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# Disruptive excesses: gender economics, excesses, and the gaze in Marnie and Vertigo

Anthony Stagliano

DePaul University, ANTHONYSTAGLIANO@YAHOO.COM

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DISRUPTIVE EXCESSES:

Gender Economies, Excess, and the Gaze in *Marnie* and *Vertigo*

A Thesis

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BY

Anthony Stagliano

Department of English

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

DePaul University

Chicago, Illinois

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## Chapter 1

### DISRUPTIVE EXCESSES

In Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and *Marnie*, an economy of gender relationships based in containment of excess exists on two planes. On the first, and most visible, level is the financial economy of the world portrayed in the diegetic story and in which the films were made and marketed. The second, less obvious, is the economy of narrative sense itself. Many film theorists have identified an underlying tension within narrative film between spectacle and story. I will show this tension, in these two films at least, reflects the tension in the larger social economy between excess and reserve, expenditure and conservation. These relationships, I will demonstrate, are gendered at both levels.

At the level of the economy of the diegetic story, the male characters are often related in these films to the world of financial economy, the world of work, while the female characters are often associated with the notion of excess, and clearly disrupt the functioning of this financial economy. I will show in these films a clear contrast between work and productivity on the one hand, and excess and wasteful expenditure on the other. Work—"useful" activity—is frequently presented as a masculine quality, and excess, expenditure, and waste as feminine characteristics. My work in this thesis will show how these lines blur in *Vertigo* and *Marnie*.

On the plane of narrative, though, in these films there is an economy of meaning, with men as producers of meaning and women as bearers (Mulvey, 20), made visible in the narrative structure of the two films. Where I will diverge most from Mulvey and psychoanalytic film

scholarship generally is in my emphasis on the narrative dialectic, which she raises in her essay, between spectacle and narrative. I tend to agree with these scholars that Hollywood cinema has been, for much of its history, patriarchal, and that much of its representation of women is repressive, rather than liberative. Analyzing, though, the tension between spectacle and story, in the economy of the film's narrative, in its production of realism, shows *more* fissures in that patriarchal film system than Mulvey permits. Analyzing, too, the disruptive potential of excess in the literal economy, the world of work, that is portrayed in these films—an excess associated with the feminine—shows parallel fissures.

The dialectic in cinema between spectacle and narrative must have parallels in other arts. What is the parallel tension in literary arts? Novelists since the high modernism of the 1920s have experimented frequently with the tension between the materiality of the text on the page and the need to create a self-contained “story.” From the fragmentary story-telling techniques of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, where the singular voice of the narrator (first or third person) is displaced in favor of many voices, including streams-of-consciousness, to the reflexive post-modernism of Nabokov and David Foster Wallace, where footnotes, not a traditional element to storytelling in prose, become integral parts to constructing the whole story, writers have toyed with the dialectic between the words on the page delivering the story, creating an image of a world in the reader's mind, and their being understood *as* writing, as moments of stylistic exuberance.<sup>1</sup>

Are these excesses gendered in the way the excesses in cinema are? Is this tension, in the fashion I use here, an economic tension? Mulvey and Metz identify what is unique to cinematic

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Woolf, *Jacob's Room*; Joyce, *Ulysses*; Nabokov, *Pale Fire*; Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, as well as the more explicitly theoretical work of Alain Robbe-Grillet, laid out in *Notes for a New Novel*, and his many novels, as well as Maurice Blanchot's fictional works.

*storytelling*. The potential for excessive visual pleasure is one characteristic unique to cinema;<sup>2</sup> another is the potential, within the “scopic regime” (Metz, 216) of the cinema to identify with both the characters on the screen, the creator of the image (the enunciator; Ballour 68) and with oneself as “all perceiving subject” (Metz, 216). This excess of identification, left relatively untouched in both Mulvey and Metz will form part of my argument that the potential excesses inherent in cinematic storytelling are unique to the form.

Narrative in cinema, like in any other arts, takes on a variety of forms, and for the most part, as theorists, Mulvey and Metz stick close to the classic realist cinema, most often identified with Hollywood production. Hitchcock’s mature films fit into both this production scheme and its “classic” realist mode, by and large, and the two films I analyze here were cited by Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure* as examples of the form. This mode of filmmaking, what Mulvey calls “illusionistic narrative film” (25), relies on several narrative and technical strategies to give the appearance of a reality, unfolding in time (whether subtly stretched for suspense or compressed for economy), that the spectator looks on, and which is relatively unaware of the spectator. The narrative works toward a conclusion, with the events taking place in the film chosen to move the film toward a satisfactory conclusion of the plot.

Sticking to this form of film as “cinema” itself is problematic, though—there are a great many “films” that violate many, or all, of the received techniques of narrative realism, and, furthermore, the form itself is dynamic, not static. Since 1958, when *Vertigo* was produced, the world has seen several “waves” of artistic, avant-garde and experimental narrative filmmaking, the most famous of which being the “French New Wave,” beginning in earnest in 1960. Many of

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<sup>2</sup> Metz attributes to cinema an effect called “perceptual wealth” That is, the cinema is visual and auditory. Theater is as well, but does not consist of *images*, but is portrayed by real actors, in real space and time. This distinction between present actors and the image is important to Metz, Mulvey, and my reading. (Metz, 214)

the techniques that were anathema to classic Hollywood narrative cinema in the 1950s (such as jump-cuts) have been incorporated into today's Hollywood filmmaking. David Fincher can do, to put it a bit too simplistically, things in his Hollywood films that Hitchcock could not.<sup>3</sup> Whatever avant-garde techniques and strategies have been absorbed into the form of narrative filmmaking, the question still remains about the tension between spectacle and story, perhaps even to a greater degree. David Lynch, a contemporary director who pushes this tension, usually within the Hollywood form of narrative film (in production strategy, and in narrative), clearly references *Vertigo* in his work.<sup>4</sup> For that director, at least, the French New Wave is not to be the most important influence, and it is Hitchcock he turns to. Thus, I feel justified in returning to this question with Hitchcock and Mulvey, in revisiting canonical films and a canonical essay, to see what questions they have raised that have not been explored deeply enough.

In *Visual Pleasure* Mulvey writes that “the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” and that “this alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative” (19). Mulvey here does not concern herself with all forms of spectacle pulling away from narrative flow. She notes that in musicals the “song-and-dance numbers break the flow of diegesis,” (19), but does not claim that *that* alien presence needs to be brought into cohesion. “Mainstream film,” she argues, “neatly combined spectacle and narrative” (19), but in her argument the spectacle of

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<sup>3</sup> In Fincher's *Fight Club*, for instance, the character Tyler Durden deliberately looks at the camera, bringing the audience into the diegesis. Hitchcock's cameos hardly count as a substantial violation of realism or interruption of the illusionistic quality of his films. Even more germane, perhaps, are Laura Mulvey's own experimental films (co-directed with Peter Wollen), attempts at enacting an art cinema that subverts “visual pleasure.”

<sup>4</sup> Lynch's *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, for instance both seem to be Hitchcockian “mysteries,” but defy traditional narrative sense in that they do not offer an easy, unambiguous conclusion, and at times seem to interrupt the “illusion” of a complete, whole reality being seen by the spectator.

woman on the screen as erotic object, of crucial importance to the narrative film,<sup>5</sup> is destructive to the flow of the narrative. Mulvey and Metz, though differing on the importance of women as images in film, agree that narrative cinema presents a “hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience” (Mulvey, 17), a world that is “radically ignorant of its spectator” (Metz, 217).

In his work on early cinema (between 1895 and the end of World War One), Tom Gunning discovers a historical opposition between narrative and non-narrative filmmaking, arguing that the history of early cinema has been written “and theorized under the hegemony of narrative films” (161). The early “actuality film” as opposed to the narrative film (the one of concern to Metz and Mulvey) was an “exhibitionist cinema,” not a “voyeuristic cinema” (162). Narrative cinema does not, however, replace “exhibitionist confrontation” with “diegetic absorption,” (163) but the dialectic between narrative and spectacle “has fuelled much of the classic cinema” (164), and found in the classical Hollywood film is the “primal power of the attraction running beneath the armature of narrative regulation” (164). Gunning’s essay, like Metz’s, is not concerned with the status of women in narrative Hollywood films, but in the dialectic between spectacle and narrative that Mulvey notes in *Visual Pleasure*.<sup>6</sup> Taken together, these three different theories, which nevertheless have some similar conclusions, help map the territory of the way excess can disrupt the economy of storytelling in the Hollywood narrative film.

As Mulvey does, I will exclude the musical from this discussion, as the voyeuristic quality of peering into a reality that is “not articulated — it is” (MacCabe, 203) is crucial to the

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<sup>5</sup> She does note the work Molly Haskell was doing at the time on “buddy” movies, in which the “active homosexual eroticism of the central male figures can carry the story without distraction” (19).

<sup>6</sup> Gunning cites both Metz and Mulvey in his essay.



realist film, but not as much in the musical. Musicals in classical Hollywood production are not realist texts *in the same way* as the classical narrative realist film. To understand what is at stake in creating a reality in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and *Marnie*, we will have to take as our territory that large, but not all inclusive, slice of cinema production that is defined by the term classic Hollywood realism.

### *Narrative and the Gaze.*

In Mulvey's view, narrative realism is contingent on the pleasure the spectator gets in voyeuristically looking at the performers, especially the women, on the screen. This mastering "gaze" helps sustain the narrative, adapting the concept of the gaze from the theories of Jacques Lacan. Mulvey, Christian Metz, and more recently, Slavoj Žižek, have all used Lacan's work to analyze film, and a great deal of film theory since the 1970s, especially work on gender and Hitchcock has been decidedly "Lacanian" in bent. Mulvey's work in *Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema*, in 1975, inaugurated feminist gaze theory, which became a lasting paradigm for many critics. Her adaptation, in this essay, of Lacan's "gaze," while not without controversy, has been extremely influential. Mulvey's concept, in brief, is that in the patriarchal symbolic order, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (242), and that women in films are the erotic objects of male gaze. Women in mainstream film are "simultaneously looked at and displayed," serving as "erotic object[s] for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object[s] for the spectator within the auditorium" (243). Her thesis, that the spectacle of the erotic woman on the screen works "against the development of a story line," tends to "freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (243) can also be

analyzed from the point of view of excess. The moments of narrative seizure and interruption can also correspond with moments, as in *Vertigo*, when the female character's role as erotic object is destabilizing to this very symbolic order. Mulvey hints at the economic dimensions of the patriarchal symbolic order when she refers to an "active/passive heterosexual division of labor" (243), but what is needed is a deeper exploration of that metaphor. The opposition she implies, but does not complete is between the economy of meaning production/narrative on one side as masculine, and meaning expenditure(waste, excess)/spectacle as feminine on the other side. If the symbolic order is where meaning is produced, *and* there is a symbolic division of labor between genders (with women as "bearers of meaning" and men as "makers of meaning"), then it is clear that the moments in *Vertigo* where meaning breaks down, where Kim Novak as Judy as Madeleine possessed by Carlotta eludes (by exceeding) meaning, the production of meaning ceases, the film's narrative unravels. Novak, for most of the film, plays a woman we are led to believe is "Madeleine Elster," whom we see commit suicide, jumping from a church bell tower. This is witnessed by Scottie Ferguson, played by James Stewart, who has been following her, having been hired by Elster's husband Gavin, played by Tom Helmore. Ferguson has fallen in love with Madeleine, but cannot save her because of a crippling case of vertigo caused by acrophobia. He later finds a woman, called Judy Barton, also played by Novak, whom he follows back to her hotel, asking her to have dinner with him. She resists at first, but agrees, asking him to come back later. When Ferguson leaves, we see in a stunning flashback, that Judy *is* the Madeleine Scottie knew, and that she was portraying her in a plan hatched by Gavin to kill his real wife with Scottie serving as witness to her suicide.<sup>7</sup> Part of the story of Madeleine that Ferguson and we as spectators believed was that Madeleine was suicidal because she had been possessed by the spirit of her great-grandmother, Carlotta Valdes, who was also a suicide. This

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<sup>7</sup> How Elster and Judy got away from the murder scene is conveniently ignored.

dizzying layer of identities defies the spectator to make sense of the film, and at times, it shows little interest in sense.

