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Author(s): Susan White

Source: *MLN*, Vol. 106, No. 5, *Comparative Literature* (Dec., 1991), pp. 910-932

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2904592>

Accessed: 15/11/2014 12:17

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Allegory and Referentiality: *Vertigo* and Feminist Criticism



Susan White

I. In the Place of the Mother

Her huge smile was the glowing heart of that furnace into which, sore and weary, Bea nightly dragged herself, wanting to be enveloped into the limitless reaches of its warmth.

Fannie Hurst, *Imitation of Life*

For more than a decade, since the publication, in 1975, of Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Hitchcock's 1958 film *Vertigo* has been at the vortex of critical debates about the fundamental structures of classical narrative cinema.¹ Psychoanalytic, formalist, feminist, post-structuralist, and Marxist readings of the film have multiplied, making it one of the most frequently analyzed films in the Hitchcock canon, if not in cinema history in general. I will not attempt to explain why *Vertigo* has been thus honored by critics, though I hope that the intrinsic interest of the film will become obvious in what follows. This is, rather, a critical review of the essays on *Vertigo* that seem to me most relevant to feminist theory. My aim is to identify certain fundamental problems in some of the most interesting of these readings: to point to, for example, a nostalgia for an empirically-based history, the essence of which is an unproblematized set of references, upon which

¹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, 3 (1975): 6-18, reprinted in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1988), pp. 57-69. Page numbers will refer to the latter text and will appear in the body of my essay.

the “truth” of the film or the ultimate reading of that film would rely. In my confrontation with Hitchcock critics including Mulvey, Rothman, Cavell, Wexman, Modleski, and Jameson, such issues as maternity, bisexuality, the place of the “real” woman in a materialist reading of the film, and the meaning of allegory from a formalist perspective on *Vertigo* will be considered. I will offer, finally, a reading that speaks of critical failure even as it gives itself as yet another ultimate, in this case *allegorical* reading of the film. I will add that, of course, my own presentation of these critics’ work is itself “allegorical,” in De Man’s sense of the word, in that they are *figures* for me: my allusions to these critics’ theories about the film no doubt fail to capture any referential “truth” about their arguments.

A rapid review of *Vertigo*’s plot, along with some initial placement of the film in psychoanalytic and other well-weathered critical terms is in order. The familiar litany is this: Scottie (James Stewart), the male protagonist of *Vertigo*, is traumatized at the beginning of the film by what Robin Wood describes as a vertiginous birth experience.² He is seen in the first sequence hanging on the edge of a roof while a fellow police officer falls to his death below. We never see (or hear about) Scottie’s rescue—in a sense, as Wood notes, Scottie remains hanging over the edge of the precipice throughout the film (p. 225). He resigns from his position as a man of the law and, marginalized from the working world, physically constrained by a corset, and mentally hemmed in by the vertigo his accident produced, is then recruited by his old school pal, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), to investigate Gavin’s wife Madeleine (Kim Novak). Madeleine seems to be possessed by her female ancestor, the strange and sad Carlotta Valdez, a 19th-century Hispanic woman who was loved and abandoned by a powerful Anglo man, a citizen of San Francisco. Abandoning his “friendship” with the “boyish yet motherly” Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes),³ Scottie falls

² See Robin Wood, “Male Desire, Male Anxiety: The Essential Hitchcock,” *A Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames, Iowa: Iowa St. University Press, 1986), pp. 219-30, reprinted in Robin Wood, *Hitchcock’s Films Revisited* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 371-87. The latter work is a revision of Wood’s earlier *Hitchcock’s Films* (South Brunswick and N.Y.: A. S. Barnes and Tantivy, 1966). Page numbers will refer to the version in the *Hitchcock Reader*; all further page numbers will appear in the text. (The discussion of Scottie’s fall as birth trauma is on p. 224.)

³ See Karen Hollinger’s very interesting reading of the narrative and visual ex-

desperately in love with the possessed woman, only to see her fall to her death, apparently under Carlotta's influence. After a period of mental illness, Scottie meets Judy (also played by Kim Novak), who strangely resembles Madeleine and who is in fact (as we find out in a subsequent flashback) Gavin's abandoned girlfriend, who played Madeleine as part of a plot to get rid of Elster's wife. Allured by the strange resemblance, Scottie convinces Judy to play the part of Madeleine for him—only to find out that she has deceived him. Sorely disappointed, he forces Judy to admit the plot, in an incident that leads to her death in a fall.

Laura Mulvey describes James Stewart's Scottie as an embodiment of the active "gaze" of the male spectator who, terrified by the spectacle of female "lack" or castration (the "abyss" into which he looks at the beginning of the film), fetishistically attempts to recreate the "ideal," phallic woman (Madeleine). When this attempt fails Scottie "persecutes" and "punishes" the woman for what symbolically amounts to her castrated state. He does this because the woman's lack implies the possibility that he, too, is subject to lack, not only as the loss of an organ, but as that organ's loss stands in for human subjection to all loss. For Mulvey, Scottie's vertigo is a trope for his confrontation with the abyss of the feminine, conflated with the terror of birth and with the horizon of death, presented both as the literal gaping hole of the grave in Scottie's dream of Carlotta, and as the Freudian repetition compulsion.

As Mulvey's critics have observed, Scottie's apparent mastery of the threatening woman is deceptive. To his horror, at the end of the film, which we will now examine more carefully, Scottie discovers that in "fetishizing" Madeleine he has inadvertently repeated the actions of the powerful Gavin Elster, (re)dressing the same woman chosen by Elster to play the part of Madeleine. The discovery occurs in this manner: Scottie's fetishizing and metacinematic (directorial) act is deflated when Judy "accidentally" wears a necklace once worn by Madeleine. Seeing it, Scottie recognizes that he has been duped, and proceeds both to demystify the situation and to cure himself of vertigo by dragging Judy back to the tower

pression of female desire in *Vertigo*, "The Look, Narrativity, and the Female Spectator in *Vertigo*," *Journal of Film and Video* 39, 4 (Fall 1987): 18-27, in which she describes Midge as a spectator figure with whom the female spectator identifies uneasily, since Midge, who is both too motherly and too boyish, "is permanently divorced from what the narrative suggests is the appropriate character of femininity" (p. 21). Further page references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

off of which Gavin Elster had thrown his wife. Judy is to be frightened and thus punished for her inability to approximate the image of the fetish-object Madeleine. But once again, the repetition compulsion holds sway: Scottie overcomes his vertigo—this time making it to the top of the tower, where he had tried and failed to follow Madeleine before—but even as he and Judy exchange an ambiguous kiss, there emerges from the shadows a ghostly figure, a nun, whose looming figure incites Judy to leap over the parapet to her death.

