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HITCHCOCK AND THE MATERIAL POLITICS OF LOOKING: LAURA MULVEY, *REAR WINDOW*, AND *PSYCHO*

An Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for Graduation with

Undergraduate Research Honors

Georgia State University

2012

by

Tyler Theus

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Dr. Angelo Restivo, Honors Thesis Director

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HITCHCOCK AND THE MATERIAL POLITICS OF LOOKING: LAURA MULVEY, *REAR WINDOW*, AND *PSYCHO*

by

TYLER THEUS

Under the Direction of Dr. Angelo Restivo

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I argue that issues of voyeurism and scopophilia raised in Laura Mulvey's early essay, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," are closely related to the social and economic shifts which occurred during the post-war period. Specifically, I argue that Mulvey's essay articulates a particular kind of formal technique associated with what she calls "non-narrative scopophilia," a kind of long-take shot that is utilized to great effect by Alfred Hitchcock in two of his later films, *Rear Window* (1955) and *Psycho* (1960). I argue that these shots represent a disruption to the smooth functioning of the classical Hollywood model of narrative and gender ideology in the post-war period tied closely to the changing economic realities of the period. I further argue that such a disruption is closely related to a new model of consumerism that emerges during this period.

INDEX WORDS: Hitchcock, Psychoanalysis, Lacan, Mulvey, *Rear Window*, *Psycho*, Feminism

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

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April 2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this essay to Kerlyn Deguia, without whose encouragement, support, and understanding this project would have never been completed.

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I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Angelo Restivo, for working with me closely on this essay. Without his comments, suggestions, patience, and overall guidance this essay would not have been possible. In addition, his classes, which I was able to attend during the spring semesters of 2010 and 2011, and his published work on Hitchcock, psychoanalysis, and film history, which he was kind enough to share and discuss, also served as helpful guide and background as I was researching and writing. I would also like to thank my mother, father, grandparents, and friends for supporting me during the research and writing of this essay. I also acknowledge my debt to all of my professors during my undergraduate career, particularly those in the departments of moving image studies and philosophy.

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I.) Introduction

There has been a recent revival of interest in psychoanalysis as a paradigm for the study of culture as the works of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek have become increasingly popular in both academic film studies and in the larger public discourse. Although Žižek's works have been the most popular outside of academic circles, he is but one part of a larger scholarly movement that attempts to reappraise the work of French psychoanalyst and philosopher Jacques Lacan. This new push in psychoanalytic theory has been informed by a renewed understanding of Lacan's thought that brings in many of his later works which have been previously neglected. Against readings of Lacan as a kind of "structuralist" largely concerned with linguistics, these new readings attempt to bring out the neglected and misunderstood concepts of "the real," "the death drive," and "the gaze" to bear on both philosophy and media studies.

These theorists have also focused much of their work in film studies on a certain kind of "periodizing" hypothesis, taken from the work of Lacan, which better situates psychoanalytic insights historically. Žižek, along with many other theorists, often frames his Lacanian analyses of various cultural phenomena with the claim that the "order of desire," the symbolic network of cultural norms, has witnessed a disruption in the post-war period that is best described utilizing the Lacanian categories of the death drive and the real. However, given the highly abstract nature of this claim, there has also been a call for more historically concrete studies of popular culture using this framework. This historical interest has in turn led to a new surge of psychoanalytic work on the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Žižek, whose works in both philosophy and film theory include heavy references to Hitchcock's films, has been only one of a number of theorists in the Lacanian tradition to study Hitchcock with these kinds of historical claims in mind.

This recent scholarship has come out strongly against what it perceives as a tradition of misreading Lacan and Freud in the psychoanalytic trends of film theory associated with theorists such Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey. They accuse this once popular strand of film theory of misreading Lacan as a little more than a "structuralist" theorist, emphasizing the importance of linguistics for the study of culture at the expense of all else. This reading, so they argue, ignores Lacan's fundamental disagreements with thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Claude Levi-Strauss. Against these thinkers, Lacan holds that there is a traumatic real that lies beyond culture and language at the same time as it serves as a kind of precondition for it.[1] Although I am sympathetic with these critiques, they have led many to simply abandon the work of previous film theorists working in the psychoanalytic tradition. This, I believe, is a mistake for historical reasons.

In film studies, we might say that Alfred Hitchcock is a filmmaker who has become bound up with a series of what Fredric Jameson has called powerful interpretative *acts*; that is, interpretations which, for better or worse, orient the discussion of a subject in a specific direction for future commentators. Indeed, it is very hard to write anything about Hitchcock without finding oneself bogged down in the vast amount of secondary literature that has become known as 'Hitchcock Studies,' and even harder (or perhaps impossible) to return to a 'pre-theoretical' viewing of them once engaged with the interpretive debates in this area. However, as Jameson is also acutely aware, historicizing these interpretations may often reveal previously ignored insights into the works being interpreted. In the field of psychoanalytic film theory, and in Hitchcock studies in general, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" is one such interpretation that I believe is crucial for understanding subsequent readings and debates. In this

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[1] See, for instance, Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press 1995), 10-13

sense, it is my project in this essay to seek historical insights into two of Hitchcock's films through a reading of Laura Mulvey's now canonical work against the background of the new work in Lacanian theory.[2]

In this essay, I present Mulvey alongside *Rear Window* (1954) and *Psycho* (1960) to show how both the theory and the films register certain historical transformations of gender ideology and spectatorship in the post-war period. Through this juxtaposition, I wish to show how both Hitchcock and Mulvey portray classical Hollywood gender ideology as fundamentally unstable in changing cultural and economic times. I will show that issues of voyeurism and scopophilia that have often been commented upon with regard to Hitchcock are closely related to the social and economic shifts during the post-war period. Specifically, I will argue that Mulvey's essay articulates a particular kind of formal technique associated with what she calls "non-narrative scopophilia," a certain long-take shot that is utilized to great effect by Hitchcock. I argue that these shots represent a disruption to the smooth functioning of the classical Hollywood model of narrative and gender ideology in the post-war period tied closely to the changing economic realities of the period. Such a disruption, I argue, is closely related to a new model of consumerism that emerges during this period. To this end, I will be looking closely at the economic and cultural concerns, especially those concerning the rise of television, which have often been overlooked in much of the secondary literature that are present in these two films.

First, I will look closely at Mulvey's essay in order to show that historical facts about both the period in which she was writing, and the period of the films she was writing about, are crucial to understanding her essay and her picture of male dominance in classical Hollywood

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[2] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 6th edition, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press 2004), 837-848

cinema. I will then turn to *Rear Window* to show how Hitchcock undermines the narrative dominance of the male protagonist by challenging his look using long-take crane shots. I will argue that this disruption of traditional gendered notions of spectatorship is closely tied in to the rise of a new kind of spectatorship and model of image consumption related in many ways to the worries of the time about the popularization of television as a medium of image circulation. After arguing that these worries about new models of image circulation and consumption are part of a larger economic shift occurring during the post-war period, I will turn to *Psycho* to show how Hitchcock comments on these shifts in this later film through the use of this long-take technique that disrupts traditional notions of narrative and gender normativity.

II.) The Ambiguity of Pleasure: Mulvey and the Social Experience of Looking

In her famous essay, Laura Mulvey holds that the way in which spectators derive pleasure from classical Hollywood cinema is the outcome of a male dominated regime of looking. By this she means to describe a system of identification that includes the look of the spectator at the screen, the looks of the characters in the film at each other, and the look of the camera itself. According to Mulvey, all of these looks are organized through formal, narrative, stylistic, and editing techniques in the films themselves to the end of privileging the male look, or as she later comes to call it, “the male gaze.” Her basic idea is simple, and there is something intuitive about it as a generalization. As Mulvey points out, in such traditional Hollywood films there is traditionally a male protagonist with whom the audience is encouraged to identify, and a proper female “object” he is supposed to “obtain” by the end of the film. Mulvey’s essay attempts to lay out the formal techniques used to enforce this norm.

Mulvey, however, wants to push this idea much further than the seemingly weak thesis that most Hollywood films have a male protagonist whose look is supposed to somehow “align" with that of the audience. Mulvey, taking points from Freud and Lacan, argues that such a male-dominated model is fraught with tensions and conflicting tendencies. There is a fundamental tension, she argues, within the male scopophiliac instinct which is the target of such formal practices.[3] On the one hand, she argues, it is pleasurable to subject the things on the screen to the gaze, thus turning them into objects. On the other hand, Mulvey argues that there is another, more primitive (pre-oedipal, in psychoanalytic terms) pleasure derived from identifying with the image on screen, in blurring the boundary between inside and outside, and in realizing one’s “ideal ego” in the ideal images being projected.[4]

According to Mulvey, both ways of deriving pleasure are at odds with one another insofar as “one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), [and] the other demands identification of the ego with the [male] object on the screen through the spectator’s fascination with and recognition of his like.”[5] These two modes of seeking visual pleasure in cinema cannot be pursued simultaneously. One must always be pursued at the expense of the other.

For Mulvey, the tension exists because both modes of seeking pleasure are aspects of the same instinct, and both demand satisfaction in the male viewer. To resolve this tension, the Hollywood film needs two figures: the male protagonist and the female love-interest/object. However, this framework only displaces the problem since there are two contradictory ways that a film can present the relevant female character on the screen as the proper love-object. The male protagonist can first subject her to the narrative, forcing resolution through forward narrative

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[3] Ibid., 841
[4] Ibid., 849-840
[5] Ibid., 840-841

movement.[6] In this case the spectator can vicariously "have" the woman through the male character.

There is, however, a disruptive alternative in which the image of the woman becomes an end in itself.[7] As Mulvey argues, there is always a tendency in Hollywood films to break the female into fetish-parts that are to be enjoyed purely for the sake of enjoyment without contributing anything to the resolution of a film's narrative. In this case, the woman on screen exists solely for the spectator without reference to the look of the male protagonist, and with him, the narrative depth of the film.[8] Mulvey notes that musical numbers involving show-girls, for example, are used to give release to this tendency.[9] Again, Mulvey argues that both devices for deriving pleasure in Hollywood cinema are antagonistic.

All of this leads Mulvey to paint a picture of gender norms in Hollywood cinema as fundamentally unstable. This is because the privileged object, 'the woman,' must both resolve and internalize such basic antagonisms that Mulvey argues stem from the male unconscious. There is an irreducible tension between what Mulvey calls "narrative sadism," in which the male protagonist controls the woman for the sake of forward narrative movement, and "non-narrative scopophilia," in which the male spectator enjoys the woman as an object "to-be-looked-at" without any forward narrative movement.[10] In other words, Mulvey believes that there is a fundamental antagonism between narrative conventions and the visual presentation of the woman on screen as a sexual object in classical Hollywood films.[11] Pleasure on the side of the spectator is opposed to narrative resolution and vice-versa.

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6 Ibid., 841-842
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 842
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 843-844
11 Ibid., 843

This model importantly highlights certain formal techniques that disrupt narrative functioning. If voyeurism is associated with narrative, and narrative is associated with sadism, we could easily consider montage to be the formal building block of this mode of looking. Montage forces unconnected fragments to make meaning in combination. In apparent opposition to this technique, we have the "long take," or rather, the opposite of narrative montage. This would be a camera movement not only without cuts, but without forward diegetic movement. It is a shot that lingers over the visual field for the sake of sheer enjoyment. This Mulvey designates as "fetishistic scopophilia." Mulvey sharply notices, however, that this distinction is not the end of the story. She also warns us of the dangers inherent in narrative montage: "One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen."[12] Any shot could become scopophiliac once it is not subordinated to a narrative and allowed to stand on its own for the sake of enjoyment alone.

