Section II: Study
5. **Hitchcock, Film Studies, and New Media: The Impact of Technology on the Analysis of Film**¹

*David Colangelo*

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**Abstract**

Perceptual shifts related to the technological conditions of film scholarship have shaped the analysis of film. By observing a sampling of Hitchcock scholarship dating back to the 1960s, we can see how technology enables and shapes academic discourse on film. While early work on Hitchcock involved frantic note taking in darkened theatres leading to short, comprehensive reflections, the ability to control the means of projection via technologies such as the VHS allowed scholars to engage in lengthy, visually detailed readings of film structures, as well as close, personal readings of signs and moments. Currently, the digital life of film (and film scholarship) is thriving in its growing affinity with art and information exemplified in works such as Christian Marclay’s “The Clock” and Douglas Gordon’s “24-Hour Psycho.”

**Keywords:** film scholarship, film analysis, Alfred Hitchcock, VHS, viewing environments, film studies

The dominating vantage of the critic is merely that privilege he derives from being a spectator who arrives on the scene after the fact, in a new age of knowledge and in the name of greater enlightenment.²

– Jean Starobinski

Man the tool-making animal has long been engaged in extending one or another of his sense organs in such a manner as to disturb all of his other senses and faculties. But having made these experiments, men have consistently omitted to follow them with observation.³

– Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan
Perceptual shifts related to the technological conditions of film scholarship have shaped the analysis of film. Using a cross section of scholarship on Hitchcock dating back to the 1960s – as it represents a large, varied, and longitudinal data set – including the work of Robin Wood, Maurice Yacowar, William Rothman, Raymond Bellour, Stanley Cavell, Murray Pomerance, and Joe McElhaney, I demonstrate the ways that the film critic and scholar arrive at their analysis of films amidst new ages of technology – technology that enables and drastically alters the academic discourse on film.

Viewing environments and operations available to film scholars throughout history, starting with the 16mm print, projector, and editing table, and proceeding to the personal VHS, and finally the DVD and the digital film viewed on a networked screen, have changed the practices and products of film scholarship. Early work in the analysis of Hitchcock’s films involve frantic note taking in darkened theaters, or, at best, infrequent sessions at an editing table with hard-to-find 16mm prints. This leads to “relatively short reflections” that focus on “themes.” In the later writings, however, (such as with Rothman, Bellour, and Pomerance), the ability to isolate and possess frames and moments, that is, the ability to control the means of projection via technologies such as the VHS, open up possibilities for lengthy, visually detailed, close, personal readings of film structures and of signs and moments in Hitchcock’s works. The changing material apparatus of film scholarship, in its shift towards personal, fragmented, and controllable modes of reception, can also be seen to influence movements away from the authority of filmic texts towards greater structural and visual analyses, with greater emphasis on personal, institutional, and technological impacts.

What we can do with films, and what scholars can say about (and with) them, continues to change as the cinema migrates to the digital, networked screen. Today, as film ‘relocates’ to new platforms and new environments, as Francesco Casetti observes, it takes on, among other things, the functional characteristics of computation and facilitates intensely personal visions – it is made increasingly open and available to recombination and refraction by successive technological advancements, lending it new registers of ‘expressivity’ and ‘relationality’. In the case of Hitchcock, the increased ease and availability of reviewing films and capturing clips and stills is exemplified by the ‘1000 Frames of Hitchcock’ website, a site that has subdivided each Hitchcock film into 1000 pre-frozen moments available for viewing and downloading, democratizing and even popularizing, to a degree, detailed visual analyses of his films. More generally, the increased ease of access to ‘film’ has made academic discourse on film more reliant
on data visualization and the treatment of film as information. At the same time, there have been a growing number of artists working with film, particularly using digital film and digital tools, to simultaneously celebrate and critique Hitchcock, and more generally film and cinema. I suggest that installations such as Douglas Gordon’s ‘24-Hour Psycho’, which presents Hitchcock’s 1960 film at a glacial pace in a gallery setting, may be indicative and instructive of how film has come to be viewed and used in the age of digital media: in private, mostly, and on computers that allow for the surgical dissection and precise suspension of a traditionally time-based medium.

As a result of technological changes, the digital life of film (and film scholarship) thrives, as D.N. Rodowick notes, in its growing affinity with art and information. Such is certainly the case with recent work on Hitchcock. Examples of digital films as art and information, such as Geoffrey Alan Rhode’s ‘52 Card Psycho’ and Christian Marclay’s ‘The Clock’, employ data visualizations, editing tools, and interfaces unique to the current state of film digitization in order to critique and memorialize Hitchcock – and the entire body of film – in an ever evolving drama of knowledge, personal expression, enlightenment, and technology. In doing so, they might suggest a future for the analysis of film, or an alternative to it, that emphasizes the expressive, algorithmic, and relational.