A fine example of *Vertigo's* loose relationship with cohesive narrative sense is the early scene at the Kitterick Hotel. Scottie Ferguson has reluctantly agreed to follow Madeleine Elster (when he *sees* her; Gavin Elster's original verbal entreaties failed), and he follows her to the Kitterick Hotel. Madeleine goes in, clearly, and disappears. Where is she? How did she disappear? What is this scene meant to mean? She is already erotic object of both Scottie Ferguson and the putative male spectator. Why does she disappear? The economics of Hitchcock's narratives is clear: male/active/narrative=meaning production and conservation, while female/excessive/inactive/spectacle=meaning waste, expenditure. Kim Novak, as Madeleine, as erotic object, affects narrative sense—she makes the film *stop* meaning. Alfred Hitchcock, not Kim Novak, constructed that scene, to be sure, but in assembling his film this way, he rather helps me prove Mulvey's point (which was secondary to her main thesis): women in the films, as erotic objects, create a loss of narrative without return, an expenditure of meaning. Hitchcock is likely banking on the air of mystery within the narrative to sustain acceptance and belief, but in analyzing *Vertigo*, we will see other instances where narrative sense is destabilized by the tension between men as producers of meaning and women as its potential destroyers, as erotic objects of the "pleasure of looking," which entails excess. Mulvey's formula is fruitful: men create a cinema with women as spectacles, as erotic objects, who then disrupt or halt the flow of narrative. The male characters then must, in some way contain these women; "the alien presence" as Mulvey provocatively puts it, "then has to be brought into cohesion with the narrative" (19). I will show that in *Vertigo*, Kim Novak is not brought into cohesion, but in *Marnie* Tippi Hedren is, and hope to offer a cogent reason for this.

Mulvey has influenced a great many critics with her work in *Visual Pleasure*, but she has been taken to task by many as well, mainly for theorizing a “monolithic” male gaze, and ignoring the possibility of a spectator who is not a heterosexual man.<sup>8</sup> Mulvey herself revised her opinion slightly in *Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure*. In this later essay, Mulvey tries to answer the intense scrutiny her emphasis on the male spectator in *Visual Pleasure* was met with. Returning to Freud and Propp, she continues to argue the passive status of women in “Western” narrative traditions. She does concede that the trans-gender identification of a female spectator, “masculinization,” happens, but is unstable and incomplete, and it is this instability, this “difficulty of sexual difference that is missing in the undifferentiated spectator of “Visual Pleasure” (Mulvey, 30). This process, though, incompletely accounts for the spectator’s complex identification. Even when the spectator is clearly identifying with the male protagonist, as in *Vertigo*, we will see that character’s own masculinity undermined *within* the film, even as he performs the tasks of male hero. His relationship to the gaze is not uncomplicated.

The rather “monolithic” (Modleski, 9) male gaze aside, what is still valuable in Mulvey, for my purposes here, is the distinction between spectacle and narrative that she clearly associates with a division “of labor” between the genders within the symbolic order. If it is the task of men to produce meaning and women to bear it, there is an economy of meaning inherent in this arrangement. This economy of meaning is gendered through this division of labor, and we will see moments in *Vertigo* and *Marnie* where its cohesion and functioning is disrupted. Likewise, it would be fair to assume, though, that Alfred Hitchcock and the respective studio executives at Paramount and Universal imagine, likely without much thought, a heterosexual male viewer as their target viewer. When the narrative in these films makes more or less sense,

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<sup>8</sup> Cf., for instance, Doane, Clover, and Modleski.

we should wonder why does it do so for this viewer, as the film, a commercial product, result of a great deal of capital investment and labor, stands or falls mainly on that viewer's feelings. How is the economy of the film's production written into the economy of the film's narrative?

The spectator, then, is crucial to the narrative film's meaning, even in Lacanian gaze theory. Metz's and Žižek's respective deployments of Lacan's gaze do not emphasize gender, but for both the gaze situates the spectator in relation with the film's meaning. For Metz, *all* film spectatorship is scopophilic, but the process of identification is not gendered—men need not identify with male characters, or as Modleski and Clover<sup>9</sup> argue, undergo transgendered identification; rather, the film spectator that Metz theorizes identifies with *himself* as “pure act of perception,” as “a kind of transcendental subject” (216). Žižek, following Lacan's Seminar 11, sees the gaze in the “blind spot” in the object of the spectator's look. The screen returns the gaze on the seeing eye. That is, the spectator sees on the screen evidence that there is an “other” hidden there, returning the gaze (229). Both theorists will prove helpful as I sort through the tensions inherent in narrative cinema between spectacle and story.

### *Narrative Economy and Excess*

It seems clear to me that the structure of narrative form is working as an economy, and that in the cinema, this is often literal (the narrative structure creates meaning that the audience consumes; the narrative that fails to do this, that *wastes* its meaning in loss without return, subverts the economy of cinema). As mentioned above, the economy of narrative structure, at least in cinema, is often gendered: men *make* meaning and women *bear* it. Some characters, as

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<sup>9</sup> *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.

will become clear in my chapter on *Vertigo*, slip between these simple gender categories, whatever their biological gender may be. But in general, I will hold close to Mulvey's and Modleski's interpretation of the world inside the film frame as decidedly patriarchal. What is most interesting to me, though, and is the tension Mulvey, Metz, Gunning and others note between narrative and spectacle. My contribution, modest as it is, is to point to the underlying economy of that tension *within* the diegesis of the film; the film fails to *make* sense, in terms of production, when the spectacle takes over and halts the narrative. In *Vertigo*, this spectacle is gendered and its subversion is a subversion of the patriarchy behind the narrative. At the same time, the narrative economy is a gender economy, with male characters more closely associated with active narrative roles and control and production of meaning *within* the story, and female characters more associated with passive roles, and the *destruction* of meaning. Judy/Madeleine/Carlotta serve as erotic objects, but also frequently undermine the closure of the narratives that their very presence initiates. *Marnie*, however, tells the story of a more successful containment, and ends with narrative closure, with, for the most part, all its loose ends tied up and Marnie restored to her subordinate role as a woman in early 1960s American patriarchy. Since the disruptions I am locating in *Vertigo* are economic, disruptions the excess Kim Novak embodies as part of the economy of narrative, it is not a surprise to find Marnie Edgar (played by Tippi Hedren) disrupting the literal, financial economy in the film's story.

Especially in the chapter on *Vertigo*, I will look to the feminist theory of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray alongside Georges Bataille's conceptual cluster of waste, excess, and expenditure. In doing so, I hope to account for gaps and fissures in these two films that Mulvey and those who respond to her do not. Excess as a concept can account for the disruptions that women represent in the economy of narrative. Excessive femininity, excessive spectacle, as

Mulvey would put it, disrupts the plot economy in *Vertigo*, with Kim Novak overwhelming the story so much from her first appearance, that the film beggars plausibility to the breaking point. The woman as erotic object of the gaze, the “to-be-looked-at” of women on film, has an economic dimension, and its dimension is that of excess. Barbara Bel Geddes, in *Vertigo*, is clearly not meant to be an erotic object of the spectator’s or of James Stewart’s gaze (and she gets no mention in Mulvey’s use of *Vertigo* in *Visual Pleasure*); she is of the world of work, though, a functioning member of the financial economy in the film, and, when she catches the swooning Stewart in one of the film’s first scenes, is at least partially identified as having masculine traits.<sup>10</sup> Bel Geddes, as Midge, in this film, is as much a “man” as active agent (having a job), and narratively (of meaning), as James Stewart’s Scottie Ferguson. She functions economically *within* the narrative, and does not disrupt it, just as she functions within in the financial economy, by *working*.

At the same time, masculinity itself is hardly as monolithic as it is portrayed in Mulvey’s essay. My chapter on *Vertigo* will explore in depth the troubled masculinity of Scottie Ferguson, and show that he is far from the “sadistic” metonymy of the symbolic order as police detective that she has him, but is a vulnerable failure, who has not been able to perform his role in that profession, and his masculinity will be questioned throughout the film, from the very first scene. It is true, though, that the spectator is identified most with Ferguson, but as we will see, this identification further troubles the spectator’s possession of the mastering male gaze.

The disruptions to narrative that Mulvey describes in her essay, the moments that cause the narrative to “freeze” in “erotic contemplation” are the result of excess. Kim Novak in

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<sup>10</sup> This occurs in the second scene in the film, when Ferguson has failed in his own job, and is now wearing a corset. Midge works, successfully, it seems, and the swooning, corset-wearing Ferguson does not.

*Vertigo*, unlike Barbara Bel Geddes (who is masculinized), is *too much* for the story to contain. The diegetic metaphor of this is the dizzying complexity of sorting out *who* we are looking at, the multiplicity of Kim Novak as Madeleine; as Madeleine possessed by Carlotta; as Judy as Judy; as Judy dressed as Madeleine; and undermining the whole thing, as Novak as Judy as all the others. This film takes to an absurd dimension the misogynist anxiety common to Hollywood films that women are inscrutable and multiple. But, let us follow multiplicity to a positive end, through the notion of excess; this dizzying multiplicity of signification that Novak possesses in *Vertigo* irreparably upsets the film's story. If, as I will argue here, the film's narrative is metaphoric of the gendered economy at large (which will be clearer with *Marnie*), then the disruption of the film's narrative disrupts the circulation of meaning that men are supposed to control. Novak can only do this by being the erotic object of the film. This is where I will break with Mulvey. I take seriously her argument that the erotic object on the screen is disruptive to the narrative (indeed, this is central to my thesis); where things get more complicated, I believe, is when we account for other sexualities, or even heterosexual female sexuality, and different erotic objects appear, disrupting narrative flow at unexpected moments. Another complication is the male in the "male gaze," as we will see with Scottie Ferguson, who is not an untroubled example of masculinity.

However, in analyzing *Vertigo* and *Marnie*, I will show the excess that women possessed in the 1950s and 1960s with respect to the economy of narrative, and how the financial economy is portrayed in film. I will leave aside for other discussions the role of women in the workforce (including the labor force employed in the film industry) as well as the analysis of *other* erotic objects on the screen disrupting the flow of plot. For example, a more contemporary film like



*Fight Club* clearly eroticizes the male body, disrupting its own narrative sense to the breaking point, and also portrays a financial economy disrupted by the same erotic force.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, this thesis is not necessarily only about feminism, but rather is concerned with the tension between spectacle and narrative as an analogous tension—stemming from the same problems—between the economy of useful productive activity and the economy of excess, waste and loss without return. Gender, however, is most assuredly the site of these tensions within Hitchcock, and will be of concern throughout this thesis in that respect.

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<sup>11</sup> It is the presence of Tyler Durden, clear erotic object, in the narrator's life that causes him to lose his condominium—dramatically by fire—and his job, in a moment of disruption and excess. That Durden is later revealed to be the narrator himself is hardly the point, as this after the fact revelation, like the revelation of Gavin Elster's murder plot in *Vertigo*, does not replace or undo all that the spectator has seen, or thinks he has seen.