In addition to these antagonistic ways of seeking pleasure through looking, Mulvey identifies what she calls a "deeper problem" with the woman on screen. Importantly for Mulvey, the antagonism of sadism and scopophilia also signals two different ways for the constructed male viewer to avoid the unconscious threat of recognizing sexual difference. Mulvey here invokes Freud's notion of the "castration complex" in which the male child attempts to rationalize the fact that there are some who do not have a penis by thinking that women are really castrated men. This is supposed to lead to the fear that they themselves might be castrated as well. On this view, narrative sadism seeks to expose the "mystery" of the woman by the "re-enactment of the original trauma" in which sexual difference was discovered.[13] Non-narrative

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[12] Ibid., 846
[13] Ibid., 844

scopophilia, on the other hand, attempts to completely disavow the threat of castration by turning the threatening object, the woman, into a fetish that can be enjoyed for its own sake. Mulvey's woman, then, invokes both comfort and pleasure, while simultaneously posing a deep threat to this very pleasure by invoking the castration anxiety. This general picture proved to be largely influential, and has remained an essential part of academic film theory canon. As noted in the introduction, however, this picture has not gone uncontested. While it is generally agreed that Mulvey must be right about the general fact that most classical Hollywood films frame themselves in such a way as to privilege the male point-of-view, Mulvey's arguments linking this fact with the theories of psychoanalysis have been hotly contested. Criticisms have ranged from minor adjustments to Mulvey's use of psychoanalysis to rejections of the foundations of her argument.

The most common criticisms are those that charge Mulvey with making unnecessarily broad generalizations. As Robin Wood puts it, "I don't wish to reject the Mulvey thesis as a useful starting point for the exploration of filmic texts [...]. The problem is that the thesis has been taken (and indeed explicitly offered) as much more: as a comprehensive overview of mainstream cinematic practice."[14] Wood argues that Mulvey was wrong to claim that the male gaze has an exclusive position among many other ways in which a spectator can be invited to identify with a character. Wood lists five other possible ways, including ways in which filmmakers invite spectators to identify with female characters. Other critics begin by noting that there are countless counterexamples to her generalization in which muscular and attractive male stars are made into spectacles in Hollywood films, and in Hollywood films that feature female

[14] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 305

protagonists.[15] Mulvey herself wrote a "retrospective" essay, revising her ideas to include a theory of female protagonists.[16] Without wishing to disagree on a general level with these criticisms, I believe that there is still much more to be said about Mulvey's essay beyond a rejection (or affirmation, although this is almost never the case) of it as a total theory of film spectatorship.

To this end, we can ask some important historical questions: what kinds of textual themes, formal practices, and spectator experiences does Mulvey's model highlight at the expense of others, and why? I want to suggest that the part of the reason Mulvey's essay struck such a chord is that it highlights a historical conflict over practices of image consumption which are also at work in a number of films, especially the later works of Hitchcock. Mulvey draws our attention to moments in films when gender norms are enforced through acts of looking, by both the characters and the spectators, and the means by which these looks can be disruptive to the very system they form a part of. Further, Mulvey draws out the formal techniques by which these themes manifest themselves. If Mulvey's essay fails to give us a general theory of film spectatorship, it does, I believe, highlight some of the ways that conflicts and anxieties over gender manifested themselves in post-war Hollywood.

In order to draw out these conflicts, we should look at the structure of Mulvey's argument. Mulvey initially casts her argument in terms of a tension or contradiction in what she calls the male instinct. This is the tension between the pleasure gained through identifying one's ego with an ideal image, and that gained through subjecting objects to the gaze. After working through this tension in her argument, she adds that the real tension in classical Hollywood's construction of the male spectator position is the threat of the castration complex and the tension

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[15] See especially Noël Carrol, "The Image of Women in Film: A Defense of a Paradigm" in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticis*m, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Autumn, 1990), 353-354

[16] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasure*s (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). ix-xxvii

between the various ways to resolve this anxiety. This, I believe, is the first major error of her essay.

We should here observe that there is an asymmetry between the first antagonism that Mulvey finds between the two ways of seeking pleasure and the threat that the female figure poses as a representative of the threat of sexual difference to the male unconscious. In the first case, Mulvey theorizes the ways that pleasure itself can be disruptive, while in the final analysis she reads both avenues for seeking pleasure as ways to deal with the "unpleasure" of the castration complex. It is the first antagonism between non-narrative scopophilia and narrative sadism that I believe is the key to understanding Mulvey.

However, there are a number of conceptual ambiguities that must be addressed in Mulvey's essay. Firstly, this "unpleasure" as Mulvey describes it seems to have no direct relation to the theories of either Freud or Lacan. At this point it becomes obvious that Mulvey is working with an incomplete understanding of psychoanalysis and particularly the theories of Jacques Lacan. As Clifford Manlove points out, Mulvey's description of the "threat" of castration also bears very little resemblance to the accounts of either Freud or Lacan upon close inspection.[17] Although Mulvey's description of the castration complex resembles Freud's in some places, Manlove points out that "Mulvey's theory that visual pleasure contains an unpleasurable 'threat' is quite different from Freud and Lacan's theory that Eros/pleasure is subject to repetition/death."[18] Further, he points out that "[w]hile Lacan speaks of the castrating effects that can accompany the gaze, he never figuratively or literally associates castration – loss and 'lack' – with either women or the penis."[19]

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[17] Clifford Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey," *Cinema Journal* 46, No. 3, Spring 2007, 90.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

Mulvey also neglects several key distinctions that recent theorists in the Lacanian tradition have heavily emphasized. Mulvey leaves out any room, in her final analysis, for the register of what Lacan calls "the real," that which escapes symbolization.[20] Secondly, she does not make the Lacanian distinction between "instinct" and "drive" which is crucial to Lacan's later work. Recent scholarship on Lacan and his relevance for film studies has focused heavily on these aspects of his work. This work focuses on the way in which human drives reconcile themselves with the symbolic network of culture. "Drives" (which are fundamentally all the same "death drive") are understood as basic mental cathexes, and are contrasted with instincts. Instincts, for psychoanalysis, are energies directed at already given objects. Because of their reliance from birth on symbolic interactions, human agents do not have such objects given before their entry into language. Lacanian theory, drawing heavily on Freud's account in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, attempts to understand the way in which the particular object that is associated with a mental cathexis is attached retroactively upon a child's entry into language and separation from its mother. Further, Lacan proposes that any object that connects itself to the drive is "always-already" lost. That is, because of its retroactive creation, the object that such drives attach to can never be present because it never really existed.

The subject that has successfully entered into language and the symbolic order of culture misrecognizes this fact and believes that he or she can find the lost object, thus giving rise to a metonymic shift from object to object that is called "desire." Desire, by definition, is never satisfied because it is simply the movement from object to object, and only seeks to reproduce itself as desire to continue the movement. Desire is the lack that allows a subject to integrate his or her cathexes into the symbolic realm. The drive, however, gains satisfaction in the very act of frustration. As Todd McGowan puts it: "The drive repeats the initial loss that founds it [that is,

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[20] Ibid.

the loss of the "lost object"] when the individual undergoes subjectivization [or enters language], and the subject derives satisfaction from this repetition. The production of its own obstacles allows the drive to be self-sustaining and to operate outside the constraints of time."[21] The drive satisfies itself not by achieving its aim, but by circling around the frustration of the lost object and finding satisfaction in its own obstacles.

"Pleasure," as Mulvey uses the term is ambiguous insofar as she does not make these Lacanian distinctions. On the one hand, we may consider pleasure derived from "narrative sadism" to be on the side of desire, as it is contained within the symbolic network of proper narrative resolution. On the other hand, the pleasure that Mulvey associates with non-narrative scopophilia may be placed with the drive. In this sense "pleasure" is more akin to what Lacan designates as *jouissance*, the kind of disruptive enjoyment associated with the drive which disrupts the smooth functioning of the symbolic order.

I now want to suggest that this ambiguity in the use of the term "pleasure" in fact points to some contradictory elements that can be found in the films of the post-war period themselves. Indeed, this ambiguity places Mulvey in the context of recent arguments from psychoanalytic theorists who use the distinction between desire and drive and Lacan's later focus on the order of the Real to characterize a historical shift in the way that we, as a culture, experience enjoyment. According to these arguments, our western society is increasingly moving away from an economy and culture characterized by desire to one centered on the enjoyment of the drive. The historical argument involved in positing a cultural move from an economy of desire to that of drive is summed up by Joan Copjec in her book, *Read My Desire*:

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[21] Todd McGowan, "Hitchcock's Ethics of Suspense: Psychoanalysis and the Devaluation of the Object," in *A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, eds. Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 509

> Lacan has argued that this shift [from desire to drive] describes a general transition whose process we are still witnessing: the old modern order of desire, ruled over by an Oedipal father, has begun to be replaced by a new order of the drive, in which we no longer have recourse to the protections against *jouissance* that the Oedipal father once offered. These protections have been eroded by our society's fetishization of being, that is, of *jouissance*. Which is to say that we have ceased being a society that attempts to preserve the individual right to *jouissance* to become a society that commands *jouissance* as a 'civic' duty[22]

In terms of classical Hollywood narrative, desire is what characterizes the "normal" couple insofar as the hero must renounce a kind of obscene pleasure associated with stagnation (in Mulvey's terms, "non-narrative scopophilia") in order to enter into the "proper" sexual relationship. The traditional couple represents desire because it is set in motion by a prohibition in the moral law, what Copjec has called the protection of "the Oedipal father." This is opposed to *jouissance*, which Copjec associates with "being." "Being" is here understood as a posited state of undifferentiated wholeness that a child experiences before its entry into language. This most notably manifests itself for the child as a separation between the child and its mother, the retroactive cause of the "lost object." *Jouissance* is said to be on the side "being" rather than "sense" or meaning because language introduces a separation between the child and "being." The "fetishization of being" is here used to describe an obsession with returning to such an imaginary state of wholeness through the experience of extremely private and personal *jouissance*.

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[22] Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 182-183

This brief overview obviously fails to do justice to the complexity and depth of Lacanian theory. However, with this overview, we can see how Mulvey's theory has a much more complex relation to psychoanalysis that she was originally unaware of. The distinctions made by Lacan and his later followers do not necessarily refute Mulvey's findings, but they do complicate the picture that Mulvey paints of Hollywood in her essays, partly by adding a historical perspective to the categories of psychoanalysis. Such Lacanian distinctions have been used to advance a kind of "periodizing hypothesis," (as Jameson famously describes his conceptualization of postmodernism).

In economic terms, an "economy of desire" is one in which we as consumers, citizens, etc, are called upon to properly integrate our urges into the symbolic order through renouncing purely private pleasure in favor of "proper" cultural outlets. In terms of textual economy -- the way in which emphasis in narratives is organized -- an economy of desire describes a text that privileges proper narrative resolution in order to reinforce the moral order. Historically, Copjec is claiming, along with other theorists such as Slavoj Žižek, that a shift has occurred in the way that enjoyment is organized and directed during the post-war period. Copjec argues that, through various economic and cultural mechanisms, the once highly structured symbolic order that regulates desire has given way to privileging the destructive and highly private enjoyment of the drive.

It is is just this tension between economies of desire and those of drive, textual or otherwise, that we find implicitly at work in an interesting way in Mulvey's essay. Mulvey's model specifically highlights the contradictory ideological elements involved in the concrete experience of looking at a screen and seeing a particular kind of ideologically charged image, the figure of the woman in classical Hollywood. Specifically, Mulvey highlights one way in which

the eroticized scopophiliac look can derail the smooth narrative functioning of the Hollywood film, thus preventing proper narrative resolution.

