capacity to do something that, compounded by a bit of bad luck, might plunge us into some approximation of where Marian finds herself as she sits there listening to Norman.

This is certainly how Marion responds to Norman's way of putting his question—about whether she sometimes goes a little mad—on the only chance she ever gets to construe it. "Yes," she answers, "sometimes just one time can be enough." As Robin Wood observes,

[a]t the beginning of the film we see Marion in the grip of an irresistible impulse whose intensity destroys her freedom of choice. From the moment she steals the money (and, subtly, Hitchcock never shows her deciding to take it—she never gets to the point of deciding—rather, she is gradually possessed by her decision), Marion, under the sway of fear, becomes unable to think and act rationally. An instant's reflection would be enough to show her that she has no chance of succeeding, as the accusing voices which speak to her in the car tell her clearly: she alone could have stolen the money, her chances of escaping the police and finding a safe hiding place are so slight that no sensible person could take them seriously. She knows that even her lover will refuse the money and the solution it offers. . . . In fact, her behavior is very close to that of Norman, who is himself "possessed",

a detail which their later conversation will make explicit. (“Psychoanalysis of *Psycho*,” 2018, 4)

Wood gets something absolutely right here: their later conversation is meant to serve to connect the theme of Marion’s mode of possession with that of Norman’s. Many of Wood’s sentences about Marion may be called upon to speak truths about Norman as well, for example: “We see him in the grip of an irresistible impulse whose intensity destroys his freedom of choice.” Yet Wood also gets something absolutely wrong insofar as he suggests that what is awry in Norman’s agency differs from Marion’s only in degree, not in kind, thereby implying that his sentences about Marion (along with their terms of description: “impulse,” “never getting to the point of deciding,” “unable to think and act rationally,” “accusing [inner] voices which speak [to her],” and so on) can fully bear the same sense in application to Norman. Marion’s mode of being “possessed” is characteristic of the state of mind of a Noir protagonist; Norman’s mode of possession is characteristic of the state of mind of no movie protagonist prior to the advent of the Hitchcockian genre here under investigation. Unlike Marion Crane and like Robin Wood, we are afforded further chances, on subsequent viewings, to glean how this remark of Norman’s, on a deeper reading of it than Marion’s, might aptly serve as a motto for the movie as a whole. To comprehend this, however, involves arriving not only at a far more radical construal of what it now means “to go a little mad” but also at a limit to one’s very ability to “identify” with “the character” at the center of the “action.” This, in turn, requires that the very concepts of “identification,” “character,” and “agency”—which it had originally been the project of the Noir to interrogate and attenuate—be placed under so much additional pressure that the grounds of the possibility of their continued employment gradually melt away before our very eyes.

I have adduced examples of how, on some further viewing of the film, one can begin to appreciate how the movie’s manner of insinuating its false bottom, on the one hand, and its exploitation of Noir conventions, on the other, dovetail with one another. Norman’s remarks to Marion (for example, about Mother not being “quite herself” today or about his not hating her but only “who she has become,” and so on) each admit of at least two different readings: one that allows it to epitomize a classic Noir problematic (where such movies, as Pippin puts it, “show us what it literally *looks like*, what it *feels like*, to live in a world where the experience of our own agency has

begun to shift" [*Fatalism* 22; emphasis in original]) and one that allows it to crystallize the thematic horizon of a genre-busting Hitchcock movie (where Mother's condition of not being "quite herself" becomes only notionally distinct from Norman's not being quite himself; for the person he wishes not to hate—whom she "becomes" and on whose behalf she "acts"—is "the self" he is). This structural feature of the dialogue is just one example of how this movie exploits conventions of the Noir in order to confer an entirely new significance on them—one that explodes the genre from within.⁶⁷

The understandings of sentences in Norman's and Marion's dialogue that we need to work our way toward on some subsequent viewing—in order to understand this movie and fathom its genre—will come close to being the opposite of the understandings of Norman's remarks at which Marion herself arrives. The film thereby performs one of its characteristic double movements, obscuring from view (on a first viewing) what sort of movie it is that we are watching, while simultaneously preparing the way for our discovery (on a further viewing) of scorching irony. How much more scorching an irony can there be than this: Norman's question "we all go a little mad sometimes, haven't you?" which, on a later hearing of it, may strike us as epitomizing the structure of the movie as a whole, strikes Marion, on her only hearing of it, as a liberating utterance, therapeutically empowering her to take control of her life? In response, she breaks out into a grateful smile, as if this line helps her see the folly of what she has done. It springs her from her trap. When she eventually utters something in response—now talking to herself more than to Norman—she says she wants to go back and try to pull herself out of it: back to Phoenix. Then, shedding all artifice and dissemblance, she in effect makes a double confession, revealing her true name (as opposed to the one she signed in with in the motel guest book) and conceding that she has been running away from something—something she will now turn back and face.

Thus, on a first viewing, this seems to be a movie whose horizon of action can up until this point still accommodate the possibility of Marion's emotional rescue. The ingredients for such a plot all seem to be fully in place. This does not mean that we are not fully expecting some further jarring plot twist to obstruct Marion's happy intention to go back to Phoenix and try to pull herself out of it. But it does mean that we have acquired a certain horizon of expectations: a certain conception of what may count as a case

of their fulfillment or frustration within which the plot of the movie can now move and with which it may now play. Against the background of this horizon, questions such as the following will acquire their urgency for a viewer: can she go back to Phoenix; if Marion went back, voluntarily gave herself up, and returned the money, what would happen to her then; and so on?⁶⁸

Until now the film has been about Marian Crane and the consequences of her impulsive act. She has committed a foolish crime and has gone a little mad—but we all go a little mad sometimes—yet she also has, with Norman’s disarming assistance, begun to pry herself free from the trap of her own making. The story of the movie appears to be her story, and it fully holds our attention. It is evident that the camera likes her and that we are supposed to share in its feelings for her. She has been on screen almost all of the time for the first forty minutes of the movie. If we know anything about how such movies work, surely, we know this: this movie is about her. If we know anything about what a Hollywood movie is, then we also thereby take ourselves to know a great many other more specific things, such as that we need to keep one eye firmly fixed on the forty thousand dollars, wrapped up in a newspaper, which she left back in her hotel room. What happens to that money matters. Let this stand as the first entry in a long list of related sorts of things that we mistakenly take ourselves to know—a little over a third of the way into this movie—about what is (and what is not) supposed to matter.

The last time we see Marion Crane acting fully under her own power, she steps into the shower, ready to purge herself of her crime and wash herself clean. From that point on, we are increasingly deprived, as the action unfolds, of the things we unreflectively took ourselves on a first viewing to know about what we are watching. This is one evident respect in which the shower scene constitutes the pivotal seam in the architecture of *Psycho*. It divides the movie into a first and second half, each beginning with its own crime, each of which leads to a further crime; each half featuring its own heroine (Marion Crane and Lila Crane, successively portrayed by Janet Leigh and Vera Miles) and an enigmatic counterposed persona or hybrid of personae (the innocent young man who cannot say the word “bathroom” and Norman’s mother’s murderous substitute for a lover, successively portrayed by Anthony Perkins and Anthony Perkins).⁶⁹ Different forms of division of the

movie into halves are beheld on a first and second viewing of this cinematic diptych, each yielding a distinct experience of how the two halves form a whole. On a first viewing of the shower scene—the central panel of the diptych—the splintering into halves is precipitated by the shock of the loss of the initial organizing center of consciousness. The second time, armed with the foreknowledge of that impending loss and where it leads, we see a different first part (discovering previously latent layers in the dialogue, alternative schematizations of who is doing what to whom—for example, in the shower scene—and so on), which, in turn, yields wholly different forms of apprehension of how the half posterior to the shower scene completes the half that precedes it. In order for this one scene to be able to serve alternately as the central panel of two such radically divergent diptychs, it must be able to give rise to two distinct forms of experience on successive viewings of it.

The Shower Scene

The cinema has its own methods and its own scope. We must beware of missing the significance of a shot or a sequence by applying to it assumptions brought from the experience of the other arts. (Wood, *Hitchcock's Films* 57)

We have seen how an interplay of structures of latent and patent intention are everywhere encoded in the form of the dialogue in the preamble to the shower scene. We now want to attend to how this finds its cinematic counterpart in the form of the visual mode of presentation of the shower scene itself. Before we do this, it is worth noting that this means that there are countless remarkable matters pertaining to the scene (and especially what went into the making of it) that preoccupy much of the secondary literature on *Psycho* that will not—for the purposes of this inquiry—need to concern us in the remainder of this article.

The task of accurately describing the entirety of the mosaic of images comprising the scene is itself a formidable one.⁷⁰ Hitchcock is often rightly called “a master of detail,” and this is arguably the most meticulously planned and intricately structured slice of cinema in his oeuvre. The sheer volume of effort that went into the scene’s assemblage has attracted dozens of studies of archival research, sparking numerological controversies about whether its number of seconds in length is forty-five, whether the number of pieces of film spliced together in it is seventy-eight, whether the number of images that

comprised the storyboard constructed to guide its shooting was forty-eight, and so on. Anecdotes about the production of this morsel of a movie have become staples of cinematic lore and the topic of many articles and book chapters. The scene demanded an intimate degree of cooperation between the screenwriter (in the incorporation of the scene into the plot), the graphic artist (in the execution of the storyboard), the cinematographer (in the construction of sets and the placement of the camera), and the director.⁷¹ It required painstaking preparation,⁷² the building of an elaborate set,⁷³ a full week to shoot,⁷⁴ and so on. I allude to these matters and the quarrels they have unleashed (for example, about who deserves credit for what) only to indicate they are irrelevant to this article's aim—namely, that of bringing to reflective self-consciousness the depth of unity in this work of art.⁷⁵ My interest here lies not in excavating the conditions of the genesis of the work but, rather, in attending to the structure of the product of that artistic process and elucidating its aesthetic form.⁷⁶ With respect to the shower sequence, the aim will be to discern the forms of aesthetic intention latent in what we apprehend as viewers of the scene and to lay bare the means deployed to achieve those ends with a maximum of economy.⁷⁷

In discussions with an aesthetic focus, the scene is adduced as an example of what is most distinctive about Hitchcock's art—his predilection for “absolute camera”⁷⁸ or his aspiration to achieve “pure cinema”⁷⁹ or something else. Such concepts are framed with an eye to characterizing what is most patently eye-opening about Hitchcock's cinematic craft. I will concentrate instead on the scene's dimensions of latent virtuosity. To this end, we will again need to distinguish throughout between what we see on a first viewing of the scene from what there is to be seen on a subsequent viewing.⁸⁰ In doing this, we will want to be careful not to run together the following two sets of distinctions: (1) between what is immediately apprehensible on a first viewing and all that is eventually visually apprehensible in the scene on some eventual viewing of it and (2) between what can become visible on some viewing of the scene and what we never directly visually apprehend on any viewing of it. Let us begin with this last point, by noting some of what we do not directly apprehend in our experience of the scene. We are not subjected to the visceral experience of watching a blade repeatedly pierce skin; no nudity that violates the letter of the Hollywood censorship code is shown; no blood gushing out of wounds is open to view.⁸¹ Theorists of Hitchcock's

patent virtuosity will want to focus on questions of the “how” form: how is it possible to shoot a sequence vividly depicting a naked woman, being murdered while taking a shower, without displaying anything that rises to the level of nudity; how do you depict a brutal murder, involving countless thrusts of the knife, and show no bleeding wounds; and so on? Our inquiry is after a different quarry, one whose guiding questions are of the “why” form: why go to such extraordinary lengths to depict the murder in just this way?

One answer (implicit in much of the secondary literature on the scene) is that the very point of going to such lengths is to display the director's cinematic prowess (hence, in effect, to rub the viewer's face in his mastery of the art of pure cinema,⁸² or absolute camera, or whatever). This sort of answer presupposes that cinematic form (however pure or absolute) and dramatic content (however gritty or concrete) in a well-made Hollywood movie comprise two self-standingly intelligible dimensions of the work, such that either could suffer alteration independently of the other. Another no less common answer is that the sequence had to be shot in this way so that Hitchcock could get the scene past the censors. This might be true. But to think that this is the whole explanation would be sorely to underestimate what the scene accomplishes. This is the cinematic equivalent of answering the question “why does Shakespeare end the first line of Sonnet 116 with that word?” by saying: “So that it will rhyme with the last word of the third line!” It is true that he needs it to anticipate the rhyme to come. Any idiot can see that. The task of the critic is to help us to appreciate how much more it accomplishes than just that. If the critic is successful, then a certain conception of what a perfect translation of it into another language would be—one that involves no tradeoffs or compromises, perfectly capturing every nuance of its meaning while perfectly mirroring every aspect of its rhythm, meter, and rhyme scheme—will strike us as confused. We should find the following idea no less absurd: the idea of a correspondingly perfect “remake” of *Psycho*—hence, one that fully recaptures every aspect of what is cinematically achieved in the original construction and depiction of the shower scene.⁸³

It may prove instructive to consider that in the book by Robert Bloch, upon which the movie is loosely based, the shower murder is the matter of an instant: the Norman Bates character kills the Marion Crane character with a single well-placed thrust of the knife. The cinematic equivalent of

this manner of depicting the murder would last a single second as we watch (and perhaps hear) the knife penetrate her body. And that would be that. Yet, in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, in order to kill Marion, the knife must be raised and driven toward her flesh a seemingly uncountable number of times. Why is it that this character—who may be killed off in a single short moment by the author of the potboiler rendition of the narrative—must die in such cinematically etiolated fashion in Hitchcock's movie? And why must the manner in which we, the viewers of the movie, experience her death be mediated through such an unprecedentedly elaborate forty-five-second-long, seventy-eight-shot montage sequence?

George Toles comes close to asking the questions that I think need to be asked here, if we wish to arrive at a proper conception of what this scene accomplishes within the context of the work and how it accomplishes it:

Before asking any questions about the formal lucidity of Hitchcock's conception of the shower sequence, one would do well to consider the massive weight that this episode achieves within the total narrative structure. In Robert Bloch's potboiler novel, from which *Psycho* was adapted, Marion's death—far from being the central action in the plot—is matter-of-factly reported in a single terse sentence. If it is appropriate to point out that Bloch made nothing of an event that Hitchcock responded to with astonishing imaginative intensity, it is also appropriate to inquire why Hitchcock made so much of it. Does it seem either dramatically feasible or fitting that a female protagonist whose status in the narrative never rises above that of pitiable victim should be disposed of in so extravagant, prolonged and visually intoxicating a fashion? Is Marion's shabby, useless death a proper occasion for a virtuoso set piece? (163–64)

The difference between Toles's manner of phrasing these questions and my own is worth noting. Just as the ambitious critic of a Shakespeare sonnet will not ask merely whether it is "fitting" for the author to employ this word or construction at this juncture in the poem but, rather, will show how the poem, as we know it, would cease to exist if we were to tinker with this detail—hence how the unity of the work as a whole is crystallized into this part—so, too, the discerning critic of Hitchcock's work will elucidate how the structured cinematic whole that is *Psycho* depends upon the precise contours of the shower scene and vice versa—hence, how the degree of

rigor informing its construction must outstrip what we seek to discern if we inquire only why its manner of presentation is “apt” or “fitting.” Thus, for Toles’s first question—is it fitting that Marion should be disposed of in so extravagant, prolonged, and visually intoxicating a manner?—I wish to substitute the question: in order for the movie to realize its ends, why must Marion be disposed of in such a cinematically dazzling, temporally dilated, and eidetically arresting manner? For his second question—is Marion’s death a proper occasion for a virtuoso set piece—I wish instead to ask: why does the depiction of her death require precisely this form of montage?⁸⁴

The entire sequence is, as Toles indicates, immediately recognizable as virtuoso cinema. This is true of many aspects of it, and perhaps most memorably true of the last shot of the sequence: the breathtakingly executed zoom away from Marion’s head, collapsed and squashed against the bathroom floor.⁸⁵ Some of the shots that immediately precede it, at least on a first viewing, are also likely to lodge themselves in the memory of the beholder—for example, the unforgettable manner in which the camera lingers over and almost loses itself in Marion’s lifeless eye. Toles seeks to articulate his sense of what is so breathtaking about this moment—one in which we are afforded an extreme close-up of her face, framed so as to highlight the absolute immobility of her eye: an eye from which every sign of life has been drained. After the frantic montage crescendo to which we have just been treated, accompanied by the equally virtuoso sequence of *agitato* runs, trills, and abbreviated *staccato* stabs of Bernard Herrmann’s orchestral string section, this abrupt transition to a markedly unhurried form of visual and aural presentation, zeroing in on the stillness of her eye, brings home to us that she really is gone—there is no center of consciousness here any longer with which we may identify and through which we may continue to access the world of this movie. Toles sums up what this mode of presentation serves to convey: “In a culminating extreme close-up, this eye contemplates us with the alert fixity of death, while a false tear, formed by a drop of shower water on Marion’s face, announces that emotion (of any kind) has no place here. The tear might as well be a fly: nothing is but what it is” (163). This is a fine piece of film criticism, astutely observed and beautifully expressed. However, its aim is to bring to reflective understanding one of those moments of patent virtuosity in the construction of the scene. As already indicated, my aim below will be to direct our attention to its dimensions of latent virtuosity and, hence, to

how much that is cinematically extraordinary in this sequence will escape our notice if we approach it with an eye trained only on what is manifestly extraordinary about it.

