



PROJECT MUSE®

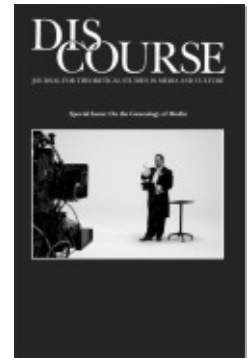
Zarathustran Bird Wars: Hitchcock's "Nietzsche" and the Teletechnic Loop

Tom Cohen

Discourse, Volume 31, Numbers 1 & 2, Winter & Spring 2009, pp. 140-160 (Article)

Published by Wayne State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/dis.2009.a379608>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/379608>

Zarathustran Bird Wars: Hitchcock's "Nietzsche" and the Teletechnic Loop

Tom Cohen

I love those who do not know how to live,
except by going under, for they are those
who cross over.

—Friedrich Nietzsche,
*Thus Spake Zarathustra*¹

Every kind of media of recording gets
its moment in Hitchcock's films, but is
always subordinated to the designs of cinema. There is the auction house and the monumental sculpture in *North By Northwest*. There are acrobats, an LP record and concerts in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. There's fireworks and fancy dress in *To Catch a Thief*.

—McKenzie Wark,
"Vectoral Cinema"²

As Nietzsche put it, man is "a rope over an abyss," stretched between animal and "Übermensch." Brandon in Patrick Hamilton's theatrical version of *Rope* cites Nietzsche as the sponsor of adventure and danger. His name is not mentioned

Discourse, 31.1 & 2, Winter & Spring 2009, pp. 140–160.

Copyright © 2010 Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan 48201-1309. ISSN 1522-5321.

in Hitchcock's film. . . . Taut, tensed, that rope can be extended into a trapeze. The character played by Grant in *To Catch a Thief* is a veteran of the high wire.

—Peter Conrad,
*The Hitchcock Murders*³

Reading “Nietzsche” by way of media and the tele-archival era today raises issues about the political spell of the present, the mediocratic trance of a coming post-democratic era for which, perhaps, the “‘global’ war on terror”—without temporal or geographic horizon, a double chase of a specter that accelerates the self-canceling of an archival program (economic, ecological, and profoundly biopolitical). It might choose to pass by way of Walter Benjamin’s remarks on the advent of cinema. By implying that the *phenomenal* world would be generated from mnemonic programs, Benjamin identifies in the cinematic event something like a model for historical intervention that he will finally name, by his practiced inversion of terms, “materialistic historiography.” This early entanglement between Benjamin’s revision of *The Birth of Tragedy*⁴ in his *Trauerspiel* and “cinema” recalls that the “birth” of theater and discourse out of what is called the “spirit or ghost [*Geist*] of music” in Nietzsche’s tract mimes something like a genealogy of media, the emergence of semiosis programming sense and the sensorium. While I will return to this later, *The Birth* performs an inversion of classical *aesthetics* that has long been avoided yet that cinema covertly exemplifies. Rather than “represent” or index in the mimetological sense, as though in a neutered site of “play” or entertainment, the cinematic effect generates the visible, installs mnemonic programs that define perception, phemonenualizes mass political consciousness, and shapes *aesthetic ideology* tout court.

It is to break this trance at its inception that Benjamin insisted that cinema arrives with a destruction of aura. Aura is often mistaken for a figure of lost presence, the remote original, yet the Baudelaire essay⁵ is much more explicit, and voids any myth of lost presence. It is, he says, personification, which is also to say, mimesis, identification, *anthropomorphism* more generally. Film Studies, which frequently cites this Benjaminian *mot* as inspiration, has unwittingly labored relentlessly to restore “aura” before this event. The French “Hitchcock” was so decisive to marking and beginning a process of theorizing Hitchcock. French aestheticians saw

something first—another gift of a certain sort of translation effect. But they did so, the *Cahiers du Cinema* critics, very much from within the tradition, still, that Hitchcock was assaulting; that is, under the figure of the auteur. The “Hitchcock” we are examining today, an effect of signature systems, empties the auteur model with its theanthropomorphic premises (Hitchcock as master, as “god,” and so on). The *Hitchcock* I propose is a still operative event within the histories of teletechnic and the unclosed horizon of “global” media, with all its affiliations to technogenocides of the twentieth century and eviscerations of the earth beyond. This points elsewhere today: to the spell of ocularcentrism in today’s historical culture.

Nietzsche’s mock-dialectical narrative moving from dithyramb into representation, from lyric into dialogue and later eristics, and so on, presents history as the morphing effect of linguistic forms or mediatrixes. But why is this referenced to the spirit or, better still, *ghost* of “music”—what, according to *The Birth*, seems prefigural, originary, which is to say, at first glance, “Dionysian”? Or again, why in Benjamin does “cinema” inherit an allo-historiographical praxis elsewhere in his work called allegory, or translation, or materialistic historiography, that not only generates the perceptual fields out of inscriptions but claims the power to negate, accelerate, or anaesthetize archival programs out of which virtual futures (and pasts) would be reselected, disinscribed, *transvalued*?

Cinema seems heir to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* whose operative version was Nietzsche’s “MacGuffin” or pretext for writing *The Birth*, particularly if we replace *Kunst* with *Technik*. It is able to incorporate and absorb all teletechnics—what in Hitchcock is endlessly marked through machines of telegraphy, typography, telephony, mnemonic recording of all sorts, vehicles of transport. Uncle Charlie, in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), is explicitly linked to telegraphy and telephones (and, finally, telepathy). The “birds” rest before their attacks on telegraph wires and geometric jungle gyms. And Hitchcock’s first cameo in *The Lodger* (1927) occurs as news editor before giant printing press wheels and teletype machines—figures of imprinting and media that extend to wireless broadcasting into the heads of morphing faces and print carrying trucks with eyes. In *Secret Agent* (1936), what is called a “spies’ post office” appears in which the relay of transcribed espionage code is hidden in and disseminated as “chocolate” (entertainment bonbons, excrement)—behind the gigantist geared and surreal *factory*. From the spies’ post office, signature effects and subversive networks fan out across the oeuvre and archival histories that “Hitchcock”—as the signature, then, for the advent of “cinema”—recapitulates and interacts with.