However, this look which can potentially derail the system should be read as a historical rather than transcendental insight into classical Hollywood films. Mulvey, of course, views this insight in an abstract way without explicitly considering its economic and historical dimensions, and the ways in which this highly charged object might break down as ideological categories shift. As a historical document, however, it is interesting to note the ways that these shifts and changes are registered in the essay, specifically through descriptions of the experience of looking. Mulvey's model in fact highlights some of the contradictory ways in which images in the post-war period were experienced by both producers and consumers, and offers some insight into the ways in which ideological categories of gender were negotiated in certain films.

On my reading of Mulvey, then, one should not discuss the anxieties and ambivalences that her essay expresses, both explicitly and implicitly, without also taking into account some of the historical and economic struggles over gender and culture of both the films that she sought to criticize and the conditions in which she was writing. Mulvey herself, in the introduction to the book in which she re-published "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," notes that the essay must be situated within the turbulent and uncertain times in which it was written, amid the economic crisis and rise of the women's movement in the early to middle 1970's. In fact, the relation between economics and gender is one that Mulvey explicitly turns to in her later essays, as she notes in the same introduction.[23]

If we keep these conflicts in mind, I think that a useful framework for talking about certain Hollywood films of the post-war period emerges. Against a systematic and totalizing understanding of Mulvey's claims (perpetuated in large part by her own rhetoric in the essay

[23] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, ix-xxvii

itself, which she later distanced herself from), this framework focuses on the ways in which ideological notions of gender are negotiated in light of economic and cultural changes, specifically by focusing on the political aspect of looking at and consuming mass-produced images. The antagonism between the smooth functioning of the Hollywood narrative and the disruptive pleasure of the scopophiliac gaze, I argue, is crucial to understanding many of the tensions and anxieties over the relation between image consumption and gender identity in the post-war period.

Moreover, I want to argue that the themes that emerge with these considerations of Mulvey's essay can also be found at work in the later films of Hitchcock. Although her own readings of some of these films at the end of the essay are unsatisfying, I think that there is still more to be said about the relation between the two, and the ways in which both Mulvey and Hitchcock recognize the shifting nature of gender ideology in Hollywood cinema during the post-war period. I want to suggest that what Mulvey calls the scopophiliac gaze is a broader phenomenon than she accounts for, and one that is closely tied to historical and economic shifts occurring in the post-war period.

However, any account of the historical negotiation of gender roles with during this time must include the role of television, and its impact on the way in which images were consumed and circulated must be accounted for. Indeed, as my later readings will show, I believe that such concerns over image consumption were a crucial part of Hitchcock's later films. To account for the way in which this historical development is manifested in the films, I turn to Fredric Jameson's brilliant essay, "Allegorizing Hitchcock," in which he provides his take on the connection between linguistics and film studies by examining the role that social experiences

have on the meaning-making process in film.[24] What Jameson proposes, beyond a critique of structuralist or purely linguistic approaches to film studies, is a useful framework for understanding the ways in which films are shaped from the historical realities in which they were produced.

The medium of film, as Jameson sees it, is a fundamentally modernist medium because each film must invent its own "private language," a feature that is a common trope in modernist literature.[25] Because, as Christian Metz has pointed out, the smallest meaning-making unit in film is more analogous to a sentence than a letter, each film must contain its own way of forming such "sentences" in the material contained in each single shot.[26] Jameson draws the further conclusion from this observation that filmic "language" differs further from a written language because each shot is composed of elements of a reality that, unlike the phoneme, are "always-already" symbolically coded. Film involves the "recoding" of signifiers that are loaded with meaning because of their existence in the symbolic or social realm.[27] Spaces, places, objects, and persons being filmed come loaded with meaning tied to the experiences of daily life. Film must appropriate rather than create culturally meaningful subject matter in order to make meaning within shots.

When we examine the historical context of the films that Mulvey writes about, we find a series of shifts in both gender politics and economic conditions. As I have already indicated, one such experience that I believe is crucial to understanding both Mulvey's theory and the films that she focuses on in this context is the rise of television as a competing model of spectatorship and image consumption for cinema. In the last twenty years, scholarship on television has

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[24] Fredric Jameson, "Allegorizing Hitchcock," in *Signatures of The Visible* (New York, NY: Routledge 2007), 135-175

[25] Ibid., 140-141

[26] Ibid., 141

[27] Ibid.

demonstrated just how important television was to the construction of gender identities and ideologies, as well as to Hollywood cinema, which then had to learn to compete economically with the new medium. Lynn Spigel, in her groundbreaking book *Make Room for TV*, provides a particularly useful discussion of the ways in which television was involved in the renegotiation of gender roles in the consumption of images.

As Spigel documents, television disrupted the traditionally male-dominated mode of cinema spectatorship by targeting women as spectators who were fundamentally active. Further, television targeted women from within the domestic space of the household, a space that cinema could not effectively reach at the time.[28] This shift is at the heart of a number of other spatial and ideological reorganizations that affected the "everyday" experiences of gender in America. As the domestic space of white, middle class families shifted from the urban to the suburban, the consumption of moving images was now organized within the space of the home, blurring private and public space while causing a further confusion of traditional active/passive, male/female ideological oppositions as women came to participate actively in image consumption through the shifting nature of their work inside of their homes.[29]

The more active women spectators became, the more male spectatorship came to be viewed as a passive, diminishing experience within the home.[30] Drawing on both the analysis of print advertisements, magazines, and television programing from the post-war period, Spigel tracks the ideological tensions of the time through the conflicting ways in which visual media addressed men and women. For men, Spigel notes, television was frequently discussed and

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[28] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 73-75

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 47

advertised as a relaxing activity after a long day's work.[31] For women, however, "the passive calm of television viewing was never so simple [...], because even when women were shown watching television [in advertising and women's magazines], they often appeared as productive workers."[32] Women were not only directly addressed both as spectators and consumers, they were also addressed as *active* in these roles as they watched and shopped in the midst of their daily work. Further emphasizing these shifting gender roles, Spigel also acutely points out that, while the body of the male spectator in the house was reduced to the "couch potato," the physical size of his "screen surrogate" (to use Mulvey's term) on the tiny television screen was also massively reduced.[33]

As the dynamics of looking were changing through the renegotiation of specators' everyday experiences of gender, the experience of moving image consumption also shifted. I specifically want to call attention to the way television changed practices of image consumption by offering a number of competing "flows" of images. Although there were only two networks originally, television was able to offer a potentially vast array of different programs, advertisements, and narratives to consume at any given moment whereas cinema could offer only a single narrative of moving images to consume at a time. All of these changes are very significant for the way in which we find ideological categories of gender and identity being negotiated in Hollywood films. One important result of these changes brought on by television is that there was a large amount of anxiety surrounding the figure of the woman "to-be-looked-at" in cinema. The active/passive, male/female oppositions were shifting in important ways.

All of this leads, I argue, to a disruption in the Hollywood system insofar as it relies on such a woman "to-be-looked-at" in order to enforce gender norms at a time in which men were

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31 Ibid., 93-94
32 Ibid., 94
33 Ibid., 64

experiencing their role as spectators in increasingly passive terms. Mulvey's analysis, I believe, provides a set of categories with which to understand the "everyday experience" of gender and spectatorship given through the politics of gendered looking in these turbulent times. What I have described as Mulvey's key distinction between narrative sadism and non-narrative scopophilia becomes a way to track the shifting notions of gender and spectatorship, and to relate these shifts to their historical background. In this essay, I will track these shifts by looking to the use of a certain kind of formal technique, the long-take that disrupts forward narrative movement used by Hitchcock in his later films, and how this technique challenges traditional notions of spectatorship. The use of this technique is closely related, I argue, to Hitchcock's fascination with television, and the manifestation of more general worries regarding the more volatile manifestation of capitalism that emerges at the beginning of the post-war period.

III.) *Rear Window*: Gender Conflicts and Narrative Disruptions

Mulvey famously concluded her essay with a brief analysis of several films by Hitchcock and Sternberg. Her thoughts on *Rear Window* have proven to be especially influential. Given that the film deals explicitly with issues of voyeurism, Mulvey, drawing on the classical analysis by Jean Douchet, argues that Hitchcock's *Rear Window* is a "metaphorical" or allegorical representation of cinema spectorship. The idea that *Rear Window* is somehow self-reflexive or meta-fictional has come to be a powerful interpretive act that has framed the discussion of the film ever since. In fact, many refutations of Mulvey's theoretical arguments also involve specifically rejecting her reading of this film. In turn, many of these refutations focus on the

many ways in which Jeff's masculine authority is undermined in more ways than Mulvey recognized.

However, the undermining of Jeff's masculine authority need not serve as an objection to Mulvey *per se*. In this section, I bring out the way in which Hitchcock continually undermines Jeff's authority over the visual field by having the camera stray from Jeff's point of view at crucial points in the film, thus problematizing the construction of his narrative about Thorwald. I will further argue that this disruption of Jeff's perspective is not necessarily opposed to Mulvey's theory, which can allow us important insights into how this disruption functions. As Jeff's authority is undermined by the film itself, I argue that we can also see an important way in which the figure of the woman as the love interest/object is de-privileged as the sole object of the scopophiliac gaze. This de-privileging, I believe, is closely linked to anxieties about television as a new medium of image consumption in the post-war period that serves to subvert traditional gender ideology.

The shift in the scopophiliac gaze, I argue, points toward a new experience of image consumption manifest most clearly in the rise of television in which the act of choosing itself is privileged over the chosen object. In this section, I will first look at two theorists who contest Mulvey's reading of *Rear Window* and show that, while they provide useful complications to Mulvey, do not necessarily refute many of the tenants of her essay. I will then offer an alternative reading of *Rear Window* in order to show the historical importance of the scopophiliac gaze, and how it ties in to concrete worries over changing economic and cultural conditions in the post-war period.

The plot of *Rear Window* follows the story of L.B. Jeffries (Jimmy Stewart), a reporter on leave after breaking his leg in an attempt to photograph a crash at an automobile race. As

revealed in a photograph in his apartment, Jeff was struck by a tire that flew off one of the race cars in the crash as Jeff stood only yards away with his camera. Now confined to a wheelchair in his apartment, Jeff spends his days watching his neighbors, who form a series of sub-plots, across the courtyard. His girlfriend, Lisa Freemont (Grace Kelly), is a fashion model whom he is generally uninterested in. As Jeff becomes more and more obsessed with spying on his neighbors, he continually ignores both Lisa's advances, and the suggestions from his caretaker to marry Lisa. Jeff soon becomes obsessed with watching one of his neighbors in particular: Lars Thorwald, who lives directly across from Jeff with his nagging, bedridden wife. After one stormy night, Thorwald's wife disappears and Jeff begins to suspect that Thorwald may have killed her. Jeff spends the rest of the film trying to prove Thorwald's guilt amidst the doubts of Lisa, his caretaker, and the police.

On the simple allegorical reading of the film, Jeff represents the typical film spectator and his neighbors correspond to characters in a film. As Mulvey puts it, "[Jeff's] enforced inactivity, binding him to his seat as a spectator, puts him squarely in the fantasy position of the cinema audience."[34] On this reading, Lisa's role as both a fashion model and Jeff's love interest places her in the role of the "woman-to-be-looked-at" *par excellence*: "Lisa's exhibitionism has already been established by her obsessive interest in dress and style, in being a passive image of visual perfection [...]."[35] However, many theorists have challenged this reading by arguing that the gender dynamic in *Rear Window* is much more complex and ambiguous than Mulvey's reading allows.