One consequence of one of the sorts of aesthetic theory I was opposing at the outset of this essay is the way in which it more or less directly implies a certain conception of the nature of cinematic achievement. It implies that the moments of greatest aesthetic achievement in a movie are those in which the spectator is overtly alerted to the means by which a cinematically significant end is brought about. Such a theory pushes one in the direction of almost having to hold that there is an inverse correlation between the degree of a beholder's absorption in the world of the movie at a particular moment and the degree of aesthetic significance or interest that may rightfully be claimed on behalf of an absorbing moment of cinematic art.⁸⁶ This pushes one in the direction not just of being attentively disposed, as a fine critic such as George Toles is, to linger over moments of patent cinematic brilliance, such as the tour-de-force touch of placing that false tear on Marion's inexpressive face. But it can also push some so-called "theorists" of film into a particular variety of altogether poor criticism, born of bad theory. The theoretically top-heavy species of criticism that I have in mind commits itself in advance to privileging (what we might call, borrowing a term from Michael Fried) cinematically theatricalized moments of filmmaking—moments that interrupt our absorption in the world of the movie precisely in order to call attention to themselves as performing a gesture, directed at a beholder located outside of the work, the interest of which lies in its self-reflexive or meta-perspectival or otherwise self-thematizing character.⁸⁷

It is no accident that film theorists who love movies that contain such flourishes (indeed, ones that appear to be executed with the requirements of just such film theorists in mind) tend to love Hitchcock's films. For there is no denying that this director has everywhere strewn throughout his oeuvre morsels of grist for their mills. But we need to look again at what those morsels are doing there and how they function within the whole. Often, in eagerly seizing upon them and remaining focused on the task of gobbling them up, such self-professed admirers of Hitchcock tend to miss that, in catering to their species of sophisticatedly cinephile appetite (no less than when he panders to any other segment of his audience), Hitchcock thereby seeks to fasten their gaze as well—leading them, too, by the nose. They

are therefore no less prone to mistake what is comparatively shallow in his layering of cinematic significance for its depths.

Let us now attend to the various features of the famous shower sequence in *Psycho* that depend upon (what I have called) its latent virtuosity. Let us approach this task by first considering what this “episode” would have had to have been like if it had been filmed in a more continuous and spatially encompassing fashion from a single comparatively stable and sustained point of view. In such a mode of presentation, it would have been difficult to avoid a fairly graphic and stomach-turning depiction of tremendous violence and carnage. For the scene to fulfill the purposes that Hitchcock requires of it, the details of the horror and brutality of the scene unfolding before our eyes must take place largely in our imagination. What we are directly given to see, though it conveys a forceful understanding of the form of the event as one that is horrible and brutal, almost entirely abstracts from the sensible matter that would allow us to immediately visually or aurally apprehend it as such. This is a characteristic hallmark of Hitchcock’s art: to terrify us all the more by placing us in a perfectly measured degree of indirection in our relation to that which terrifies us, thereby allowing it to take hold of our imagination in a way in which no direct glimpse ever could. One might sum up the governing maxim of this dimension of Hitchcock’s craft as follows: never directly show the viewer anything that might detract from the power of what she will experience if she must complete what she sees with the work of her own imagination.⁸⁸

Hitchcock’s treatment avoids turning our stomach by (as Victor Perkins puts it) aestheticizing the horror, abstracting from a representation of the totality of the scene and flitting instead from one detail of it to the next in a manner that allows us to receive a vivid impression of violence, brutality, and despair, while showing us hardly anything in the way of blood, guts, and gore (*Film As Film* 108ff).⁸⁹ This returns us to the topic of what we do not see that another director might have shown—we do not see Marion’s injuries; we do not see blood pulsating from her wounds—and there is much to be said about what we do see, which another director would not have the camera dwell on—a frontal close-up straight into the face of the shower head spewing water, a shot onto the drain that gathers it and any other liquid, with blood only shown highly diluted with water, as it swirls down the drain. These and other indirect means of forcefully conveying an

impression of violence, brutality, and despair in the absence of any focal depiction of the physical trauma sustained, allows a maximum of shock to be imparted via the intellectual and emotional registers of our understanding of what is happening, while provoking minimal immediate physical revulsion and visual recoil from the details of that which we are actually permitted to see. This gap between what we see of what is happening and what we understand to be happening in the world of the movie is the space in which the real action of this scene unfolds.⁹⁰

But there is much else this scene accomplishes in the context of the movie. Here are three further tasks it obviously needs to accomplish: (i) a transition in default point of view; (ii) a concealment of the identity of the murderer; and (iii) an appreciation on the part of the viewer not only of what has just happened *in* (the world of) the movie but also its significance *for* the movie. When I say it “obviously” must accomplish these tasks, then this itself is an observation whose obviousness is available only to someone who has already seen the entirety of the movie at least once. Hence, on a first viewing of the movie, even these most obvious aspects of what the sequence must accomplish are in no way apparent (let alone obvious) to a viewer. These dimensions of filmic virtuosity can emerge from their latency phase only over the course of subsequent viewings of the movie.

Let us start with the first of those three. One reason it is not merely “fitting” but necessary that Marion not be disposed of in a cinematically banal, temporally punctate, and visually uncomplicated manner is the fact that the shower scene must negotiate a transition in the meaning of the default point-of-view shot and, hence, in the primary anchor of narrative identification for the viewer. Such a shot in the movie until now has been associated with the point of view of Marion Crane. Its meaning must now shift so that the default understanding of what is revealed through it is now to be associated with the subjectivity of someone else—first of all, with that of Norman.⁹¹ Until now, the central character of the movie has been Marion. She is about to leave this world. The shock we undergo is not merely because a sympathetic character in this world is dying in a horrific fashion but also because the light that has illuminated our vantage onto this world is, right before our eyes, being extinguished once and for all, threatening not merely the physical death of our heroine but also the ontological death of the world of the movie.⁹² Gradually, over the course of the montage sequence, what we see is refracted

less and less through Marion's (that is, the victim's) subjectivity and more and more through, first, that of the murderer and, then, increasingly, from no apparent point of view at all.⁹³ While our viewpoint in terms of *what* we see may appear merely to jump violently about, the viewpoint *through* which we see is being subtly renegotiated, and we acquiesce in this renegotiation. While being distracted by what is happening in the world of the movie, we alter the manner through which our access to this world is configured. A close description of the construction of the shower scene would register how the implicit point of view of the shots within the montage sequence thereby serve to facilitate this transfer to a new mediating center of consciousness through which we experience what is visually unfolding before our eyes.⁹⁴

Norman's initial spontaneous response to his discovery of what seems to have taken place in that shower itself serves to give voice to our own understanding of where we are at the denouement of that scene. This transfer of point of view is completed when we identify with Norman's exclamation (upon his apparently discovering Marion's corpse on the floor of her bathroom): "*Mother! Oh God! Mother! Blood! Blood!*" *Our* understanding of what must have happened now dovetails with (what we, at least on a first viewing, take to be) *his* understanding. It is this point of view with which we now identify and implicitly operate as we watch him set about the task of divesting Marion's motel room of all traces both of the crime and of her prior presence there.⁹⁵ In so identifying and operating, taking ourselves still to be inhabiting a form of cinematic genre with which we are antecedently familiar, we again make numerous tacit assumptions. These, in turn, structure our experience of the final panel of the diptych on a first viewing of the movie. For example, we take the ensuing cleanup to be in service of protecting the mother from the legal consequences of her homicidal bout of rage—thereby understanding Norman (as we understand ourselves) to be witnessing the aftermath of a drama he in no way authored—hence, viewing him (no less than Marion) as one of the drama's victims, thus as someone with whom we can identify.

In saying that we take Norman to "discover" Marion's corpse, we touch upon a further end that the construction of the scene must realize: one of effectively serving to conceal the identity of the murderer without cheating. Let us return to our thought experiment of what we would see if we were afforded a maximally perspicuous view of the scene. Well, if there were a single sustained non-close-up shot affording an overall view of the event of

the murder, we would have no difficulty visually identifying the murderer. It is important that, on a first viewing, we are enabled to rest with our presupposition that the murderer is the mother. This assumption has been carefully prepared. We so effortlessly fall into making it that we fail to register the ulterior significance of the camera's withholding from us any crisp view of her. This blinds us on a first viewing to what would otherwise be discernible—namely, that the silhouette of the perpetrator accords poorly with that of a sick and elderly mother, while matching perfectly the frame of the tall and lanky Norman. The beauty of Hitchcock is that he does not cheat.⁹⁶ This allows for a structure of (what we might call) hidden visual literality.⁹⁷ It is the cinematic counterpart of the structure of hidden linguistic literality present in so much of the dialogue in *Psycho*. On a first viewing of the shower scene, we fail to register the possibility of a visually strict construal of what the images show; on subsequent viewings, as our familiarity with the structure of the movie is refined, it becomes ever more impossible to fail to see what was previously invisible to us while being right before our eyes.⁹⁸

On a further viewing, we are able to see that the murderer has the mien of a spry, lean, upright young man, significantly taller than Marion, able to thrust the knife from above down upon her, while garbed in clothing unbecoming anyone in 1950s rural California of his gender, build, and age. We are freed from the series of expectations that inhibit us from registering how anomalous the spry and erect bearing of this little old lady is. We find ourselves suddenly schematizing our visual impression of the murderer in a different way so that it now organizes itself into the *Gestalt* of Norman, outfitted in his mother's garb and a wig.⁹⁹ What is withheld from view is therefore not literally invisible: it is simply placed in a manner that causes us to overlook what we do not expect and then, on a subsequent viewing—once we know what to listen and look for—to wonder how we possibly could have overlooked what now strikes us so conspicuously other than we had first imagined it to be.¹⁰⁰ A perfect degree of equipoise must be struck here—invisible enough to go at first unnoticed and yet fully visible enough to become at some later point suddenly apparently “unmissable.”¹⁰¹ Two aspects of its construction that allow the shower scene to attain the required equipoise are the adroit handling of the rapid montage and the perfectly gauged distribution of shadow and light across the scene.¹⁰²

Each of the preceding points requires the scene to have a double-edged temporality so that what happens suddenly (in the world of the movie) is experienced gradually (in the apprehension of the viewer). It needs to enable us to linger over and fully absorb the extraordinary implications of what is happening before our eyes, while representing an event we understand to be sudden and violent. In order to have its power, it must convey this suddenness and violence, while temporally dilating the presentation of the murder on the canvass of the screen in a manner that permits the viewer to process its initial significance for a first viewing as well as (when the visually latent becomes patent) the different significance its comparatively visually literal construal confers on a second viewing. The scene needs to be able to serve two apparently contradictory purposes at once. On the one hand, we need to see something sudden and shocking in such a way that we experience it as genuinely sudden and shocking while, on the other, also needing to experience it in such a way as to be afforded sufficient time to appreciate where this now leaves us qua viewers of the movie. While seemingly contradictory, each of these two forms of experience of the scene in fact presupposes the other. It has often been appreciated that directors must find devices for contracting time (in the viewer's apprehension of an action or episode) in ways the viewer does not experience as anomalously brief in relation to her understanding of the objective temporality (within the world of the movie) of the action or episode itself. Yet it is no less critical to devise forms of visual narration that dilate time in ways that are not experienced as anomalously dilatory, and nowhere is it more critical than in the rendition of this scene.

Finally, silent steps are taken to subvert the genre of the Noir from within and prepare the way for the revelation of a previously unsuspected adjacent genre. At the inception of the final panel of the diptych, a gulf begins to open up as, on a first viewing, it gradually dawns that we are no longer simply in a Film Noir—the stolen money is a MacGuffin—and we are no longer able to determine how great the distance is between the genre of the movie we took ourselves to be watching moments ago and the one we are now watching—no more than, as the gulf further widens, we are later able to determine how to gauge the psychic distance separating Norman from his mother. The original transition of viewpoint and identification for the viewer, in the immediate aftermath of the shower scene, from Marion to Norman involves you, qua viewer, in a segue from a character with whom

(as you get to know her) you are increasingly able to identify to a character with whom (as you first try to get to know “him”) seems not to resist such an effort on your part, but who—as you push further into the movie—proves increasingly to elude your capacity for identification. This, in turn, presages the even more profound and disorienting transition that awaits you: from a genre of film in which you are able to find your feet and feel at home to one whose dimensions defy encapsulation in a readily enumerable set of conventions with which you are antecedently familiar (unless, that is, you are already a seasoned aficionado of the Hitchcockian genre).

An Example of the Second Dimension of *Psycho*'s False Bottom

In the world of unknowingness created by Hitchcock, we . . . cannot take things as they always seem, must struggle to distinguish the public self-representations of others and our own self-representations from what is truly the case, must work to distinguish the staged and theatrical from the real, the self-deceived from the honest. (Pippin, *Philosophical Hitchcock* 122)

The doubleness latent beneath the overtly diptych structure of the film is mirrored by a corresponding doubleness within Norman's psyche underlying the overt bipolarity that we, on a first viewing, experience in his sudden alterations of mood over the course of his parlor conversation with Marion. When we first watch the movie and seek to befriend it, we take ourselves to know how to place this bit of Hollywood within the community of other movies with which we are acquainted—that is, until its false bottom gives way, and we wander into an underlayer of the movie that is initially hidden from view, bereft of the usual signposts for orienting ourselves in such a work. If we take the full measure of our resulting disorientation, we will feel the need for a new concept: one through which we can comprehend what sort of movie it is that we are now watching. When we first get to know Norman, like Marion as she seeks to befriend him, we take ourselves to know how to place him within the community of other persons whom we have encountered inside and outside of movies—that is, until the false bottom in his psyche gives way and a hidden personality comes into view for us. If we take the measure of our lack of moorings here, we again are left with a felt need for a new concept: in this case, one through which we can comprehend the sort of being with whom we are here called upon to identify. What holds

of Norman's psyche holds equally of the form of reality of which—as the movie's title indicates—*Psycho*'s cinematic world partakes. In each case, the contours of what or whom we seek to understand equally defy demarcation via any antecedently available theory we have at our disposal for understanding either movies or persons—ourselves or others—in our world.

At the end of *Psycho*, we are presented with someone who denies all this: a village explainer in the figure of the “Psychiatrist.”¹⁰³ He purports to provide those in Norman's world with the concept they crave—one that, by bringing him under it, would calm their sense of alarm at the unfathomability of their neighbor. This figure offers a model not only of how to fail to take the measure of the difficulty of acknowledging the strangeness of this person (or person within a person) but also that of acknowledging the experience of strangeness that this movie (or movie within a movie) has the power to elicit.¹⁰⁴ The knowingness of this figure serves as a kind of Rorschach test for the viewer. He fulfills a double office at the level of the second dimension of the movie's false bottom, depending upon which form of response he elicits in a viewer and on which viewing. On the one hand, he may provide a self-satisfied viewer with a mirror of herself and, therewith, an off-ramp back to complacency—to feeling that she knows how to situate the movie within the framework of expectations that she brings to it.¹⁰⁵ The certainty with which he fields questions and delivers judgment on the case of Norman serves to enforce the idea that the gulf that separates the madness about which this expert speaks from the sanity he displays through his discourse is as wide as an ocean—as unbridgeable as the one that separates the mushy ground of the fantasy world depicted in a Hollywood movie from the *terra firma* of the non-Hollywood reality that the aforementioned sort of viewer takes herself to inhabit. On the other hand, the figure of the “Psychiatrist” may provide an attentive viewer with the opposite epiphany—unmasking what purports to be the authority of expertise for a strategy of deflection—through the manner in which the very knowingness of his tone serves to indicate that his explanations are as pat and shallow as he is smug and supercilious. On the latter perception of him, this figure of knowingness is experienced as illustrating the hopelessness of attaining the self-satisfied viewer's preferred vantage on the movie—one that, previously innocent of this genre of movie, we, too, perhaps unthinkingly adopt at the outset of our first viewing.