Scribblers in the Dark

And now, whilst others are sleeping, this man is leaning over his table, his steady gaze on a sheet of paper, exactly the same gaze as he directed just now at the things about him, brandishing his pencil, his pen, his brush, splashing water from the glass up to the ceiling, wiping his pen on his shirt, hurried, vigorous, active, as though he was afraid the images might escape him, quarrelsome though alone, and driving himself relentlessly on. – Charles Baudelaire

The enduring image of Baudelaire’s ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ might very well be this: a man scribbling furiously in a room attempting to capture something eternal from the passage of time made apparent by the rush of the crowd before him. Certainly more than a coincidence, this is not unlike the image of the film scholar of the 1960s attempting to capture the essence of a film from the flickering impressions of the cinema. Compare Baudelaire’s description above to what we find in the introduction to
Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*. Reflecting on his seminal work *Hitchcock's Films*, published 20 years earlier in 1969, Wood writes:

> When I wrote [*Hitchcock's Films*] the technology of film study was still in a fairly primitive stage (as was the critical apparatus): with most of the films I worked from memory, or from notes scribbled in movie theaters during public screenings.¹²

The film scholar of the 1960s, like Baudelaire's painter, spent much of their time scribbling in the dark in order to capture something from their preferred window on the world. Instead of looking through smoky windows – “the principle thoroughfares of the city”¹³ as Poe calls them – to grasp something of the crowd outside, the film scholar looked to the illuminated screen as an area of heightened value to record, analyze, and understand something of the world unfolding before their eyes. The technology available to both Baudelaire and Wood, each in their respective epochs, influenced what their objects of inquiry were and what they could do with them.

In the 1960s, when access to a film meant only a few uninterrupted viewings in a darkened theater, note taking was the only memory aid available to the film scholar. At best, a researcher might procure a 16mm print from a library or film institution¹⁴ and gain access to an editing table. The material conditions of the cinema at the time limited a scholar's options for experiencing a film to theaters where the films happened to be showing or to scarce and expensive 16mm prints. As such, viewings were usually infrequent and precious;¹⁵ film was certainly not treated like the ubiquitous and replaceable DVDs and digital files traded and downloaded internationally today. The film as a rare and precious thing had a significant impact on the critical apparatus that emerges from this period of film scholarship.

Early Hitchcock scholarship that derives from the analysis of these relatively scarce 16mm prints tends to exhibit comparatively economical analyses, with a proclivity to highlight literary structures and interpretations of the intentions of the auteur regarding narrative meaning. Although writing later than Wood in 1977, Maurice Yacowar notes in *Hitchcock's British Films* that a great deal of space in his analysis is given over to longer plot summaries to bring his reading audience up to speed with films such as *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1927)¹⁶ that were difficult to obtain and impossible for many to watch at the time.¹⁷ As part of his research, of which a great deal was conducted in the dark,¹⁸ Yacowar made a pilgrimage to the British Film Institute on his first sabbatical,
booked private screening rooms, and managed to supplement his viewings with a week on a Library of Congress Steenbeck editor.

Restricted access to films in the 1960s contributed to scholarly readings that reflect the linearity of the available modes of reception, thus exemplifying a more traditional literary approach to texts as having a certain authority, with a focus on plot, genre, narrative, and theme. As Yacowar himself notes, “I analyze the way each film works within itself as a drama of themes and devices.” Working from a ‘text’ that cannot be read out of order, and only once or twice at that without the luxury of skipping about the film as we have come to expect, Yacowar’s method is understandably literary. This is certainly also compounded by Yacowar’s academic training, one steeped in literary traditions as opposed to yet-to-emerge interdisciplinary studies that later extended the discourse of film analysis to include technology and media. Overall, technology that favors coherence and linearity in film projection and traditional academic training in literature both contribute to Yacowar’s literary approach to Hitchcock.

Another characteristic of a period of analysis distinguished by an unbroken linearity of film screenings and a relative scarcity of film was the critical focus on the text as holding a kind of essential meaning closely controlled by an auteur. On the first pass in 1969, Wood, also trained in English and Shakespeare, views Hitchcock’s films as evidence of Hitchcock’s true authorial genius. As he notes in his analysis of *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), “[w]hat concerns (or should concern) the critic is not what the film should be but what it is.” Take, for example, his analysis of *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), again somewhat stingy by today’s standards at nine pages. His analysis, working chronologically and briskly, pauses only to highlight and reinforce the brilliance of the thematic material. He ends with the exaltation, “Hitchcock is a much greater artist than he knows.” The state of media available to film scholars is reflected in the form and content of analysis. Linear, infrequent passes at film contributed to relatively short pieces of analysis concerned with the authorial text and uncovering themes, narratives, and so-called coherent truths. This effect is compounded by academic traditions yet to incorporate the effects of media and technology into their critical frameworks.

The reflections of both Yacowar and Wood on their original methods in the respective re-releases of their books on Hitchcock point to a growing awareness over time of the technology of film analysis and the shifting ground of analysis due to technology. Reflecting on his methods in the 2010 re-release of *Hitchcock’s British Films*, Yacowar states that he was “working on the savage frontier, that is, before the pause button and rewind of the
As noted earlier, Wood also refers to this time as a “primitive stage” in both the critical and technical apparatus of film. Yacowar and Wood, like Baudelaire’s painter, appear to us to be at the mercy of the pen and paper, prone perhaps – as Wood notes in Hitchcock’s *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* – to “the injustice of judging by the senses alone.”