One theorist who has focused exclusively on the ambiguity of gender ideology in Hitchcock's films is Tania Modleski, whose book, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, marks an

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[34] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," 846

[35] Ibid.,

important break in the debate concerning the place of Hitchcock's films in feminist discourse.[36] Rather than arguing about the degree to which Hitchcock's films do or do not exhibit sexist tendencies, Modleski proposes that Hitchcock's films reveal a strong ambivalence to femininity that "subverts the claims to mastery and authority not only of the male characters but of the director himself."[37] In her analysis, Modleski draws out the ways in which the women in Hitchcock's films, although they are often subjected to considerable violence, nonetheless "remain resistant to patriarchal assimilation."[38]

Modleski challenges Mulvey on two grounds. First she calls attention to Lisa's generally dominating and active appearance throughout the first part of the film. Secondly, Modleski observes the various ways that Lisa articulates her own "spectator" position with regard to the events taking place in the apartments which Jeff watches. Modleski points out that Lisa at first contradicts Jeff's account of Thorwald, only to bring her interpretation in line with his for the sake of narrative resolution at the end of the film. Even as Lisa comes to accept Jeff's narrative construction about Thorwald, however, the dominance of the male perspective is problematized by the ambiguous ending of the film, in which Jeff finds himself in an even less active position than before while Lisa begins to explicitly adopt Jeff's "masculine" interests.

To this end, Modleski reads *Rear Window* not to argue for or against the ways in which Hitchcock does or does not critique the male spectator position. Rather, Modleski's focus is to show the contradictory ways that Hitchcock actually does portray women, particularly through the character of Lisa Freemont. Against Mulvey, who claims that Lisa functions throughout the

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[36] Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York, NY: Netheun, 1988), 3

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

film as a "passive image of visual perfection," Modleski argues that Lisa is often portrayed as an active, dominating presence that provides a counterpoint to Jeff's passivity.[39]

Modleski has not been the only one to mount an in-depth challenge to Mulvey's reading of *Rear Window*. Recent psychoanalytic film theorists, under attack by those opposed to psychoanalysis as a framework for film criticism, have criticized Mulvey for misrepresenting Lacan's theory of the gaze and popularizing this misconception. Mulvey's misconception, it is argued, leaves out important aspects of film spectatorship and its relationship to ideology. Todd McGowan, following earlier work by Copjec, points again to Mulvey's use of Lacan's "mirror stage" as the basis for her argument without noting that Lacan heavily modified his theory in his later years. According to McGowan, Mulvey's picture of the gaze is one in which the (male) subject achieves imaginary mastery of the visual field.[40] The male spectator desires to control the visual field through his gaze, and Hollywood cinema provides the ideological illusion of such mastery through the enforcing of certain gender norms.

As McGowan points out, however, the Lacanian theory of the gaze, as formulated in Lacan's later seminars, is a reversal of this notion of the gaze as the illusion of mastery. The Lacanian gaze is rather an account of how mastery of the visual field, in the form of an "objective" distance from it, is undermined by the viewing subject's own desire.[41] The Lacanian distinction between desire and drive, and the notion of the real as that which resists symbolization is crucial for this account. The gaze, for Lacan, is on the side of the real. It is a

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[39] Mulvey, quoted by Modleski, Ibid, *3*

[40] Todd McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes," in *Cinema Journal* 42, No. 3, Spring 2003, 30-31

[41] See Slavoj Zizek's account in his essay, "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin is Writ Large," in *Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Lacan (But Were Too Afraid To Ask Hitchcock*), 2nd edition (New York: Verso 2010), 219-223

traumatic eruption of this real in the visual field that shows the subject the condition on which his or her objective distance from the visible world is based.

If we return to the account of the genesis of a subject's desire given by Lacan, we find that his notion of the gaze is a crucial part of this account. Our vision, as Lacan notes, is not a simple matter of physical laws and geometric space. Indeed, understanding vision in this "objective" way is itself an abstraction. Vision, for Lacan, is inherently conditioned by the symbolic realm of culture in the way that we organize and divide up the world into meaningful chunks. However, on Lacan's account, one of the conditions of such symbolic organization is a separation from a posited state of "being" on the part of the subject. The Lacanian gaze is thus the complex and paradoxical result of this separation in the visual field.[42]

As a further argument against Mulvey's use of the gaze, Clifford Manlove argues that this disruptive gaze that Lacan describes gives a more accurate picture of the way that anxieties about looking are portrayed in *Rear Window*. According to Manlove, *Rear Window* is "the story of a man's search for his object *a* [...]," the name that Lacan gives to paradoxical object-cause of desire retroactively created on the subject's entry into language. As the lost object-cause of desire (it also functions, in a different way and under a different name in Lacan's theory, as the object of the drive), the *objet a* serves as a kind of frame that shields us from the real.[43] It is what, unconsciously, tells the subject what he or she is for the big Other, originally considered as the figure of the mother's desire, but later identified as the anonymous network of culture: "While the *real* is that which is impossible or unbearable, the *objet a* (object 'small' *a* [for 'little other']) is that which veils the omnipresent real, alleviating anxiety in each subject, permitting

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[42] For the best account of this given by Lacan himself, see the four seminars he devoted to the gaze in: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Reprint edition. Translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 67-105

[43] Clifford Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative," 96

each to develop stable patterns (and characteristics). Object *a* helps to fill in the split between reality (the imaginary and symbolic registers) and the real."[44]

Manlove holds that this crucial Lacanian concept better explains the kind of voyeurism encountered in *Rear Window*. Jeff, he argues, has an unstable *objet a*, or object of desire that frames his reality in order to keep out the traumatic real.[45] Thorwald, on this reading, provokes Jeff insofar as his look represents a stain in Jeff's visual field and implicates Jeff in the picture that he views in the apartment across the courtyard.[46] When Thorwald confronts Jeff at the end of the film, he presents Jeff with the problem of his desire. Thorwald's look implicates Jeff in the "objective" picture he attempts to construct, and thus represents the eruption of the gaze in Jeff's field of vision. The problem for Jeff throughout the film, according to Manlove, is to reestablish his *objet petit a* and the priority of his desire over the power of the drive.[47]

Both of these alternative readings, however, seem to leave out the fact that *Rear Window* is fundamentally concerned with the circulation and consumption of images. Although Manlove is quick to point out that Jeff's desire centers around the lens of his camera, he misses the economic implications that this reading suggests. Interestingly, Mulvey is keenly aware of this fact, noting that Jeff's position as the active male protagonist is closely tied to his "work as a photo-journalist, a maker of stories and captor of images."[48] Indeed, the film introduces the characters through images in the form of photographs and magazine covers. Jeff, the protagonist, is a photographer who is injured on the job and can no longer produce images, and his love interest, Lisa, is a fashion model. Although Manlove realizes that "Jeff's visual pleasure is directed at the camera lens and those things on the other side of the lens, not only the image of

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44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 97
47 Ibid., 99-100
48 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 846

the woman," he fails to make explicit the historical and economic significance of this observation.[49] If Jeff is a producer and consumer of images, he represents a particular model of image production and consumption that is slowly becoming obsolete, as shown in the way that the film undermines his authority.

In this way, we can, I believe, regard *Rear Window* as a kind of allegory in which Jeff in many ways "represents" a cinema spectator. However, this allegory is much more akin to that which Jameson describes in his work on film than previous ahistorical readings.[50] That is, rather than giving us an ahistorical picture of film spectatorship, *Rear Window* seems to reflect the social experiences involved in consuming images through competing mediums as its "raw material." As such, it also seems to go beyond Mulvey by showing a much more complex picture of pleasure and enjoyment, and the politics involved in regulating it.

Both Modleski's and Manlove's accounts seem to largely neglect the reflexive nature of the film in favor of locating ambiguous representations of gender thematically in the narrative. In both accounts, there is little discussion of the formal concerns that occupied Mulvey. On a first reading, this omission seems apt. If, as Modleski argues, Lisa is not simply the woman "to-be-looked-at," and in fact has a perspective of her own that challenges Jeff's masculine power, then Mulvey's theory of the male gaze as a mastering gaze seems to be inapplicable in this case. Modleski is not alone in criticizing Mulvey in this way. As we have seen, this fits in with the general pattern of those who reject Mulvey's essay. If Mulvey is claiming to provide a totalizing theory of film spectatorship, then any exceptions to her theory will count as a refutation. I have already given reasons why I think that such easy dismissals miss something crucial about Mulvey's essay, and both Modleski's and Manlove's lack of concern with the formal devices

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49 Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative," 96-97

50 For Jameson's discussion of allegory in this sense, see *Signatures of the Visible*, 51-52, and 168-170

used in *Rear Window* misses the way in which the gender ambiguities in the film are presented through such devices.

Something is lost when one completely rejects Mulvey's account of the male gaze and the formal and stylistic devices that structure it in classical Hollywood cinema. Mulvey's model is useful because it calls our attention the way that gender ideology is enforced and contradicted in a film's form. Against this trend of rejecting Mulvey's ideas about film form entirely, I argue that the tensions between the new activity of the female spectator and the relative passivity of the male, brought out by Modleski through the tension between Jeff's and Lisa's respective looks, are emphasized by a formal device in the way that the film articulates its content.

At the end of her essay, Mulvey tells us that, "Hitchcock uses the process of identification normally associated with ideological correctness and the recognition of established morality and shows up its perverted side."[51] Jeff's immobile position in the film puts him in the same position as the film spectator who must establish his correct aim and object within the patriarchal framework of classical Hollywood cinema. It follows from this that Lisa will only be attractive to him insofar as she shows herself capable of being objectified by appearing with Jeff's "screen" as an image. While she exists on the Jeff's side of the screen, the possibility that she will assert herself as a maker of meaning is threatening to him insofar as he functions as an allegory for male-dominated cinema specatorship.

For most of the film, Jeff commands the narrative montage through a formula that presents us with a shot of Jeff looking, followed by a shot of what he is looking at, and then cuts back to his reaction. The film, however, also presents us with a kind of antithesis to this formula, and the look of the camera separates from Jeff at crucial points in the film. *Rear Window* begins with an extended, long-take crane shot that surveys the settings of the film. This lingering

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[51] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 845

examination of the visual field occurs in several key moments throughout the film, particularly at the opening of the film, and in one curious scene in which Jeff begins to suspect his neighbor Thorwald of murdering his wife.

The film begins with three windows whose blinds are raised. The camera then pushes forward to look out, then cuts. The next shot tracks the movement of a cat, before becoming distracted with some of the neighbors. After it drifts once across the courtyard, the camera finds Jeff asleep in his wheelchair. The film then quickly cuts to a shot of a thermometer that shows a temperature of over 90 degrees, and pans to a view of the composer who lives next to Jeff. The film cuts once more to a shot of a couple asleep on their fire escape before panning down to "Miss Torso," the attractive dancer who lives directly across the courtyard from Jeff. Without cutting, the camera then returns to Jeff's apartment for a second time, and finds him asleep *again*. This time the wandering camera takes the opportunity to explore Jeff's apartment and the objects in it, still without cutting. It is almost as if the camera must continually check back to see if Jeff is asleep so that it can continue its appraisal of his apartment without him.

The constant repetition of finding Jeff asleep before moving away anticipates a scene in which we are given evidence of Thorwald's innocence. In this scene, we see Jeff as he attempts to stay awake long into the night spying on his neighbors. While he is awake, we see the montage formula in which we are shown exactly what Jeff sees by the juxtaposition of the apartments across the courtyard with shots of Jeff's face. At some point, he falls asleep. We then see a long crane shot that pans, rather than cuts, across the courtyard, and shows possible evidence for Thorwald's innocence before panning back to show us that Jeff is asleep. We see Thorwald leaving his apartment with a woman dressed in black. This piece of information will prove paradoxically important during the film, but also rendered unessential at the conclusion in

which we find out that Thorwald did, in fact, kill his wife. A directly allegorical reading of the scene, which holds that Stewart represents the film spectator, is thus problematic. If he represents the audience, who, exactly, is viewing the apartment? Further, and more importantly, what narrative purpose does this shot serve if it turns out that Thorwald really did commit the murder?