## Chapter 2

## JUST SOMETHING YOU'VE CAUGHT

Criticisms of Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure* focus often on either the absence of a "female spectator" in her concept,<sup>12</sup> the lack of verifiability in her claims,<sup>13</sup> or on her mishandling of Lacan.<sup>14</sup> Rarely, though, do critics address the matter raised in *Visual Pleasure* surrounding the tension between "spectacle" the "pleasure of looking" and narrative. Her essay specifically cites three Hitchcock films, two of which are the subject of this thesis, but all of which are structured, to a greater or lesser extent, as mysteries. Their narratives, that is, are driven by the search for *more* information. *Rear Window* is the most explicit. *Vertigo* is the most troubled. Setting aside as much as we can of the psychoanalytic implications she identifies in these films, and keeping in mind what problems that might invite, let us examine the dialectic between spectacle and narrative outside Mulvey's psychoanalytic theoretical perspective, and examine an economy of narrative that hinges on a gendered "division of labor" in the making of and bearing of sense.

Marnie is not only "to-be-looked-at" but solved, cured, and made sense of. The pleasure in watching *Marnie* for Mulvey's heterosexual male spectator is in part identifying with the "dominant male possessing money and power" (Mulvey, 23) who ultimately dominates and "cures" Marnie. Mulvey's gap here is that the identification *with* Mark Rutland, played by Sean

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<sup>12</sup> Clover, Carol J. "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film." *Representations* 20 (1987): 187-228; Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator." In *Femmes Fatales*, 17-33.

<sup>13</sup> Bordwell, David and Carroll Noel, eds. *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Manlove, Clifford T. "Visual 'Drive' and the Cinematic Narrative: Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey." *Cinema Journal* 46.3 (2007); McGowan, Todd. "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes." *Cinema Journal* 42.3 (2003): 27-47.

Connery, is contingent on Connery's "to-be-looked-at-ness." He is a much younger, more virile and clearly sexual character and actor than James Stewart was in *Vertigo*. Ignoring this dimension of "visual pleasure" in identifying with the characters on screen misses part of the armature of cinematic patriarchy that makes women objects of erotic attention, while at the same time plays on the attractiveness of men for Hollywood's putative heterosexual male spectator. We can imagine, then, not only other spectators—straight women, gay men, gay women, bisexual men or women—who come to see other objects of erotic desire, or the same objects from different perspectives within the same screen frame. Even without the mastering male gaze, it seems clear that the people, male or female, populating the screen are there "to-be-looked-at."

Marnie's sexual attractiveness, though, does have a distinct difference to Mark Rutland's, and a new understanding of the different functions (in the narrative) and roles (in the diegesis) of men and women in Hitchcock films can be teased out from an analysis of this film as portraying in the diegesis, the dialectic between excess and reserve, that *Vertigo* writes into the structure of storytelling. The aspects of Mulvey's work that deal directly with patriarchy and spectator identification will be left to other critics (who have been debating these for 35 years<sup>15</sup>); I will pick up the opposition of narrative and spectacle—which Mulvey herself describes in economic language—as a mirror dialectic between the economies of excess and reserve. That is not to say, that these two poles, in both cases, have to do specifically with the workings of the financial economy, but the location of women and men in the economies, respectively, of the "workings" of narrative and the social world in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in which these two films were made. To put it in different terms: Kim Novak disrupts the narrative's functioning in *Vertigo* in the same way, and for the same ultimate reason, as Tippi Hedren disrupts the world of work in

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<sup>15</sup> See, for an excellent recent survey of the debate, Manlove, op. cit. (Note 3.)

the diegesis in *Marnie*—it can be said that she steals it. The tension between narrative and spectacle, I am arguing, is the same tension between excess and reserve, and in both cases, at least in the 1950s and 1960s portrayed in these two Hitchcock films, we can see a gender division, with men on the side of meaning, reserve, and women on the side of mystery, excess, and emotion. These connections, between “femininity” and excess emotions have been made before, but what I will show here is the parallel structure in the very construction of sense in the Hollywood film.

The excesses in the narrative of *Vertigo* that I will address later have their corresponding excesses in the character of Marnie, both within the diegesis, as a person in the world portrayed on the screen, and in the excess of spectator identification caused by her in the enunciation of the film. Her excesses do not disrupt the internal logic or plausibility of the narrative, but the daily functioning of the world in which she exists in the film, in the diegesis of the story. Hitchcock may have learned his lesson from the financially underperforming *Vertigo* and stuck more directly to the patriarchal portrayal of women’s excesses, and attractiveness as dangerous. Marnie is not a femme fatale, leading—tempting—Rutland to his ruin, but she is clearly portrayed by the film as out of order in the world, and can only be *cured* of her frigidity (she does not want to sleep with Rutland, who has blackmailed her into marriage) through Rutland’s acting the psychologist to her, recovering a repressed memory, and restoring her to her role as good wife (who is not frigid). Feminine excess, beginning with Marnie’s uncontrollable seizures and kleptomania, is contained by masculine resolution, reason, and ultimately, firmness.

Marnie does, though, clearly bring trouble to the work world. The world of work is metonymically presented here in the form of the office, with men clearly in power, as managers and bosses, and women—like Marnie, as Rutland and Strutt describe her in the first scene—as

decorative elements, to improve “the looks” of the office, or they serve as nearly invisible labor, like the woman cleaning Rutland publishing after-hours while Marnie, doing her own work, is robbing the safe. Secretaries and assistants, meanwhile, like Susan (played by Mariette Hartley) at Rutland publishing, seem to have both the “looks” and some access to power. Susan has the combination to the safe at her disposal, and could steal the money at any time (as could Ward or Rutland himself), but does not. What Marnie represents, then, what she brings into the office, the world of work, is that potential threat all attractive women hired as decorations possess. Marnie, in Strutt’s office, was no different from the nameless secretary who is present when Strutt reports the crime. She is attractive and knowingly smirks at Strutt’s difficulties describing Marnie, as he gets distracted in his own description. She knows the contradictory power of being in the work place, hired for looks alone, given little real authority; she has the power, just by being the object of the erotic gaze, to disturb and disrupt the work place. Susan and Strutt’s secretary both can represent the potential that Marnie realizes in her thefts, the potential disruption to the economy that the woman as erotic object of the gaze represents, in a parallel to the same function she serves in the economy of the narrative structure that Mulvey identifies.

At the same time, other worlds of work do exist in the film, even as it clearly favors the business world that Strutt and Rutland exist in. Sex work is the clearest contrast. Marnie’s mother, we discover during Marnie’s “cure,” worked as a prostitute during Marnie’s childhood. An assault by one of her clients led to his accidental murder at Marnie’s hand, which was the trauma causing Marnie’s frigidity and phobia of the color red. Linking this trauma to the sex economy, *Marnie* portrays an inversion of the economy of the office: in the office sexuality is present, but needs to be contained, in sex work it is commodified, and the workers are under constant threat. Women, with their potential sexuality, the film seems to say, are a threat to the

work space typified by the office, while their own work is shunted off to marginal positions within this economy (secretaries, cleaning crews), or into illicit economies in which they are still sexual objects. Both Marnie's work as a thief and her mother's work as a prostitute hinge on being potentially sexual objects. Marnie improves "the looks" of the offices she is hired into, and when she has stolen the money, the managers, like Strutt, seem unable to complete a simple police description without being overwhelmed by Marnie's erotic attraction. Women's erotic potential, then, in the economy is more complicated than a simple binary of active subject versus passive object. Marnie uses her sexual attraction, while denying herself sexuality,<sup>16</sup> to gain access to the offices she robs. As the scene with Strutt shows at the beginning of the film, that same sexual attraction can short-circuit the very patriarchal law and order mechanism that would be employed to bring her in line. On the other hand, her mother's work as a sex worker put her and her daughter into danger in an illicit economy that is afforded no protection from the mechanism of law and order. The binary of passive versus active, tied by Mulvey to looking at and being looked at, collapses in *Marnie*.

In Mulvey's view, recall, this binary is part of the structure of realism in the narrative film, and we would expect to find realism failing in *Marnie* at the same time. William Johnson, however, wrote in his contemporary review of the film in *Film Quarterly*: "In *Marnie*, Hitchcock has gone all out for realism" (39). Perhaps this seems surprising now, after nearly four decades of feminist film scholarship showing us the underlying patriarchy in the "realism" of Hollywood films, especially as Johnson writes lines, in the same review, like "Marnie ... represents the conventional clichés of the sixties woman—chic exterior, sexual problems, amoral resourcefulness—until the denouement cleanses her of all but sweetness" (40); it is clear that the

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<sup>16</sup> Which further complicates what Hitchcock's film might be saying about women's sexuality.

portrayal of women in *Marnie*, so problematic to many today was less troubling to at least that one (male) reviewer of the film. What I want to seize upon in Johnson's review, though, is not his troubling misapprehension of misogynist strains in Hitchcock's filmmaking, but his emphasis on *Marnie* as realistic, remembering that, at least for Mulvey, the misogyny in Hitchcock's films is part of what makes them realistic. If we are to interrogate that understanding of realism, we might ask what is realistic about this film. Johnson sees elements in it that betray Hitchcock's "patently blind eye" (40), including "phony backdrops that grate like TV commercials (especially in color), the bits of rapid montage that do not quite fit together, and the two-shots that are held so long that they almost ossify" (40). The realism, then, is not stylistic, but rather plot-based. The realism is not still present in that denouement that Johnson notes descends into "bathos" that feels like "a slap in the face" to the viewer (what about to Marnie herself?). Johnson claims that Hitchcock as a "popular director ... recognizes that well-rounded plots are still in demand, even if they have to be hammered violently into shape" (42). Thus, the realism he identifies is the same narrative realism Mulvey exposes in *Visual Pleasure*, the realism that need not end on a note that has any relationship with reality, the realism that need not portray characters (especially women) as they really might be in the world, but a realism contingent on adherence to strict conventions of resolution that make the story appear real. *Vertigo*, we will see in the next chapter, despite what Mulvey insightfully notes about the film, violates the realist contract and does so mostly through excess.

*Marnie*, though, revises that plot in many ways, and also seems more punitive; Marnie, of course, does not die, as Judy does (or, for that matter, the real Madeleine Elster), but the film does portray, in the guise of a "cure," Marnie's autonomy being systematically destroyed by an enraged tyrant. While the film's narrative is more stable, the excess does not disappear, but is

situated in the diegesis. In both cases though, in *Vertigo* and *Marnie*, an economy is disrupted by gendered excess. In *Vertigo*, it is the economy of meaning in the very structure of storytelling in cinema; and in *Marnie*, it is in the world of work portrayed in the film. In both cases, the presence of excess disrupts realism.

*Marnie* begins with a shot of a woman's hand holding a yellow clutch purse, its womb symbolism being none too subtle. That this purse turns out to contain the ten thousand dollars Marnie has stolen from her employer's safe only reinforces the identification with woman's sexuality and the threat it poses to the world of work. We of course do not know all of this yet, and only see her hand and the clutch. She is walking away in this shot, though, and as we gradually come to see more of her, we see this woman, with black hair, walking in the center of the frame, away from the camera down the platform at a train station. She never turns; we never see her face. She may be pure object here, but the camera, that has been following her, step by step, has stopped, and she continues to walk away. She subtly in that moment breaks the domination the camera has had on her in that following. Her walk away shows autonomy that, for instance, Judy Barton in *Vertigo* does not share. Crucially, we do not see her face here; she is not yet wholly identified as an image. First she must be *described*.