Written in the late 1970s, Raymond Bellour’s essay ‘A Bit of History’ refers to the technique of taking notes in a darkened theater and argues that there remains an insurmountable and significant gap between the scholar’s notes and the film. Like Yacowar and Wood, Bellour admits to “years in the dark [...] trying to capture with a practiced but fatally inept and always insufficient hand” the dialogue, action, shot sequence, and structure of the film, along with their primary relevance. Bellour remembers jotting down “everything [...] filling notebooks to the point of absurdity.” For Bellour, the feeling that he had come up empty-handed, that he had missed the essence of the film, was ever-present.

This is what leads Bellour to refer to film as the “unattainable text.” Part of what Bellour means by ‘unattainable’ is that one’s reading of a film is highly personal and in many ways inexpressible. Borrowing from Roland Barthes, who shows us in ‘The Death of the Author’ that there is no single authorial reading to uncover in any text, Bellour reminds us that differential texts are produced in the act of reading. Film is no exception. But, at the same time, Bellour places a great deal of hope in technology, seeing it as a way to get a bit closer to the elusive object and as a means to provide richer, more meaningful analyses of film. With this, Bellour introduces the idea that the viewer’s ability to observe and report is tied to their ability to remember and reflect, and this, as Bellour points out, is tied to technology. For Bellour, technology creates a new kind of intimacy with an always-elusive object.

With film scholarship, a shift in the control over the means of projection, as Bellour notes, produces a different kind of proximity with film that changes what scholars do with film in the 60s and 70s. Bellour reflects on what Constance Penley identifies as “a revelatory moment in the late sixties and early seventies when film critics first took the film off the projector and onto the editing table to be able to view it shot by shot, stopping and starting it according to the needs of analysis rather than the rhythms of ‘normal’ viewing time.” The freeze frame, the ability to alter the temporal flow of the film to isolate specific frames and extract them from the film ushered in by the use of editing tables and made ubiquitous with increased access to films, film stills, and the advent of the VHS in the late 1970s, brought about a completely new way of looking at film, one that changed the needs and outcomes of analysis.
The Frozen Frame

I have seen what happens to film writing when one writes from memory or with the help of a few notes taken in the theatre – when one wants to avoid the very costly, perhaps too costly penalty for freezing the image.32
– Raymond Bellour

Stills are essential. Indeed they represent an equivalent, arranged each time according to the needs of the reading, to freeze-frames on the editing table, with the absolutely contradictory function of opening up the textuality of the film just at the moment they interrupt its unfolding.33
– Raymond Bellour

A new relationship with film was introduced by a greater focus on the freeze frame and film still.34 Examples of Hitchcock scholarship throughout the 60s, 70s, and 80s, show that the freeze frame and film still contributed to a shift from a linear, literary approach, to a focus on signs and shots – a shift to the semiotic building blocks of Hitchcock’s films. This was accompanied by an increase in visual evidence in Hitchcock scholarship, facilitated by greater access to film and film stills. Yet, amidst these technological developments that allowed for a microscopic dissection of film there was the danger, as Bellour notes, of losing the very essence of cinema: movement. Amongst Hitchcock scholars, Raymond Bellour seems most acutely aware of the tensions between stillness and movement and demonstrates the transformations film scholarship underwent when the film was made susceptible to precise visual dissection via the freeze frame and film still. For example, in contrast to both Wood and Yacowar, Bellour is not interested in digesting entire films. This is partly a consequence of the isolation and presentation of film stills that gives him so much more to look at and write about. His close readings of specific sequences flow from, he says, a “logical accident of a fascination,”35 a fascination that is born amidst the sense that this fascination might be indulged on the editing table. In this, Bellour avoids narrative analysis and makes few allusions to authorial visions related to theme and character. This speaks to a shift in the kind of analysis that the freeze frame makes possible. The freeze frame allows Bellour to enter into a deep analysis of the structural composition of passages and allows him to communicate this to his audience via an extensive collection of previously unavailable stills.

The freeze frame also serves to atomize the film and allows Bellour to comment on the nature of its construction – to perform a semiotic analysis
of film as opposed to a literary one. Take for example his analysis ‘System of a Fragment (on The Birds)’ from The Analysis of Film, originally published in Cahiers du Cinéma in 1969. Here, Bellour dispenses with a thematic or narrative approach and instead picks apart a specific sequence frame by frame. The sequence – the scenes that take us across Bodega Bay with Melanie to the Brenner House and back across to meet Mitch (and an angry gull) at the pier – is dissected into the 84 shots of its composition, diagrammed and labelled according to the ‘look’, ‘framing’, and ‘movement’. The overall effect is to create a kind of score for the visual music that Bellour sees at play in Hitchcock’s films. Instead of telling us what the film means, Bellour attempts to tell us how it means through meticulously annotated shots. He rounds off this analysis with a lengthy commentary, referencing precise shots and moments. In one particular passage about the Bodega Bay sequence, Bellour explains:

The central point of [Melanie’s] itinerary is the room in the Brenners’ house where she intends to deposit the lovebirds. Thus, shots 32-36 (A3) [referencing a series of annotated stills], which show her in the house, constitute the hinge of the sequence. They punctuate Melanie’s journey out and back with a resting point; and the action at each end echoes that at the other, reinforcing their median positions.36

The meaning that Bellour extracts from this sequence comes from the repeating patterns and rhymes that become visible in the constituent elements of each shot. They are motifs of vision that become apparent only when they have been reduced to annotated moments enabled by the material conditions of analysis he has access to and employs. Bellour shows us how film can be seen to work on us like music or poetry, and can only do so by slowing the film to a speed that allows for its transcription. It is not that these motifs are otherwise invisible; it is that they only become discoverable – they only enter our perception and the episteme of film – alongside a changing technological apparatus of film scholarship. In this way, the material conditions of analysis – the freeze frame and film still in this case – construct, in the access granted by the technology, what we perceive to be the nature of film. Simply put, watching a film once or twice in a theater versus watching it multiple times and pausing whenever one wishes leads one to see, think, and speak about a film in completely different ways.