Cinema already marks with its advent the “global” or postglobal orders that it, from the first, cannot stop itself from assuming and proliferating—as through its linkage to the advance of technowear, onry and genocide, hypercapital, contemporary mediocracy, accelerations of terrestrial evisceration, and so on. Hitchcock likened his practice in the early espionage thrillers to time bombs and, later, nuclear blasts—sabotagings that dematerialize the “world” into atomized marks and spectral orders. Peter Conrad observes in *The Hitchcock Murders*, “Hitchcock likened his films to buzz bombs—clever engines of mass destruction, invented by the century in which men made war against humanity.”⁶ In *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), Hitchcock will even indicate this as a futuristic toy ray gun in the hands of a child. In doing so, he associates this epistemopolitical recasting with figures of a sort of Nietzschean “transvaluation” or crossing that include *aporetic* borders, ports, and bridges over which transport is often arrested or does not arrive.

I

To Catch a Thief (1955) ends with a mock-apocalyptic gala scene in the hills near Nice. It is peopled with *formal* costumes and many of the citational props that roam Hitchcock’s other sets. Yet it seems to fall through and precede modernity itself, going back to an eighteenth-century affair—a courtly, Enlightenment charade. It mimes a prerevolutionary and precinematic moment sliding toward a great beheading—as though historical trappings of identity, and any refuge in past sartorial icons, were a period piece of a film set harassed by prehistorical agencies. One such agent is the asolar animeme, the black cat prowling at night, simulacrum of a thieving trace or mobilized eclipse: redoubled as the “copycat” jewel thief, the latter’s pursuit by the original “cat” (Cary Grant) provides the film’s voiding temporal backloop, a double chase or MacGuffin that instantly precedes itself—like a sudden slide into a premodern epoch costume gala whose floodlights mime a production set. It is not accidental that at this Riviera event the *Mediterranean*—at once ground or *middle* earth and trope of media—is referenced, by Grace Kelly, as without locus or gravity (“It used to be” this way, she quips when asked). The faux transparent glass or diamond, the *bijou* that is both stolen and referenced to a movie house from which saboteurs operate (in *Sabotage* [1936]) is at once explosive and capable of voiding semiotic and mnemonic orders, referential histories, gravity, or “earth” itself. Cinema arrives as avenging, in

advance, on behalf of prehistorical logics—like the teletechnic *birds* that would drive out humans from any pretended interior of the house or family.

The fact that *To Catch a Thief* is set in Nice, or Nizza, where Nietzsche composed a part of *Zarathustra*, has a certain resonance—since the fourth part of that work also features something of an antiapocalyptic gathering for Zarathustra's stragglers and creatures.⁷ Hitchcock would know this and be aware of the Nietzschean parallel of eternal recurrence to his own MacGuffins associated with rings and returns, with cinematic spools and zero or ocular figures of time's backlooped ingestion of itself. Could Hitchcock be read as a sort of cinematic "going under"—or over? Would it be possible to call Hitchcock "Nietzschean"—that is, a Hitchcock identified through his marking system with the cinematic as a teletechnic logic—or would there be any point to a "Hitchcockian" Nietzsche in turn? Does such a question relate to that of a biopolitics of the tele-image today, which must seek its examples in the cinematic archive—which has, virtually and in fact, reprogrammed global memory in imperial fashion? Is such a convergence coincidental or does it indicate where Hitchcock may function within—and against—the ineluctable advance of a teletechnic empire's sensorial programming, a cinematic counterstroke to the latter's production of the "last man" of touristic teleconsumption?⁸

The interest of this question, today, would not be in the more pop-iconic senses, such as those that link the name "Nietzsche" to the rhetoric of the *Übermensch* in the one place in Hitchcock it occurs, in *Rope* (1948)—unless that would be as the citational dismissal of that rhetoric, which Brandon unauthoritatively performs in the Manhattan penthouse. Peter Conrad, in the earlier epigraph, incorrectly notes that Nietzsche's "name is not mentioned in Hitchcock's film," when it is, explicitly, if in obverse association with Hitler: it is the only overt mention of the name in Hitchcock, and it is bracketed in the most dubious of ways, as uttered by Mr. Kentley, the dead boy's father. It enters the rarefied space of the screenplay only through the most suppressed and mediatized of relays, in short, and though disturbing the entire surface (and marking *Rope* in entirely saturated and *cycloramic* ways as Nietzschean), it is allowed to hang, in suspense, only to be caught in a further occlusion.

Everything, in *Rope*, is caught first of all in citational (or cinematic) loops: words—such as Rupert's flaccid and self-protective routine on the superman's right to dispose of lessers—circulate with borrowed authorship, literalize, precipitate into events, and are disowned by their supposed authors. Thus Brandon contests

the citation of Nietzsche as a cheap purveyor of superman theories even as he enacts precisely that—again, dismissing Hitler as a vulgar literalization while, in fact, reabsorbing from a Manhattan penthouse the fascist *rhetoric* of the recently conquered (and incorporated) fascist *other*. Thus the rope itself encircles a stack of books said to be *first editions*—that is, original *copies*. This last occurs in the work by way of the academy, the self-disowning discourse and *playful* aestheticism of Brandon's humanist professor, Rupert, or more literally the screen icon James Stewart, who would, one supposes, be the very antithesis of this—as though Hitchcock espies in the screen construction of the all-American hero, whatever his plaintive moralism, a variant on the hero worship and mimetic identification that suffused Nazi propaganda.

Hitchcock leaves negative traces of this contact with Nietzsche—as in the name Alicia Huberman in *Notorious* (1946), drawing again on pop associations—but the performative consequences of this interface would be sought elsewhere. The backloop of telemnemonic media, which resides in the Francis Poulenc score (“Perpetual Movement”) that Phillip pecks at intermittently on the piano, evacuates citational repetition as literalization of clichés. Yet it presents the tool or means of a test: the so-called *Übermensch* emerges from its circularity, altered or otherwise, disinscribed of all “natural” tropes or interiority. In a way, “he” will stumble out of Hitchcock's reels as a hyperperformative, an enigma, postgendered, a citational expletive, like Bruno Anthony emerging from the click of strange feet or shoes on a cinematic train.