The form of interpretatively safe ground to which such a viewer aspires is the reflective counterpart of the sort of literal safe ground for which each

of us, as viewers of the movie, cannot help but yearn as we imaginatively participate in its swirling course of events. This provides us with an illuminating instance of how the first dimension of *Psycho*'s false bottom is joined to its second: how the manner in which it gives way enables its second dimension to emerge into view. The quotation from Pippin that forms the epigraph to this section may be read as encoding both these dimensions. In its first dimension, the world of unknowingness created by Hitchcock is one that you first discover in the world of the movie: where—as Pippin rightly observes—you, qua inhabitant of that world, cannot take things as they always seem when it comes to the relations between the characters (who must struggle to distinguish the other's public self-representations from the self that is withheld) and in the relation they each bear to themselves (unable to distinguish their own self-representations from who they really are). You must struggle to discern not only what in this world is performance or pretense from what is spontaneous or unfeigned but also those expressions of thought and desire that are sincere from those that are outright deceptions. Yet this, too, is still only the tip of the iceberg. For you must also learn to distinguish between unwitting theatricality and witting self-deception, and to distinguish both of these from yet more puzzling forms of unknowingness—from unknowing knowingness (such as that of the "Psychiatrist") and unknowing unknowingness (such as that of Norman).

Pippin's remarks are no less valid for the second dimension of unknowingness for which Hitchcock arranges—the one that transpires within the sphere of the spectator's own self-understanding, qua inhabitant of a world outside the movie. For the ways you found yourself to be engaged by the movie come to be turned back onto you, weaponized into ways in which the movie may interrogate you, requiring a recognition of your own forms of genuine unknowingness and false knowingness. The figure of the "Psychiatrist" specifically affords one such opportunity—in this case, to discover your own attraction to a particular species of knowingness. As George Toles observes,

[n]ot only does *Psycho* contain no point of release for the viewer—it also becomes unclear what the viewer expects (or needs) to be released *from*. *Psycho* offers a number of gestures of release ... which turn out to be no release at all. ... [F]or example, Hitchcock caresses us, in the dying

woman's presence, with a hope of recovery, then immediately crushes it out as Marion extends her arm beseechingly out *to us*, ... clutches the shower curtain and collapses to the floor. Marion's gesture to save herself answers to our felt need, then instantly turns that need against us. Part of Hitchcock's complex achievement in the film is gradually to deprive us of our sense of what 'safe ground' looks like or feels like. (159)

These indications of possibilities for apparent diegetic release, which turn out in the end to afford no such release, find their counterpart in the myriad ways in which the movie suggests possibilities for interpretative closure that turn out in the end to provide no such closure. The discourse of the "Psychiatrist" represents the movie's final gesture in response to this demand for safe ground—in this case, interpretively safe explanatory ground.

The "Psychiatrist" presents an account of who the murderer is—one that purports to respond to any remaining felt need we might have for someone to come along and tie up (what may still appear to be) all the narrative loose ends, neatly shoehorning them into a final package of theory. Cavell says this about Hitchcock's recurring deployment of spokespersons for psychiatric expertise in his movies:

Marnie continues Hitchcock's examination of our world of stolen love. ... Hitchcock [in *Marnie*] ... reactivates his long obsession with the phony psychological explanations we give ourselves to ward off knowledge. *Psycho* is some ultimate version of this obsession; the brutal rationality of the "psychiatrist" at the end, tying up the loose ends of our lives, exhibits one form in which our capacity for feeling, our modulation of instinct, is no longer elicited by human centers of love and hate, but immediately by the theories we give ourselves of love and hate. Knowledge has not replaced love as our address to the world, but knowledge has replaced the world as the object of our passion. So science turns back into magic, theory becomes incantation, and intellectual caution produces psychic promiscuity. (*World Viewed* 65)

Here, the knowingness of the "Psychiatrist" is presented as a strategy for warding off knowledge and, in particular, self-knowledge.¹⁰⁶ Yet a further indication that he ought not to be accorded the final word on what this all means—on what it would mean really to see the figure who in the penultimate

scene of the movie sits in the next room (while the “Psychiatrist” talks about him or her) for the kind of person he or she is—may be gathered from the fact that Hitchcock does not give this village explainer the last word. It is given to Norman’s mother or, rather, to that incarnation of her who has come to inhabit her son’s union of mind and body, such as it is.

As the “Psychiatrist” comes to the end of his discourse and prepares to light a cigarette, a policeman comes in from the hall and directs the following question to him: “He feels a little chill. Can I bring him this blanket?” After the blanket is transported to its intended beneficiary, we share in the policeman’s view of the ensuing scene: one in which Norman is wrapped in the blanket, sitting in a chair against a blank wall. As the camera begins to move in, we increasingly attain a vantage on the scene that becomes ever harder to identify with one that emanates from the perspective of the policeman or from that of anyone else within the world of the movie. To whose center of consciousness and subjectivity are we now transitioning? As we see Norman in medium close-up, we hear the voice of Norman’s mother, as she begins an extended interior monologue from a depth of interiority seemingly unregistered in outward expression. As this voice begins to speak, we look upon the completely impassive face of whomever it is we take Anthony Perkins here to be portraying. No muscle in that face betrays the activity of thought. The voice opens with a plea that she, the speaker, be seen for the kind of person she is:

It’s sad when a mother has to speak the words that condemn her own son. I couldn’t allow them to believe I would commit murder. They’ll put him away now as I should have years ago. He was always bad and in the end he intended to tell them I killed those girls and that man. As if I could do anything except just stare like one of his stuffed birds. Oh, they know I can’t even move a finger and I won’t. I’ll just sit here and be quiet just in case they do suspect me. They’re probably watching me. Well, let them. Let them see what kind of a person I am.

The last word is given to this voice—the one who says: “Let them see what kind of a person I am.” In a moment, we will be presented with an exercise in seeing this person—an exercise that may pass us by on a first viewing.

In our closing view of the movie’s final speaker, the significance of the prison guard (who is keeping watch) and the policeman (who brings the

blanket) lies not in its being their points of view that we share but, rather, in its being their gaze that she (who is thereby seen) is made to suffer. She imagines them, understands them, to be gawking at her. Part of what her words declare, in revealing their audibility to us, is their correlative inaudibility to those who stare at her. In thinking this, she also thinks: these thoughts of hers elude them. Just as they cannot see her, they cannot hear her. Just we do not share their gaze, we are able to hear what they do not hear—namely, what she thinks. We, the viewers of the movie, form the only available audience for her final discourse.¹⁰⁷ Then her voice continues: “Why, I’m not even going to swat that fly,” and it is accompanied by a close-up, from the speaker’s point of view, of her hand with a fly lingering upon it. So now the viewpoint that we, as viewers, share is hers—that of the final speaker. It is her consciousness in which we participate as we hear her say: “I hope they are watching. They’ll see. They’ll see and they’ll know and they’ll say, ‘Why, she wouldn’t even harm a fly!’” As she says these words, the face that partakes of the outward physiognomy of Norman Bates assumes a mode of expression that we understand to belong to the mother. That face looks up directly at us, the viewers of the movie, and grins a grin that forms a not unnatural accompaniment to her words. While the mother thereby declares, both through speech and countenance, how the kind of person she is eludes those who look upon her from within the world of the movie, Hitchcock here takes the first step toward directing a counterpart declaration at us, the viewers of his movie: “Let them watch. Let them see what kind of a movie this is.”

Then comes the second step in that counterpart declaration. It is another of those junctures at which what is shown, and, hence, what is there to be seen, may escape us on a first viewing, caught up as we are in the pathos of trying to fathom the diegetic significance of what we hear that final speaker saying. The camera dissolves from a physiognomic superimposition to a photographic one—from the dramatically uncanny to the cinematographically uncanny—as it fades out of the elderly mother’s grin animating Norman’s youthful masculine visage and into the even more unsettling grin on the countenance of Norman’s deceased mother’s skull. The latter grin is one we have already encountered, atop a fully clothed corpse, perfectly placed onto a rocking chair. It, too, seemingly animated through an exogenous source, powered in that scene by the waxing and waning illumination thrown by

a swinging light bulb. This penultimate shot of the movie links back to the scene in which we first learn to what lengths Norman practices his arts of taxidermy, along with what he is hiding—both literally and figuratively—in his basement (or in what the movie mischievously refers to as his “fruit cellar”). This dissolve from the one grin into the other results in a fleeting superimposition of the two modes of superimposition—the two inversely related portraits of spiritual possession—one in which Norman’s living body is possessed by his dead mother’s spirit and one in which his mother’s dead body has been outfitted by Norman’s desire for her reanimation. This rapid threefold transition—from Norman’s impassive face to the palimpsest of physiognomies, to the moment of photographic superimposition, to the dissolve into the grinning reanimated skull—resolves itself in turn into the final sustained shot of the movie: a view of the swamp, with the initially submerged car emerging into view, as it is pulled up out of murky waters.

How does this movie end? After completing a first viewing and being asked about this—upon being asked, in particular, about the closing shots—a considerable number of viewers report seeing Anthony Perkins’s face break into that grin (in response to the elderly female voice remarking: “Why, she wouldn’t even harm a fly!”), followed immediately thereafter by the car, tugged by a tow chain, emerging from the swamp. That is, just as, on a first viewing of the shower scene, we may fail to see how the corporeal *Gestalt* of the murderer whom we take to be the mother bears the physique of the son, so too, on a first viewing of the closing shots, we may fail to see the living face of the speaker dissolve into that of someone able to address us only from beyond the grave. For it is hard to see what we lack the categories to schematize. Do we even understand what it would mean to share in the consciousness of this persona to whom our final cinematic foothold of identification is apparently transferred in the movie’s closing moments?

Both dimensions of *Psycho*’s false bottom may extend for a viewer throughout her first experience of the entire length of the movie—from its opening credits to its closing moments. They will extend that far if these final superimpositions fully come into view for her only upon a second viewing—in which case, only then may the full extent be registered to which this sequence itself serves to vacate the movie’s final false offer of release. Just as at the end of the first panel of the diptych Hitchcock caresses you, the viewer, in Marion’s dying presence, with a hope of recovery (as

her arm reaches out seeking something secure enough to bear her weight), then crushes out that sliver of hope (as the shower curtain collapses and she crashes to the floor); so, too, he teases you at the movie's close with a final exemplar of knowingness (as you reach out for a fulcrum secure enough to secure interpretative closure), then follows it up with possibly the movie's most unsettling sequence, paving the way for the discovery that the persona within its narrative frame whom you, in your mode of engagement with the movie, possibly resemble most may be the "Psychiatrist."

This should prompt us to revisit the concept most commonly adduced to characterize the experience of watching a Hitchcock movie—namely, suspense. What sort of condition of suspense does such a work engender in us? Between what and what are we suspended? As long as the false bottom remains in place, we, as viewers, are suspended between a present and an open future: between what is presently happening (and hence bears progressive aspect) and what will soon have happened (once it admits of description in the perfective form). Once that false bottom is punched through, the temporal structure of the suspense is reversed: we are suspended between the present (recalibrating our comprehension of it ever anew) and an open past (our comprehension of which is repeatedly unsettled, reopening countless matters that we took to have been determinately brought to a point of closure). It is this reversal that engenders the profounder cinematic experience of Hitchcockian suspense. Unlike the first form of suspense (between a present and an open future), the experience of the second (between a present and an open past) persists well beyond a first viewing. It is occasioned by discovering the seeming endlessness of what eludes us, so that (even after countless successive viewings) the movie challenges our every effort to conclude not only that we are done with it (done figuring it out) but also that it is done with us (done affording us with opportunities to figure ourselves out). The full experience of this form of suspense turns on more than just the sense that we are unable to achieve secure footing on narrative safe ground—like someone standing at the edge of precipice, looking into the depths below, haunted by the possibility of falling. Once both dimensions of the movie's false bottom give way, that initial apprehensiveness about when and how we will be afforded an impending moment of closure yields way to its deeper Hitchcockian counterpart. It derives from the sense that we no longer know what it would mean for there to be ground on which to stand—what it

would mean to be liberated from the condition of suspense—like someone who continues to be afflicted by vertigo, even with both feet planted and her gaze firmly fixed on the only sort of candidate for firm ground her world seems able to afford.

The Conjuror's Art

[T]he effort of seeming effortless is the most demanding of all. (Perkins,
Film As Film 113–14)

To summarize our previous discussion of the shower scene, in order to move toward a few concluding observations, recall that these are the five purposes that need to be realized through the manner in which the shower sequence in *Psycho* is depicted:

- (1) the transition from one organizing center of narrative subjectivity to another: from a perspective onto the world of the movie mediated through Marion's consciousness to one that is, albeit far less transparently, mediated through Norman's;
- (2) the dilation of the temporality of the scene: achieved through the mode of conveyance enabling the viewer to experience the shocking suddenness of the murder, while absorbing something that cannot be processed suddenly—its implications for the viewer's mode of access to the world of the movie;
- (3) the aestheticization of the horror: vividly imparting violence, brutality, and despair, while abstracting from blood, guts, and gore in a manner that frees the viewer up to experience and navigate the other four purposes that the scene must achieve, thereby preparing the ground for its climax;
- (4) the concealment of identity: the displacement of one crime and set of assumptions through which to comprehend the action of the movie (pertaining to the ever-ramifying consequences of Marion's theft) with another (pertaining to the apparent disclosure of the murderer as Norman's mother) in such a way as to allow the details of most significance to escape our view on a first viewing;
- (5) the insinuation of a false bottom in the movie's generic structure: like the placement of a pin into a hand grenade, it is the assumptions the

viewer is induced to make, as she takes in this scene, that pave the way for their removal and, hence, the subsequent explosion of the movie's appearance of participation in a familiar Hollywood genre.

On a third or fourth viewing of the movie, we may come to appreciate the artfulness of technique, the efficiency of means, and the breathtaking simultaneity with which all five of these desiderata are realized through this one sequence of rapid montage. None of this could be accomplished unless the very extent of this joint accomplishment were itself invisible to a viewer on a first viewing. What is most apt to strike us on a first viewing of this necessarily unforgettable scene is this: we have just witnessed an episode that is—especially in its use of montage—cinematically remarkable.¹⁰⁸ In priding ourselves on being thus struck by the scene, we are bound to fail to appreciate how that dazzling impression itself serves to deflect our attention from where the scene's real virtuosity lies—namely, in the extent to which the above five maneuvers in the director's conjuring game are all performed simultaneously in a manner permitting none of them to strike us at all.¹⁰⁹

Attention to the seeming effortlessness with which this fivefold task is discharged ought to put pressure on what sorts of answers satisfy us to two sorts of question briefly touched on above—one having to do with the nature of the cinematic medium and one having to do with the aesthetic evaluation and criticism of such forms of art. Here are some examples of the first sort of question: what is montage; what is montage for; and how does the technique of montage confer meaning on a sequence of shots? What reflection on the shower scene's use of montage reveals is that, when posed at this absolutely hopeless level of generality, such questions are ill posed. One way to show this is by exhibiting some of the indefinite number of different cinematic purposes that can be realized through the employment of a given technique by looking at the very different sorts of significance it reveals across a range of contexts. Another is to show how a single scene can employ "the same technique" to realize a variety of such purposes all at once, as is the case with the shower scene. No established answer to the question "what is montage?" delivered by a film theorist wed to his or her preferred theory of film ought to satisfy us if it serves to blind us to the forms of cinematic complexity and aesthetic unity embodied in this scene. This is not only because it shows that there are an indefinite number of significance-in-a-movie-conferring games a director can play

through employing the technique that film theorists call “montage”—and that a great director (such as Hitchcock in *Psycho*) will find ways to play several of them at once—but, rather, because such an artist will often be concerned to explore ways to employ these means in the service of entirely novel cinematic ends. For there are more ends to which this (or any other) “cinematic technique” may be put, dear Horatio, than are dreamt of in your (or any other film theorist’s) philosophy of “the” medium.