Take, as another example, William Rothman’s Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze, published in 1982. Rothman’s analysis, which includes hundreds of
film stills carefully extracted from the 16mm prints he was working with, highlights the technical mechanics of film as essential to its construction. These mechanics are observable to Rothman only through the expanded means of viewing film that he engages with. His analysis, particularly his work on *Psycho*, seems to be guided first and foremost by the movement of the camera. Instead of seeing the film as a literary text produced by an auteur that masterfully weaves together plot, theme, and character, as Yacowar and Wood do, Rothman sees it as a *film* comprised of evocative sequences of camera movements controlled by an artist of the medium. On *Psycho*, Rothman illustrates this perspective in a number of ways, stating that “the camera's opening gesture is posited as enigmatic,” that “the camera descends to earth,” and that, “[a]s the film opens, the camera appears spontaneous, unselfconscious, free.” In the end, just under 100 pages later – a significant shift from Wood's ten-page analysis of the same film – Rothman notes that “[a]t one level, *Psycho* is an allegory about the camera's natural appetite.” Like Bellour, Rothman's technical apparatus allows him to view the film as if under a microscope and to digest it one visual morsel at a time. As such, Rothman is able to discover an aspect of the film's construction, the specific movements and placement of the camera, and uses this as the basis for his analysis of the film and of Hitchcock.

That said, there are challenges created in working from what is seen frame-by-frame. Careful visual analysis certainly contributes to the lengthy page counts of Bellour and Rothman. To speak for (and to) pictures is something that seems to both confound and compel Bellour and Rothman. Each frame, it appears, contains the potential for an inexhaustible ekphrasis. Wood and Yacowar, on the other hand, working within the familiar literary boundaries of narrative, plot, and theme in the presentation of their analysis, can maintain a relative economy in their work.

Of course, shifts in technology that engender visual approaches used by Bellour and Rothman do not make previous literary approaches obsolete. It is important to note that experiments and shifts in the analysis of film can and do employ mixed modes of analysis. Take, for example, Stanley Cavell’s essay on *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959). This piece, first published in 1981, mixes literary and technological perspectives. With an eye on the technology of film, Cavell names Rothman's work as an inspiration, taking from him a sense of the “murderous gaze” emanating from Hitchcock's camera that interrogates its human subjects and, as Cavell says, “inevitably proceeds by severing things, both in cutting and, originally, in framing.” While interpreting and analyzing Hitchcock by way of watching what he does with his camera, Cavell also keenly searches for
literary connections and explanations. A full half of the essay is dedicated to making connections between North by Northwest and Shakespeare's Hamlet. Enabled by an attention to visual detail occasioned by the freeze frame and the film still, Cavell's mixture of comparative literature and an analysis of the grammar of film deftly expands an appreciation and critique of Hitchcock beyond literary merits, but not apart from them.

Beyond Grammar and Structure: Moments Reviewed and Relived

In the moment that we experience it, cinema is pre-grammatical, specifically in the sense that grammar is the organizing principle of scripture even though there is a ‘grammar’ of images. For the purposes of analysis, exchange, and reference – all of these being beyond experience – it is convenient, perhaps, to think of a film in terms of scenes, sequences, and shots – the elements of ‘film grammar’ – an approach that does consistently show the merit of revealing the constructive principles of film by foregrounding them. But at the moment when we are caught up in our actual gaze at the screen – with our disbelief suspended, as it were – none of this matters, or seems evident, or is visible. – Murray Pomerance

In his 1985 article ‘Analysis in Flames’, Bellour notes that as much as the freeze frame and the VHS freed the film scholar to delve into the visual language of the film, the VHS, the “ideal instrument for analysis,” “killed” the analysis of film. By this, Bellour does not mean that film analysis ends with the VHS. He means that film analysis, once based on treating the film as an entity to be viewed and written about as a whole, is forever altered by the pause, fast forward, rewind, and stop functions engendered by the VHS. What is most useful about Bellour’s proclamation – and we might also add here Rothman’s regard for Hitchcock’s camerawork – is the attention that it draws to the impact of technology on film scholarship. The most important message we receive from Bellour and Rothman is that film analysis cannot continue without a consideration of film’s technology – lenses, cameras, lights, etc. – or without considering how technology enables and encourages certain modes of analysis.

That said, and as Pomerance notes above, film analysis can get bogged down in technical details when it becomes too focussed on structure and constructive principles, and can miss something essential about the experience of film in the process. Instead of taking a step back, Pomerance, in
An Eye For Hitchcock, published in 2004, suggests that we get up close and personal with film as an antidote to dispassionate, structural analyses. While remaining highly visual, Pomerance’s analysis specifically avoids referencing individual frames (and subsequently using them as evidence) and instead looks to expand upon signs, moments, and sequences that have both moved and perplexed him. The kind of analysis we find in Pomerance’s work is related to a mode of interacting with films in private, personal settings on television sets and computer screens. Starting with VHS and proceeding through DVD to films on demand (or download) to computers or mobile devices, various technological advances in film and screen-based media have allowed a greater control and proximity to the film in a personal and private setting for viewers and scholars alike. In Pomerance’s analysis of Hitchcock’s films, this contributes to an intensified focus on the visual and the personal.