Before we see Marnie, we hear that there has been a robbery at an office, committed, Strutt, the company's manager believes, by one of its employees (who, in the way the information is arranged in the film, must be the woman who was just on the train platform, and will of course turn out to be Marnie). What is important here, and what Raymond Bellour begins to hint at in his "Hitchcock, the Enunciator," is that the *image* of Marnie as desired object is first constructed in enunciation, in Strutt's telling of the story of the robbery. In this moment, then, the potentially disruptive *image* of Marnie as erotic object is suppressed in favor of the narrative



of her crime. Marnie as erotic object is constituted by Strutt's speech. Strutt's description of the crime, though, his employment of the authority of the police (an apparatus of patriarchy in Mulvey's article) to put Marnie to justice, is constantly interrupted by his own erotic contemplations of Marnie's physical attractiveness and her gestures which have caused such erotic reflections before. He cannot get through telling Rutland who she is, without such interruptions. Of course this can prove up Mulvey's point, that women as erotic objects of the masculine gaze are at once the objects of classical narratives and the spectacles that threaten these. But what is happening in the diegesis of this scene is exactly what happens in the spectator relationship Mulvey describes in classical Hollywood films. Strutt has a narrative to get through, his *story* of Marnie's crime—twice, once to the police and once to Rutland—but is unable to complete this *work* when his erotic contemplation of her overwhelms him. Objectifying her as pure visual object is patriarchal, but this excess that is created, when she as erotic object is exactly what short circuits the very reporting of her crime, complicates that repression. Marnie, in this scene, only seen from behind so far, walking away on the train platform, has begun to destabilize the simple patriarchal discourse of mastering gaze that Mulvey identifies in this film. Of course Mulvey does argue that the disruptive spectacle of the woman needs “to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative” (19), but in emphasizing the psychoanalytic properties of such negotiations, she neglects instabilities in the economy of the narrative storytelling in the classical Hollywood film, not to mention the very real (in the diegetic world) economic disruptions this erotic image of Marnie causes in this film. Thus, Marnie as erotic object of the male gaze exceeds that role and (at least momentarily) disrupts the operations of that patriarchal power structure (business, finance, the police) employing the gaze (as Mulvey understands it) that creates Marnie as object of erotic desire. Bellour's essay concludes its analysis with the end of

the Strutt scene, with Marnie walking down a hotel hallway, and Hitchcock's cameo, looking at Marnie. Bellour writes: "By observing Marnie object of desire, enigma (becoming the one by being the other) Hitchcock becomes a sort of double to Mark and Strutt who have just contributed to making his image, but who, at the same time are caught in it" (73).

Marnie, in a reversal of Judy Barton in *Vertigo*, changes her own hair color, clothes, names, and identity, and generates her own crimes. Taking ownership of herself as object of the male gaze, she inverts Judy's position as object, first of Gavin Elster's machinations and then of Scottie Ferguson's. This is effective, on the diegetic level, because she, as erotic object, exceeds her position as "passive" object of the erotic gaze. On the level of enunciation, the metaphor is clear too: Strutt's enunciation of Marnie's crime is interrupted by the very "erotic contemplation" that Mulvey identifies as part of the underlying structure of the mastering male gaze. That is not to say that *Marnie* is somehow a feminist film, or that even this scene is ideologically aligned with feminism, but to show that the excess that is behind the image of woman as erotic object itself is destabilizing to the patriarchal structure that generates it. In other words, the creation of images of women's bodies as objects of erotic contemplation both effects a repression of women and contains disruptions to the discourse that creates these images. I think Mulvey is right to note both that classical Hollywood narrative films—at least in Hitchcock's time—employ women mainly as erotic objects, and that the tension between narrative and spectacle puts that film in a constant state of potential collapse. The final connection she does not make is to link that *excess* image with the collapse of narrative.

We first see Marnie's face after she has dyed her own hair and (so far) successfully gotten away with the ten thousand dollars she has stolen from Strutt. Comparing this film with *Vertigo* and ignoring who the ostensible impetus for Marnie's change in identity (herself), in

contrast with Judy Barton's (first Gavin Elster, then Scottie Ferguson) misses crucial unions and divergences between the films. In this moment, then, she is "Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie*" her own "Marnie" and, as Raymond Bellour points out, the erotic image of Mark Rutland's fantasy (who has taken subjective position with respect to the camera), as manufactured by Rutland and Strutt in the last scene with Strutt describing her as thief. This excess of subjects is more complicated than Mulvey's reading allows, and the position of Marnie, as agent, as object, within the film's diegesis *and* within the film's enunciation exceeds the simple dichotomy active/male passive/female.

Marnie, in these early scenes, though, is not passive object of any character's look. Rutland is nowhere near her yet, and it is perhaps too much to say that his fantasy, created in the scene with Strutt, identifies him *wholly* with the camera in these scenes. Rather, the camera operates in the objective position, with the audience not identifying with any male character within the story, at the moment, gazing on Marnie. The audience is peering in on a "closed world" indeed, but it is Marnie's story, as far as we can tell at the moment. Recall the oppressive subjective camera in the early scenes of Kim Novak in *Vertigo*<sup>17</sup>. She was always already the object of Scottie Ferguson's (as former police detective, as current surrogate eye of her husband) gaze. Marnie, however, thus far is the subject—in both senses—of this film, and as subject, in the sense of active agent, exceeds her role as *mere* object of the masculine gaze and inaugurates audience identification with her<sup>18</sup>

Identification with Marnie as subject, as active agent, in these scenes is not unproblematic, though. There are no subjective shots in these scenes fixing Marnie as object of

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<sup>17</sup> Later, I will address complications in that subjective camera associated with Scottie Ferguson.

<sup>18</sup> Modleski and Clover both treat at length the possibility of trans-gender identification in the male audience members. Modleski, Tania. *The Women Who Knew Too Much*. New York: Routledge, 2005; Clover, Carol J. "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film." *Representations* 20 (1987): 187-228.

another subject's gaze, but also missing are any subjective shots from Marnie's perspective. At first blush, this seems a minor stylistic concern, but in two key places, there is an evident *avoidance* of subjective shots from Marnie's perspective, when, in the demands of filmic sense, there should be these shots.

Through particular camera strategies (excluding subjective shots from Marnie's perspective) Hitchcock indeed slants identification away from her, leaving her more an object of the spectator's look than subject of any of the looks portrayed on the screen. First, when Marnie has arrived at the stables to take her horse out for a ride, she is clearly the subject, the character of this scene. We learn from the dialogue that the horse is of great importance to her, but we see the horse in an objective shot, not from Marnie's perspective. Later in the same scene, and more obviously egregious, Marnie is riding the horse through the woods, evidently in contemplation or reflection. Marnie, though, is *looking around*. But we are never given any clue as to what she *sees*. Next, she arrives at her mother's house (a location that will figure crucially in the film's story). Outside the neighbor's stoop are some children playing. Marnie obviously looks at these children, and again, we do not cut to a perspective shot. Most importantly, to the film's story, and sense of suspense, are the gladiolas inside her mother's house. Upon seeing these red flowers, Marnie has the first of her many fits in the film. These fits, their cause and their cure, will become deeply important elements in the film's plot, but the shot of the flowers, after Marnie sees them and begins to panic, and the score hits a note of terror, is not clearly from Marnie's perspective, since the flowers are framed up in the center of the screen, not identifiably in an eyeline match shot—Marnie is seen, not seeing. She is at once subtly the subject of the story, the narrative, and the object of the spectacle, the look, since she does not see what the audience sees, and if she sees anything, we do not see it in the same way she sees it. In the same

scenes, then, Marnie is potentially the erotic object of the spectator's gaze, and the subject of the film's narrative. According to Bellour, the spectator watching the first scenes of *Marnie*, undergoes "two processes of identification ... identification with the camera and with the object" in a "perpetual dialectic between being and having: identification and object-choice" (68). This excess of identification, this dialectic between identifying with the camera and the camera's object is part of the same dialectic, ultimately, between spectacle and story.

Soon, though, there are subjective camera shots from Marnie's perspective. And after all the scenes in which these shots are denied, suppressed, their appearance later is an *excess* of subjectivity, evidence of her destructive potential as subject, rather than object. Unsurprisingly, they begin to appear when she has entered Mark Rutland's business world. Rutland has hired her *because of her looks*, identifying himself as a "spectator," likely because he believes her to be the woman Strutt described. But, only in the economy of narrative storytelling is this possible. The film cleverly reduces the amount of time that has passed, the distance between the two cities, and the possible number of applicants for the job, let alone the statistical unlikelihood of the thief presenting herself for this particular job. An excess is operating here. Rutland brings her into his company, imagining that she is the thief Strutt described, because, through the narrative construction of the film, she could possibly be no one else, she exceeds her position in the closed world that the diegesis is supposed to be constructing, and becomes the *only* object of erotic contemplation, regardless of the other women in the scene. Thus, the appearance realism of the Hollywood narrative, of which *Marnie* is meant to be an example (recall the Film Quarterly review cited above), is built on a constitutive excess, the excess of, in this case, the woman as an "an indispensable element of spectacle" (Mulvey, 19), whose power as spectacle, as excess, both conditions and destabilizes the possibility of narrative. But Marnie seizes some subjective

territory in this scene, and *looks* at something, and for the first time, there is a cut to an eyeline shot from her perspective. What she sees is as important as the fact of seeing what she sees: she looks at the desk drawer that contains the combination to the office safe. This, like the fit caused by the red gladiolas, will prove an important element in the plot, since we already know what Rutland suspects—that Marnie is the thief. But unlike with the gladiolas, she is positioned as subject of a look in the film here, only because it relates her subjectivity, within the narrative, with her crime. The image of the gladiolas, which causes Marnie’s fit, evidence of an illness, cannot warrant a subjective camera, since it would identify the spectator with her not as criminal but as sympathetic sufferer, thus making complicated any later identification with Rutland, whose cruelty would be intolerable under those circumstances.

The erotic gaze itself is not always considered an engine of mastery, though. Todd McGowan argues, from a Lacanian perspective that the gaze is rather the moment the “object looks back,” the “object petit a” in Lacanian theory<sup>19</sup> (32). He writes, “Although in his essay on the mirror stage Lacan conceives of the gaze as a mastering gaze, he thought of it in precisely the opposite way later on—as the point at which mastery fails. In Lacan's later work, the gaze becomes something that the subject encounters in the object; it becomes an objective, rather than a subjective, gaze” (27), thus, Mulvey’s male gaze only grasps half of the complexity of the tension, and only half of the equation created by the “gaze.” The excess of identification, of looking (mastery, active/male) and being looked at (object petit a, passive/female) simultaneously is irreducible to Mulvey’s binary concept, and exceeds her concept of pleasure in looking always being on the side of patriarchal dominance. The tension between the narrative of films and pure visual pleasure is between identification in the Symbolic order, *mastery* of the

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<sup>19</sup> This is also Žižek’s understanding of the gaze, and though he rarely mentions Mulvey by name, it appears his definition of the gaze is meant as a revision of Mulvey’s theory.

visual, and, as McGowan shows, the “disruption” of “safe distance” (29). This is one aspect of the excess I have been describing here. Marnie as object of the gaze both looks back and does not. She disturbs that safe distance by exceeding the simplistic role as object of mastering gaze, and being at times both object and subject. The pleasure in watching *Marnie*, then, even for heterosexual male spectators, can be at once sadistic and masochistic, mastering and freeing. It is this surplus of identification, this excess of subjects, that complicates Mulvey’s reading of *Marnie* as a film in which the title character is brought under control by a man with money and power (23), even if she concedes that Hitchcock’s is an “uneasy gaze” (23).

