Craig Fox • Britt Harrison
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Editors
Craig Fox
Philosophy
Pennsylvania Western University
California, PA, USA

Britt Harrison
Philosophy
University of York
York, UK

Cinematic Invisibility: The Shower Scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*

James Conant

One mark of a great work of art is how it can seem to unfold within itself an infinite degree of intention so that every aspect of the work appears to contribute in an essential way to its overall unity. If we are talking about a great poem, 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, or duration of rhyme or lyricism or pathos, or degree of indulgence or restraint in relation to any or all of the above. If we are talking about certain great movies, every murmur or scream we are able or unable to hear, every violin stroke of the soundtrack, every camera angle and movement, everything 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 every dimension of its rhythm and pacing—*everything* in the work—carries aesthetic significance and contributes essentially to

J. Conant (✉)
Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA
e-mail: jconant@uchicago.edu

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the unity and power of the whole. Alteration of any one tiny aspect of the film would mangle the whole no less drastically than altering a single line of a Shakespeare sonnet.

This classic conception of the unity of a great work of art is not one to which every Hollywood director aspires, but it is one to which Alfred Hitchcock aspires. 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: the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

On our initial viewing of *Psycho*, seeing Marion Crane meet Norman Bates for the first time, 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. On a second viewing, the bubble of our focus is irremediably burst; we are now in a position to begin to gauge the ramifying ways in which Marion's (and our own) attention was misdirected. We begin to register what we blithely misconstrued, grossly minimized, or blankly overlooked, as that which was never hidden becomes visible.

In this essay, I consider the challenges and achievements of one such case of cinematic 'invisibility.'

CINEMATIC ORIENTATIONS

Until the film arrives at the shower scene, it has been about Marian Crane and the consequences of her impulsive act. The story appears to be *her* story not least because she has been on screen for almost all of the first forty minutes of the movie. If we know anything about how such movies work, we know this: this movie is about *her*. If we know anything about what a Hollywood movie is, we also take ourselves to know a great many other things—such as: we need to keep one eye firmly fixed on the $40,000, which she left back in her hotel room; for what happens to that money *matters*. Let this stand as the first entry in a long list of things

which we mistakenly take ourselves to know about what is (and is not) supposed to matter.

The last time we see Marion acting under her own power, she steps into the shower, ready to wash herself clean and purge herself of her crime. From this point on, we are increasingly deprived of the things we 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 structure of *Psycho*. It divides the movie into two halves, each beginning with its own crime, each of which leads to a further crime; each half featuring its own heroine (successively portrayed by Janet Leigh and Vera Miles) and an enigmatic counterposed persona or hybrid of personae (successively portrayed by Anthony Perkins and Anthony Perkins). Different forms of division of the movie into halves are beheld on a first and a second viewing of this cinematic diptych, each yielding a distinct experience of how the two halves form a whole. On a first viewing, the splintering into halves is precipitated by the shock of the loss of the initial organizing center of consciousness. The second time we watch the movie, armed with foreknowledge of that impending loss and where it leads, we see a different first part; this, in turn, yields a wholly different experience of how the half posterior to the shower scene completes the half that precedes it. For this scene to serve as the hinge of this diptych, it must be able to give rise to two distinct forms of experience on successive viewings.

An interplay of structures of latent and patent intention are everywhere present in *the form of the dialogue* prior to the shower scene. After Norman admits to Marion that he likes to stuff things, she 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.) 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." [1]

I want to attend here, however, to how this latent/patent interplay finds its cinematic counterpart in *the form of the visual mode of presentation* of the shower scene itself. The task of accurately describing the entirety of the mosaic of images comprising the scene is formidable.[2] My interest lies not in excavating the *genesis* of the work, but in attending to the structure of the *product* of that artistic process and elucidating its aesthetic *form*. With respect to the shower sequence, the aim is to discern the aesthetic

intention latent in what we apprehend as viewers of the scene and to lay bare the means deployed to achieve those ends.[3]

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" or his aspiration to achieve "pure cinema"[4] or something else. Such concepts characterize what is most patently eye-opening about Hitchcock's cinematic craft. I will concentrate instead on the scene's latent virtuosity. To this end, we need to distinguish between what we see on a first viewing of the scene from what there is to be seen on a subsequent viewing without running together the following two sets of distinctions: (1) between what is *immediately* apprehensible on a first viewing and all that is *eventually* 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, noting that 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. Theorists of Hitchcock's patent virtuosity focus on "How?" questions: 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. Such as: Why go to such extraordinary lengths to depict the murder in just *this* way?