In question is where or whether the totalization of the cinematic in Hitchcock's hands—the atomization of de-auratic traces that links Benjamin's work on allegory in the *Trauerspiel* to *The Birth of Tragedy*, say, whose title its own mimes—options a rupture and inversion of a received model of aesthetics as such. This, while the imperial order of image programming issued from Hollywood wields a mimetic spell for the state that drifts toward a production of the “last man”—the teletechnic tourist of the postglobal era to come, long arrived. This elaboration Hitchcock would both oversee as perhaps the earth's first master of global media and revoke. In the earliest British thrillers the usurping cinematic anarchists variously assaulting the home state called “England” are without known political agendas (except for a totalizing intervention). They represent a war already under way, that over a totalization of the teletechnic empire in which they (like Hitchcock) also participate as specters of cinematic logic. Later, as in *To Catch a Thief* or in *Torn Curtain* (1966), this order of the cinematic, tied to Hitchcock's irreducible marking systems, may

be aligned with what is called the “Underground” or “Resistance.” It resists, or avenges, in the name of a wholly other—which can appear as wraith, serial murderer, attacking birds, the teletechnic, as nonanthropomorphic and nonauratic language.

A certain accord lies, again, between the eternal recurrence and the banal facticity of the cinematic spool. Certainly, it is not just one or another MacGuffin that is, in Hitchcock’s system, a “nothing,” as if such could be opposed to a something or someone. The MacGuffin as a performative marker is precisely like the zero in its modern functions—a placeholder over a nonsite from which numeration can seem to begin, from which the $N + 1 . . .$ can appear to start a narrative or serial chain. The “eternal recurrence” would have been Zarathustra’s MacGuffin. It is purely cinematic, and Hitchcock inherited in the machines of the cinematic process—for which memory is prosthetic and exterior—the banal literalization of the eternal recurrence as a questioning of the structure of mnemonic repetition, the priority of inscriptive programs (celluloid) over phenomenality (projection). The back-spinning wheel that opens the first frames of *Blackmail* (1929) then materializes beneath a detective van on a seemingly perpetual chase that resembles a mobile camera studio, replete with telegraphic machinery bearing facelike knobs. The “flying van” tells us this is a teletechnic as well as political problematic. This new van represents not so much a modernist chapter within an archival history as an acceleration and absorption of all archival variants within a relatively short official “history” of human script and its monumental history, the several thousand years represented in the British Museum’s assemblage of forms—assembled by and for the soon-extinct empire. When the chased blackmailer Trac(e)y runs through the museum’s archive and precedes this history, indicating hieroglyphs themselves as cinematic effects, it is to fall through the headlike dome into the universal reading room—circles within circles of readers.

Hitchcock’s underlying “war” is never that of the historical occasion that the film wraps itself about or allegorically uses as a set. Germans are not named as such (*Foreign Correspondent* [1940]) nor later are the Russians (*North by Northwest* [1959]), whereas American industrialists can appear as fascist (*Saboteur* [1942]), or the French as racist colonialists (*Aventure Malgache* [1944]). One might say, rather, that the broader war against Enlightenment epistemotemplates that is under way involves, from the center of the cinematic or its canons, the family plot of an always already post-global horizon. It involves, as do Nietzsche’s hammerlike epigrams, coming wars of reinscription. And this war connected with the

cinematic at its advent is never that of the colonial “world” wars of the twentieth century (hot or cold, as Hitchcock also marks them in mediatized fashion): these appear fratricidal conflicts between extreme variants of Enlightenment templates or epistemologies, already ghosted. The liberal democracies and “America” will absorb the fascist other and proceed, in ways, to its hypercapitalized refinement in a multitiered postdemocratic mediocracy of disengaged consumers in which selective eugenics is the option of an endowed hyperclass. Rather, the underlying war surfaces as what *The Birds* (1963) terms the “bird war” of prehistorical technemes and animemes against the anthropomorphized or auratic community of earth-eviscerating humans blind to their own mnemonic programming, to their interiorizing metaphors of home and nature, to their status as teletechnic ghosts: the bird war strikes out against humanity on the side of black suns and wing beats, mediatized and associated with the hum of engines. And they go straight for the eyes—as though to blind the ocularcentric model.

II

This Nietzschean connection releases a series of questions pertaining to the circle, the zero, and the spectrality of what can be called the *one*. It is not just that Hitchcock’s persistent treatment of numeration accords with the fiction of a zero for which the “one,” too, is a secondary trope of sorts. That is clear, say, in the proliferating appearance of triangles and pyramids (or the number thirteen) from *The Lodger* onward—as if that itself initiated an open series incapable of stabilization. In these works, the number *three* appears as a so-called first number, much as for any technician of the visual triads represent the first visual plane (the triangle), or for discourse theorists the first “social” ensemble. One is what any speaker or so-called subject pretends to be. Yet it is a spectral retroprojection of and from the third, apparently, a complex initialed in the *thirteen* that pervades Hitchcock’s work and marks his, in this sense self-canceling, birth date (13 August). But the labyrinth of numeration represents an interesting dossier for cinema, which departs from spinning wheels and null points. The circularity of the spool is but one tangible enigma, since the unspooling (forward) of a stored mnemonic band, again and again, presents itself as a Phoenix-like beginning in the ashes of its own recurrence—and raises the question of where, or how, the affirmation of the “eternal recurrence,” of the MacGuffin, paradoxically ruptures a

representational program by returning to a site anterior to itself: the nonsite, technically and in fact, of inscriptions.