Although it seems to exemplify what she sees as the rigidly dichotomized pattern of male voyeurism and scopophilia, Mulvey refrains from finally condemning *Vertigo*. She asserts, rather, that the film goes further in the right direction than do most Hollywood films, because it turns the processes the viewer employs back on “him”self, thus showing how the woman is ultimately made to suffer for the man’s visual and narrative pleasure. Other critics defend the film in even stronger terms. Robin Wood asserts that Hitchcock’s film can be “saved” for feminism precisely insofar as it exposes “the monstrosity of a project built on the infantile demands of the regressed male ego and its denial of woman’s human reality” (pp. 220, 229-30). Karen Hollinger notes that the film actually works through a *female* Oedipal drama, the desire for unity with a powerful maternal presence (Carlotta), and in that way subverts its masculinist premises (p. 22). In her recent book on Hitchcock,⁴ Tania Modleski also sees *Vertigo* as telling a tale of female desire for unity with a mother “who assumes unlimited power in death” (p. 93). In this way, like Wood and Hollinger, Modleski sees the film as inscribing the woman’s desire into a scenario that otherwise is based on the effort to get her to mirror man and his desire.

Using similar reasoning to claim that *Vertigo* is somehow *about* the difficult or impossible position into which the woman is placed, William Rothman debates whether or not *Vertigo* can be considered as an instance of the new genre delineated by Cavell in his attempt to describe women who, like Judy, remain “unacknowledged” by the men they love.⁵ In Ophüls’s paradigmatic *Letter From an Un-*

⁴ Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (N.Y. and London: Methuen, 1988). Page references will appear in the text.

⁵ See William Rothman, “*Vertigo*: The unknown Woman in Hitchcock,” in *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis, and Cinema*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William

known Woman, as in Hitchcock's film, the male protagonist fails to recognize, until it is too late, the woman he once loved: such a failed structure of deferral replicates, for Cavell, the nostalgic or diphasic structure of human experience, achieved, as we have seen, through repetition. For Cavell, this misrecognition reflects the "villainous potential in maleness" (a potential always at work in the margins of the comedy of remarriage, as in, say, the phony rape scene in Cukor's "comedy," *The Philadelphia Story*). Cavell finally locates both male villainy and the failure of acknowledgment of the woman in a particular interpretation of the "problem of other minds" (Do other minds exist? Can I know what they know?, etc.). The possibility of radical skepticism concerning other minds, Cavell claims, is a specifically masculine province—that of not really being able to know whether or not his child is his own. Although Cavell finds "vulgar" the notion that any reified form of difference can be located "in some fixed way women know that men don't" (and vice versa), it seems to be the case for him that women know maternity in a way that men do not know paternity and that broader epistemological consequences can be drawn from this: knowing the existence of the other, for Cavell and for the man, comes to present itself as knowing both the body and what the other knows—the agency of her pregnancy (p. 33). For Cavell, both film and psychoanalysis, created or discovered during the same period, privilege female knowledge in this rather mystified form. Garbo is, like Freud's mnemonically gifted hysterics, a monument of memory and knowledge (p. 36). For both film star and hysteric, the body is the locus for the expression of her knowledge. Indeed, it is perhaps this expressive potential of the woman's body that so often inspires critics to locate "truth" in its (finally broken) presence.

Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 64-81, and Stanley Cavell, "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman," *ibid.*, pp. 11-43. References to both articles will be cited parenthetically in the text. The "melodrama of the unknown woman" is the tragic sister of Cavell's "comedy of remarriage." See Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). Ophuls's *Letter From an Unknown Woman* is the film that inspired Cavell's designation of this new genre, or subgenre. For rather complex reasons, including Judy's guilty relationship with Gavin Elster, Rothman (p. 79) finally decides that *Vertigo* is not a true example of the unknown woman genre. Rothman's discussion of the mother-daughter bond in *Vertigo* in the light of the characteristics Cavell discerns in this genre is nonetheless of interest.

In Cavell's melodrama of the unknown woman, the woman achieves her existence, or fails to do so, "apart from or beyond satisfaction by marriage" and *with the presence of her mother and her children*, while in the related remarriage comedy the woman's existence is ensured by her conversational exchange with the man (what Milton calls, Cavell notes, "meet and cheerful conversation," p. 18). For William Rothman, *Vertigo* counts as an instance of the melodrama of the unknown woman insofar as Judy "apprehends her condition more deeply than do the men in her world" and "possesses a deeper vision, intelligence, and depth of feeling" than do these men (p. 78). Rothman also rather brilliantly shows how Judy is tied to the genre by virtue of her (imaginary) relation to Carlotta Valdes, by the bonds of both mother- and daughterhood:

Judy's and Carlotta's stories are the very stuff of the unknown woman melodramas, but they seem to lack connection. Why should Judy be haunted by Carlotta's tragedy? It helps to think of Judy's bond as being not only with Carlotta Valdes, the mother whose daughter was taken from her, but also with Carlotta's daughter, the little girl whose mother failed to keep her from becoming lost. This provides a key to Judy's psychology—she keeps a photograph of herself with her mother, who, after her first husband's death, married a man her daughter didn't like, precipitating Judy's move to the big city in search of a man who would love her for herself, and her ensnarement by Elster. (p. 78)

Not only does Judy both know and feel more than do the men who are using her, she is also peculiarly knowledgeable about a "mother" to whom her ties are merely fictional, as well as to a "real" one with whom her relations are troubled.⁶ Thus do Wood, Rothman, Hollinger, and Modleski all focus on Judy's privileged relation to the camera and her tragic knowledge of the conditions of her own existence. This privileged knowledge is revealed to the audience at the pivotal point in the film where an unorthodox shift to Judy's range of knowledge reveals, through the agency of the flashback opened by Judy's direct gaze into the camera, that Judy and Madeleine are indeed the same woman. We, the audience, do finally seem to know what Judy knows: the privilege of female knowledge is revealed in such a way as to induce sympathy for the woman's plight in the spectator.