This piece of information is only known by us, the spectators, and it is disregarded as the film goes on. Its only purpose, it seems, is to provide the audience with doubts regarding Jeff's accusations against Thorwald, rendering him unable to construct a coherent narrative. As Robin Wood so acutely points out, the woman seen leaving with Thorwald could very well have been his wife leaving to catch a train, thus rendering Jeff's entire theory about Thorwald's murder false, and the plot of the film pointless.[52] But such a blatant separation of the spectator's look from that of the male "screen surrogate" in order to undermine his ability to command the narrative seems to show that Mulvey's theory is inadequate to describe what is going on in the film.

Before we completely abandon her insights, however, we should first look to the way in which Mulvey's distinction between narrative sadism and non-narrative scopophilia, and the subsequent tension that is inherent between them is at work in this sequence. Recall that Mulvey theorizes that forward narrative movement often comes at the expense of the male spectator's scopophiliac desire to look and, *vice-versa*, indulgence in the spectator's non-narrative pleasure can only come as a halt to narrative resolution. In order for the classical Hollywood system to do the ideological work required of it, both must be balanced in the proper way. As Mulvey points out, this is nearly always accomplished by sacrificing the pleasure gained through non-narrative scopophilia in favor of narrative resolution.

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[52] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films,* 103

We can identify two functionally opposed formal techniques that correspond to these tensions: On the one hand, we have the montage technique that corresponds to Jeff's look, and which he seems to command in Mulvey's sense. In this way, the narrative in *Rear Window* seems to be largely built upon such a pattern. On the other hand, we also see, less frequently, long-take crane shots that are not tied down to any particular character's point of view. Such shots, like the one discussed above, frequently undermine or contradict Jeff's privileged position as the creator and agent of narrative. On this reading, there is a sense in which the allegory of cinema spectatorship holds on the level of the narrative, while at the same time being undermined by the film form itself. In other words, *Rear Window* is allegorical to the extent that Jeff represents a form of spectatorship that is slowly losing its privileged status amidst the social changes of late capitalism manifested in the way that film seems to contradict his diegetic perspective.

What is interesting about the crane shot in which we see Thorwald leaving his apartment with an unnamed woman is not its lack of narrative content, but its explicit contradiction of the narrative that Jeff's attempts to construct throughout the film, thus undermining his authority. In the sense that this lingering examination of the visual field lies "outside of linear time" as established by the film's narrative, it bears resemblance to the kind of formal practice that Mulvey identifies with non-narrative scopophilia. However, it clearly signals something quite different, as its purpose is not pleasure in Mulvey's sense. Rather, the shot serves only to sever the connection between the look of the spectator and the look of the male protagonist. Is this simply a case of Hitchcock subverting the notion that the spectator's look is always capable of smoothly aligning with that of the male protagonist, or is there something more going on here?

Importantly, not only do we see another example of the way in which the wandering camera undermines Jeff's authority, but the film also introduces the character of Jeff to us

through his *things*, the physical objects in his apartment. It is also significant that many of these objects turn out to be images. As the camera tracks through the apartment, we see the photograph that he took in front of a crashing car moments before a flying tire struck him, thus creating the injury that forms the basis of the plot. We also see a number of negative photographs of Lisa before the camera focuses on the fully developed version of the photo that adorns the cover of *Life* magazine. Since Jeff makes his living as a producer of images, many of the belongings in his apartment used to introduce him are themselves images. In this way, the film draws attention to the nature of images as commodities, and also associates a particular type of formal technique with the appraisal of such commodities -- the long-take crane shot.

There is a fundamentally ambiguous attitude expressed towards the undermining of traditional gender roles shown in the film. Through these long takes, the film seems determined to escape Jeff's point of view, to go beyond his narrow concern for narrative resolution. Mulvey's identification of the antagonism between narrative sadism and non-narrative scopophilia is crucial to understand this break. Classical Hollywood organizes pleasure in such a way that attempts to ensure, not simply ideological notions about gender, but a whole way of consuming images in an attempt to guarantee a certain economic model. Notions of what it means to be a consumer, and how consumers are addressed to ensure certain economic models are thus heavily bound up with cultural gender norms, among other things, in a way that leads to various types of dialectical dependency between each.

IV.) The Rise of Television and the System of Objects in *Rear Window*

It is important to note that, unlike the cinema spectator, Jeff is presented with a wide array of mini-narratives and images to view, and it is up to him to make one of them into the "correct" one that will ensure proper resolution. The array of screens across the courtyard seems to more closely resemble the predicament of a television spectator, who can choose between a number of narratives and "channels," rather than a film spectator. However, it also seems that Jeff in some way embodies the worries felt by the traditional male cinema spectator when confronted with this new medium of image circulation and consumption.

In some sense, I think, we can refer to Jeff as a representation of the traditional cinema spectator, only one that finds himself struggling to hold together the classical Hollywood model of image consumption in changing cultural and economic conditions. In this way, I argue that the long-take cranes shots that undermine Jeff's narrative express a need to go beyond the perspective that he represents. In this section, I will argue that the rise of television as a competitor to classical Hollywood cinema is crucial to understanding the gender dynamics in *Rear Window*. I will further argue that once we consider the film against this historical background, Mulvey's insights, as well as those of some of her critics, can be read together to show how *Rear Window* deals with changing economic and cultural trends. I will argue that the film is particularly concerned with the role that a new kind of spectatorship, associated with the changing model of image consumption associated with television, has in undermining and disrupting the more traditional Hollywood model.

As a product of the mid-1950s, *Rear Window* is situated at the emergence of an economic trend that a group of theorists have linked to a number of cultural changes. David Harvey has

called this economic transition in the post-war period "flexible accumulation," and it is at the heart of a larger cultural transformation to what is now referred to as postmodernism.[53] The term "postmodernism" here describes a prevailing cultural tendency or a "cultural dominant" rather than a philosophical movement or set of beliefs ascribed to individuals. For Harvey, following in the tradition of other Marxist thinkers such as Jameson, postmodernism describes a set of cultural conditions that accompany the rise of certain tendencies in capitalism as a global force. Flexible accumulation is the term Harvey uses to describe the dominant economic model for accumulating capital that arose out of the collapse of the Fordist/Keynesianist model in the 1960s and1970s. Whereas Fordism as a model of production put a heavy emphasis on centralized production in factories located in urban areas, and Keynesianism emphasized government regulation of the more destabilizing tendencies of capitalism, flexible accumulation favors decentralized coordination in production and deregulated markets.[54]

As Harvey argues, this shift in economic organization comes with an extreme "space-time compression," by which he means to describe the way that, as the production of capital spreads out all over the globe, the communication and cooperation required to coordinate the many areas of production quickly eliminates the experiential distance between places, and the time required for transactions.[55] Flexible accumulation also involves a rapid speed-up in both the production and consumption of goods. As technology allows the production of consumer goods at increasingly faster rates, the demand for quick consumption arises. Such a rapid mode of production lends itself to fashion markets, disposable goods, and most of all, the mass production

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[53] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, revised edition (Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 173-188

[54] Ibid., 189-197

[55] Ibid., 284-285

of images in such a quantity not experienced in previous times.[56] Because images can be produced, circulated, and consumed quickly, they become an increasingly important part of the global economy.

Although Harvey tracks this shift to the series of economic crises beginning in 1972, a number of the infrastructural changes that he identifies as preconditions for the shift to flexible accumulation were already developing and producing cultural changes as *Rear Window* was being produced. This, I believe, can be seen especially in the way that the rather rapid popularization of television quickly introduced new ways of circulating and consuming images in the 1950s. As a newly popularized medium of image dissemination and consumption, television played a particularly important role in the speed-up in production to which Harvey refers, not least for its ability to quickly circulate images. As Harvey tells us: "Mass television ownership coupled with satellite communication makes it possible to experience a rush of images from different spaces almost simultaneously, collapsing the world's spaces into a series of images on a television screen."[57] Images from all over the world could suddenly be consumed alongside each other at a faster than ever before, ushering in a new kind of consuming experience in which time and place become ever more collapsed onto the flat screen.

Television also circulates these images in a specific way. As several theorists have pointed out, one of television's defining traits is its ability to provide a fluid stream of images that circulate continuously in the background regardless of whether or not they are being watched by any particular person or individual.[58] Televisual images circulate constantly and

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[56] Ibid., 287-293

[57] Ibid., 293

[58] See, for example, Margret Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, The Mall, and Television," in *Logics of Television*: *Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990), 194; and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press 1991), 71-74

fluidly, much in the same way that the new economic emphasis on credit, arising around the same time, makes the process of monetary exchange more constant and fluid than ever before.

However, such constant circulation brings with it a new experience of commodity consumption and consumer culture. The French cultural critic and philosopher Jean Baudrillard has described this new mass of circulating commodities that we are now confronted with as the "system of objects" that connects all of these commodities into a system of meaning.[59] Baudrillard described a mass collection of commodity objects that all form a kind of system of signs, but one in which each sign has itself as its own referent, the paradigm of such a sign/object being the brand name.[60] All of these objects implicate one another in a signifying chain of associations. For example, McDonald's hamburgers imply french fries, which further associate with Coca-Cola through advertising, which leads itself to a whole host of other product associations.

Whereas film can only provide one chain of images at a time in the form of a single narrative, television is able to offer a vast array of such images that are then subject to the arbitrary will of the consumer in a new way. Programs are interrupted by commercials, each containing their own self-contained narratives, all while the spectator has the ability to flip between different "stacks" of discourse from one channel to the next.[61] In its own way, television provides a striking example of the kind of pleasure that Baudrillard associates with the feeling of freedom felt in the "random selection of objects." The enjoyment obtained from television is not simply from the immediacy of experiencing visual media in the comfort of one's home, but from the act of choosing itself, in the stupidity of repetition involved in flipping through channels before choosing one to focus on.

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59 Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 1998), 11

60 Ibid., 17

61 Margret Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Life," 198

It is also here that we find the psychoanalytic concept of drive at play in an interesting way. Baudrillard describes very clearly the way in which the ideological pleasure in the act of choosing, which he calls the "ideology of personal fulfillment," functions: "The goal is to allow the drives that were previously blocked by mental determinates (taboo, superego, guilt) to crystalize on objects, concrete determinates where the explosive force of desire is annulled and the ritual repressive function of social organization is materialized."[62] He goes on to add: "The ideology of personal fulfillment, the triumphant illogicality of the drives cleansed of guilt, is nothing more than a tremendous endeavor to materialize the superego. *It is a censor, first of all, that is 'personalized' in the object* [...]. Advertising does not liberate drives. Primarily, it mobilizes phantasms which block these drives."[63] Baudrillard is here describing a kind of cultural imperative used in advertising and other consumer messages that ask us to realize our "true desires" in the act of consumption in a kind of consumerist hedonism. When we realize such imperatives, however, Baudrillard argues that we are only materializing what we believe our own internal, culturally constructed censor, conscience, or superego, does not want us to have, not what we "really want."