It is not incidental, then, that Hitchcock's work is littered with what might be called *O-men*, who inherit this transition, who are emptied as ciphers and couriers of something to come—something they know nothing of and that does not, in any case, arrive intact. It is amusing to reflect that these can be James Stewart or Cary Grant, and that the individual actors' entire Hollywood iconography is cited and dragged into the semiotic maelstrom of inversions with them, but that is certainly the case: when Scottie goes under, so to speak, in *Vertigo*, an entire template of mimetic and gender or identity assurances linked to Stewart and America undergoes irreversible disarticulation. Uncle Charlie's smoke rings—or the names Otis and Oakley; Hannay called a "nobody"; Barry Kane to whom Tobin, in a library, points out a book titled *Death of a Nobody* (imbricating him, cinematically, with the end of the biblio-era); Johnny-O Fergusson, Dick-O Blaney, Roger O. Thornhill—and so on, inclusive, otherwise, of specters, revenants, cinamnesiacs inheriting the memories of others. All are hostage to voided marking systems, in which the circuit as MacGuffin is installed. This is so rigorously marked by a seeming chorus of graphics, letters, and nominal tags that the trope of circuitry itself is critiqued as a mnemonic construct. If anything, the supposed nothing or nobody named "George Kaplan" in *North by Northwest* signifies too much by comparison—anticipating, in his nonexistence, not only the replicant subject but the giant faces of Mount Rushmore whose personification appears to fall away before a de-anthropomorphized rockscape—heads (capos) of the earth (geo[rge]).

The recurrent series of proper names that dislocate nominal identity across Hitchcock characters, for whom lists of names or extra nicknames pop up, seems a general condition of the cipher—much as, in *The Lodger*, the morphing of faces on those listening, supposedly, to the wireless inscribe the singular viewer or consumer of the screen work in the event of the showing as interchangeably individuated beings over time who are both mnemonically preinhabited and produced as effects. The recurrence to a certain zero effect has nothing to do with a "character" or psychology. The facticity of the screen wraith as shadow play and mnemonic specter is assigned the structural space of the human in whose "eye" or head the entire band will be run or rerun. The facticity of the cinematic is marked as coextensive with the citational program of cognition or consciousness or identity, to use available terms. What is called life or the living is not structurally other than

a form of animation—like that produced from artfully cut effects of light and sound play, zoôtropes. Inserted into the memory disks of mass culture, the cinematic is totalized as the aesthetic organization of spectral experience, perception in the teletechnic empire of global logics to come.

The explosion or “shock” that would be cinema’s advent is not only registered with the annulment of tropes of origin—whether called “nature,” the “eye,” “light,” or “mother.” It accords with an inversion of whatever had been rendered as the aesthetic within broader traditions of philosophic hegemony. The place where this tradition is performatively inverted is *The Birth of Tragedy*.

III

Raymond Durgnat observed of *Psycho* (1960) that “it has a Dionysiac force and ruthlessness; one might call it a Greek tragicomedy.”⁹ Hitchcock already had called it a comedy, which renders the second part of this note regressive, but the adjective “Dionysiac” is arresting.

Friedrich Kittler deems Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) an *ur*cinematic work: “Nietzsche . . . produced a film theory before its time under the pretext of describing both *The Birth of Tragedy* in ancient Greece and its German rebirth in the mass spectacles of Wagner.”¹⁰ One must recall the ocularist powers accorded to Apollo in the work, or the manner in which what is narrated is nothing less than a prioritization of media to the mapping and generation of historical programs, events, “experience,” form. The seeming birth of theatrical space out of the specter or *Geist* of what is called music returns to an alternation, an arrhythmic differencing that preinhabits the star power of Dionysian exorbitance, as the latter gets to portray itself. What is the ghost of music in advance of itself—reminiscent in graphic display of the Hitchcockian parallel bar sequence? The succession of linguistic forms passes through dithyramb, dialectic, eristics, descriptive language, and Euripidean ratiocination. Presented as the unfolding of an allomorphic or teletechnic archive, it yields successive modes of language power delivering up, finally, Socrates and ratiocinative prose. The MacGuffinesque agon of the two gods gives cover to this narrative. Yet the definition of “music,” or its spirit, appears in question. On the one hand, it is the domain of the mock-originary Dionysus who has the upper hand to Apollo’s countermastery of the plastic arts—and of the eye. Apollo gives it his best shot, but he is all along affiliated

with belatedness, the cooling down of volcanic and preoriginary excess, the domain of reflective form. There is no contesting Dionysius's charisma. His association with predescriptive and seemingly primordial *Musik* is the clincher.

In question are the cinematic analogy and the definition of aesthesis. The term *aesthetics* recurs to the Greek *aisthanumai*, "perception." The narration which Nietzsche proposes that moves us from dithyramb to Socrates implies a linguistic model for what Benjamin dubs a sensorium's programming. It is not accidental that the place it ends, with the Platonic invention, is that in which the *eidein* installs or affirms a metaphoric coincidence of knowing and seeing: this prehistory concludes implicitly with the program of ocularcentrism, the production of the eye. Does a certain Apollo, the derivative god, bide time and triumph discretely while letting Dionysus seize the thespian spotlight?

If it is possible to call *The Birth of Tragedy* a cinematic theory, as Kittler does, then it begins with the projection of the visible out of Dionysian primordality: like Wagnerian opera, a sequestered stage materializes the newly concealed powers of the orchestra below. Here the aesthetic model is inverted, since instead of representing life it names where "life" would be phenomenalized, virtually, out of mnemonic effects. It begins a theory of teletechnics that leads to the most famous line of the monograph: "[I]t is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified." The linkage is startling if it means something like beauty is the only justification for existence. It is more startling, still, if something like justice is bound to the production of perceptual phenomena (*aesthesis*). The world is determined, for humans, out of its archivization, for which there is no simple or pure "perception." The rule of mnemonic programming and inscription is cinematic, but—since the detour through signifying agents can imply their spectral division and subdivision as citational and material marks—cinema's atomizing power can contest, interrupt, disinscribe. It is here that proliferating telenetworks and temporal redecisions are accessed, as at the faux séance that Hitchcock uses, in *Family Plot* (1976), as a figure of the cinematic spell: it is a family plot within the recurrent "house" of Hitchcock's works that, like Derrida's reading of "the autoimmunity process" apropos America's reaction to "9/11," accelerates its own self-cancellation in trying to restore the homeland, the family, the line of heirs through a spectral double chase (today, the "global" war on something called terror). What is called the visual, as on a screen or as Apollo, is a forgetful product of inscriptive forces before any pretext of light or the eye is

introduced. *Aura*, as the term occurs in Benjamin, is banished with the advent of cinema.