⁶ It is interesting to note that Judy, like Scottie, may be looking for a replacement for a lost loved one, in this case her father.

The question of the woman's unknownness and of her eerie knowledge resurges at the end of the film in the moment of Judy's death, a moment Rothman and Marian Keane (who, like Rothman, seems to count herself a Cavellian) both see as revelatory of Judy's superior knowledge of the conditions of her existence (partly indicated by her special relation to the camera and to visibility itself),⁷

⁷ See Marian Keane, "A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock, and *Vertigo*," in *A Hitchcock Reader*, pp. 231-48. Page references will appear parenthetically in the text. Keane's essay astutely criticizes Mulvey's work on *Vertigo*, noting, among other things, that Mulvey gives voyeurism a purely active and sadistic role, when in fact it seems clear that the Jimmy Stewart character *suffers* mightily in his role as voyeur and thus is at least partially a passive character, since to suffer is to be acted upon. (For Keane and for Rothman, Hitchcock himself also suffers from an inability to make himself, or his camera [continually] visible onscreen.) Keane returns to Freud's writings on scopophilia to substantiate her (at least partially valid) claim that Mulvey is misusing the term. Keane also reproaches Mulvey for linking "activity" too strongly with biological masculinity and "passivity" with biological femininity. It is my opinion that the former criticism is made more accurately by Tania Modleski ("Femininity by Design: *Vertigo*," in *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, pp. 87-100), who notes Scottie's suffering, but indicates how, according to terms that Keane herself sets up, this suffering is in effect a *feminization* of the Jimmy Stewart character. (Keane says, citing Cavell, that Scottie is forced to come to terms with, to inhabit a "feminine region of the self," [p. 243]). Since Keane acknowledges that passivity and, concomitantly, suffering are often linked to the state of femininity in our culture, her only possible remaining criticism of Mulvey (on this point) is her observation that "in psychoanalytic usage the term 'masculine' does not indicate a quality that is possessed by men only and that 'feminine' does not describe an instinct or quality that can be understood as the special province of women" (p. 239), a fact of which, Keane claims, Mulvey seems to be ignorant. What Keane herself ignores is that Mulvey considers this very point (the occupation by the woman of both "masculine" and "feminine" positions in her spectation of films) in the companion piece to "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," *Framework* 15/16/17 (1981): 12-15, reprinted in Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory*, pp. 69-79, which appeared long before Keane's essay on *Vertigo*. Although I find much of value in Keane's work, I am dismayed by her reduction of Mulvey's position, and by her final comments on feminist theorists' use of Freud: "If feminist criticism is to understand itself to be deeply informed by Freud's thinking (as Mulvey declares her thinking to be) and by film history (which Mulvey also declares to be the case, though she understands that as a sad rather than wonderful fact), then it must recognize that, as in Freud's work and in films of major importance, its central subject is loving" (p. 247). It seems to me that by making "loving" rather than *sexuality* the "central subject" of Freud's work Keane is denying, as well as the stated central subject of this work, the fact that the woman serves *asymmetrically* as the object of violence (related to sexuality, that is, to "loving") in Hitchcock's (not to mention others') films, as well as the fact that, although feminists after Mulvey may have a more "positive" relationship to Hollywood cinema than Mulvey seems to allow, this cinema, like heterosexuality itself as we know it (barring dramatic and fundamental social changes), for the most part *problematizes* the very female subjectivity that renders possible any such (reciprocal) "loving."

as compared to the men who use her and finally “cause” her death. Indeed, the emergence of the nun, who frightens or inspires Judy into leaping from the tower, might be read as the representation of Judy herself as “spectre” (p. 244), the woman unacknowledged and denied by Scottie’s vision. Or, Keane notes, “what Novak/Judy sees rising up in the shadows of the bell tower is an embodiment of Hitchcock’s camera,” itself an invisible spectre, whose existence is “unacknowledged and sexless” (p. 245). And finally, for Keane, “Hitchcock endorses Novak/Judy’s leap because it certifies, as no other act can, her actual existence” (p. 245). The leap somehow connects Judy to a more actual, referential self, one that is endorsed by Hitchcock and by his critics.

Like Keane, Karen Hollinger objects to Mulvey’s notion that Scottie’s relationship to Madeleine/Judy is one that he controls:

If Scottie has created through his “look” the strength of her visual presence for himself and the spectator, Elster has given her a story, one that is particularly in accord with Scottie’s Oedipal drama. Madeleine’s story, in fact, is the female version of Scottie’s own dilemma: like him she is stranded in the Imaginary, where she is unable to sever her connection with the figure of the Mother in the person of Carlotta Valdes. (p. 22)

Having witnessed the death of the “father” (the representative of the law, the policeman) at the beginning of the film, and having difficulty in his attempt to break with the motherly Midge, Scottie not only finds the ideal “phallic” woman in the Madeleine created for him by Elster, but also sees his own painful plight with regard to the mother mirrored in hers. The spectral figure of the nun who appears at the end of the film is metonymically related to that of Carlotta, in that nuns nurtured her as a child. These childless women might be said to stand *in loco matris* to Carlotta, even as Carlotta, whose child died, seems to have occupied that position for Madeleine/Judy. Keane asks why, in the name of love, Scottie cannot acknowledge Judy, “the real woman divorced from her relation to Carlotta Valdes” (p. 241), while Hollinger (from a very different perspective) argues that Scottie is eager to break off his relationship with the maternal. I would maintain that it is, rather, precisely insofar as this melodrama of an unknown woman expresses something about the woman’s desire for (a perhaps impossible) reconciliation with the mother—or at least her need to resolve what her mother’s place is in her existence—that it holds fascination for both

male and female spectator. Although it is certainly true that in order to be “seduced into femininity” (Hollinger, p. 23) the woman must give up her relation to the mother (as well as the boyishness exemplified by Midge), it is also paradoxically the case that it is the woman *as linked to the mother*, who cannot be seduced away from the mother, that is the object of the man’s insistent desire in *Vertigo*. It is ultimately this link to the figure(s) of alternately powerful (pre-Oedipal) and wounded (Oedipal) maternity that also constitutes the critics’ fascination with *Vertigo*, and which incites them to produce not only Judy/Madeleine as a “real woman,” but Carlotta Valdes as a “real” historical figure, as well.