A director whose exploration of cinematic craft faithfully answers to the antecedent expectations of the film theorist is the aesthetic equivalent of the poet whose exploration of language always answers to the expectations of the grammarian. The unfolding history of poetry shows us how any requirement that a grammarian ever lays down may be flouted in the interest of achieving a form of expressive power not otherwise attainable. So, too, nothing other than the ongoing development of the cinema can disclose the possibilities of cinematic art. That is part of what it means to claim that it deserves our recognition as a form of fine art—one whose aesthetically significant means and ends are themselves determinable only through the actuality of the history of the unfolding of its practice.¹¹⁰

A second way in which an appreciation of the fivefold accomplishment of the shower scene can serve to illuminate the nature of cinematic art—especially that of the great Hollywood movie—is beautifully summed up in the quotation from Victor Perkins that serves as the epigraph to the present section of this article (*Film As Film* 113–14). The shower scene exemplifies how those moments in the history of Hollywood that have non-accidentally come to be most fêted and fawned over are, indeed, the ones displaying brilliant artistry, yet not where the critic is most apt to look for it. There is a mode of invisibility that is internal to the very form of artistic excellence that such cinema achieves. What attention to the shower scene reveals is how this mode of invisibility is itself the source of our immediate unreflective experience of a certain form of fineness in cinematic texture. If we wish to reflectively account for the conditions of the possibility of that form of aesthetic experience, then we must bring to successive viewings of the scene a critical attentiveness comparable in measure to the patience, care, and nuance invested in its construction.

There is a tendency to remember a sequence like the shower scene as being a remarkable scene but to think that this fact must rest on some

straightforwardly isolatable aspect of Hitchcock's method of film making, one whose distinguishing marks or features can be gathered together and designated by a single concept. The aim here has been to allow this scene to serve as an example of how unexamined categories of classification and overworn terms of criticism engender the illusion that we already understand what it is that we experience when we watch such a scene, prior to our allowing it—and the work it performs within the form of movie in which it occurs—to teach us what it means to watch it. What I have attempted to show is how, even when a moment in a movie may be singled out as self-evidently brilliant, it can be exquisitely difficult to articulate why it is so brilliant—how the source of its immediately felt brilliance may be due precisely to its employing means and fulfilling ends, none of which are themselves self-evident.

If one seeks the source of the effect in the employment of forms of technique whose significance can be comprehended by treating the scene as a self-enclosed entity, intelligible apart from its role and significance within the whole of the movie, then one will be drawn to a certain sort of theory for how to account for its power. I have tried to do the opposite: to show how the structure of the movie (as a whole) and that of the scene (as a part therein) mutually depend upon and sustain each other. My discussion has therefore been obliged to weave back and forth between reflections on the form of movie that *Psycho* is, on the overall structure of this member of that genre, and on the diverse purposes fulfilled by this particular scene within that structure.

What is easily lost on us—and becomes unrecoverable when we are in the grip of a certain form of theory—is how the very fact that, on a first viewing, we may miss most of the artistry that goes into such a movie is tied to the very nature of the sort of artistry that it is. One way the degree of cinematic perfection present in such a work may be misgauged is by chalking the effectiveness of a given scene or sequence of shots up to some fortuitous knack or facility with which the director has been happily blessed.¹¹¹ Another theoretically more stultifying way is by displacing the aesthetic power of the work—which the critic experiences but has difficulty accounting for—onto the physical nature of the photographic medium (as if the crucial effect in question is secured simply through something having to do with the very nature of projected motion picture images) or onto

some single theoretically privileged tool in the filmmaker's toolbox (such as "the" technique of splicing such images together). This leads to theories that mystify the medium without ever discerning what is most essential to it—namely, that which allows the medium of the Hollywood movie to achieve the varieties of aesthetic excellence that mark it out as the distinctive form of art that it is. Such theories, in turn, encourage the idea that the measure of a movie qua work of art—qua object to which genuine depth of artistry may be attributed—must lie in its willingness to obtrusively draw attention to (and perhaps even take up arms against) its own medium out of an eagerness to declare its seriousness of aesthetic purpose. There thus arises, as noted above, an inordinate fondness on the part of the theorist for cinematic gestures deemed to be cleverly self-reflexive or otherwise preoccupied with overtly thematizing the very techniques that are antecedently valorized by a certain form of theory. When this sort of gesture comes to be regarded as a mark of a movie's aesthetic sophistication, then its capacity to retain the beholder's attention by drawing her ever more deeply into its world is bound to end up seeming to be a mark of Hollywood cinematic naiveté.

Such theories of cinema will not lack for strategies for carving out an exception for Hitchcock, absolving his Hollywood creations of this general charge of naiveté by singling out for attention aspects of his work that the theory in question has advanced its own reasons to valorize, such as interpretively elusive and vertiginous dimensions of narrative structure, intricacy in the employment of montage, delight in gestures of self-reflexivity, and density of moments of self-evident cinematic virtuosity. The idea that governs such forms of theory is that what is great in such cinema is to be measured by what has already been antecedently thought out in, and prescribed by, theory. Once such a requirement is in place, the only form of thought that can be discovered in a movie is one that is already available to the viewer prior to her aesthetic experience of the movie itself. The idea that governs the account of *Psycho* offered here is the opposite: it is only in and through what is genuinely novel in the cinematic form that it forges that what such a movie itself thinks—and what it enables us to think—is to be discovered.¹¹²

This takes us back to the particular theoretical requirement touched on at the beginning of this article: the governing idea that serious art in our age must overtly lay stake to its intention to participate in the modernist condition. Our discussion of the shower scene provides an example of how

even the outwardly most modernist moments in Hitchcock's work still form part and parcel of the exploration of an aesthetic medium structurally designed to overcome the very forms of opposition that modernist works of art seek to effect: between insiders (who appreciate seriousness of aesthetic purpose under conditions of modernity) and outsiders (who expect to be entertained) and, hence, between serious art (that spurns mere popularity) and popular art (that measures its success at the box office). If the measure of an art house film's excellence is understood to be a function of its overt preoccupation with, and capacity to, draw attention to its methods of cinematic world construction, then most Hollywood movies are relegated on *a priori* grounds to the category of the aesthetic poor cousin of all putatively ambitious art films. Once such a picture is in place, then even a Hitchcock creation deemed by such a theorist to qualify as exceptional cinema will be overpraised for its immediately discernible cinematic pirouettes and underestimated for all that it achieves seemingly effortlessly. Not unlike the spectator who takes up the invitation to presume that there might be something quite extraordinary about the "perfectly ordinary hat" that the conjurer invites him to examine carefully (thereby misdirecting the spectator's attention in a manner essential to the successful performance of the trick), the theorist who looks for the secret to Hitchcock's genius in his most easily discernible cinematic gestures (allowing her attention to be thereby channeled by this conjurer) misses the extraordinariness of effort present in what she mistakes to be the effortlessly ordinary portion of the performance.

A well-made movie, perhaps more than any other art form, activates our capacities for engaged reflection and intelligent response in ways in which the world itself does by presenting us with, and involving us in, its world—one that measures our capacities for such reflection and response. Not only does it do this while eschewing the comparatively esoteric routes that the other arts have generally felt obliged to travel since the advent of modernism, but it often does this by achieving forms of aesthetic self-consciousness that it conceals within itself. For much of what a certain kind of well-made movie does, it can do only if it also initially conceals the means by which it exploits and explores its medium: only if it buries its artistry so deeply that it can take decades before those who profess to be its theorists are able to work out what even the rudiments of the medium

thereby disclosed are. And, like many things American, a certain form of Hollywood movie—no matter how apparently sophisticated—is able to cloak its moments of artfulness in those of its stratagems most apt to be mistaken for relapses into naiveté.¹¹³

Roughly, how many moments of cinematic perfection are there on the order of the shower scene in the history of Hollywood cinema? Only when we have a great many more film critics of the caliber of a Stanley Cavell, or a Victor Perkins, or a Robert Pippin—who are able to show how the whole of a movie is present in each of its parts and how seemingly negligible aspects of those parts are essential to the achievement of the whole—will we begin to know the answer.¹¹⁴

James Conant is Chester D. Tripp Professor of Humanities, Professor of Philosophy, and Professor in the College at the University of Chicago. He works broadly in philosophy and has published articles in Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, Aesthetics, German Idealism, and History of Analytic Philosophy, among other areas, and on a wide range of philosophers, including Kant, Emerson, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Josiah Royce, William James, Frege, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Putnam, Cavell, Rorty, and McDowell, among others. His most recent book is *The Logical Alien*, edited by Sofia Miguens (Harvard University Press, 2020). He has edited, among other things, two volumes of Hilary Putnam's papers and co-edited (with John Haugeland) one volume of Thomas Kuhn's papers. Together with Jay Elliot, he is the co-editor of the volume of the *Norton Anthology of Philosophy* titled *After Kant: The Analytic Tradition* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2017).

Notes

- 1 "So we had to say 'Hitchcock is a greater genius than Chateaubriand'. Then people said: 'You're joking. Are you crazy?'" (Godard, *Introduction* 32). Such claims, associating Alfred Hitchcock with some of the great names in the history of art and literature, emanated in the 1950s primarily from French cinephiles, writing especially in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Hitchcock came to be regarded by many of the members of this group as ranking "among such artists of anxiety as Kafka, Dostoevsky and Poe" (Truffaut 20) or to be likened to Marcel Proust as "one of the century's great artists" (Godard, "Les cinémathèques 287). In the early and mid-1960s, related claims by Robin Wood on behalf of Hitchcock came in for considerably more derision among anglophone cinephiles—claims such as this: "*Psycho* is one of the key works of our age. Its themes are of course not new — obvious forerunners include *Macbeth* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (*Hitchcock's Films* 150) or this: "In complexity and subtlety, in its emotional depth, in its power to disturb, in the centrality of its concerns, *Vertigo* can as well as any film be taken to represent the cinema's claims to be treated with the respect accorded to

longer established art forms" (129–30). In an essay detailing the reception of Wood's early book on Hitchcock, Harry Oldmeadow rightly remarks in connection with the latter claim: "This passage will not, perhaps, strike today's reader as exceptional. In 1965 these were brave words indeed" (410).

- 2 As Robin Wood reports, "[t]he first piece of film criticism I submitted for publication was an article on *Psycho* that, in considerably expanded form, was the basis of the chapter in *Hitchcock's Films*. . . . I submitted the article to *Sight and Sound*, and it was rejected by Penelope Houston, who informed me in a very courteous letter that I had failed to grasp that the film was intended as a joke" (*Hitchcock's Films* ix). Houston's own contemporaneous published assessment of *Psycho* in 1960 is, indeed, perfectly encapsulated in the following remark from her critical notice on the film: "[It] is a sick joke in a Gothic horror format" (*Contemporary Cinema* 69). Wood went to submit his review to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, where it was published (1–6) under the title "Psychoanalysis of *Psycho*" and reprinted in *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews* (3–10). Twenty years later, a great deal had changed: when Houston was then commissioned to write an entry on "Alfred Hitchcock" for a reference work, she devotes several pages to respectfully detailing the central claims of Wood's later book on Hitchcock (487–502).
- 3 Just one example: "Hitchcock is no more than the world's best director of unimportant pictures" (Grierson 72).
- 4 Again, just one example: "Hitchcock has never been a 'serious' director" (Anderson 58).
- 5 One example: "Nobody would seriously compare Hitchcock to a dozen directors and producers who have used the film medium as an art form" (Hardison 137–38).
- 6 "The cinema—especially the Hollywood cinema—is a commercial medium. Hitchcock's films are—usually—popular. . . . From this there arises a widespread assumption that, however 'clever', 'technically brilliant', 'amusing', 'gripping' etc., they may be, they can't be taken seriously as we take, say, the films of Bergman or Antonioni seriously" (Wood, *Hitchcock's Films* 57).
- 7 As Andrew Sarris (writing in 1968) put it, "Hitchcock's reputation has suffered from the fact that he has given audiences more pleasure than is permissible for serious cinema" (*American Cinema* 58). See also the opening lines of the original edition of Wood's *Hitchcock's Films*: "Why should we take Hitchcock seriously? It is a pity the question has to be raised. . . . As things are, it seems impossible to start a book on Hitchcock without confronting it" (55).
- 8 "Genre films especially are criticized because they seem to appeal to a preexisting audience, while the film "classic" creates its own special audience through the unique power of the filmmaking artist's personal creative sensibility. . . .

Genre films offend our most common definition of artistic excellence: the uniqueness of the art object, whose value can in part be defined by its desire to be uncaused and unfamiliar, as much as possible unindebted to any tradition, popular or otherwise” (Braudy 556).

- 9 “For the blatant fact about film is that, if it is art, it is the one live traditional art, the one that can take its tradition for granted” (Cavell, *World Viewed* 15).
- 10 It is this distinction that underwrites his famous conclusion “better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied” (57). Contrary to a now standard reading of the distinction between higher and lower pleasures, however, the contrast that matters here, for J.S. Mill, is not between pleasures of mere feeling as opposed to those of the mind but, rather, the contrast between feeling uninformed by intellect or intellect uninformed by feeling, on the one hand, and a unity of mutually interdependent pleasures of intellect, feeling, imagination, and moral sentiment, on the other.
- 11 This is the literary equivalent of regarding a Henry James novel and a piece of pulp fiction as equal partners in a single aesthetic genre because they are both governed by “the principle of the gold-digger,” where this turns out to mean nothing more than they both feature a young woman seduced by an older man out to marry her for her money.
- 12 As we shall see in a moment, if some such set of features could suffice to qualify something as a Film Noir, then *Psycho* would be properly classifiable as one.
- 13 These points are made in various ways, in varying degrees of detail, and in connection with very different examples of genre in the writings by Stanley Cavell. For one compressed, but illuminating, articulation of such points (in connection with the genre that Cavell calls the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage), see, for example, the opening chapter of *Pursuits of Happiness*.
- 14 Cavell spells out this point in five steps: “[T]he members of a genre share the inheritance of certain conditions, procedures and subjects and goals of composition, and that in primary art each member of such a genre represents a study of these conditions, something I think of as bearing the responsibility of the inheritance. There is, on this picture, nothing one is tempted to call ‘the’ features of a genre which all its members have in common. First, nothing would count as a feature until an act of criticism defines it as such. . . . Second, if a member of a genre were just an object with features then if it shared *all* its features with its companion members they would presumably be indistinguishable from one another. Third, a genre must be left open to new members, a new bearing of responsibility for its inheritance; hence, in the light of the preceding point, it follows that the new member must bring with it some new feature or features. Fourth, membership in the genre requires that if an instance (apparently) lacks a given feature, it must compensate for it, for example, by showing a further feature ‘instead of’ the one it lacks. Fifth,

the test of this compensation is that the new feature introduced by the new member will, in turn, contribute to a description of the genre as a whole" (Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness* 28–29). A further crucial and fascinating aspect of Cavell's account of genre that I have omitted (because I think it lacks the power to illuminate the cases of genre that interest me below) is his further suggestion that we think of "the common inheritance of the members of a genre as a story, call it a myth. The members of a genre will be interpretations of it, . . . revisions of it, which will also make them interpretations of one another" (19). As I indicate below, this is an aspect of Cavell's account that plays an important role in Robert Pippin's account of the Western, but not in Pippin's account of the Film Noir. It also plays no role in the account I offer below of the genre whose possibilities Hitchcock discovers and explores.

- 15 No two authors have done more than Cavell and Pippin to rescue the Hollywood genre film from the aforementioned forms of condescension (that have so often attended its reception in supposedly sophisticated critical circles) and to theorize what it could mean to say that the exemplary instances of a genre embody forms of philosophical reflection. It is a fool's errand to try to sum up in a few words what Cavell and Pippin, over the course of their respective pairs of major books on the subject, have jointly revealed about the nature of this peculiar form of cinema. I am, nevertheless, by way of a preamble to this article, attempting here to highlight a central aspect of their work on this topic upon which the present article will seek to build.
- 16 I am about to attempt to do something that, by my own lights, is strictly speaking impossible: to provide an overview of an aspect of the form of a genre while prescinding from any sort of detailed reading of any of its instances—hence, from the matter to which that form is essentially related. This sort of illustration (of what it means to think out a genre) is slightly less quixotic in the case of the Western than it would be for most other cases. There are at least three reasons for this: (1) the concept of the Western possesses a coherence qua aesthetic category more readily apprehensible than that of other familiar cinematic genres; (2) it is a genre whose unity is less tightly and intricately structured than those of concern below and, hence, easier to bring to mind; and (3) Westerns have a way of sitting in a viewer's memory that makes it possible to discern (even without having recently and attentively rewatched a handful of them) how they jointly enter into a single conversation with one another.
- 17 This is just one sort of question that the frontier setting and the need for a new founding of civil society permits the genre to explore. Below, I touch on subsidiary questions to which its exploration of this question leads. But there are other directions in which the genre moves, allowing for the Western's distinctive ways of drawing into question received conceptions of matters such as the place of the woman in bourgeois society, the right of a single

wealthy individual to hold vital resources or vast tracts of land as property, the justification for dispossessing Native Americans of their homeland, and the nature of the white man's racial anxieties—to mention only a few salient themes that I do not touch on below. To take all of this into account would require that many more steps be taken in the unfolding of the thematic field of the genre than the few that are sketched here.