Kittler appropriates Nietzsche's lines of thought in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* to argue for a "transvaluation" implied by the cinematic machinery: "If 'the world' can be 'justified to all eternity . . . only as an aesthetic product,' it is simply because 'luminous images' obliterate a remorseless blackness."¹¹ While this characterization privileges the luminous over the "remorseless" black—as though retaining the auratic premise—it is modified. The Dionysian is for Kittler "the flow of data," the "elementary fact of Nietzsche's aesthetic." It makes Dionysus the "master of media."¹² Dionysus as the master of media controls the projector booth, like Hitchcock's first cameo in the editor's booth before the giant printing presses, while Apollo is permitted association with form and sight—the product of archival manipulation. Appearing to puppet the formalist Apollo, Dionysus wields prefigural powers and the primal pain of dismemberment. Music remains safely prefigural, virtually divine, the orchestra concealed from site.

But it goes downhill from here, particularly once the two godlings start to mingle, as the mock-dialectic software erodes with its own duplications.

Locating this moment requires a certain slow-motion replay. Dionysus at first accords with the cinematic cut and hence the Hitchcockian signature effect or "mother." In Hitchcock, precisely such an (a)maternal and (a)material site seems formalized in the haunting weaves of what has been called "Hitchcock's signature," the visual and aurally syncopated bar series, the slashes generating and suspending the effects of narrative, or mimesis, or the visible. Irreducible as markings precedent to any possible perception, this is visualized by William Rothman as "/ / / /."¹³ It can morph into virtual faces, letters, graphics. All visibility, all networking, begins and ends with this cutting. Yet how does Hitchcock's "formalism," his obsession with the techne, translate into the "Dionysian" power that the maverick Durnat found himself compelled to note? Was not Dionysus supposed to manifest the most originary of violences, before representation? Where is the "aesthetic phenomenon" associated with music—or with rhythm, alternation, the keeping or production of time? *The Birth of Tragedy* stammers on this point in a hiccuplike reversal that is invariably covered over. In an anomalous passage, Apollo changes places with Dionysus, or seems to, and then is put back as if nothing happened. But this occurs at the most loaded instant—at the origin of "music" itself. Apollo is briefly recalled as the official originator of music:

If music, as it would seem, had been known previously as an Apollonian art, it was so, strictly speaking, only as the wave beat of rhythm, whose formative power was developed for the representation of Apollonian states. The music of Apollo was Doric architectonics in tones, but in tones that were merely suggestive, such as those of the cithara. The very element which forms the essence of Dionysian music (and hence music in general) is carefully excluded as un-Apollonian—namely, the emotional power of the tone, the uniform flow of the melody, and the utterly incomparable world of harmony.¹⁴

This is covered up, but it is too late, and one suspects a certain “Nietzsche” was altogether in on the flashing expedition. Instead of the exorbitant Dionysus, seducer and mystifier, the formalist and bizarrely minimalist Apollo, only pretending to have been mimetologically inclined, is irrevocably placed as if at the *ur-site* or *Ursprung* of all semiosis—like the waltzing legs that descend as though from another memory or time into *Shadow of a Doubt* at unlikely junctures. A simulacrum of music occurs as if before or at its origin still, a copy without original. Apollonian music here excludes the Dionysian, is called merely rhythmic, so that it must be excluded itself even as music. A ghost or *Geist* of *Musik*, it gives nonbiological “birth” out of its own afterlife and in advance of *Musik*’s true emergence. Music seemed a premimetic order to which “language” was added (“language, in its attempt to imitate it, can only be in superficial contact with music”¹⁵), yet here whatever is called *Musik* is born out of the alternacy of sheer form or semiosis, coming as if out of dithyramb as linguistic differencing in its barest or most minimal form: rhythm. Rather than present a plenitude, Dionysus represents a preoriginary repetition (“himself pure primordial pain and its primordial re-echoing”¹⁶). Apollo momentarily precedes Dionysus, determining the latter as already an aftereffect, as his front. By letting Dionysus win and become a poster god for the misreading of the work, Apollo is canny. He, Apollo, becomes invisible thereafter, an increasingly unharassed formalist, like an unserious filmmaker. He preserves opportunity and power. He of the long shot watches over the elegant villains in Hitchcock’s tele-archival thrillers.

Hitchcock’s bar-series scissors: it cuts up the eye in advance.¹⁷ It invents the generation of spatial and temporal difference, hence the possibility of a series, serial murder, allegorical remarkings, perceptibility, or reading. Apollo precedes the pretense of Schopenhauerian will or music. Apollonian dismemberment connects the bar series and its affiliates (aural concatenation, knocking) to a Dionysian pretext: yet it is not only counterrhythmic but arrhythmic, a MacGuffin at the origin. The bars represent and perform the

permanent suspension of mimetic claims and surfaces, the Apollonian dreamscape.¹⁸ The trance of the cinematic, artificing a site of disinscription and reinscription, is like that of the dithyramb: a jubilating public identifying with that which ruptures primordial difference, Dionysus, quiescently reassembled before the hypnopotics of a dark and seated enclave. It is anesthetized, spellbound.

One could propose a Hitchcockian reading of the final manner in which Nietzsche marks his own project, at the end of his career, as though Apollo has been subsumed totally and is no longer the other: Dionysus versus the Crucified. Not the pagan versus the Christian, but one god premised on absolute self-difference and another instituting chiasmus as a hermeneutic regime. Chiasmus, like the giant “X” that turns up across Hitchcock at key, if surprising, moments, strives machinally to invert signifying poles and referents in advance.¹⁹ By the Crucified we can hear an installed chiasmics of truths and hermeneutic polarities, a camera obscura image inverted before they are codified as reference or symbolic law (hot and cold, male and female, black and white). To oppose Dionysus to the Crucified, to a hermeneutic regime of semantic inversions, is to oppose the Dionysian or cinematic bar series of irreducible and de-auratic media to a gigantic Greek chi—or X, a giant “X” that appears across Hitchcock’s oeuvre: Carole Lombard’s skis in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941), the back of the servant Germaine’s apron in *To Catch a Thief*, the “crisscross” or monogram on the lighter in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), the flag before the targeted prime minister in the second *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956).