In An Eye For Hitchcock and The Horse Who Drank the Sky, both published in the last ten years, Pomerance offers a clear example of the kind of intimacy that the remote control and the computer interface allow with what we might now call the digital life of film. Although he does not explicitly outline his viewing methods, his stated methods of turning and returning to filmic moments evoke a relationship with an apparatus that allows for easy and precise access. Still, Pomerance does explicitly reveal the following about his work:

I took as a model Truffaut’s reminiscences of watching the ‘Good Mornin’!’ routine from Singin’ in the Rain over and over on a Moviola until he had seen the finest nuance of a gesture Debbie Reynolds executed at one moment in history to cause her skirt, in mid-step, to cover a naked knee. This kind of discreet moment is the stuff of film. To stand back oblivious, to run over it by trying to follow the story, to glide past it in order to see yet another and still another film, are all ways of being blinded.45

Just as Truffaut did with Singin’ in the Rain (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), the digital reincarnation of Hitchcock’s films allows many more of us to inhabit and bathe in key frames and moments. In taking multiple, intense, close looks at Hitchcock, what Pomerance catches, and what he implores us to be aware of, is the “small stuff”,46 stuff that he believes scholars and fans may be missing. He entreats us to go back and take a closer look. But of course, only with the DVD loaded up or the file at our command can we truly entertain Pomerance’s suggestion in this day and age; only with digital files might we get to this level of detail. The good news is that scholars and non-scholars alike have the means to make good on his suggestion.
Pomerance shows us how technical memory devices can help to shape the memory and experience of the film scholar. Given the apparatus that Pomerance uses to view and review Hitchcock, it is not surprising that he describes a closer connection between how he conceives of his memory and how he interacts with film. As he notes, “[o]ften, instead of following the story in a linear fashion, I leap across moments, rather in the way that memory does when we recollect films and try to map them against our experience.”47 Pomerance’s recollection, perhaps a kind of post-modern recollection that prefers a highly personal genealogy to a defined history, finds its match in the technical apparatus at hand. While Hitchcock’s films may have been encoded to be experienced from front to back, they are, as Pomerance argues, often remembered in disordered fragments connected by individual recollection. Similarly, Martin Lefebvre the relationship between artefact and spectator in his work on Psycho, recalling Malraux’s concept of the ‘imaginary museum’, that is, the idea that multiple images present us with an excess of references that we personally remember and order so that, in the case of a film, we might ‘read’ it in our own way against itself as well as against other films, or what Lefebvre calls film culture.48 This mixed temporality, relationality, and personalization of the experience of film is one that is facilitated, constructed, and extended by the changing technical apparatus of film scholarship. A blended sense of time, texts, and memory is one that we can imagine more fully, one that is made more real, by the compulsive repetition and fragmentation facilitated by the digital technologies and files at hand. Pomerance’s concept of film experience, a highly personal recombination of film moments within and across films mixed with our own personal experience, can be seen to emerge alongside the digital technology we now use to watch and analyze film.

Writing on the changing materiality and interface of film in Death 24 X A Second, Laura Mulvey notes that, “[w]ith electronic or digital viewing, the nature of cinematic repetition compulsion changes.”49 The technology available to film scholars and film viewers today invites the pausing, reviewing, annotating, and delaying of film at any moment and caters to the splitting of film into segments that can be displayed in books and seminars, and shared on various surfaces with the aid of today’s ubiquitous data projectors and network enabled screens. The use of the Lignes de temps software by the Institut de recherche et d’innovation/Centre Pompidou in 2010, an educational tool aimed at facilitating the annotation and comparison of frames and sequences of films, provides another example of this – students were asked to use Lignes de temps (‘timelines’ in English) to analyze Hitchcock’s North by Northwest.50 Thus, with the film “fragmented from linear narrative into
favourite moments or scenes,” the spectator, student, and scholar alike are able to “hold on to, to possess, the previously elusive image.”

Other outgrowths of this new operability on film include the production and circulation of online works such as YouTube ‘supercuts’ that, for example, might present every significant death scene from every Hitchcock film arranged and synchronized within a single multi-frame clip, or every Hitchcock cameo in chronological order. Pomerance’s deeply personal and precise recollections speak to this shift to constructing, possessing, and enriching these moments through repetition and close attention. The technology of film today indulges and amplifies personal reflections and compulsions as it relocates films to places and spaces where we can explore its relationality to itself and to ourselves, and at the same time explore its expressivity through ourselves and through digital tools. As Casetti notes, it institutes a kind of filmic experience that “boasts liberatory values rather than the celebration of a discipline’s glory.” That this becomes apparent alongside assemblages that allow for a highly personal and controllable “means of projection” is a consequence, not a coincidence. This mixture of fragmented precision and intimacy comes with being able to manipulate the things that give us visual pleasure wherever and whenever we want.