- 18 The preceding paragraph is my foolish attempt to summarize in a few words a portion of the extraordinarily dense and challenging tangle of questions that Pippin in *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth* shows the great Hollywood Westerns not only to be each asking but also to be each concerned with thinking through in ways that aim to unsettle our preferred American answers to them. The concept of myth that Pippin deploys (already in the title of his book) is essential to his account of the Western but not (as it is for Cavell) essential to his conception of genre as such. There is, for example, no entry for “myth” in the index to Pippin’s book on the Film Noir, and he offers principled reasons for not according the concept the same weight in his account of the latter genre. He contrasts the Western’s evocation of life prior to the establishment of law with the Film Noir’s foretelling of an impending nearly post-legal future: “Westerns are often about foundings . . . and adopt a mythic style of narration appropriate to founding narratives, presenting us with questions about the possibility of law, often the question of the psychological possibility of allegiance to law, in prelaw situations. Noirs . . . concern . . . human life under conditions of corrupt or decaying or incompetent law, the postlaw world of disillusionment, one might say” (Pippin, *Fatalism* 10).
- 19 Claims of this sort on behalf of Hollywood films encounter an entirely different kind and degree of resistance in my experience than do similar claims on behalf of classic works of literature. François Truffaut or Robin Wood are apt to seem to be indulging in hyperbole when they (as cited above) rank Hitchcock among artists such as Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Edgar Allan Poe or single out Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as worthy forerunners of *Psycho*. The claim that works of literature embody philosophical thinking is one that readily can find a hearing. (Indeed, it can appear to border on a truism when claimed of, say, *The Trial* or *Crime and Punishment*.) Though many a cinephile no longer resists the idea that Hitchcock’s achievement within the cinematic medium somehow rivals that of such writers within the literary sphere, they are likely still to find the following further claim—suggested by a mere application of the principle of transitivity—harder to swallow: namely, that such movies embody a comparable depth of philosophical reflection.
- 20 One such book on the Western is mentioned in note 18 above.
- 21 I will, in my summary remarks immediately below, refrain from saying anything detailed about any particular genre, including the four to which Cavell and Pippin have devoted entire books. The two genres that Cavell uncovers, and thereby

makes available for the first time as possible objects of aesthetic reflection in their own right, are the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage and the Melodrama of the Unknown Woman—the former in *The Pursuits of Happiness*; the latter in *Contesting Tears*. These two genres are more specific and tightly structured than those of the sort that scholars or theorists of film generally attempt to specify. It is also essential to Cavell's purpose that they jointly constitute a pair of (what he calls) "adjacent genres." The two genres whose inner logic Pippin seeks to articulate and elucidate in his two books are more capacious in structure and sprawling in scope. They are, indeed, two that even the most unlearned student of film is able to name: the classic Hollywood Western and the original American Film Noir. They form the respective topics of Pippin's *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth* and *Fatalism in American Film Noir*. In the light of Pippin's work, it becomes evident how great the extent is to which the latter two—the Western and the Noir—have generally been conceived by film theorists as something less than properly constituted aesthetic genres in the demanding sense adumbrated above.

- 22 "Bernard Williams once wrote that there can be a great difference between what we actually think about something and 'what we merely think that we think,' and great literature or great film can make clear to us in a flash, sometimes to our discomfort, what we really think" (Pippin, *Philosophical Hitchcock* 6, quoting Williams 7).
- 23 Cavell and Pippin do each begin to take an interest in such matters, however, when they turn their attention to Hitchcock. Hence, at various junctures in his tour-de-force reading of *Vertigo*, Pippin discusses how its "invoking elements of the film noir genre" constitute moments where the movie is concerned, in effect, to perform the cinematic equivalent of alluding to and displaying—he himself characterizes this as its undertaking "to quote"—cinematic conventions drawn from the Noir (*Philosophical Hitchcock* 51).
- 24 I do not mean to suggest that at the end of the day this is the best—or even a good—way to designate the genre in question. I designate it thus because it provides a quick and easy way of picking out a raft of movies that bear the formal structure that I seek to elucidate here—one in which the generic conventions of a pre-existing genre are exploited to allow for the construction of the specific sort of false bottom characteristic of the Hitchcockian movie. One formal feature that the designation is meant to indicate is that there is no single antecedent genre that is "the" one that is repeatedly busted open by each of the members of the Hitchcockian genre. (*Shadow of a Doubt*, *Psycho*, and *Torn Curtain*—to take just three examples—respectively start out by appearing to acquiesce in the preexisting conventions of three very different genres.) Of course, if this is a genre, then "being made by Hitchcock" is not one of its constitutive features. Movies not made by Hitchcock may inherit and participate in it. Hence, though I am sympathetic to its spirit, I must

demur from the letter of the “anyone but Hitchcock” part of the following remark from Victor Perkins: “The Hitchcock movie is a genre impossible for anyone but Hitchcock and extremely hard to bring off even for him” (“I Confess” 369). Conversely, not every Hitchcock movie is an instance of the genre here under discussion—not every Hitchcock movie is (in the sense adumbrated above) a Hitchcockian movie. Arguably, the first fully successful instance was *Shadow of a Doubt*, which, after an opening sequence that smacks of the Film Noir, suddenly transports us to what appears to be a Frank Capra romantic comedy, set in small-town America, featuring a marriageable and charming young heroine, the antics of her wacky family members—along with the house in which they live, whose charming idiosyncrasies cast it as a further character in its own right. As in *Psycho*, it is only in the wake of a certain pivotal development that it no longer remains possible to sustain the heroine’s disarming reading of her world. The generic conventions of a Capra comedy then cease to define our horizon as we are plunged into a darker and more vertiginous form of aesthetic experience—one that allows us to discover upon a second viewing the many respects in which its Capra-like moments are the outer guise of something whose inner structure was never that of a Capra comedy. What is the thematic affinity between the Capraesque genre and the Hitchcockian one—their profound differences notwithstanding—one that enables the latter to build on the former in this way? The following remark of Cavell’s (about *Vertigo* and *It’s a Wonderful Life*) points to the beginning of an answer: “The Capra and the Hitchcock films make nakedly clear the power of film to materialize and to satisfy (and hence to dematerialize and to thwart) human wishes that escape the satisfaction of the world as it stands; as perhaps it will ever, or can ever, stand” (*Themes Out* 180).

- 25 Éric Rohmer puts it this way in one of his interviews: “Hitchcock is the greatest creator of forms in the cinema” (qtd. in Fauvel and Herpe 186). This remark occurs verbatim in Episode 4a, titled “Introduction to the Method of Alfred Hitchcock,” of Godard’s cinematic magnum opus *Histoire(s) du cinema*.
- 26 For example, movies may be genre busting in more benign ways—ones that aspire to a comparatively more loving and respectful form of engagement with a genre’s characteristic features. Consider, for example, a form of cinema that seeks to achieve a hybrid form of generic structure, blending together features of, say, the Western and the Film Noir (as the television series *Justified*—based on Elmore Leonard’s Raylan Givens stories—arguably does). In this case, both the seams of the Film Noir and those of the Western are burst in the sense that the work signals that it aims to inherit both at once—and hence to display some of the conditions of the very possibility of their combination. But such a work still genuinely inherits, participates in, and extends each of these genres in so relating them to one another. It does not assume the conventions of either (in the manner *Psycho* engages one of the two) as an outward façade

that must be peeled back in order to discern the inner logic that governs the form of cinema we are watching.

- 27 It is no accident that this task remains undone. The assignment is a dauntingly formidable one, and it is not the aim of this article to discharge it in full. The best of the aesthetically astute, philosophically minded critics of Hitchcock to date (Charles Barr, Stanley Cavell, James Harvey, Gilberto Perez, Robert Pippin, George Toles, Victor Perkins, William Rothman, George Wilson, Robin Wood) have tended largely to confine themselves (as I do here, in attending to certain aspects of *Psycho*) to the already sufficiently difficult, preliminary task of offering readings of individual members of this body of work—clarifying the questions each such instance raises—one movie at a time. No one has yet attempted anything on the order of ambition of what Cavell and Pippin have each done (for the respective pairs of genres to which they attend) for the logic of the genre that I here claim Hitchcock called forth.
- 28 All of the quoted bits in this sentence indicate representative ways that such a claim has been formulated. They can be found, for example, in Schatz 9.
- 29 “If there is system . . . in Hitchcock, it is because his much criticized form is not just ornamental but is rather so closely linked to the content that any form of expression other than film would be entirely unthinkable” (Rohmer, “Le soupçon” 67; translation amended).
- 30 An underappreciated effort to delineate a novel cinematic genre in a manner that exemplifies what it means to discharge these three tasks in tandem may be found in André Bazin’s stunning account of why the early masterpieces of 1950s Italian neo-realist cinema constitute the advent of a new form of cinema. See the first seven essays, and especially those on De Sica—the third, fourth and fifth—collected in volume 2 of *What Is Cinema?*
- 31 The description is given via a designation of the so-called “genre” (for example, “romantic comedy” or “psychological suspense thriller”) and the level of appreciation by an assessment no less bereft of genuine aesthetic significance (for example, “three and a half stars”).
- 32 Much contemporary writing about film involves a confused amalgamation of these two concepts of “genre”—the aesthetically neutered concept (one perfectly suited to the goals that *TV Guide* sets itself in its deployment of concepts such as “comedy,” “thriller,” and so on) for which these tasks can be separated and the aesthetically exiguous concept for which they cannot (one whose determinations Gotthold Lessing, Johann Goethe, Walter Benjamin, and Peter Szondi, among theorists of the arts—Bazin, Cavell, Pippin, among those of the cinema—strive to elucidate). The confusion is so widespread as to have become—as with any deeply entrenched confusion—largely invisible to the culture within which it circulates.

- 33 Rohmer nicely characterizes how this dimension works as follows: “Hitchcock’s art throws us into the implausible, only to eventually hold us thanks to an attention to the “true fact” that is so meticulous that the least event gets tinged with a second and more exact truth” (“Le soupçon” 63).
- 34 See, in this connection, Cavell’s remarks on what it means to become a good reader (*Themes Out* 52).
- 35 This is the place in the architecture of each of his works that Hitchcock’s concept of the *MacGuffin* finds its application: the concept of an object, device, or event that—as long as the first dimension of the false bottom remains in place—*appears* to be the motor of the plot or the wellspring of the characters’ motivations. In *Psycho*, the initial MacGuffin is the forty thousand dollars.
- 36 The Film Noir is the antecedent genre from which *Vertigo* and *Psycho* both take their point of departure—a genre that, as Pippin has taught us to recognize, certainly explores the thematic field a protagonist’s inability to fully realize his or her will or desire, revealing the impotence in question to be a function of deeper forms of incapacity, hampering the exercise of her powers for self-knowledge and practical agency. Yet, in a very different way, this same thematic field governs the first half of any one of Cavell’s melodramas of the unknown woman, prior to the heroine’s clarification of her own desire—hence, her discovery of forms of agency and voice that allow her to lay claim to her desire—in both speech and action—as genuinely hers. She thereby, as she leaves the persona of that more familiar form of melodramatic heroine behind, renders herself no longer knowable to those around her, even to those most intimate with her, as well as no longer knowable even to us, the beholders of her cinematic metamorphosis. In this sense, the melodrama of the unknown woman itself may be said to bust the seams of a certain traditional form of melodrama, one in which the heroine, impotent to sustain her desire on her terms, approaches her end with the sorts of tears that Giuseppe Verdi’s courtesan does at the close of *La Traviata* rather than those far less copious ones accompanying that far less fathomable final look in Betty Davis’s eyes in *Now, Voyager* or in Barbara Stanwyck’s in *Stella Dallas* as they each head off in hitherto uncharted directions at the close of their respective movies.
- 37 Each member of the genre is no less concerned to dislodge parallel conceptions of the self-standing intelligibility of the relata that figure in our other pairs of concepts listed above: the relation of privacy to publicity, passivity to activity, madness to sanity, and so on. That is to say, the genre brings under pressure “the ideas of behavior and of sentience”—and the related tangle of ideas of inner and outer and so on—that animate what Cavell calls the problem of skepticism as it arises in traditional epistemology (*Claim of Reason* 46–47). This raises the question of what a Cavellian treatment of the Hitchcockian oeuvre would involve. Though attempts have been made to bring Cavell and Hitchcock together, a proper treatment would demand a more nuanced understanding of

Cavell than most film theorists have taken the trouble to acquire. When Richard Allen, for example, takes up the topic, he simply identifies “skepticism” with a posture of doubt directed at knowledge-claims regarding the external world or other minds. Allen’s ensuing misreading of Cavell on Hollywood genre film closely parallels Gerald Bruns’s misreading of Cavell on Shakespeare (for further discussion, see Conant, “On Bruns”). Allen fails to notice—or else utterly to misunderstand—countless remarks of Cavell’s such as the following: “I do not, that is, confine the term [“skepticism”] to philosophers who wind up denying that we can ever know; I apply it to any view which takes the existence of the world [or other minds] to be *a problem of knowledge*” (*Claim of Reason* 46; emphasis added). Allen formulates the central claim of his putative critique of Cavell as follows: “Hitchcock’s films call into question Cavell’s assumption that the portrayal of romance in popular American cinema and in Hitchcock’s films, in particular, dramatizes ‘the truth of skepticism’” (43). Allen vindicates this claim by pointing at junctures in Hitchcock’s movies in which the characters resolve various doubts that they harbored at some earlier point in the movie. (Notice: if this is a “refutation” of Cavell, then it is equally easily performed in connection with every Hollywood comedy, melodrama, and so on—and, indeed, every play, novel, or story—Cavell ever writes about in connection with the topic of skepticism; there is no reason to take the detour into Hitchcock to demonstrate the stupidity of Cavell’s views, so understood.) Allen takes the following observation to be relevant to mounting a challenge to Cavell: “Hitchcock, though he is preoccupied with doubt and deception, is not a ‘skeptic’” (51). But, in Allen’s sense of the term “skeptical,” neither is Capra, George Cukor, or Howard Hawks—nor is Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen or Henry David Thoreau—nor is any other major literary figure or Hollywood director whose work Cavell explores in connection with skepticism. (Again, one wonders: if this is the point to be made against Cavell, why go all the way to Hitchcock? On this reading of Cavell, he is wrong about everyone he writes about!) If one proceeds in this manner, then wherever Cavell talks about “skepticism,” it is easily shown that, though there may be a concern with doubt or deception, the aim of the work in question is not to present a full-fledged endorsement of (what Allen calls) “skepticism.” Though Allen notices (and even, on occasion, himself quotes) passages from Cavell that suggest the possibility of a more nuanced understanding of skepticism (remarks, for example, about how “skepticism” is to be “interpreted” as a “failure” of “acknowledgment”), he fails to appreciate what these remarks are about—how they form part of a set of reflections concerned to challenge the conventional understanding of skepticism with which Allen himself operates. He notices that Cavell identifies “the truth of skepticism” with the discovery that “our relation to the world as a whole, or to others in general, is *not one of knowing*” (Cavell, *Claim of Reason* 45; emphasis added), but Allen takes this to mean: our relationship to the world, and to others in general, is one of *not knowing*. So precisely where Cavell seeks to problematize a certain employment of the concept of knowledge, Allen reads

him as not only acquiescing in it but also wishing to join the skeptic's side in a dispute in which the concept is permitted to be so employed. The recovery of (what Cavell calls) "the truth of skepticism" requires that we do not accede to such an employment of the concept but, rather, reinterpret the skeptic's self-understanding of what he takes himself to discover. What Allen takes Cavell to mean by "the truth of skepticism" requires none of this. It simply requires leaving that self-understanding unchallenged, taking it to make good sense, and then concluding that skepticism is true! Cavell says: "[W]hat I mean by calling [an] . . . argument an expression of skepticism is this: it can *seem* to make good sense only on the basis of ideas of behavior and of sentience that are invented and sustained by skepticism itself" (47; emphasis added). The very ideas that Allen takes to make good sense are the ones that Cavell seeks to show nourish and sustain a mere appearance of making good sense, engendering illusory forms of knowledge and knowingness that deflect non-illusory demands for love, trust, and acknowledgment. It is in their sustained exploration of such forms of deflection that Cavell locates the connection between the concerns of *The Claim of Reason* and those of the two Hollywood genres he investigates. Though it forms no part of the business of this article to offer a Cavellian reading of even just *Psycho* (as one certainly could, for example, by drawing on Cavell on deflection, acknowledgment, and human separateness), it is the point of this footnote to acknowledge that instances of the Hitchcockian genre call for Cavellian readings to the extent that they discover ways to bring (what Cavell calls) "ideas invented and sustained by skepticism itself"—and the forms of deflection to which they give rise—under pressure: to the point where they implode under the weight of their own requirements. Cavell's remarks about the figure of the "Psychiatrist" and the putative "knowledge" he dispenses (touched on briefly below) would provide a good starting point for such a Cavellian reading of *Psycho*.