IV

Hitchcock implants a blackout at the retrodawn of the video age, “globalization,” telemarketing, hypertechnics.²⁰ Moment is at issue, the photographic *Augenblick* about which Zarathustra mock-cinematically disports:

Must not whatever can walk have walked on this lane before? Must not whatever can happen have happened, have been done, have passed before? . . . For whatever can walk—in this long lane out there too, it must walk once more. . . . And this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway . . . must not all of us have been there before? And return and walk in that other lane, out there, before us, in this long dreadful lane—must we not eternally return?²¹

The spool runs again erasing, but for a trace, where it has been—like the two hands clasping at the close of *The 39 Steps* (1935), one of which next appears, in the opening frame, buying a ticket at the music hall. In *Zarathustra* that spectral other on behalf of which the overman (or what Werner Hamacher has called, stressing his sheer or media-induced exteriority, the “out-man”) would go under in a general disarticulation of the received template of man is called earth, site precedent to face or voice yet scored by the bar-series effects. The cinematic spectralizes earth. Hitchcock’s O-men—on occasion or throughout postgendered—appear one cipher for a voiding of epistemopolitical bands.

Cinema’s implicit atomization of the world—the dissolution into inscribed points, generated photons, virtual number, and Phoenix-like reconstitution as marked specter, troped in Hitchcock as a nuclear bomb (*Notorious*)—is clearly double: its mimetic pretexts can serve or service a statist program by spellbinding a populace or training them in mnemonic habits of identification or ocularcentric mystifications, or it can sabotage from within the archive, accelerating the latter’s death drive against it. This war makes space for others. The two alternating faces of the cinematic appear like proverbial time travelers from an imperiled future “present” retroprojecting their combat for dominance perpetually back into an unsuspecting past set—from which, depending on the outcome, different future “presents” would be cast. The struggles that often inhabit Hitchcock’s narratives, inversely to appearance, seem like Bruno and Guy (*Strangers on a Train*) on the zoötroptic carousel yet to reference, not so discretely, the de-auratic import of media: it is the double logics of nihilism, the stripping away of metaphor and the ocularcentric blinders by the avenging birds at a limit of a transformation if not affirmation—before which the earth appears as it does on Mount Rushmore, as aterra, purely prosthetic and self-preceded, barely anthropomorphized. Its fetishized and broken “figure,” pre-Columbian or seemingly preoriginary (to “America”), reveals to view a celluloid snippet of microfilm. Hitchcock is not modernist, nor surrealist, nor postmodernist; not auteurial, nor ocularist, nor mimetic in any way.

V

The Nietzschean import coincides with “pure cinema’s” absolute reflection on teletechnics and the logics of the backloop. When, in *Spellbound* (1945), Hitchcock takes up a fratricidal war with

psychoanalysis, opposing cinema to the latter as modernity's dominant science of ghosts and memory, he makes cinema stand in for the repressed of psychoanalysis, the one thing it cannot address, psychosis, and illustrates its own access to a mnemonics before memory inaccessible to the Enlightenment caricature of that great competitor with cinema for access to the heads and memory bands of the public. Hitchcock's cinema seems in *Spellbound* to obsess over the signature effect that returns in every work, the pattern of parallel bars—the originary (cinematic) trauma of the film's O-man amnesiac, Gregory Peck, into recollecting a preoriginary fratricide. And this pattern of bars sends him into psychotic, teeth-grinding trances, visually emanating from tablecloths, in suits and bedspreads, as tracks on the snow. What triggers the psychotic spells or cinematic trances of Peck is the de-auratic signature of cinematic semiosis void of discrete memory or even locus—it is what the audience's eyes are tracking stripped of all mimetic sets.

This autoscopia or inverse psychoanalysis of cinema explains the work's overt assault on ocularcentrism—in the Dali dream sequence's giant eye on a curtain cut with scissors, or in Murchison's suicide with a giant hand and revolver's shot into the camera or eye itself. Ocularcentrism is still identified with the spells of Green Manors, the great house of psychoanalytic hermeneutics and of Hollywood imperialism (Selznick's studio). Discretely, *Spellbound* casts itself as a war over empire—there is the citation from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and mention of a wandering Rome three times (in Italy, in Georgia, and in New York—the Empire State), as well as a central scene in an Empire State Hotel in New York City: at the close of the Second World War, the work deals already with the next (and global) war, which will be over control of media, the spectral levers that control perceptual programs. It will be an invisible war over what *Sabotage* calls “the center of the world,” in that case Piccadilly Circus, implying a place where inscriptions are set that will be produced as perceptions. Thus, when Ingrid Bergman's mentor Dr. Brulov quips about Peck's psychotic reaction to the white of the snow, he calls it “photophobia.” The mock illness names something other than fear of light.

Psychoanalysis is set up as an Enlightenment project in the opening scrolled text that Selznick contrived to insert and that secretly served Hitchcock. It conceives the “cure” as a coming to light of the suppressed that restores memory and health—at least, the simulacrum psychoanalysis of the film. But the phobia is that the effect called light is itself artficed, the product of waves and alternating frequencies, since what Peck responds to is not the glare but the

“tracks” in the snow, the cuts that precede and situate the reflected light. One is afraid, in *Spellbound*, of knowing what constitutes “light,” the eye perhaps, which is why the fratricidal trauma—in which the bar series appears as a spiked fence on which the child-brother’s body is by “accident” kicked—will accelerate to a suicidal gesture. Cinema, as mediatic ghost regime, will commit suicide knowing it can survive that ending since it was never fully embodied anyway: thus a giant hand prop shooting a revolver into the eye or lens. The spell of *Spellbound* that seems to require this gesture is multiple. It names the cinematic trance but also the spell of an overriding imperial hermeneutic: Green Manors or the psychoanalytic bulwark. And implicitly the spell names, on a more political level, that of ocular-centrism, as well as that of a more general media trance that the post-global era would assume as a product of cinematic logics—a spectral “empire” complicitous with Hollywood.