**Hitchcock’s Digital Afterlife: Art and Information**

What other transformations might we see in the analysis of films as films themselves continue to be digitized, stored, searched, pinched, clicked, stretched, sped up, slowed down, cut, mixed, shared, and recombined? What happens when we can produce reflections on film not only through textual analysis supplemented by photographs of films, but through actual combinations and transformations of the body of film now available to us in digital formats?

D.N. Rodowick has written about the impact digital conversion, production, and access have had on film studies. Rodowick notes that digital screens “give us image as illusory space and image as instrument for action.” In other words, by virtue of interactive interfaces (e.g. DVD software, QuickTime, Final Cut, YouTube, *Lignes de temps*) digital images represent to us the potential for action upon them. As such, digital artefacts are particularly precarious, mutable, and open to recombination and intervention when surrounded by software controls and susceptible to various algorithms and commands. Mediated by interfaces, the digital film, much more than its celluloid predecessor, asks to be controlled, managed, and used as material for re-composition.
The digital film image, beyond the impact of the freeze frame and film still, changes how we see and use film. Instead of an image that can only be watched, scrutinized, or observed, digital film provides material that can be modified, managed, and exhibited by a kind of networked observer-participant. As “the image is treated more and more as information to be accumulated, stored, sorted, and analyzed,” we get further away from the idea of a delimited text within an objective history. This is something that started with the freeze frame but has intensified with digital film.

In light of this shift, it is important to consider what we might ask of this “new age of knowledge [...] in the name of greater enlightenment,” brought about by the digitization of film. For Rodowick, the most important functions for film in a digital era are as information and as art. To understand film as art, consider first Douglas Gordon’s ‘24 Hour Psycho’, an installation that involved stretching a single screening of Hitchcock’s Psycho over twenty-four hours. Gordon notes that ‘24 Hour Psycho’ comes out of wanting to show his experiences of viewing Psycho in a private setting, a mode of reception that allowed him to slow the film down so he might compulsively analyze particular moments. In this way, Gordon shows us something about how film is used and can now be seen by general audiences and critics alike, and how it changes what we get out of it as a result. Reduced almost to a sequence of stills, viewers can begin to see what critics and scholars are finding when they are slowly and repeatedly reviewing moments or stills. Viewing Psycho in this way strips the film of its ability to communicate character, plot, theme, and narrative as Hitchcock intended, and foregrounds for the viewer the very aspects of the film that have become observable to the scholars and artists working with a slowed down, controllable film text: camera movement, shot composition, and personal reflection. Similar to the writing of Rothman, Bellour, Cavell, Casetti, and Pomerance, Gordon can be seen to show us how the changing material conditions of film shift the focus of both the critical and pleasure seeking eye.

As Rodowick points out, film as art and new media “challenges film studies and film theory to reinvent themselves, to reassess and construct anew their concepts.” As the preceding appraisal of ‘24 Hour Psycho’ suggests, this might even mean a reconsideration of the vehicles whereby questions of film are asked and presented. Bellour, who was one of the first voices from within film scholarship to call for the analysis of film beyond print, notes that the dispositif of the gallery itself is important to the use of film within it: it is a critical, discursive space, and thus prefigures our relationship to what is presented there in a way that is distinct from our
engagement with the written word, the printed photograph, or the film projected in a theater. Unlike the theater, the book, or even the computer screen, the gallery can provide a space to ask questions of film with film, presenting us with a particularly productive ‘relocation’ of film.

This is not to say that probing film with film is a new phenomenon. In fact, Hitchcock himself can be seen as an artist who was able to create rich narrative spaces while remaining conscious and critical of the construction of film. This, in many ways, is the point that Rothman makes by highlighting Hitchcock’s ability to understand and express the power of the camera in his films. Joe McElhaney, in his essay on *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964) in *The Death of Classical Cinema*, similarly foregrounds the artistic expressivity alongside the medium-specific critique in Hitchcock’s work. Although a product of the Hollywood studio system, McElhaney argues that Hitchcock can be seen to have a great deal in common with alternative art cinema and the modernist filmmaking of artists such as Antonioni and Resnais that critically appraise the medium from within. In *Marnie*, McElhaney sees Hitchcock as grappling with the tensions between his interest in modernist cinema and the expectations of Hollywood. The result, according to McElhaney, is a beautifully broken film that compels the audience to see it “as a film of pieces,” delightful in its instability. Interestingly, as McElhaney notes, “What is ‘in pieces’ in *Marnie* is not simply this film alone but virtually all Hitchcock’s cinema, which *Marnie* exhaustively calls on in its attempt to create a new kind of Hitchcock film.” What McElhaney and Rothman allow us to see operating in the existing, unadulterated Hitchcock, is an artist conscious and expressive of the vicissitudes of his craft and medium and, perhaps most interestingly in light of digital automatisms available to us today, willing to embrace fragmentation, excess, and imperfection as a position from which to create anew.