One answer (implicit in much secondary literature) is to display the director's cinematic prowess. This presupposes that cinematic form 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 to get the scene past the censors. This might be true. But to think that this answer suffices 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.

In the book by Robert Bloch, upon which the movie is loosely based, the shower murder is the matter of an instant: the Norman character kills

the Marion 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. Yet in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, to kill Marion, the knife must be raised and driven towards her flesh a seemingly uncountable number of times. Why is it that this character must die in such cinematically etiolated fashion? 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, 78-shot montage sequence?

George Toles comes close to asking what is needed to arrive at a proper conception of what this scene accomplishes:

> 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 … 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? (Toles, 1999, pp. 163-4)

The difference between Toles's manner of phrasing these questions and my own is notable. For Toles's first question—is it *fitting* that Marion should be disposed of in so extravagant, prolonged, and visually intoxicating a manner?—I substitute: 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 a manner? For his second question—is Marion's death a proper occasion for a virtuoso set piece—I ask: Why does the depiction of her death *require* precisely *this* form of montage?

The entire sequence is, as Toles indicates, immediately recognizable as virtuoso cinema. Some of the shots are, on a first viewing, also likely to lodge themselves in the memory of the beholder—for example, the 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:

> 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. (1999, p. 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. My aim is to direct attention to its *latent* virtuosity: to how much that is cinematically extraordinary in this sequence escapes our notice, when our eye is trained only on the manifestly extraordinary. One consequence of the sorts of account of cinema I am opposing is the way in which they imply a certain conception of the aesthetic achievement in the movies. They imply that the moments of greatest cinematic achievement are those in which the spectator is overtly alerted to the means by which an aesthetically significant end is brought about. Such a theory pushes one in the direction of holding 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.

Such orientation and focus 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 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.[5] It is no accident that film theorists who love movies that contain such flourishes tend to love Hitchcock's films. For there is no denying that this director has strewn throughout his oeuvre morsels of grist for their mills. But we need to look again at what those morsels are doing and how they function within the movie as a whole. Often, 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. They, too, are no less prone to mistake the comparatively shallow in his layering of cinematic significance for its depths.

Latent, Patent, and Potent Cinematicity

Let us approach this task of attending to (what I am calling) the latent virtuosity of the shower sequence in *Psycho* 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 compara-
tively stable and sustained point of view. It would have been difficult to
avoid a fairly graphic and stomach-turning depiction of violence and car-
nage. For the scene to fulfill the purposes Hitchcock here requires of it,
however, the details of the horror and brutality of the scene unfolding
before our eyes must take place largely in our imagination. For what we
are directly given to see, though it conveys a forceful understanding of the
event as 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 hallmark of Hitchcock's art: to terrify us all the more by
placing us in a measured degree of indirection in 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 her own
imagination.

Hitchcock's treatment avoids turning our stomachs 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 (Perkins, 1972, pp. 10ff.). We do not see Marion's
injuries. We do not see blood pulsating from her wounds. The forceful
impression of violence, brutality, and despair in the absence of any focal
depiction of the physical trauma sustained allows maximum shock to be
imparted via the intellectual and emotional registers of our understanding,
while provoking minimal physical revulsion and visual recoil from that
which we are actually permitted to see. This gap between what we *see of*
and what we *understand* to be happening *in* the world of the movie is
where the real action of this scene unfolds.

But this scene obviously has three further tasks it obviously needs to
accomplish: (i) to transition to a new default point of view, (ii) to conceal
the identity of the murderer, and (iii) to enable the viewer's appreciation
not only of what has just happened *in* (the world of) the movie, but of its
significance *for* the movie. Saying the scene "obviously" must accomplish
these is itself an obvious observation only to someone who has already
seen the entire 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 to a viewer. These dimensions of filmic virtuosity emerge from their latency phase only over the course of subsequent viewings.

Let us start with the first of those three required accomplishments. 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 following: 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 Marion's point of view. Its meaning must now be caused to shift; the default understanding of what is revealed is now to be associated with the subjectivity of someone else— first of all, with that of Norman. The shock we undergo is not merely because a character in this world is dying in a horrific fashion but because the light of her subjectivity 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 the ontological death of the world of the movie. Gradually, over the sequence, what we see is refracted less and less through Marion's subjectivity and more and more through, first, that of the murderer, and then, increasingly, from no apparent point of view at all. 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 to this. 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 serve to facilitate this transfer to a new mediating center of consciousness through which we experience what is visually unfolding before our eyes.[6] 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. It is his point of view we now share watching Norman divest Marion's motel room of all traces of the crime and of her prior presence.