While endorsing this analysis of the new consumer imperative of postmodern cultural logic, we should here add a Lacanian twist: The very act of "materializing" the superego is just what the drive is all about. The drive is never about realizing what we "really want," out of reach of the supergo (there is nothing that we "really want" outside of prohibitions; this is a misrecognition of the lost object of the drive and the object cause of desire, the *objet petit a*). The superego -- the obscene agent of the moral law -- is itself an agent of the drives. It has always-

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62 Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings,* 13

63 Emphasis in the original; Ibid., 18

already found what "really wants," which is the mindless repetition of the very act of frustration from which it derives its enjoyment.[64]

It is just the logic of this Lacanian correction of Baudrillard that we can see at work in *Rear Window*. In turn, we can also see how Hitchcock shows the instability of the formal system described by Mulvey by invoking a kind of scopophiliac gaze that is not tied down to the erotically charged image of the woman "to-be-looked-at." Although it will be up to Jeff to pick the correct "screen" or image to ensure the construction of a proper narrative, the camera has no such obligation, and it undermines Jeff at a crucial point in the film. The problem for Jeff is that the changing economic conditions, the shift from desire to drive, demand the enjoyment of all of these image commodities with no discernible way to pick a "proper" one that will ensure the functioning of social norms, particularly those regarding gender. If Laura Mulvey seems to say that finding (and dominating) the proper object, namely the woman, is what holds mainstream cinema ideology together, television complicates this model by simply giving us too many objects at once.

Angelo Restivo, in his essay entitled "The Silence of The Birds: Sound aesthetics and public space in later Hitchcock," posits this destabilization of the Hollywood model in similar terms, discussing the ways in which the "Hitchcockian object" (as it has been called in the new psychoanalytic literature) changes to accommodate the television medium: "The Hitchcockian object has now become the oversized prop, as fetishized and disproportionate as the close-ups of tooth-paste tubes and mouthwash bottles that would populate the commercials of the 1950's television."[65] Again, the focus in *Rear Window* seems to be not only on the disruptive enjoyment

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[64] My account is here informed by Slavoj Žižek's discussion in his essay, "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin is Writ Large," 219-223

[65] Angel Restivo, "The Silence of The Birds: Sound Aesthetics and Public Space in later Hitchcock," in *Hitchcock Past and Future,* eds. Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-Gonzalez (New York: Routledge 2004), 173

of images as commodity objects, but on the way in which these objects are presented as part of a larger “system of objects," and the problem this multiplicity presents for the classical Hollywood spectator. If the solution is to remain within the realm of American Capitalism, what is needed is not a lesser amount of objects, but more libidinal cathexis to accommodate their numbers.

It is perhaps here that we can locate Mulvey's simplification of film spectatorship as a form of image consumption: She assumes that the interests of patriarchy (the social conditions and traditions the film seeks to enforce) and capitalism (the economic conditions that allow the film to be made) will always align like the look of the spectator and the look of the male protagonist. *Rear Window* shows us that, even if the patriarchy is satisfied, there is a drive that it did not anticipate. The real break in Hitchcock comes with the inability of the formal properties embodied partly in the crane shots in *Rear Window,* to reconcile with the Classical Hollywood narrative. This break takes the form of a kind of gaze, the look of the camera, that is not tied down to any diegetic point of view, although it is closely related to the system of looks between the characters. This lingering look of the camera first presents us with the array of screens that Jeff looks at in the film, associating them with the commodity images that cover Jeff’s apartment. It then undermines his ability to construct a classical narrative by breaking the alignment of his look with the spectators and contradicting him. Jeff’s authority is challenged by Lisa and Thorwald, but this gaze is addressed to the spectators who, it seems, are made into accomplices in undermining the traditional authority of the male protagonist.

If we look closely at the film, we will find that many of the gender conflicts pointed to by Modleski and Manlove can be productively read against this historical background as well. Although Lisa’s function in the film is much more complex than that given to her by Mulvey as the woman “to-be-looked-at,” she still plays a key role in both undermining Jeff’s ability to

construct a narrative at the beginning of the film, and making it possible to realize this narrative at the end of the film. As Modleski rightly observed, Lisa's character reveals a highly ambiguous and conflicted representation of gender. Although Modleski does not historicize her observations in any great detail, we can see how the ambivalent representation of Lisa in *Rear Window* might be tied to historical circumstances.

As Modleski observes, Lisa's very first appearance puts her in a position of power and activity relative to Jeff's. This position of power disrupts Jeff's ability to control the narrative. We frequently see her standing over him, helping, and generally controlling the space of the apartment in a way that Jeff cannot. Modleski points specifically towards the first close-up shot of Lisa as she bends down to wake up Jeff. In this shot, we see her as a bright, powerful figure surrounded by the shadows of Jeff's apartment. According to Modleski, this image of Lisa recalls another shot at the opening of the film, in which the camera focuses on a series of photographic negatives of Lisa from the cover of *Life* magazine.[66] Modleski argues that such a contrast between the "dark" Lisa in the negatives, and the "light" Lisa on the cover of the magazine points a fundamental ambiguity in her ideological role in the film.[67]

Modleski, however, makes a further observation emphasizing the diminishing activity of the male spectator position that reveals a striking parallel with Spigel. The "screens" that Jeff watches throughout the film are in fact "microscreens" compared to the larger than life world of classical Hollywood.[68] Such miniature visual fields tend more towards "tableau than narrative," leaving Jeff to construct his own linear narrative out of them.[69] This reduction and multiplication of visual fields fits very well with Spigel's account of the anxieties surrounding the size of the

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66 Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much,* 76
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 94
69 Ibid., 79

male Hollywood male protagonist on the television screen. In addition to opening up a relatively passive spectator position for men, the physical size of the male hero on screen was drastically reduced, further undermining the male position of visual authority. No longer suitable for the medium of television, the masculine heroes were slowly replaced with "pragmatic family types" of early sitcoms and the "juvenile" appeal of television westerns. In this sense, Spigel argues that "television not only competes with the father at home, but also disturbs the central values of patriarchal culture by replacing old authorities with a new and degraded art form."[70]

Even more fascinating is the way that Modleski shows how these tensions and ambiguities over gender manifest themselves in terms of narrative resolution and its disruption. Modleski describes this dynamic in very clear terms: "Jeff's interpretation of the events he sees across the way - his piecing together the fragments of evidence he observes in the Thorwald apartment into a coherent narrative - is designed to reverse the situation in his own apartment, to invalidate the female and assure his own control and dominance."[71] Modleski further argues that Lisa's perspective on the events differs from Jeff's in significant ways, further challenging Jeff's position of authority. While Jeff struggles to control the visual field through constructing consistent narratives, Lisa is more concerned with identifying with and understanding the "characters" that develop in the various apartments as she watches.[72] According to Modleski, in order for Jeff's narrative to function as an assertion of patriarchal dominance, Lisa's perspective must not only be negated, it must also be brought in line with Jeff's own narrative. The woman must "acquiesce" to the male narrative for the sake of resolution.[73]

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70 Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 65
71 Ibid., 80
72 Ibid., 80-81
73 Ibid.

Indeed, Lisa is only attractive to Jeff *after* she goes along with his story, validating it with her "feminine intuitions." As the film's conclusion shows, however, such dominance on Jeff's part is incomplete to say the least. With the apparent acceptance of gender roles at the end of the film, it is unclear where the male figure stands with regards to his visual authority. Jeff is even more confined to his wheelchair (if that is possible) with two broken legs, and Lisa has begun to take up Jeff's "masculine" hobbies. It appears as if there is an irreconcilable rift between Jeff's and Lisa's perspectives that continually undermines Jeff's masculine authority.

Jeff's masculine authority thus seems to be tied to proper narrative resolution and functioning, and the threatening of this authority seems to be bound up with the changing ways of consuming and circulating images. However, there seem to be two sides to this threat on masculine authority. First, there is the problem that Lisa presents as a female spectator, which challenges traditional assumptions about gender and spectatorship. At the end of *Rear Window*, however, Lisa's and Jeff's looks do align in order to overcome another kind of disruption, the threat that comes from the depersonalized crane shots that also disrupt narrative flow. In *Rear Window*, what allows the couple to unite formally is total faith in the montage-image. For the resolution of the film, we must disavow the information that we have obtained through crane shots and assert the truth of Stewart's look. In different terms, the couple is brought together by renouncing the pleasure of static, non-narrative scopophilia. As the ambiguous ending of the film suggests, however, the separation between the look of the camera and Jeff's point of view, introduced by these long-takes, does not seem to be entirely reconcilable.

While Mulvey may certainly be criticized for her reductive reading of the role that Lisa plays in the film, the scopophiliac gaze still plays a crucial role in *Rear Window*. The character of Lisa is ambiguous to the extent that she plays a crucial role in the film by first disrupting the

authority of Jeff's look, but also in strengthening it in order to resolve the plot of the film. Importantly, there is one character in the film that does effectively function as the woman "to-be-looked-at": "Miss Torso," as she is called by the characters in the film, the dancer that Jeff watches across the courtyard practicing in varying degrees of dress. However, this character is only one among many images or screens that Jeff and eventually Lisa must choose from to resolve the narrative. The scopophiliac gaze is no longer tied to a specific object. The woman "to-be-looked-at" has lost the privileged position it once held as that which secured the alignment of looks that ensured smooth narrative function, and thus indicated proper practices of image consumption.

We can also see how Manlove's discussion of the Lacanian gaze in *Rear Window* is relevant here, although his remarks must be read against the historical background of the film as well. Thorwald's gaze does disrupt Jeff's ability to maintain an objective distance from the events across the courtyard, asking him quite literally: "what do you want from me?" However, this moment is perhaps much more ambiguous than Manlove's analysis shows. Implicit in the return of the gaze from the real is the deficiency of Jeff's desire, and his tendency to give way to the scopophliac drive. When Thorwald asks Jeff the crucial question -- "what do you want from me?"-- he is presenting Jeff with the problem of his desire, with his inability to construct a proper *objet petit a* and overcome the pleasure of the drive.[74]

This failure of desire, however, cannot be reduced to the mere pathology of a particular character. Rather, Jeff's character remains tied to concrete cultural worries in changing economic times. It is again significant that, at the crucial moment when Thorwald confronts Jeff with the problem of his desire, Jeff should reach for his camera to defend himself. Once again, our attention is brought back to Jeff's role as a photographer, a producer of images. The failure of

[74] Clifford Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative," 96

Jeff's desire, brought about by Thorwald's look as the eruption of the gaze, is thus tied back into these cultural worries and shifts that have been developing throughout the film. We can further see how the way in which the film undermines Jeff's masculine authority at the end of the film is linked to his role as an image producer. In this climactic scene, Jeff does not actually produce images. Rather, he uses the semblance of taking pictures as a way to defeat Thorwald. What is more, his role as an effective producer of images is not restored at the film's conclusion in which we see Lisa reading travel magazines, potentially poised to take on Jeff's role as the adventurous photographer.

However, the breakdown of Jeff's desire seems to be the jumping off point for a different perspective on cinema, one that is not tied to narrative resolution and the male perspective associated with it. As we have seen, Hitchcock presents us with a perspective, associated with these long-take crane shots, that shows a desire to get past the traditional perspective of Jeff and the traditional notions of gender and spectatorship that he represents. Jeff and the classical Hollywood couple are not fit for the wide array of images and commodities in this emerging economic trend. However, this new perspective, although more fitted to the shifting cultural and economic practices of postmodern or "late" capitalism, is fraught with problems of its own.

V.) *Psycho* and The Disembodied Gaze

The breakdown of desire and the eruption of the drive is a theme that has been the focus of many discussions of Hitchcock's later film, *Psycho*. We can, indeed, see many of the themes and worries that developed in *Rear Window* carried over into this film. However, few theorists have read these two films together. Mulvey left *Psycho* out of her discussion of the male gaze in

Hitchcock, instead choosing *Vertigo* and *Marnie* as her other examples. Those who wish to dispute Mulvey's claims have, in turn, tended taken up readings of these films. Against this trend, it is worth noting here that the article by Jean Douchet that Mulvey drew on for her analysis of *Rear Window*, "Hitch and His Public," was, in fact, an essay primarily concerned with *Psycho* and issues of voyeurism.[75] Indeed, although *Psycho* and *Rear Window* are rarely linked explicitly, much recent work on *Psycho* in the Lacanian tradition has focused on similar themes of the gaze, the drive, and the breakdown of intersubjectivity that concern theorists such as Manlove in *Rear Window*.