- 38 Each member of the genre is no less concerned to dislodge parallel conceptions of the relata in our other pairs of concepts listed above: the relation of the inner to the outer, passivity to activity, and so on.
- 39 The deployment of the scene of the post-coital cigarette, starting in this same year, would become one of a staple of visual tropes in the 1960s French New Wave's attempt to inherit the American Film Noir of the 1940s and 1950s—an American genre that received its generally accepted designation as "Film Noir" and its first theoretical articulation as an aesthetic category at the hands of French film critics, prior to its first major cinematic rearticulation on the screen at the hands of French directors. I think it is no accident that the very film critics who first appreciated that Hollywood had over the previous decades given birth to the genre (they sought to theorize under the heading) Film Noir were also the same ones first to appreciate that Hitchcock was developing a new cinematic form distinct from that of the Noir (even in those of his movies that engaged Noir conventions). One can hold properly apart in one's thought

the difference between a genuine article of the Noir and a (markedly Noirish) Hitchcockian movie, only if one has first made some effort to comprehend each of these forms of cinema in its own right. So it is no accident that many of those who participated in the attempt to theorize Noir as a self-standing aesthetic category—Alexander Astruc, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Éric Rohmer, and François Truffaut—were among the first theoretically incisive critics of Hitchcock's work. Some of these same critics (Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, and Truffaut) then went on to become leading directors in the French New Wave. Some of them, in turn, sought to inherit and take to another—Frencher—place not only the genre of the Noir but also that of the genre-busting Hitchcockian movie.

- 40 That many of Hitchcock's movies make use of Film Noir conventions is not news. On this topic, see especially the two fine essays on *Vertigo* and *Psycho* by James Harvey as well as Homer B. Petty's essay "Hitchcock, Class, and Noir." My aim, however, will be to outline an account different in form—regarding how a Hitchcock movie (such as *Rear Window*, *Vertigo*, or *Psycho*) engages these conventions—than any proposed in those essays.
- 41 In the context of discussing one of his own movies (*Die Marquise von O*), Rohmer coins a lovely concept (and an unlovely term for it), explaining what it means for a director to "Hitchcockize a story" [*hitchcockiser une histoire*] as follows: "it means to deceive the spectator . . . in such a way that the spectator of our time"—that is, someone antecedently familiar with a certain genre of our time (who, e.g., 'has seen detective films' and hence is looking for *the sort of truth* upon whose discovery a detective story turns)—'will come to a certain moment in the film where he will say to himself: 'Maybe I was wrong after all, the truth is not what I thought it was'" (Gauteur, qtd. in de Baecque and Herpe 272). Notice the parallel between the following pairs of pictures of truth/knowledge: (1) the sort of truth Rohmer thinks "the spectator of our time" will look for and what becomes of that conception of discovering the truth once the story has been Hitchcockized and (2) the sort of candidate for knowledge a spectator of Hitchcock such as Richard Allen thinks "skepticism" calls into doubt and what becomes of that conception of a *problem of knowledge* once skepticism has been reconceived along the lines proposed by Cavell.
- 42 In a conversation for which I am grateful, Stephen Mulhall pressed me on how far my account of hidden literality in Hitchcockian dialogue resembles or differs from the account of Beckett's strategy articulated in Cavell's essay on *Endgame*. Cavell describes "the language Beckett has discovered or invented" as possessing its own "particular way of making sense" through (what he, too, calls) its hidden literality: "The words strew obscurities across our path and seem willfully to thwart comprehension; and then time after time we discover that their meaning has been missed only because it was so utterly bare—totally, therefore unnoticeably, in view" ("Ending" 119). The difference

is that in Beckett we are presented with sequences of signs apparently still in search of a meaning (with words that, as Cavell himself just put it, “strew obscurities across our path and seem willfully to thwart comprehension”), whereas in the dialogue between Marion and Norman we are presented with words that seem in no way obscure or difficult to comprehend: they appear to admit of perfectly self-evident, unpuzzling construals—the ready availability of which obscures from view the possibility of alternative, gobsmackingly literal, construals. Hence, the hidden literality of meaning to be discerned in Hitchcock is not missed because, à la Samuel Beckett, it is laid so utterly bare but, rather, because it is cloaked à la Hitchcock in an outer layer of meaning that must first be penetrated. Cavell says the discovery of this hidden literality in Hamm’s and Clov’s lines “has the effect of showing us that it is we who had been willfully uncomprehending, misleading ourselves in demanding further, or other, meaning where the meaning was nearest” (119–20). But this is not what the dialogue between Marion and Norman reveals. Here, too, we fail to comprehend, but now not because we are willfully uncomprehending but, rather, because we are misdirected by design along a set of rails laid onto the surface of the scene. This depth of difference between Beckett and Hitchcock notwithstanding, the fittingness of describing them as each employing a strategy of hidden literality would nonetheless certainly seem to indicate some dimension of affinity. This is perhaps why it is no accident that later on in that same essay Cavell can say this about *Endgame*: “[Beckett’s] characters . . . have the abstraction, and the intimacy, of figures and words and objects in a dream. Not that what we see is supposed to be our dream, or any dream. It is not surrealism, and its conventions are not those of fantasy. If this were a movie its director would not be Cocteau but Hitchcock” (131). The characterizations of *Endgame* that Cavell here singles out for criticism (“dream,” “surrealism,” “fantasy”) are equally commonly found in commentary on Hitchcock and are no less inadequate, without further qualification, as characterizations of the counterpart dimension of uncanniness of which his work partakes.

- 43 At the opposite extreme stands a critic such as Jean-Luc Godard—not accidentally, a great director in his own right—who invariably operates with an exiguous aesthetic standard in formulating judgments about the accomplishments of other directors—hence, who is perfectly willing to make claims such as the following: “Throughout his entire career, Hitchcock has never used an unnecessary shot. Even the most anodyne of them invariably serve the plot, which they enrich rather as the ‘touch’ beloved of the Impressionists enriched their paintings. They acquire their particular meaning only when seen in the context of the whole” (*Godard on Godard* 48–49).
- 44 “If there is system . . . in Hitchcock, it is because his much criticized form is not just ornamental but is rather so closely linked to the content that any form of expression other than film would be entirely unthinkable” (Rohmer, *Taste for Beauty* 67; translation amended).

- 45 Not because it is not worth doing but, rather, because it would require an extraordinary degree of detailed description and, hence, a very lengthy treatment.
- 46 In his own book-length study of the forty-five-second scene, Philip J. Skerry says: “[I]t is no exaggeration to say that the shower scene is *the* most analyzed, discussed and alluded-to scene in the film history” (*Psycho in the Shower* 220). Joseph W. Smith III adduces myriad forms of evidence—such as the fact that a Google search for “psycho shower scene” nets a quarter of a million entries—in support of this claim. Paul Monaco declares that this scene “marked the arrival of what was to become the dominant motion-picture aesthetic of the late-twentieth century” (190). Insofar as I understand it, that latter claim strikes me as self-evidently false. But it provides a nice example of the sorts of hyperbolic things people are moved to say out of an eagerness to justify their sense that this scene ought to be accorded a privileged place in the history of cinema, while being quite unclear or (as in Monaco’s case) unpersuasive as to why.
- 47 The initial irony may simply seem to have to do with the fact that Norman’s taxidermical pursuits extend to preserving his mother’s deceased body in a lifelike state. The deeper irony in play here is compounded and reversed in various ways in the closing scenes of the movie, perhaps most explicitly in the mother’s final remark: “As if I could do anything except just stare like one of his stuffed birds.” As she says these words, the body whose gaze is here frozen into a stare is Norman’s—and what it is stuffed with is his mother’s reanimated psyche. The “hobby” has, quite literally, come to fill all of his time.
- 48 On a second viewing, we are in a position to appreciate that the concept of “best friend” in play here eviscerates the boundaries that otherwise govern the relations in which boyhood and motherhood stand to one another.
- 49 The layers of irony here are manifold. To mention just the first two: we are about to see Norman’s life become very eventful (as it presumably does when guests such as Marion stop by the Bates Motel) and to see Marion’s emptied of everything but quiet (as she enters into a condition in which—as George Toles puts it—emotion of any kind has no place).
- 50 He turns out to be no less right in one way about Marion (whom we are about to see clawing at the air) than he is in another way right about his mother (whom he needs to scoop up and carry if she is to move at all) and eventually in a third way about “Norman” (whose capacity for activity, physical or mental, becomes wholly vacated and given over to an alien will).
- 51 Here, too, the ironies are manifold: both in the depth of the *accuracy* of the observation in application to herself (for, as she is stepping out of one trap, she is thereby—as she utters these words—stepping into another, more fatal

- one) and in the depth of its *inaccuracy* in relation to Norman (for, as he is about to point out, he did not exactly *step* into his).
- 52 One appreciates what the alternative construal of this counterfactual comes to only once one understands what it would mean for one to hear a voice speak to one in the way *Norman* hears that voice. And Marion is literally right: both about herself (very soon, she will never be able to laugh again) and about Norman (somewhat later, when that voice that speaks to him in that way becomes the only voice in him). The final little suppressed laugh (accompanying the words “Why, she wouldn’t even harm a fly!”) we hear emanate from “Norman” is no longer his. He, too, will now never be able to laugh again.
- 53 By the end of the movie not only do we come to appreciate the sense in which this is literally true (he cannot leave her) but also the sense in which the converse is not (as she, in effect, does leave him—so that, rather than Norman’s having nothing left of his mother but her body, it comes to be the other way around).
- 54 Fathoming the most emphatic sense in which this true (that she is not just “ill” but *ill*) depends upon appreciating that her illness and his are not distinct.
- 55 This is literally true—as it is of anyone who has nothing left in the way of life (and especially true of someone who is dead).
- 56 Necessarily oblivious to the depth of the truth she has just uttered.
- 57 The screenplay at this point contains the following stage direction—one that is deftly executed by Anthony Perkins: “Turns away as if in distaste of the word [‘lover’].” Here, as throughout the scene, the ebbs and flows of tension indicated by Perkins’s facial expressions and direction and manner of gaze signal a depth drama beneath the surface drama—one that we are able properly to schematize only on a second viewing. This is one of many moments in the scene in which a further dimension of interplay between what is patent and what is latent—in this case between the outward meaning of Norman’s remarks and the inward meaning of his demeanor—is enacted.
- 58 By “someplace,” Marion, of course, does not mean “in some *fruit cellar*,” let alone “in some *body*,” and certainly not “in *somebody* (else)” —to mention just three kinds of location in which we later see the mother placed.
- 59 Having provided the previous twelve and the next six footnotes as models for how to do this, I leave the task of excavating the layers of irony latent in these five sentences as assignments for the reader to work out for herself.
- 60 This could serve as a description of the penultimate scene of the movie, in which the mother suffers the studious gazes bearing down upon her, including ours.
- 61 The scene this rhetorically foreshadows is much more immanent.

- 62 This comes close to predicting not only what happens in the penultimate scene but also the very words his mother will then utter: "As if I could do anything except just stare like one of his stuffed birds. . . . [T]hey'll say, 'Why, she wouldn't even harm a fly!'"
- 63 No comment.
- 64 We will turn to the undertow in these lines when we take up how to understand the role of the figure of the psychiatrist.
- 65 She is (literally) nothing without him.
- 66 Propositions such as the following: "Characters who had been righteous, stable, and paragons of responsibility all their adult lives" can be "seamlessly and quite believably transformed in a few seconds into reckless, dangerous, and even murderous types" (Pippin, *Fatalism* 7).
- 67 To say that it explodes the genre from within does not mean that the (at first latent and then patent) thematic horizon of the Hitchcock movie simply leaves the thematic concerns of the Film Noir behind, shedding it like a snake its skin. What it means is that its mode of engagement of the conventions of the exploded genre is no longer straightforwardly one of acquiescence or participation. In so far as successors of the features of the exploded genre remain in play, they will have been radicalized—cinematically thought through to a logical endpoint that subverts their original interrelationship, thereby crystallizing them into a new genre. If Noir delineates (as Pippin has persuasively argued) a world in which agents come to realize that the meaning of their actions is unclear or even opaque to them, then *Psycho* depicts a world in which the Noir protagonist's agential self-opacity has been pushed to its logical limit. The Noir mode of thematizing the vicissitudes of agential self-knowledge, though adequate to the task of portraying the species of agential self-opacity that prompts and plagues a Marion Crane, is revealed to be—once the movie's false bottom drops out—insufficiently radical to portray the species of agential self-deformation that imprisons a Norman Bates. (I am indebted to correspondence with Stephen Mulhall on this topic.)
- 68 Indeed, as if to deepen the stratum of irony here initiated, we learn later in *Psycho* that the victims of Marion's theft are, indeed, willing not to press charges as long as the money is returned.
- 69 In the first substantive appreciation of *Psycho* to appear in English, published shortly after its debut in 1960, V.F. Perkins archly concludes an enumeration of these points with the remark that the movie presents its viewer with a "bargain offer" as it, in effect, "comprises two complete films" ("Charm and Blood" 96).
- 70 This has often been attempted, perhaps most illuminatingly by William Rothman (299–317).

- 71 That is, between Joseph Stefano, Saul Bass, John L. Russell, and Hitchcock. For a brief overview, see Pallant and Price 113–27; for a detailed account of this mode of cooperation in Hitchcock, and not only in the making of the shower scene, see Krohn.
- 72 Hitchcock (with the aid of Saul Bass’s storyboard) was able to explain in advance to Janet Leigh, as she puts it: “[I]n exact detail how he was going to shoot the scene from Saul’s plans. The storyboards detailed all the angles, so that I knew the camera would be *there*, then *there*. The camera was at different places all the time” (Leigh, qtd. in Rebello 102; emphasis in original).
- 73 More precisely: seven full shooting days spaced out over several weeks.
- 74 The crew had to build a separate shower unit with four detachable walls, an overhead scaffold for high-angle shots, and a main bathroom unit to and from which a separate shower unit could be repeatedly attached and detached.
- 75 There is a vast body of literature devoted to whether Hitchcock is an *auteur*, based on apportioning degrees of responsibility—for example, between figures such as Stefano, Bass, Russell and Hitchcock in the construction of, for example, the shower scene. What the evidence deemed relevant to such disputes is held to show depends on the eye of the beholder. Pallant and Price conclude their discussion of the shower scene as follows: “Krohn’s study of the documentary, archival evidence provides no grounds for supposing anyone other than Hitchcock was in overall command of the filming” (116). Others, basing themselves on Krohn (and, hence, on exactly the same evidence), draw opposite conclusions. Such disagreements tend to turn on what it means to say a director is an *auteur*. At one end of the spectrum are those who take it to mean that every bit of the movie is conceived in advance “in the mind” of the *auteur* and everyone else simply follows his instructions. Krohn’s research demolishes—for those who thought it needed demolishing—the claim that Hitchcock is an *auteur* in this sense, documenting him to be constantly making changes during production, shooting multiple takes to furnish flexibility of editing, seeking the cinematographer’s advice, looking into the camera to check lighting and composition, and so on. None of this upends the claim that a director may still be the *auteur* in the sense of being in overall command of the conception and production of the work. (This does not mean that such a claim with regard to a given movie cannot be overturned.) But such questions nowhere form the concern of this article. Its questions have to do with (what Wood calls in the epigraph to this section of the paper) “the *significance* of a shot or a sequence.”
- 76 Hence, outside of this paragraph and its endnotes, nothing I say should be construed as involving a claim about what happened on the set when the movie was made. The logico-grammatical register in which I otherwise employ expressions such as “construction,” “point of view,” “what the

camera shows," and so on pertain to characterizations of a viewer's aesthetic experience.