Tania Modleski also describes the mother-daughter relationship as an occulted but extraordinarily powerful model for structures of identification in Hitchcock’s films. *Vertigo* is what Modleski calls a “limit text” (p. 87) in its treatment of the problematics of identification first introduced in *Rebecca*, in that both *Vertigo* and *Rebecca* tell the tale of a dead woman’s grip on a living “daughter” figure. Hitchcock’s ambivalent fascination and Scottie’s identification with this mother-daughter dyad, in which the mother constitutes the ghostly, unknown figure the daughter risks becoming, seems to Modleski to deconstruct the very notion of masculine identity. Indeed, this is a powerful reading. Unlike Keane, Modleski emphasizes the violence with which the threatened male spectator or director seeks to reassert the control destabilized in *Vertigo* by, among other things, the spectacle of female bisexuality, as evidenced in the daughter’s continued investment in the ghostly mother.

Why is this bisexuality so threatening? Modleski tells us that this is because the woman’s bisexuality reminds the man of his own (menacing and alluring) bisexual nature. Just as the Stewart character in *Rear Window* is immobilized and in that way can be identified with the victimized female invalid whose murder he is investigating, *Vertigo*’s Stewart is in a position of enforced passivity—he *suffers* from his painful identification with femininity, his own potential, even actual femininity. At the beginning of the film, while he watches Midge draw a brassiere designed on the principle of the cantilever bridge (a double gesture of demystifying the woman’s constructed body and alluding to the mystery of Madeleine, who will jump into the Bay near the bridge), Scottie, too, is wearing female undergarments—a corset. By the mid-point in the film, Scottie has become completely identified not just with Madeleine, but with the sad Carlotta: like her he wanders the streets looking

for a lost loved one. Scottie *is* the deprived mother, just as, for Rothman, Hitchcock *is* the “unknown” and victimized woman (p. 79). I would add to Modleski’s argument about the threatening nature of female bisexuality that, as I have implied above, it is the woman’s seeming epistemological privilege with respect to the mother and to the fact of maternity that also renders her bisexuality both suspect and *enviable*—and finally eminently co-optable by the desiring man who is watching her, though not without risks. (He risks, among other things, the catatonia, the immobilization, and the symbolic castration undergone by Scottie during the course of the film. He also *risks* death, but does not die. It is the woman, the “feminine” part of the man, his more vulnerable other, the part of him that is umbilically linked to the mother, who dies or is cast off at the end of the film.) In his essay on the unknown woman, Cavell reminds us that for Freud the repudiation of the feminine is “the bedrock beyond which psychoanalysis cannot go.”⁸ In *Vertigo* the male subject investigates, adores, abhors, bonds with, and finally *abjects* (in the Kristevian sense) the feminine.⁹ The fascination with the mother may indeed only be invoked in order to permit a more decisive casting off than was earlier, only partially accomplished.

There is, we have seen, another side to this story—the side told from the point of view of the feminine *subject* in the film. For virtually all of these critics, Wood, Hollinger, Modleski, Rothman, Keane, *et al.*, the “real” woman’s point of view is somehow sympathetically conveyed, through the device of the flashback from Judy’s perspective.

What is the force behind the critical impulse to identify the place of this so-called real woman, conflated with a maternal entity, as

⁸ Cavell, p. 40, is referring to Sigmund Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74): 23, 211-53.

⁹ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, tr. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) for her discussion of how the “throwing off” of both mother and child takes place even before complete (psychological and physical) separation has occurred. This state of abjection is very much like the Imaginary one described by Karen Hollinger as the source of Scottie’s need to separate from the mother by accepting from a father figure (Gavin Elster) an ideal substitute. The state of abjection might also be invoked in Modleski’s discussion of Scottie’s “femininity,” since, according to Kristeva, the masculine child, when still part of the mother’s body, is also “feminine.” Birth, like Scottie’s initial fall, initiates a “drive which, propelled by an initial loss, does not cease wandering, unsated, deceived, warped, until it finds its only stable object—death” (p. 23).

the position from which the truth of the narrative can be revealed? This impulse is based for several of *Vertigo's* critics on a particular reading of Marxist and Brechtian theory. (This is the case even for Modleski, who ostensibly rejects Brechtian “distanciation” as anti-feminine because it seems to dismiss as ideologically suspect the identification and merging which she claims as specifically female modes of interacting with a text [Modleski, pp. 8-9]. Modleski nonetheless feels that women are somehow better positioned to “read” patriarchy than are men—a view that has its etiology in Marxism.)

Brecht’s concerns, so often invoked by recent film critics influenced by Marxism, were “rooted in a realism that ran deeper than verisimilitude.”¹⁰ It involved

discovering the causal complexes of society/unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who rule it/writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught/emphasizing the element of development/making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it.¹¹

The attempt to discover the “causal complexes of society” in an historical and materialist manner can become an exercise in critical self-gratification if the question of just where that standpoint is located—the one “which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught” is not carefully posed. By positing the “real woman” as the locus of textual truth in *Vertigo*, non-Marxist critics like Rothman and Keane valorize this woman in a frankly empiricizing gesture, just as other critics, including Modleski, see the (empirical) female spectator as the site of *textual* truth. What is odd is that it is here, at the locus of the woman’s (fallen) body that such divergent critical approaches meet. I will now turn to examining the way in which this critical emphasis on Hitchcock’s (though perhaps not Scottie’s) recognition and representation of this woman’s “reality” obscures, rejects, or collapses what might be termed an allegorical reading of *Vertigo*.