In this section, I will argue that it is not only these general Lacanian themes that *Psycho* shares with *Rear Window*, but that *Psycho* is also further concerned with many of the concrete economic and cultural concerns that I have been developing. Although many psychoanalytic theorists have written about the problems with identification and gender in the film, none have read these insights against the social raw material presented in the film. I argue that, although many Lacanian themes may be crucial to the film, they are closely tied to the worries about changing economic and cultural conditions in the post-war period that make up the raw material of the film. I further argue that Mulvey's notion of the scopophiliac gaze is crucial to understanding these cultural and economic worries that inform the film, which continues to use the long-take technique to undermine traditional notions of narrative and resolution. I will then look closely at Slavoj Žižek's reading of the film in order to argue that many of the more abstract Lacanian insights into the film can be productively historicized by reading them against the cultural and economic concerns of postmodern or "late" capitalism.

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[75] Jean Douchet, "Hitch and His Public," trans. Verena Andermatt Conley, in *A Hitchcock Reader* eds. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Wiley-Blackwell: 2009)

Psycho begins with the story of Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), a secretary for a real-estate agent in Phoenix, and her relationship with Sam Loomis, who is recently divorced. The film opens with both of them carrying on an affair in a hotel room, where Marion questions Sam about what they are doing if they are not planning on getting married. Because of a divorce and the recent death of his father, Sam claims he cannot afford to get married. Marion takes matters into her own hands by stealing $40,000 from a client at her office who insists on paying for a house for his newly-wed daughter in cash. Marion flees Phoenix towards the small town in California in which Sam lives. After two days of interstate driving, one night being spent in her car on the side of the freeway, Marion stops at the Bates Motel a few miles off the main road. It is here that she meets Norman Bates, the young proprietor of the hotel who, as we discover at the end of the film, is a psychotic murderer that killed his mother and kept the mummified corpse in the old, Gothic mansion that he was raised in. After having a change of heart during a dinner conversation with Norman, Marion decides to go back home and return the stolen money. Her plans are thwarted when Norman murders her, dressed as his mother, in the now infamous shower scene. The rest of the film follows Norman and several investigators, including Sam and Marion's younger sister, as they try to unravel the mystery of what happened to Marion.

As many theorists have noted, there is something perverse about the film right from the very beginning. In his analysis of the film, Douchet draws out the connection between *Rear Window* and *Psycho* in the following terms: "Thus in Psycho[:] Assume that Stewart has descended from the screen of *Rear Window* to take his place in the theater, that he has become each one of us, a spectator. His voyeur's appetite finds nourishment in the opening of *Psycho*."[76] Indeed, the film opens with a long-take crane shot that slowly zooms in through a window in a hotel room where we find Marion and Sam undressed in an intimately private scene. Not only

[76] Ibid., 20

are we "voyeurs" on this scene, as Douchet describes, but the scene itself seems to be a perversion of the traditional Hollywood couple. Marion is the one who pushes Sam to get married, in a seeming reversal of gender roles in the classical Hollywood narrative. Further, Sam is not only unenthusiastic about marriage, he is financially unable to bring the couple together, leaving the task of driving the relationship and the narrative to Marion. As Robin Wood observes: "Sam's insistence on waiting until he can give her financial security annoys us, because it is the sort of boring mundane consideration we expect the romantic hero of a film to sweep aside."[77] Whereas Jeff in *Rear Window* must struggle for control over the narrative and the visual field, in *Psycho* we find a diegetic world in which this classical Mulveyian notion of male dominance is greatly problematized.

Despite this problematized male perspective, the issues of identification and the gaze -- Lacanian or otherwise -- have been crucial part of debates about the film. The pioneering Hitchcock critic Robin Wood framed his discussion of the film around this issue: "Everything is done to encourage the spectator to identify with Marion."[78] Even when Marion steals $40,000 from one of her boss's clients, according to Wood, "we are very much drawn to Marion's readiness to accept things as they are for the sake of the relationship," to such a degree that we, as spectators, are drawn into "complicity in the theft" of the money.[79] Marion's abrupt death, coming only a third of the way into the film, is particularly traumatic from Wood's perspective because, "[a]t the time [she is murdered], so engrossed we are in Marion [...], that we can scarcely believe it is happening; when it is over, and she is dead, we are left shocked, with nothing to cling to, the apparent center of the film entirely dissolved."[80] Marion's death is all the

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77 Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, 143
78 Ibid., 143
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 146

more shocking for Wood because Norman, the psychopathic murderer, is the only character we have left to identify with.[81]

Psychoanalytic philosopher and theorist Slavoj Žižek has taken these insights further, arguing that identification with Norman is not only problematic for moral reasons, but because he represents a psychotic subject position in the Lacanian sense, the subject who has failed to fully enter the symbolic realm. In his essay, “In His Bold Gaze My Ruin is Writ Large," Žižek argues that Norman represents the “abyss beyond identification,” the “real” of the subject that resists inclusion in the symbolic order:

> Norman thus eludes identification in so far as he remains prisoner of the psychotic drive, in so far as access to desire is denied him: what he lacks is the effectuation of the ‘primordial metaphor’ by means of which the symbolic Other (the structural Law epitomized by the Name-of-the-Father) supplants *jouissance* -- the closed circuit of the drive [...]. Norman Bates is therefore a kind of anti-Oedipus *avant la lettre*: his desire is alienated in the maternal Other, at the mercy of its cruel caprice.[82]

Žižek here means to describe the way in which Norman represents the possibility -- inherent in all human subjectivity according to Lacan -- that the subject will fail to properly enter into language and separate from the mother figure, thus becoming a psychotic in the Lacanian sense. As a psychotic, Norman lacks the “paternal metaphor," or the father figure considered as a linguistic function that structures one’s symbolic reality by forcing separation with the mother,

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81 Ibid.

82 Slavoj Žižek, “In His Bold Gaze My Ruin is Writ Large," 228-229

and thus a separation with “being" and “*jouissance*." By forcing the audience to “identify,” in some sense, with Norman, Žižek argues that Hitchcock confronts us with the aspect of the human subject that exists beyond culture and language.

Žižek is particularly concerned with the way in which the film produces a jarring effect in the transition from Marion’s narrative arc in the first third of the film, to the murder mystery after she is killed. Žižek first notes that both Marion’s and Norman’s respective narrative arcs form more or less complete stories on their own:

> The first part (Marion’s story) could well stand alone: it is easy to perform a mental experiment and to imagine it as a thirty-minute TV story, a kind of morality play in which the heroine gives way to temptation and enters the path of damnation, only to be cured by the encounter with Norman, who confronts her with the abyss that awaits her at the end of the road -- in him, she sees a mirror-image of her own future; sobered, she decides to return to normal life [...] The film’s second part, Norman’s story, is also easy to imagine as a closed whole, a rather traditional unraveling of the mystery of a pathological serial killer.[83]

For Žižek, the problem of resolution only comes when the two stories are placed together in a whole. To use his term, the two arcs “denaturalize” themselves, making each other ambiguous because of their narrative asymmetry. The abrupt death of Marion, which takes place *after* the resolution of her seemingly closed “narrative,” occurs in the “intermediate time, when the decision, although already taken, is not yet realized, inscribed into the public, intersubjective

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[83] Ibid., 232

space -- in the time which the traditional narrative can easily leave out."[84] It is the transition from Marion's perspective to that of Norman that produces such a shock, according to Žižek. Further, Žižek locates the film and its jarring narrative transition into a larger historical hypothesis. According to Žižek, this transition "epitomizes the 'regression' from the register of *desire* to that of *drive.*"[85] As Žižek argues, "Marion stands under the sign of the Father -- that is, of the symbolic desire constituted by the Name-of-the-Father; Norman is entrapped into the mother's desire not yet submitted to the paternal Law [...]."[86]

However, Žižek's insights are left at a high level of abstraction. Although Žižek here expounds Lacanian concepts with great skill using *Psycho* as an example, many of the details of the film are obscured, and the periodizing hypothesis that he offers is problematic. Specifically, Žižek fails to note the ways in which Marion and her relationship with Sam is problematic from the very beginning. As both Wood and Douchet noted, the very first scene of the film associates the film's couple with a certain kind of perversity. The relationship between Marion and Sam is extramarital, and the audience is implicated in this perversion of the classical Hollywood couple through the way in which we are made into voyeurs on their affair. In this way, his remark that Marion "stands under the sign of the Father" is not entirely accurate. Marion's association with the traditional order of desire is rendered problematic from the very beginning of the film.[87] Žižek also fails to make explicit the ways in which *Psycho* is largely concerned with particularly concrete issues of American economic life in the early 1960's, and his misreading of Marion leads him to disregard an account of the complex social raw material represented in the film.

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84 Ibid., 233
85 Ibid., 228
86 Ibid.
87 I owe this insight to my thesis advisor, Angelo Restivo, in a conversation regarding a previous draft of this essay.

We should also note, however, that this perversion of the classical couple is also tied to specific economic themes. Throughout her arc, Marion is associated with various kinds of perverse economic transactions, of which the theft that sets her story into motion is but one. The $40,000 is itself associated with the perversion of the client whom she stole it from at the real-estate office in which she works. When we first see the money, the client, a man named Cassidy, is buying a house for his newly-wed daughter in cash. While he flaunts his money drunkenly, he makes several lewd remarks towards Marion before noting that he is "buying off unhappiness" for his daughter. As Wood notes, this establishes a theme of problematic parent-child relations that runs throughout the film: "Cassidy's relationship with his 'baby' takes us a step into the abnormal, because it is highly suspect: she will probably be better without the $40,000 house, which is clearly a symbol of her father's power over her."[88] At this point in the film, however, these abnormal family relations are tied to equally problematic economic transactions.

Even the cash itself, as a kind of symbol for these kinds of transactions, is somehow rendered obscene. When Cassidy begins to flaunt the money in front of Marion, we first see the shock registered on Marion's fellow secretary, Caroline's (Patricia Hitchcock) face before the film cuts back to the money in his hand. Lowery, Marion's boss, is extremely uncomfortable with the cash, asking Cassidy to put it in a safe. When Cassidy insists on paying in cash, Lowery quickly tells Marion to take it to a safe deposit box until it can be converted into a check as soon as the bank opens following the weekend.

We can also find this theme at work in the scene in which Marion stops to trade in her car at a used car lot to prevent herself from being tracked with the stolen money. The salesman is extremely suspicious of her when she pays quickly with a large sum of cash and leaves. However, the figure of the used car salesmen himself is a bit suspicious. Against Marion's

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[88] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films*, 144

desperate push for a speedy transaction, she is constantly accosted by the car salesman to spend more time browsing through the cars. “One thing people never ought to be when they're buying used cars, and that's in a hurry,” he tells her. After she quickly finds a car, he is clearly disappointed that she does not wish to “spin it around the block.” It seems as if the car lot itself is representative of a certain model of consumption that film portrays as problematic. The act of shopping hinders Marion from achieving her goal. We might say that the cars in the lot are themselves a kind of “system of objects" as Baudrillard described. As the car salesman repeatedly asks her to enjoy the act of choosing between the cars in the lot, we find Marion's frantic forward movement hindered specifically by a multiplicity of consumer objects.

The way in which the film brings together the perversion of traditional family values and corrupt economic transactions ties into a number of themes that we saw in the analysis of *Rear Window*. Although *Psycho* is not concerned specifically with images as commodities, the gender politics of the film are bound up with economic concerns. Marion’s stagnant and non-normative affair with Sam, and the problematic familial relations of the other characters become intertwined with with representations of economic stagnation. In this way, we can see how Žižek’s quick split of the film into a trajectory of desire to one of drive should be complicated. Although Marion and Sam are in some sense the traditional couple of the film, their relationship is plagued by a disruptive private enjoyment from the very beginning of the film. The cultural and economic setting of the film already renders such a couple problematic.