One can cut into this Nietzschean Hitchcock anywhere.²² But it is a “lighter” example of Nietzsche’s imbrication in Hitchcock that I would return to, as mentioned at first, and this in a film that deploys pyrotechnics, literally, to liken cinema to a cold atomic explosion. *Light* in this work marks in advance the superficiality the work is mistaken to have, as a guise, in losing all gravity—all orientation to origins or even earth as ground. It echoes in phrases like “light as air” or “lighter side,” yet drifts toward the film’s pyrotechnic display, which will burn out the screen and eye. In *To Catch a Thief*, it is “Cary Grant” who, as star, will be drawn into the circular acceleration in which “originals” and “origins” appear perpetually circled back on or before themselves—burned away as more simulacra. Since this undermines the entire metaphysics of cinema and photography as mimetic or indexical media, the consequences for mnemonic and signifying orders (not to mention *time*, the word most used in the film) extends beyond any modernist trick. Hitchcock thinks with a network of markers that exceeds the double chase, always, in a certain impossible direction—a one-way street or rather nondirection (“north by northwest”) that, ultimately, passes through what he calls the “bird war.”

Keeping in mind the associations of Nice, or Nizza, with the composition of *Zarathustra* and Nietzsche’s name, the film’s imploded circular chase—the (original) cat pursuing his “copy-cat” by anticipating (copying) his copy—replicates a historical dilemma. During this double chase that loops behind one and seems to consume temporalities in the postwar Riviera, Cary Grant’s “John Robie” assumes yet another alias in presenting himself to the Stevens women as a tourist. The name is “Conrad Burns,”

and he introduces himself to the Stevens women as a lumberman from Oregon—who, in turn, annotates the zeroid figure of “Grant” himself (reference is made to Robie’s origin as a jewel thief that accords with Grant’s as a screen star, leaving a “traveling circus” that “folded”).

Yet Hitchcock slips into this name, according to his cryptonymic calculus, a Nietzschean calculus—likening the effect that Cary Grant as film star produces to a Zarathustran logic. The sun is direct in southern France, and there is one line about its being “too much” and in “the middle of the day.” The name “Burns” cites the blinding flash that will come and simulate a nocturnal sun (the pyrotechnic scene) and the fact that the earthscape, shown at length and advertised to the tourist viewer as “beautiful,” seems burned away of trees or vegetation. While the audience is seduced by the Riviera panorama shot from a plane, they do not see that the land is barren, scorched by a sun positioned behind, or in line with, the eye of the camera—whose technologies and representational appropriations work, inversely, in that deforestation. Trees, genealogical emblems of natural images, what the camera seems to shoot, are sweepingly burned away or cut—as by “Conrad Burns,” from a state, Oregon, that cancels and echoes “origin” itself. (The name “Portland” continues this counterinscription, a word-name citing at once passing and carrying, framing and movement, as well as a stationary site: the word suggests a translational task of cinema, an aporia, as it is used in the murder site of *The 39 Steps*: “Portland Place.”) But Hitchcock also marks the cognitive implications of this circuit. The *Con* of Conrad is marked repeatedly to signal a trope of consciousness or cognition, as well as conning—Constantinople, Constance Porter, Jo Conway, Victor Constantine—while the German *Rad* for wheel marks this mass cutting of natural origins as partaking of a backspinning auto-preinhabitation allied to the reel, making “Conrad” or “Cary” an effect of an effect, the cinematic and historical noon of being caught in a backloop of recurrences. The “star” scythes away all origins as simulacra, himself absorbing (or thieving) identification from the public’s investing gaze. In the lightest of dismissed works (“light as air”), Hitchcock signals a shadowless noon in his, and cinema’s, midcentury trajectory. With the alias “Conrad Burns,” Hitchcock inscribes “Grant” as a minor Zarathustran courier and cineastic trope, “the cat.” The black cat, however, is like a mobile black sun or trace. *To Catch a Thief* hides behind its excessive lightness, “light as air,” in which Grant seems to fall upward again and again, the film dismissed. This may be why, toward its conclusion, it shifts times into the (an)apocalyptic gala,

a citational dress-up in “historical” formal wear miming cinema’s pretense to install historical phantasies and pasts—drifting toward a great beheading (already accomplished).

* * *

For Hitchcock, cinema implies an inversion of the received sense and practice of *aesthetics*—which shifts from being a domain of play and simulacrum to the site from which the *phainesthai* is engendered, senses programmed, hermeneutic regimes installed. Cinema emerges as a political practice of spellbinding implants and instantly arrives, by reflecting on its sheer technicity, at blocked sites of transvaluation or crossing, ports and bridges. The “bird war” perhaps defines this de-auratic invasion of the purely external, the animeme as techne, prehistorical and avenging in the name of no nominally inscribed other. It arrives from another literacy. In this, Hitchcock’s cinema impersonates Zarathustra’s asolar trance before coming wars of reinscription that this cinema had assumed from *The Lodger* on.

Notes

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Prologue,” in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1982), quotation on 127.

² McKenzie Wark, “Vectorial Cinema,” *Senses of Cinema*, no. 6 (2000), <http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/6/vectorial.html>.

³ Peter Conrad, *The Hitchcock Murders* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2000), 112.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967).

⁵ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–40, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 313–55.

⁶ Conrad, *The Hitchcock Murders*, 118.

⁷ The evocation is in the source text, David Dodge’s novel *To Catch a Thief* (1952), about which Peter Conrad notes in *The Hitchcock Murders*, “[Francie] regards Robie, who shines up drainpipes as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra vaulted over canyons, as ‘a kind of superman’” (112). Conrad, waxing autobiographical about his experience of Hitchcock as a kind of rape (“a Bleeding”), describes inadvertently a type of shock or translation, even transvaluation: “*Psycho* had come to resemble a rite of passage, a visceral, constricted tunnel you had to pass through to get from one age to the next” (5).