The presence of Marnie in the world of work is a parallel disruption to its economy that the disruption the image of Kim Novak insistently presents to the economy of storytelling in *Vertigo*. Not long after beginning her job at Rutland publishing, Marnie is invited by Rutland to work overtime with him at his office on a Saturday. An establishing shot of Rutland publishing (which is unnecessary for narrative sense, and is thus excessive in itself) shows a brewing storm nearby. Inside, Marnie’s presence as potential object of Rutland’s erotic gaze, and possible predator is played up in the dialogue. Rutland has her type a copy of a zoological essay he has written on predators, “the criminal class of the animal world.” His next line is “lady animals figure very largely as predators,” taunting Marnie the thief. But it also brings to the fore another gender relationship, one that was apparent in the Strutt scene. Marnie’s presence in the work place as erotic object (both Rutland and Strutt hired her for her looks) *and* as potential thief, as “predator” suggests within the diegesis the same destructive potential woman as spectacle poses for storytelling. In the economy of making the narrative flow, the presence of woman as erotic object is constitutive *and* potentially threatening. In the world of work in 1964, the presence of woman serves the same function. Women are everywhere in these offices, and the ones, like

Marnie, who exceed their roles as objects of the gaze and have agency, are predators, can disrupt the workspace by being there. Marnie's thefts, then, metaphorize her destructive power as object and subject simultaneously. No scene better portrays this visually than the storm in Rutland's office. While Rutland is discoursing on female predators in the animal world, the storm mysteriously does not exist in the sound track or visually. It only reappears, suddenly, when Marnie begins to scroll paper into her typewriter, when she has begun to work in earnest. Marnie, as predator, as "lady animal" has invaded the work-space of Rutland's office, and the storm she brings as excess crashes through the window, ending, before it begins, the day's work. Her theft is metaphorically this same storm, crashing into the office with her.

What happens *to* Marnie in this scene is important as well. The storm causes one of her many fits in the film, and, looking out the window, she sees the lightning flash red, the color most disturbing to her. She tries to go to the light switch, but in this state, her movements are fitful, uncontrolled, and she presses herself against the door, in terror. Rutland ultimately comes over to her, and tries to calm her, which culminates in a kiss. Afterwards, Marnie seems not to remember the substance of the fit, she does not recall saying "The colors! Make them stop!" Another fit, in the next scene, at the racetrack, occurs when she sees the red polka dots on a jockey's jersey. She is momentarily shocked again, and has to move away from this horse and chooses not to bet on it (it wins, however). Marnie's fits, then, are the mirror excess of her role in the world of work within the story's narrative. The fits are excess, because only in the economy of a Hollywood narrative would such a thing not beggar plausibility completely (how often, in a single day does someone encounter the color red?). They are *visual excess* because in seeing the color red, with her look, she is arrested by it, caused to have these minor apoplexies, and her subjectivity, and autonomy are momentarily seized. She says things that are unconscious, that



she does not remember (as in Rutland's office during the storm); she loses her sense of reason (as at the racetrack, when during the fit, to get away from the horse, she refuses to bet on it), and control over herself. Her fits, caused by a spectacle, disrupt the flow of her subjectivity, in the same way as Mulvey's spectacle of woman in film disturbs the flow of narrative, but Marnie is a spectacle of woman in film, and the fits she has, analyzed this way are not reducible to the simple binary active/male passive/female. Marnie is active, most of the time, and is only made passive in these moments by her gaze, by her look on something (a color) that is not even an object, least of all an erotic object. While, in Rutland's office, then, Marnie as erotic object of his gaze is potentially hazardous and the symbolic destruction she brings into it is twofold, when the tree branch crashes through the window, it is a case of pre-Columbian art, collected by Rutland's dead wife, that is destroyed, bringing the destruction to the domestic and professional spheres in one moment. Marnie herself, though, is frozen by what *she* sees, and it is significant, I think, that it is abstract, a color, and not an object *per se* that can be psychoanalytically reduced to transferred male gaze. What is clear is the destructive power of the spectacle on economies of narrative, either the economy of the literal narrative of the film (as in Mulvey), the financial economy portrayed in this film's narrative (as in the storm and Marnie's thefts), or in the economy of the subject in the film (Marnie's fits).

Marnie herself as an object of erotic spectacle is constructed in two ways within the story; in one way, the male gaze, communicated between men and closely identified with the operations of business, power, and the law in the scene in Strutt's office, creates the erotic image *verbally*, repeating and reflecting on the disruptions her physical presence, as erotic object of Strutt's look, created. On the other hand, Marnie herself fashions her look, changing her identity, name and appearance whenever she changes cities. The image, within the story, of Marnie as

erotic object, that Strutt conjures in his mind, and which delays him in dispatching the police after her, is an image *she* manufactured to manipulate his imagination for this very purpose. On the level of the narrative, though, we know she is “Alfred Hitchcock’s Marnie” and it is difficult to separate Tippi Hedren being fashioned, like Kim Novak before her in *Vertigo*, to meet Hitchcock’s erotic fantasy from the character she plays in the film. This excess of signification that Tippi Hedren presents as erotic image within this film is also the mechanism by which the film functions as a narrative. This excess, the excess within the erotic image<sup>20</sup> of woman, is what permits a classical Hollywood narrative like *Marnie* to appear realistic. Its “reality” so easily falls to scrutiny (but much less so than *Vertigo*) but sustains within the experience at least in part because “the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film” (Mulvey, 19). However, within the narrative logic of realism, *Marnie* is when Hitchcock “has gone all out for realism” more than the films most recently before it. This too is mainly a result of the managed excess in the film’s narrative economy of realism, and the “alien presence” that Marnie is as erotic object (who is frigid, however) does in the end get “integrated into cohesion with the narrative” (Mulvey, 19), giving the appearance of narrative completion and reality. This realism in *Marnie*, then, is contingent in many ways on excess, most of which constellate around the dialectic between spectacle and narrative (in whatever form it manifests) and the disturbing, but essential presence of woman, in this case Marnie, as erotic object. We have seen an excess of subjectivity, in which the spectator is at once, or in succession identifying with the gazing camera *and* Marnie as subject; we have seen Hitchcock’s narrative techniques complicate identification with Marnie, in his withholding of subjective shots from her perspective; we have seen, within the story, Marnie enter the work world *as* erotic object, and

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<sup>20</sup> Another view is that any erotic object on the screen serves the same function, something that queer theorists have addressed since Mulvey’s essay was published.

exceed that role to have agency<sup>21</sup>; we have seen Marnie's own "gaze" cause her harm, when she sees the color red, and this spectacle disrupts her daily life, her own "narrative." In sum, though, we can see that this complex interaction of spectacle and narrative and the many ways that spectacle can exceed its purpose for narrative is irreducible to Mulvey's gaze theory, in which the narrative economy, the "heterosexual division of labor" that she claims "has controlled narrative structure" (20) with the male gaze conditioning the dichotomy active/male passive/female. In *Marnie*, we have seen otherwise.

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<sup>21</sup> Though even this is complicated by its identification with crime.

## Chapter 3

## THINGS LEFT UNDONE

In my chapter on *Marnie*, I hope I have shown that the excess associated with the woman identified as erotic object destabilizes both the world of work within the diegesis—the literal financial economy—and the economy of narrative, by disrupting the production of realistic meaning and by dividing spectator identification uneasily between Marnie and Mark Rutland. This chapter continues the analysis of gender economies in Hitchcock’s films—an analysis of how the excesses associated with the feminine destabilize the capitalist world of work. This is not universal in the films of the 1950s and early 1960s; if we look to many *films noirs* of the period, it is usually the traditional “nuclear family” life that is challenged and destabilized, either explicitly or implicitly, by the excess sexuality of the “femme fatale” character.<sup>22</sup> But in *Vertigo* and *Marnie* the middle-class, nuclear family is nowhere to be found. The challenges to masculinity, and masculine subjectivity (Modleski, 8) are not to the domestic life of the suburban married man, but to the power and authority of the “man of independent means,” as Scottie Ferguson calls himself in *Vertigo*; the man in control is who is challenged. And in all cases here, *what* he is in control of, and in danger of losing control of, is the self defined by the economic space he lives in, in 1950s America.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* for *femmes fatales* who are destructive to traditional marriage. Also, look to *Kiss Me Deadly* for a less overt portrayal of marriage under threat (the protagonist and his female assistant operate an investigation business specializing in seducing then blackmailing couples in divorce cases).

The work world, though, is portrayed differently in *Vertigo*. Scottie Ferguson's only job through the main plot of the film is his investigation of Madeleine, which ends with her death long before the film ends. Gavin Elster, of course, works, but he appears only twice. Pop Leibl, the bookstore owner who tells Scottie and Midge about Carlotta appears only once. Most, then, of the people in the film who are visibly employed are women. Midge designs women's fashion; and the many sales staff at department stores Scottie and Judy go to, to transform Judy into Madeleine, are also all women. It would not be accurate, then, to make an even comparison between Judy as Madeleine and Marnie Edgar, and say that somehow Judy/Madeleine has affected the world of work for Elster or Scottie. Rather, we need to look at the film's narrative economy of meaning, to *Vertigo* unstable in sense of realism for the audience, and easy identification with one character (Scottie) while objectifying another (Judy/Madeleine). *Vertigo's* instabilities are deeper in the film than *Marnie's*, but rooted in the same excess upsetting the "monolithic" patriarchy which defines, according to Mulvey, Hollywood cinema.

*Vertigo* is at risk of losing control over its narrative economy, as Deborah Linderman notes in her essay "the Mise-en-Abime in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*," which treats the film's "textual system as a set of self-reflecting mirrors" (52). The textual system of *Vertigo*, according to Linderman, is tied up with its portrayal of gender. In the end, we get a total picture of a gender economy doubly articulated in *Marnie* and *Vertigo*. On the one hand, Marnie Edgar is directly disruptive to the masculine economy of work, in her kleptomania. Meanwhile, Kim Novak's multiple-identity character in *Vertigo* threatens the film's narrative realism, and often it makes little or no sense—its textual system, as an economy of narrative, is upset by the excess associated with Novak's Judy Barton, who has been Madeleine Elster for half of the film.

Often different theorists describe the same phenomena using different language. We can see the similarities between Hélène Cixous's idea of feminine writing, as Susan Sellers interprets it in her introduction to *The Hélène Cixous Reader* "while feminine writing is potentially the province of both sexes ... women are currently closer to a *feminine economy*," (xxix) and Bataille's economic ideas. He does not explicitly identify his excessive economy (it is called "General Economy" in *Accursed Share*) as feminine (nor, understanding his project, would we expect him to), but we will see that the excesses, differences and multiplicities that Cixous and Irigaray define as feminine and part of the "feminine economy" are the same that Bataille has in mind when he writes, in *The Accursed Share*, "If the system can no longer grow, or if the *excess* cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it *must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically*," (21) and in *Heterology*, "homogeneous reality presents itself with the abstract and neutral aspect of strictly defined and identified objects. Heterogeneous reality is that of a force or shock. It presents itself as a charge, as a value, passing from one object to another ... the heterogeneous world consists in everything resulting from *unproductive expenditure*. This consists of everything rejected by homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value. Included are ... the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value." (Emphases mine.)

Immediately we are presented with an economy that is different to the capitalist one we are familiar with, the one in which Hitchcock's characters find themselves living. If the man in control, the successful businessman or "man of independent means" allows himself "glorious" or "catastrophic waste" in films, his story will end badly and we usually are expected to pity him, to see his story as a tragic one. Scottie Ferguson, at the end of *Vertigo*, standing in the bell tower window, ready perhaps to jump, is one such character. But the film, rather than negatively

reinforcing the existing economy or presenting a utopian alternative, shows the ambiguities and ambivalences in gender and subject identification in such an economy. We cannot pity Scottie for failing; we feel bad for him, if we do at all, in the same way we do the heroes of *films noirs*, for living in a world that is too much like our own.