Indeed, the film’s setting and plot are closely tied to the emergence of postmodern or “late” capitalist social organization and cultural forms as its “raw material.” As Angelo Restivo has pointed out in a recent essay, the film’s plot importantly depends on the newly developed

interstate highway system.[89] Further, the city of Phoenix itself can be seen as part of the newly emerging "Sunbelt" made possible by the interstate system, combined with a number of economic policies characteristic of "flexible accumulation" such as the move away from production in unionized industrial cities of the north in favor of the un-unionized labor in the south.[90] In this sense, the Bates motel can be read as an "outmoded space," or in other words, "the kind of small business threatened by the increasing standardization of the new, national markets, fostered by both the limited-access highway (with artificially constructed rest stops rather than the real towns of Route 66) and by television."[91]

However, we should note in Žižek's defense that the character of Norman and the gaze associated with him remain crucial to the film, although they are much more historically grounded than Žižek's analysis shows. The character of Norman is at the center of many of the cultural and economic worries expressed in the film, and it is important to note that initially, he is associated with a kind of scopophiliac gaze. The film first makes this association towards the end of Marion's arc when Marion first arrives at the Bates Motel. Soon after Norman takes Marion to her room, the film shows us Norman peeping at her through a hole that he has drilled in his office wall (the film hints that Norman gave Marion the first room in the motel next to the office for just this reason).

In this way, Norman is associated right away with an extreme form of antisocial stagnation that opposes both normative sexual codes and economic functioning. This is further established by the objects that surround him in his office. As he tells Marion, Norman devotes his only free time to taxidermy, stuffing dead birds as a hobby. Although much has been written

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[89] Angelo Restivo, "Hitchcock and the Postmodern," in *A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, eds. Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague (Wiley-Blackwell Ltd., 2011), 556

[90] Ibid., 556-557

[91] Ibid., 557

about these birds as symbols or representatives of Marion, they have rarely been looked at as simple objects, stagnant and inert. They lie outside of any kind of cultural and economic commerce. Throughout the film, Norman is continuously associated with objects that lie outside symbolic exchange and circulation, both with his stuffed birds and the old toy objects discovered in his room by Marion's sister at the end of the film, which appear as outmoded as the gothic style house in which they lie. Importantly, Norman does not even notice the large sum of money that Marion has with her, simply discarding the stolen envelope without caring to examine it.

We can begin to see how many of these economic and cultural worries that inform the film coalesce, in some sense, around the figure of Norman, thus making the identification with him as a character, which many theorists and critics have been concerned with, so problematic. It is crucial that the long-take crane shot technique that I have identified appears at several important moments throughout the film. We first see the film open with a long-take crane shot specifically associated with a certain kind of voyeurism. This disembodied gaze takes us into the deeply private realm of Marion and Sam. From the beginning of the film, then, we as an audience are implicated in a certain kind of perversion.[92] More importantly, however, we get another shot of this kind immediately following Marion's death. We see the camera slowly move into the dark shower drain as Marion's blood pours down it, then float back out through her eye. The shot then continues examining the area until it finds it's new subject to follow, Norman Bates. Finally, at the end of the film, the floating camera finds Norman sitting a holding cell at the police station, where he acknowledges the gaze of the camera by looking directly into with a terrifying smile as a skull flashes across his face.

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[92] As Robin Wood points out, however, this opening "shot" is in fact composed of several dissolves and one "awkward cut." However, the emphasis of the scene remains the lingering search of the camera as it floats through space. See Ibid., 211-212

If we accept Žižek's reading of Norman as a traumatic representation of psychotic subjectivity, we must also recognize the social raw material in the film that makes the identification with such a character so shocking. The move in the film from the disembodied shots at the beginning, to Norman's recognition and identification with the shot at the end, makes the conclusion all the more chilling. Slowly, we as an audience begin to realize that this gaze that seems to directly address us without the characters in the film is attached, in some way, to the disruptive and traumatic gaze of Norman.

It is instructive that Žižek ties his discussion of Norman's gaze into Michel Chion's reading of the film as the story of a disembodied voice, what he calls the "*acousmatic*, -- a voice without a bearer, without an assignable place, floating in an intermediate space, and as such all-pervasive, the very image of the ultimate Threat."[93] For Žižek, the floating voice of Norman's mother is "embodied" precisely at the moment when Norman returns the gaze of the camera, thus making the scene all the more "uncanny:"

> [...] the effect of [the embodiment of the voice at the end of *Psycho*] is the exact opposite of 'gentrification' which renders possible our -- the viewer's -- identification: it is only now that we confront an 'absolute Otherness' which precludes any identification. The Voice has attached itself to the wrong body, so that what we get is a true zombie, a pure creature of the Superego, totally powerless in itself (Norman-mother 'wouldn't even hurt a fly'), yet for that very reason all the more uncanny.[94]

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93 Slavoj Žižek, "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin is Writ Large," 234

94 Ibid.

Žižek, however, leaves out the important sense in which this final scene also attaches a certain kind of gaze associated with these long-take crane shots to the figure of Norman. There is a sense in which *Psycho* is also the story of a certain disembodied gaze of the camera that is finally attached to the character of Norman as he looks into the camera at the end of the film.

Žižek also does not link together his observation about the discontinuity created by the intersection of Marion's story with Norman's. The two narrative arcs are, in fact, linked together by a long-take crane shot that comes after Marion's murder in the shower. This, I believe, is important for several reasons. First because we see the camera move into the shower drain and out through Marion's eye as she lays lifeless on the floor, which associates this gaze of the camera with a traumatic kind of look that extends, in some way, beyond death. Secondly, this traumatic gaze that bridges the two parts of the films and thus, as Žižek says, "denaturalizes" the film represents a particularly paradoxical space in the diegesis. The lingering look of the camera draws out the strange narrative gap between Marion's and Norman's arc. The shot itself exists as the very ambiguous substance that glues these two stories -- in some sense complete in their own right -- together at the very same time that it prevents us from understanding either narrative as properly resolved in a traditional sense.

However, this seemingly strange experience of a transitional space that appears to defy location in respect to the whole is closely tied to particularly postmodern spatial experience described by Margret Morse as "non-space." In her article "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction," Morse describes a "non-space" as a space which is not experienced as a stable location that fits into its surroundings as a "place."[95] It is a transitional space that is characterized by constant motion that displaces it from the spatial context of the environment it cuts through. In her essay, Morse describes the experiences of freeways, shopping malls, and television

[95] Margret Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction," 195

programing as examples of a certain derealization brought about by a space (virtual or actual) which is experienced in perpetual transition.[96] Further, such experiences are frequently isolated, or, in the case of shopping malls, governed by a logic of private consumer experiences rather than public social interaction.[97]

The famous long-take shot following the shower scene in *Psycho* seems to follow the phenomenological logic of such a "non-space" insofar as it seems to come from "nowhere," a place in the diegesis that is difficult to represent within the context of the whole. This long take serves to defamiliarize and dislocate us, the viewers, with reference to the larger narrative made by combining the two arcs. The hotel room similarly becomes a kind liminal space that materializes Marion's dilemma in terms of particularly postmodern experiences. As Žižek points out, Marion's murder takes place in moments between the time she decides to go home and return the money, and the time in which she is able to actualize her decision.[98] Žižek reads this disruption in the circuit between inner decision and social realization as a subversive gesture: "it reminds us that we live in a world in which an insurmountable abyss separates the 'inner decision' from its social actualization; that is, where -- in contrast to the prevailing American ideology -- it is decidedly *not* possible to accomplish everything, even if one really resolves to do so."[99]

However, the long-take that materializes this "abyss" should also be read alongside the kinds of postmodern cultural and economic experiences the film struggles with. It is significant that this crucial and alienating moment in the film comes after Marion's stressful journey on the newly built interstate highway system. As a representation of a kind of transitional "non-space,"

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96 Ibid., 196-198
97 Ibid.
98 Slavoj Žižek, "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin is Writ Large," 234
99 Ibid.

the shot also shows the danger inherent in the highly private nature of postmodern cultural and economic experiences. Coming at the end of a series of problematic social, cultural, and economic exchanges and interactions, the shot from Marion's eye reminds us of the danger inherent in the kind of private enjoyment that the characters indulge. Circuits of exchange, interaction, and communication are disrupted by the wondering look of the camera, a look that will later be tied to the psychotic figure of Norman, a character that further embodies the problematic nature of such private enjoyment.

In a sense, Norman's point of view comes to represent the kind of scopophiliac gaze that I have been developing taken to the extreme. Outside of language and culture, his look in the film becomes the kind of lethal gaze caught in the drive that Žižek describes. Importantly, Norman's gaze does not only disrupt the smooth functioning of the traditional narrative by fully embracing the pleasure of the gaze; by doing so, he also becomes a destructive force against culture and intersubjectivity itself, bringing together a number of worries about postmodern social and economic changes. As Žižek notes, he represents the "nocturnal reverse" of "contemporary American everyday life."[100] However, as we have seen, the notion of "contemporary American everyday life" is much more complex than Žižek accounts for, and Norman's disruptive gaze cannot be considered outside of the concrete historical worries present in the film.

VI.) Conclusion

As a concluding remark, I would like to draw out one more observation about the relation between Mulvey and Hitchcock in changing economic times. It is usually forgotten that at the

[100] Ibid., 227

time Mulvey wrote her essay in the early 1970s, the economic consequences of the shift to late capitalism, or Harvey calls it, "flexible accumulation," were only beginning to be felt through a series of economic crises.[101] The breakdown of what Harvey calls "Fordism-Keynesianism" as an economic and industrial model was becoming fully and explicitly apparent as Mulvey wrote.[102] Seen in this light, it seems less of a stretch to imagine both Mulvey and Hitchcock attempting to come to terms in their own ways with an outmoded ideology of gender, one that was slowly being replaced by a new, although no less oppressive or problematic, set of cultural experiences related to the consumption of moving images (among other things). The outcome of the exercise in reading theory proposed here implicitly seeks, then, to shed some light on our relationship to older theories of film without regarding them as merely invalid arguments or failed models to be discarded, forgotten, and surpassed. Mulvey's essay and other "canonical" works of film theory might be better understood as historical acts in their own right that complement and interact with the films they discuss.

Mulvey's theory of the male gaze has so influenced the way that Hollywood films are approached critically that it has become a part of the way that we, as critics, theorists, and film students experience certain films. It is my position that Mulvey, even if she did not have a complete grasp of theoretical psychoanalysis (which, due to the unavailability of many of the canonical texts in English even today, cannot be entirely her fault), did in fact articulate an important tension in certain Hollywood films once they are understood historically. However, it is my hope that, in historicizing the theory, I have also shown that many themes in Hitchcock that are discussed rather abstractly also have an important historical background that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

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[101] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 141-145

[102] Ibid.; See also Mulvey's introduction to the second edition of her collection of essays, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, ix-xxvii

Since the purpose of this essay has been to track the way in which certain features of an economic and cultural shift are manifested in certain films as well is in Mulvey's theory, it is important to point out the consequences of this shift are still being felt, and that a conclusion can only be tentative as we continue to work out the problems and ambiguities inherent in it. It is hoped, however, that I have shown the privileged position that psychoanalysis, with the proper historical sense, serves as a much needed way to articulate the unique cultural and ideological situation we find ourselves in today. While a re-reading of Mulvey alongside new developments in psychoanalysis may only provide historical understanding, I believe that such historicizing serves as an important step to better understanding the present state of both cinema spectatorship, and the larger culture of image consumption.

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