¹⁰ See Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 64.

¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, “Against George Lukács,” *New Left Review* 84 (March-April 1974): 50.

II. Allegory Story

Je m'adore dans ce que j'ai fait.

Rousseau, *Pygmalion*

In a 1982 review of William Rothman's book on Hitchcock, *The Murderous Gaze*, Frederic Jameson levels an attack on Rothman's view that Hitchcock's cinema "triumphantly" allegorizes the cinematic process.¹² According to Jameson, Rothman derives from that quintessentially modernist (or medieval) allegorical double consciousness (of cinematic "form" and "content") some notion of artistic achievement that can only remain, for Jameson, self-enclosed and sterile because it does not insert itself (as, say, Godard attempts and often himself fails to do) within a materialist history. For Rothman (*The Murderous Gaze*, p. 102), the camera is doubly representative: first it is the instrument of a real relationship—the "author's act of directing, choosing the views to be presented to us," and, second, "it represents the author who creates and animates that world and presides over its accidents, who wields a power of life and death over the camera's subject." In his critique of Rothman, Jameson claims that this "duality [the "real" world, the world of film], this relative separation of functions, makes possible an allegorical reconnection, a punctual conjoining of the two levels or narratives" (p. 39). But Rothman, as Jameson notes, observes (like Keane) that the "camera's master" is also impotent. Insofar as his place is behind the camera, he represents only a haunting, ghostly presence within the world it frames. He has no body: no one can meet his gaze. For Rothman, therefore, the allegory of Hitchcock's cinema also involves the auteur's need for recognition, for a contradictory acknowledgment as embodied and as an invisible, mastering presence. This contentless allegory will, for Jameson, always be inadequate (and he locates it in Rothman's reading rather than "in" the Hitchcockian text), since it is a form of "idealism" that itself "betrays an unconscious need for content proper" (p. 42).

Jameson's materialist discussion of the inadequacy of allegory can be traced, perhaps "historically," perhaps only analogically, to the Romantic opposition between allegory and symbol described by

¹² Frederick Jameson, "Reading Hitchcock," *October* 23 (Winter 1982): 15-42 (this citation from p. 42), is reviewing William Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). Further page references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Paul de Man in one of his best-known essays, "The Rhetoric of Temporality."¹³ De Man delineates a history in which, as the 19th century progressed, the literary world witnessed an increasing supremacy of the symbol, "founded on an intimate unity between the image that rises up before the senses and the supersensory totality that the image suggests" (p. 189). The structure of the symbol is "that of the synechdoche, for the symbol is always part of the totality that it represents" (p. 191). Allegory, on the other hand, "appears as dryly rational and dogmatic in its reference to a meaning that it does not itself constitute" (p. 189): it implies, as Jameson notes, a "disjunction of the constitutive faculties" (p. 191), where material perception is not continuous with imagination, as is the case with the symbol. "In contrast," de Man notes, citing Coleridge [*The Statesman's Manual*], "the allegorical form appears purely mechanical, an abstraction whose original meaning is even more devoid of substance than its 'phantom proxy,' the allegorical representative; it is an immaterial shape that represents a sheer phantom devoid of shape and substance" (pp. 191-2). Just so does Jameson comment that in Rothman's *Murderous Gaze* "an initially inert and 'meaningless' content—the elements of the murder plot proper—is allegorized into so many figures for the formal process of the film itself" (p. 42).

Jameson's nostalgia for content, his impatience with those who would fetishize the codes of "pure cinema" is echoed in a 1986 essay by Virginia Wright Wexman, "The Critic as Consumer: Film Study in the University, *Vertigo*, and the Film Canon."¹⁴ In this essay Wexman, like Jameson, takes to task the critics who argue *Vertigo's* status as "pure cinema," noting that they rationalize what Gramsci has called the hegemonic functions served, in this case, by particular cinematic institutions at work in the film (p. 34). Wexman is even harder on feminist critics who, like Mulvey, theorize *Vertigo* as a film that enacts the objectification and fetishization of woman, since these critics do not take into account the effect that

¹³ Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), reprinted (in slightly altered form) in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., intro. Wlad Godzich, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 7, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). Page references, from the latter edition of the essay, will appear parenthetically in the text.

¹⁴ Virginia Wright Wexman, "The Critic as Consumer: Film Study in the University, *Vertigo*, and the Film Canon," *Film Quarterly* 39, 3 (1986): 32-41. Page numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.

the increasingly powerful positions occupied by white bourgeois intellectual women have on the vested interests of their critical postures. Such positions of power, according to Wexman, produce for this academic group “methodological constraints that prevent it from addressing broader and more historically specific issues of class, race and economics” (p. 34). Feminist critics are, in effect, *blinded* by their own class position, and thus do not occupy the “standpoint” from which the historical truths of the narrative can emerge.¹⁵ For Wexman a more materialist approach, for both groups of critics, would involve grounding Hitchcock’s allegory of the creation of the star (Judy as Madeleine) not simply in the directorial drive towards controlling his leading ladies but in the industry-wide phenomenon of manipulation and control of the female star. The reading of *Vertigo* as simply recreating the director’s relationships with his female stars, according to Wexman, “shifts the focus of discussion away from the meaning inherent in the star’s *own presence*” (p. 34, my emphasis). Wexman would move away from allegorical readings of the general cinematic processes reflected in the film to looking at the meaning inherent in the bodily presence of the star herself. Wexman goes on to detail just how Kim Novak was held hostage in her dressing room by the producers at Columbia, constantly watched and allowed to eat only food specially prepared for her (this “fat Pollack,” as she was termed). Wexman’s approach to reading *Vertigo*—materialist in that she investigates the real events as they influenced the making of the film (a materialism occluded in other readings by the self-interest of bourgeois feminism?)—would also recognize how the film’s “buried references to issues of class and race were contained during the fifties as part of a nationalist ideology that defined American society in terms of its ability to achieve world dominance” (p. 38). When Gavin Elster “speaks nostalgically of ‘the