⁸ George Collins, "Incidence of Instant and Flux on Temporal and Pictorial Objects, Listeners and Spectators," *Tekhnema* 4, no. 3 (1998): 26–61. In George Collins's "Incidence of Instant and Flux," Nietzsche is linked to Hitchcock by addressing "Nietzsche's three throws at 'maintaining a sense' for 'God' in light of the will to power" (28). Or its dismantling? This association of Hitchcock with the thinking of technicity before a (Nietzschean) passage anticipates new readings of his work that would move beyond those programmed by a certain mimetic "relapse" basic to culturalist hermeneutics, identity politics, and neo-Lacanian codes.

The three, strictly speaking, is hyperbolic—marked as such in phrases like "revolutionary uplift" or "pick up" or "catch up on my reading." The three lies behind the performative "zero" as a signature, too, for the atopos of the camera, marked too in the third letter "C," the machinal other witnessing and interrupting the mise-en-scène of human speech, dialogue, presentation. The zero passes into circuitry, circles, rings, and ringing—the "traveling circus" that Hitchcock will, in passing, name his cinematic operation, as if that too were a futuristic ray gun (*The Trouble with Harry*) or an atomic weapon (*Notorious*).

⁹ Raymond Durnat, *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock: Or, the Plain Man's Hitchcock* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974), 137.

¹⁰ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 120.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ William Rothman states,

The view is through the bars of the banister, and the frame is dominated by the bars in the foreground. I call this pattern of parallel vertical lines Hitchcock's / / / / sign. It recurs at significant junctures in every one of his films. At one level, the / / / / serves as Hitchcock's signature: it is his mark on the frame, akin to his ritual cameo appearances. At another level, it signifies the confinement of the camera's subject; we might say that it stands for the barrier of the screen itself. It is also associated with sexual fear and the specific threat of loss of control or breakdown. (*Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982], 33)

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., 55–56.

¹⁶ Ibid., 50.

¹⁷ The accord between the bar series and rhythm is marked by its corollary in knocking, intervalled sound, but also by the blinking Drummer Man at the close of *Young and Innocent* (1937)—the eye as effect of blinking, of drumlike rhythm, associated with the agent of originary murder.

¹⁸ What Apollonian music opens with is the supplantation of a formalization, measure, or rhythm, before the screen or metaphor of the originary—sheer alternation, or spacing, like the Cymbalist's score in the Royal Albert Hall scene of the second *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, where one pretends to read in close-up serial, spaced, mute bars.

¹⁹ As when in *Young and Innocent*, the Drummer Man's arrhythmic heartbeat betrays and overwhelms the eye-twitching, black-faced murderer at the heart of the band, overturning his percussion altogether. And as "The Storm-Cloud Cantata" mounts in the second *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and a crash of cymbals (or symbols) mimes a lightning *Blitz* or strike, the music score appears before us to read as a series of large and increasingly minimal bars.

²⁰ In *The 39 Steps* the many-named "Annabella Smith" leads Hannay, with her death, into the narrative web, voiding identity in a quest that departs from the Mr. Memory show—where consciousness emerges in asking the vaudevillian questions to which it already knows the answers. A baby is heard crying, consciousness being coddled. While Memory is Hitchcock's modern Mnemosyne (thus absorbing and preceding classic epic), the name Annabella also cites the anagogic dialectic of Plato's *Symposium*—where "beauty" (bella) leads anagogically upward (ana) to the idea of the Good. But Annabella does not, as the veiled woman, lead up—she is murdered, and the trail leads to feet (or "feat," [f]acts of Memory), to steps, a secret band of agents we do not meet, upkicking chorines closing out Memory's death scene. The itinerary includes a routine catabasis in the Hades of the darkened movie house, yet also by a semaphoric blackout inscribed in the bar slash itself. This summons a sublime—the formula for a silent warplane—of agrammatical signifiers, letters, and words, dis(re)membered markers that nonetheless break Memory's mimetic pretext as mere recorder, mere reproduction, mobilizing the most banal of figures (hands, numbers, feet) as corporeal agents in a failed crossing or intervention that also "is" the text. The aesthetic emerges not as the discourse of the beautiful but that of the mnemonic trace, out of which "perception" is projected or emerges. But a second example is yet more definitive: the scene in *Psycho* where Norman Bates in the fruit cellar emerges dressed as mother, knife raised, restrained from behind by Sam Loomis while struggling, his wig shaken, grimacing in the suspended glory of a performance. The image cites an icon of Western aesthetics, the Laocoön, here restrained not by snakes but by Loomis and a sheer anteriority that has Norman in its double grip—a material and aesthetic figure whose arrest occurs at the point of an "act."

²¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 270.

²² One could depart from numerous points in this repertoire that read "Nietzsche" by way of more or less covert markers: in *The Lodger* that takes the form of a mediatized assault on cognitive resentment, an Avenger striking out at—and by—the repetitive structure of revenge, this by media apprehended as "London fog" (the chiaroscuro of suspended reflective particles and the atomization of the visible and mnemonic in cinema); in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, solar hyperbologics and the false temple of sun worshippers (as movie house) dismantle cognitive excess as a simulacra effect; *Vertigo* (1958) can be read as a deconstruction of "eternal recurrence" as such. The explosiveness of cinema, its resemblance to a saboteur's time-bomb or a nuclear blast, is related to its dissolution of the visual orders into graphics and micrological markers—chemical processes which are atomized and reconfigured. All of the aporetic bridges in Hitchcock stopped over or just pictured, left uncrossed, all of the borders to be traversed in escape—each gestures toward a transvaluation that is, by the structure of mnemonics or its backloop, already implied. It is a destroying transition that is quested for and already anterior—like the secret weapon of mass de(con)struction of Mr. Memory that, though stopped, would already be at work in the film that is relaying the allegorical suppression of Memory's secret formula.