In taking Norman to "discover" Marion's corpse, we touch upon a further end that the construction of the scene must realize: concealing the identity of the murderer without cheating. In our thought-experiment of what we would see from a maximally perspicuous view of the scene, we

would have no difficulty 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 it that this blinds us, on a first viewing, to what is otherwise 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 about Hitchcock is that he doesn't cheat.[7] This *hidden visual literality* (as we might call it) is the cinematic counterpart of the structure of linguistic literality present in so much of *Psycho's* dialogue.

On a further viewing, we 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 unbefitting clothing. We are freed from the expectations that inhibit us from registering how anomalous the little old lady's bearing is. Our schematizing of the visual impression of the murderer now organizes itself into the *Gestalt* of Norman, outfitted in his mother's garb and a wig. 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. Two aspects of its construction which facilitate the required equipoise are the adroit handling of the rapid montage and the perfectly gauged distribution of light and shade.

The preceding points require the scene to have a double-edged temporality: what happens suddenly (in the world of the movie) is *experienced gradually* by the viewer. It enables 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. It must convey this suddenness and violence, while dilating the presentation of the murder to permit the viewer to process its initial significance for a first viewing, as well as (when the visually latent becomes patent) the different significance its construal confers on a second viewing. The scene needs to serve two apparently contradictory purposes at once. On the one hand, we need to see something sudden and shocking so as to experience it as genuinely shocking, while, on the other, experience it in such a way as to be afforded time to appreciate where this now leaves us qua viewers. Seemingly contradictory, these two forms of experience of the scene, in fact, presuppose the other. It has often been appreciated that directors must find devices for contracting time but it is no less critical to devise forms of visual narration that dilate time in ways that are not experienced as such.

Finally, silent steps are taken to subvert the genre of the Noir from within and prepare for the revelation of a previously unsuspected adjacent genre. At the inception of the second half of the diptych, a gulf opens up as it dawns on us, on a first viewing, that we are no longer simply in a film noir. We are no longer able to determine the distance between the genre of movie we took ourselves to be watching, moments ago, and the one we are now watching; nor, as the gulf widens further, are we able to gauge the psychic distance separating Norman from his mother. This presages the even more profound and disorienting transition 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 antecedently familiar conventions.

The Conjurer's Trick

[T]he effort of seeming effortlessness is the most demanding of all.[8]

These then are five purposes that need to be realized through the manner in which the shower sequence in *Psycho* is depicted:

a) *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, far less transparently, mediated through Norman's;

b) *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;

c) *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;

d) *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 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;

e) *the insinuation of a 'false bottom'*[9] *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 appreciate the artfulness of technique, the efficiency of means, and the breathtaking simultaneity with which these desiderata are realized. None of this could be accomplished unless this joint achievement were initially invisible to a viewer. What is most apt to strike us on a first viewing of this necessarily unforgettable scene is that we have just witnessed a cinematically remarkable episode.[10] In priding ourselves on being thus struck by the scene, we fail to appreciate how that dazzling impression deflects our attention from the scene's real virtuosity—namely, 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.

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 questions touched on above—one on the cinematic medium, the other relating to the aesthetic evaluation and criticism of such forms of art. Here are some examples of the first sort of question: What is montage? Or: What is montage for? Or: How does the technique of montage confer meaning on a sequence of shots? Reflection on the shower scene's use of montage reveals 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 when employing a given technique by looking at very different sorts of significance it provides across a range of contexts. Another is to show how a single scene can employ "the same technique" to realize a variety of purposes all at once—as with the shower scene. No established answer to the question "What is montage?" delivered by a film theorist wedded 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.

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 answers to the expectations of the grammarian. The history of poetry shows us how any requirement a grammarian lays down may be flouted in the interest of achieving a form of otherwise unattainable expressive power. So, too, nothing other than the 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 determinable only through the unfolding of its practice.

A second way in which appreciating the fivefold accomplishment of the shower scene can serve to illuminate the nature of cinematic art—especially the great Hollywood movie—is beautifully summed up in the Victor Perkins's quotation that serves as the epigraph to this section.[11] There is a mode of invisibility internal to the very form of artistic excellence that such cinema can achieve. Attention to the shower scene reveals how this mode is itself the source of our immediate unreflective experience of a certain form of fineness in cinematic texture. To reflectively account for the conditions of the possibility of such aesthetic experience, requires bringing to successive viewings a critical attentiveness comparable in its patience, care, and nuance to that invested in its construction.