¹⁵ One, of course, wonders how it is that Wexman, a white, feminist, academic critic, is *not* blinded by her own position. Perhaps it has something to do with the way in which certain “historically specific” arguments about class, race, and economics have been appropriated by academic critics (like myself), who are able to reap career benefits from such readings, and therefore are not prevented, out of class-interest or whatever, from recognizing these truths. I find Wexman’s reading of the film excellent, and certainly do not accuse her (or myself) of profiteering, but her statements regarding class blindness seem incoherent. A further critique of her position might be made if one deconstructs, along with de Man, the Enlightenment-inspired notion that blindness is *opposed* to insight, rather than being the very means by which insight occurs. See Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Blindness,” in *Blindness and Insight*.

old San Francisco' when men had 'freedom and power' " (p. 38), we are indeed hard-pressed not to read this as a harking back to the good old days of unselfconscious U.S. power-mongering on the international scene. For Wexman the ultimate trope of this desire to dominate lies not merely in the film's discourse about a man both yearning for and visually persecuting a woman, but in the oppositions set into play between the upper-class setting of the desired woman (Madeleine is clearly aristocratic) and the lower-class background of the "real" woman, Judy. This class difference seems to have been *unspeakable* for the formalist critics of both schools Wexman criticizes. And even more unspeakable is the question of racial or ethnic opposition: In Scottie's nightmare, Wexman writes, he sees Elster not with the "patrician" Madeleine, but with the darkly ambiguous Carlotta. "In the nightmare, Carlotta represents what ultimately terrorizes Scottie, and the fears that Carlotta arouses in him are more *culturally specific* than either Hitchcock or his feminist critics are in a position to acknowledge" (p. 38, my emphasis). The "culturally specific" here takes the shape of that menacing, unformalizable entity—Carlotta—a metonymy for the dark, densely material and densely "historical" past of the perky and gum-snapping Judy. I would like to pose the question here as to whether, in following the materialist or Romantic move away from allegory towards symbol, with its synecdochal connection to the "real," we are not in some sense reduplicating the scene in Pop Liebl's bookstore where this amateur historian thrillingly traces for us a moment in history where power relations were more blatant, more overt, more readable, more *real*, when Carlotta's lover threw the dark mother into the street. Nostalgia for and fear of a material/maternal correspondence: is it allegory that Scottie wants or symbol? When Scottie sees the necklace metonymically linking the "real" Judy to the perhaps unreal Madeleine, he is furious, he falls into a murderous rage. We will find out at the end of the film that Madeleine has no material tie to the real Carlotta (the latter's child died leaving no offspring). Judy/Madeleine's necklace both asserts and denies a real tie to Carlotta: is it the lack of an unambiguous material link to the dark woman rather than evidence that she is *still attached* to that woman the trigger of Scottie's rage?

I have tried to imply, at various moments in this essay, that the recovery of that feminine abject, cast-off, waste product—the very honorable project of Marxist and feminist scholars—is nonetheless a problematic one. The bedrock of critical thinking on *Vertigo* is the

notion, found in all of these critics, that somewhere here the real woman, a victim, is speaking. For Rothman (in his essay on *Vertigo*) and for Modleski, the voice of that victim is ventriloquized by Hitchcock. This melancholy identification with female suffering and with the woman as lost object is Scottie's, Hitchcock's, and the spectator's gravest fear (will we see only the abyss of Carlotta's grave?) and greatest desire (to know what the woman knows is the guarantee of her own existence and ours). Although he denies the radical feminist claim that women speak a different language from men, we've seen that Cavell does indeed posit a biologically determined or at least *influenced* way of knowing for women that excludes the possibility of skepticism *about maternity*. Modleski, too, in her occasionally essentialist way, sees women as knowing *too* much (to paraphrase her book title), as somehow knowing something outside patriarchal culture (perhaps *about* the pre-Oedipal mother). As the victims of sexist culture, as the privileged sufferers of the camera's gaze, women like Judy, whose knowledge we are privileged to share, know the reality of male villainy and the uncanny possibility of the maternal made real. To know the mother's story is finally to become one with her—the overidentification and boundary confusion experienced by daughters, as Modleski describes it, a model imitated by Hitchcock's men, including Norman Bates, is the risk run by those who seek to know the story of the real victim. But to produce the daughter (much less the son) as perpetually desiring to merge with the mother, to identify with the knowledge that the woman brings—these can be more oppressive gestures than some feminist critics have been willing to admit.

Jane Gallop has noted that “A mode of language where mother, not father is authority—matriarchal discourse—is not an object of focus but a dream, that is to say, in psychoanalytic terms, the fulfillment of a wish.”¹⁶ Gallop is describing the French feminists' fantasy of speaking the non-patriarchal language of the pre-Oedipal mother. But this *dream*, in *Vertigo*, is Scottie's, just as it is his wish to project his fall onto the woman, to make her the representative, the lightning rod for his lack-in-being. It is in this wish to merge with the maternal *mind*, to know what she knows, that the desire of French-influenced feminists and what Modleski describes as the authorial desire of Hitchcock coincide. Fascinated and hor-

¹⁶ Jane Gallop, “Reading the Mother Tongue: Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism,” *Critical Inquiry* 13, 2 [Winter 1987], p. 321.

rified by the notion that woman somehow has greater access to the otherness of maternity, the man pursues and punishes her when she is unable to provide him with the knowledge he seeks—when, like the rejected Midge—she turns away from or even mocks the desire to merge with the maternal figure, while still invoking her own maternal role.¹⁷ This is not to say that desire for the mother is not important to female psychic development—something about female desire is certainly being expressed in these films. The protagonist of *Rebecca* is most assuredly discovering in herself an ambivalent—both horrifying and exhilarating—identification with the dead, omnipotent mother-figure. But the problem is two-fold. First, the desire to merge with the mother is, as every reader of Chodorow knows very well,¹⁸ extraordinarily threatening for the daughter, too, and is a structure of desire produced at least in part by parenting practices under patriarchy. And second, we must ask what kind of object of knowledge the desired [m]other becomes for us as feminist critics. The way this desire is figured in the cinema obviously does not offer us access into some unspeakable maternal realm, conflated with the material reality of victimization: the body of the fat Kim Novak trapped in her dressing room. This is not to say that these discursive layers are inaccessible to us—but they are no more and no less than discursive.