- 77 I take aesthetic intention to be something a critic discerns in a work of art, not something postulated through psychological speculation about what was "in" the mind(s) of its creator(s) at the time of its making. The real underlying confusion in the contrary view is not one about art, but one about intention. On intention, see Anscombe and especially her diagnosis of what "conspires to make us think that if we want to know a man's intentions it is into the contents of his mind, and only into these, that we must enquire" rather than into "what a man actually does" (9). For the parallel point about intention in art, see Cavell's "A Matter of Meaning It" for why "intention is no more an efficient cause of an object of art than it is of a human action; in both cases it is a way of understanding the thing done, of describing what happens" (230).
- 78 Here is Philip J. Skerry's account of wherein the absoluteness of "absolute camera" resides: "Hitchcock called his approach to films, 'pure cinema,' a combination of *mise-en-scène* and montage, at the basis of which was the motion picture camera. Hitchcock says about his camera, "The only thing that matters is whether the installation of the camera at a given angle is going to give the scene its maximum impact. The beauty of image and movement, the rhythm and the effects—everything must be subordinated to the purpose." This is the essence of Hitchcock's 'absolute camera'" (21; citations omitted).
- 79 Here is Bruce Isaacs on wherein the "purity" of such cinema resides: "First, 'purity' refers to a mode of signification or communication intrinsic to the medium of cinema; elsewhere, Hitchcock will specify that the medium is comprised of moving images, images of movement, and, most explicitly, images of action. Second, 'purity' refers to that highly specific though somewhat undefined phenomenon filmmakers refer to as 'visuality,' or simply 'the visual.' This was a common position held by filmmakers like Hitchcock and a host of other classical Hollywood directors: their position was that cinema ought to relinquish its aesthetic lineages to the novel and theatre and, in Hitchcock's words, speak 'in its own language,' the language of moving images. For Hitchcock, the phenomenon of cinematic visuality is both a complex of highly orchestrated formal elements within the film image and a singularity, an essential element of the medium, that which makes the medium what it is" (3).
- 80 It is, indeed, likely to require at least a third viewing for one to sufficiently detach oneself from one's engrossment in the two successive forms of shockingness of this moment (which we respectively experience on a first and second viewing) to be able to begin to notice, let alone fully appreciate, all that is extraordinary in the manner in which our access to that world is mediated through the manner of construction of this scene.

- 81 These are claims about our overall experience—the phenomenology of what we see—in a technologically unaided visual apprehension of the scene. This is not to deny that a frame-by-frame analysis will uncover a single momentary shot (likely to elude the naked eye) in which the blade barely pierces skin yielding a tiny spot of blood (just above the navel) or a fleeting glimpse of a naked breast (so out of focus that the censors were happy to let it pass).
- 82 The term “pure cinema” is in fact one that Hitchcock himself would sometimes employ, as Isaacs and Skerry note in the passages from them cited above—passages in which they each unpack cinematic dicta straight from the horse’s mouth. What generally goes unnoted is that Hitchcock speaks in such ways when appearing in his most frequent role outside of his movies, namely, when playing the part of “the great director” being interviewed. It is easy to see why some of the remarks he makes in these contexts purporting to explain what “pure cinema” is—such as that it is a special kind of montage for which “you must do the editing in your head, in advance”—have led some critics to want to regard the shower scene as the ultimate exemplification of this concept (see, for example, Hitchcock’s remarks in Gottlieb 142, 194). It would take a separate article to address questions such as the following: what sort of role it is that Hitchcock plays in these recurrent “non-fictional” appearances of his; what sort of genre is the “Hitchcock interview”; and what sort of persona is it that he adopts when he purports to indulge the demand for a “behind the scenes” look, not only into his movie-making but also directly into the “mind of the director.” There is a tendency in secondary literature on Hitchcock to treat his interview pronouncements as unvarnished currency you can take to the bank and rely upon in elaborating an account of his art—hence, to overlook the playfulness, irony, and general air of mischief that pervades this other Hitchcockian genre, one not without its own darker undertows—and, thus, to fail to register how it also seeks to explode the (in this case, non-fictional) genre in which it purports to participate. With the exception of Bob Dylan, I know of no other artist who has as playfully developed the interview into as reticulated an art form in its own right, with its own series of false bottoms not unlike those that characterize—and, hence, are not simply discontinuous with—the artist’s aesthetic oeuvre proper.
- 83 There is, alas, no contradiction in the following thought: those works of art that are most inimitable are precisely the ones that are most prone to attract imitators. *Psycho* is no exception to this rule. For a discussion of how (what might appear to be) minor details of difference in acting, shooting, lighting, editing, and so on yield an entirely different movie in, for example, Gus Van Sant’s *Psycho*—thereby draining Norman, Marion, and their world of his, her, and its original significance—see Clayton 73–79. For an overview of the desultory assortment of remakes, sequels, and what not *Psycho* has spawned (including one titled simply *Remake*), see Verevis. When it comes to aesthetics, every such rule may eventually meet its happy exception—one that uncovers a

dimension of the work in the guise of merely re-presenting it. When it comes to *Psycho*, the happy exception is Douglas Gordon's brilliant video installation piece *24 Hour Psycho*. For brief but insightful remarks about it, in the context of a wider discussion of Gordon's work, see Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws* 186–88.

- 84 I take it to be the first business of the critic to gauge the degree to which a work of art measures up to this exiguous standard—that of aesthetic necessity. That is, I take it, from the very logic of its claims serious art criticism must be—as Cavell puts it—inherently immodest (see “Avoidance of Love” 311ff).
- 85 That was a shot that proved technically extremely difficult to pull off. Hitchcock singles it out for attention in interviews, but does so for a certain sort of audience on a certain sort of occasion—catering, as he often does, to what will satisfy that audience's appetite to be afforded a “behind-the-scenes” look at the bag of tricks he deploys to create the distinctive forms of art that he does. We touch here again on the topic of the self-protective mischievousness of these performances, in which Hitchcock addresses himself to those who want to know “more” than they imagine they can learn by just watching his movies. They imagine that this something more, if he will just divulge it, holds the key to understanding his art. One sort of audience is the critic or theorist of film to whom Hitchcock caters in his interviews with cinephiles; another is the curious public to whom he panders, often in tongue-in-cheek (and, in any case, in overtly theatrical) ways, especially in his video presentations about his movie making. Both these audiences seek, each in its own way, an inside scoop, directly from the horse's mouth, about what is really going on in his movies. Ever the entertainer, Hitchcock is happy to meet them halfway. But ever the sort of entertainer he is, these performances, too, contain their own sort of false bottom. This topic will recur in these footnotes: how a portion of the commentary on Hitchcock uncritically treats what he says in these performances—and especially the “tricks” of his trade that he in this connection “divulges”—as furnishing appropriate starting points for a critical inquiry into the nature of his art.
- 86 This is connected to the related assumption—touched on at the outset of this article—that how entertaining a Hollywood movie is and how serious a claim it can stake to being a great work of art must be inversely proportional.
- 87 For an account of the concepts of absorption and theatricality, see Fried, *Absorption*. For the further application of the concept of theatricality to instances of post-modernist art whose very intelligibility depend upon the provision of theoretically top-heavy varieties of criticism of the aforementioned sort, see the pieces collected in Fried's *Art and Objecthood*. For a vindication of the bearing of these concepts on cinema, see Conant, “The World of a Movie.”
- 88 We quoted Bruce Isaacs above on how the “purity” of Hitchcock's form of cinema resides in its commitment to the purely “visual”—to (what Isaacs calls) visuality: to (as he likes to put it) the “visualness” of the “visual” (3). We see now

how—at least on one understanding of what such words might mean—this comes close to being exactly wrong. We express an important truth about Hitchcock’s art if we negate Isaacs’s various dicta and say it is committed to enabling forms of seeing that go beyond the purely or merely visual. It thereby both reveals and acknowledges an omnipresent possibility of the medium of cinema: its capacity to show—and to allow its beholder to see—non-visually.

- 89 The next few pages of this article are indebted to conversations with Perkins (Victor, not Anthony) about *Psycho*.
- 90 It belongs to the very logic of the medium of cinema that the world that we see in any movie must be imaginatively filled in. For its world is ontologically distinct from our world. (There is no continuous path that can be traced through space and time that leads from where the beholder is back to that shower in the Bates Motel in *Psycho*.) What we understand ourselves to see always exceeds the frame of what we are shown in ways that draw upon our power to imaginatively complete our conception of the cinematic world of which we are afforded a glimpse. But Hitchcock takes this structural feature of the medium to a new place—in a manner enormously influential on the subsequent development of the medium—in his discovery of ways to visually communicate that which most attracts our desire or elicits our terror “in” what we “see” so that the representation of what is happening or may happen is effected primarily through the elicitation of exercises of the beholder’s powers of imagination and anticipation.
- 91 Though this, proves not to be a stable resting place either—not because it, too, comes to be simply eliminated as a candidate locus of identification, but for reasons altogether more unsettling, touched on in the penultimate section of this paper.
- 92 “[S]o engrossed are we in Marion, so secure in her potential salvation, that we can scarcely believe it is happening; when it is over, and she is dead, we are left shocked, with nothing to cling to, the apparent center of the film entirely dissolved” (Wood, *Hitchcock’s Films* 146).
- 93 If cinematic point of view were a matter of literally (or even just approximately) seeing things from the angle in which and the manner in which they appear when “seen through” someone else’s eyes (as some theories of subjective camera hold), then such a transition of default point of view could not be as seamlessly executed as it is in the course of this sequence. For further discussion of this point, see Conant, “The World of a Movie”.
- 94 This renegotiation of point of view arguably begins with that striking close-up profile shot of Norman’s peering eye (after which we then share in Norman’s gaze of Marion in a state of undress, observed through his secret spyhole into her room) and ends with the shot (discussed above) of Marion’s lifeless eye (showing us what Norman is about to see).

- 95 The continuation of our undue interest in what will become of that money, wrapped in the newspaper, remains the last lingering trace we still possess of our prior point of view onto this world—the one we once shared with Marion. Just as the camera, moments ago, went to some length to drive home that she is no longer with us and never coming back, so too, in the upcoming scene, it will go to equal lengths to make it clear, as Marion's car (and the money along with it) sinks into the swamp, that the serviceability of our prior understanding of what it meant to occupy a point of view onto this world (with its attendant set of expectations, stemming from the logic of the genre of the Noir) has been no less definitively extinguished.
- 96 What it means to cheat, for these purposes, is to present a visually intentionally misleading scene in such a way that, on a second or third or tenth viewing, even when the viewer knows how the film turns out, she will still find herself no less drawn to visually schematize the scene in the manner she originally did on her first viewing of it. She may understand the significance of the scene to be very different on a second viewing than on her first, but there will be no substantial shift in the *Gestalt* of what she is able to visually apprehend. (Most directors who want to build “surprises” into their films cheat most of the time.) I am here employing Hitchcock's own term for this concept: “I'm a great believer in making sure that if people see the film a second time they don't feel cheated. That is a *must*. You must be honest about it and not merely keep things away from an audience. I'd call that *cheating*. You should never do that” (Sarris, *Interviews* 246; emphasis added).
- 97 If one were to attempt to compile a list of the characteristic features of the members of this genre, this would be a central one.
- 98 We are now in a position to see that there is, after all, a truth contained in Bruce Isaacs's various dicta regarding how the ethic of “purity” to which Hitchcock's form of cinema aspires is somehow tied to what is given purely “visually”—to the “visualness” of the “visual” (3). Only we now see that this dimension in what proves, after all, to be purely visually present in the movie is such that it becomes visible only once its non-accidental initial invisibility to the viewer is overcome. So we express a further important truth if we modify Isaacs's various dicta and say of Hitchcock's art that it is committed to exhibiting the possibility of forms of seeing that enable us to see what is invisible to us even though it already is—visually—right before our eyes. Here, too, his art reveals and acknowledges an omnipresent possibility of the medium of cinema: its capacity to teach its beholder simply and steadily to see what she otherwise causes herself to unsee in what she sees.
- 99 That is, in the very form of attire in which we (on our first viewing, only later) unmistakably see Anthony Perkins clad, when his character attempts to reenact certain aspects of the shower scene in the nearby basement, when he lunges with a knife at Marion's sister.

- 100 This dimension of the Hitchcockian genre—its refusal to cheat—reaches its highest pinnacle of artistry in *Vertigo*. There can seem to be no end to how much there is that you cannot help but not notice on some subsequent viewing of *Vertigo*, which you proved fully unable to notice on a prior viewing. (Let this example stand for a hundred others: the manner in which a viewer's ear can eventually become fully attuned to the ways in which Kim Novack's character's voice, whenever within the first panel of that movie's diptych she is placed under extreme emotional pressure by Scotty—hence, torn between the exigencies of her feelings for him and those of the role into which Gavin Lester has cast her—discernibly wavers between Judy's Kansas mid-western drawl and Madeleine's posh upper-crust manner of speech.) *Vertigo* thereby embodies to an exemplary degree a feature that characterizes any true member of the Hitchcockian genre. Hitchcock wants you on viewing $n + 1$ to be able to discover aspects of the world of the movie that you missed on viewing n , and on viewing $n + 2$ to further register what you still missed on viewing $n + 1$ and so on. What is perhaps most vertiginous about *Vertigo*—and wherein one layer of significance in its title lies—is in how apparently indeterminable the value of n may be for a sufficiently attentive viewer, without ever bottoming out into a perspective onto that world about which the viewer may be confident that it, in turn, will not give way as well.
- 101 I take it to be no accident that the visual signature that Hitchcock stiches into each of his films (in which he himself momentarily makes a cameo appearance on the screen) serves in this respect as an epitome of his art: he always appears briefly enough that, on a first viewing, one is not unlikely to miss him; yet, upon a subsequent viewing, having once spied him, it is no longer possible to miss him. How long he appears therefore varies with how he appears—how busy the scene is, how far in the background or foreground he places himself, and so on—and, hence, what sort of effort of discernment on the part of a viewer is required.
- 102 What is bathed in light and what is obscured in dark shadow thereby, on a subsequent viewing, itself emerges as a dimension of detail in the visual presentation of the scene that turns out to be necessary for it to be able to realize its aesthetic ends.
- 103 I will henceforth refer to him capitalizing the first letter (to make it clear that it is the name of a character in the movie) and in scare quotes (to distinguish him from those who ply the trade of psychiatry with honor).
- 104 For a discussion of the species of difficulty at issue here and the forms of deflection it invites, see Cora Diamond's essay "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy."
- 105 The above remarks from Pippin (that serve as the epigraph to this section) figure in a book on—and are provoked by reflection on—*Vertigo*, but their continuation forges the bridge to *Psycho* as follows: "We may think we have found the truth behind an appearance, but that might be a projection rather

than a discovery. . . . This is why, however relevant a psychoanalytic explicans is for the film, it can assume an authoritative knowingness that is also a kind of blindness. See the psychiatrist's speech in *Psycho* (*Philosophical Hitchcock* 122–23). See also Midge's response in *Vértigo* to the authoritative knowingness of the psychiatrist treating Scottie (which ends with her remark: "And you know something, Doctor? I don't think Mozart's going to help at all").