### *Judy Barton and Madeleine Elster*

The character(s) Kim Novak plays in *Vertigo* live in the same world, but face different challenges, especially in their access to power and economic independence. Novak's excess, though, in *Vertigo* is not, as is common of films of the period, an excess of sexuality or emotion, but a literal excess of *subjects*. While she really is only playing one character, Judy Barton, in the film, this fact is revealed so late that it cannot erase the first half of the film when she *was* Madeleine Elster, who frequently was "possessed" by the ghost of Carlotta Valdes. For example, when Scottie and Madeleine are on one of their "wanderings," in the redwood forest, Madeleine looks at a felled tree, with different historic dates marked on several of the tree's rings. She puts her finger near a ring in what would be the mid nineteenth century, and says "here I was born," and then moving her finger to the right, "and here I died." This is meant to be Carlotta speaking through Madeleine. The fact that this is part of Judy's performance, prodded by Gavin Elster (is he watching somewhere in the woods? Did he coach her *every* line?) is irrelevant, since when that is revealed to the audience, it requires a second viewing (at least) to tease out the textures of her layered identity. Kim Novak, through much of the film, then, is effectively playing at least three "characters." Her role in *Vertigo*, it seems, is to bring to the fore the problem of feminine subjectivity in the masculine economy noted by Irigaray, when she writes, in *The Power of*

*Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine*, “to play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it... it also means ‘to unveil’ the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is also because they are not simply absorbed in this function. *They are also elsewhere*” (795). And that since, as she writes later in the essay, the feminine is defined as “lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject” by this logic “a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side” (796).

Women, in this economy are “good mimics” and the ones, like Kim Novak in *Vertigo*, who can “play with mimesis” and still “be elsewhere” are shown in Hitchcock’s films to enact that “disruptive excess.” This reading, though, does not correspond with Mulvey’s interpretation. In her view, the threat presented by the visual presence of woman on the screen, in Hollywood narrative film, is circumvented by “voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms” (25). We will see later, though, that at both the level of enunciation, the level of spectacle, and at the level of the diegesis, the level of the narrative, these mechanisms, meant to situate the spectator as male in identification with the film’s male protagonist, possessor of the mastering gaze, are much more complex than Mulvey allows.

That is not to say that *Vertigo* is simply a feminist film. Novak dies—*twice*—onscreen and we know from the context of the narrative that these deaths are, at least implicitly, the punishment for that “disruptive excess.” However, it is not simply a film of containment either; the disruption, as far as we can tell by the end of the film, *works*. Judy, Novak’s character, may be dead, but if we are to take Scottie Ferguson metonymically for the whole masculine economy, it is clear that the system is ruptured beyond easy (or perhaps even effective) repair. She is dead and he is ruined.



Nevertheless, at the film's end, it is Scottie Ferguson standing, *living*, at the edge of the bell tower's window, staring down at Judy dead below. Her minor displacement, however successful in its own way, doesn't change the fact that perhaps, while ambivalent about gender, Hitchcock ultimately sides with patriarchy. If he had ended the film with Judy having destroyed Scottie, and his need for order, similarity and control, it indeed would have been a different film, but may not have been much less misogynistic, leaving her, as would likely happen, to be interpreted as a *femme fatale*. Judy's disruption might be the only successful kind in a commercial film, since destroying Ferguson completely would have served the patriarchal function of making Judy a true *femme fatale*. *Vertigo*, in those circumstances, likely could not be read with a slant toward its subversion.

What does belong to Judy here and is defined as feminine, by Cixous, is her multiple identities; she is all of these people, while Elster and Ferguson, and, as we will see later, Midge, are singular, and masculine. In Cixous's words, with women subordinated in the "masculine order" being, that is *identity*, or, that which is not always *becoming*, is "the condition for the machinery's functioning" (350). Cixous, then, identifies what Nietzsche contrasted against the metaphysical concept of being, *becoming*, as feminine. To Bataille, "homogeneity [read as *being*]" is a characteristic of "appropriation" which has "objects as final result, whereas excretion presents itself as the result of a heterogeneity [read as *becoming*], and can move in the direction of an ever greater heterogeneity, liberating impulses whose ambivalence is more and more pronounced" (Bataille, 273). This multiplicity, this focus on the mobility and *difference* of identity, which is feminine in Cixous is also feminine here, in *Vertigo*, while the homogeneous, the production of "objects," of *being*, the reduction and removal of *excess* is masculine here, and is represented by Scottie Ferguson. This relationship is not without complications though, and

below, I will show Scottie's unstable masculinity in the film, and what that does to the binaries active/male passive/female, which I have rephrased here as object/male difference/female.

The economic aspects are clear: *objects* which can be created, controlled, understood and commodified are the province of the masculine economy, and have their corresponding value in the economy of meaning in the "illusionist narrative film" (Mulvey, 25), which uses its creative techniques to convince of realism. What the masculine subject gains in the economy, access to power in the material world, costs him subject mobility and difference. By devaluing and degrading difference and multiplicity, the masculine economy denies feminine subjects much power even there. The narrative film suffers the same; in constructing the realist narrative, whole swaths of possible visual forms are excluded. As noted above, though, the minimum conditions for narrative verisimilitude are not static, but evolving. Nevertheless, in order to secure the illusion of reality—however that is achieved—other possible forms of film are excluded.

The first image of the film, in the opening credit sequence, shows us our territory. We see, in a black and white image, *part* of a woman's face filling half the screen. The image quickly moves over to her mouth, in the center of the frame, and we range around her face finally ending on her eye, which fills the frame, and the title, *Vertigo*, comes out of her eye toward us. The nature of Ferguson's vertigo is what will come into question here, for while it is consistent with the credit's association with the eye, we cannot simply assume it is the literal vertigo caused by fear of heights that is a catalyst for much of what happens in the film, since it is not *his* eye in the credits, but *hers*. We have been looking at her face, until now, when she returns the look, the *gaze*, and is staring back at us. She as agent causes the vertigo.

For Mulvey, the cinema is a place where men go to look, to gaze at objectified women, and where, sitting in the theater, looking, women are in a masochistic position. But what of identification? When she is staring back at us, she objectifies the audience, as she does to Ferguson at some level. Even when he is most callously and forcefully trying to mold *her* to what he wants, he is still *her* audience. She performs for him, first in her role as Madeleine, the plot chosen by Elster, but it is Judy's performance which takes in Scottie, not just, as Mulvey simplifies it, the image of her as erotic object. Her story of the nightmares, culminating in their trip to the mission, where Madeleine dies, is crucial to the success of Elster's plan; if she remained, as Modleski calls her, the "mute, only half-seen object" (93) of Scottie's gaze, it would have failed. She must perform for him, and he must be her audience for the plan to work. In this way, while Scottie is ultimately Gavin Elster's dupe, he is more immediately Judy's audience, and the look, which in Mulvey's formulation, that is supposed to give him mastery over her, has quite the opposite effect.

Judy, who is being molded to become Madeleine—who, we know already, was and *is* Madeleine—is not the upper class wealthy woman that Madeleine was. Judy tells Ferguson, when he tries to "pick her up" after following her to her cheap hotel room, that she "has been picked up before." She knows what he does not, that she *is* the woman he is obsessed with, that she is all at once, Judy, Carlotta, and Madeleine, the mixture, the mobility, the excess that causes him his vertigo. In performing these roles, in *being* all of them, she destabilizes his control over her, and over meaning; he wants Judy to *become* Madeleine, who had already become Carlotta and jumped out of the church tower window out of his control, by changing Judy's coarse, lower class manners into Madeleine's upper class style and diction (Scottie says, as he and Judy go up the church tower: "You were a very apt pupil, weren't you?"), but he doesn't know, *yet*, that the

Madeleine he “fell in love” with, *her* manners, diction, style, dress and behavior was performed for him, the audience, to *trap* him, by Judy. Of course, the plan was initiated by Elster, the real Madeleine’s husband, so that could kill *her* with impunity. This is the swirl of gender roles and confusion of power roles in *Vertigo*—Judy, as Madeleine, *possessed* by another woman, Carlotta, has the power to cause Ferguson’s vertigo, to make him try to keep *her* under his gaze, but she can only do this, here, it seems after being *taught* to perform Madeleine by a man, by Elster.

### *Scottie Ferguson and Masculinity*

Scottie’s masculinity, then, should be interrogated. If the active/male passive/female dichotomy is to hold, where is Scottie in this? Mulvey believes, simply, that he is on the side of the Symbolic, on the side of the masculine economy. He is “exemplary of the symbolic order and the law” and in *Vertigo* the “power to subject another to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned onto the woman as object of both” (23). This surely describes what Gavin Elster does, to both Judy and Scottie, but Scottie’s attempt to make Judy into Madeleine is ironic in the structure of the narrative, since the spectator has already *seen* through Judy’s flashback that she is Madeleine. Scottie’s attempt to both subject her to his will and to his gaze is contingent on her tearing up her confession letter and staying with him, by her own will, rather than taking flight when he has found her. He cannot subject her to his will, to make her into Madeleine, since she has already been molded that way by Elster, the real “exemplary” of the symbolic order. Clifford T. Manlove argues that Mulvey’s interpretation is too simplistic, that *Vertigo* and *Marnie* (and *Rear Window*) “show ambivalent, less-than-powerful heroes struggling

to resist patriarchy” (84), and that Scottie specifically is “the naïve victim of a larger conspiracy” (90). He claims that Mulvey falls into the same trap that Scottie himself falls into, in believing that Scottie has the power to make Judy into the image of his object of erotic desire, that he is in control (91). In Manlove’s estimation, though, “Scottie’s trauma” makes him “aware of the real in the realm of the visible” (91). What he misses is that the trauma, rightly identified as a “visual trauma” also expressly feminizes Scottie, and at the same time, by identifying the spectator with Scottie, feminizes the spectator as well. The first “Vertigo shot” in the film, when Scottie is dangling on the side of a building in the film’s first scene, Manlove credits as Scottie’s “encounter with the real” (91). Looking down the side of the building to the ground below, Scottie sees the ground “simultaneously approaching yet infinitely receding.” The spectator, though, in the “vertigo shot,” as Manlove does point out “shares Scottie’s look in an eyeline match” (92). Scottie’s visual trauma, then, is the spectator’s visual trauma. Manlove rather hyperbolically claims that “what castrates Scottie is not the image of a woman, or her subsequent “failure” to be the woman he desires, but rather his own failure as a subject, as a professional, and as a man” (92). Manlove fails to follow this thought through, and see that the spectator, who is sharing in this visual trauma, is also “castrated” by it. The spectacle, from the beginning of the film, disrupts the simple voyeuristic distance and mastering gaze that Mulvey holds crucial to narrative cinema, and which she claims is secured through subjective camera work, from Scottie’s perspective. The “vertigo shot,” though, as visual trauma, in tying the spectator to Scottie, also undoes this male gaze. Scottie, and the spectator are “castrated” as Manlove and Mulvey note by the act of looking. The threatening spectacle, as Manlove points out is not the image of the woman, but the image in the vertigo shot itself. Stepping away from the Lacanian reading Manlove gives, we can see that the vertigo shot here is pure cinematic effect; Scottie

does not *see* this, not in reality, but rather, he and the spectator see Hitchcock's cinematographic effects intruding into, displacing momentarily, the forward thrust of narrative to get at an affective moment. Manlove's reading hinges on a characterological analysis, an analysis of Scottie's "encounter with the real." That, though, neglects the evident tension in this moment between the excess of spectacle, a visual trauma, and the needs of narrative realism. This moment is pure spectacle, since, like the nightmare Scottie has later (just before he loses the power to speak, to symbolize), it is not meant to portray reality as it is—which propels the *plot* forward—but exists as excess spectacle, which is feminizing here. Modleski argues that the "male spectator is as much 'deconstructed' as constructed by [Hitchcock's] films, which reveal a fascination with femininity that throws masculine identity into question and crisis" (89). The crisis of masculinity that Scottie experiences, though, clearly begins before he sees and becomes fascinated with Madeleine Elster. It occurs when he sees, *through a cinematographic effect, excess.*<sup>23</sup>