Taken literally, it is from these fragments of film – the clips available today with film editing software or ready-made online – that contemporary artists are attempting to reinvent film and film studies. In doing so, many are treating film algorithmically, or, returning to Rodowick’s second foreseeable role for film in the digital age: as information. One such work that illustrates this shift is Christian Marclay’s ‘The Clock’ (2011), a 24-hour montage of clips sampled from several decades of cinema. Every clip, painstakingly selected by Marclay, depicts a specific time of day referenced explicitly within a film that matches the actual time during its day-long exhibition. For example, at 1:45 p.m., one would see a clip from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Sabotage* (1936): a black-and-white shot of a clock ticking towards 1:45 p.m. followed by a package exploding on a double-decker bus in London. Marclay’s ‘The Clock’,
just barely possible given today's digital tools, six treats the entire body of film as a kind of database – as information – to be searched through as if by computer algorithm. As Zadie Smith notes in her piece on ‘The Clock’ in The New York Review of Books:

Marclay has made, in essence, a sort of homemade Web engine that collates and cross-references an extraordinary amount of different kinds of information: scenes that have clocks, scenes with clocks in classrooms, with clocks in bars, Johnny Depp films with clocks, women with clocks, children with clocks, clocks on planes, and so on, and so on, and so on.

By treating film as information, applying an algorithm, and digitally displaying the results in the gallery, ‘The Clock’, and other works like it, challenge the printed page's primacy in recording or expressing what is seen and felt when we think about our relationship with film. In a way, ‘The Clock’ asks an epistemological question about how we come to know film – and ourselves – through film. Perhaps bits of carefully selected film clips painstakingly spliced together with the generous support of visualization software approaches a better approximation of our memory and experience of film today than a written investigation into plot, theme, and character. Clocks, a sign of time – and as ‘The Clock’ points out, a sign of our times – might find their deepest and most engaging analysis for us today with the aid of an algorithmic inquiry into the body of film and its digital recombination and display in the gallery.

Art and information, the two functions that Rodowick sees for the digital life of film, appear to coalesce in a recent work by G. A. Rhodes at York University’s Augmented Reality Lab entitled ‘52 Card Psycho’. With ‘52 Card Psycho’, 52 individual playing cards are imprinted with unique markers that are tracked by a digital camera. The camera passes this information on to a computer that matches the cards with individuated shots from Psycho’s shower scene and overlays a video feed of the cards with these scenes on a separate screen. On the website, Rhodes describes his project as:

an installation-based investigation into cinematic structures and interactive cinema viewership [...] The cards can be stacked, dealt, arranged in their original order or re-composed in different configurations, creating spreads of time [...] The medium of the animated image, in its wedding with the real world, loses the privileged linearity of the screen, and gives the opportunity to re-perceive cinema as the juxtaposition of its parts.
'52 Card Psycho' shows us how we can now do far more than look at and write about film. We can interact with film via interfaces that enable new relationships via data-rich interfaces and environments. In this respect, '52 Card Psycho' illustrates what Rodowick means when he says "cinema has become more like language than image, with discrete and definable minimal units (pixels) open to transformations of value and syntactic recombination"72 – cinema becomes an image-based language open to the relationality and expressivity we have come to expect of language. We find ourselves, once again, learning this new language with its new challenges and new outcomes for material, new and old.

Of course, some might see these experiments and expressions as a denigration of the body of film – as Hitchcock, and the rest of his colleagues, hacked to bits by a shadowy, murderous force. Instead, I would argue that we should see this as a 'revelatory moment',73 similar to the moment when film scholarship began to embrace the editing table and the freeze frame that accompanied it. The digital life of film reminds us that there is so much more to be discovered in film, and so much more to learn about ourselves, and about the tools that we create and use to aid memory and analyses. Having extended our senses once again, we should not, as Marshall and Eric McLuhan warn, omit to follow these experiments with observation. In our ability to alter, recombine, search, and find patterns in film with the aid of computers, we might gain a greater appreciation for Hitchcock, the construction of film, and the experience of film. The ideal spectator, or the ideal film scholar for that matter (if such a term still applies), may no longer be one who sits in a movie theater with a notepad, or even in a living room with a stack of DVDs and a laptop, but one who actively interacts with the body of film as information and as art.

The trajectory of film technologies has taken film analyses from linear, literary analyses where films are presented as coherent texts to non-linear, highly personal and/or algorithmic analyses of a body of film opened up to recombination and annotation. This leaves us with some questions. Does this democratize or popularize film analysis? Does it make film analysis more accessible? With filmic texts and tools for analysis readily available, as well as a means to propagate them at hand with various digital distribution networks, the answer would appear to be yes. That said, the 'analyses' presented in works of film as information and art such as ‘The Clock’ and ‘52 Card Psycho’ provide a productive relocation of film in both setting and format that goes well beyond the means of the amateur enthusiast. Perhaps, in order to remain relevant, the film scholar must, like Rhodes and Marclay, become a media artist as well, signaling the next frontier for film analysis through customized
interfaces that provide novel perspectives of form and content. They must do something that the audience does not and cannot do themselves, while making their analysis accessible to said audience in some way. The scholar, once dedicated to tracking down archival reels and editing tables instead might create algorithms and interfaces that produce new observations of film to justify their position. Alternatively, the film scholar may have to become a media scholar, interpreting and analyzing film in its specific transformations and relocations by way of our ever-evolving tools and techniques.