- 106 In this respect, the putative "knowledge of a self" that the "Psychiatrist" purports to offer is precisely the opposite of that to which psychoanalysis aspires.
- 107 Except perhaps, for that one other possible occupant of the chamber—if any scrap of his consciousness still abides. That Norman's degree of psychological reality has at this point been reduced to zero, fully eclipsed now by that of his mother, may be the one thing about which the psychiatrist is right.
- 108 That this is what is most apt to strike a viewer about the scene is something Godard thematizes, in his characteristically mischievous manner, in his cinematic meditation on the history of cinema, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Episode 4a of that monumental work at first appears to celebrate Hitchcock's directorial achievements but actually turns out to be concerned with juxtaposing one vision of wherein great cinema consists (often articulated in words we hear someone saying) with another vision (primarily displayed in the visual register through the excerpts from Hitchcock's oeuvre we are given to see). The episode bears the title "Introduction to the Method of Alfred Hitchcock" and revolves around an opposition between what that method purports to be (as articulated by Hitchcock and/or his admirers) and what that "method" really is or, for that matter, whether it really is a "method." The first of these visions (and correlative conceptions of method) is the one advanced by certain of Hitchcock's admirers—uncritically basing themselves on certain of the master's own pronouncements—the other is Godard's. We are presented with an excerpt from the shower scene with a voice-over of Hitchcock delivering the sort of pronouncement upon which Hitchcockian theorists of pure cinema like to seize. We hear Hitchcock saying: "The public aren't aware of what we call montage, or in other words the cutting of one image to another. They go by so rapidly, so that they are absorbed by the content that they look at on the screen." At the same time, Godard presents us with the shower scene: the scene from the history of cinema about which it would be most ludicrous to claim that what escapes the viewer's notice is that it rapidly cuts from one image to another. In a penetrating account of Episode 4a—and, hence, of the Godard/Hitchcock nexus—Daniel Morgan details how this moment from the *Histoire(s)* fits into the larger structure of the episode: "Godard certainly defines his own practice in relation to Hitchcock, but he does so through opposition rather than emulation. . . . At various moments in the sequence, Godard includes aural recordings of Hitchcock discussing his own method and then works to undercut them. . . . If Hitchcock argues that the public is drawn into the

stories being told, absorbed into the narratives, Godard has been saying all along that what we remember about his films is precisely not their narrative . . . but rather the privileged moments, the instances of cinematic detail. Through this gesture, Godard deploys a cinephilic approach that emphasizes details, a move designed to undermine the narrative omnipotence Hitchcock marks as his ambition” (Morgan 174). This is consistent with the following thought: Godard is concerned to mount a visual argument for the claim that the most memorable moments in Hitchcock’s oeuvre are by no means solely those upon which official Hitchcockian theory invites us to fixate—an argument in which the excerpt from the shower scene serves as just one example among many of how so much that a true lover of Hitchcock is bound to love is in no way illuminated by such a theory. Morgan contrasts his own reading of the episode with one that posits the sufficiency of a single controlling principle to account for the variety of cinematic forms that we find in Hitchcock (so that the targeted conception of cinematic method involves the subordination of every aspect of the work to a “a kind of imperial control”). He also contrasts it with the super-formalist reading of the visual argument of Episode 4a offered by Jacques Rancière (which simply substitutes one hegemonic aesthetic principle for another). On Rancière’s reading, Godard’s aim is to celebrate “the primacy of images over plot” by presenting us with a whole range of excerpts aiming to show that what really captivates us in Hitchcock are visual images which are self-standingly memorable apart from any role they play in advancing the narrative drive of the tale: “Hitchcock’s cinema, Godard is saying, is made of images whose power is indifferent to the stories into which they’ve been arranged” (Rancière 172). Morgan brings out how Rancière fails to make sense of many aspects of the episode’s homage to Hitchcock—not least the fact that the excerpts comprising Godard’s own Hitchcock highlight reel—Marion driving in the downpour from *Psycho*; the uranium spilling out of the bottle from *Notorious*; the lighter in the gutter from *Strangers on a Train*; the strangely lit glass of milk from *Suspicion*—are unforgettable in part precisely because they are “not random images but narratively charged moments” (Morgan 173–74).

109 If this is correct, then the interview pronouncement from Hitchcock (quoted in the previous footnote) may itself be regarded as a characteristically Hitchcockian device of deflection, one that invites the sophisticated cinephile to be on the lookout for the deployment of certain cinematic techniques (such as montage), while thereby, through their very deployment, directing attention away from crucial maneuvers that enable the director to pull off his conjuring trick. This affords an account that occupies neither pole of the opposition between official ideology and “actual cinematic practice” touched on in the previous footnote. The poles of that debate involved affirming or denying that, as Morgan puts it, “the control Hitchcock strives for depends on an unthinking absorption into a film’s narrative: the audience is caught up by the stories, moved along, manipulated” (174). In rejecting the claim that our

total absorption in the tale hides the operation of cinematic technique from view, I am not just claiming the opposite: that the deployment of forms of self-standingly arresting cinematic virtuosity obscure what the real tale is. Though this is true, it is equally true that what is arresting in such forms of technique serves to hide a range of far subtler cinematic maneuvers from view. So my point will be misunderstood if construed as follows: in the schema *absorption in X hides Y from view*, we should now substitute “cinematic technique” (or, say, “montage”) for *X* and “what is happening in the story” for *Y*, rather than the other way around. What I wish to claim is equally distant from either of the poles of this opposition. It is rather this: a certain picture of “technique” (of wherein the achievement of cinematic artistry must lie) and a certain picture of the “diegetic” (of what it means for a movie to “have” a “story” and for the viewer to be “absorbed” in its “narrative”) are pictures the Hitchcockian genre has its characteristic ways of simultaneously engaging and deploying to its own ends. It activates them and permits them to mutually reinforce one another, thereby interdependently securing both dimensions of the movie’s false bottom at once, hiding from view only subsequently discoverable forms of technique (including the aforementioned five maneuvers) and of diegetic strategy (in which what is to be revealed are not only the character’s desires, attachments, and fantasies within the story, but equally those which the viewer brings to the tale, shaping her apprehension of it).

- 110 This dovetails with what Godard in Episode 4a, on Morgan’s persuasive reading of it, aims to show us about “the” so-called “method” of Alfred Hitchcock as it reveals itself in his actual cinematic practice: namely “that there is no universal model for interpretation here, no absolute principle of making meaning. There are no hard and fast rules to determine which instances do and which don’t require contextual knowledge in order to be understood (regardless of whether that information is internal or external to the film itself). The viewer is simply faced with . . . a moment that demands interpretation. Throughout *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard emphasizes these moments as acts of *judgment*” (Morgan 177). That each act of criticism must rest in this way upon a critically autonomous act of judgment—and, hence, may not be casuistically derived from fixed principles of aesthetic “method” somehow antecedently enshrined—holds no less of all of the other arts (as Lessing and Kant were each concerned to insist) than it does of the cinema. This is a point upon which Godard repeatedly insists throughout his writings and interviews, emphasizing that the theorist or critic of cinema mistakes her task—no less than would the theorist or critic of great painting or poetry—if she takes it to lie in uncovering an aesthetic formula that a director must be seeking to realize in making his films. That is to say, I take the following two sentences from Godard to be two ways of expressing one and the same thought: “Hitchcock is one of the century’s great artists. He made difficult, sensitive, mysterious, and successful films that didn’t follow a recipe” (Godard, “Les cinémathèques” 287).

- 111 In discussing moments in Ingmar Bergmann's films where he thinks the viewer is likely to miss the depth of the artistry that in each case went into their construction, Godard remarks that "as with Hitchcock at his best"—so, too, with Bergmann at his best—the critic is prone to mistake "for facility" what is in fact due to "a greater rigor" in conception and execution on the director's part (*Godard on Godard* 76).
- 112 As Godard explains, "[i]n cinema it's the form that thinks. In bad cinema, it's the thought that forms" (qtd. in Morgan 169).
- 113 It is the mark of a certain form of American cultural product to leave itself dismissible. For further discussion of this point, see Conant, "Cavell," especially 60–68.
- 114 My evident intellectual debts to Cavell, Perkins, and Pippin in the foregoing represent only the tip of a much larger iceberg, stemming not only from my study of their works but also from countless conversations—memories of which I cherish (why is it that exploring a shared sense of why a movie is great allows for a particularly exhilarating form of intellectual intimacy and joy?): with Cavell especially in the 1980s, with Perkins especially in the 1990s, and with Pippin in the first fifteen years of this millennium and especially during the two courses he and I co-taught on Film Noir and on Hitchcock. I am also indebted to comments on earlier drafts by Cora Diamond and Stephen Mulhall.

Works Cited

- Allen, Richard. "Hitchcock and Cavell." *Thinking through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*, edited by Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg, Blackwell, 2006, pp. 43–53.
- Anderson, Lindsay. "Alfred Hitchcock." *Focus on Hitchcock*, edited by A.J. LaValley, Prentice-Hall, 1972, pp. 48–59.
- Anscombe, G.E.M. *Intention*. Basil Blackwell, 1957.
- Barr, Charles. *Vertigo*. 2nd ed., BFI Publishing, 2012.
- Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?* Edited by Hugh Gray, vol. 2., U of California P, 1971.
- _____. "Hitchcock vs. Hitchcock." *André Bazin: The Critic as Thinker*, edited by R.J. Cardullo, Sense Publishers, 2017, pp. 156–64.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. Edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, Harvard UP, 2008.
- Braudy, Leo. "Genre: The Conventions of Connection." *The World in a Frame*, 25th century edition, U of Chicago P, 2002, pp. 104–81.
- Bruns, Gerald. "Stanley Cavell's Shakespeare." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 16, Spring 1990, pp. 612–32.

- Capra, Frank, dir. *It's a Wonderful Life*. Liberty Films, 1946.
- Cavell, Stanley. "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*." Cavell, *Must We Mean*, pp. 267–356.
- _____. *The Claim of Reason*. Oxford UP, 1979.
- _____. *Contesting Tears*. Harvard UP, 1989.
- _____. "Ending the Waiting Game: A Reading on Beckett's *Endgame*." Cavell, *Must We Mean*, pp. 115–62.
- _____. "A Matter of Meaning It." Cavell, *Must We Mean*, pp. 213–37.
- _____. *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge UP, 1976.
- _____. *Pursuits of Happiness*. Harvard UP, 1981.
- _____. *Themes Out of School*. North Point, 1984.
- _____. *The World Viewed*. Harvard UP, 1979.
- Clayton, Alex. "The Texture and Performance of *Psycho* and Its Remake." *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, vol. 3, 2011, pp. 73–79.
- Conant, James. "Cavell and the Concept of America." *Contending with Stanley Cavell*, edited by Russell Goodman, Oxford UP, 2005, pp. 55–81.
- _____. "On Bruns, on Cavell." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, Spring 1991, pp. 616–34.
- _____. "The World of a Movie." *Making a Difference*, edited by Niklas Forsberg and Susanne Jansson, Thales, 2009, pp. 193–324.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Penguin, 2017.
- de Baecque, Antoine, and Noël Herpe. *Éric Rohmer: A Biography*. Columbia UP, 2014.
- Diamond, Cora. "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy." *Reading Cavell*, edited by Alice Crary and Sanford Shieh, Routledge, 2006, pp. 98–118.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. Vintage, 1993.
- Dylan, Bob. *The Essential Interviews*. Edited by Jonathan Cott, Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Fauvel, Philippe, and Noël Herpe. "Interview with Eric Rohmer: The Memory of the Figurative." *Éric Rohmer: Interviews*, edited by Fiona Handyside, U of Mississippi P, 2013, pp. 185–89.
- Ford, John, dir. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*. Paramount Pictures, 1962.
- Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. U of Chicago P, 1988.
- _____. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. U of Chicago P, 1998.
- _____. *Four Honest Outlaws*. Yale UP, 2011.
- Gauteur, Claude. "Interview with Éric Rohmer." *Le Film français*, 4 July 1975.

- Godard, Jean-Luc. *Godard on Godard*. Da Capo, 1972.
- , dir. *Histoire(s) du cinema*. Gaumont Films, 1988–98.
- . *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*. Caboose, 2001.
- . “Les cinémathèques et l’histoire du cinéma.” *Jean-Luc Godard: Documents*, edited by Nicole Brenez, David Faroult, Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt. Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006, pp. 286–91.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited by John Gearey, Princeton UP, 1994.
- Gottlieb, Sidney. *Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writing and Interviews*. Vol. 2, U of California P, 2015.
- Grierson, John. *Grierson on Documentary*. Edited by F. Hardy, Faber, 1966.
- Handyside, Fiona, ed. *Éric Rohmer: Interviews*. U of Mississippi P, 2013.
- Hardison, O.B. “The Rhetoric of Hitchcock’s Thrillers.” *Man and the Movies*, edited by W.R. Robinson, Louisiana State UP, 1967, pp. 137–52.
- Harvey, James. *Movie Love in the Fifties*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2001.
- Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. *Marnie*. Universal Pictures, 1964.
- , dir. *Psycho*. Paramount Pictures, 1960.
- , dir. *Rear Window*. Paramount Pictures, 1954.
- , dir. *Shadow of a Doubt*. Universal Pictures, 1943.
- , dir. *Spellbound*. Selznick International Pictures and Vanguard Films, 1945.
- , dir. *Torn Curtain*. Universal Pictures, 1966.
- , dir. *Vertigo*. Paramount Pictures, 1958.
- Houston, Penelope. “Alfred Hitchcock.” *Cinema, A Critical Dictionary: The Major Filmmakers*, edited by Richard Roud, vol. 1, Secker & Warburg, 1980, pp. 487–502.
- . *The Contemporary Cinema*. Penguin, 1963.
- Isaacs, Bruce. *The Art of Pure Cinema: Hitchcock and His Imitators*. Oxford UP, 2020.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. Schocken, 1999.
- Krohn, Bill. *Hitchcock at Work*. Phaidon, 2009.
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Edited by Edward Allen McCormick, Johns Hopkins UP, 1984.
- Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism*. Edited by Roger Crisp, Oxford UP, 1998.
- Monaco, Paul. *The Sixties: 1960–69*: vol. 8 of *History of American Cinema*. Charles Scriber’s Sons, 2001.
- Morgan, Daniel. *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*. U of California P, 2013.

- Oldmeadow, Harry. "Robin Wood's Hitchcock." *A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, edited by Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague, Blackwell, 2011, pp. 405–24.
- Pallant, Chris, and Steven Price. *Storyboarding: A Critical History*. Palgrave, 2015.
- Perez, Gilberto. *The Eloquent Screen: A Rhetoric of Film*. U of Minnesota P, 2019.
- Perkins, V.F. "Charm and Blood." Perkins, *V.F. Perkins on Movies*, 96–101.
- _____. "I Confess: Photographs of People Speaking." Perkins, *V.F. Perkins on Movies*, 365–91.
- _____. *Film As Film*. Penguin Books, 1972.
- _____. *V.F. Perkins on Movies: Collected Shorter Film Criticism*. Edited by Douglas Pye, Wayne State UP, 2020.
- Petty, Homer B. "Hitchcock, Class, and Noir." *The Cambridge Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, edited by Jonathan Freedman, Cambridge UP, 2015, 76–91.
- Pippin, Robert. *Fatalism in American Film Noir*. Yale UP, 2012.
- _____. *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth*. Yale UP, 2010.
- _____. *The Philosophical Hitchcock*. U of Chicago P, 2017.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Film Fables*. Berg, 2006.
- Rapper, Irving, dir. *Now, Voyager*. Warner Brothers, 1942.
- Rebello, Stephen J. *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*. St. Martin's, 1990.
- Rohmer, Éric, dir. *Die Marquise von O*. Janus, Artemis, Losange, & Gaumont, 1976.
- _____. "Le soupçon." *Cahiers du Cinéma*, vol. 12, May 1952, pp. 63–66.
- _____. *The Taste for Beauty*. Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Rothman, William. *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*. 2nd ed., State U of New York P, 2012.
- Sarris, Andrew. *Interviews with Film Directors*. Avon, 1967.
- _____. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968*. E.P. Dutton, 1968.
- Schatz, Thomas. *Hollywood Genres*. Random House, 1981.
- Skerry, Philip J. *Dark Energy: Hitchcock's Absolute Camera and the Physics of Cinematic Spacetime*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
- _____. *Psycho in the Shower: The History of Cinema's Most Famous Scene*. Continuum, 2009.
- Smith, Joseph W., III. *The Psycho File*. MacFarland, 2009.
- Szondi, Peter. *Theory of the Modern Drama*. Polity Press, 2020.

- Toles, George. "‘If Thine Eye Offend Thee’: Hitchcock and the Art of Infection." *Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho: A Casebook*, edited by Robert Kolker, Oxford UP, 2004, pp. 120–45.
- Truffaut, François. *Hitchcock*. Rev. ed., Simon & Schuster, 1985.
- Van Sant, Gus, dir. *Psycho*. Universal Pictures, 1998.
- Verevis, Constantine. "For Ever Hitchcock: *Psycho* and Its Remakes." *After Hitchcock*, edited by David Boyd and R. Barton Palmer, U of Texas P, 2006, pp. 15–29.
- Vidor, King, dir. *Stella Dallas*. Samuel Goldwyn Productions, 1937.
- Williams, Bernard. *Shame and Necessity*. U of California P, 1993.
- Wilson, George M. "Alfred Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest*." *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, 2nd ed., Johns Hopkins UP, 1992, pp. 62–81.
- Wood, Robin. *Hitchcock’s Films Revisited*. Columbia UP, 1989.
- _____. "Psychoanalysis of *Psycho*." *Cahiers du Cinéma*, vol. 13, 1960, 1–6.
- _____. "Psychoanalysis of *Psycho*." *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, Wayne State UP, 2018, pp. 3–10.