That Scottie's failure here is a failure of his masculinity is clear in the next scene, where he is at Midge's apartment, wearing a corset, and wondering aloud how many men wear corsets. In the same scene, he tries to climb a step ladder, which he places too close to a window that faces down on the street below. When he looks down, the "visual trauma" returns, and he *swoons* into Midge's arms. Quoting Robin Wood, Modleski notes that spectator identification in *Vertigo* is "severely disturbed," (89) but, in her estimation, identification becomes "problematic" when Scottie has followed Madeleine into a department store through "a dark back room" during which the "camera [is] insistently wedding our subjectivity to his through point of view shots" (93). Madeleine is seen shopping for flowers and turns toward the camera, and then "with the cut

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<sup>23</sup> Manlove, Žižek and other Lacanians identify the "real" as an excess, the remainder "or stain" on the Symbolic that cannot be symbolized. The real, then, *is* excess.

we expect the reverse shot to show that, as is usual in classical cinema, the man is in visual possession of the woman” (93). The shot we do see though is quite different: the door is hidden behind a mirror, and “this shot shows both Scottie, as he looks at Madeleine, *and* Madeleine’s mirror image” (94; emphasis in original). The disturbance in spectator identification, according to Modleski, happens here, at the “*very outset* of Scottie’s investigation” (94). Locating it here, though, skips this earlier disruption of “man-centered vision” (Modleski, 9) in classical realist Hollywood film. The spectator is clearly “wedded”<sup>24</sup> to Scottie’s point of view, but this identification is not disturbed at the outset of the *investigation*, but at the outset of the *film*. As we saw above, Scottie is “castrated” (to use Manlove’s Lacanian term) by his visual trauma at the film’s beginning, which the spectator shares in, and the following scene underlines that the trouble is in his masculinity. Modleski does see that Scottie’s position in this scene is one of “enforced passivity... a position the film explicitly links to femininity and associates with unfreedom” (92). Mulvey notes the “enforced inactivity” of L. B. Jefferies in *Rear Window* (which is a point of comparison for Modleski) binds “him to his seat as a spectator” (24), rather than feminizes him. Scottie, however, is active in her estimation, and having chosen to be a police detective—he was a successful lawyer—shows his “sadistic side,” choosing the “possibilities of pursuit and investigation” (24) attendant to that profession. What she misses, what feminizes Scottie, and thus the spectator who is identified with him through subjective camera, is that he *fails* to perform in this profession the very first moment we see him, and the vertigo shot on the side of the building, in its excess of visual style, as visual trauma, causes the spectator to also fail in this performed masculinity. This failure of male dominance, however brief, is performed *visually*, through the very mechanisms Mulvey insists are deployed to secure this dominance, through spectator identification with the male protagonist (achieved by use of

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<sup>24</sup> Modleski’s choice of words is interesting.

subjective camera, from that protagonist's perspective), and through spectacle that exceeds the immediate demands of storytelling, through the visual excess of the vertigo shot itself. This, as Manlove points out, all occurs before Scottie or the spectator become erotically fascinated with Madeleine Elster.

After Madeleine dies, Scottie goes into a sort of catatonic shock, and is hospitalized. Midge attends to him, but he merely stares off into space, unable to speak. This shock is not immediately precipitated, though, by Madeleine's death. After her fall, we see Scottie leave the chapel, walking across the grounds of the mission. Next, is the coroner's inquest, during which the coroner's investigator upbraids Scottie for his "weakness" (said twice in this scene, for emphasis) which has made him "powerless" to perform his job—for his failure to perform his masculinity, in short. The very next scene is Scottie's nightmare, another *visual trauma*, another moment of excessive spectacle interrupting the storytelling, since no story information is contained in the nightmare, and all its visual exuberance serves in the film's diegesis is to *show* the audience, to make the audience experience, just like the first visual trauma, what causes Scottie's break. It was not Madeleine's death, specifically, that was the immediate cause of the break, but the visual excess of the nightmare, which comes after the final proof of Scottie's failure as a man.

*Identification: Who Wins in the End of Vertigo?*

One of our questions might be, again, who wins in the end? Who is the subject we identify with? Is it Scottie? The superficial answer is easy, since most of the photography and structure of the story guides us from his perspective, and *he*, not Judy, is standing in the church



tower window at the end, alive and looking down on all that has happened<sup>25</sup>. But this view is over-simplification, and ignores other elements, other moments in the film that change the subjectivity. When Madeleine (This is Judy playing Madeleine; we never see the “real” Madeleine) is obsessing over Carlotta, she starts wearing her hair in the same way that Carlotta has hers in the painting. Elster says that when she is “possessed” by Carlotta, her manners, her “way of walking” are different. She is doing, to herself, what Scottie will want to do later: she is creating herself as the space of the object of desire.<sup>26</sup> It is an obvious parallel to the scenes in which Scottie is trying to transform her (now as “Judy”) into his desired object, Madeleine. Another moment that complicates the subjectivity of the film is dependent *itself* on Scottie always being the in the subject position; when he “meets” Judy, who now has brunette hair, instead of blonde, and has successfully convinced her to have dinner with him (“I’ve been picked up before,” she says; with some irony? Is she talking about Gavin Elster?), Scottie leaves, and we are now in the hotel room with Judy, who now remembers, and we see in this flashback, *from her perspective*, the murder of Madeleine, which reveals Judy as the “Madeleine” that Scottie thought was dead, but this “privileged moment” also produces a “spectator position painfully split between Scott[ie] and Judy for the rest of the film,” (Wood, quoted in Modleski, 89). So, while it is Scottie standing at the end of the film, we as audience have had plenty of reason and opportunity to identify ourselves not only *with* Madeleine, but to identify *Scottie* with Madeleine in his repetition of her actions, and also to identify with Judy, who gives us different eyes to see through.

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<sup>25</sup> The much more troubling, and unexplored answer is that Gavin Elster wins, since it is clear that Scottie will not likely be able to prove anything that Judy has told him, even if he can find Elster.

<sup>26</sup> It is true that Elster likely has told her to do this, but, again, this information is given to us, as spectators, much later, after we have learned the “truth” of her performing Carlotta. Also, even allowing Elster’s plan, one may wonder why he has incorporated this performance into it.

The transformational, the multiple selves that Judy—as Madeleine, as Madeleine possessed by Carlotta—represents a disruption of the machinery, a wrench thrown into Scottie Ferguson’s psyche causing his vertigo. His vertigo, it is clear, now, is not caused by a fear of heights, by looking down from the top of the church tower, but by fear of women, by looking down from the top of the patriarchy. The epigram to Modleski’s chapter on vertigo is from Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, and is quite fitting: “Masochism is characterized as a species of vertigo, vertigo not before a precipice of rock and earth but before the abyss of the Other’s subjectivity” (Quoted in Modleski, 89).

### *No One Possesses You*

When Gavin Elster hires Scottie Ferguson to follow his wife, Scottie declines at first, thinking that Elster wants him to catch Madeleine in an affair. Elster says the case is something different, and what the case is, is entirely in keeping with our analysis. Elster says, “Do you believe that someone out of the past, that someone dead, can enter and *take possession* of a living being.” Madeleine, he says, changes before his eyes, she “becomes someone [he doesn’t] know.” Setting aside for a moment what we do not find out until much later in the film, until after Madeleine is dead, that Gavin Elster is using this story as a plan to murder her, and set Scottie up as a witness to her suicide, setting all that aside—since that is *not* known to us until we see it through *Judy’s eyes* in flashback—we get a view of a particular male anxiety. His wife is unknowable to him, as she contains multiple selves, or worse, she *lets* another self *possess her*. (This language, “possession” will become important later, just before Madeleine’s “suicide”.) He says too that “she wanders,” that she goes out in the day, and goes places he doesn’t know about.

He has *no control* over her. We can, I believe, ignore the fact that this story is part of his murder plot right now for two reasons; Elster's story and Judy's *performance*, for the plan to work, have to convince Scottie, and the murder plot itself is risible, it is so outrageous that we aren't really meant to be thinking about *it* at all during Scottie and Judy's final confrontation in the church tower. Manlove points out that Scottie, the police detective, is *willingly* duped by Elster (91), claiming that Scottie "gallantly" accepts the case (92), which is a bit off the mark. Importantly, Scottie is ready to leave Elster's office having declined the case, but Elster insists that Scottie *see* Madeleine. The next scene is the scene in Ernie's Restaurant, when Scottie first becomes fascinated with "Madeleine's" face, crucially visible here only in profile, as the "mute half-seen object of man's romantic quest" (Modleski, 93). The scene immediately following this one is Scottie following Madeleine. He has accepted the case off-screen, without further explanation or comment needed<sup>27</sup>. Hitchcock, having wedded us to Scottie, assumes that we have also accepted the case in seeing Kim Novak's profile. Novak, as Judy as Madeleine, real or fake, is like Cixous's newly born woman in that she is "made up of parts that are wholes [Judy; Madeleine; Madeleine as Carlotta; *Kim Novak*], not simple, partial objects but varied entirely, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where eros never stops traveling, vast astral space" (Cixous, 353). What will prove difficult for Scottie, in falling in love with "Madeleine," is an inability to gain control over her, to cause her to be singular, an entity of "being," when she is multiple, and entity of "becoming."

But the sexuality of Elster's language is hard to miss. Scottie and Elster's control over Madeleine is threatened by *her* obsession with a woman, with, as Scottie will soon learn, the

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<sup>27</sup> Chris Marker comments on this in his essay on *Vertigo*: "After a shot of Madeleine, glimpsed at Ernie's, there follows a shot of Scottie beginning his stake-out of the Elster house. Acceptance (bewitchment) needs no scene of its own; it is contained in the fade to black between the two scenes. This is the first of three ellipses of essential moments, all avoided, which another director would have felt obliged to show." <http://www.chrismarker.org/a-free-replay-notes-on-vertigo/>

overwhelming *visual power* of looking at the woman, this time the painting of Carlotta. That Carlotta “enters” and “possesses” Madeleine extends this sexual domain. Scottie’s possession of her is undermined by Carlotta’s possession of her; that is, it is undermined not only by Madeleine’s multiple identities, but now by an *excess* of sexualities too, or as Cixous says, Madeleine’s bisexuality that “does not annihilate differences, but cheers them on, pursues them, adds more” (352).

This excess, to Scottie, both of number of “people” (or whole “parts”) within her and her excess of sexuality, is what he is trying to solve, to make go away, when he says “if I could just find the key.” He is trying to make her controllable, by making her understandable and singular, and on the other hand, to make her *homogeneous*, to eliminate all the wasteful, excessive sexuality and behavior that cannot be reduced to the world of objects, of *being*, since its function, its *power* maybe, is in its “*non-explainable difference*” as a “body of material prior to any intellectual reduction” (Bataille, *H*, 275). She is a being “which is complex, mobile, open;” the key Scottie is looking for is not, cannot be, in the context of the film, one to *unlock* the secret, but one to *shut the door* to Carlotta, and more generally, Madeleine’s openness to Carlotta, to her being possessed by another woman. His next line after saying that he wants to find the “key,” is, mixing metaphors, “I could put it together.” He views the all the difference, the *becoming*, that is Madeleine as her dream of the hallway filled with fragments of broken mirrors. Another moment confounds his attempts at order and putting “it all together;” as Madeleine falls from the church tower, we hear a scream. Scottie believes that it is Madeleine screaming. At the end of the film, in the final confrontation between him and Judy, after he has figured out that she, the Madeleine he *knew*, didn’t fall or die, he demands to know why she screamed. He repeats the question:

“Why did you scream? Since you’d tricked me so well up till then.” To him, the scream is *excessive*.

Earlier, when Scottie and “Madeleine” are there, just before Madeleine commits her “suicide,” she and Scottie are near the stables and Scottie is holding her firmly and trying to kiss her while she stares off toward the tower; he says, while gripping her, “no one *possesses* you, you’re safe with me.” Of course, *he* literally *possesses* her at that moment, and that likely is the measure by which he rates his success in “solving the case,” how much *he* can possess her, and how little anyone else can. He believes that, “cured,” she is restored to her proper place in society, *being*, being possessed *only* by a man.