There is a feminist line of analysis that may be able to avoid placing the maternal realm as an object of knowing (both in the active and the passive sense). This will involve the transformation of the subject-object relation. Naomi Scheman,¹⁹ like Luce Irigaray, has described as *the* feminist project *par excellence* “the creation of the conditions for a transformed subject/object relation” (p. 87), in which the very notion of what it is to be known or to be knowable is radically altered. For Scheman, it is a Cartesian separation from and domination of the object of knowledge that is crucially prob-

¹⁷ I’m thinking of the composite portrait of Midge’s head on Carlotta’s body—a little joke about merging that Midge makes and that Scottie thinks is “not funny.” Though she’s a “maternal” figure (“Come to Mother,” she tells the mentally ill Scottie), an ambiguous representative of the female spectator, and a Hitchcockian “knowing” woman in glasses, Midge is actually ignorant of Scottie’s situation, as Scottie is ignorant of Madeleine’s. She is *not* troped as the knowing woman in the film, the one who offers “real” access to the mother.

¹⁸ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

¹⁹ Naomi Scheman, “Missing Mothers/Desiring Daughters,” *Critical Inquiry* 15, 1 (Autumn 1988): 62-89.

lematic. This is also to cast doubt on the project of controlled merging with the mentality of the other, with “sympathy” in Eliot’s sense of the word, a mode of apprehension that is reduplicated in the putatively feminine desire to merge as well as in the desire to identify with the vision of the oppressed other. There is a strong current of recent thought that espouses just this path to “other” knowledge. But, as Gayatri Spivak has observed, in an essay on *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Frankenstein*, “The absolutely Other cannot be selfed . . . the monster has ‘properties’ which will not be contained by ‘proper’ measures.”²⁰ We must, as liberal or radical, or even as conservative feminist critics, be suspicious of our own troping of the other as embodying *that* otherness which is *in* us. This is true of “the mother”; it is true of the Third World discourses we are so eager to appropriate as the “real” ground of the functioning of the First World. To construct the theoretical bases of a genuine materialist criticism, which recognizes specificity without essentializing or appropriating it, is an extraordinarily difficult task. If, therefore, we are tempted to find in Judy’s flashback access to the “reality” obscured by Scottie’s fantasy, we should note that our gesture precisely reduplicates the fantasy of uncanny female knowledge (described by Cavell as *male* skepticism and longed for by Scottie).

The problems of self and other and that of the (historical) referentiality of symbolic or allegorical reading that we have encountered in various critics’ work on *Vertigo* resemble the issues thrown into relief in de Man’s analysis of allegory. Allegory, in its play with temporality, always implies “an unreachable anteriority,” perhaps something like the unreachable world or body of Carlotta Valdes, or even the less remote anteriority of Judy’s flashback. But this temporality is illusory: allegory engenders “duration as the illusion of a continuity that it knows to be illusionary” (p. 226). In the world of the symbol, on the other hand, it would be possible for the image to coincide with the substance, “since the substance and its representation do not differ in their being but only in their extension” (p. 207). Allegorical signs constitute meaning through repetition, the allegorical sign referring, like Scottie’s attempt to reconstitute Judy as Madeleine, to the sign preceding it. Such allegory is, as Jameson notes, indeed agonizingly devoid of “content.” In one of

²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 258.

the most moving moments in the film, Madeleine stands before a fallen redwood, on whose exposed rings the dates founding Western civilization have been marked. "Somewhere in here I was born, and here I died. You took no notice," she murmurs to the pained and mesmerized Scottie. Madeleine (whose name of course recalls Proust's famous experiment in recollection)²¹ is speaking the dilemma of the subject necessarily produced as an illusory temporality, a temporality that seems at once to constitute Madeleine's subjectivity and dissolve it in Carlotta's:

The fundamental structure of allegory reappears here in the tendency of the language towards narrative, the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration to what is in fact simultaneous in the subject. (p. 225)

The "I" and the "here" are deictic terms, utterly without referential security, like the "self" that Judy wants Scottie to get to know. These are all allegorical selves: here is no longer here; I is no longer I—the three names that Madeleine takes as her own constitute a simultaneity that does not coincide in time. Such is the "authentically temporal predicament of the self" (p. 208). Madeleine simultaneously lives the three modes of self she has spread along the axis of time: Carlotta, Madeleine, Judy. It is, actually, Scottie's *failure* to create the moment of identity that defines his effort as allegorical:

Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void left by this temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully recognized as a non-self. (p. 207)

Scottie is not Madeleine, though both are caught in the Imaginary realm, tied to the mother; Judy "is" not Madeleine, nor is she Carlotta, because there is no Madeleine or Carlotta except insofar as they are modes of Judy's self, placed along an axis of time, and

²¹ For a suggestive reading of Proust's novel as a subtext for *Vertigo*, see Richard E. Goodkin, "Film and Fiction: Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and Proust's 'Vertigo,'" *MLN* 102, 5 (December 1987): 1171-1181. Goodkin discusses both the "madeleine" and the Elster/Elstir parallels. The scene of Madeleine before the fallen redwood is memorialized in Chris Marker's complex exploration of cinematic memory, *Sans Soleil* (1982).

except insofar as they are expressions of a present that can only be evoked through a layered past, Hitchcock's appropriation of the image of the female star, Kim Novak. Allegory can only relate the (discursive) present. It produces this present as a rhetorical structure insofar as it posits a pure anteriority—one that never was, a past that never existed, Madeleine's, Carlotta's, even Judy's?