Notes

1. Special thanks to Murray Pomerance for giving me an eye for Hitchcock.
6. “What consequently emerge are, on the one hand, new forms of access to filmic experience and, on the other, new surroundings in which this experience might take place.” Filmic Experience, 62.
7. Filmic Experience, 63.
15. In the acknowledgments of *Hitchcock’s Films*, Wood thanks the National Film Archive in England for allowing him to see “certain films otherwise unavailable.” See Wood, *Hitchcock’s Films*, 7.
17. Many of Hitchcock’s British films are available on YouTube. For example, see ‘Rich and Strange (1931)’, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAoKjVG2fec..
18. Yacowar also later reports that his “writing was necessarily based on a single viewing and – usually – the foolhardy diligence of note taking in the dark” (see Yacowar, *Hitchcock’s British Films*, xii).
20. Yacowar majored in English, producing a Master's dissertation on The Earl of Rochester, a seventeenth-century poet, and completing a PhD at The Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham (see ‘Maurice Yacowar | Department of English', University of Calgary, http://english.ucalgary.ca/engl/MauriceYacowar.

21. Wood received his training in English at Cambridge and was inspired by the Shakespearean scholar AP Rossiter (see Charles Barr, ‘Robin Wood obituary’, The Guardian, 4 January, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2010/jan/04/robin-wood-obituary). Granted, in the first lines of Hitchcock’s Films, Wood promises a move away from a literary analysis to a visual analysis that “grasps the nature of the medium” (see Wood, Hitchcock’s Films, 7). Upon reviewing his work in comparison to some of the work that follows (see Bellour, The Analysis of Film, and Rothman, Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze) it can be seen to maintain traditional literary concerns.


23. Ibid., 123.


27. Bellour, The Analysis of Film, 2.

28. Ibid., 3.

29. Ibid., 21.

30. Hitchcock is particularly deft at showing how technology contributes to the mediation of proximity. In an amusing and illustrative passage from North By Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959), Roger O. Thornhill (Cary Grant) looks through a telescopic lens to get a closer look at the faces on Mt. Rushmore. This lens system, a vision system with Galilean roots, extends the eye in order to construct a closeness with distant objects, the same way that the camera, the lens systems and machine vision that Hitchcock employs, takes (and makes) scholars and audiences closer to Grant’s familiar and adorable mug.

31. Bellour, The Analysis of Film, xii.

32. Ibid., 5.

33. Ibid., 26.

34. William Rothman explains the process, arduous by today’s standards, of obtaining stills from film: “I used a 35mm SLR still camera mounted on a Steenbeck editing table and simply photographed each frame as it appeared on the screen. Since the images in the book are rather small, in most cases they turned out reasonably well. Because the 16mm prints were in decent shape but had their share of scratches, I had to find, for each still, a frame that was relatively free of scratches. Also, Stennbeck screens tended to have hot spots in the center of the image, so I also had to find, for each still, a frame in which the hot spot was not too noticeable. If I remember correctly, it took me a grueling day for each film to take all the shots I needed” (William Rothman, e-mail message to author, 15 July, 2011).
36. Ibid., 50.
39. Ibid., 255.
41. At 20 pages, Cavell’s analysis is slightly longer than the early work of Yacowar and Wood but shorter than Bellour’s analysis of the same film.
42. Here is one of a number of fascinating connections between the plot, narrative, and themes of *North by Northwest* and *Hamlet* that Cavell points out: “Thornhill’s identifying ‘rot’ as his trademark by now irresistibly suggests to me Hamlet’s sense of something rotten” (see Cavell, *Themes Out of School*, 158).
43. Pomerance, *The Horse Who Drank the Sky*, 4-5.
46. Ibid., 5.
47. Ibid., 4.
48. Lefebvre, *Psycho: De la Figure au Musée Imaginaire*.
56. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 154.
57. Ibid., 147.
59. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 143.
61. Rodowick, ‘Dr. Strange Media’, 1403.
62. Bellour says, “However detailed and complete it may be, and even if it says more, much more, than the film ever appeared to say, the written text can never capture anything but a kind of elementary skeleton, stripped of flesh from the beginning” (see Bellour, *The Analysis of Film*, 16). Bellour calls for new creative strategies that might open up the illusory science of film analysis “to a wider world of images and to relations between and among images and texts” (see Bellour, *The Analysis of Film*, xii).

64. Mixing modes of analysis, McElhaney’s work combines a keen eye for visual detail with a comparative approach and a more literary concern for genre (see McElhaney, The Death of Classical Cinema).


66. Ibid.

67. Marclay spent so much time making ‘The Clock’ that his fingers became calloused from editing (see ‘Slave to rhythm: Christian Marclay on Deadline’, The Economist, 25 August, 2010).


70. ‘52 Card Psycho’.

71. Rodowick, The Virtual Life of Film, 166.

72. Bellour, The Analysis of Film, xii.

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**About the author**

David Colangelo is Assistant Professor of Film Studies at Portland State University and Director, North America, of the Media Architecture Institute. His writing, research, and practice focuses on massive media (urban screens, media architecture, and public projection) as a means to support critical and creative engagements with the city, the moving image, public art, and information. Colangelo’s writing has appeared in Public Art Dialogue and The Journal of Curatorial Studies. His work as a media artist has been presented at the International Symposium for Electronic Art (Istanbul 2011, Sydney 2013, Vancouver 2015), the Media Architecture Biennale (Aarhus 2014, Sydney 2016), the Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism in Shenzhen/Hong Kong (2013-14), and in the Leonardo Electronic Almanac.