### *Excess and the Desired Object*

Meeting Judy, some time it would seem, after Madeleine’s “suicide,” Scottie is instantly obsessed with her, and begins, when he and she begin a personal relationship, to transform her into Madeleine. What is peculiar here is not that Judy *is* already Madeleine, or anyway the Madeleine that Scottie knew, but that in that “privileged moment” mentioned above, where our identification splits between Scottie and Judy, we *find out* that fact. So, when we watch Scottie mold her into Madeleine—when he asks her to dye her hair, and she resists, he says “it can’t matter that much to you”—we know he is doing to Judy what Gavin Elster has already done, and also, what we saw Madeleine doing, on a smaller scale, when she was molding herself like Carlotta, perhaps opening herself to Carlotta. We cannot ignore these relationships, then, Scottie is now performing Gavin when he molds Judy, who is performing herself, since in the current relationship with Scottie, she must *perform* a Judy who doesn’t know what she knows—and we

do as well—that she is already Madeleine. She has, then, to perform, all over again, as the first time was part of a performance also, the act of “falling in love” with Scottie; she has to perform in the department store, when he is picking out the grey suit for her, that she does not already know which suit it is, and that she does not already *have* it (not one like it, but the very suit) in her own closet. The suit, then, becomes two costumes in two performances; when he has her dressed in the suit again at the end, now “Judy” playing “Madeleine,” we see that he thinks it is the one he bought for her, but it could very well *be* the other one, the one from her closet.

This multiplication of the desired object, the suit which represents Madeleine, is itself multiplied. There are two suits, but also two Judys (the Judy we know, and he figures out later; the Judy he *thinks* he knows), and *three* Madeleines (the real, murdered Madeleine; the first Madeleine Judy performed; and the Madeleine that Scottie makes her perform). There is, however, as one would expect, only one Scottie; he may change over the film, from a seemingly positive character to the near sadist that he is by the end, but he is always the same person.

This is why I argue that Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes) is gendered male here; if the woman, in *Vertigo*, the woman to desire, to obsess over, the woman to love, the woman to *possess*, and the woman to destroy or kill (likely because she is the woman of all those other things in that list), is the woman of excess, the woman of change, multiplicity and heterogeneity, then the static Midge, who is merely a character in the film, is best read, I think, as male in this film. She is performing her role, her gender, in a way that is invisible to us; we cannot *see* her performance the way we Judy’s (*Kim Novak’s*, really) is constantly thrust before our vision. Midge also is of the world of work; she performs her *job* in a way that seems to be successful, in contrast to Scottie’s performance of his job, in which he fails, twice, and lets people fall to their deaths. Midge’s gender is of course not literally male in the film; when she tends to Scottie while

he is in his catatonia, she says “mother’s here,” and her role in the film, as a woman who is not sexually threatening may be a maternal one. At the same time though, her stability in character, her invisible performance, her successful *work* make her gender as unstable as Scottie’s is.

Performance, though, is what much of *Vertigo*’s plot and gender relationships hinge on; Judy’s Madeleine embodies Butler’s “expansion of the conventional view of acts to mean both that which constitutes meaning and that through which meaning is performed or enacted” (901). Judy, for Elster’s plan to work, needed to *play* Madeleine’s femininity, different from her own, and more sexually attractive to Scottie, convincingly. When Scottie “meets” Judy again, later, and she is “herself,” she needs again to perform her role as Judy in a convincing way; she needs to be receptive to his transformations, and not reveal that she already is Madeleine, at once performing that role and also her own.

Scottie’s molding Judy into Madeleine, as we have seen, is his repetition of Elster’s molding of her, but it has a wider meaning; we, watching this, already knowing that this is happening, are also reminded that, for *Vertigo* to work, that is for a film which has a plot that hinges on the preposterous, *Kim Novak* must convincingly perform her role as the woman-as-object.

In these scenes, then, Scottie does multiply some; he is the audience of Judy’s performances, the male eye gazing on her as object, and he is *Hitchcock*, taking *Kim Novak* and changing her into the desirable woman, the performance(s) on which the film relies. Nevertheless, he multiplies only in those ways, and remains a stable, single identity.

In the end, it seems, that the excess of Kim Novak as Judy as Madeleine overwhelms and tears apart the unlikely and illogical plot of the film, and becomes itself the film. *Vertigo* is no longer about a police detective with a fear of heights duped into helping cover up a murder, but is now about the destabilizing presence of the excess in film. Midge, gendered here as we have seen as another man, doesn't drive Scottie to vertigo and madness, but the complexity and heterogeneity of Judy/Madeleine that causes his worst vertigo.

Hitchcock may be a misogynist himself, as it is clear that the scary, destructive thing in *Vertigo*, for Hitchcock and likely his audience is not Elster's cold-blooded capacity to murder his wife, but the femininity as subject, as mobility, as self-causing performance, as *irreducible difference*. This difference, heterogeneity, multiplicity, mobility—this *excess*—has the force to not only upset and destabilize Scottie's attempts at making sense of Madeleine, but also our ability to make sense of *Vertigo*.

If the diegetic economy of the “illusionistic narrative film” (Mulvey, 25) requires that the excess, the spectacle of woman as erotic object ultimately bow under the “armature of narrative regulation” (Gunning, 164) and all the paternalistic imagery that phrase conveys, then *Vertigo* does not pass as an illusionist, or realist film. This conclusion, though, is far from sufficient, since we have seen excessive spectacle deployed to create the reality being portrayed at the same time it is undermining it. The image of woman as erotic object, Mulvey argued, is essential to narrative cinema at the same time it is threatening. The look, she writes, is “pleasurable in form” but can be “threatening in content” (19). The “alien presence” of woman on the screen not only does not need to be brought into “cohesion” with the story, but the story is contingent on other excesses, other spectacles, such as the vertigo shot itself, which undermine the containment metaphor that Mulvey has constructed.



Spectator identification, then, in both *Vertigo* and *Marnie* is more fluid, “disturbed” to use Wood’s terms, than the active/looking passive/to-be-looked-at binary lets on. Rather, in analyzing *Vertigo* for the very dialectic between spectacle and narrative, and the economy of narrative meaning and the literal one portrayed within the film, with an eye to gender, I hope I have shown that the process of verisimilitude and sense in “illusionist” narrative cinema does hinge on complex gender representations while at the same time also is always ready to break apart under the excess needed to create it.

## Chapter 4

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I hope to have done a few things, all of which constellate around the role of excess in *Vertigo* and *Marnie*. First, I have argued that the role of woman in narrative film, contrary to Mulvey's narrow conception, is more than merely being the passive object of the male gaze. This is hardly a radical assertion in itself—many of the critics discussed herein have effectively widened Mulvey's conceptual scope, and, as noted above, she herself has adjusted many of her early claims. Nevertheless, much of this criticism hinges on the psychoanalytic reading she presents in her original text, or, otherwise, argues for a wider feminist approach, such as that of Tania Modleski. Few, however, have taken up her description of the dialectic between narrative (as patriarchy, as the symbolic, as sadism) and spectacle (as excess, disruption, and voyeurism). In taking up this very tension, and investigating it in two of the Hitchcock films she works with in her essay, I have shown that the role of women in these films, especially in the moments when their presence is disruptive, do not so easily reaffirm the patriarchy behind Hollywood cinema that Mulvey argues, while the role of men is hardly the unproblematic position of power she ascribes for them.

The spectator's sympathetic identification with the male protagonists in the film is a central part to Mulvey's economy of gender in the narrative film, and I believe I have shown that through the excess present in both of these films, part of the flaw in this reading is evident in the excess of spectator identification; at times, as noted above, the spectator is in sympathetic

identification with Marnie and Mark Rutland, who is the man of money and power that Mulvey claims he is. In one significant scene, which Mulvey dismisses as a mere flashback (Mulvey, 24) spectator identification, as Robin Wood has also noted, is split between Judy Barton and Scottie Ferguson. I hope I have also shown that identification with Ferguson in *Vertigo* is scarcely identification with a powerful man who is representative of the symbolic order, but with a man whose own masculinity is unstable and who fails to perform his job twice on screen. Women are often the objects of the erotic gaze in these films, and do seem, as Kim Novak does in *Vertigo*, to disrupt the forward flow of narrative, but this is, as seen above, part of a wider, more complex, relationship between spectacle and narrative that is upset often by excess.

The disruptions of women as erotic objects are true interruptions, eruptions of excess into the controlled world of cinema, rather than merely reinforcing the narrative itself. Hitchcock, though, does not lose control of these films, but manipulates the tension between visual excess and narrative cohesion, to create films that pass as “realist,” but upon scrutiny, often gloss over lacks in verisimilitude. This is accomplished indeed by his manipulation of the image of women as erotic objects on the screen, but often, as I hope I have shown, this does not simply amount to an uncomplicated gendering of passive, “to-be-looked-at” women and active looking men. In Mulvey’s formula, the women as erotic visual objects, potential threats to the narrative, must be brought into cohesion with it, but we have seen the complicated relationship of visual excess to narrative thrust in both of these films, and at least with *Vertigo*, this simply does not take place. In *Vertigo*, at least, the male protagonist, to whom the spectator is “wedded” in Modleski’s terms, is unstable in his role as possessor of the gaze, and while, on a superficial look, it is Ferguson looking at Judy, and trying to mold her to his image of Madeleine, *he* fails in his job, which is expressly tied to a failure in masculinity. Ferguson’s gaze, in short, is not masterly, and

does not successfully bring Kim Novak as Judy into cohesion with a sensible narrative, and only moments after he learns the whole—risibly implausible—murder plot, she has fallen to her death and he is standing at the edge of the bell tower, and the film abruptly ends, denying any real sense of narrative closure.

In analyzing these two films, I found a parallel tension, between excess and reserve in the work place, between the woman as erotic, potential destructive force, that is nevertheless necessary, in the workplace, and the reserve that defines the world of work, dominated by men in *Marnie* and more troubled in *Vertigo*. This parallel tension, I have argued, mirrors the tension between visual excess and narrative, and is gendered in the same complicated way. While the world of work *appears* to simply be the offices Marnie invades, and robs, there are other economies and other women and men working in the film, giving a more textured understanding of the patriarchal system portrayed by, and reinforced, Hitchcock's film. At the same time, Scottie Ferguson in *Vertigo* fails to perform his job as police detective, and is feminized in subsequent scenes in the film. His vertigo, however tied it may be later to the visual presence of Madeleine Elster as erotic object of his gaze, has as much to do with his failure, from the beginning of the film, to perform his own masculinity. As Clifford Manlove points out, Scottie himself is the victim of Gavin Elster's plan, and under those circumstances, is himself under the gaze. I have shown, in my chapter on this film, how Scottie is, even while he tries to mold Judy into Madeleine (who she already is), is more her audience than he suspects. The "to-be-looked-at" Judy, is also performing, actively, for Scottie, her role as "Judy," and is actively looking at Scottie to *see* his reactions to her performance. The "heterosexual distribution of labor" that Mulvey identifies in narrative films is not quite as simple as it would seem. *Vertigo* and *Marnie* however, do indeed repress their female characters, Kim Novak dies twice in *Vertigo*, and

Marnie Edgar is “cured” at the end of her aversion to men, and brought into line with her role in patriarchy as wife. Her thefts presumably stop, and she is now able to do the job of wife without disrupting the system.

By identifying this link between two types of excess, one in the structure of narrative film, and one in the world such film portrays, and showing its complicated gender associations, I hope to have widened the argument not only about the two films discussed here, but about Mulvey’s important and influential essay, and about the complicated nature of realism in cinema, and the two-fold gender problems such realism opens up.

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