Frederick Jameson has derided as "allegorical" William Rothman's purely formalistic, overly codified reading of Hitchcock's films, which, Jameson claims, ignores "content proper," a content revealed by a criticism that would be historical and "concrete." Jameson would be right to find troublesome Rothman's "allegorical" readings of Hitchcock's films if, for Rothman, Hitchcock were *adequately* allegorizing the filmmaking process through films like *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*. Such allegory, unlike that described by de Man, would imply a correspondence of medium and representation, the possibility of a successful allegorization of "content" through form. However, Rothman's view of Hitchcock as filmmaker acknowledges that in Hitchcock's search for "supreme power" (Jameson, 42), for a mastery of content so complete that it becomes a pure allegory of form, Hitchcock necessarily fails: the quest for recognition is defeated, as for Hitchcock's characters, by the ghostliness of their necessarily allegorical presence. For Jameson the search for content proper, untouched by allegory, though desired by the "idealism" that transforms "a formal structure or feature into a type of content in its own right," *can* succeed.

Moralizing about this type of idealism is inappropriate, since the very attempt betrays an unconscious need for content proper, an unconscious awareness that one's reading is a purely formalizing one, a sense of the virtual chemical deficiency, the felt lack or absence of the material ground. (p. 42)

This "content" is historical. Like Virginia Wexman, Jameson advocates an "historical perspective" from whence

it becomes possible to transform the formalism of an auto-referential interpretation (the film's deepest subject as filmic perception proper) into a more complex historical and social one. (p. 41)

Of course one must praise the work of Wexman, Hollinger, Modleski, *et al.*, whose research into the history of filmic perception and whose various materialist approaches permit us to identify the tropological structures otherwise occulted (by our formalism? our

class position? our ignorance?). But these critics are themselves telling stories that arise out of a failure of language (to make reference, to enact itself performatively—as when Scottie tries with an effort of language to create Judy as Madeleine). History is the telling of the story of the generation of the text. Allegory (not as a particularly formalized code for reading tropes, but as an acknowledgment of non-coincidence) does not find something real in a temporal past that is resurfacing in the text, but *produces* a history as an effect of the tropological structures themselves. The nostalgia for “content proper” may not differ, as allegorical structure, from Madeleine’s nostalgia for a non-existent past, or Judy’s and Hitchcock’s for an acknowledgment that is never forthcoming. The allegorical text refers to something outside itself only as a “previous sign,” of which it is the “essence . . . to be pure anteriority” (p. 207), a “temporally distant sign in turn emptied of its referent—the very inverse, then, of the symbol.”²² In its peculiar relation to temporality, allegory resembles irony; they are “linked in their common demystification of an organic world postulated in a symbolic model of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality could coincide” (de Man, p. 222). Wexman (and, by implication, Jameson) encourages us to regard history as the Real of the text of *Vertigo*, a place where, indeed, fiction and reality meet, but, as de Man notes, “[i]t is a historical fact that irony becomes increasingly conscious of itself in the course of demonstrating the impossibility of our being historical” (p. 211). As Samuel Weber has observed, the view of history that Jameson promulgates in another text, *The Political Unconscious*, derives from a Marxism that is an “engine of appropriation,” in which “History” becomes “a story waiting to be told, once and for all, in the one and only way.”²³ Like Wexman, who sees “buried references to issues of class and race” as a kind of textual and historical “specificity” inaccessible to blinded academic critics (p. 38), Jameson notes that

It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring

²² Carol Jacobs, “Allegories of Reading Paul de Man,” in *Reading de Man Reading*, Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, ed., Theory and History of Literature, vol. 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 113. My reading of de Man on allegory is very much influenced by Jacobs’. Peter Fenves also contributed his (as always) uncanny insights into the complexities of the issues of allegory and history.

²³ Samuel Weber, “Capitalizing History,” in *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 52. Further page references will appear parenthetically in the text.

to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity.²⁴

The danger is not, I repeat, in this discerning of cultural tropes that write the guilty history of the white male, America, or academia in large letters (on the contrary, hooray!). It is this excavation of a single, dominating reality that knows itself, knows its priority, comes from a position that knows no blindness and seems to have no vested interest, one that is simply temporally anterior, not allegorical—this is where a danger might be found. Jameson seems to be forgetting what he elsewhere asserts—that the Real is, if singular, always only accessible as text, multiple, interpretable.

To close, a few notes on “vertigo.” The recognition of the non-self, the divided self, what de Man, after Baudelaire, calls the *ironic* self (the self, who, like Scottie, at last must recognize the impossibility of collapsing even the illusory temporality that constitutes the woman he loves) takes place “in immediate connection with a fall” (p. 213). Midge’s ironic portrait clearly reflects her understanding of (wo)man’s self-division. Baudelaire describes the unsettling power of irony as *le vertige de l’hyperbole*, the vertigo of hyperbole: irony is unrelieved vertigo, dizziness to the point of madness, *le comique absolu*. This comedy of madness consists in nature’s reminder, through the fall, that man is factitious, a thing: he can be converted to objecthood but lacks, as Scottie discovers, the power to convert a “thing” to the human.²⁵ Ironic temporality “recaptures the factitiousness of human existence as a succession of isolated present moments lived by a divided self” (de Man, p. 226). Allegorical ideal time may rhetorically unify those isolated moments, never in the here and now, as symbol attempts to do, but always as a past or an endless future. In *Vertigo*, as in Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the tower is the site where the possibility of a duration, an overcoming of the discontinuity of the ironic may be accomplished—but not as simultaneity and identity. The nun, figure of the camera, of Hitchcock as ghost, of the ghostly mother, of the inevitable phantom of allegory, comes forth to remind us that

²⁴ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 20, cited in Weber, p. 52.

²⁵ Of interest here is de Man’s discussion of Rousseau’s treatment of the Pygmalion myth in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 160-87.

the wish for embodiment in the other, the wish to merge and emerge with a knowledge of how that other constitutes ourselves, may be a desire in bad faith. In a rather Rothmanesque move, I'll tout the wisdom of Hitchcock's film, which seeks to indicate to us that a materialist history may not resemble our desire and fear of being engulfed by the victim/all-powerful mother who constitutes the "real," and that it may be our own desire that reconstitutes the woman-as-victim, the racial other whom we also want to appropriate as our own.

University of Arizona