The Conjurer's Art

There is a tendency to remember a sequence like the shower scene as remarkable, but to think that this must rest on some straightforwardly isolatable aspect of Hitchcock's film-making method, one whose distinguishing marks or features can be designated by a single concept. This scene serves as an example of how unexamined categories of classification and overworn terms of criticism can engender the illusion that we already understand what it is that we experience when we watch such a scene, prior to our allowing it to teach us what it means to watch it. What I have attempted to show is how it can be exquisitely difficult to articulate why a scene's immediately felt brilliance may be due precisely to its employing means and fulfilling ends none of which are themselves self-evident.

If one treats 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 of 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. What can become unrecoverable when we are in the grip of a certain form

of theory is that, on a first viewing, we may miss most of the artistry that goes into such a movie, and the very nature of such artistry.

One way of misgauging the degree of cinematic perfection present in such a work 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 blessed. Another, theoretically more stultifying way, is by displacing the aesthetic power of the work 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 which mystify the medium without ever discerning what allows the medium of the Hollywood movie to achieve its distinctive varieties of aesthetic excellence.

Such theories, in turn, encourage the idea that the measure of a great Hollywood movie qua work of art 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 an inordinate fondness on the part of the theorist for cinematic gestures deemed to be cleverly self-reflexive or otherwise overtly preoccupied with 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 a mark of Hollywood naiveté.

Such theories of cinema will not lack for strategies for carving out an exception for Hitchcock, absolving his Hollywood creations of this charge of naiveté by singling out for attention aspects of his work that the theory in question already valorizes—such as interpretively elusive and vertiginous dimensions of narrative structure, intricacy in employment of montage, delight in gestures of self-reflexivity, and density of moments of cinematic virtuosity. The idea that governs such theories is that what is great in such cinema is measured by what has antecedently been 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 already available to the viewer prior to her aesthetic experience of the movie itself. The account of *Psycho* offered here is the opposite: it is only in and through what is genuinely novel in the forged cinematic form that what such a movie itself thinks is to be discovered.[12]

This invites investigation into an even more entrenched theoretical presumption:[13] the governing idea that serious art in our age must unmistakably lay claim 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 (able to appreciate work aspiring to seriousness of aesthetic purpose under conditions of modernity) and outsiders (able to make nothing of such work), 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 preoccupation with and capacity to draw attention to its methods of cinematic world-construction, then most Hollywood movies are relegated a priori to the category of the aesthetic poor cousin of all putatively ambitious art films. 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" which the conjurer invites him to examine carefully, the theorist who looks for the secret to Hitchcock's genius in his most easily discernible cinematic gestures (thereby allowing her attention to be channeled by this conjurer) misses the extraordinariness of effort present in what she mistakes to be the 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. Not only does it do this while eschewing the comparatively esoteric routes that other arts have generally felt obliged to travel since the advent of modernism, but it does this by achieving forms of aesthetic self-consciousness that it conceals. For it can do so only if it also initially conceals the means by which it exploits and explores its medium: only if buries its artistry so deeply that it can take decades before its professed theorists are able to work out what even the rudiments of the medium thereby disclosed are. 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.

How many moments of cinematic perfection are there of 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—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.[14] What such critics encourage us to do is set aside our antecedent commitment to some prior philosophical theory of how cinematic art *must* work and instead to look and see how it *does* work. Philosophers of film who share their aim of elucidating forms of aesthetic achievement within the medium of the movies would do well to follow their example.

NOTES

1. See Section 4 of my (2018) for a detailed exploration of the dialogue.
2. See Rothman (2012, pp. 299-317) for one of the most influential attempts.
3. 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 confusion on the contrary view is not one about art, but one about intention. See G. E. M. Anscombe's (1957) account and Cavell's "A Matter of Meaning It" in his (1976) 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" (1976, p. 230).
4. See, for example, Isaacs (2020).
5. See Fried (1988) and my (2011).
6. 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).
7. "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" (Hitchcock, "Interview with Sarris", op. cit. 246).
8. Perkins (1972, pp. 113–114)

9. See my (2018) for the development of the idea that the work contains a further false bottom; the second contingent upon the first.
10. Godard thematizes this, in his characteristically mischievous manner, in his *Histoire(s) du cinema*. Episode 4a of that monumental work at first appears merely to celebrate Hitchcock's directorial achievements, but actually turns out to juxtapose two distinct visions of wherein great cinema consists.
11. This is drawn from Perkins's own discussion of the shower scene, op. cit.
12. Godard: "In cinema it's the form that thinks. In bad cinema, it's the thought that forms" quoted by Morgan (2013, p. 169).
13. See my (2018, Section 1)
14. My intellectual debts to Cavell, Perkins, and Pippin stem not only from my study of their works, but also from countless conversations. (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?) I am also indebted to Cora Diamond and Stephen Mulhall for comments on earlier drafts of my (2018) longer manuscript from which much of this material comes.

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